The Rights-Obligations Proposal says that the concept of a moral right is definable by that of *prima facie* moral obligation and some nonethical concepts. Several philosophers have tried to implement it and failed. B.C. Postow has recently suggested a new strategy for implementing the proposal. Postow’s strategy is initially promising, but examination reveals that it is just as problematic as those already discarded.

1. Let me indicate what is promising about Postow’s strategy, before I explain what is wrong with it.

The main challenge facing proponents of the Rights-Obligations Proposal is to isolate the relation that holds between $A$, $A^*$, and one of $A^*$'s *prima facie* obligations when $A$ has a moral right against $A^*$. Some have suggested that $A$ has a moral right against $A^*$ just when $A$ is an intended beneficiary of one of $A^*$'s *prima facie* obligations. This strategy fails to account for third-party beneficiaries, who benefit when someone keeps the *prima facie* obligation he has as a result of someone else’s moral right but lack a corresponding moral right of their own. The strategy also fails to account for people who are intended objects of someone’s *prima facie* obligation of beneficence but lack corresponding moral rights.

Other proponents of the Rights-Obligations Proposal have suggested that $A$ has a moral right against $A^*$ just when he can create a *prima facie* obligation for $A^*$ by making a claim against him. This strategy commits us to the false view that a moral right gives rise to a corresponding *prima facie* obligation only when it is exercised. The strategy also fails to account for people who can create a *prima facie* obligation by making a claim but lack a corresponding moral right.

Postow makes a new suggestion: Roughly speaking, $A$ has a moral right against $A^*$ just when he can release $A^*$ from a *prima facie* obligation. Having a moral right does not amount to being an intended beneficiary of a *prima
facie obligation or to being able to create prima facie obligations by making claims; it amounts to being able to release people from prima facie obligations.

This suggestion promises to avoid the difficulties with earlier ones. It implies that third-party beneficiaries and intended objects of prima facie obligations of beneficence do not have corresponding moral rights, since they cannot release people from the relevant prima facie obligations. It implies that even unexercised moral rights are accompanied by corresponding prima facie obligation. Let us consider Postow’s definition and see how her strategy by making a claim is not the same as having a moral right. Postow’s suggestion captures the fact that having a moral right amounts to having some sort of moral authority: a right holder has the authority to release someone from a prima facie obligation.

Yet, Postow’s suggestion is problematic. It overlooks the fact that the waiving of a moral right does not always remove the corresponding prima facie obligation. Let us consider Postow’s definition and see how her strategy for implementing the Rights-Obligations Proposal runs aground on this fact.

2. Postow defines the concept of an all-things-considered moral right.

P1: $A$ has an all-things-considered moral right to be treated in $X$ manner if and only if
(a) it is someone’s prima facie obligation to treat $A$ in $X$ manner; and
(b) either:
   (i) one or both of the following is met: (1) $A$ can relieve the obligated party or parties from their prima facie obligation by freely making some conventional sign designed to release them from it, or (2) the performance of this prima facie obligation would be non-harmful (on balance) to $A$, and if $A$ were of age, of sound and competent intellect and fully informed, then $A$ could release the other party or parties from their prima facie obligation by freely making some conventional sign designed to release them from it; or
   (ii) the obligated parties would not be under this prima facie obligation, were being treated in $X$ manner harmful (on balance) to $A$, and no other agent $B$ meets either of the