

The Ties that Bind: The Concept of Obligation

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It is a conceptual truth that systems of law define legal obligations, but this raises the issue of how the practices that constitute something as a system of law give rise to legal obligations. This requires explaining how these practices give rise to the kinds of objective practical reasons to which obligations, as a conceptual matter, give rise in a manner that warrants characterizing norms that define those legal obligations as *binding* subjects in the manner in which obligations, as a conceptual matter, bind subjects. This requires identifying those conditions conceptually necessary for the existence of a legal obligation and explaining why anything satisfying those conditions gives rise to the right kind of objective practical reasons and are properly characterized as binding subjects. But the content of the concept of legal obligation cannot be fully explicated without explicating the content of the more general concept of obligation; after all, everything properly characterized as a legal obligation is also properly characterized as an obligation. I attempt to give an account of the more general concept of obligation as a prelude to giving an account of the concept of legal obligation.