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# Expectations and Obligations

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**Abstract**
Ever since the publication of Scanlon's *Promises and Practices* and *What We Owe to Each Other*, expectations have become an important topic within discussions on promises. However, confining the role of expectations to promises does not do justice to their importance in creating obligations more generally. This paper argues that expectations are one of the major sources of obligations created within our personal relationships. What we owe to our friends, partners, or siblings very often follows neither from the duties associated with the given role, nor from our explicit promises, commitments, declarations, or consents. The obligations that our close relationships create often arise from a shared understanding of those relationships—and subsequent mutually acknowledged expectations.

**Keywords** Expectations · Obligations · Promises · Scanlon

## 1 Personal Relations as Normatively Underdetermined

One of the key tasks of practical philosophy is to disclose the structure of our duties and obligations and the reasons why we have them. We want to know "what we owe to each other" and why. This paper deals, more specifically, with how our duties and obligations are influenced by our unique personal relations. In other words, it is not concerned with normative commitments we have "as rational beings," "as humans," "as friends," or "as teachers". It is concerned with duties and obligations that arise from individual personal connections.[1]

The basic framework of this paper is given by my belief that our duties and obligations are to a large extent second-personal (Darwall 2009). Our normative commitments to other people are very often given by our reciprocal relations of mutual accountability. The things we ought (or ought not) to do are there because someone is in position to demand that we do (or not do) them. For example, imagine a situation where you are standing on my foot and I want you to stop because it hurts (Darwall 2009, p. 5–7). I may produce a third-personal reason, telling you

[1]In this paper, I use words like "duty," "obligation," and "commitment" interchangeably, as nothing I say rests on any eventual distinction between them.

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that a human being is suffering because of your action. However, a much stronger and more natural response would be simply to demand that you should stop. I assume practical authority to make this demand—and you have a duty to comply with it. Many of our duties and obligations are created because we hold ourselves mutually accountable and accept that the other person is in position demand something from us.

We have many second-personal duties and obligations simply because we are humans, a part of moral community. We engage with other people and there are things that we should and should not do that are quite general. We have a duty not to murder, rape, or arbitrarily stand on someone's foot, as well as a duty to help someone in danger. Other people can demand these actions from us regardless of our personal relationship. They are generalizable across anyone who is capable of entering into second-personal relations with others.

Apart from these general duties, the roles we have in society often contain normative commitments that are more specific and stricter than the duties we have as humans. We enter into special relations of mutual accountability in which others can demand us to fulfill the commitments we have undertaken with the role. For example, it is my obligation as a teacher to be fair and impartial to my students, suspend my sympathy, and work with everyone on equal terms. I have no such obligation to people in general; in my private life, I can be very partial towards people I like. However, my students are in position to hold me accountable if I act on my sympathy. The same thing happens in private life. Our friends and family can make claims on our conduct that go over and above what we owe to everybody else; we have obligations to them we do not have towards strangers. In general, our social roles are the source of many important duties and obligations that we have.

However, and this is where it gets interesting for the point I want to make, the duties and obligations we have as friends, parents, or spouses do not cover all the duties and obligations we acquire from our personal relations. Concrete personal relations tend to be normatively richer than general duties and obligations associated with the given type of personal relation. Thus, while we can certainly think of duties entailed by, say, friendship, any concrete instantiation of this type of relation can (and probably will) contain additional duties and obligations that are not associated with all relations of this type. In short, personal relations are *normatively underdetermined*.

There are things that everyone should or should not do to *a friend*. But they do not exhaust the things I should and should not do to *my friend Amy*. Individual personal relations are unique not only because they contain feelings, mutual knowledge, and personal history that is always *sui generis*. The singularity of our personal relations means that our normative commitments will vary as well. Two people developing a relationship of a certain type can shape the duties and obligations that fall from it.

A greatly simplified picture of our second-personal normative commitments thus runs as follows: we have, first, certain duties and obligations as humans; they are the ones that all members of moral community can demand from us. Second, we have duties and obligations that stem from our particular social roles and from the types of personal relations we develop (or find ourselves in); we have them as friends, teachers, doctors, parents. The duties of the second type, however, are normatively underdetermined. Humans are creative beings and their mutual relations can create normative commitments that are different in every instantiation of a certain type of personal relation. Therefore, there is a third source of our duties and obligations: they stem from our individual, unique relations. These obligations are not reducible to the obligations coming from social roles. And they are the focus of this paper.

One way to support the thesis that our relations are normatively underdetermined is to look at the implausibility of its denial. Normative determinacy would entail that *all* duties and obligations

I have in virtue of my personal relationship with someone are determined by duties and obligations associated with this type of personal relationship in general. My duties and obligations *as Amy's friend* would be fully expressed by general duties and obligations friends have to one another. This picture is wrong, first because it assumes that there are acultural and ahistorical types of human relations with a set number of normative commitments – which is simply not true. The conceptions of friendship, marriage, or parenthood are anything but ahistorical. They change in time and they are subject to reinterpretation on both individual and cultural levels.[2]

Second, a claim that our relations are normatively determined entails that we can come up with a full taxonomy of personal relations and their corresponding duties. Certainly, a philosopher with an Aristotelian passion for classifications might multiply the types of relations so that they resemble our experience more closely. For example, there are things one should not do to *a close friend* or to *his loving wife* that are acceptable when it is just *a friend* or *a wife*. However, any effort to formulate an exhaustive classification of all types of human relations with their requisite duties and obligations will fall short of our divergent reality.[3] Every human relation has its quirks and particularities, which have a direct impact on the normative commitments it generates. Thus, even though our relationships fall under generic categories that specify some of their generic normative features, each of them is normatively "finished," so to speak, by the two people in it.

While normative underdetermination of personal relations is not a uniquely modern phenomenon (no society can possess a moral code specific enough to fully determine all duties and obligations its members can have), the social movements of the last century made it much more visible. Western societies before the twentieth century often had very refined sets of binding social conventions that specified the duties and obligations of, for example, a married woman. Now it is no longer the case. The feminist movement can be credited with uncovering the oppressive power structures behind these roles. Subsequent emancipation processes meant that gender roles (and social roles in general) are not as specific and certainly not as enforced as they used to be. Women have more freedom to advance their ends than before—although the situation is still far from ideal.

Pluralism has a similar effect. As our societies become more and more open, duties and obligations implicit in human relations become less and less specific. Our societies now contain multiple cultures, multiple ways of life, all with different ways to structure normative commitments of personal relations—and we can choose between them. This has led some communitarian thinkers to assert that we are now unable to create truly deep commitments (MacIntyre 1981; Taylor 1992). I do not believe this is the case. However, it is certainly true that our commitments are no longer prearranged by an extensive, dominant set of social conventions. Our personal relations, especially their normative part, are far less conventionally determined than 150 years ago. Yet this does not mean that our personal relationships do not engender duties and obligations. It only means that many normative components of our relations are only

[2] This point can be made in Wittgensteinian terms. "Friendship," like any other concept of our language, is less than fully determinate. Its use can be characterized by family resemblances, not by a fixed list of duties and obligations. Nonetheless, if none of these family resemblances are present, we would struggle to call a given relation "friendship." If someone claimed that she has a friend to whom she owes no special obligations beyond the ones that she owes to a complete stranger, we would probably conclude that she does not know what "friendship" means.

[3] Perhaps contrary to this statement, Niko Kolodny invites us to imagine "the exhaustive list of partiality principles." However, he uses this list only as a heuristic device in his argumentation and does not contemplate it seriously. To my best knowledge, no one argues for such a reductive picture of human normativity. See (Kolodny 2010, p. 39).

created within them, as they develop. The limited social conventions of modern societies are very far from specifying everything that we owe to our friends, spouses, and parents.

Let me demonstrate the normative underdeterminacy of personal relations on one relatively trivial example. Imagine a group of friends that is going on a three-day hiking trip, high up the mountains. During this trip, do they have an obligation to inform their respective spouses that they are safe? In cases like this, there are significant differences among people. Some will not call at all. They simply leave on Friday morning and then come back three days later. Others, however, feel a great obligation to send at least an SMS. In the evening, if there is no signal in the camp, they break from the group, regardless of how much fun they are having, and climb above to catch a signal. Both they and their spouses consider it to be an important obligation. If they did not do it, the spouse would be angry and they would feel guilty, with all the reactive attitudes that generally come with breaking an important obligation.

I hold that there is no generic obligation to call your spouse during a hiking trip. If we attempted to formulate a list of duties a married couple owes to each other, "calling at least once in three days when on a trip" would not be there. However, this does not mean that Bill has no obligation to call his wife, Amy. When we observe the sense of duty with which he walks out into the cold to catch a signal, and the reactive attitudes involved when he forgets, it is difficult to claim that the obligation is merely apparent. The relation with his wife is such that he has a second-personal duty to call her during a hiking trip; this is how they came to understand what they owe to each other.[4]

## 2 Expectations and Normative Commitments

In the previous section, I showed that we have normative commitments that go over and above the generic duties and obligations associated with any given type of personal relation. The question now is whether we can say something philosophically interesting about these commitments. After all, "many of the issues we encounter in personal relations are too dependent on contingencies of shared history, idiosyncratic personality, special circumstances and so on, for universal moral theories to provide much useful specific guidance" (Darwall 2013, p. 97). However, while it is probably impossible to come up with a "universal moral theory" of personal relations and to specify sets of necessary and sufficient conditions for different (non-generic) obligations to arise, this does not mean that there is nothing philosophical to say. Even if general principles are unattainable, it is still possible to disclose the most important *mechanisms* that create obligations in personal relations. In other words, while moral philosophy might not be able to come up with tools that would categorically specify what each unique pair of friends or partners owes to each other, we may at least describe the most important ways in which normativity in relationships arises and what it entails. This is indeed my main ambition in this paper. I will analyze what I consider to be the most important factor that generates duties and obligations peculiar to particular personal relations – *mutually recognized expectations*.

I hold that within personal relationships, absent special circumstances, *you have an obligation to $\varphi$ if there is a mutually recognized expectation that you $\varphi$.* This is how we

[4] One of the defining features of obligations is the fact that reasons based in convenience cannot defeat them—they even seem out of place. "I was having such a good time that I found it difficult to leave the group and call you" is not only an insufficient reason in this situation. It is a reason of a wrong kind. For a further analysis of what obligations entail, see (Heuer 2012, pp. 843–844).

should understand the example from the first section. When going on a three-day trip, Bill has an obligation to call because his wife, Amy, expects it, he knows it, and she knows that he knows. This expectation belongs to the normative landscape of their relationship, to use a metaphor from David Owens. Amy feels that Bill would be letting her down if he does not call—and Bill recognizes it. That is why the reactive attitudes of disappointment, anger, blame, or guilt are appropriate if the phone call does not happen.

The role of expectations in creating or modifying our duties and obligations is not a new topic within moral philosophy. Famously, Thomas Scanlon has proposed an expectation theory of promising, claiming that obligations associated with promising are established by voluntarily and intentionally created expectations, and not by social convention (Scanlon 1998, pp. 295–327). The appeal and controversial nature of Scanlon's proposal meant that for the last 20 years expectations were discussed almost exclusively within the context of promising. This has made the task of analyzing their role in moral philosophy difficult. With regard to expectations, the context of promising is both narrow (most, if not all, obligations created by expectations are not promises) and problematic (promising creates complications that other obligations created by expectations do not have).

Let me unpack the last two claims. Promises are narrow because they require a specific set of conditions in order to successfully arise. Scanlon, in his "Principle F," analyses at least six of them. Promises need to be voluntary, intentionally created, sufficiently weighty, accepted by the promisee, with the requisite beliefs, intentions, and mutual knowledge (Scanlon 1998, p. 304). All these conditions make sense. Promises on Scanlon's account are normatively weighty and do not presuppose any personal relationship between the involved parties. They need to bind complete strangers in the state of nature as well (hence his spear and boomerang example). Therefore, the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a promise need to be strict and specific. As a result, promises in Scanlon cover mostly single actions and are created by a single act of reassurance. His numerous examples (return of a boomerang, mowing a lawn, lending money) testify to that. While long-term commitments are not logically excluded by Scanlon's account, they are difficult to capture. After all, our plans beyond the immediate future are usually not specific enough to fulfil the conditions he sets up. In general, Scanlon's expectation theory of promising covers only a narrow subset of normative considerations within personal relationships.

When Joseph Raz pointed out that "it is mark of a healthy relationship that the number of explicit promises is small" (Raz 1982, p. 931), he identified a very important feature of our relations. The fact that there are fewer promises in healthy relationships does not mean that there are fewer duties and obligations. The opposite can be the case. Under normal circumstances, however, our obligations in relationships arise without the sort of formalities that promises require. Even though in relationships we sometimes ask for explicit commitments, declarations, and assurances, more often than not they are a sign of uneasiness, worry, or a lack of trust. If everything works, the commitments created within our relationships remain well below any threshold required by a successful promise.

A further analysis of the hiking trip example can illustrate the issue. While it is perfectly possible that Bill formally promised to call, this is far from necessary for an obligation to arise. For example, he might have agreed to call when he was going on the first hiking trip, 20 years ago. However, claiming that he is still bound by that reassurance would be a gross misrepresentation of the issue. He never explicitly acknowledged that he should call Amy every time he leaves for the mountains. He never intended to create such an obligation. Amy never accepted it. Almost none of the conditions that Scanlon specifies are present. Nonetheless, within the

context of their relationship, this is something they understand that they owe to each other; there is a mutually recognized expectation. If you asked Bill, he would say that he should let his wife know that he is OK. If you asked Amy, she would tell you the same. Thus, expectations can play a role in many of our obligations within personal relations —and the context of promises is much too narrow to capture them fully.

Apart from being too narrow, promissory obligations are also complex and problematic. This means that they are not a good model on which we can isolate the normative work done by expectations. The nature of promises is still a hotly debated topic between theorists, and there is no consensus in sight (see for example Gilbert 2013; Owens 2006, 2008; Shiffrin 2008; Taylor 2013; Watson 2004). To present a dogmatic opinion (since delving into the literature on promises would make for a completely different paper), it seems to me that an expectation theory of promising has at least one important shortcoming: it fails to account for the promisee's rights. A full-fledged promise, to quote Seana Shiffrin's illuminating account, "involves the transfer of a party's power to change one's mind to another party." As a result, a power to make promises "enables a fully first-personal perspective on joint activity" (Shiffrin 2008, p. 516). If this is the case, then I find it difficult for an expectation theory of promising to fully account for this transfer of power. While voluntarily and intentionally leading someone to believe that I will do X does create obligations, the expectations by themselves seem unable to account for the change of perspective advocated by Shiffrin. Early warning, apology, or a possible compensation are fully adequate in most cases of obligations created by expectations, even when they fulfill all of Scanlon's conditions. Thus, expectation accounts find it difficult to cover for some distinctive features of promises.

In general, obligations created by expectations are both broader and weaker than promises. They are created within relationships, often without the requisite intentions or explicit acceptance. They can often be dissolved by warning—or a termination of the relationship. If Bill informs Amy that there will be no signal in the valley where they plan to climb, then he has no obligation to call. If they break up, then he has no obligation to call either. The obligations created within a relationship depend on the continued existence of this relationship. Assuming we can voluntarily end our private relationships, this would mean that our obligations within them are never "fully first-personal." Therefore, they are importantly different from promises, which can work even between strangers and thus can be independent of any personal relation.

## 3 Expectations and Shared Understanding

I have argued in the first section that our social roles cannot determine all obligations within our personal relations. They leave an important space for individuals to shape their commitments. In this section I also want to argue that this space cannot be filled by formal commitments (promises, contracts, explicit consents). This means that a role played by expectations is both important and not reducible to other items of moral theory.

The previous section has already discussed the difference between obligations based in expectations and promises. Its two main conclusions, however, can be applied to a whole family of formal commitments. First, these commitments are created by an explicit statement of intention, declaration, promise, consent, etc.—something that can be accepted or rejected by the second party. However, human relationships very often do not work like this. The obligations within them usually come from what we can best describe as a shared understanding of how the given relationship works. These mutually recognized expectations are not

reducible to, and cannot be analyzed in terms of, single acts of will or a single utterance (be it reassurance, promise, approval, etc.). Obligations based in expectations within personal relationships usually arise much more "organically."

The second important difference between formal commitments and obligations based in expectations concerns the rights of the other person. While formal commitments entail that the second party has gained certain rights that are independent of the will of the first party, obligations based in expectations are always conditional. A simple warning will often be sufficient to alter the expectations and thus remove the obligation. In more serious cases, the obligation can be removed by termination of the relationship that gave rise to it. Since this is always an option, obligations based in expectations cannot be described in terms of rights.

Fidelity can serve to demonstrate the issue. It is undeniable that fidelity is a very important feature of a great majority of romantic relationships. Partners usually understand their relationship as exclusive, so that they are obligated not to "cheat." However, this is not necessarily so. Some romantic relationships can be "open" and not obligate the partners in this way. So how does an obligation of fidelity arise?

It would be difficult to claim that an obligation of fidelity is necessarily a promissory obligation or any similarly formal commitment. Sometimes, there might come a moment when, after several dates, the partners have a long discussion and solemnly proclaim that they are now in an exclusive relationship with all the corresponding rights and duties. However, this is not how relationships typically work. Partners usually do not formally promise or explicitly specify mutual obligations, not after several weeks of dating. We can describe the process much more accurately as an evolving shared understanding of what the relationship entails. The two partners then at some point come to a mutually recognized expectation of fidelity. However, it is often impossible to identify a precise moment when the relationship became exclusive, because there was no declaration, which was somehow accepted. There were only evolving expectations that, once mutually recognized, evolved into firm obligation.

The point so far is descriptive. Many obligations within our relationships in fact do not meet the standards required by any kind of formal commitment. Evolving mutually recognized expectations provide a much more plausible explication of why these obligations hold and how they come into existence. However, a more subtle, evaluative point can also be made: obligations created by expectations and shared understanding of mutual commitments express the nature of our relationships better. While more "juridical" obligations (contracts, consents, or promises) tend to be clearer, more straightforwardly established, and easier for third parties to evaluate, they do not suit the intimate, personal nature of our special relationships. This is the motivation behind the above-quoted observation by Joseph Raz that explicit promises between friends are rare. Obligations in personal relationships are always part of a bigger picture of shared history, mutual feelings, and much more. A drive to make all expectations explicit and create a situation similar to a contract between strangers would necessarily ignore this bigger picture—and would reliably signal that something is in fact wrong in the relationship. Therefore, obligations based in expectations reflect the nature of personal relationships much more sensitively. As a result, they play a role that is irreducible to other, more standard instruments of moral theory.[5]

However, while obligations created by expectations are less rigid than the ones created by promises, this does not mean that they are not normatively weighty. Fidelity can (again) serve

[5] An elaborated argument claiming that promises are inimical to intimacy is provided by (Markovics 2011). Markovics persuasively explains that promises tend to be fixed (and as an instrument are therefore quite rigid) while loving relationships develop and shift with the changing mutual understanding of the relation.

as an example. As I claimed above, once there is a mutually recognized expectation of fidelity (based on a shared understanding of a given relationship), both parties have an obligation not to have an affair. If, say, Bill were unfaithful, then he would break a weighty second-personal obligation he has towards Amy. Given the importance of exclusive personal relationships, his breach of the expectation-based obligation of fidelity would be much more normatively important than most promises. The fact that Bill can unilaterally get rid of this obligation by breaking up with Amy at any moment does not decrease its stringency in any way.

Cases like these demonstrate that expectation-based obligations inhabit a distinct space among normative phenomena connected to personal relations. They are not reducible to formal commitments, because they function differently and rely on a shared understanding that is often not translatable into promises, consents, declarations or other singular acts of will. Also, as I showed in the first section, they are not reducible to generic obligations associated with different types of personal relationships, because these relationships are normatively underdetermined. We should therefore conclude that expectation-based obligations cannot be subsumed under other, traditionally much more analyzed types of commitments.

## 4 From Expectations to Obligations

So far, I have not analyzed the conditions under which expectations lead to obligations. While I have pointed out cases in which they do (expectation of fidelity, calling during a hiking trip), there are many other cases where expectations have no such consequences. The expectations of overambitious parents do not obligate their kids to become medical doctors; patriarchal expectations of husbands do not obligate their wives to stay at home, etc. An account of obligations based in expectations thus needs to explain when they lead to obligations—and when they do not.

The variety of our relationships and their unique characteristics of course greatly complicate the issue. Duties and obligations created within them are a feature of deep personal bonds, shared history, or mutual understanding and thus tend to be less than clear-cut and difficult to evaluate impersonally. Therefore, as I claimed above, listing necessary and sufficient conditions for the validity of expectation-based obligations is a hopeless task. It would be possible to create counterexamples to every set of putatively exhaustive criteria. There can be no equivalent to Scanlon's "Principle F" for non-promissory obligations. However, this does not mean that it is not possible to identify broad conditions, which, when they hold, usually establish expectation-based obligations.

Expectations tend to bind when they are *mutually recognized*. I take this to be the most important condition. It guarantees that obligations within a relationship are not one-sided, but are a feature of shared understanding between the parties. It is always partially the task of two people developing a relationship to set out what they owe to each other. Therefore, obligations within personal relationships are not like commands; the two parties need to endorse them together. In this way, the condition of mutual recognition eliminates two large groups of non-binding expectations: those that the second party does not know about and those that are one-sided. If one partner has a specific idea of what the other should do, yet the other does not know, his expectations do not bind. The same is true about the expectations a slave-owner has towards his slaves, an overbearing mother towards her child, or an obsessively jealous husband towards his wife. Also failing these conditions are various cases of miscommunication and misunderstanding that tend not to create obligations, because the expectations involved are not shared and mutually recognized.

However, the condition of mutual recognition still does not exclude at least one big group of non-binding expectations: those based on power and/or social pressure. For example, in patriarchal relationships some expectations are mutually recognized yet do not create obligations. If Bill expects Amy to do all the housework and she understands it as a part of her role as a "wife," she has no obligation to do it. Expectations based on power do not bind even when the person in question accepts them. The reason is that the exercise of power or social pressure undermines a sense in which the commitments within a relationship are truly a joint project of the two parties. If one party is in a weaker position and has little choice but to accept the arrangement, a sense of a "shared" commitment vanishes. The expectations are distorted and therefore they do not bind.

Expectations tend to have normative force only when they are *freely* mutually recognized. I understand "free" here in a sense informed by critical theory, as excluding ostensibly voluntary choices by actors who have no real opportunity to act otherwise, because they are pushed into acceptance by power structures in society or power disparity within the relationship. This is of course problematic, but it only reflects the fact that expectation-based obligations are extremely difficult to assess in conditions of unequal power (including not only gender inequality in patriarchal societies but also parent-child relationships, workplace relations, abusive relationships, etc.). Yet, while the condition of free recognition importantly diminishes the number of cases where expectations play an important role, most personal relationships remain untouched. Relations between parents and their adult children, between adult siblings, friendships, and romantic relationships are very often unaffected by power disparity. Therefore, we can say that the expectations within them are indeed freely mutually recognized, and they create obligations.

Taking on board the conditions discussed in the previous paragraphs, the general outline of expectation-based obligations goes as follows:

(1) If X has a personal relation with Y and
(2) if X expects Y to $\varphi$ and
(3) if X knows that Y knows about the expectation that she will $\varphi$ and
(4) if X and Y would both freely recognize this expectation as appropriate, then
(5) Y has an obligation to $\varphi$.

However, I should stress again that this is only an illustration, a most common *schema* of valid expectation-based obligation. We can imagine cases in which there are no obligations even if these conditions are fulfilled, as well as cases when expectation-based obligations do arise even if some of these conditions are *not* fulfilled. Nonetheless, I hold that almost all human relationships contain obligations of roughly this type. This is the most common way in which normatively underdetermined human relations take on additional commitments. The next section will address some consequences of this view.

## 5 Same Situation, Different Obligations

One of the key consequences of the view presented in this paper is that *different expectations we have of different people in the same situation generate different duties*. In other words, two people who are ostensibly in the same situation and have done the same thing can be appraised differently because of different expectations. I hold that this conclusion is a typical feature of our ordinary moral thinking, even though moral

philosophy has not paid attention to it so far. The following elaborate example should demonstrate the issue.

Imagine that Bill in fact did leave Amy, and she is utterly devastated. Looking for emotional support, Amy calls two of her friends, Christina and Deborah, and goes out with them. She wants to get really drunk and forget about the heartbreak, at least for a moment. However, Amy knows that when she drinks she cannot walk straight, loses orientation easily, and has problems getting home. Her friends also know this very well and she expects them to take care of her if this happens.

However, the differences between her friends are very relevant at this point. She has been close to them for years and she knows exactly what to expect. Amy knows that Christina is very dependable. She usually takes her obligations seriously, and Amy cannot remember a situation in which she has let her down. The two of them have a history of mutual help in tough situations. On the other hand, Deborah is much more light-minded. She is fun to be around, extremely sociable, and Amy is very glad she could come. However, in bars she has a tendency to mingle with other people, start flirting, and she often ends up chatting at some other table, forgetting about her friends.

Unsurprisingly, the difference in how Amy views her friends informs her behavior. If she were drinking alone with Christina, she would feel free to get drunk, knowing that Christina will get her home. On the other hand, in a similar scenario with Deborah, Amy would be more careful, making sure that she retains an ability to get home on her own.

Now back to the evening in question. Surprisingly, Deborah did not socialize elsewhere and the group stayed at the bar until it closed. In front of the bar, both friends said goodbye and left, not checking the state of Amy. Being in fact severely drunk, Amy quickly lost her bearings and proceeded to sleep on a sidewalk. There she was picked up by the police and taken into custody to sober up. In the morning, apart from an acute sense of shame, she found out that her wallet, phone, and keys are missing. Needless to say, this was an appalling experience for her, complicating her life for the days and weeks to come.

At this point, it is clear that Amy is furious with her friends. They know her well, they knew this could have happened, they could have prevented it. Yet they did not, and in the process they made her life even more miserable. Both of them are to blame. However, and this is where it gets interesting, Amy is not disappointed with them equally. Quite the opposite. Deborah acted shamefully, yet this is a type of behavior that Amy has come to expect from her occasionally. The anger and disappointment is therefore directed mostly at Christina. She truly let Amy down. Amy counted on her and she left when Amy needed her most. Moreover, this vulnerable state would not even have occurred were it not for Christina's reassuring presence.

I hold that Amy's reactions here are unproblematic and understandable. Given the difference in expectations, everyone would feel a different level of reactive attitudes in situations like this. Consistently with the position defended in this paper, I hold that the variation in reactive attitudes signals a real difference in normative circumstances. Even though both Christina and Deborah are Amy's friends, and they were in the same situation, one had much more stringent obligations than the other did. The reason for this was the unique nature of the relationship between Amy and Christina, their shared understanding, history of mutual help, and appreciation of each other's reliability. This relationship then created expectations that transformed their mutual normative commitments, so that Christina had much more stringent obligations than Deborah.

I take this example to be an instantiation of the schema I presented in the previous section. Expectations, when freely mutually recognized, tend to create obligations that go over and

above what we owe to friends or partners in general. Such expectations therefore change the extent and stringency of our normative commitments. As a result, in the same situation, some people will have more stringent obligations than others.

At this point, a very natural objection comes to mind: *Is it fair?* Doesn't the proposed account discriminate against good people? Because if expectations play a role, then it would mean that good, caring people have more robust obligations than bad people, Christina has a more stringent duty to help than Deborah does, etc. Thus, it could be claimed that bad people are "rewarded" for the lack of expectations they create, while good people are "punished" for being so diligent and reliable. In fact, this line of argument has already been pursued as a critique of Scanlon's account. Erik Encarnacion (2014) claims that a role for expectations in moral theory would result in a situation that "rewards bad behavior."

There are several powerful responses to this worry. The first one is descriptive. Even though some philosophers may regard it as unfair, our everyday practices vindicate the normative role of expectations. We simply expect more from some of our friends—and we are more readily disappointed as well.

A more weighty reason why it is wrong to claim that expectation-based obligations "reward bad behavior" is connected to our interdependence. Human beings make plans and need to count on the actions of others to do almost anything. The power to bind ourselves and others is vital for us; it solves coordination problems, breaks prisoner's dilemmas, and greatly facilitates our lives. Within our relationships, mutually recognized expectations make us do things that we would otherwise be too hesitant, too skeptical, or simply unwilling to do. In this way, we are more exposed to people with whom we share deep commitments. In the end, the overall situation can be characterized by an old cliché: with great(er) power comes great(er) responsibility. Close relationships make us more exposed to other people (just as Amy was to Christina). However, we can also demand more. If all our relations were shallow, we certainly would have fewer obligations, but it would be difficult for us to persuade other people to commit to shared goals and make them rely on us. Our capacity to coordinate and cooperate would be diminished. And it is difficult to see how this can be construed as a "reward."

Perhaps most importantly, obligations based in expectations are a sign of a certain depth within a relationship. This depth is of course difficult to capture philosophically, but it is something that we strive for when we seek to have a real connection with other people. It is something that, for many people, brings value to human lives. In this sense, cases like failing to help a drunk friend might seem trivial, but this is only one manifestation of a much more important issue. If you are the first person that someone calls when they are in distress, and they are willing to fully rely on you, it is of course a heavy responsibility. However, it is also a great privilege. Such an event is the ultimate expression of your importance in someone else's life. It is a chance to *really* make a difference and affirm what was already implicit in the relationship. Such situations, in other words, are valuable. They enable us to express our humanity, to stand by our deepest commitments. Seeing obligations based in expectations only as a burden would therefore be a mistake.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper analyzed personal relations only insofar as they create obligations. While the proposed account of these obligations needed occasional references to shared history or mutual understanding, there was no ambition to capture these phenomena. Love, friendship, and deep personal

bonds are extremely complex and this paper considered only one (and arguably quite a shallow) aspect of them: the expectations they create and their consequences on what we ought to do.

Given that the factors driving unique personal relationships are so varied that they remain out of bounds for general moral theory, no attempt was made to capture the necessary and sufficient conditions for expectation-based obligations. Expectations within personal relationships can misfire in countless different ways. What one party describes as an exclusive, committed relationship may be just a summer fling for the other. Such situations create difficulties that might be impossible to analyze in the abstract, without the full context. This is a field where great novels can provide insights that are difficult to grasp by short examples in philosophical papers. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, it is nonetheless possible to identify a general pattern in how our obligations in personal relationships arise—with the help of mutually recognized expectations.

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