A NEW VIEW OF WHY PROMISES OBLIGATE

My research with Leslie has focused on two related concepts: promises and expectations. Promises are a core concept in any complete moral theory. Almost all the great moral philosophers have offered an account of how promises obligate, as have most modern philosophers. Some have argued that promises obligate because of social convention. Others have argued that promises obligate for reasons of utility. Yet others have argued from Kantian perspectives. The varied answers to this problem are logical extensions of the moral framework the various authors work within.

My research offers a new view of promises. It does this by redefining the source of the obligations that promises generate. Unlike the traditional views, which identify the source of obligations with either the promisor or the larger social relationship, my view begins with the expectations of the promisee. My research defends this perspective as a better one than that offered by the traditional accounts. It also shows how this new view solves several of the problems the traditional accounts encounter.

This project is part of a larger philosophical inquiry into why expectations matter. Such an inquiry is of great theoretical and practical interest for both moral philosophers and legal contract theorists.