

Ethical Theory

Testing Universalizability

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*, section 7.2.

Questions

1. What is a test of universalizability supposed to accomplish at the level of foundations? Why is this not a form of foundational teleology? Why is universalizability as a foundational approach intuitively attractive? What problems does the universalizability approach face in general?
2. In order to explain and justify a particular version of a universalizability test, what three questions must be answered? What five versions of a universalizability test does Kagan consider? How do they answer these three questions? What problems are faced by each of these five tests?
3. What does Kagan mean by “act universalizability”. What is this? What sorts of tests might it have? How plausible are these?
4. Does Kant seem to endorse any of these tests in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*?