

## Consequentialism and Normative Fictionalism

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Though the notion of a ‘useful fiction’ was employed by early Utilitarians, such as Jeremy Bentham, it has been underemployed in recent years to solve problems that have beset act-utilitarianism as well as some novel variants. For example, one could argue that the notion of the supererogatory is a useful fiction that promotes maximization of the good by inflating expectations regarding how much effort should be made in promoting the good. What makes ‘supererogatory’ a fiction is that there is no such thing as an act that is better than what one ought to do, given the standard ‘maximizing’ construal of act-utilitarianism. Yet, given fairly plausible assumptions about human psychology – assumptions we see reflected in common sense morality – it is useful for us to think in terms of the supererogatory, and limits on obligation that fall short of maximization.

This paper explores 1) the notion of a ‘useful fiction’ and the distinction between an ideal and a garden variety useful fiction; and 2) the usefulness of ‘useful fiction’ itself in the development of novel variants on act-utilitarianism. The analysis is expanded to show the notion can solve fairly standard problems for scalar utilitarianism (or, more generally, scalar consequentialism), which holds that, strictly speaking, there are no right actions, only actions that are ‘best’ relative to other options open to the agent. The claim is that, since standard act-consequentialists have made use of the ‘useful fiction’ when it comes to other evaluative terms, the scalar consequentialist is simply employing the same strategy more widely. However, the structure of the sort of scalar consequentialism that results is somewhat different than the form suggested by writers such as Alastair Norcross since it is still the case that the aim of the morally good agent (though not the intentional or conscious aim, necessarily) must be to promote good to the fullest extent. Unlike Norcross’ version, this version would be highly demanding. This renders any additional intuitive plausibility of scalar consequentialism over standard act-consequentialism illusory. The useful fiction, then, takes the form of an *ideal*, which is a special kind of useful fiction.