Three points dealing with reason come from Kant, Aristotle, and Marcus Aurelius. Kant thought that we should not allow the anticipated consequences of our actions to drive our decision making. He felt that that the consequences of our actions should not be something that should weigh against our decision to act. Kant thought that we are rational and autonomous, which helps support his statement about deciding what to do. He also thought that telling the truth is right, no matter the circumstances. Aristotle is being included in the reason side of things because of his explanation on how to find the right thing to do. Aristotle thought that in order to act virtuously, we must find the middle ground through rationality. This middle ground came from weighing the two extremes (whether it is excess or deficiency) and picking the most appropriate for the situation. Marcus Aurelius is a stoic and bases a lot of his views off being a rational human being. Being a stoic, he felt that humans should remain unaffected by the world around them in order to perform whatever duty has been appointed to him. This process of remaining unchanged calls for reason because it is not based on emotions or feelings. It is also important to note that Kant was a deontologist (duty ethics) as was Marcus Aurelius.

On the other side of reason is acting based on feeling. Some of the key figures for this point of view are Mill, Hume, and Confucius. Mill, a utilitarian, felt that our action are only morally right to the extent of their ability to produce happiness (and they are wrong if they make unhappiness). This is a clear example of feeling based ethics since according to Mill, we should do whatever makes the most people happy (aka focus on happiness above all else). Hume gets thrown in this category because he realized that humans should not rely only on reason and thought that we need a “moral sentiment” to help guide us. This was based on observation which ultimately point towards using feelings (since an awe inspiring view can create emotion in some). Hume fits into both categories, but is more suited for feeling based moral action than reason. The last feeling based view comes from Confucius. Confucius is not as clear cut as the other philosophers that have been previously discussed. He talks about pursing the Dao, or living life in a manner to become more human. This is the key to understanding Confucius as a feeling based ethicist. He felt that there was a “Golden Mean” that should not be overshot or undershot. Confucius also realized that a lesser virtue was capable of becoming a vice if the employment of the virtue was done wrong.

As far as the importance of reason and feelings in ethics, both play a very crucial role in identifying the morally right thing to do. It seems that there is a minimum amount of reason that should go into any decision, since Humans are rational beings. This ability to have thought places a reasoning requirement on tough ethical choices. On the side of feeling, it is also equally important because humans are capable of rational thought. This rationality needs to be tempered by a humans feelings related to the situation in order to help guide a person in the right direction. Feelings exist for a reason and it is merely following nature’s order by using them to guide a decision. Feelings are partially a reflection of the environment around the individual who is undergoing the feeling. Someone who is sad, most likely has a reason for it and it is that reason that should be used to help keep reason alone in check (for it is just as capable as horrible things as strictly feelings are). Regarding a situation dealing with opposite decisions from feelings and reason, it would be fair to say that more time is required to further review the action in question. If time is short, then it seems that humans should react in a manner to preserve other human life above all else. When looking at both reason and feelings as moral guidance systems, it is important to remember that both can be dangerous. Over reasoning things can lead us to hurting other humans when there is not necessarily a cause for it (think of 5 people dying vs 1 million). While relying solely on feelings can cause it’s own set of problems (this feels good, good = happiness, therefore I should do more of this). In a feeling situation, people are not controlled by their will, but rather are free to indulge excessively.