Normative relevance, obligations, and responsibilities: an outline

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In the past, we were unaware that high levels of lead in paint used on toys for children could constitute a health risk. We were unaware of urgent need for sanitation in hospitals. Japan doctors were unaware of the proper treatment when victims of Tokyo gas attack started to gather in hospitals. We were unaware of several side effects of medications used in the past. And for sure, we are unaware of several side effect of medications used nowadays.

If we had known, obligations and responsibilities of relevant agents would have been different. However, it is not knowledge as such what we are up to in examples of this kind. As it were, some of the relevant agents knew in the time when others did not. Yet their knowledge was not sufficient for changing the *normative relevance* of certain actions (or state-of-affairs). Sometimes it is just common knowledge what is required for respective changes in normative relevance; sometimes it is an administrative procedure of certain kind (such as adding a particular chemical compound on an official list of dangerous/ prohibited chemicals).

Because of this, I will talk about normative relevance as such rather than about knowledge. I will employ *awareness structures* to this end.[1] Admittedly, the notion of awareness differs from the notion of normative relevance. Yet certain features of awareness structures can be employed in the present setting. The common core is constituted by the idea of 'not taking something into account'. In the epistemic setting, we do not take certain propositions into account when arguing, inferring, discussing, thinking, and so forth, simply

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[1] Schipper, B. C. (2015). Awareness. In van Ditmarsch, H., Halpern, J. Y., van der Hoek, W., and Kooi, B. (Eds.): *Handbook of Epistemic Logic*. Milton Keynes: College Publications.

because we are unaware of these propositions. In the deontic setting, we do not take certain propositions into account when deciding what to do or planning our actions, simply because these propositions are not normatively relevant.

In the present talk, I will suggest a toy-logic for normative relevance which makes use of awareness generated by primitive propositions. I will illustrate how the logic works in terms of analysing a (simplified) real-world example of responsibility attribution (the case Feldman v. Lederle Laboratories).[2] I will sketch other modelling options afforded by awareness structures. Finally, I will explain how the present work relates to formal analysis of responsibility in general.

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[2] Feldman v. Lederle Labs., 97 NJ 429, 479 A.2d 374 (1984).