

Ethical Theory

The Role of Options

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 5.1 & 5.2.

Questions

1. Some have argued that consequentialism should be rejected because it is “too demanding”. What does this mean and what is its rationale? Why do constraints fail to make a moral theory less demanding?
2. What is an option and how do options differ from constraints? How might options have thresholds? Kagan claims that by introducing options we risk having to recognize problematic options, such as an option to do harm. How does the introduction of options create problems like this for deontologists?
3. Kagan suggests that options are difficult to reconcile with the moral equality of persons. Why is that?