



The Fundamentals of Ethics

Russ Shafer-Landau

Download now

Read Online ➔

The Fundamentals of Ethics

Russ Shafer-Landau

The Fundamentals of Ethics Russ Shafer-Landau

In *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Fourth Edition, author Russ Shafer-Landau employs a uniquely engaging writing style to introduce students to the essential ideas of moral philosophy. Offering more comprehensive coverage of the good life, normative ethics, and metaethics than any other text of its kind, this book also addresses issues that are often omitted from other texts, such as the doctrine of doing and allowing, the doctrine of double effect, ethical particularism, the desire-satisfaction theory of well-being, moral error theory, and Ross's theory of *prima facie* duties. Shafer-Landau carefully reconstructs and analyzes dozens of arguments in depth, at a level that is understandable to students with no prior philosophical background.

Ideal for courses in introductory ethics and contemporary moral problems, this book can be used as a stand-alone text or with the author's companion reader, *The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems*, Fourth Edition.

The Fundamentals of Ethics Details

Date : Published June 21st 2017 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780190631390

Author : Russ Shafer-Landau

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Academic, School

 [Download The Fundamentals of Ethics ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Fundamentals of Ethics ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Fundamentals of Ethics Russ Shafer-Landau

From Reader Review The Fundamentals of Ethics for online ebook

Wing says

This great book starts by demonstrating that neither hedonism nor desire-satisfaction provides a sound foundation to a value theory. It then explores utilitarianism, Kantian categorical imperatives and contractarianism in depth, and highlights their respective deficiency. As none of these competing normative theories is complete, an intuitionist approach based on *prima facie* duties needs to be considered. The book then points out that all the aforementioned theories fail to address the issue of moral character, and virtue ethics may therefore complement them. Finally, the author makes a good case that relativism and nihilism are almost certainly false. Five stars.

Hilary says

This book sucks. The author talks too colloquially, which makes the chapters skip along, it's true, but also makes you struggle through a lot of slang language where the author is trying to be hip. The author also makes outrageous assumptions, and supports or denies philosophical theories based on the strength of his own assumptions and morals. If you ever wondered what it would be like if Socrates had actually answered any questions, this is it. However, having someone tell you what to think is less satisfying than it would seem.

Emre says

Oversimplified but informative enough for beginners of philosophy.

Travis says

After reading this Shafer-Landau's 1st edition of the "The Fundamentals of Ethics" in its entirety, I can say it is definitely a very good survey text of ethical theory. That said, it has a few flaws that deserve noting.

Generally speaking, "The Fundamentals of Ethics" has several advantages over some of its competitors. The introductory discussion is quite good, I think; the book splits up the discussion of psychological and ethical egoism into two separate chapters, which makes the topic more manageable; it includes a chapter on desire-satisfaction theory, which most ethics texts ignore; it covers particularism, doing and allowing, and other issues often ignored in survey texts of this kind; and it does a consistently fine job of defining and explaining terms and principles. And as one reviewer (on the OUP site) pointed out, Shafer-Landau's book is better organized than his primary competitor's (James Rachels'"The Elements of Moral Philosophy"), much more comprehensive, and covers some essential meta-ethics. Most of the discussions are easy to follow and most chapters (not all—see below) cover the essentials of each theory. And Landau is an engaging and cogent writer who is a pleasure to read.

But the text also has some minor and major flaws that reviewers have ignored. What I consider the minor

problems are these:

1. the book's conversational tone borders, at times, on being a bit annoying
2. the book sometimes divides up its discussion of normative theories into two chapters rather than one—a chapter addressing strengths and a chapter addressing weaknesses—when in most cases those considerations belong together
3. inclusions of examples and applications are uneven at best

Those criticisms are mere quibbles, but I have a few that are substantial:

1. the book does a very poor job of covering the history of ethics, often failing even to mention key figures associated with the development of each theory
2. the chapter on utilitarianism explicitly delimits its analyses to act-utilitarianism (AU), considering what is commonly called rule-utilitarianism (RU) only in a small section of a subsequent chapter on the difficulties of consequentialism, where RU is reduced rule-consequentialism (RC) understood as a rubric of optimific social rules—which effectively poisons the well for robust and nuanced forms of RU (and makes them easy prey for J. Smart's accusations of irrational rule worship) by tacitly disqualifying in advance any rules which might govern non-social moral conduct or might allow a greater sensitivity to situational demands
3. and most surprising of all, the chapter on Kant is very disappointing, failing to discuss many critical aspects of deontological ethics in general, and of Kantian deontology in particular.

Admittedly, it is hard to strike the right balance between too much material and too little in a text aimed at the undergraduate academic market, where it will primarily be used in semester-long classes divided into weekly meetings. But whatever that perfect balance might be, I think this book needs a bit more work before it achieves it. According to the OUP site, however, the new 2nd edition has added discussion questions at the end of each chapter, has expanded the discussion of skepticism, moral rights and the moral community, and has added more real-life examples throughout. And those changes will certainly improve the book's appeal. I only wish the chapter on Kant had been reworked.

But even with its weaknesses, this is still a very good book. And thanks to OUP and Landau, it is one of the most reasonably priced texts of this kind on the market.

Peter Jana says

The strength of this book lies in the step-by-step method the author uses to analyze philosophical justifications and counter-claims. Michael Sandel's **Justice** might have more appeal because Sandel covers similar territory with more case studies and thought experiments, but Sandel does not pick apart premises with the type of consistency of Shafer-Landau, nor does he cover topics like ethical pluralism and relativism. I found this to be an insightful entree into philosophical argumentation. The section on the relevance of the prisoner's dilemma for social contract theory was especially useful for my teaching.

Joshua says

The Fundamentals of Ethics is a useful introductory text to the issues of ethics.

First, the text is written colloquially; it is accessible and engaging for the new ethics student. Second, it holds to a clear structure with each chapter following naturally and easily from the previous. Third, each major argument is simplified into well-crafted argument forms. This encourages the reader to cultivate and apply her logic skills.

One important flaw, however, is the unwarranted assumptions made throughout the text. The author will often provide a critique to one theory that assumes the correctness of another. On the other hand, the author will also include critiques that have historically been raised to the respective ethical theories.

Overall, I would recommend this text to anyone beginning a study of ethics.

Michelle Johnson says

An excellent introduction to some of the popular ethical theories. Many readers who are already knowledgeable in these theories seem to criticize Shafer-Landau's simplification of the subject, but it is exactly why I would compliment him. It's a great way to introduce those who are assigned the reading, by keeping it short and easy to read. It gives enough information about each theory, as well as arguments against them and comparisons to others, and easily instigates much classroom discussion about why each theory was or was not agreeable.

Parel says

The author focuses a lot on presenting nuanced points of view- this nuance is especially present in the chapter on feminist ethics. This is great and grants the reader a multiple-sided understanding of philosophical theories.

The only thing I did not like, though, was that the book references lots of primary sources without going into depth about them. I would have liked to read a bit more explanation about these texts, as it sometimes feels as though the book is incomplete on its own.

Josiah says

The book does its job of presenting the different positions that exist in academia on ethics from a philosophical point-of-view and does a pretty good job of raising possible objections to each of the positions. Since it was coming from a secular perspective, it wasn't as useful for me personally as a Christian as it could be. But as a book on ethics, it did its job of presenting each side fairly clearly and without much bias.

Rating: 3-3.5 Stars (Good).

Jenni says

As a basic overview of ethics this book is well structured and well-written. For the layperson interested in an

overview of the philosophical issues it is a great resource. My only criticism would be that this is the furthest it goes - even for a basic intro to ethics undergraduate class the content is sometimes too basic and some of the issues are glossed over too quickly with some main criticisms of positions (I am thinking specifically of the situationist criticism of virtue ethics) are missed. Overall though, the book is helpful for anyone interested in an introduction to the field of ethics.

Stephanie :} says

Had to read parts of this for an Ethics class in college awhile back. Piqued my interest so went back and read the whole thing. It's a great introduction to the different ethical theories out there.

Zach says

Five years after taking my undergraduate ethics course, and completely skimming over this book the first time, I finally read the whole thing as I promised myself to do, and found it to be quite a bit more rewarding than I imagined. (I was mostly just glad to contemplate it in peace, rather than having to listen to the sophomoric speculations of my classmates from way back.) Shafer-Landau does approach most of the major ethical schools of thought in a fair way, though it's clear in a few chapters that he finds certain strains unconvincing. I came into the book expecting to align much more closely with some of the skeptical metaethical positions, but left feeling quite a bit more convinced (or at least interested in and open to) the qualms posed by objectivists.

Philipp Schwind says

I used this book for an class on contemporary moral issues and I don't think I am going to assign it again. Here is why:

- in general, the book stays too much on the surface, quickly presenting a position and then moving to a long list of objections against it. I (and my students) would have preferred a more in-depth treatment of fewer issues.
- consequently, some difficult issues are presented in a way that don't benefit anyone. E.g. S-L's treatment of moral motivation or his discussion of how Kant would respond to the amoralist. He treats these subjects in a page or two, and all that happens is that students shrug their shoulders and move on. Leave it out or have a longer section on it.
- the coverage of natural law theory is way too dumbed down and makes the theory look totally stupid. Even if you don't agree with natural law theory, it is more complicated and deserves a fairer treatment
- in the first section on well-being, S-L discusses a very implausible version of hedonism and let's it then fail. He only mentions in a footnote that Aristotle has a different understanding of happiness and never again comes back to it. Please! Concluding the section, S-L states that an objective list-theory is probably the most convincing candidate, but never explains why or how. Please!
- too few examples; those he uses are not very appealing. No comparison to authors like Sandel (e.g. in his 'Justice', a great introduction to pol phil and public policy)
- on the bright side, I liked the fact that the book comes with Power Point presentations and a test bank. This has saved me a lot of time
- the introductory treatment of how arguments in ethics can fail was quite nice

Cj Guth says

I was a philosophy major in college, and read this as something of a refresher on moral philosophy. I confess I was disappointed.

I think it is fair to say that the book is written from the fundamental conviction that ethics is important, and that there are some true ethical claims (think "Killing babies for sport is wrong"). That's surely reasonable, and frankly I appreciate anytime an author of a survey book will honestly tell you where he or she is coming from. Nevertheless, I confess I think that this book could have the opposite effect as the one he intends. He basically sets out the major moral theories in a chapter or two, gives some pros, then argues against them. He pretty clearly comes across as thinking all the general theories clearly do not work, which I suspect will engender a sort of skepticism in Intro students. I suppose this isn't something I can fault him for too much, since it represents his own meta-ethical views (something of a pluralistic intuitionism, I guess). And perhaps my worry is based mainly in my skepticism about the plausibility of his own view.

Maybe more problematic is his treatment of some of the theories. He treats virtue ethics as if it is ONLY the view that moral knowledge is found in emulating some exemplar. That is what SOME virtue ethicists say, but by no means all of them; indeed, it most certainly is not Aristotle's view. Worse still, however, are his treatments of Natural Law and Divine Command Theory. I have little sympathy for DCT, but treats it as if it just is voluntarism (the view that something is right or wrong just because God says so). This ignores some contemporary treatments of DCT (e.g. Adams) which try to get around the Euthyphro Dilemma. Shouldn't he at least have given them a hearing? Natural Law is worse. Basically he says Natural Law thinks good is what's "natural" for humans to do, and that this has a lot to do with sex (a comment that suggests he has in mind particularly implausible pop-Catholic views). He then criticizes that on Humean grounds. But he doesn't mention that the Aristotelian tradition of Natural Law isn't empirical in the sense of statistical generalizations about people, but rather is based on a supposed apprehension (by abstraction) of the essence of humans. Then, add to that the meta-ethical analysis that "good" always means "good for x," and you get the view that ethics is about what is good for humans *as* "rational animals." What is a good "rational animal?" As rational, he or she is just; as vulnerable, fortitude is important to flourishing, etc. Shafer-Landau mentions none of that. Is he unaware of this, or did he want to present a straw man? Finally, he fails to note that science is often invoked in favor of both psychological egoism and utilitarianism, especially evolutionary psychology. Indeed, evolution is often implicitly linked to egoism in news and pop-culture, so given that he's trying to defend altruism, why doesn't he address this? Even though he's trying to keep things simple for underclassmen, he could have articulated the views in a more plausible way, without making them more complex, it seems to me.

There are some good things about the book. He is a very clear writer, and does a nice job, I think, laying out arguments given for positions premise by premise. His treatment of hedonism and egoism was, on the whole, pretty good it seemed to me. And in general he does give a good lay of the land in moral theory. One wonders if focusing on a little less would have been better, though.

Rui Carlos da Cunha says

Reading over the reviews of those who dislike this book and yet offer no other books on ethics as ones they

favor makes me wonder why people waste their breath and time to complain about a book they chose to read in the first place. It's a good introduction to ethics with excellent use of vocabulary. Some of the syllogistic arguments may seem as contrived as a Socratic dialogue, but unless the reader can create better arguments to offer as examples, it becomes a case of put up or shut up. Other than a handful of typos scattered in the first edition, I find the text cogent and intelligent. Maybe those who complain may find this site a great place for themselves to vent to others and try in vain to look smarter than the author. It is laughable to read many of the complaints hurled at this book on Goodreads. It does not diminish the value of the book or the understanding the author, Russ Shafer-Landau, has in regards to ethical objectivity, which is the running thread guiding most of the chapters in the text. Some concepts are argued with more force than others, as in the case of Virtue Theory, but overall, some theories need less argumentation to refute. I applaud Russ Shafer-Landau and hope one day to meet him in person to discuss moral skepticism and moral naturalism. I do feel that the last chapter on Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity should actually be the Foreword after the Introduction at the beginning of the book. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did, as I savored it during my lunch breaks for nearly 15 months, but I look forward to another book filling that space-time when I get to read with little interruption. And the bibliography itself is worth the time to figure out which ethics book will explain what you seek to understand, to know, and to implement in the real world.
