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Confirmation and Obligation

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It would take too long to reply to all of Mr. Vorobej's criticism since in addition to objecting to a number of things I have said he castigates me for advocating several theses I have never maintained or implied and some of which I have even explicitly denied. I shall however touch upon a number of his points.

(1) Section II of Vorobej's paper is devoted to refuting my claim that obligations are not transitive. In that context, in his footnote 5 he explains:

Curiously Schlesinger is able to derive this result because he infers the truth of Ac(~B) from the truth of O(~B).

Now indeed to infer that anything morally undesirable does in fact never obtain seems to me more than just curious; it is ludicrous! He however goes on merely to say:

. . . it is altogether implausible to argue that B is acceptable in some context because it is obligatory in that context.

Mr. Vorobej seems too kind in using a mild term like "implausible" where others would have found "raving lunacy" more appropriate. Anyone not born yesterday knows that in many cases Ac(~B) is false even though O(~B) is true. There is plenty of crime even though there should be none; people are often unkind even though they ought to be kind. We all know that countlessly many things that ought not exist, do exist.

Why then did I assert anything so preposterous? The answer is, I did not. In my entire paper nothing of this sort is said or implied. All I did say was that Ac(~B), which is an expression in inductive logic, is the counterpart of the deontic term O(~B). Now on the first page of my paper I explained that valid *theorems* in inductive logic imply their deontic counterparts. Did Vorobej perhaps believe that O(~B) or Ac(~B) is a theorem (regardless what B stood for!)?

(2) In the same section I am also charged with maintaining that it is for-bidden for the good Samaritan to help Jones who was robbed. In fact not only have I not said anything as ridiculous as that but have clearly stated the very opposite. After having asserted that it is one's duty to ensure that ~ (A&B), I explicitly conclude:

Given that O(A), [i.e. that it is *obligatory* — rather than forbidden (!) — for the good Samar-itan to help Jones] it follows that the falsity of (A&B) must be brought about by making sure that B is false. (p. 531)

(3) By now it should be clear that the attack on my views concerning transitivity does not get off the ground; still it may be worth to make a fur-ther point. Though I have made nowhere any use of a deontically ideal world, I might nevertheless mention that as a matter of fact even in such a world it is false that given that Fred is suffering from disease x, his surgeon must give him anesthetic. Suppose that for some reason the requisite tools for the operation are very hard to obtain. Surely it is still O(B/C), i.e. given that Fred has x, everyone should try their best to ensure that the operation is performed. Let us assume that all the efforts have produced no result, and that such an outcome was not too improbable. Thus B fails to mate-rialize not because of any moral imperfection but because of physical obstacles (and of course a morally ideal world may very well be physically imperfect). However, since the probability that all efforts to obtain the required instrument will fail was appreciable from the beginning, it is not the case that O(A/C), for B would have to be highly probable before one is to administer anesthetic.

(4) On p. 138 Vorobej says:

Even if S entails a duty to bring about A, O(A/BvC) does not follow from Ac(S/BvC) for the simple reason that Ac(S/BvC) is compatible with the falsity of S!

It was way back in 1964 when Chisholm pointed out the important paral-lel between deontic and inductive logic, saying that just as confirmation is defeasible and may be overridden with additional information so is ethi-cal requirement. In fact this is stated quite clearly in the very first para-graph of my paper. Thus O(A/BvC) is also compatible with the falsity of S. Moral duties depend on what we justifiably believe to be true, regardless what unbeknown to us the facts may be. Consequently, if S entails O(A), then O(A/BvC) definitely does follow from Ac(S/BvC).

Finally, Vorobej would not have arrived at the idea that I believe that X's age may be inferred from the fact that he saved my life (as mentioned in his fn. 3) were it not for an unfortunate misprint. Clearly, on p. 517 the four lines beginning with "I could not. . ." and ending with ". . . birthday is next week" are part of the definition of "B".

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If there is any moral to all this, it is that the principle that there is a strict parallel between deontic and inductive logic is of supreme importance. The fact that it has such a large number of applications, that it is capable of handling all the known paradoxes plus the fact that as we just saw, the most arduous search for some plausible objection to it has led absolutely nowhere, should give us strong confidence in its validity.