

# Ethical Theory

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## Reflecting Humanity

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 7.4.

### Questions

1. What is meant by a reflection theory? In general, what two or three things must such a theory do to provide a foundation in normative ethics? Why does Kagan believe that such a theory runs the risk of subjectivism by varying the contents of morality from person to person? Why does he believe, nevertheless, that a reflection theory could still justify a universal morality that applies to all people equally?
2. In a multitude of examples, Kagan discusses several different sorts of characteristics, features, or facts about human beings that morality might reflect. Explain the following ones:
  - A. Rationality (pp. 282–283),
  - B. Biases in favor of one's own interests and concerns (pp. 284–286, 289),
  - C. The ability to feel pleasure and pain (pp. 287–288),
  - D. Needs that one cannot fulfill alone (p. 289), and
  - E. Autonomy (pp. 291–293).

For each of these, how might it influence a reflection theory at the level of normative factors? Which one(s), if any, do you think are both morally relevant and what morality ought to reflect? Are there any others not on this list that you believe are relevant for a reflecting theory?

3. What is the difference between morality reflecting what it means to be an *agent* versus what it means to be a *patient*? Why is this distinction important for a reflective theory, e.g., when justifying the moral status of nonhuman animals?
4. Does Kant seem to endorse any aspects of reflection theory in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*? If so, what are the relevant facts about humanity that he believes that morality ought to reflect?