

**Two arguments (plus a third)**

- i. If animals have moral obligations, these obligations do not make a difference to animals' behavior.
- ii. Moral obligations must be able to guide behavior.
- iii. Thus, animals do not have moral obligations.

“obligation” implies “can” if  $x$  is morally obligatory for A, then A is able to  $x$ .

- a. If a moral obligation is impossible to fulfill for an agent, then that obligation cannot make a difference to that agent's behavior.
  - b. Moral obligations must be able to guide behavior.
  - c. Thus, there are no moral obligations that cannot be fulfilled.
- If an agent is unable to ascertain their moral obligations, then that obligation cannot make a difference to that agent's behavior...

**Some examples**

1. Carrie promised (yesterday) to pick Mindy up at noon today. At eleven, Carrie gets on a flight that makes it impossible for her to pick Mindy up at noon. At noon (when she is in midair), is it wrong for Carrie to not pick Mindy up?

Carrie doesn't pick Mindy up. Is there anything Carrie should do later on? Why?

2. Frank takes out a loan in 2014 knowing that, in 2015, he will be unable to pay it. In 2015, when the loan becomes due and Frank has no money, is he obligated to pay the loan (it is wrong for him to not pay the loan)?

If Frank can't pay the entire loan, but can pay some, what should he do? Does it matter if the bank from which he borrowed the money needs the money less than Frank does?

3. Iris is a compulsive, psychopathic kleptomaniac: she is completely incapable of not stealing, and does not care at all. Is it wrong for her to steal?

Iris often steals food and leaves it in her refrigerator for her roommate to eat. Is there any moral problem with her roommate eating this food, if she knows that Iris stole it and is a kleptomaniac?

4. Frank was framed by the police for pedophilia – he is definitely not guilty. However, expert testimony from psychologists show that, during the trial, Frank has realized that he really is a pedophile. Frank confirms this, and it is clear that, if Frank goes free, he will engage in terrible behavior. Is it morally permissible for the judge in Frank's case to let Frank free? Is it morally permissible for the judge to sentence Frank to prison, even though he has committed no crime and was framed by the police?

**How can obligations guide?**

*The arguments about animal obligations, and ought implies can, focus on:*

- A's obligation to  $x$  might guide A to do  $x$ .

*But perhaps obligations also guide as follows:*

- A's future obligation to  $x$  might guide A to avoid situations where A is unlikely to  $x$ , or guide A to become a person more likely to  $x$ .
- A's present, unfulfillable obligation to  $x$  might guide A to approximate  $x$ .
- A's present, unfulfilled obligation to  $x$  might guide B to not be complicit in what A does.
- A's past, unfulfilled obligation to  $x$  might guide A to apologize or make up for what they have done.

**If this were true, what would some implications be for what we've discussed?**

*Triage*

- Even if triage is inevitable, it might still be wrong.
- Perhaps those in triage situations have to make up for what they have done, and work to avoid triage in the future.
- Others should avoid "getting their hands dirty" in triage (e.g. don't spectate when Marius is fed to a lion).

*Demandingness*

- Even if we are unlikely to fulfill demanding obligations, we have reasons to try to become people who do, or to make up for our failure.
- We shouldn't help/enable people to fail to fulfill their demanding obligations.

*Conflicts*

- We can see duties are more often absolute.
- When they conflict, then one will do wrong no matter what.
- People should try to avoid moral conflicts, and make up for whatever they do in these conflicts.

**A problem**

5. Susan sees a drowning baby. No one is around. Is she obligated to save the baby?

6. Same as 5, except Susan is stuck in a bear trap, through no fault of her own. Is she still obligated to save the baby?