

Reading Questions for March 1

These questions cover parts of two chapters by Fred Feldman, one called “Utilitarianism, Victimism, and the Morality of Killing” and the other called “Why Killing is Wrong” from a book called *Confrontations with the Reaper*. The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

This week, we’re looking at the question of when killing is wrong. We’re taking a somewhat indirect approach to this question, focusing on why killing is wrong, with the idea being that once we figure out why it’s wrong, we’ll be able to know when it’s wrong. To help us answer this question, we’re working through a couple of book chapters by Feldman.

*Questions:*

1. In the section titled “Theories Based on Harm to the Victim” (167-70), Feldman introduces a new sort of theory – harm-to-the-victim theory. What is the new theory? What are some nice things about the way that Feldman writes this section?
2. In the next section (170-2), Feldman offers some criticisms of harm-to-the-victim theory. What are his criticisms? Are they plausible?
3. Feldman introduces some new theories starting in his next chapter. First, he clarifies “Ideal act utilitarianism” on pages 173-4. Then he introduces and criticizes Vitalistic Act Utilitarianism on pages 174-7. What are the two theories? What are his criticisms of Vitalistic Act Utilitarianism? Are they plausible?
4. In the next two sections (177-82), Feldman introduces and then criticizes another theory – Hedono-vitalistic Act Utilitarianism. What is this theory? What are his criticisms? Are they plausible?