Blameworthiness and Time

Abstract

The following theses concerning moral obligation are widely accepted. *Future Obligation*: It is possible that at some time you are morally obligated to do something that you have not yet done but will do at a future time. *Obligation-Changeability*: It is possible that although it is obligatory, at some specified time, for you to do something later, at a time pursuant to this specified time you no longer have this obligation. I argue that analogous theses concerning moral blameworthiness are true too: It's possible that you may now be blameworthy for something you have not yet done but will do, and that blameworthiness can change with the passage of time.

Keywords: Cambridge actions; changing obligations; indeterminism; prospective blameworthiness

1 Introduction

Moral obligations (and prohibitions) can change with the passage of time in this way: Given times, t_1 , t_2 , and t_3 (higher numbers indicate later times), it is possible that at t_1 but not at t_2 it is obligatory for you to do A at t_3 . Simple examples support this changeability thesis. At t_1 you borrow a book from Fred that you promise to return at t_3 . Assume that in virtue of promising, you incur an obligation at t_1 to return the book at t_3 . Wishing to upset you, your neighbor burns the book at t_2 . Since "ought" implies "can":

O/C If, you ought at t to do A at t^* , then at t , you can do A at t^* (t^* may be identical to t or a time later than t),

at the time the book ceases to exist, it is false that you ought to return it at t_3 . Owing partly to your misfortune, you may incur other relevant obligations at t_2 such as the obligation to apologize to Fred or make amends for his loss. But once the book is destroyed, you have no obligation to return it.¹

It will be useful to distinguish two theses concerning obligation.

Future Obligation It's possible that (*Prospective Obligation*): it is obligatory for you at a time, t_1 , to do something, A , that you have not yet done but will do at a future time t_3 .

Obligation-Changeability It's possible that *Prospective Obligation* and at t_2 it's false that you ought to do A at t_3 .

In this paper, I advance reasons to support the following analogous theses concerning blameworthiness and time.

Future Blameworthiness It's possible that (*Prospective Blameworthiness*): at t_1 , you are blameworthy for something, A , that you have not yet done but will do at future time t_3 .²

¹ See, e.g., Feldman 1986; Zimmerman 1996. Obligations can, of course, expire. If you promise to return the book at 9:30 and it's now 9:35, at 9:35, you don't have the initial obligation to return the book at 9:30. I will largely set these sorts of uncontroversial cases aside.

² Skeptics of this thesis include Rachels 1978; Cottingham 1992. In addition, assuming that when one is blameworthy, one is deserving of blame, Wojciech Sadurski says, "desert considerations are always past oriented. When talking about desert, we are evaluating certain actions which have already happened" (1985, 117). Brian Barry writes, "Desert looks to the past—or at most to the present—whereas incentive and deterrence are forward looking notions" (1965, 111). David Miller claims that "Desert judgments are justified on the basis of *past* and *present* facts about individuals, never on the basis of states of affairs to be created in the future" (1976, 93).

Blame-Changeability It's possible that *Prospective Blameworthiness* and at t_2 it's false that you are blameworthy for doing A at t_3 .³

2 Initial Thoughts against *Future Blameworthiness*

If you reject *Future Blameworthiness*, then you should reject *Blame-Changeability*. You may offer the following preliminary consideration against *Future Blameworthiness*.

Suppose you believe that *Future Obligation*, unlike *Future Blameworthiness*, is true.

You may reason that in cases relevantly like the borrowed book case, nothing prevents you from having an obligation at t_1 to do something at t_3 . In particular, you may concur that obligation requires freedom or control: nothing can be obligatory for you unless you can do it freely. You may also agree that *OIC* captures part of this freedom requirement because you cannot freely do something unless you can do it. But nothing about this control requirement precludes you from having an obligation at t_1 to do something later. If you ought at t_1 to return the book at t_3 , then you have the ability and opportunity at t_1 to return it at t_3 . The antecedent of this conditional does not entail that you return the book at t_3 . Rather, *OIC* entails that you have the obligation-presupposing ability, whatever it precisely amounts to, to bring about whatever is obligatory for you.

³ Recent and insightful discussion on blameworthiness and time can be found in Shoemaker 2012; Coleman and Sarch 2012; and Khoury and Matheson 2018. Shoemaker argues that responsibility does not presuppose personal identity. Khoury and Matheson defend the view that blameworthiness may diminish through time. If you're blameworthy to some degree for doing A at some time, and at a later time, your psychology is significantly different from what it was at this earlier time, then at the later time you may be blameworthy to a lesser degree for doing A at the earlier time. Coleman and Sarch seem to resist this view. One of their primary aims is show that Strawsonian or reactive attitude views of responsibility are inadequate principally because blameworthiness and blameworthiness attitudes or reactions are differentially responsive to the passage of time. None of these papers address *Future Blameworthiness* or *Blame-Changeability* although they may have interesting ramifications for these theses.

Although there are exceptions, it's widely accepted that blameworthiness requires control, and regarding actions, one element of this control is the ability to perform the action for which you are blameworthy.⁴ So, this principle, like *O/C*, enjoys widespread endorsement:

Blame/Control If, at t , you are blameworthy for doing A at t^* , and t^* is not earlier than t , then at t you can do A at t^* .⁵

Some may insist that *Blame/Control*'s antecedent, when aptly filled out, *does* entail that you do A at t^* and that t^* cannot be later than t . But affirming the latter conjunct is forthrightly question-begging when the thesis to be assessed is *Future Blameworthiness*. Indeed, you may be tempted to argue in this way: Both obligation and blameworthiness presuppose your having the relevant ability, the ability to do what's obligatory for you and the ability to do what you're blameworthy for respectively. Unless one has special reason to believe otherwise, just as obligation-relevant ability does *not* undermine *Future Obligation*, blameworthiness-relevant ability does not undermine *Future Blameworthiness* either.

It may be thought that some advocates of Strawsonian or reactive attitude accounts of blameworthiness who favor the view that blameworthiness consists in the manifestation of objectionable attitudes should reject *Future Blameworthiness* for different reasons. Appealing to this these sorts of account, it might be argued that the

⁴ The exceptions include Schlossberger 1992 and Adams 1985.

⁵ When t is later than t^* , this principle is false: If, at t , you are blameworthy for doing A at t^* , then at t you can do A at t^* . Suppose you are now blameworthy for killing George yesterday. It's false that now you can injure George yesterday.

fact that you will manifest objectionable attitudes at some future time implies not that you are now blameworthy for what you will do in the future but that you will be blameworthy at the future time.⁶

However, on any credible Strawsonian view, it is implausible that what comprises blameworthiness is the bare manifestation of objectionable attitudes such as indifference to the suffering of others. Not only do Strawsonians recognize excuses and exemptions but they insist that it must be appropriate or correct to express the pertinent reactive attitudes. So, for example, even if you display ill regard toward another person in your action, you need not be responsible for that action. More credible Strawsonian views develop the thought that you are responsible for *A* if, and only if, it is fitting to adopt some reactive attitude toward you or you are worthy, or deserving, of some reactive attitude in respect of *A*.⁷ Nothing about such Strawsonian views excludes the possibility that it may now be fitting to adopt some reactive attitude toward you for something you have not yet done but will do later.

3 An Initial Thought in Favor of Future Blameworthiness

Even if you reject *Blame-Changeability*, you may try to defend *Future Blameworthiness* by appealing to Cambridge actions. To explain, start with this simplified variation of a case David-Hillel Ruben advances (Ruben 2013, 82). At *t1* (10:00 am), you bend your finger and you pull the trigger. Your intended victim, the queen, collapses in her parlor. Shortly after, she is rushed to hospital where she dies at *t3* (noon).

⁶ I thank an anonymous referee for raising this concern.

⁷ See, e.g., D'Arms and Jacobson 2000; Zimmerman 2010, 104, 109 – 111; Coleman and Sarch 2012, 4, 121 – 27.

Assume that at $t1$, you are blameworthy for bending your finger. If you suppose that you perform only one action at $t1$, and that *bending your finger*, *pulling the trigger*, and *killing the queen* are different descriptions of the very same event, then you are also blameworthy for killing the queen at $t1$. But although at $t1$ you bend your finger and pull the trigger in the parlor, the queen doesn't die at $t1$. She dies later in hospital. Some might take this to undermine the minimalist view that you perform only a single action in this story. In any case, if you accept what some may well regard as the counterintuitive verdict of the minimalist view that you kill the queen at $t1$, you can at some time be blameworthy for killing someone even though, at this time, that person isn't dead but will die two hours later.

Against the minimalist view, you may instead insist that your killing the queen (KQ) and your bending your finger (BF) are two different actions that occur at different times.⁸ BF occurs at $t1$ but when does KQ occur? Presumably at $t3$ and not at $t1$ because the queen still lives at $t1$. The concern, however is that on this competing prolific view of actions, you don't *bring about* anything at $t3$. So, how can it be that you perform an action—KQ—at $t3$? Ruben's proposed solution is intriguing.

I'll take some liberties with Ruben's terminology to outline his solution.⁹ Your bending your finger at $t1$ is a real action because it involves a real change in you. Your killing the queen at $t3$ is a Cambridge action because when the queen dies at $t3$, you undergo a Cambridge change. (Compare: When, today, Socrates comes to have a new

⁸ In the interests of simplicity, ignore the putative third action of pulling the trigger.

⁹ Taking these liberties is inconsequential to what follows.

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admirer, Lucy, the change in Lucy—she now admires Socrates—is real because this change involves acquiring a real property. The change in Socrates, however, is Cambridge because his change involves acquiring the Cambridge property of *being admired by Lucy*.) Ruben proposes that a Cambridge action or event is suitably paired with a corresponding real (and not merely a Cambridge) event (Ruben 2013, 83.).¹⁰ Your killing the queen is a Cambridge action; it is paired with the real event of the queen's death at t_3 . Suppose your daughter gives birth at 2:00 am. You become a proud grandparent at this time. Your becoming a grandparent (at this time) is a Cambridge event. It is paired with the real event of your daughter's giving birth at 2:00 am. Cambridge actions or events are placed and dated by the real events with which they are paired: they occur at the place and time at which their partner real events occur (Ruben 2013, 84 – 85.). Your killing the queen, a Cambridge action, is paired with the

¹⁰ More precisely, Ruben says, "Real changes pair in some way with Cambridge changes" (2013, 83).

real action of the queen's death. The queen dies in the hospital at noon. So, KQ occurs at t_3 in the hospital.

In the queen's case what are you blameworthy for at t_1 (supposing you are blameworthy at this time for something)? The options are: (i) BF but not KQ. (ii) KQ but not BF (iii) KQ and BF. Option (ii) is implausible because it may be assumed that BF is a necessary prerequisite of KQ; you can't kill the queen unless you bend your finger.

Perhaps the most obvious rationale for (i) is that at t_1 , KQ has not yet occurred. How can you be blameworthy for something that hasn't yet occurred? In the present context concerning *Future Blameworthiness*, however, this is again question-begging.

You might instead propose that you can't at t_1 be blameworthy for KQ because KQ is in the future relative to t_1 and whether KQ occurs is too much a matter of luck. There are many factors over which you have no control whatsoever that could prevent the occurrence of KQ (for instance, the medics are successful; the queen has incredible powers of regeneration, and so forth). You may attempt to modify the case by nipping away at these "*exempting factors*" so that there are progressively fewer until there are none. Assume that BF occurs at an isolated location where nobody other than you can help the queen. In the absence of a miracle, her eminence's imminent death is inevitable given that she won't receive aid. At least my intuitions now begin to waver. Going along with the prolific view that KQ *is* an action, it's no longer so odd to think that you are now blameworthy for something that you will do later. (You may want to deviate somewhat from the prolific view and endorse, instead, the following. You are, at t_1 , blameworthy for a consequence of BF—the queen's death—that will occur at t_3 .)

But now for the inevitable, “Hum, there’s something fishy going on here; after all, we’re supposing that KQ is a *Cambridge* action!” Take this exclamation as an invitation to disambiguate the claim that you can, at t_1 , be blameworthy for something that you do not do at t_1 but will do at t_3 . You might agree that at t_1 you are blameworthy for KQ even though KQ will occur at t_3 . However, you might insist that blameworthiness at t_1 for KQ is essentially empty or wholly derivative.¹¹ The thought is that since KQ is a Cambridge action (or so we’re supposing), if you’re blameworthy for such an action, it’s only because you’re blameworthy for some other real action to which KQ is appropriately related, in this case, BF. The germane lesson here would be that we differentiate these two theses:

Change1 You can at t_1 be blameworthy for a Cambridge action that you have not done at t_1 but will do at t_2 .

Change2 You can at t_1 be blameworthy for a real action that you have not done at t_1 but will do at t_2 .

Change2 (and not *Change1*) lies at the heart of our discussion. Regarding the possibility of your having an *obligation* now to do something that you haven’t yet done but will do later, none of the relevant actions need be Cambridge actions; they may all be real actions. So, what about the possibility of being blameworthy now for a real action that you haven’t yet done but will do tomorrow? Assume that you haven’t at t_0

¹¹ Compare: It isn’t out of the ordinary to think that blameworthiness for the consequences of an action is essentially empty because it is wholly derivative from blameworthiness for that action (or for an appropriately related basic action (one that you perform but not by way of performing any others)).

done BF (bent your finger) but you will do it at $t1$. Can you, at $t0$, already be blameworthy for BF, a real and not a Cambridge action? Think more about progressively eliminating exempting factors. Suppose, if all goes well—you won't slip on a banana peel, you won't be overcome by paralysis, the Joker won't kidnap you, the queen's angel won't ensure that you can't flex your fingers, and so forth—you will end up doing BF at $t1$. Why, then, is it so implausible to think that you're already blameworthy at $t0$ for a real action that you have not yet done but will do at $t1$?

You might insist that as long as there is some *chance* that you won't do BF at $t1$, you cannot at $t0$ be blameworthy for BF at $t1$. But this is suspect. At $t1$, event $e1$ indeterministically causes event $e2$ at $t2$ if, and only if, at $t1$ $e1$ occurs and causes $e2$, and given the same past up to $t1$ and the same laws of nature, there is a chance that $e2$ does not occur at $t2$ even if $e1$ occurs at $t1$. Suppose your bending your finger at $t1$ is indeterministically caused. There is a chance (assume a very small chance) that, given the past and the laws, you will refrain from doing BF at $t1$. Barring any other problems with indeterministic causation and moral responsibility, it looks as though you can, at $t0$, be blameworthy for doing BF at $t1$ despite there being some chance that you won't do BF at $t1$.¹² But then chanciness *per se*—it's being chancy that some event will occur at some time—need not, after all, preclude blameworthiness for that event. I return to this concern about chanciness below.

¹² If any version of the "luck objection" to being responsible for indeterministically caused (basic) actions is sound, then the sort of chanciness at issue undermines blameworthiness. See, e.g., van Inwagen 1983; Mele 1999; Haji 2019.

To support further the conceptual possibility of being blameworthy at an earlier time for a real action that you will do later, we may introduce a Frankfurt example in which a failsafe mechanism ensures that you will, indeed, perform the real action later without compromising responsibility for that action (Frankfurt 1969). Start with the notion of *L-openness*. If it is L-open to an agent to do something, *A*, at a time, *t*, then the agent can do something other than *A* at *t* consistent with the past and the laws of nature remaining unchanged. More rigorously, it is L-open to *S* at *t* to do *A* at *t** if, and only if, it is not causally determined that at *t* *S* does *A* at *t**. At *t*, it is not causally determined that *S* does *A* at *t** if, and only if, at *t* *S* does *A* at *t**, and there is a possible world that is (a) past-wise indiscernible (with respect to “genuine” or nonrelational facts) from the actual one until just prior to either the moment at which *S* does *A*, or an earlier moment at which *S* does something else, *B*, such as forming a judgment to do *A* or an intention to do *A*; (b) governed by the same laws of nature as the actual world, and (c) such that, in it, at *t* *S* does other than *A* at *t**. (At *t*, it is causally determined that *S* do *A* at *t** if, and only if, it is false that at *t* it is not causally determined that *S* does *A* at *t**)

Now consider *Bomb-1* that sets the stage for the Frankfurt case.

Bomb-1. It is causally determined that queen Victoria will enter her parlor at 11:30 am and not leave before noon.¹³ Wishing to kill Victoria, Rob has hidden a bomb in the room. Nobody save Rob knows about the whereabouts of this bomb nor has any inkling about Rob’s intention to murder the queen. The bomb can be activated by a remote

¹³ The conjunction of the proposition expressing the non-relational facts at a time, *t*, prior to 11:30 am and the proposition expressing the laws of nature entail that Victoria enters her parlor at 11:30 and does not leave by noon.

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control device in Rob's possession. On the basis of indeterministic deliberation, Rob decides at 11:00 to activate the bomb at 11:30 by using the device. Once activated, the bomb will detonate at noon. Assume that, as of 11:00, it is L-open to Rob to act on his decision to activate the bomb at 11:30. He is resolute about his decision; once made, nothing whatsoever will change his mind. Furthermore, nobody else will intervene as no one save Rob knows about his plan to kill Victoria, and no one will uncover that plan even after Victoria's demise. Having executed his deadly decision at 11:30, Rob boards a plane to Paris. The bomb detonates at noon and the queen is killed.

One may be concerned that these two claims in the previous paragraph are inconsistent: (1) At 11:00, it is L-open to Rob to act on his decision to activate the bomb at 11:30. (2) He is resolute about his decision; once made nothing whatsoever will change his mind. For if you think that Libertarian free decisions are "torn" decisions—roughly, being torn between making two different decisions that you can't both execute—then, it cannot be that Rob is resolute about his decision and this decision is L-open (or not causally determined). In reply, first, on Kane-type libertarian views (Kane 1996), directly free actions are not causally determined; they are suitably indeterministically caused. Many mundane directly free decisions are not "torn" decisions. You may freely decide, now, to flex your fingers now. This putatively directly free decision is not a "torn" decision; a libertarian can affirm that your making of this decision, a mental action, is directly free as long as this mental action is appropriately (non-deviantly, and so forth) indeterministically caused. Second, your being resolute about a decision is consistent with that decision's *not* being causally determined. You

may be resolute about deciding (at t) to donate to a particular charity at (t). This is consistent with the following conditions all being satisfied: there is a possible world that is (a) past-wise indiscernible (with respect to “genuine” or nonrelational facts) from the actual one until just prior to either the moment at which you decide to donate, or an earlier moment at which you do something else, such as forming a judgment to donate to the charity, (b) governed by the same laws of nature as the actual world, and (c) such that, in it, at t you do other than decide to donate at t .

The judgment that in *Bomb-1*, at 11:00 Rob is blameworthy for the queen’s death at noon seems reasonable. It is credible primarily because, as of 11:00, for all rhyme and reason, the queen’s fate is as good as sealed. In *Bomb-1* Rob is seemingly responsible for, among other things, a distal consequence of an action (activating the bomb) that he performed earlier.

The “as good as sealed” in *Bomb-1* may raise legitimate concerns because *it’s being as good as sealed that A* does not entail *A is inevitable*. Addressing this worry, I introduce a variation of Alfred Mele and David Robb’s Frankfurt case (Mele and Robb 1998).

Bomb-2. At t_1 , Black initiates a deterministic process P in Rob*’s brain with the intention of thereby causing Rob* to *decide* at t_2 to press the *Annihilate* button at t_3 on a remote device just like the one Rob has. Pressing the button will detonate the bomb in Victoria*’s room. P , screened off from Rob*’s consciousness, will deterministically culminate in Rob*’s deciding at t_2 to press the *Annihilate* button at t_3 unless he decides

on his own at t_2 to press the button at t_3 or is decisionally incapacitated at t_2 . (Black is unaware that Rob* can decide on his own at t_2 to press the button at t_3 ; he is confident that P will cause Rob* to decide as he wants Rob* to decide.) It happens that Rob* decides on his own at t_2 to press the button at t_3 on the basis of his own indeterministic deliberation. Rob* is resolute about this decision, and once made, nobody or nothing will intervene. But if he had not just then decided on his own to press the button, P would have deterministically issued, at t_2 , in his deciding to press it. P in no way influences the indeterministic decision-making process that actually issues in Rob*'s decision.

Adding one more layer of complexity, imagine that, at t_1 , Black also initiated another deterministic process, Q , in Rob*'s brain with the intention of thereby causing Rob* to press the *Annihilate* button at t_3 . Q , just like P , screened off from Rob*'s consciousness, will deterministically culminate in Rob*'s pressing the *Annihilate* button at t_3 unless he presses it on his own at t_3 or is actionally incapacitated at t_3 . (Black is, again, unaware that Rob* can press the button on his own at t_3 ; he is confident that Q will cause Rob* to act as he wants Rob* to act.) It turns out that Rob* acts on his own at t_3 , pressing the button at t_3 on the basis of his own indeterministic intention-forming capacities. We can suppose that, having made the indeterministic decision at t_2 to press the button at t_3 , Rob* had to form various other intentions to see to it that he would press the *Annihilate* button at t_3 . For example, he had to form the intention to switch on the remote device and to have the device handy so that he could press the button at t_3 . Assume that the processes culminating in these intentions are

indeterministic. Had Rob* not, at t_3 , pressed the button on his own, Q would have deterministically issued, at t_3 , in his pressing it. Q in no way influences the indeterministic processes that actually issue in Rob*'s pressing the button at t_3 .

In *Bomb-2*, it's credible that Rob* is morally blameworthy at t_2 for deciding at t_2 (a real mental action) to press the button at t_3 . Furthermore, it also seems that, as of the time he makes his decision, he is blameworthy then, too, for his future (real) bodily action of pressing the button at t_3 . He is blameworthy, roughly, in virtue of the fact that, given the decision at t_2 to press the button, Rob*'s pressing the button at t_3 is inevitable. In *Bomb-2*, though, Rob* *cannot* refrain from making the decision that he does at t_2 and he *cannot* refrain from pressing the button at t_3 . So it is not an option to a skeptic of *Future Blameworthiness* to rejoin that, at t_2 , Rob* cannot already be blameworthy for pressing the button at t_3 because it is *L-open* to Rob*, at t_2 , to press the button at t_3 .

In sum, there are reasonable grounds to endorse *Future Blameworthiness*.

4 Changing Blameworthiness

We may finally revert to blameworthiness and changeability. Regarding obligation, principle *Obligation-Changeability* is true. At t_1 you ought to return the borrowed book at t_3 . At t_2 , when the book is destroyed, this obligation expires. What is obligatory for you at an earlier time is no longer obligatory for you at a later time.

Now imagine a case ("*Test*") in which at t_1 you are blameworthy for what you haven't yet done but will do at t_3 . At t_2 Black, sees to it that you perform A at t_3 but not freely. Maybe, at t_2 , she renders your desire to do A irresistible, in some philosophically

respectable sense of “irresistible,” without your being aware of her interference. It seems that we have a case involving changeability in blameworthiness that parallels in relevant respects the case involving changeability in obligation: at $t1$ but not at $t2$ you’re blameworthy for doing A at $t3$.¹⁴

There is a fairly obvious objection to *Test*. In the previous cases involving future blameworthiness—*Bomb-2*, for instance—when one judges (if one does so judge) that you are already blameworthy at $t1$ for the action, A , that you will do at $t3$, one presumes that you will do A *on your own* at $t3$. In particular, in these illustrative cases, one assumes that there are no exempting factors between $t1$ (the time at which you are already supposedly blameworthy for the action, A , that you will perform later) and $t3$ (the time at which you do A). Without this presumption, your judgment about future blameworthiness is undermined. In turn, without support for this judgment, the changeability thesis regarding blameworthiness (*Blame-Changeability*) cannot be sustained.

In reply, when one judges that at $t1$ it’s *obligatory* for you to return the book at $t3$, one supposes that at $t1$ you can either return or refrain from returning the book at $t3$. At $t2$, something significant changes; the book is destroyed. It’s owing (partly but pivotally) to this change that at $t2$ it’s no longer obligatory for you to return the book at $t3$. The fact that it’s true at $t2$ but not earlier that there is no book to return *does not* problematize the

¹⁴ Assuming *Future Blameworthiness* is true, I take it that the following sort of case involving changeability is not problematic. At $t1$ you are blameworthy for what you haven’t yet done but will do at $t3$. At $t2$, you aren’t blameworthy for this action because an explosion annihilates you at $t2$.

original judgment that at $t1$ (when you have the book), it is obligatory for you to return it at $t3$.

Similarly, at $t1$ and shortly after in *Test* there is no interference in how you conduct yourself; during this temporal period Black does not show her hand. So, it's perfectly reasonable to judge that at $t1$ you are blameworthy for what you will do at $t3$ (again, granting *Future Blameworthiness*). Responsibility-subverting interference occurs at $t2$. The fact that's it true at $t2$ but not earlier that, as of $t2$, your agency has been bypassed should not undermine the original judgment that at $t1$ (when there is no interference), you are blameworthy for what you will do at $t3$.

In addition, to disarm the objection under scrutiny, the following is vital. I have *not* argued that the only way in which you can at an earlier time ($t1$) be blameworthy for what you will do later (at $t3$) is that there are no exempting factors of the sort previously described between $t1$ and $t3$ or it is not true that at $t1$ there is a chance that you won't do *A* at $t1$. I appealed to a no-exempting-factors case (like *Bomb-2*) to establish the *conceptual possibility* of future blameworthiness—your being blameworthy for *A* at a time before the time at which you do *A*. A stronger argument would be required for the conclusion that future blameworthiness is possible only if either between the relevant times $t1$ (the time at which you are already putatively blameworthy for your future act, *A*) and $t3$ (the time at which you do *A*), there are no exempting factors, or it is false that at $t1$ there is some chance that you won't do *A* at $t3$. I'll be happy to attempt to evaluate this argument when I see it.

5 Ramifications

The ramifications of *Future Blameworthiness* and *Blame-Changeability* are many and varied. I limit discussion to three.

Forgiveness

In *Impending Death*, you are Michelle's and Michael's mother. Michael's lover, Sky, has severely injured Michelle. You and Michael are aware of this. The court case against Sky turns on Michael's testimony. You know that Michael will lie on the stand to get Sky off the hook and he will be blameworthy for lying. The trial will take place a week from now. You realize that you will die two days from now. Can you now properly forgive Michael for this future act that he hasn't yet done but for which he will be blameworthy later? It is widely believed that proprietary or well-founded forgiveness presupposes blameworthiness; you cannot properly forgive someone for something unless she is blameworthy for that thing.¹⁵ Suppose this presupposition is to be understood as implying that time of blameworthiness cannot be later than time of forgiveness:

Forgiveness/Blameworthiness If at t you forgive S for something, A , that at t' S does at t^* , then at t' S is blameworthy for doing A at t^* and t' cannot be later than t . (Leave it open whether t can be identical to t' .)

Then at $t1$ you cannot rightly forgive Michael for his future act if *Future Blameworthiness* is false. We may say things like "I forgive you now for the lie you will tell or the person you will betray next week." Strictly, though, if time of blameworthiness cannot be later than time of forgiveness, and *Future Blameworthiness* is false, the proposition this

¹⁵ See, e.g., Nelkin 2013, 183; Warmke and McKenna, 2013, 205; Warmke 2016, 13.

sentence expresses cannot be true. However, *Future Blameworthiness* is not false. So, not all relevantly similar propositions need be false.

Frankfurt Cases and Impermissibility

Ponder this simple argument for the view that nothing can be impermissible for anyone unless one could have done otherwise.

1. If it's impermissible for you to do *A*, then you ought not to do *A*. (This premise derives from principle *Equivalence*: it's impermissible for you to do *A* if, and only if, you ought not to do *A*).
2. If you ought not to do *A*, then you can refrain from doing *A*. (From *OIC*).
3. Therefore, (*IAvoid*): if it's impermissible for you to do *A*, then you can refrain from doing *A*.

You might invoke a Frankfurt example to impugn 3. Suppose, in Stage 1 of the example, although it's impermissible for Jones to steal some pears, he freely steals them. In Stage 2, counterfactual intervener, Black, ensures that Jones can't refrain from stealing the pears, but remains on the side lines because Jones freely steals them. Since Jones acts no differently in Stage 2 than in Stage 1, intuitively, it's impermissible for Jones to steal in Stage 2 even though he could not have done otherwise. So, *IAvoid* is false. You may now argue that as the conjunction of *Equivalence* and *OIC* entails *IAvoid*, and *IAvoid* is false, *OIC* is false too because *Equivalence* is beyond reproach.

In reply, as previously noted, *OIC* is pertinently like the following principle.

Blame/Control: If, at t , you are blameworthy for doing A at t^* , and t^* is not earlier than t , then at t you can do A at t^* . (More generally, you are responsible for performing an action only if you can perform it.)

Blame/Control expresses the truism that blameworthiness requires control. Notably, Frankfurt examples do *not* undermine this principle. The principle of alternate possibilities regarding blameworthiness (*PAP-Blame*: you are blameworthy for doing something only if you could have done otherwise) is a conjunction of *Blame/Control* and

Action: For any event and any agent, the event is the agent's action only if she has the ability to preclude it from occurring (Zimmerman 1996, 86).

Action provides the alleged link between blameworthiness and alternative possibilities, but Frankfurt examples undercut it.

If Frankfurt examples leave unscathed the principle that blameworthiness requires control (*Blame/Control*), they should leave unscathed the principle that obligation requires control (*OIC*). Regarding *PAP-Blame*, *Action* is essential to the link between blameworthiness and alternate possibilities but Frankfurt examples undermine *Action*. Regarding *IAvoid*, essential to the link between prohibition and alternate possibilities are *OIC* and *Equivalence*. If you grant that Frankfurt examples leave untouched the principle that blameworthiness requires control, you should also grant that they leave untouched the principle that obligation requires control. Moreover, it is implausible to suppose that Frankfurt examples undercut *Equivalence*.

But the battle is not yet over. You may object that there is a pertinent dissimilarity between the putative control requirement for responsibility, on the one hand, and this sort of requirement for obligation, on the other. The concern is that *Blame/Control* (omitting temporal indices, you are blameworthy or, more generally, morally responsible for performing an action only if you can perform it) is trivially true because being blameworthy at t for A -ing entails that you A -ed at or before t ; *Blame/Control's* antecedent entails that you A -ed. But this isn't so with the principle that if you ought to do A , then you can do A ; here there is no analogous entailment.¹⁶

However, it's dubious that *Blame/Control* is trivially true. For one thing, suppose Sam is drowning in Australia. An opponent of *OIC* might say that even though Samantha is now in Canada, and so can't now save Sam, she may now have an obligation to save him (because "ought" does not imply "can"). An opponent of *Blame/Control* might aver that even though Samantha is now in Canada, she may now be blameworthy for the state of affairs, *that Sam is drowning in Australia*, even though she cannot now bring about this state of affairs (because, roughly, blameworthiness does not require control). For another thing, *Future Blameworthiness* tells against the alleged triviality of *Blame/Control*.

A Plea for Caution

In everyday life it is frequently incredibly taxing to ascertain whether someone is blameworthy for a bit of her intentional behavior. Is the freedom, or epistemic, or what some take to be an ownership or authenticity condition (whatever the precise analyses

¹⁶ I thank David Copp for this objection.

of these conditions) of blameworthiness satisfied in any particular instance when there is suspicion of moral blameworthiness?¹⁷ It's almost impossible to say. Our fallibility or ignorance here very strongly cautions against, for instance, overtly blaming the person—perhaps by reacting with some negative attitude such as indignation or anger. *Blame-Changeability* enforces the directive for restraint. Even if you have grounds to believe that at $t1$ Jones is blameworthy for her future act of stealing some pears that she will perform at $t4$, you should be judicious about, for instance, *overtly* blaming Jones at some time, $t2$, for this future act, because, for all you know, as of $t2$, she may not be to blame for stealing at $t4$.

One may object that, plausibly, the concept of blameworthiness is to be understood or constructed, partly and in some way, by appeal to the function of blame. Some may propose that what I've offered in this subsection raises the worry that these functions cannot be fulfilled if we allow for future blameworthiness and blame changeability. So why treat the reasons I provide for vigilance or restraint as reasons for exercising caution about our blaming practices rather than reasons to reject the possibility of future blameworthiness or changeability?¹⁸

While I acknowledge the importance of this proposal, I believe that caution is still in order. Working toward a comprehensive and correct overall account of blameworthiness requires accommodating in something like reflective equilibrium theoretical constituents of the account and practical ones or other initially attractive

¹⁷ On an ownership or authenticity condition, see, e.g., Mele 1995; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Haji 1998; 2013; Haji and Cuypers 2008. See Zimmerman 2011 for a deeply insightful discussion on skepticism about ascertaining whether agents are blameworthy for their pertinent behavior.

¹⁸ My thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection.

practical considerations. We may end up adjusting or giving up either of these factors in the quest for truth. For example, if the best account of the control blameworthiness presupposes implies that it is next to impossible to ascertain whether, in individual cases, agents exercise responsibility-level control in their actions, or that agents are bereft of this sort of control, we may have to adjust radically some of our blaming practices.¹⁹ Or it may be that pressure from a practical consideration compels us to modify an initially appealing theoretical tenet. I propose that we look upon the possibility of future blameworthiness and the changeability of blameworthiness over time as plausible considerations, worthy of serious attention, in the philosophical pursuit to develop a comprehensive account of blameworthiness.

To conclude, credible grounds support the thesis that you may now be blameworthy for something you have not yet done but will do. This thesis, in turn, energizes a second thesis that just as obligation can change with the passage of time, blameworthiness can too.

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¹⁹ See, e.g., Pereboom 2001 and 2014 for the view that agents at the actual world are not morally responsible for any of their conduct and the impact of this thesis for various practices.

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