

Shafer-Landau and Moral Realism

[Review Essay: Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), x + 322 pp.]

In 1903 G.E. Moore celebrated a robust nonnaturalistic form of moral realism with the publication of his *Principia Ethica*. Subsequent years have witnessed the development and refinement of a number of views motivated at least in part by a deep resistance to the metaphysical and epistemological commitments of nonnaturalism. Over time, Moore's view arguably has become the position of last resort for philosophers working in metaethics.

Exactly one hundred years later, analytic metaethics has come full circle with the publication of Russ Shafer-Landau's *Moral Realism: A Defence*. Shafer-Landau confidently elaborates and defends a form of nonnaturalism about moral facts and properties, and conjoins his moral metaphysics with an anti-Humean theory of motivation, motivational externalism, reasons externalism, moral rationalism, and a hybrid of self-evident justification and reliabilism in moral epistemology. Needless to say, Shafer-Landau's book is highly ambitious with respect to both the number of controversial theses it tries to defend as well as the antecedent skepticism it attempts to overcome. Regardless of whether its arguments are ultimately successful, *Moral Realism* deserves to be taken very seriously by anyone interested in metaethics, moral psychology, and the philosophy of action.¹

In what follows, I will consider all five parts of *Moral Realism* in order, offering a brief summary of some of the main ideas in each section as well as raising a few objections (although without being able, in the space available, to do justice to all or even the majority of the interesting arguments with which the book is filled).

¹Soon after *Moral Realism* appeared, Shafer-Landau followed it up with *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), a much simpler treatment of many of the same issues that is aimed at undergraduate audiences in introductory and lower division philosophy classes.

Part I: Realism and Its Critics

Shafer-Landau devotes the first section of *Moral Realism* to two broad tasks: clarifying metaethical terminology and attacking the main rivals to moral realism. On his view, moral realists believe that “there are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that *the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective*” (15, emphasis his). Such a characterization makes use of what will amount to an important distinction for Shafer-Landau between moral principles or standards on the one hand, and moral facts on the other. The former are general conditionals linking nonmoral facts with moral evaluations (such as “taking someone’s property without his or her permission is wrong”), whereas the latter are particular moral facts that result from the conjunction of moral standards and specific nonmoral facts (such as “Jane’s action last night of taking Bill’s property without his permission was wrong”). For Shafer-Landau, worlds without any agents in them would have no moral facts, but the moral realist could still hold that moral standards nonetheless exist in such worlds (15).

Moral realism is to be contrasted with both constructivism and nihilism. Constructivists share realism’s commitment to moral truths, but reject the independence condition of realism by arguing that moral reality is the result of some construction function that takes as its inputs various human attitudes. Nihilists, on the other hand, reject the existence of a moral reality altogether (14). Subjectivists, relativists, and contractarians are supposed to count as constructivists on this taxonomy, whereas emotivists, prescriptivists, and error theorists come out as nihilists.

Shafer-Landau also makes use of the cognitivist/noncognitivist distinction. Cognitivists construe moral judgments as beliefs with truth-apt moral contents, whereas according to noncognitivists, “there are no moral facts or truths ... [and] moral judgements are not beliefs and thus are not truth-evaluable” (18). Using this construal of the distinction, emotivists, prescriptivists, and expressivists are meant to come out as noncognitivists, whereas realists, constructivists, and error theorists are cognitivists.

While the distinctions above are fairly familiar from the metaethics literature, let me make three comments:

(a) Shafer-Landau’s taxonomy has the unusual consequence that cognitivism and noncognitivism turn out to not be exhaustive. Given that there is a metaphysical clause in the formulation of “noncognitivism” that is not present in the characterization of “cognitivism,” a logically possible third view is one according to which moral judgments are not beliefs, but nonetheless there are moral facts and truths. The problem here as I see it is that Shafer-Landau has let a metaphysical condition

sneak into the definition of what is supposed to be a purely psychological view about the nature of moral judgments. On an alternative understanding, noncognitivism is just the view that moral judgments do not express beliefs, which would then have what I take to be the proper consequence that noncognitivism is compatible (if only in theory) with moral realism.²

(b) By restricting moral realism to only being a view about the objectivity of moral *standards*, Shafer-Landau's construal seems too narrow. In principle at least, one could hold a view according to which there are no moral standards but there exist thoroughly objective particular moral facts, and such a view surely deserves to be classified as a realist view.

(c) At the same time, the construal of moral realism also seems too broad, given that it would (wrongly in my view) classify many contemporary expressivists as moral realists. Whether it is through the employment of Simon Blackburn's quasi-realist program or of deflationary theories of truth, property, and facthood, most expressivists today have no qualms about countenancing objective moral truths. To take one representative example, here is Blackburn: "For minimalism takes *everything*. We can happily climb the horizontal ladder from *p* as far as '*p* is in accord with the eternal and real normative order that governs the universe'."³ It is clear from the remainder of Shafer-Landau's book that he takes himself to be rejecting and not defending any version of expressivism,⁴ and yet his taxonomy does not make it transparent enough to me at least how it is meant to exclude such a view.

The remainder of Part I is devoted to a series of objections to both noncognitivism and constructivism. Against the former, Shafer-Landau argues that (i) noncognitivism cannot preserve ordinary moral truth talk and the diversity of moral predicates (23-26); (ii) noncognitivism cannot account for moral error (26-27); (iii) noncognitivism cannot account for the normative questions we ask ourselves (27-30); (iv) noncognitivism is objectionably arbitrary (29-30) and leads to relativism (30-33); (v) noncognitivism is objectionably circular (33-37). And against constructivism, Shafer-Landau tries to show that the view faces a serious dilemma con-

²David Copp, among others, has made the same formulational observation about the compatibility of non-cognitivism and moral realism. See his "Realist-Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 (2001): 1-43. Interestingly enough, one can read Allan Gibbard as actually holding such a view in his recent work. See, e.g., his "Normative and Recognition Concepts," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (2002): 151-67.

³Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 298 (emphasis his). For related discussion, see also Paul Horwich, "Gibbard's Theory of Norms," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (1993): 67-78, and "The Essence of Expressivism," *Analysis* 54 (1994): 19-20; and James Dreier, "Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004): 23-44.

⁴See, e.g., pp. 30-33.

cerning whether the conditions for choosing the relevant attitudes are moralized or not (41-43). If they are, then the view would be undermined, since moral standards independent from the construction procedure would be constraining its operation. If they are not moralized, then the resulting outputs may conflict with our most important moral convictions and platitudes. With such a dilemma in hand, Shafer-Landau goes on to attempt to undermine what he takes to be the four strongest arguments for constructivism.

Clearly there is much here that is worth examining in detail. Given limitations of space, however, I'll focus on just one objection, namely, the claim that noncognitivism leads to an objectionable relativism. Here is what I take to be the heart of the objection:

Though few will judge their own views to be true only relative to their own outlooks, the absence of any moral facts outside particular outlooks makes it the case that the judgments rendered within one outlook are no more true than those of a competing outlook. The views of each incompatible outlook are equally (un)true. This is relativism. (32)

But it is hard to see why this conclusion follows. As Shafer-Landau rightly notes, there are two perspectives that need to be examined here (31-32). From the “morally disengaged” perspective of speculative metaphysics, expressivists are committed not to relativism (the view, roughly, that there are socially or culturally relative moral truths, facts, and standards), but rather to nihilism (the view that there are no moral truths, facts, and standards whatsoever). On the other hand, from the “morally engaged” perspective of first-order normative commitment, expressivists sound just like realists, and typically would be deeply resistant to inserting relativistic qualifiers into their moral claims. So if the morally engaged and disengaged perspectives are exhaustive, and if neither shows any signs of relativism, then it seems to me that much more needs to be said about why expressivism is deserving of such a label.⁵

Part II: Moral Metaphysics

Now we get to the heart of the matter. If we want to be moral realists, then Shafer-Landau thinks we should be nonnaturalists rather than naturalists. Naturalists about properties in general hold that “all real properties are those that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences” (59). In the moral case, then, a naturalist realist claims that (i) moral properties exist objectively, and (ii) they would

⁵See also Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons, “Expressivism Yes! Relativism No!” in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

be countenanced ineliminably in perfected science. Nonnaturalist moral realists, on the other hand, claim that objective moral properties exist but are not identical to scientifically legitimate properties (65).

Note that on this taxonomy, the issue separating naturalists from non-naturalists is not property identity but rather scientific standing. As Shafer-Landau emphasizes, one could be a property dualist about moral and descriptive properties but still be a naturalist if one thinks that moral properties are scientifically legitimate. Such a view is, in fact, precisely that of the Cornell realists (64). In place of nonreductive moral naturalism, however, Shafer-Landau himself advocates nonreductive moral nonnaturalism, where moral properties are constituted by, but not identical to, descriptive properties, and furthermore are not themselves scientific properties (65-66).

Why nonreductive versus reductive moral realism? One of Shafer-Landau's main reasons is inductive, namely, that we cannot overlook the "signal failure of classical naturalists to plausibly defend any robust identity claims linking the fundamental moral properties with natural ones" (67). And why nonreductive *nonnaturalism* rather than nonreductive *naturalism*? Here one important consideration seems to be that for Shafer-Landau, moral obligations are intrinsically reason-giving, which is something that descriptive properties are not (112). And another consideration is that moral standards "function as devices for specifying *oughts*. And that is not something that neatly fits the paradigm of descriptive, scientific laws" (112, emphasis his).

Much of Shafer-Landau's attention in this part of the book is devoted to responding to three important arguments against nonnaturalism—Blackburn's well-known supervenience argument, an argument to the effect that nonnaturalists cannot explain why certain particular descriptive properties constitute a given moral property as opposed to some other descriptive properties, and a family of arguments alleging that moral properties are explanatorily inefficacious. Let me pursue the last line of discussion in more detail.

Shafer-Landau provides the following formulation of what he takes to be the strongest challenge to moral realism from considerations of explanatory adequacy:

- (1) Moral facts do not cause anything in the non-moral realm.
- (2) Moral facts do not cause anything in the moral realm.
- (3) Therefore moral facts do not cause anything at all.
- (4) If a putative fact causes nothing, then we lack any reason for justifiedly believing that it exists.
- (5) Therefore we lack any reason for justifiedly believing that moral facts exist. (105)⁶

⁶Shafer-Landau provides two additional premises in order for the overall conclusion to be that we have good reason to *deny* the existence of moral facts, but for the sake of

While there might be good reason to question (4), Shafer-Landau's primary response is, as far as I can tell, to reject (1). What makes his discussion here novel and interesting in my view is that he rejects (1) by considering Kim's well-known argument against nonreductive physicalism in the philosophy of mind.⁷ Here is Shafer-Landau's formulation of Kim's argument:

- (A) The physical domain is causally closed—every physical event has a full and complete set of physical antecedents that cause and explain its occurrence.
- (B) The mental is not identical to the physical.
- (C) Therefore if mental facts cause physical occurrences, then there is systematic causal overdetermination of physical occurrences.
- (D) There is not systematic causal overdetermination of physical occurrences.
- (E) Therefore mental facts do not cause physical occurrences. (106)

The analogy to nonreductive moral realism should be clear enough. And the upshot of the argument would be that moral facts are causally impotent and hence epiphenomenal.⁸

Shafer-Landau concedes that the analog to Kim's argument in the moral case is logically valid, and that he is committed to (A) and the moral version of (B). Furthermore, Shafer-Landau wants to reject the claim that moral properties are causally impotent, and in fact affirms Kim's causal inheritance principle that "for any property M that is instantiated at a time by the realization of property P, M's instantiation inherits at that time (possibly a subset of) P's causal powers."⁹ It follows that on Shafer-Landau's picture, instantiations of moral properties have at least a subset of the causal powers had by the instantiated descriptive properties in their subvenient bases. At the same time, they have *no more* causal powers than those they inherit from their bases, since Shafer-Landau rejects what he calls Kim's strong causal test of ontological credibility, according to which real properties must have independent causal powers (110).

simplifying the discussion we can ignore them here.

⁷See Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *Mind in a Physical World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), and *Philosophy of Mind* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

⁸Strictly speaking, we would also need premise (2) of the prior argument in order to show that moral facts are causally impotent, but if moral facts are supposed to cause other moral facts, then the same kind of overdetermination would result, since moral facts are also brought about by their subvenient constitutive descriptive facts. In addition, both in Shafer-Landau's discussion and in the above, talk of "moral facts" and "moral properties" is loose and at times interchangeable. I hope nothing of importance will hang on this in what follows.

⁹This is Shafer-Landau's statement of the principle (109), which is taken from Jaegwon Kim, "Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction," in *Supervenience and Mind*, pp. 309-35.

Given all of this, then, Shafer-Landau sees his only way out of Kim's argument to be to reject (D). Here is what he says for the mental case:

On this picture, it can and often will be true that a given mental event, all by itself, is sufficient to cause whatever physical outcomes it does. And also true that a physical event, all by itself, is sufficient to cause that very same outcome. And so there will be overdetermination. But this is not objectionable if the mental event is exhaustively constituted by a physical event, and inherits its causal powers. Indeed, this form of overdetermination is rampant, and occurs in any case of something that is constituted by causally efficacious phenomena. (109-10)

So a nonreductive physicalist can reject premise (D), and similarly a moral nonnaturalist can reject both the analog of (D) and premise (1) in the original argument against moral realism.

Let me raise three questions and make a comment about Shafer-Landau's treatment of Kim's argument. First, it is not clear that the proposal on offer still preserves the causal closure of the physical. Part of the difficulty here is that Kim states the causal closure principle in various ways, some of which are clearly weaker than others.

Among the weaker formulations are the following: "Any physical event that has a cause at time t has a physical cause at t ";¹⁰ and "If a physical event has a cause at time t , it has a physical cause at t ."¹¹

But the principle also gets stated in this way: "If you pick any physical event and trace out its causal ancestry or posterity, that will never take you outside the physical domain. That is, no causal chain will ever cross the boundary between the physical and the nonphysical";¹² and "No causal chain involving a physical event will ever cross the boundary of the physical into the non-physical."¹³

It should be clear enough that the first two formulations pose no trouble for Shafer-Landau's proposal in either the mental or the moral case, but that the third and fourth ones certainly do. It is with the latter formulations in mind that Kim says things like the following: "[T]he nonreductive physicalist, like the emergentist, is committed to irreducible downward causation, causation of physical processes by non-physical properties, and this of course means that the causal closure of the physical is breached."¹⁴ The upshot of this is that more work needs to be done on giving a precise statement of the causal closure of the physical.

The second question is whether Shafer-Landau's proposal in the men-

¹⁰Jaegwon Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism," in *Supervenience and Mind*, pp. 265-84, at p. 280 (emphasis removed).

¹¹Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 147.

¹²Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*, p. 40; cf. "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism," p. 280.

¹³Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 147.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 232.

tal case implies something like telekinesis. As he says, “a given mental event, all by itself, is sufficient to cause whatever physical outcomes it does” (109). But is it really intelligible to think that an instantiated mental property could, in virtue of the causal powers it has inherited from its subvenient base, by itself cause neurons to fire or muscles to contract?¹⁵

The third question is just a natural extension of the second to the moral realm. Instantiated moral properties, too, are supposed to inherit all and only the causal powers of their descriptive bases, and so any event caused by the relevant descriptive properties will be redundantly caused to the same extent at the supervenient level. But in my mind it seems extremely odd to say that the *wrongness* or *evil* of a particular instance of my being in pain has exactly the same causal power to make me cry out as the instance of pain by itself does. And when it comes to matters of explanation, it seems even more odd to think that my crying out could have been causally explained *equally well* by appealing to the causal powers of the instantiated moral property as opposed to appealing to the pain itself. Not only does the former explanation seem to be not equally as good as the latter, it does not seem to be even a close contender. So the third question is whether there is anything that could be said that would help blunt the force of this oddity.¹⁶

At the end of the day, though, my suspicion is that Shafer-Landau’s proposal will run into more trouble, not from detailed objections, but rather from a gut reaction that the metaphysical picture of nonreductive causal overdetermination on offer here is too ontologically extravagant to swallow. In this way, he may find himself in good company with Moore.

Part III: Moral Motivation

As we move to the third section, Shafer-Landau continues to respond to attacks on moral realism, but here the attacks come from purported conceptual truths about moral psychology rather than moral metaphysics. More specifically, the main threat comes from the following familiar argument from the metaethics literature:

¹⁵For a similar concern, see Jaegwon Kim, “Mechanism, Purpose, and Explanatory Exclusion,” in *Supervenience and Mind*, pp. 237-64, at p. 247; and “The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism,” p. 281.

¹⁶In response, it might be that instantiated moral properties only inherit *some* of the causal powers of their base descriptive properties, as the parenthetical clause in Shafer-Landau’s statement of the causal inheritance principle allows. And perhaps causing me to cry out would not be one of the powers had by instantiated moral wrongness or evil. But then I’d want to hear much more about what principled grounds explain why it would be that only some powers get inherited in this way and not others.

- (1) Necessarily, if one sincerely judges an action right, then one is motivated to some extent to act in accordance with that judgement. (*Motivational Judgment Internalism*)
- (2) When taken by themselves, beliefs neither motivate nor generate any motivationally efficacious states. (*Motivational Humeanism*)
- (3) Therefore moral judgements are not beliefs. (*Moral Non-cognitivism*) (121)

Fortunately for the realist (and for the cognitivist more generally), Shafer-Landau thinks that we have good reason to reject both of these premises. Let us take each of them in turn.

(a) *Motivational Judgment Internalism*

As Shafer-Landau formulates it, motivational judgment internalism (hereafter MJI) is the view that there is a necessary connection between certain judgments and motivation:

- (1) Necessarily, if one sincerely judges an action right, then one is motivated to some extent to act in accordance with that judgment.

The necessity in question is intended to be conceptual necessity, and the motivation need only be defeasible as opposed to overriding.

As stated, this formulation of motivational judgment internalism could use some refinement. For one thing, the kind of rightness in question should be restricted to moral rightness, since it is implausible to think that necessarily all rightness judgments about etiquette or the law motivate. Additionally, in the first instance the agent's judgments should concern his or her own actions rather than concerning the rightness of, say, Stalin's or Caesar's actions, judgments that need not themselves have any immediate motivational upshot. Finally, the actions in question might need to be restricted even more narrowly, since it may be that judgments about actions performed in an agent's distant past or possibly performed by her in remote future circumstances need not have any immediate motivational implications either.¹⁷

Leaving these formulational issues aside, Shafer-Landau's strategy when treating MJI is to first raise a series of purported counterexamples, and to then respond to internalist objections to motivational judgment *externalism*. The counterexamples seek to demonstrate the conceptual possibility of amoralists, here taken to range over agents who, if only in a single instance, are not motivated at all by one of their moral judgments. I'll briefly summarize one of these types of counterexamples, raise an objection on behalf of the internalist, and then make a general comment

¹⁷The internalist might want to claim that the agent would at least have dispositional and/or counterfactual motivation when making judgments of these kinds. This may be right, and I simply leave it to internalists to decide how best to proceed in formulating their view.

about Shafer-Landau's approach.

Adopting a familiar strategy from Stocker, Mele, and others, Shafer-Landau argues that in cases in which a person is "clinically depressed, apathetic, relatively affectless, or otherwise listless to an extreme degree, [she] can issue non-moral evaluative claims and entirely fail to be moved by them" (150). And if this is true in the nonmoral case, then there is no reason why it could not be true for moral judgments as well.

My own view is that internalists should not be easily persuaded that this particular counterexample strategy is successful. Typically, motivational internalism is taken to be a thesis about the moral judgments and motivations of *agents*, and yet one plausible way of understanding many of the psychological conditions mentioned above is as having the result of temporarily undermining agency, for the presence of enervating psychological conditions could impact deliberation in ways with which the agent does not identify and from which he may even be deeply alienated.

It is clear from the entirety of *Moral Realism* that Shafer-Landau's concern is with the moral lives of agents. As he himself emphasizes, "[m]orality is essentially a matter of regulating and assessing the activities of *agents*" (102, emphasis his). Now it is true that some philosophers use "agent" as synonymous with "human being." But it seems to me to be clear that there could be nonhuman agents (aliens, artificial intelligence, supernatural beings), as well as nonagential humans (infants, those asleep, the comatose). On my view, agency is a phase sortal that certain beings can come to instantiate at various times during their lives, just as some human beings can come to be students, wives, parents, lawyers, Americans, and the like.¹⁸ Even adult human beings who are awake and alert can fail to exhibit agency if, for instance, they are being caused to behave by psychological forces beyond their control with which they do not identify. Frankfurt's famous example of an unwilling drug addict illustrates this point nicely.¹⁹

Return, then, to the counterexample strategy to MJI that appeals to depression and listlessness. In order for these cases to pose a problem for MJI understood to be a conceptual truth about *agents*, they need to be cases in which the agent both makes the judgment and is not motivated. But it is not at all clear that this is what is happening. In fact, Shafer-Landau continues his description of the examples he has in mind here by noting that the individual is "all the while wishing she were capable of such motivation" (150). So rather than the agent not being motivated as a

¹⁸For a very similar view about personhood as opposed to agency, see Eric Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chap. 2.

¹⁹Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5-20.

result of the enervating psychological condition she is in, it seems instead that the condition has at least temporarily undermined the capacity of the human being in question to exhibit agency in the world.²⁰

A similar response could also be used for some of the other purported counterexamples that Shafer-Landau raises against MJI, and so it might be thought that because of this, MJI wins the day after all. On the contrary, I share Shafer-Landau's rejection of MJI, but think that a rather different strategy is needed.²¹ Instead of elaborating on my own work, however, let me make one final comment.

Shafer-Landau formulates MJI as (1), and it is important to note that the antecedent of this conditional ranges over all agents. Yet in the past fifteen years or so, attention in the literature has shifted to versions of MJI that restrict the antecedent more narrowly to, for example, only *normal* agents or *rational* agents.²² Impressive arguments have been brought to bear in support of these versions, and it is not clear whether they would fall prey to any of Shafer-Landau's counterexamples. So it is surprising that he does not focus his attention instead on this more recent work and on the use to which these narrower versions of MJI might be put in arguing for noncognitivism.

(b) Motivational Humeanism

The second premise is the Humean theory of motivation (hereafter HTM):

(2) When taken by themselves, beliefs neither motivate nor generate any motivationally efficacious states.

The general idea behind HTM is that desires rather than beliefs are what motivate agents to act. Shafer-Landau thinks that this is false—while it might be true that all desires motivate, at least some evaluative beliefs, or beliefs with evaluative propositional content, can motivate too (122).

One note on the formulation of HTM in (2): As Shafer-Landau is well aware, Humeans reject the existence of *besires*, or unitary mental states that have the properties of both beliefs and desires, and in particular have opposite directions of fit towards different propositional contents.²³ Yet

²⁰While one could say that the absence of agency at the time still makes it true that the agent isn't motivated by the moral judgment (because the agent herself has disappeared for the time being), such a response clearly isn't in the spirit of the conceptual connection that advocates of MJI are trying to capture.

²¹I offer that strategy in my "Motivational Internalism: A New Problem," unpubl. ms.

²²For the former see James Dreier, "Internalism and Speaker Relativism," *Ethics* 101 (1990): 6-26, and for the latter see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

²³See, among many others, Philip Pettit, "Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation,"

(2) does not capture this important feature of the Humean view.

Shafer-Landau's strategy for rejecting HTM is by now familiar—he first raises several counterexamples to (2), and then objects to what he takes to be the five strongest arguments for HTM. One kind of counterexample involves inferring a conclusion from available evidence, which doesn't seem to require a desire to form beliefs or inferences (124). Another involves having a mistaken belief about one of our desires, a belief that according to Shafer-Landau can motivate us to act without there having to be another desire lurking in the background that stands in for the absent desire (125).

There are a number of concerns one might raise about these purported counterexamples as well as about the objections offered in response to arguments for HTM. However, I join Shafer-Landau in rejecting HTM in all of its various formulations in the literature, and in fact think that the real problem with his discussion here is that he has not taken his rejection of HTM nearly far enough. Again, we should remember that the concern is primarily with what motivates agents,²⁴ and on my view we should not look for some hybrid theory of agent motivation that appeals in some cases to desires and in other cases to evaluative beliefs. In fact, we shouldn't look to mental *states* of any kind, but rather to mental *contents*, where “mental states” are taken to be mental attitude/content pairs such as my belief that *p* or my desire that *q*.

While there is no way that I can do this alternative view justice in the space available here, let me briefly raise two arguments for its superiority over Shafer-Landau's form of anti-Humeanism. One of the arguments will be postponed until the next section, but the other takes seriously the commonly forged connection between motivation and motivating reasons:

(MR) What motivates an agent to perform an action is always one or more motivating reasons.

Shafer-Landau seems to accept (MR), as do a number of Humeans and anti-Humeans alike.²⁵

Mind 96 (1987): 530-33, p. 531; Smith, *The Moral Problem*, pp. 117-20; David Lewis, “Desire as Belief,” *Mind* 97 (1988): 323-32, p. 324; Philip Pettit and Huw Price, “Bare Functional Desire,” *Analysis* 49 (1989): 162-69, p. 162; Mark van Roojen, “Humean Motivation and Humean Rationality,” *Philosophical Studies* 79 (1995): 37-57, p. 40, and “Humean and Anti-Humean Internalism about Moral Judgements,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2002): 26-49, p. 29 n. 6; and Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, “Moral Cognitivism and Motivation,” *The Philosophical Review* 108 (1999): 161-219, p. 168. And for more on desires in general, see J.E.J. Altham, “The Legacy of Emotivism,” in Graham Macdonald and Crispin Wright (eds.), *Fact, Science and Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 284, and Smith, *The Moral Problem*, pp. 117-20.

²⁴See in particular p. 135.

²⁵For a sampling, see Mark Platts, “Moral Reality and the End of Desire,” in *Refer-*

To appreciate the alternative picture of motivation, we can begin by considering the following.²⁶

(R) The motivating reasons in light of which an agent deliberates, decides, and acts are to be found in the contents of the intentional mental states that make up that agent's practical reasoning.

Note that (R) accords well with our ordinary practices of explaining our actions to others. Thus when asked why I performed a particular action rather than some other, my natural response might be, "I bought the second volume of her series because the first one was so good," "I'm going to stay inside because a dangerous storm is coming," or "I jumped out of the way because the bicyclist was about to crash into me." As such, these purported explanations seem to be appealing only to our propositional representations of facts in the world, and not to anything about our psychological states themselves.

Admittedly, we also say things like "I ran because I thought I was late" and "I went to the movie because I wanted to see something by that director." But these explanations need not conflict with (R) once we disambiguate scope, for of the following:

S's belief that *p*
that S believes *p*

only the first is precluded by (R) from counting as a motivating *reason* for why the agent arrived at the conclusion she did and ultimately acted. When the agent makes reference to a mental state in giving her action explanation, she simply could be giving expression to the *proposition* that she believed so-and-so.

What role then do mental states play in the genesis of intentional human action in agents? While admittedly controversial, the following seems to me to be true:

(C) It is the relevant mental states and not their contents that are the *relata* in the causal relations that obtain during an agent's first person practical reasoning as well as in third person causal explanations of such reasoning.

ence, Truth and Reality (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 69-82, at pp. 73-74; Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chap. 4; Philip Clark, "What Goes without Saying in Metaethics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60 (2000): 357-79, p. 361; and Jonathan Dancy, "Why There is Really No Such Thing as the Theory of Motivation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 95 (1995): 1-18, and *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For Shafer-Landau's apparent endorsement of (MR), see p. 135.

²⁶What follows is taken from my "Practical Reasons, Causation, and Motivation," unpubl. ms.

Thus, mental states still have a crucial role to play in the genesis of action, but it is merely a causal and not a normative role. The normativity of practical reasoning is found where motivating reasons are found, and those reside in mental contents. Given the connection between motivating reasons and motivation found in (MR), it follows that it is mental contents that motivate, not mental states.

However, not just any mental contents will do. First of all, the propositional content in question must be *normative* propositional content—merely descriptive content like “that the candy has five grams of fat” or “that I desire q” is by itself insufficient to generate any pressure towards action. Furthermore, the normative content also has to have some bearing on *me* if it is to directly motivate my acting in various ways. Thus beliefs like “that he is honest” or “that my friend shouldn’t act that way” are ruled out as candidate contents.

Clearly much more needs to be said here, and I have tried to fill in the details at length elsewhere.²⁷ Let me conclude this section, though, with a few reminders. First, the alternative view here is only concerned with what motivates agents, and so may have no bearing whatsoever when it comes to the motivational lives of animals, infants, and other nonagents. And second, the view is entirely consistent with the claim that one or more desires must be *present* in order for an agent to be motivated; it only claims that a desire is not itself what does the motivating.

Part IV: Moral Reasons

In the fourth part of *Moral Realism* we are faced with another argument against moral realism, again with two main premises that receive a chapter of discussion each. Here is the argument:

- (1) Necessarily, if S is morally obligated to Φ at t , then S has a good reason to Φ at t . (*Moral Rationalism*)
- (2) Necessarily, if S has a good reason to Φ at t , then S can be motivated to Φ at t . (*Reasons Internalism*)
- (3) Necessarily, if S can be motivated to Φ at t , then S must, at t , either desire to Φ , or desire to Ψ , and believe that by Φ -ing S will Ψ . (*Motivational Humeanism*)
- (4) Therefore, necessarily, if S is morally obligated to Φ at t , then S must, at t , either desire to Φ , or desire to Ψ , and believe that by Φ -ing S will Ψ . (170)

The conclusion is one that no moral realist like Shafer-Landau can accept, since then moral obligations would be constrained by our actual desires. The one noticeable difference in Shafer-Landau’s response to this anti-realist argument is that this time he rejects only one of the premises (rea-

²⁷Ibid.

sons internalism) while defending the other (moral rationalism). I'll briefly summarize his discussion of each view, and then raise a general objection that threatens to undermine the coherence of the overall psychological picture at work in Parts III and IV.

First, though, two concerns about Shafer-Landau's use of premise (3) in the formulation of the argument. For one thing, it is not clear why the Humean theory of motivation has to step in here—wouldn't the argument be equally effective against moral realism if some evaluative beliefs can motivate, as Shafer-Landau's preferred theory holds? If premises (1) and (2) are true and the argument is valid, then moral obligations would be tied to individuals' beliefs rather than their desires, which seems to have just the same antirealist force. Furthermore, it is not immediately clear why the Humean is committed to saying that the mere possibility of an agent being motivated to act implies that the agent *must* desire to act or else have a prior end-directed desire. Part of the problem here is that the sense of "can" must be univocal with the sense at work in premise (2), and yet reasons internalists have proposed a wide range of different interpretations of the term. Even so, on most of them the sense of "can" involves the motivation of some greatly improved version of S, and that only serves to reinforce the problem with (3), since it is not at all clear why the motivations of an improved version of an agent require, on the Humean view, that the agent as she *actually* is must have the desires in question. Perhaps the problem here is not one for Shafer-Landau but rather for advocates of this kind of argument, but it would have been worthwhile trying to sort out these matters in detail from the start.

According to moral rationalism (premise (1)), there is an intimate connection between moral obligations and reasons for actions, either because the former are merely necessarily connected to such reasons, or because the obligations are themselves intrinsically reason-giving. Shafer-Landau thinks that rationalism is true, and furthermore that a presumptive case for it is rather easy to establish; after all, we often cite the rightness or wrongness of an action as the reason why we did or did not perform it (192-93). Rather, the main challenge here is responding to four challenging antirationalist arguments, the most important of which in my mind appeals to the conjunction of rational egoism and the falsity of ethical egoism. Shafer-Landau argues, forcefully it seems to me, that we should reject rational egoism, and hence can reject this challenge to rationalism.

As mentioned above, reasons internalists (premise (2)) tie reasons to the motivational states of either agents as they actually are, or, more plausibly, agents as they would be after the relevant parts of their psychologies are improved in various ways. Again Shafer-Landau's discussion takes a predictable path—two counterexample strategies are devel-

oped against reasons internalism, and then four arguments for the view are criticized. The second of the two counterexample strategies generalizes into an important argument:

1. If internalism is true, then one has no reason to do what is rationally impossible.
2. If one has no reason to Φ , then one can't be justly blamed or punished for not Φ -ing.
3. Therefore if internalism is true, then one can't be justly blamed or punished for avoiding what is rationally impossible.
4. Some agents are justly blamed or punished for their evil deeds, even though avoidance of such conduct was rationally impossible.
5. Therefore internalism is false. (187-88)

The agents who Shafer-Landau has in mind include disciplined immoralists, principled fanatics, and hardened misanthropes (187).

Overall I agree with Shafer-Landau that we should reject reasons internalism while defending moral rationalism, and furthermore it seems to me that he has provided a number of considerations worth taking seriously on behalf of each enterprise. I conclude this section with a general problem for the conjunction of Shafer-Landau's views about reasons together with his anti-Humean theory of motivation.²⁸ Normative or good reasons for Shafer-Landau are objective facts or standards that are not constrained by an agent's motivational capacities. Motivating or subjective reasons, on the other hand, are the reasons that an agent *takes herself* to have for performing an action, and they are what motivate that performance. As we saw in the previous section, motivating reasons for Shafer-Landau amount to either desires or evaluative beliefs, both of which are mental states. But then these two views about the ontology of practical reasons seem to entail a striking conclusion:

(C1) The reasons that motivate us to act can never be nor represent any objective reasons for action.

The argument needed to derive this consequence is the following:

- (i) For Shafer-Landau, objective practical reasons are facts or standards, and in deliberation they can be represented in the contents of the relevant mental states.
- (ii) Shafer-Landau's view alleges that motivating reasons are mental states.
- (iii) There is a categorical divide between mental states and mental contents.
- (iv) Therefore, the reasons that motivate us to act can never be nor represent any objective reasons for action.

²⁸Here again I draw on my "Practical Reasons, Causation, and Motivation."

Premise (iii) makes what seems to me to be the uncontroversial assumption that a mental attitude/content pair such as my belief that p is of a different ontological kind altogether from the mental content itself, namely, p . But if we accept (i) and (iii), then we have what seems to be a *reductio* of (ii), for then it would follow that strictly speaking we are never motivated to act for objectively good reasons, since those reasons are simply of a different ontological kind altogether from the reasons for action operative in our motivational lives.²⁹

But (C1) isn't the end of the story. For given Shafer-Landau's brand of moral rationalism, we can derive the following:

(C2) We can never be motivated by what we ought, objectively, to do.

Shafer-Landau is an *intrinsic* moral rationalist, and so holds that moral obligations themselves are intrinsically normative and reason-giving (204-5). So if the above argument works for objective reasons, then it will work for moral obligations and moral facts as well.

Given the implausibility of (C1) and (C2), especially for a moral realist, the above can be taken as another strong reason for rejecting Shafer-Landau's particular anti-Humean theory of motivation and instead endorsing a view whereby mental contents rather than mental states are what motivate agents to act.

Part V: Moral Knowledge

The final and longest part of *Moral Realism* is devoted to epistemic matters. Here Shafer-Landau provides a hybrid account of the justification of moral beliefs—we are to combine an internalistic self-evident foundationalism for beliefs about moral principles with an externalistic process reliabilism for moral beliefs about particular act and trait tokens.³⁰ Let us take each of these in turn.

With respect to moral principles, we can have justified beliefs about them if, according to Shafer-Landau, they are self-evident. So we get the following:

(a) A moral principle is justifiedly believed if it is self-evident (247).

Next we are told that the following is true:

²⁹For related discussion, see Dancy, "Why There is Really No Such Thing," and *Practical Reality*.

³⁰In this section, "internalism" and "externalism" will refer to the two opposing views in epistemology, and have no connection to the earlier views about motivation or practical reasons.

(b) A belief is self-evident if its content is a self-evident proposition (247).

But this isn't very enlightening without:

(c) "A proposition p is self-evident =_{df.} p is such that adequately understanding and attentively considering just p is sufficient to justify believing that p " (247).

The remainder of the chapter is then devoted to heading off seven arguments against self-evident propositions.

Three questions immediately arise in my mind for Shafer-Landau's theory. First, it is unclear why (b) is only meant to be giving a sufficient condition and not a necessary condition as well. Secondly, in order to get a good handle on what (c) is trying to say, I need to be told what "understanding" amounts to, and furthermore, what it is to "adequately" understand something. For all that is said, understanding could require anything ranging from internalist coherence relations to externalist proper functioning.³¹

Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is not clear to me how promising a methodology it is to let (c) be the basis for one's moral epistemology. Combining (a), (b), and (c), we get:

(d) A moral principle is justifiedly believed if adequately understanding and attentively considering just the principle is sufficient to justify believing it.

But leaving aside concerns about adequate understanding and attentive consideration, we are given no assurance here that any such beliefs actually *are* justified, since (d) clearly relies on a general standard of belief justification. For all we are told, such a standard could require reliable externalist processes or internalist coherence relations. And if it did require either of these, then presumably no belief in a moral principle would be justified in the way outlined by (d).

Another way to put the point is that I would have thought the more fundamental project here is to first try to characterize what it is to justifiedly believe something, and to then show how one could go about having one's beliefs concerning moral principles satisfy that characterization. Given Shafer-Landau's own view, we could start with some general theory of justification that would have to be properly motivated and defended in its own right, and then show how adequate understanding and attentive consideration are sufficient to meet the conditions of that

³¹Shafer-Landau is aware of this concern, but chooses to not fill in the details here (p. 249 n. 3).

general theory.

Let us turn to the other side of Shafer-Landau's moral epistemology. When it comes to verdictive beliefs, or all things considered moral beliefs about act and trait tokens, we find that here we should be reliabilists instead. Interestingly enough, Shafer-Landau rejects the standard view that verdictive beliefs are arrived at via inference from beliefs about moral principles (268). Nor, on the other hand, are they self-evident, since in order to form them one needs to first have empirical beliefs about the descriptive facts that ground the particular supervenient moral facts (271). Rather, we should look to reliable cognitive processes that take empirical beliefs as their inputs and that output verdictive beliefs.

Shafer-Landau says very little about the conditions either necessary or sufficient for a verdictive belief-producing process to be reliable, well-formed, or functioning properly. Instead he devotes most of his attention in the final chapter of the book to defending reliabilism as a general epistemic theory by, for example, responding to the generality problem as well as to challenges to both the necessity and the sufficiency of reliability for conferring positive epistemic status.

Needless to say, trying to tackle these extremely difficult topics in just a few pages makes their treatment seem a bit quick and sketchy. At the same time, I am left puzzled by what seem to be tensions between the two parts of the overall hybrid moral epistemology. To take one example, Shafer-Landau devotes an entire section of the final chapter to defending the necessity of reliability for epistemic justification (285-87), and yet in the previous chapter the standards for justification in the case of beliefs about moral principles can be solely internalist self-evidence standards.

Let me end this section with an important issue that I hope Shafer-Landau will take up in future work. The existence of reliable verdictive belief-forming processes plays a crucial role in his moral epistemology, and so it would be nice to see what the evolutionary story looks like whereby, given the adaptive values selected for by evolution, it is reasonable to think that natural selection would have favored beings with these kinds of processes. Such a story would have to be told within the confines of the denial of the following: rational egoism, ethical egoism, motivational internalism, and the Humean theory of motivation. It also would have to confront forceful challenges in the literature, including Richard Joyce's sophisticated evolutionary discussion of moral fictionalism and Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against the conjunction of naturalism and the reliability of our cognitive faculties.³² Yet without

³²See Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). "Naturalism" for Plantinga is primarily meant to exclude supernatural beings rather than moral properties of the kind Shafer-Landau countenances.

such an story, the epistemology component of Shafer-Landau's theory will be noticeably incomplete.

Concluding Remarks

Moral Realism: A Defence is very well written, clear, accessible, and carefully structured. It could be used in courses on metaethics for undergraduate majors, while at the same time it is of interest to specialists in the field. Let me conclude this essay with some general observations about the book.

Particular views versus general positions

An important part of Shafer-Landau's methodology is to criticize general metaethical positions rather than the details of particular views. Thus, objections are raised against constructivism or noncognitivism as such rather than against specific constructivist or noncognitivist positions. One result of this approach is that we find almost no treatment of, for example, Gibbard's sophisticated version of expressivism, Joyce's important defense of moral fictionalism, or Scanlon's influential brand of constructivism.³³ Of course, taking up a critical evaluation of the details of these views would significantly lengthen any discussion of moral realism, but at the same time it would in my view strengthen that defense considerably as well. Philosophers such as Gibbard, Joyce, Scanlon, and others are typically well aware of many if not all of the objections that Shafer-Landau has raised, and have each in their own way articulated important responses to them that need to be addressed on a case by case basis.

The ground covered

The book covers an impressive amount of ground—we are provided with the foundation for a novel theory of the metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and rationality of the moral, which should give us a complete metaethical theory when combined with a moral semantics. When it comes to a choice between breadth and depth, however, I tend to prefer depth at the expense of covering a few additional topics. In this case, for example, the reliabilist theory for verdictive beliefs receives only a preliminary positive treatment, as most of the attention is devoted to defending reliabilism as a general theory of positive epistemic status. Instead,

³³See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*; and T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

perhaps it would have been worth expanding the discussion of moral metaphysics or moral psychology, and saving topics in moral epistemology for another book altogether.

Cost-benefit analysis

Shafer-Landau's methodology reflects a common trend in analytic philosophy—a new position is staked out on the philosophical landscape, and then cost-benefit analysis is used to argue in favor of that position. No decisive arguments are to be had on any side; rather, one tries to minimize the costs associated with one's own view while trying to impress upon readers the prohibitively high costs associated with rival views. When the final tally is done, then, the pluses and minuses are supposed to come out in favor of one's own view.

I find the results of this approach to be somewhat depressing, since it seems that there is very little consensus among philosophers as to what consequences of views count as costs, and furthermore, if they are costs, how high they really are. Familiar debates about, for example, the metaphysics of composition or of persistence through time have exhibited this feature for quite a while, and the same is becoming apparent in analytic metaethics as well. Thus Shafer-Landau is willing to conjoin nonnaturalist moral realism, causal overdetermination by moral and descriptive properties, and the epistemic self-evidence of moral principles, and argue that such a conjunction has fewer costs associated with it than does any rival view. Others, however, are no doubt going to tally the costs and benefits rather differently. The end result, I fear, will be a fundamental gridlock in metaethics.

In spite of any misgivings outlined above, I consider *Moral Realism: A Defence* to be essential reading for anyone working in contemporary metaethics and moral psychology. It is bold, well-informed, and forceful, and makes a strong case for taking nonnaturalism seriously again on the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of *Principia Ethica*.

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