

Chapter 1 : The Fundamentals of Ethics, 3e

In The Fundamentals of Ethics, Third 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.

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 like "Killing babies for sport is wrong". Nevertheless, I confess I think I was a philosophy major in college, and read this as something of a refresher on moral philosophy. 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. 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. 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. Adams which try to get around the Euthyphro Dilemma. Natural Law is worse. He then criticizes that on Humean grounds. 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. 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.

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This will make it possible for us to determine more clearly the nature of goodness in regard to both ethics and politics, a matter of great attention to the statesman, who devotes his most serious attention to his efforts to make good men of his fellow citizens. Needless to say, the virtue we must consider is human virtue, for we are seeking after the nature of human good and human happiness. By human virtue we mean an excellence of the soul, not the body, for happiness has been defined as an activity of the soul. Clearly then, it is necessary for a statesman to have some knowledge of the workings of the soul, or psychology. We will limit this inquiry to the extent required for the proper study of ethics. Some of the doctrines on the soul stated in our earlier, less technical works on the subject, are adequate for our present purposes. Let us review them: The soul consists of two elements, one rational and the other irrational. Whether these are physically separate, or are separate only abstractly e. The irrational element of the soul is divided into two parts. The first is vegetative in nature and common to all living things, thus it is not relevant to a discussion of human virtue. The other part is the source from which all appetites and desires spring i. This part, though irrational, bears a special relation to the rational faculties in that it can be made submissive to the reason and obedient to its dictates. These distinctions within the soul allow us to make a classification of the virtues, analogous to the classification of the parts of the soul. Some virtues are called "intellectual" e. Other virtues, like generosity or liberality and temperance or self-control are "moral" virtues, the virtues of character, and belong to the irrational element of the soul. They are attained when the irrational element is made to act in accordance with the dictates of the reason. Because it can be made subject to the reason, this element of the soul may actually be classified as intermediate, not fully rational or irrational, but this is not of great importance at this point. That human life is comprehensible only when conceived of as being directed toward some end or good, and that it can be interpreted by a categorization of ends and means. That the end toward which all practical human activity is directed is definable in advance of its realization. This takes moral knowledge out of the realm of abstraction and speculation, and gives it great practical importance as a code for personal life and a guide for the organization and administration of the political state. According to Aristotle, three conditions must be fulfilled for friendship to exist between two people. One of those conditions is expectation of shared material abundance mutual goodwill.

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