Consequentialization and the Structure of Morality

Kevin Dorst
Washington University in St Louis

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The debate between consequentialism and non-consequentialism is one of the most important issues in contemporary normative ethics. It is fundamentally a disagreement over the structure of morality—is the status of actions as right or wrong to be determined by their (possible) outcomes, or by independent criteria? Due to the plethora of ways to specify which outcomes one ought to aim for, in recent years several authors have begun to discuss the scope and importance of a process called “consequentialization.” To consequentialize a given non-consequentialist moral theory M, one must make a new theory M* that has a consequentialist structure and yet reaches the exact same deontic verdicts as M. With this process in mind, a natural question is whether all non-consequentialist theories can be consequentialized in this way. The aim of this work is to clarify the motive, extension, and limitations of consequentialization. I first explain why this process is important for the debate between consequentialism and its rivals, and then go on to develop an axiomatic approach that provides a general account of the scope of consequentialization. Using this account I argue that one can consequentialize any remotely plausible moral theory, provided that the theory does not invoke the concept of value incommensurability. Thus the upshot of my argument is that the status of value incommensurability as a legitimate moral fact (or not) is a key fulcrum in the debate between consequentialism and non-consequentialism, and thus should be a focus of future discussions.