

Ethical Theory

Concepts in Normative Ethics: *The Distribution of the Good*

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.

Readings

- Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, chapter 2.3–2.6.

Questions

1. What is the total view and what the rationale justifying it? Why should each individual's well-being be given equal weight? How is the total view different from the average view? What is the rationale justifying this second view?
2. Throughout these sections, two different notions of equality emerge. What are these, and how are they different? If you are committed to one of these forms of equality, must you necessarily be committed to the other? How are these connected to or different from welfarism?
3. Many of the views under discussion in these sections require that it is possible, at least in principle, to make interpersonal comparisons of well-being. What do such comparisons involve? Do you think it is ever possible to make these sorts of comparisons?
4. What are the differences between how desert, culpability, and fairness can factor into the evaluation of outcomes?
5. What is consequentialism and what are its main components? How it is connected to utilitarianism?