

# Ethics of Leadership

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## Argumentation & Justification in Ethics

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

### Reading

- Rachels & Rachels, "Are There Proofs in Ethics?" (PDF on webpage).
- Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (PDF on webpage).
- Rachels & Rachels, "The Case of Fauziya" (PDF on webpage).

### Background

Recall that according to **moral relativism** there are no objective and universal moral values, norms, and principles that apply to all people everywhere. For various reasons already seen, this is not a popular position (and those few philosophers who do endorse it typically adopt extremely sophisticated versions that are beyond the scope of this class). Instead, many philosophers accept something that we might call **moral "cognitivism"**, or **"quasi-realism"**, the idea that morality *is* objective and universal insofar as whether or not it is right for an individual to act in a certain way depends on (is "relative to") the weight of reasons for that person to act or not act in that way. (I have put quotes around these terms because I use them loosely and not in the exact, technical way that some philosophers might.)

According to moral "cognitivism", morality is therefore a matter of reasoned argumentation and justification. The first reading from James Rachels and Stuart Rachels provide a general overview of how arguments and "proofs" work in ethics, and Shelly Kagan provides more specific details on how justification works in ethics. The reading from Kagan also makes a useful distinction between normative factors and normative foundations, which is useful to know when defending a moral position. The Rachels finally present a case study about a young woman fleeing the traditions of her home country. This case provides you the opportunity to more explicitly reflect on how a leader should reason when making a decision in such a situation.

### Questions

1. According to Rachels and Rachels, how do "proofs" in ethics work? How is ethical argumentation similar to, and yet different from, proofs in math or science? Why might a leader have to appeal to such a method of proof as opposed to an alternative method suggested by moral relativism? (In answering this last question, you might recall the *Gorgias* and how Socrates defended his philosophical method of persuasion against the method of persuasion embodied by rhetoric.)
2. Kagan provides more details about how argumentation in ethics works, discussing roughly four ways in which one can go about defending a moral position. What are these ways and how does each help to justify or warrant the acceptance of a particular position in ethics?
3. What is Kagan's distinction between a "normative factor" and a "foundational theory"? What purpose or function does each serve?
4. In the case of Fauziya, how should have American leaders responded to her plight? If you were in charge of handling Fauziya's case, what are the relevant normative factors that you would consider in order to render your moral judgement of this situation? Why these factors and not others? More generally, how would you go about proving or defending that your moral judgment here is the strongest and most compelling? (The point here is not so much about what your judgment actually is, but the way in which you would defend that judgement.)