

Ethical Theory

Individual Well-Being & The Good

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, sections 2.1 & 2.2.

Questions

1. Explain what it means to be concerned about the goodness of outcomes. Why is this a plausible choice for a normative factor? Why is the distinction between *instrumental* and *intrinsic* goodness important? What is the relationship between goodness of outcomes, welfare/well-being, and pleasure and pain?
2. In section 2.2, Kagan lays out an extensive taxonomy of different theories attempting to capture the meaning of individual well-being. Explain the following ones, providing examples of each:
 - A. Welfare versus Value Hedonism,
 - B. Quantitative versus Qualitative Hedonism,
 - C. Mental State Theories,
 - D. Restricted versus Unrestricted Preference Satisfaction,
 - E. Actual versus Ideal Preference Satisfaction,
 - F. Objective Theories, and
 - G. Perfectionism.

What is the strength of each? What sort of flaws does each possess? Which of these theories provides the most plausible understanding of individual well-being?