

Scalar Utilitarianism

In “The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism” (forthcoming in *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism* edited by Henry West) Alastair Norcross argues that if one is going to be a utilitarian, one ought to be a scalar utilitarian. The scalar utilitarian ranks acts from the worst to the best, but does not divide acts into the permissible and the impermissible. We can, he argues, make do with the comparative judgements. In this paper, I demonstrate that Norcross's arguments are flawed. In addition to this, however, the discussion of scalar utilitarianism also has implications that go beyond scalar utilitarianism.

For example, I argue that one of Norcross's arguments relies on the implicit assumption that (at least in relation to punishment) utilitarians simply don't need to distinguish between permissible act and impermissible acts: “the *sole* determinant of the appropriateness of blame or punishment is how much utility will be produced by doing so.”¹ Therefore, even if I deny Norcross's claim that act-utilitarianism is the most *plausible* form of utilitarianism, I do concede that it is the most *honest* form of consequentialism: it doesn't *pretend* to care about permissibility.

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¹ Norcross, “the Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism”, p. 226.