Ethical Theory

Deconstructing the Constraint Against Harm

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*, sections 3.4 & 3.5.

Questions

1. What is the deontologist's position on the moral significance of doing harm, versus merely allowing it to happen? Describe a case in which the distinction between doing and allowing becomes difficult to maintain at both a descriptive level and a normative level. What are possible replies to objections that are based on such cases?
2. What is the trolley car example supposed to illustrate?
3. What is the doctrine of double effect? On what important distinctions does it rest?