

Scanlon's Promising Proposal and the Right Kind of Reasons to Believe¹

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Scanlon's account of the obligation to keep promises contrasts with more traditional accounts that rely on promising's status as a kind of social practice along with some sort of duty to support such practices. He suggests that the duty is better explained using a principle that governs actions broader than promising, Principle F:

If (1) A voluntarily and intentionally leads B to expect that A will do X (unless B consents to A's not doing so); (2) A knows that B wants to be assured of this; (3) A acts with the aim of providing this assurance, and has good reason to believe that she has done so; (4) B knows that A has the beliefs and intentions just described; (5) A intends for B to know this, and knows that B does know it; and (6) B knows that A has this knowledge and intent, then, in the absence of special justification, A must do X unless B consents to X's not being done.²

One succeeds in promising (according to this account) if one gets another to have such expectations in virtue of believing that one is motivated not to violate the very same obligation referenced by Principle F. Thus Scanlon's theory relies on no duty to comport with extant social practices to explain promising. It relies instead on a different normative principle, Principle F.

The resulting account in a way gives us two sorts of explanation. First, it gives us an

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²Scanlon, (1990) p. 208. Principle F also makes an appearance in Scanlon (1998a) at 304, and in (1998b) at p. 245.

explanation of why as we believe, we generally have an obligation to keep our promises unless released by the promisee. And second, it gives us a vindicating account of how the institution/practice of promising could arise without self-deception or irrationality. And this second level of explanation relies on the first. It is because the actions involved in promising do in fact trigger the relevant obligation that it can make sense for us to institute and abide by such a practice. Of course the second level depends on other claims as well, such as the assumption that people often enough comply with their obligations. But it is worth noticing that the explanation of the practice depends on the first level normative claim.

Not everyone likes this. A more traditional account of promising puts social practices at the foundational level. According to such theories it is because there is a social practice of promising that we have promises and an obligation to keep them. Pure social practice theorists ground our obligation to keep promises in the fact that there is a social practice of promising that enables us to get various benefits, including the benefits of compliance with promises, but also the benefits of assurance that something will be done. And they couple this with some normative principle requiring that one comply with just or useful social practices. Hybrid theorists, notably Kolodny and Wallace³, suggest that social practices have some such grounding role while also suggesting that our current obligations to keep promises get their normative force from something like Principle F in addition to such practice based justifications.

In support of their view Kolodny and Wallace (following Pratt, Anscombe, Warnock and Hume)⁴ have pressed a circularity objection against Scanlon's account. A person succeeds in

³Kolodny and Wallace(2003).

⁴Anscombe (1978); Pratt (2003); Warnock (1971) 99-101; Hume (1888), Bk III, Part 2, ch.5.

promising only if she creates the expectation in clause (1) by getting the promisee to believe she will do what is expected because Principle F applies. But Principle F will apply only if the promisee has the required expectation. It thus looks like the person forming the expectation must already have that very expectation for her to be justified in coming to expect the promisor will do as promised because not doing so would violate Principle F. In the absence of that expectation a lack of follow through would not violate Principle F.

Kolodny and Wallace offer a hybrid account to patch up Scanlon's account and partially vindicate his claim that the relevant obligation has to do with raising expectations and not with failing to cooperate with a mutually beneficial social practice. A hybrid strategy involves using some other principle to underwrite the promisee's rational expectation that the promisor will follow through and then to bolster that expectation with reasoning employing Principle F. Kolodny and Wallace use a practice-based principle to underwrite the initial expectation on the part of the promisee, but allow Scanlonian reasoning to reinforce the expectation once the practice-based reasoning has created it. Since this suggestion importantly relies on the status of promising as a social practice to get around the objection it does not allow Scanlon to escape reliance on practices at a fundamental level.

In this paper I will argue that any vicious circularity in Scanlon's account can be avoided without recourse to promising's status as a social practice or to the duty to comply with social practices from which one benefits. In fact, I will argue, there is also a circularity worry for the practice view – how could such a social practice could get off the ground if the obligation to keep a promise itself depended on the status of promising as a going social practice. Furthermore, I'll argue that the "circularity" objection really boils down to a right kinds of reasons objection employing assumptions about the right kinds of reasons for belief. And, I'll

argue that so construed the objection can be overcome. For too many of our seemingly unproblematic cooperative beliefs and intentions would not pass muster if these assumptions were correct.⁵

I'll break things down into three main parts. In the first, I'll go into a bit more detail about Scanlon's proposal and its virtues. In the second I will discuss the Kolodny/Wallace objection and explain why it boils down to a right kinds of reasons objection. And then in the third part I'll provide some reasons for thinking that so construed, the objection can be overcome.

I. Some Advantages of Scanlon's Promising Proposal Over Practice Accounts.

Scanlon first presents his account in contrast to social-practice accounts of promises of the sort that many people, Scanlon included, have found attractive. The basic idea of these accounts is that we have some kind of duty to comport ourselves with just and/or mutually advantageous social practices. A common and uncontroversial assumption of such accounts is that the institution of the social practice of promising is generally beneficial. Recipients of promises get the benefits of being reasonably well assured that the promisor will do as promised, and promisors get the benefits of being able to assure others of their future reliability with respect to the target of the promise. Social Practice justifications then couple this with the thought that there is some duty to comply with just and beneficial social practices. Rawls, for

⁵Since this is a workshop paper it might be useful to highlight which bits of my thesis seem to me more secure and which seem less so. I'm very sure that the basic objection is a wrong kinds of reasons objection and in particular a wrong kinds of reason for belief objection. I'm also pretty sure that there are interesting commonalities between the line of reasoning that Scanlon suggests underlies obligations of fidelity, and other lines of reasoning essential to coordination. I'm less sure that there is no valid wrong kinds of reasons worry for Scanlon's account, but think that if there is one there are likely to be resources available to provide a fix. And I'm surer yet that these resources won't rely essentially on a social-practice justification of promising.

example, invokes a Principle of Fairness, which he believes obligates the voluntary beneficiaries of just social practices to do their fair share to support them by complying with the obligations such practices place on them.⁶ It wouldn't be hard to come up with other variants of such vindicating social practice theories of promising.⁷ Common to such theories will be the reliance on a certain kind of social fact – that there is a social practice of promising from which most/all benefit – to ground the duty to obey one's promises. In the absence of such a practice there would be no genuine obligation to keep one's promises.

Scanlon notices one odd upshot of this sort of justification. Often when we think we are under some sort of obligation we feel that it is directed in some way towards certain people, to whom we “owe” performance. While others might appropriately criticize or blame us for running afoul of certain obligations, these sorts of obligation give some people stronger reason to complain than others. Promising seems to be of this sort. If I notice a friend failing to keep promises I can judge her accordingly, remonstrate with her, and perhaps even blame her for acting badly. But if that same friend makes that promise to me and fails to keep it, I have a certain sort of special standing to complain. We feel as though the recipient of a promise has special status when the promise is not complied with.

Social practice accounts are not well placed to explain this feature of promising. For they make the failure to keep a promise just a particular instance of a general duty not to free-ride on beneficial and just practices. If that's the idea it looks like all of us who are part of the practice

⁶Rawls, (1971) pp. 344-50.

⁷In addition to Rawls, Scanlon cites Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. III, Pt. 2, chap. 5 as using an ideal observer theory along with the thought that ideal observers would disapprove of defection from beneficial social practices to suggest a similar verdict with respect to breaking promises. It wouldn't be hard to come up with other variants of such practices accounts.

and do our bit to uphold it are equally in a position to complain when the promise is broken. The malefactor is not doing his or her fair share and we who are doing our share have a complaint of unfairness against that. The expectation of apology for infractions would be generally shared, as would the right to forgive those who transgress. But that isn't how it intuitively seems, at least to me. The recipient of the promise is especially owed an apology (at least if they're still around) and only they (or perhaps their agents or designees) could really accept it.

Scanlon's own account is better placed to explain why our obligation seems directed at the promisee. That's because Principle F itself seems like a duty we can easily think of as directed towards those whose expectations we raise. This directedness isn't built in by the language of Principle F, but it does seem the most natural way to take its force. One way to think of it is that in the particular transaction that creates assurance there are two parties whose concerns and interests are of focal concern. The promisor, who for whatever reason wants to provide assurance, and the promisee who wants and seeks it. When the promisor defects that will presumably be because her interests are better served by such defection. But the promisee's interests have not been taken into account – if they were she would presumably have been willing to release the promisor from the promise.⁸ So that's one virtue of Scanlon's account.

Here's another. Practice accounts lead to a circularity or regress worry of their own. They require preexisting practices to get off the ground; Scanlon's proposal, by contrast, can generate reasons to keep a promise without supposing that there have been prior instances of promising. As Kolodny and Wallace note, it is essential to both Scanlonian and practice accounts of promising that they explain the reason a promisor has to keep a promise by invoking

⁸Complications involving the dead and absent are fully noted; it might be worth adding some clause about when we know they would release us to Principle F.

a moral obligation incurred by that very act of promising. And that fact in turn explains why the promisee can reasonably expect follow through. “The promiser influences the attitudes of the promisee by reflexively invoking an obligation that is incurred by the very act of promising itself.” (Kolodny and Wallace, p. 21) Where the two accounts differ is about the nature and explanation of that moral obligation. Put abstractly, Scanlon’s account puts few constraints on the empirical facts extending back in time from the promise that creates obligation, whereas the practice account requires that there already be in place a socially useful practice of promising (or something like it).

Different social practice theories vary as to the exact nature of the normative grounds of that obligation. Rawls invoked something like a duty of fairness not to free-ride on the efforts of others in creating a generally beneficial social practice.⁹ Hume seems to invoke general benevolence to underwrite impartial disapproval of activities that might undermine useful social practices.¹⁰ But these diverse normative principles all require an actual social practice already in place to generate an obligation in a particular case. You aren’t free-riding on the efforts of others if there is no socially created practice of promising on which the success in providing assurance depends. And you aren’t undermining a useful social practice in the absence of an actual practice of the sort we are trying to explain and rationalize. As far as I can see, this can’t be fixed by tweaking the relevant obligations to apply to possible but not actual social practices. You aren’t free-riding if you don’t take what would be the first of many steps towards creating a useful practice, at least in the absence of an agreement to create such a practice. And it isn’t obvious why disinterested benevolence would motivate us to disapprove of someone who

⁹Rawls (1971) 344 ff..

¹⁰Hume (1888) pp 516-22.

doesn't take steps that would be part of a useful practice if there only was such a practice.

So far as I can tell, that leaves the advocates the option of first giving a non-vindicating account of the origins of the practice of promising and then arguing that once it is in place, we have good reason to comply because now that the practice is up and running it creates an obligation that did not previously bind those who made promises. Lucky for us, enough previous promisors mistakenly thought themselves bound that we can now say there is an existing social practice of providing assurance by making promises. And now given that fact, we for the first time have an obligation to keep the promises we make. This isn't an incoherent story, but it does give us reason to be curious about how the previous participants got themselves confused enough to keep their promises in the absence of any obligation to do so.¹¹

It is a virtue of Scanlonian accounts of promising that they require no such error-theoretic story. And that is because his account puts no requirements on the past. Grounds for accepting and keeping a promise are grounded entirely contemporaneous with and subsequent to the promising itself. As a result it doesn't require promising already to exist before one can succeed in making a binding promise.¹²

¹¹The worry is particularly pressing for Kolodny and Wallace, who write, "In promising, one signals one's recognition of a moral obligation not to undermine or exploit not merely some social practice of agreement making, but specifically the social practice of promising: the practice that consists in participants' signaling that they adhere to a policy of fidelity because they recognize moral obligations to adhere to the policy."(123) This rules out explaining the genesis of promising by piggybacking it on a distinct but similar practice.

They go on to consider a charge of bootstrapping related to my worry. But their answer really only speaks to reasons why we might continue with such a practice once it is in place – something I concede they can provide.

¹²A forthcoming paper by Ulrich Heuer attributes a circularity objection to David Owens's in a forthcoming book on promising. Owens's objection there looks like it involves the same worries that I am explicating here.

II. The Circularity Objection is a Right Kinds of Reasons for Belief Objection.

This way of putting the point will immediately remind readers of the circularity charge against Scanlon. I'm using it as a springboard to examining that worry partly to draw a contrast. Whatever circularity there may be in Scanlon's account, it isn't the kind of circularity that generates an infinite regress in time. Rather the circularity, if there is any, is logical. One's reasons to keep a promise depend on another's reasons to expect one to keep the promise, and yet that other person's reasons in turn depend on your having reason to keep the very promise in question. Kolodny and Wallace put there objection into a short argument:

- (a) In order for B to be assured—by appeal to F, in the way in which Scanlon describes—that A will do X, A must first be obligated by F to do X.
- (b) In order for A to be obligated by F to do X, condition (1) of F must first be satisfied.
- (c) In order for condition (1) of F to be satisfied, B must first be assured that A will do X.
- (d) In order for B to be assured—by appeal to F, in the way in which Scanlon describes—that A will do X, B must first be assured—by some other means—that A will do X. (K & W, p. 132)

It is easy to see how this sets up Kolodny and Wallace's hybrid solution to the problem; practice based reasons can provide assurance by another means.

A number of the premises in this argument and the conclusion make claims about what must 'first' obtain for a person to succeed in providing assurance by employing Principle F. But nothing in Principle F requires any kind of temporal priority so long as all of its clauses are simultaneously satisfied. Nor is there anything built into using Principle F to generate assurance that requires temporal priority as opposed to contemporaneous mutual recognition that the promisor has met the conditions of Principle F and thereby obligated herself.

The real worry is that being assured is a kind of cognitive attitude, one that has to be based on evidence to be well-grounded. It will only be well-grounded if there is some basis for thinking the expectation – that is the belief that the promisor will follow through – is justified. Promising is supposed to ground that belief in the thought that the promisor would be running afoul of Principle F if she does not keep the promise. But for that to be so, the promisee needs to have the expectation – that is the belief that the promisor will follow through. What we have then, seems to be a belief that is justified only if it is accepted. And the worry is that rational belief requires awareness of the justification to be rational, a justification that won't be assured until the promisee believes the proposition in need of justification.

The point here is one about justification. As Kolodny and Wallace nicely put it the challenge is, “Can an account of the obligation of fidelity spell out clearly the conditions that trigger that obligation, and would the obligation survive under explicit awareness on the part of both promisers and promisees of the conditions that provide its basis?” Understood in this way, it won't be an answer to point out that so long as the promisee fools the promisor into thinking that she believes the promisor will follow through, she will have a reason to expect follow through. Nor would it be an answer to point out that if the promisee mistakenly and irrationally comes to believe that the promisor will follow through, Principle F will trigger an obligation. So we need to think about whether the promisee's expectation can be justified without someone making an error. And that requires asking whether the promisee can have the right kind of reason to believe that the promisor will follow through, where that reason invokes Principle F.

III. A. Does the Promisee Have the Right Kind of Reason to Believe?

To put the objection most sharply, someone who doubts that the promisee has the right

kind of reason to believe might liken the belief in question to some sort of wishful thinking. It cannot, the objectors might say, be a reason to believe that the promisor will follow through that it would serve my purposes – the purposes of securing a binding promise – that I believe the promisor will. Our desires shouldn't be able to make rational a belief that would not be rational in their absence. As Nishi Shah among others has argued, reasons for belief must be such as to make sense of our taking these reasons as relevant to determining whether the belief in question is true.¹³ Believing something just because we would like it to be true is not that kind of reason.

We should note, however, that the situations is unusual in one important respect. The promisee is deciding whether to believe that the promisor will do as suggested on the basis of her coming to have that very belief. Absent worries about the promisor's good intentions, the belief will be true if she comes to have it (at least if she's right about the other conditions she is in). And the promisee and promisor are in a position to know this. A principle of belief adoption which allowed one to believe such self-validating contents would thus be reliable in the sense that it would not lead one to adopt false beliefs. That by itself does not tell us whether the promisee has the right kind of reason to believe the proposition in question, but it does reduce the urgency of the worry at least to this extent. Forming beliefs in this way won't lead us away from the truth.

In the remainder of this paper I will in effect be arguing that the reasoning in question is not really a form of wishful thinking or even relevantly like it. The promisee is not forming the belief that the promisor will follow through *just* because she wants it to be true, even though the fact that she wants it to be true enters into her reasoning in a certain way. I will pursue the issue by looking at other sorts of reasoning that have a similar structure to that involved in generating

¹³Shah (2003).

the objection here.

III. B. Reasons for Optimism

I finished graduate school and took my present job before cellular phones were widely available at a reasonable price. Jennifer and I packed all of our belongings into the largest U-Haul truck available, filling it to the point that it sagged on its suspension. We drove West out of New Jersey to Nebraska, with a stop in Illinois where my parents lived. In Illinois we picked up an old Renault sedan which my parents no longer wanted since Jenny and I did not own a car. I drove the van and Jenny followed in the Renault. Since I knew the route, Jenny was planning just to follow the large and hard to miss truck. Many miles from my parent's house and probably long before I realized it, Jenny discovered she was no longer following me. At some point I also came to that realization.

We each stopped to ponder our predicaments and each eventually figured out that it would make the most sense to call my parents at their home which we had left earlier in the day. We called them about 5 minutes apart and we were then able to pass messages along to one another. Using this method we were able to coordinate a meeting and to continue on our way as planned.

I believe Jenny and I were correct to think it made sense to call my parents as a strategy for getting reconnected. But its making sense depended on further beliefs that we each had, among them the belief that each of us had that the other was going to call my parents because that is what it made sense to do. It would have been no use calling my folks if they weren't going to have a way of communicating with Jenny. And they weren't going to have that unless she called them. I believed she would call them because it would make sense for her to call if she believed that I was going to do so as well. So it looked like each of us formed the belief that

the other would call, based on an inference from a thought about what the other could reasonably believe. And the belief we each thought it reasonable for the other to have itself depended on the a belief which would only be reasonable if that very belief was true. That's just the feature that is somewhat troubling about the promisee's belief that the promisor will follow through if Scanlon is right about promising.

The driving story I just told is an instance of a kind of problem/situation that has received a lot of attention in the decision theory and game theory literature. The situation Jennifer and I were in is structurally similar to that of players in a coordination game invented by Thomas Schelling:

You are to meet in New York City. You have not been instructed where to meet; you have not prior understanding with the person on where to meet; and you cannot communicate with each other. You are simply told that you will have to guess where to meet and that he is being told the same thing and that you will just have to make your guesses coincide. (Schelling, 1960, p. 56)

A majority of test subjects who played this game in 1960 chose Grand Central Station as the place to meet. If they were asked also to converge on a time, noon was the dominant choice. (Schelling, p. 55, fn __) Schelling called the salient coordination points "focal points", and argued that for many such coordination games and in their real-life analogues sufficiently creative individuals could reasonably form hypotheses about focal points that would attract attention from a cooperating partner.

What is important for my purposes is that these choices seem rational and that the rationality of the choices depend on the rationality of cognitive states the players might adopt. It is reasonable for a player to expect other players to choose a certain strategy on the assumption that it is reasonable for that player him or herself to choose a complementary strategy. But, at the same time, it may be reasonable for a given player to choose that complementary strategy

only if she correctly predicts that the other player will choose its complement. Here we seem to have a prediction about another party's response to a prediction about that very judgement, where the rationality of each state of mind reflexively depends on the rationality of what the other party believes and does. And that is the same feature that raised issues for Scanlon's account. If the jointly cooperative coordination point can be reasonably predicted by a player in this game, there might in principle be nothing wrong with the kind of reflexivity involved in Scanlon's account of promising.

Someone might resist my use of these examples by pointing out that the rationality of choosing such a focal point doesn't really depend on a full belief that one's partner will converge on the same point. All you really need to think is that the point in question is the most likely, or among the most likely places to meet. Or perhaps, the objection might go, you don't even need a belief that it is more likely so long as one's own credence that they will choose the relevant focal point is higher than one's credence in their choosing any other alternative. I don't think that this changes the moral of the story. The rationality of the choice in these cases still depends on what cognitive states it is rational to form in the circumstances in question. I only have reason to raise my credence in my partner's going to Grand Central Station if I can rationally expect her to raise her credence in my coming to raise my credence in that very hypothesis. Credences,, beliefs about probability, and beliefs about relative probability are all cognitive states. If a putative reason is the wrong kind to support belief – including beliefs about probability, it should also be of the wrong kind to support raising one's credence.

III. C. Lessons From Cooperation and Focal Points

At this level of abstraction such cooperative games give us grounds for optimism, but

we'd like more than that. It would be useful to be able to say why those facing these sorts of coordination problems react rationally when they form beliefs about what the other will do. If we were in a position to do that we could then look whether those same features are present in ordinary promising. I aim to get to that in due course, but I want to begin with a difference between the Schelling coordination game and promising.

In the paradigm cooperative games parties are not in a position to communicate with one another. This means, I think, that the actual credence of one party in some claim about what the other party will do does not enter directly into making the other parties expectations and actions rationally permissible. What matters for the justification of one party's expectations and beliefs is what they can rationally think the other party will do and believe given what is common knowledge between the parties.¹⁴ So in these cases, it isn't my coming to believe that my partner will go to Grand Central Station that makes it rational for her to go there, it is her believing that it is rational for me to believe that, and her thought that I will likely do and believe what it is rational for me to do and believe. This may to some extent defuse the worry that the parties' reasoning involves illegitimate bootstrapping; the rationality of my belief does not depend on my believing it. On the other hand, it may make things look worse, insofar as the rationality of that belief (that is a belief with that content) will now depend on the rationality of that very kind of belief. Still, insofar as the issue is one of figuring out what joint strategy yields the best result for both parties, and insofar as they can converge on a single joint strategy as the answer, their acting in accordance with that strategy will be rational.

I think it is this last fact that gives us a clue as to how the beliefs can be justified. First the parties can reason to a series of actions (in this case the same for each party) which will yield

¹⁴Robert Sugden, "A Theory of Focal Points." *Economic Journal*, 105 (1995) 533–50.

the optimal result for both of them. Given this, it will also be prima facie rational for each to do her part to act as that joint strategy requires so long as she has some reason to believe her partner will. That each in fact wants them both to do their part gives each some reason to do her part and therefore also some reason to believe her partner will. As each party's reason to think her partner will do her part goes up, so does her own reason to do her part. We get a kind of positive feedback loop of mutually reinforcing reasons to believe and reasons to act, which eventually yield sufficient reason to act and believe. A weak reason to think one's partner will contribute her part of the joint strategy is some reason to do one's own part. And that may be all we need to get the virtuous cycle started.

If that's right, perhaps something similar will work to get a similar virtuous feedback cycle started in our promising example. As with cooperative games, promisors and promisees share some important common goals. The promisee wishes to be assured that the promisor will do the action or actions that are the subject of the promise. The promisor wants to assure the promisee of just that as well. They can also both see that if they can jointly generate a rationally grounded expectation of the promisee that the promisor will do as promised, Principle F will generate grounds to expect just that. Thus they can see generating the conditions that trigger Principle F as an optimal joint strategy for providing the assurance they both want. One way that a potential promisor might do that is just to decide to do whatever it is that she intends to promise to do and to communicate that intention to the promisee. That itself should rationally raise the promisee's expectation that the promisor will do the action in question. And that will plausibly put the promisor in the domain governed by Principle F. The reasons it would be wrong to lead someone to fully expect one to do something and then not follow through, are of a piece with the reasons it would be wrong to lead them to a similar merely probably expectation

and then not follow through. Perhaps that strength of these reasons varies with the strength of the reasons given to form the underlying expectation. But the reasons need not be conclusive to make Principle F relevant. And once it is relevant it will give the promisor yet more reason to do what she intended and communicated to the promisee. And that itself will be yet more reason for the promisee to expect her to follow through. Thus, once the promisee has some reasonable confidence that the promisor will follow through, the promisor has a Principle F-based reason to do what she said she would.

I don't see anything wrong with this story as one way to get the promise off the ground.¹⁵ But it is worth noting that this way of going constructs a minimal version of a hybrid Scanlon-type theory. For it starts with a reason on the part of the promisor to follow through and do the action of the sort that she promises she'll do which is not itself rooted in Principle F. This reason then creates a reason to expect her to do what the promisee is hoping she'll do and that fact then creates the Principle F-based reason to do as promised. This is in some ways parallel to what Kolodny and Wallace do when they use a practice based reason to do as promised to ground an expectation which then generates a Principle F-based reason to comply. But, it avoids using a practice based account of promising as part of the grounding explanation of how promises get off the ground, so it still vindicates one of the claims I hoped to argue for – that our reasons to keep

¹⁵Some readers might worry that deciding to do what the promisee wants in order to trigger the promissory obligation is the wrong kind of reason to intend to do an action, perhaps because they buy into Parfit's state-based/object-based distinction as drawing the line for the right kinds of reason to intend. (See, for example, Parfit) Or perhaps they just think the upshot of the toxin puzzle (Kavka, 1983) is that reasons to intend must always be reasons to do the action in question. I'm not persuaded for two reasons. (1) There are good reasons to doubt this as an account of the relevant distinction. (See Schroeder, forthcoming) And, in any case, the promisor likely has plenty of good reason to do the action she wishes to promise to do. For one thing, the promisee would like it. There is more to say here, but I think these materials are enough to avoid this line of objection.

promises are not in the first instance practice based.

But we might hope for more than a hybrid account that requires that there be an independent decision to do as one will promise to do prior to the promise itself. In coordination games it doesn't seem that we really need to generate the different steps which ground the expectation that we and our partner will wind up at a focal point in any particular temporal order. In other words, we don't have first to form some small expectation that our partner will head to Grand Central Station, note that this gives us some reason to go to Grand Central ourselves, go on from there to note that this in turn gives our partner more reason to go there, raise our expectation, and so on. We can all at once, as it were, grasp that the optimal joint strategy is to go to Grand Central and this line of reasoning terminates with an expectation that one's partner will go there and an intention to go there oneself. There seems to be nothing irrational in that kind of immediate response to the structure of the situation.

If you can already see that a process of good reasoning will lead to a certain conclusion that is itself a reason to endorse that conclusion. If you expect to know that you have a sufficient reason to go to Grand Central Station in the immediate future, that is itself a reason to attempt to go to Grand Central Station.¹⁶ Things are similar with promising. If two people A and B can see that A by communicating an intention to Φ will give B reason to raise her expectation that A will Φ , and that this very expectation will make Principle F generate a further reason for A to Φ and B to expect A to Φ , and A does in fact communicate the intention to Φ to B, then B has reason to conclude that A will Φ , and A has reason to expect B to conclude just that. Both parties can reasonably come to the relevant judgements and intentions all at once, without need for any

¹⁶Such reasoning would be endorsed by even the weakest sorts of reflection principles, and these are weak enough themselves to be plausible. For discussion of some variants, see Briggs (2009).

temporally prior step.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Scanlon himself said something very much like this in his original paper defending the view against a similar objection by Anscombe:

. . . Here is a proposed analysis. When I say “I promise to be there at ten o’clock to help you,” the effect is the same as if I had said “I will be there at ten o’clock to help you. Trust me.” In either of these utterances I do several things. I claim to have a certain intention. I make this claim with the clear aim of getting you to believe I have this intention, and I do this in circumstances in which it is clear that if you do believe it then the truth of this belief will matter to you . . . Finally, I indicate to you that I believe and take seriously the fact that, once I have declared this intention under the circumstances, and have reason to believe that you are convinced by it, it would be wrong of me not to show up (in the absence of some truly compelling reason for failing to appear). (Scanlon, 1990, p. 211)

That may make what I’m arguing here seem pretty mundane in that Scanlon said it already. And really I am just arguing that there is nothing wrong with Scanlon’s answer here. But the objection to Scanlon did come from people who had already read what Scanlon says, and many others who had also read these words also thought the objection won the day.¹⁷ What I’m hoping is that by clarifying that the objection is a wrong kinds of reasons objection and by looking at other reasons for belief with the same sort of reflexive dependence on the reasons of another, we can see that Scanlon’s claims here are in order.

¹⁷ See, for example, Tognazzini (2003) pp. 209-213.

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