

Foreseeable Consequences Determine Moral Obligation

Bart Gruzalski

The standard utilitarian and consequential accounts of right, wrong and obligatory tend to be in terms of actual consequences rather than in terms of foreseeable consequences (or expected desirabilities). In this paper I offer an account of 'foreseeable consequence utilitarianism' that this is not a subjective criterion of right and wrong but rather an objective criterion. I present three arguments for the claim that utilitarianism is better interpreted in terms of foreseeable consequences than in terms of actual consequences:

Our ordinary assessments of right or wrong--including those considered moral judgments that seem to incorporate intentionality-- track more closely a foreseeable consequence account (FCA) rather than an actual consequences account (ACA).

ACA simpliciter is inapplicable in the real world. This is a critical point once we examine the point of labeling actions as right, wrong or obligatory. (ACA becomes more applicable once we supplement it with an FCA account, but that tends to show indispensability of an FCA account).

Whether we are utilitarianism or critics of utilitarianism, we want to evaluate/criticize/supporting/or teach the strongest, most invulnerable (to counterexample) version of utilitarianism and hence the most plausible form of utilitarianism. ACA is vulnerable to a number of crazy, improbable, conceptually possible but empirically impossible counterexamples. FCA is immune to these and most other alleged counterexamples and so is the better interpretation of utilitarianism.