Moral Dilemmas and ‘Ought and Ought Not’

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Although common sense and literature support the possibility of moral dilemmas, many traditional and contemporary philosophers deny this possibility because of several arguments. Probably the strongest argument against the possibility of moral dilemmas can be called the argument from ought and ought not. Various versions of this argument have been presented by McConnell, Hare, and Conee.1 Its basic form can be outlined as follows.

(1) If any agent is in any moral dilemma, then that agent ought² to adopt each of two alternatives³ but cannot adopt both.

(2) If any agent ought to adopt any alternative, but that agent cannot adopt that alternative together with another alternative, then that agent ought not to adopt that other alternative.

(3) Therefore, if any agent is in any moral dilemma, then that agent both ought and ought not to adopt each alternative.

(4) It is not possible that any agent both ought and ought not to adopt any alternative.

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2 Since the context is moral, the adverb ‘morally’ should be understood to qualify every use of ‘ought’ in this paper. Nonetheless, my arguments can be extended to uses of ‘ought’ in non-moral contexts.

3 I will use the term ‘alternative’ so that there is an alternative that the agent ought to adopt when the agent ought to do some act of a certain kind (O(Ex)Kx)) and when the agent ought not to do any act of a certain kind (O-(Ex)Kx).
(5) Therefore, it is not possible for any agent to be in any moral dilemma.

This argument is valid, so its conclusion can be escaped only by denying at least one of its premises. However, each premise seems plausible and can be supported by various subarguments.

The first premise follows from a definition of moral dilemmas as situations where an agent ought to adopt each of two alternatives but cannot adopt both. This definition has several problems, but they concern the converse of (1), so a more accurate definition would still imply that any agent in a moral dilemma ought to adopt incompatible alternatives. Thus, the argument cannot be escaped by denying (1).

The second premise is more questionable. It claims that 'ought' is extensional or closed with respect to what an agent can do. Some such principle is often assumed in moral arguments. For example, if I ought to go to the store, because I promised, and I cannot go to the store if I watch the golf tournament on television, then I ought not to watch the golf tournament on television. However, the principle behind such arguments is hard to specify without producing paradoxes. Some paradoxes can be avoided by restricting the principle to intentional actions that the agent can do separately. Even with such restrictions, Ross' paradox and the Good Samaritan paradox might seem to refute premise (2), but such paradoxes can be avoided by scope distinctions and conversational principles. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that premise (2) leads to some odd conclusions. For example, I cannot go to the store without moving some air molecules, so, if I ought to go to the store, I ought to move some air molecules. This seems odd, but its oddness can be explained by Grice's principle of quantity, i.e. a speaker should be as informative as is required for the purpose of the conversation. To say only that I ought to move some air molecules without specifying more particularly what I ought to do and why would not serve

4 A better definition of moral dilemmas is that they are situations where there are non-overridden moral requirements for an agent to adopt incompatible alternatives. This revised definition still implies (1), because moral requirements are one kind of moral reason, and, as I will argue below, an agent morally ought to adopt any alternative which there are non-overridden moral reasons for that agent to adopt. I discuss the need for these revisions in 'Moral Dilemmas and Incompatibility,' American Philosophical Quarterly 22 (1985) 321-2.

5 See, for example, my 'A Solution to Forrester's Paradox of Gentle Murder,' Journal of Philosophy 82 (1985), 162-8.

the most usual purposes of such utterances, such as advising. Thus, the oddness of such conclusions can be explained without giving up their truth or the truth of premise (2). Much more would have to be said to defend premise (2) fully, but I hope I have given some indication of why I think premise (2) is plausible. Instead of defending it further, I will grant it for the sake of argument.

I will argue that, even if premise (2) is granted, the argument from ought and ought not still fails, because premise (4) is not justified. Several arguments have been presented for premise (4), but I will show that these arguments are faulty. Since premise (4) cannot be justified, the argument from ought and ought not fails to prove that moral dilemmas are not possible.

I A Clarification

In order to assess premise (4), we must determine exactly what premise (4) claims. The crucial term is 'ought,' and 'ought' is often interpreted in terms of moral reasons. However, various strengths of moral reasons can be distinguished. Those who use the argument from ought and ought not explicitly deny that they use 'ought' so that an agent ought to do everything for which there is

\[(Oa)\] a (possibly overridden) moral reason.

For example, McConnell writes, 'It is obvious that, if there are genuine moral dilemmas, then the 'oughts' that conflict must be strict or absolute ones, and not merely \textit{prima facie} ones.'\(^7\) Similarly, Conee writes that the alternatives in moral dilemmas are 'absolutely, unconditionally, and not merely \textit{prima facie} morally obligatory.'\(^8\) However, if 'not merely \textit{prima facie}' and 'unconditional' mean approximately 'non-overriden,' and if 'strict' and 'absolute' mean approximately 'overriding,' then McConnell, Conee, and many other opponents of moral dilemmas conflate two non-prima-facie interpretations of 'ought.' On these two interpretations, an agent ought to do that and only that for which there are

\[(Ob)\] non-overridden moral reasons, or
\[(Oc)\] overriding moral reasons.

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7 T.C. McConnell, 'Moral Dilemmas and Requiring the Impossible,' \textit{Philosophical Studies} 29 (1976) 409

8 Conee, 87
The difference between these interpretations is crucial for the argument from ought and ought not.

On (Oc), it is clearly impossible that an agent both ought and ought not to adopt the same alternative. A moral reason to adopt an alternative might be stronger in one respect and weaker in another respect than a moral reason not to adopt the same alternative, but such moral reasons cannot be stronger overall than each other, so they cannot both be overriding. Thus, the argument from ought and ought not does show that there are no moral dilemmas if moral dilemmas are defined in terms of 'ought' and 'ought' refers to overriding moral reasons.

However, defenders of the possibility of moral dilemmas do not use the term 'ought' to refer to overriding moral reasons. They are not always clear about this, but it is uncharitable to interpret their claims as absurd. Thus, even if the argument from ought and ought not is sound when it is interpreted in terms of overriding moral reasons, it does not disprove what is claimed by those who claim that moral dilemmas are possible. In order to disprove that, the argument must be interpreted in terms of non-overridden moral reasons.

Those who deny that moral dilemmas are possible might respond by admitting that non-overridden moral reasons can conflict but still denying that it is possible that an agent ought or has overriding reasons to adopt incompatible alternatives. However, such supposed opponents of moral dilemmas do not then deny what is asserted when someone claims that moral dilemmas are possible. If the argument from ought and ought not is to refute any claim that has actually been made, it must be interpreted in terms of non-overridden reasons. Otherwise, the argument misses its target.

For these reasons, I will henceforth use 'ought' to refer to non-overridden moral reasons unless otherwise indicated. I am not assuming that this interpretation gives the meaning of the term 'ought' or that this is how 'ought' is used in all contexts of common usage. However, this interpretation does reflect the usage of defenders of moral dilemmas in this context. The central issue then is whether there can be both a non-overridden moral reason to adopt an alternative and a non-overridden moral reason not to adopt the same alternative. If so, it is possible that an agent both ought and ought not to adopt the alternative.

II 'Ought' Implies 'Permitted'

There are two main arguments against the possibility that an agent both ought and ought not to adopt the same alternative. They can be called arguments against ought and ought not.
The first argument can be called the argument from ‘ought’ implies ‘permitted.’ It runs as follows. If any agent ought to adopt any alternative, then that agent is permitted to adopt it. But, if any agent is permitted to adopt any alternative, it is not true that that agent ought not to adopt it. Therefore, if any agent ought to adopt any alternative, it is not true that that agent ought not to adopt that alternative.

This argument might be clearer if it is symbolized. Let ‘A’ symbolize any action sentence, such as ‘Agamemnon kills his daughter.’ Let ‘O’ symbolize the deontic operator ‘morally ought,’ so ‘OA’ symbolizes a moral judgment such as ‘Agamemnon morally ought to kill his daughter.’ Let ‘P’ similarly symbolize ‘morally permitted.’ The argument from ‘ought’ implies ‘permitted’ is then that, for every value of ‘A,’

(4.11) OA → PA
(4.12) PA → -O-A
(4.13) So: OA → -O-A
(4.14) (OA → -O-A) → -(OA&O-A)
(4) So: -(OA&O-A)

(4.11) claims that ‘ought’ implies ‘permitted.’ (4.12) follows from the standard definition of ‘permitted’ as ‘not ought not.’ (4.14) is a theorem in classical and intuitionist logic. These premises appear plausible, so the argument appears sound.

This appearance disappears when the terms ‘ought’ and ‘permitted’ are analyzed carefully. As I said, the term ‘ought’ might be used so that an agent ought to adopt an alternative if and only if there is

(Ob) a non-overridden moral reason to adopt it, or
(Oc) an overriding moral reason to adopt it.

Since ‘permitted’ is usually defined as ‘not ought not,’ there are two

10 Although this definition is used by most advocates of this argument, other definitions of ‘permitted’ do not support (4.12). For example, if ‘ought’ is defined in terms of moral reasons, including moral ideals, but ‘permitted’ is defined in terms of moral requirements, then ‘permitted’ does not imply ‘not ought not,’ because there might be no moral requirement not to adopt an alternative, even if there is a moral ideal not to adopt the alternative. Nonetheless, the argument from ought and ought not can be reformulated in terms of moral requirements, if moral dilemmas are defined in terms of moral requirements, as in n. 4.
interpretations of 'permitted' corresponding to the two interpretations of 'ought.' In this context, an agent might be permitted to adopt an alternative if and only if there is

(Pb) no non-overridden moral reason not to adopt it, or

(Pc) no overriding moral reason not to adopt it.

Which of these interpretations is used determines what is wrong with the argument from 'ought' implies 'permitted.'

If 'ought' is interpreted in terms of overriding moral reasons, both premises are true, whichever interpretation of 'permitted' is used. 'OA → PA' then claims that, if there is an overriding moral reason to adopt any alternative, then there is no non-overridden or overriding moral reason not to adopt that alternative. 'PA → -O-A' then claims that, if there is no non-overridden or overriding moral reason not to adopt any alternative, then there is no overriding moral reason not to adopt that alternative. Both of these premises are true on any acceptable account of overriding, and the conclusion follows.

However, this argument attacks a straw man, because its conclusion is compatible with the possibility of moral dilemmas as they are understood by their defenders. If '-(OA&O-A)' is interpreted in terms of overriding moral reasons, it could exclude moral dilemmas only if moral dilemmas were defined in terms of overriding moral reasons. However, as I argued above, defenders of the possibility of moral dilemmas do not define moral dilemmas in terms of overriding moral reasons. Instead, they define moral dilemmas in terms of non-overridden moral reasons. In order to address this possibility, the argument from 'ought' implies 'permitted' must be interpreted in terms of non-overridden moral reasons.

If the argument refers to non-overridden moral reasons, at least one premise begs the question. Which premise does so depends on how the term 'permitted' is interpreted.

If both 'ought' and 'permitted' refer to non-overridden moral reasons, 'PA → -O-A' is true, but 'OA → PA' begs the question. On this interpretation, 'PA → -O-A' is trivial, because it follows from the standard definition of 'permitted' as 'not ought not.' However, 'OA → PA' claims that, if there is a non-overridden moral reason to adopt any alternative, there is no non-overridden moral reason not to adopt the alternative. This is false, if there are reasons to adopt incompatible alternatives, and neither reason is overridden, because they are equal or incomparable (assuming that a reason for one alternative is a reason against any incompatible alternative). The only way to exclude this possibility is to argue that, whenever moral reasons conflict, one over-
rides the other, or they are cancelled. In the absence of any forceful independent argument for this claim,\textsuperscript{11} it begs the question to assume that 'ought' implies 'permitted' on this interpretation.

The remaining possibility is that 'ought' refers to non-overridden moral reasons, but 'permitted' refers to overriding moral reasons. On this interpretation, 'OA → PA' is true. This premise then claims that, if there is a non-overridden moral reason to adopt any alternative, then there is no overriding moral reason not to adopt the alternative. This is obvious, because the overriding moral reason not to adopt the alternative would override the moral reason to adopt the alternative, so the moral reason to adopt the alternative would not be non-overridden. However, 'PA → -O-A' begs the question on this interpretation. This premise is supposed to follow from a definition of 'permitted' as 'not ought not,' but this definition breaks down if 'permitted' refers to overriding moral reasons, but 'ought' refers to non-overridden moral reasons. On this interpretation, 'PA → -O-A' claims that, if there is no overriding moral reason not to adopt an alternative, then there is no non-overridden moral reason not to adopt the alternative. This is false, if there is a moral reason not to adopt an alternative, and it is not overriding, but it is also not overridden, because the conflicting moral reason is also neither overriding nor overridden. Without an independent argument against this possibility, it begs the question to assume 'PA → -O-A' on this interpretation.

Thus, depending on how 'ought' and 'permitted' are interpreted, the argument from 'ought' implies 'permitted' either attacks a straw man or begs the question. Either way, it fails to exclude the possibility of moral dilemmas.

Not only does the argument fail, but it is easy to explain why it seems plausible. One explanation is that each premise is true on some interpretation. 'Ought' seems to imply 'permitted,' because it does imply it, if either term refers to overriding moral reasons.\textsuperscript{12} Also, 'permitted' seems to imply 'not ought not,' because it does imply it by definition, if both terms refer to overriding moral reasons or if both refer to non-overridden moral reasons. The argument then seems sound if the various interpretations are confused.

Even on interpretations where 'ought' does not (semantically) imply 'permitted,' it might seem to do so, because 'ought' does conversationally imply 'permitted.' Roughly, saving p conversationally implies q just in case a speaker who is following the conversational maxims

\textsuperscript{11} I criticize some such arguments in 'Moral Dilemmas and Incomparability.'

\textsuperscript{12} A similar explanation of why 'ought' seems to imply 'permitted' is given by P. Foot, 'Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma,' \textit{Journal of Philosophy} 80 (1983) 385.
would not say $p$ unless the speaker thinks that $q$ and thinks that the audience will think that the speaker thinks that $q$, etc.\textsuperscript{13} One conversational maxim of quantity says, 'Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).''\textsuperscript{14} Since speakers normally follow this maxim, when a speaker offers some information, the audience normally infers that the speaker does not have any other relevant information. Thus, when a speaker says only that the agent ought to adopt the alternative and does not say that the agent ought not to adopt the alternative, the audience infers by conversational principles that the speaker does not believe that the agent also ought not to adopt the alternative (or does believe that this is not true). Thus, ‘ought’ conversationally implies ‘not ought not.’ If ‘permitted’ is defined as ‘not ought not,’ then ‘ought’ also conversationally implies ‘permitted.’ Such implications are conversational, because they can be explicitly cancelled.\textsuperscript{15} The speaker can consistently add that, even though he did not mention it, he also believes that the agent ought not to adopt the alternative and is not permitted to adopt it. Such conversational implications are often confused with semantic implications, but they are crucially different, because conversational implications do not affect truth. Even if ‘ought’ conversationally implies ‘permitted,’ it might still be true that the agent ought to adopt an alternative which the agent is not permitted to adopt. This explains why the argument from ‘ought’ implies ‘permitted’ seems plausible but really is not.\textsuperscript{16}

### III Ought To and Not To

The second main argument against ought and ought not can be called the argument from ought to and not to. It attempts to derive a contradiction inside the scope of ‘ought.’ If any agent both ought and ought

\textsuperscript{13} Grice, 69

\textsuperscript{14} Grice. 67. J. Searle also uses this maxim of quantity to show a related but different conversational implicate in ‘Prima Facie Obligations’ in Practical Reasoning, ed. J. Raz (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), 88.

\textsuperscript{15} Grice, 74

\textsuperscript{16} Such conversational considerations also explain why speakers seem to disagree when one says that an agent ought to do something and another says that the agent ought not to do it. They cannot both be correct if both refer to overriding moral reasons. Even if they are interpreted so that both can be correct, they still seem to disagree, because each denies what is conversationally implied by what the other says. Nonetheless, they can explicitly cancel these conversational implications. If they do, they did not really disagree at all.
not to adopt any alternative, then that agent ought both to adopt and
not to adopt that alternative. But it is not possible that any agent ought
both to adopt and not to adopt any alternative. Therefore, it is not pos-
sible that any agent both ought and ought not to adopt any alterna-
tive. Symbolically: for every value of ‘A’,

\[(4.21) \quad (O(A&O-A) \rightarrow O(A&-A)\]

\[(4.22) \quad -O(A&-A)\]

\[(4) \quad \text{So: } -(O(A&O-A)\]

This argument is formally valid, so a defender of moral dilemmas must
deny at least one premise for one value of ‘A’.

Some defenders of moral dilemmas claim that premise (4.22) is false
for some value of ‘A’. In other words, they claim that some agent
ought both to adopt and not to adopt some alternative. However, this
escape is implausible.

The most common argument against this escape uses the famous
principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. However, there are counterex-
amples to this principle if ‘can’ is interpreted empirically. ‘Ought’
might still imply ‘logically possible,’ and this would exclude ‘O(A&-A),’
but it would beg the question to assume this principle here.

A better argument against the possibility of ‘O(A&-A)’ is suggested
by van Fraassen: ‘If one is required to do the impossible, one is re-
quired to do everything, and all moral distinctions collapse. But for the
person in a moral quandary it is by no means true that all moral dis-
tinctions have collapsed — much as he might like to plead this.’ This
argument can be filled out as follows. If any agent ought to adopt any
alternative, then the agent also ought to adopt whatever that alterna-
tive logically implies. But a contradiction logically implies everything.
Thus, if any agent ought both to adopt and not to adopt any alterna-
tive, then every alternative ought to be adopted. But it is not true that
every alternative ought to be adopted. Therefore, it cannot be true that
any agent both ought and ought not to adopt any alternative. If we

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17 E.g. E. J. Lemmon, ‘Deontic Logic and the Logic of Imperatives,’ Logique et Ana-

18 Hare, 27-8

19 I give one such counterexample in ‘ “Ought” Conversationaly Implies “Can” ’,
Philosophical Review 93 (1984) 252-4. See also my ‘ “Ought to have” and “Can have” ’,

let □A symbolize 'it is logically necessary that A,' this argument can be symbolized as follows: for every value of 'A' and some value of 'B'

\[(4.221) \quad \Box ((A\&-A)\rightarrow B)\]
\[(4.222) \quad \Box ((A\&-A)\rightarrow B) \rightarrow (O(A\&-A) \rightarrow OB)\]
\[(4.223) \quad \text{So: } O(A\&-A) \rightarrow OB\]
\[(4.224) \quad \text{-OB}\]
\[(4.22) \quad \text{So: } -O(A\&-A).\]

This argument is formally valid, and (4.221) is a theorem in all alethic modal logics, so a defender of 'O(A\&-A)' must deny either (4.222) or (4.224). Neither escape is plausible.

(4.224) claims that there is some alternative of which it is not true that it ought to be adopted. To deny this is to claim that every alternative ought (and ought not) to be adopted. This claim is not contradictory, but it is extremely implausible. Even if I make equally strong promises to go to different places at the same time, it is not true that I ought to touch my toes, since toe touching is morally neutral. More importantly, it is not true that I ought to break both promises, i.e. that I ought to adopt neither alternative (that O-(A\&-A) or O(-A\&-A)). Finally, it is true neither that you ought to give me a thousand dollars nor that I ought to kill a thousand people, even though all such judgments would be true, if 'OB' were true for every value of 'B,' since 'B' is implied by 'A\&-A' even if 'B' has nothing to do with the dilemma where 'O(A\&-A).' Thus, the above argument cannot be escaped by denying premise (4.224).

The only other escape from the above argument is to deny premise (4.222). (4.222) is one instance of

\[(\text{CL}) \quad \Box (F\rightarrow G) \rightarrow (OF \rightarrow OG).\]

(CL) could be called the principle that 'ought' is extensional with respect to logical implication or that logical consequences are substitutable inside the scope of 'ought' or that 'ought' is closed under logical implication. I will call it the principle of logical closure, for short. Some philosophers reject logical closure because of paradoxes. However, such paradoxes depend on various confusions. McConnell argues that anyone who thinks that an agent ought both to adopt and not to adopt the same alternative but also denies of some alternative that it ought

\[21 \text{ Cf. n. 5.}\]
to be adopted will have a counterexample to logical closure. However, this is ad hoc and begs the question in the absence of any independent argument against the otherwise plausible claim of logical closure. Thus, nothing forces us to deny logical closure. Furthermore, if logical closure were denied, very few arguments could be made with 'ought.' For example, if I ought not to break a promise, then I ought to keep it (O − K → OK). However, the latter could not be derived from the former without something like logical closure. Finally, there is no need to deny logical closure in order to allow the possibility of moral dilemmas, unless 'OA&O-A' is true in all moral dilemmas. Judgments of this form cannot be derived from the definition of moral dilemmas unless 'ought' is closed under 'can,' i.e. unless

\[(CC) \neg \diamond (A&B) \rightarrow (OA \rightarrow O-B)\]

where '◊' symbolizes 'can.' However, this principle implies logical closure, so a stronger principle than logical closure is already assumed before there is any need to deny logical closure in order to allow moral dilemmas. Thus, to deny logical closure is unjustified, inconvenient, and unnecessary.

If (4.222) and (4.224) cannot be denied, neither can (4.22). Thus, it is not possible that any agent ought both to adopt and not to adopt any alternative, i.e. that O(A&-A) for any 'A.'

Since 'O(A&-A)' is not possible, the only way to defend 'OA&O-A' is to deny (4.21). (4.21) claims that 'O(A&O-A) → O(A&-A)' is true for every value of 'A.' This is an instance of what is called the agglomeration principle:

\[(AG) (OA&OB) \rightarrow O(A&B)\]

i.e. if an agent ought to adopt each of two alternatives, then the agent ought to adopt both alternatives. Thus, the agglomeration principle must be denied by any defender of the possibility of moral dilemmas who accepts that 'ought' is closed under 'can,' even if she denies that 'ought' implies 'can.'

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22 McConnell, 'Moral Dilemmas and Requiring the Impossible,' 412

23 Even if one rejects (CL), one could substitute a weaker principle, such as '[(A→B)&◊A] → (OA→OB)' where '◊' symbolizes logical possibility. This principle does not imply 'O(A&-A) → OB' for every value of 'B.' However, this escape is ad hoc in the absence of any independent reason to reject (CL), and it does not fit any standard formal semantics for deontic logic.

24 A defender of moral dilemmas can replace the agglomeration principle with a
Whether the agglomeration principle is valid depends on how the term 'ought' is interpreted. If 'ought' refers to overriding moral reasons, the agglomeration principle seems defensible. If there are overriding moral reasons to adopt each alternative, then the conjunction of these moral reasons must be an overriding moral reason to adopt both alternatives. A critic might respond that 'ought' implies 'can,' so, if the agent cannot adopt both alternatives, it is not true that the agent ought to adopt both alternatives. However, I have argued that 'ought' does not imply 'can.' Further, if the agent cannot adopt both alternatives, the moral reasons for each alternative cannot both be overriding, since these moral reasons conflict. Thus, there is no strong argument against the agglomeration of overriding moral reasons.

In contrast, agglomeration fails if 'ought' refers to non- overridden moral reasons. Even if the moral reason to adopt each alternative is not overridden, the conjunction of these reasons might be overridden, because the conjunction of the alternatives might have harmful consequences or violate a moral rule, even though neither alternative alone has these consequences or violates this moral rule. For example, if a man impregnates two women and has promised each to marry her if he impregnates her, then he might have a non- overridden moral reason to marry each woman. However, the moral reasons against bigamy might still override any moral reasons to marry both (even if it is possible to marry both). If so, he ought to marry each, but it is not true that he ought to marry both. Additional counterexamples arise from closure under 'can' in moral dilemmas. If an agent makes equally important conflicting promises, the agent has a non- overridden moral reason not to keep the first, since this is necessary in order to keep the second. The agent also has a non- overridden moral reason not to keep the second, since this is necessary in order to keep the first. However, the agent does not have any moral reason to keep neither promise, since this is not required by any promise or any moral reason. Thus, the agent ought not to adopt each alternative, but it is not true that the agent ought to adopt neither. Symbolically: \( O \cdot A \& O \cdot B \), but \( O \cdot (A \& B) \), and \( O \cdot (A \& B) \). Thus, the agglomeration principle fails when 'ought' refers to non- overridden moral reasons.}

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25 Cf. n. 19.

26 Different arguments against agglomeration are given by B. Williams, 'Ethical Con-
Without such agglomeration, there is no reason to believe that 'OA&O-A' implies 'O(A&-A)' if 'ought' refers to non-overridden moral reasons. Consequently, even though it is not possible that any agent ought both to adopt and not to adopt the same alternative (O(A&-A)), the argument from ought to and not to fails to show that it is not possible that an agent both ought and ought not to adopt the same alternative (OA&O-A), if 'ought' refers to non-overridden moral reasons. Since moral dilemmas are defined in terms of non-overridden moral reasons, the argument from ought to and not to fails to refute the possibility of moral dilemmas.

IV Conclusion

There always might be some other argument against the possibility that an agent both ought and ought not to adopt the same alternative. However, it seems probable that any new argument will depend on the same confusions that were displayed in the above arguments. In any case, in the absence of further arguments, I conclude that the argument from ought and ought not fails to prove that moral dilemmas are not possible.27

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