

3 A SKEPTICAL CHALLENGE TO MORAL  
4 NON-NATURALISM AND A DEFENSE OF  
5 CONSTRUCTIVIST NATURALISM\*

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8 In his important new book, Russ Shafer-Landau takes the  
9 defense of moral non-naturalism to a new level of sophistica-  
10 tion.<sup>1</sup> The key doctrines he aims to defend are that moral  
11 properties are *sui generis* and non-natural, and that moral  
12 predicates are not analyzable in naturalistic terms (p. 66). In  
13 the course of defending these doctrines, he deals with an  
14 impressive range of complex issues, yet his fundamental strat-  
15 egy is simple. He distinguishes among moral realism, con-  
16 structivism, and non-cognitivism, and, among realist theories,  
17 between naturalism and non-naturalism. He then argues that  
18 constructivism, non-cognitivism and naturalism face grave  
19 difficulties and that the standard objections to non-naturalism  
20 miss the mark. Non-naturalism emerges as the most plausible  
21 view.

22 I have two goals. First is to show that Shafer-Landau's  
23 objections to so-called "constructivism" are unsuccessful.  
24 After explaining constructivism, as he understands it, I dis-  
25 cuss two examples, a classic divine command theory and my  
26 own "society-centered" theory.<sup>2</sup> The most interesting of Sha-  
27 fer-Landau's objections is a generalization of the *Euthyphro*  
28 dilemma (pp. 42–43). I argue that society-centered theory is  
29 an example of a kind of "happy" constructivist theory that is  
30 not susceptible to the objection.

31 My second goal is to argue that Shafer-Landau's theory  
32 lacks the resources to address in a substantive way certain  
33 skeptical worries about morality, worries that "happy"

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34 constructivist theories can answer. This, I believe, is a major  
 35 reason to be dissatisfied with Shafer-Landau's non-natural-  
 36 ism. The problem is not that his theory is realist rather than  
 37 constructivist. For, as I explain, certain "happy" constructiv-  
 38 ist theories have "twins" that are realist and yet answer the  
 39 skeptical worries. The problem is that Shafer-Landau's theory  
 40 is a kind of *bald* realism that lacks internal structure of the  
 41 kind needed to address the skeptical worries in a substantive  
 42 way. If we take these worries seriously, we must see Shafer-  
 43 Landau's theory as inadequate.

#### 44 1. CONSTRUCTIVISM AND REALISM

45 The term "constructivism" is widely used in the literature. To  
 46 avoid terminological issues, I shall simply let Shafer-Landau  
 47 have the word.

48 The motivation for constructivism, as I understand it, is to  
 49 respond in a substantive way to the skeptical worries about  
 50 morality that I mentioned above. One example is a worry  
 51 about what could make it the case that certain garden-variety  
 52 facts are normative or have normative significance. Construc-  
 53 tivist theories attempt to respond to these worries by explain-  
 54 ing the nature of morality in terms of putatively less  
 55 worrisome phenomena, such as informed choice, rational  
 56 choice, or the like. The important point is that the skeptical  
 57 worries that motivate constructivism tend to be neglected by  
 58 theories of other kinds. Of course, it will not be clear what is  
 59 at stake until I have explained the worries more fully and  
 60 shown how society-centered theory deals with them.

61 Shafer-Landau views constructivism as a kind of cognitivist  
 62 irrationalism.<sup>3</sup> It denies a thesis he takes to be central to realism,  
 63 the thesis that some moral truths are "stance-independent"  
 64 (p. 15). He says, "Realists believe that there are moral truths  
 65 that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the  
 66 sense that *the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not*  
 67 *made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given*  
 68 *actual or hypothetical perspective*" (p. 15). In a footnote, he  
 69 explains that "moral principles" or "standards" are

70 conditionals that can be either true or false. The correct stan-  
 71 dards, “in conjunction with relevant non-moral facts”, ex-  
 72 plain “why the moral facts are as they are” (p. 15, fn. 2). For  
 73 example, if slavery is wrong, then there is a true standard  
 74 that, together with the non-moral facts, implies a prohibition  
 75 on slavery.

76 Constructivism denies the stance-independence thesis. Sha-  
 77 fer-Landau says (p. 14), Constructivists endorse the reality of a  
 78 domain, but explain this by invoking a *constructive function*  
 79 out of which the reality is created. This function has moral  
 80 reality as its output. What distinguishes constructivist theories  
 81 from one another are the different views about the proper  
 82 input. ... What is common to all constructivists is the idea that  
 83 moral reality is constituted by the attitudes, actions, responses,  
 84 or outlooks of persons, possibly under idealized circumstances.

85 Shafer-Landau explains further that, according to construc-  
 86 tivism, moral standards are “made true” by being endorsed  
 87 from a preferred standpoint (p. 16). Perhaps we can say,  
 88 then, that a constructivist theory defines an “endorsement  
 89 function” that takes a specified kind of input and yields mor-  
 90 al standards as output, where the theory holds that these and  
 91 only these standards are true, and that they are true because  
 92 they are the output of the function.

93 Although Shafer-Landau views constructivism as irrealist,  
 94 he says it “endorses” the “reality” of the moral “domain”.  
 95 To explain this, let me distinguish between “basic realism”  
 96 and “stance-independent realism”, which is a kind of basic  
 97 realism. I stipulate that basic realism accepts the following  
 98 doctrines: First, there are moral properties, such as rightness.  
 99 Second, these properties are sometimes instantiated. Third,  
 100 moral predicates express these properties. Fourth, moral  
 101 assertions express beliefs regarding the instantiation of these  
 102 properties. Fifth, in that they are properties, rightness and  
 103 other moral properties have the same metaphysical status as  
 104 familiar non-moral properties, whatever that status is.<sup>4</sup> Basic  
 105 realism accepts all five doctrines. Stance-independent realism  
 106 adds the sixth thesis that facts about the instantiation of mor-  
 107 al properties are “stance-independent”.

108 Theories that Shafer-Landau counts as “realist” appear to  
 109 accept all six doctrines of stance-independent realism. Con-  
 110 structivist theories reject stance-independence, but some of  
 111 them, including society-centered theory, accept the five doc-  
 112 trines of basic realism. This is an important sense in which  
 113 they “endorse” the “reality” of the “moral domain.” Divine  
 114 command theory is a useful example.

115 2. DIVINE COMMAND THEORY AND THE *EUTHYPHRO*  
 116 OBJECTION

117 According to Philip Quinn, a kind of action is morally oblig-  
 118 atory just in case God has commanded that actions of that  
 119 kind be performed, and, he holds, God’s commanding that  
 120 an action be performed is what *makes* it obligatory. He holds  
 121 that an action’s having the property of being obligatory  
 122 *depends on* God’s commands.<sup>5</sup> So far, this is a classic divine  
 123 command theory.

124 Divine command theories reject stance-independence, for,  
 125 as Shafer-Landau says, they propose “a constructive function  
 126 that explains the correctness of the proper moral standards”  
 127 (p. 16, fn. 4). According to such theories, we can say, a moral  
 128 standard is true just in case God has commanded compliance  
 129 with it, and God’s commanding compliance with it is what  
 130 *makes* it true. Shafer-Landau concedes that divine command  
 131 theories seem to be realist (p. 16, fn. 4). I think this is be-  
 132 cause they are a kind of basic realism.

133 The strongest objection to divine command theories, says  
 134 Quinn, can be adapted from a discussion in Plato’s  
 135 *Euthyphro*.<sup>6</sup> The objection takes the form of a dilemma. Sup-  
 136 pose that God commands compliance with a given moral  
 137 standard. Either He commands compliance because compli-  
 138 ance is obligatory, or compliance is obligatory because He  
 139 commands it. The first alternative is incompatible with the  
 140 theory as we have formulated it, since the theory holds that  
 141 what *makes* compliance obligatory is God’s command. But  
 142 the second alternative seems unacceptable, for it seems to

143 allow the possibility of God's commanding compliance with  
144 an arbitrary or horrible standard.

145 Quinn replies that God's goodness ensures that His com-  
146 mands are not arbitrary. And Quinn explains that, in his  
147 view, something is good just in case it *resembles* God in a  
148 relevant way. The result is not a form of pure constructivism.  
149 It is a divine command theory of duty-related properties com-  
150 bined with a resemblance theory of goodness. The latter im-  
151 plies, in Shafer-Landau's words, that "there are moral truths  
152 that obtain independently of any preferred perspective"  
153 (p. 15). Hence, Quinn's overall view is a kind of stance-inde-  
154 pendent realism.

155 Shafer-Landau holds that *any* (pure) constructivist theory  
156 is vulnerable to a version of the *Euthyphro* objection (pp. 42–  
157 43). Any such theory specifies a preferred standpoint. Either  
158 this standpoint is moralized, in that the endorsement of stan-  
159 dards in that standpoint is subject to moral constraints, or it  
160 is not. If it is not moralized, then, Shafer-Landau says, "there  
161 is no reason to expect that the principles that emerge ... will  
162 capture our deepest ethical convictions, or respect the various  
163 platitudes that fix our understanding of ethical concepts"  
164 (p. 42, footnote suppressed). But if the standpoint is moral-  
165 ized, then there are moral constraints that "are not them-  
166 selves the product of construction" (p. 42). This is stance-  
167 independent realism, not constructivism.

168 Shafer-Landau does suggest a strategy for rescuing con-  
169 structivism. He says that to avoid resting moral truth on  
170 arbitrary endorsements, and to avoid "lapsing into [stance-  
171 independent] realism", a constructivist theory should say that  
172 the relevant endorsements must have "been formed through  
173 exceptional attentiveness to *non-moral* reasons" (p. 43).

174 The strategy Shafer-Landau is suggesting is familiar. It is  
175 adopted by a family of constructivist theories that attempt to  
176 "reduce" morality to practical rationality in a restricted  
177 standpoint. This family includes Kantian theory and neo-  
178 Hobbesian contractarianism as well as society-centered the-  
179 ory.<sup>7</sup> In recognizing that theories in this family can escape  
180 between the horns of the *Euthyphro* dilemma, Shafer-Landau

181 is acknowledging implicitly that the *Euthyphro* objection does  
 182 not apply to all constructivist theories. Shafer-Landau objects  
 183 that it is hard to see why choices that are responsive to non-  
 184 moral reasons should determine the moral truth (p. 43). But  
 185 this amounts merely to the reasonable demand that theories  
 186 of this kind be supported by arguments.

187 There is, however, a serious concern about these theories.  
 188 Their aim is to “reduce” morality to practical rationality, but  
 189 it is arguable that the skeptical worries that motivate con-  
 190 structivism merely re-appear in such theories as worries about  
 191 practical rationality. Theories of this kind invite a skepticism  
 192 about the normativity of judgments of practical rationality.  
 193 The problem of explaining normativity might simply have  
 194 been moved to a new location.

### 195 3. SOCIETY-CENTERED THEORY

196 The idea behind society-centered theory is simple. We live in  
 197 societies, and we need to live in societies. We order our lives  
 198 partly on the basis of norms we share, where our sharing  
 199 them facilitates beneficial cooperation and coordination  
 200 among us. To the extent that the currency of these norms  
 201 actually functions as well as can be, to make things go well in  
 202 society, the norms are justified, and corresponding moral  
 203 judgments are true. A morality is a system of norms that is  
 204 justified to the extent that its currency in society enables soci-  
 205 ety to get along, and to meet its basic needs. This is the cen-  
 206 tral idea. The underlying intuition can be expressed as a  
 207 thought about the function of morality, *viz.*, that morality  
 208 has the function of making society possible by laying down  
 209 rules governing our lives that, when they have currency in  
 210 society, enable society to get along. Different moral codes  
 211 would differ in how well they would serve this function, and  
 212 a society would be rational to choose a code to serve in it as  
 213 the social moral code that would serve this function better  
 214 than any alternative. The truth about what morality requires  
 215 depends on what is required by the moral code, the currency  
 216 of which in society would best serve this function.



217 There are two key parts to the view. First is the standard-  
218 based theory of normative propositions and second is the  
219 society-centered theory of morality.<sup>8</sup>

220 The standard-based theory explicates the truth conditions  
221 of moral propositions in terms of the status of relevantly cor-  
222 responding moral “standards” or “norms”. To avoid confus-  
223 ing my usage of the term “standard” with Shafer-Landau’s  
224 different usage, I shall use the term “norm” and speak of the  
225 “norm-based theory”. This theory rests on a distinction be-  
226 tween *moral propositions* – such as the proposition that tor-  
227 ture is wrong – and *moral norms* – such as the norm  
228 prohibiting torture that would be expressed by the impera-  
229 tive, “Do not torture anyone!” Moral propositions are poten-  
230 tial objects of belief. But as I use the term, norms are not  
231 objects of belief. Most of us *subscribe* to the norm that pro-  
232 hibits torture in that, among other things, we are inhibited  
233 from torturing and would feel guilty to torture anyone, but it  
234 makes no sense to suppose that someone believes a norm.  
235 Norms are expressed by imperatives, and imperatives are not  
236 believed, nor do they represent the world as being one way or  
237 another. They lack truth value.

238 The norm-based theory proposes a schema for giving the  
239 truth conditions of moral propositions in terms of the rele-  
240 vant status of corresponding norms. Applied to the proposi-  
241 tion that torture is wrong, the theory says the proposition is  
242 true just in case the corresponding norm, the aforementioned  
243 rule that prohibits torture, has a relevantly authoritative  
244 *status*.<sup>9</sup> In my book, I spoke of this status as that of being  
245 *justified*, but this detail is unimportant.<sup>10</sup> The key idea is that  
246 there is *some* status such that when a norm enjoys that status,  
247 the fact that it does underwrites the truth of corresponding  
248 moral propositions. Call this the “truth-grounding status.”

249 The schema proposed by the norm-based theory is intended  
250 to be applicable to laying out the truth conditions for any  
251 kind of normative proposition in terms of a relevant truth-  
252 grounding status of corresponding norms. The schema says  
253 that a (pure) normative proposition of type K is true if and  
254 only if a corresponding norm of type K has the K-relevant



255 truth-grounding status.<sup>11</sup> As applied to propositions of eti-  
 256 quette, for instance, it says that a (pure) proposition of eti-  
 257 quette, such as the proposition that it is impolite to wear hats  
 258 indoors, is true if and only if a corresponding norm of eti-  
 259 quette has the etiquette-relevant status. There is room for  
 260 debate about what this status might be, of course.<sup>12</sup>

261 Society-centered theory provides a theory about the status  
 262 that a *moral* norm must have in order that corresponding  
 263 *moral* propositions be true. It links the truth conditions of  
 264 moral propositions to the status that corresponding norms  
 265 have when the society would be *rational to choose* them to  
 266 serve in the society as the societal moral code. I understand  
 267 the rationality of a society's choice to depend on whether the  
 268 choice would best serve the society's needs.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the soci-  
 269 ety-centered theory links the truth conditions of moral propo-  
 270 sitions to the status that corresponding norms have when  
 271 their serving in a society as the societal moral code would  
 272 enable the society better to serve its needs than would the  
 273 currency of alternative sets of rules.

274 The issue of how best to promote societal needs clearly is  
 275 empirical. Hence, the moral implications of society-centered  
 276 theory are both contingent and somewhat speculative. I think  
 277 the upshot is likely to be that a deontological moral code of a  
 278 familiar kind qualifies as having the "truth-grounding status".  
 279 Such a code would impose familiar duties on us.<sup>14</sup>

280 On my approach, moral "properties" are best viewed as  
 281 relations. Strictly speaking, wrongness, for example, is a rela-  
 282 tion between actions and a relevant society. To be sure, since  
 283 I believe that societies have basically the same needs, I think  
 284 the moral codes that are justified relative to different societies  
 285 will tend to be similar in content. Yet societies can be in dif-  
 286 ferent circumstances, which means that the moral codes justi-  
 287 fied in relation to them are unlikely to be exactly the same.  
 288 This point gives rise to worries of various kinds, but I have  
 289 to set them aside.<sup>15</sup>

290 This is the view in a nutshell, although this brief exposition  
 291 raises many questions that I am unable to answer here. I can-  
 292 not to pause explain the idea of a society, nor can I defend



293 the idea that societies are capable in principle of rational  
 294 choice.<sup>16</sup> It is important that society-centered theory qualifies  
 295 as a form of basic realism,<sup>17</sup> but it rejects stance-independ-  
 296 ence.

297 4. SOCIETY-CENTERED THEORY AND THE *EUTHYPHRO*  
 298 OBJECTION

299 The question to ask at this point is whether society-centered  
 300 theory has the resources to answer the *Euthyphro* objection.  
 301 According to society-centered theory, a system of moral  
 302 norms that would be rationally chosen by the society to serve  
 303 as the societal moral code is deemed to have the truth-  
 304 grounding status. Either the standpoint of society is moral-  
 305 ized, says Shafer-Landau, or it is not. I deny that the stand-  
 306 point is moralized. But then, says Shafer-Landau, “there is  
 307 no reason to expect that the principles that emerge from such  
 308 a construction process will capture our deepest ethical convictions,  
 309 or respect the various platitudes that fix our understand-  
 310 ing of ethical concepts” (p. 42, footnote suppressed). It  
 311 is true that in society-centered theory, the norms with the rel-  
 312 evant truth-grounding status are ones that society would be  
 313 *rational* to choose. But Shafer-Landau objects, it needs to be  
 314 explained why choices that are responsive to *non-moral rea-*  
 315 *sons* should be definitive of *moral truth* (p. 43).

316 I have attempted to explain this by motivating both the  
 317 norm-based theory and the society-centered account of  
 318 morality. In doing so, I have invoked certain theoretical ideas  
 319 as well as ideas that I view as platitudes. It is a platitude, I  
 320 think, that the *point* of morality is to make it possible for  
 321 societies to get along together, to cope with common difficul-  
 322 ties, and to work together cooperatively. I have also invoked  
 323 empirical claims that seem plausible, such as the claim that  
 324 societies *need* a shared moral code to get along together. It is  
 325 natural as well to think that the currency of some moral  
 326 codes would do better than the currency of some others at  
 327 enabling societies to get along. A society surely would be  
 328 rational to choose a moral code that would do better than



329 the alternatives. It is a short step from these ideas to the soci-  
330 ety-centered theory.

331 Shafer-Landau doubts that constructivism can “capture  
332 our deepest ethical convictions”, and this is a serious chal-  
333 lenge to society-centered theory. Obviously, however, I can-  
334 not attempt to address this worry here. I have attempted to  
335 answer worries of this kind in other work.<sup>18</sup>

336 Shafer-Landau points out that a constructivist theory needs  
337 to be able to rebut “a host of criticisms peculiar to its own  
338 formulation” (p. 43). Of course this is true of any theory.  
339 One worry is especially serious, however. It is the objection I  
340 mentioned before that since society-centered theory and simi-  
341 lar theories invoke norms of practical rationality, they owe us  
342 an account of the normativity of judgments of practical ratio-  
343 nality. Have we simply moved the problem of normativity  
344 back one step?

345 Society-centered theory is “reductionist”; it “reduces” the  
346 normativity of morality to the normativity of rational  
347 choice.<sup>19</sup> It postpones the difficult question of whether it is  
348 possible to explain normativity in a fundamental way, or  
349 whether, instead, normativity must be left as an unexplained  
350 primitive. To be sure, a reductionist theory must eventually  
351 face the challenge of defending the theory of rational choice  
352 that it presupposes. This can be done, however. Elsewhere I  
353 have proposed a theory that accounts for the truth conditions  
354 of judgments of self-grounded rationality by combining the  
355 norm-based account with a theory of the truth-grounding sta-  
356 tus of norms of rational choice.<sup>20</sup> It is important to note,  
357 however, that there is no need to rest society-centered theory  
358 on a theory of rational choice.

359 The central ideas of the theory are that any society *needs*  
360 to have a societal moral code in order to enable its people to  
361 get along together, and that some possible societal moral  
362 codes are such that their currency would do better at en-  
363 abling this. Given these ideas, I claim roughly that a society  
364 would be *rational* to *choose* a societal moral code. But the  
365 central ideas could be captured without making any such  
366 claim. In recent work where I have applied the theory, I have

367 emphasized the point about the societal need for a societal  
 368 moral code. I have been implicitly using a version of society-  
 369 centered theory that does not rely on claims about rational  
 370 societal choice.<sup>21</sup> This version of the theory explains the truth  
 371 conditions of moral propositions in terms of the status that  
 372 moral norms have when their currency in a society would en-  
 373 able the society better to meet its needs than would the cur-  
 374 rency of alternative sets of rules. Call this the “basic” society-  
 375 centered view. The basic society-centered theory has the theo-  
 376 retical advantage that it does not presuppose a theory of  
 377 practical rationality.<sup>22</sup>

378 Although the original society-centered theory is construc-  
 379 tive, the basic theory is not. According to the basic theory,  
 380 the truth of a moral proposition depends on which system of  
 381 norms is such that its currency would best serve the needs of  
 382 the relevant society, but this is a *stance-independent* matter.  
 383 Hence, the basic theory is an example of stance-independent  
 384 realism. But since the original theory and the basic theory are  
 385 merely different formulations of the same underlying view,  
 386 and since they are (nearly) extensionally equivalent,<sup>23</sup> the dif-  
 387 ference between constructivism and stance-independent moral  
 388 realism is rather shallow.

389 I now turn to the skeptical worries about morality that I  
 390 mentioned before. Unlike society-centered theory, Shafer-  
 391 Landau’s theory is unable to provide substantive answers to  
 392 these worries. The problem is not that his theory is a kind of  
 393 stance-independent realism. The basic society-centered theory  
 394 is a form of stance-independent realism and it deals with the  
 395 skeptical worries. The problem is that Shafer-Landau’s theory  
 396 is a kind of *bald* moral realism that lacks sufficient internal  
 397 structure to address the worries.

### 398 5. SKEPTICISM ABOUT MORALITY

399 Imagine someone who aims simply to live his life in accord  
 400 with his own ends. He recognizes no constraints on his pursuit  
 401 of his ends. In some moods he concedes that he has *reasons* to  
 402 live in accord with his ends, but he is not fully convinced that

403 there are any reasons at all. He denies that there are any stan-  
404 dards, other than those set by his own ends, that he has any  
405 intrinsic reason to pay attention to. His ends might include  
406 some that we would characterize as moral values as well as  
407 some we would characterize as epistemic. Nevertheless, he  
408 thinks it is nonsense to suppose that there are moral con-  
409 straints on his behavior. He cannot see what in the world  
410 could make it the case that there are obligations or reasons  
411 that constrain his pursuit of what he values. He cannot see  
412 what in the world could make any facts be normative or have  
413 normative significance. Of course, he cannot avoid making  
414 decisions, but he makes decisions in light of his own ends.

415 This person accepts a kind of moral skepticism that is, I  
416 think, more resilient than any argument that could be given  
417 for it. In this respect, his skepticism is similar to skepticism  
418 about the existence of God. It has a life of its own, not  
419 dependent on arguments. I think that an adequate meta-ethi-  
420 cal theory must take these skeptical concerns seriously.<sup>24</sup>

421 The society-centered theory provides a distinctive kind of  
422 answer to the concerns. It explains what would make it the  
423 case that we have moral duties and reasons, and it explains  
424 what would give certain facts moral significance. It is embed-  
425 ded in a general theory of normative judgment, the norm-  
426 based theory, which can be used to explain what gives rise to  
427 other kinds of reasons, such as epistemic reasons and self-  
428 grounded practical reasons.

429 Of course a skeptic might be dissatisfied with the answers  
430 provided by society-centered theory. Some might think, for  
431 example, that the theory does not provide an adequate ac-  
432 count of the stringent normativity of moral judgment.<sup>25</sup> But  
433 society-centered theory does at least address the skeptical  
434 concerns and provide answers to them.

435 Shafer-Landau discusses three questions that are closely re-  
436 lated to the skeptical worries. They are, "What makes moral  
437 judgments true?" (p. 45), "Why is it that the correct moral  
438 standards are correct?" (p. 46), and "How is it that moral obli-  
439 gations are intrinsically reason-giving?" (p. 49). He concedes  
440 that his position provides no substantive answers to these



441 questions that would be of interest to skeptics (or “anti-real-  
 442 ists”) (p. 48). At bottom, Shafer-Landau thinks there is noth-  
 443 ing that makes the true moral standards be true or that makes  
 444 moral obligations entail reasons. These things “simply *are*  
 445 true”, just as the laws of physics simply are true, “and there  
 446 won’t be any illuminating explanation of what makes them  
 447 true” (p. 47, also p. 46). This is “a brute fact about the way  
 448 the world works” (p. 48). I find this difficult to believe. Shafer-  
 449 Landau admits that his responses don’t inspire him “with any  
 450 sense of satisfaction” and that they are not likely to “go any  
 451 way toward assuaging the worries of moral antirealists” (p.  
 452 48). But he says the point is simply that if “some standard is  
 453 true, irreducible, and to be construed realistically, then noth-  
 454 ing *makes* it true” (p. 48). This is to concede the inability of his  
 455 theory to deal substantively with the skeptical worries.

456 Shafer-Landau concedes that constructivism “has a decided  
 457 explanatory advantage over moral realism” (p. 46, sic). He  
 458 suggests, however, that “if realism’s explanatory deficit is as  
 459 serious as constructivists allege, then we ought to be antireal-  
 460 ists about everything”. He says this because he thinks realism  
 461 about *any* subject matter gives rise to skeptical worries analo-  
 462 gous to those that afflict his theory and faces similar difficulty  
 463 in answering the worries (p. 48). But the skeptical concerns at  
 464 issue here are focused specifically on morality and arise chief-  
 465 ly because of the normativity of moral judgment. They do  
 466 not arise with respect to *every* subject matter. Moreover, the  
 467 difficulty faced by Shafer-Landau’s theory is not due to the  
 468 fact that it is realist. Society-centered theory is a form of ba-  
 469 sic realism and the basic society-centered theory is a natural-  
 470 istic form of stance-independent moral realism. Some realist  
 471 theories do address the skeptical concerns.

472 I conclude that Shafer-Landau’s theory is unable to  
 473 address the skeptical concerns in a substantive way. Is this a  
 474 serious problem? Shafer-Landau seems to concede that it is.  
 475 He acknowledges that constructivism has “a distinctive  
 476 explanatory advantage and ought to be preferred”, other  
 477 things being equal (p. 51). But he doubts that other things  
 478 are equal. For, he says, the *Euthyphro* problem “besets all

479 forms of constructivism”, and any constructivist theory must  
 480 be vindicated “against all criticisms specific to its particular  
 481 formulation” (p. 51). I have argued, however, that the  
 482 *Euthyphro* problem does not beset all constructivist theories.  
 483 Moreover, some forms of stance-independent realism address  
 484 the skeptical concerns. Of course any theory must attempt to  
 485 answer criticisms. The fundamental criticism of Shafer-Lan-  
 486 dau’s moral realism is that it does not have the resources to  
 487 deal with the skeptical worries. If we take these worries seri-  
 488 ously, then we cannot be satisfied with a theory that fails to  
 489 address them in a substantive way.

## 490 NOTES

- 491 \* I am grateful to Jon Tresan for helpful comments.  
 492 <sup>1</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon  
 493 Press, 2003). Subsequent references to this book will be found in paren-  
 494 theses.  
 495 <sup>2</sup> David Copp, *Morality, Normativity, and Society* (New York: Oxford  
 496 University Press, 1995). Hereafter cited as “Copp, 1995”. Shafer-Landau  
 497 classifies my view as constructivist (p. 39).  
 498 <sup>3</sup> Regarding irrealism, see pp. 15 and 17–18. Regarding cognitivism, see  
 499 p. 39.  
 500 <sup>4</sup> See my “Introduction: Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics”, forthcoming  
 501 in David Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (New York: Ox-  
 502 ford University Press, 2005). Properly understood, the fifth thesis is com-  
 503 patible with non-naturalism, and also with nominalism about properties.  
 504 <sup>5</sup> Philip Quinn, ‘Theological Voluntarism’, forthcoming in David Copp  
 505 (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. In the following I draw on my  
 506 “Introduction: Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics”.  
 507 <sup>6</sup> Quinn, “Theological Voluntarism”.  
 508 <sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., James  
 509 W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), e.g. Ak 449. David Gauthier,  
 510 *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).  
 511 <sup>8</sup> I developed both in Copp (1995).  
 512 <sup>9</sup> The example illustrates the relevant kind of correspondence. It is diffi-  
 513 cult to generalize because of the variety of moral concepts. I discuss this  
 514 issue in Copp (1995).  
 515 <sup>10</sup> I am ignoring my distinction between “type-one” and “type-two” nor-  
 516 mative propositions (Copp, 1995, pp. 22–24).  
 517 <sup>11</sup> A “pure” normative proposition of type K has no non-K-normative  
 518 entailments or presuppositions (other than those given by the norm-based



519 theory itself). The proposition that Smith was wrong to steal Jones's car  
520 is impure.

521 <sup>12</sup> See David Copp, 'The Normativity of Self-Grounded Reason', *Social*  
522 *Philosophy and Policy*, 22 (2005). The account of politeness that I propose  
523 treats propositions of etiquette as type-two normative.

524 <sup>13</sup> Strictly speaking, it depends on whether the choice would best serve  
525 the society's needs and enable it to serve its values. I ignore the complica-  
526 tion about values since only a society's non-moral values would be rele-  
527 vant and societies lack any interesting non-moral values. See Copp, 1995,  
528 pp. 190–198 and pp. 206–207. I develop my account of rational choice,  
529 and explain the idea of a basic need, in Copp, 1995, chapter 9. I discuss  
530 the basic needs of societies at pp. 192–194.

531 <sup>14</sup> See Copp (1995, pp. 201–209).

532 <sup>15</sup> See Copp (1995, chapters 7 and 8).

533 <sup>16</sup> For detail, see Copp (1995, pp. 218–223). See also David Copp, 'Does  
534 Moral Theory Need the Concept of Society', *Analyse et Kritik* 19 (1997),  
535 pp. 189–212.

536 <sup>17</sup> Copp (1995, pp. 223–231).

537 <sup>18</sup> Copp (1995, pp. 213–216). See David Copp, 'Morality and Society –  
538 The True and the Nasty: Reply to Leist', *Analyse et Kritik* 20 (1998),  
539 pp. 30–45.

540 <sup>19</sup> Copp (1995, pp. 54–56).

541 <sup>20</sup> See Copp, 'The Normativity of Self-Grounded Reason'.

542 <sup>21</sup> See, for example, David Copp, 'The Idea of a Legitimate State', *Philos-*  
543 *ophy and Public Affairs* 28 (1999), pp. 3–45.

544 <sup>22</sup> This was pointed out by Richmond Campbell, 'Critical Notice of  
545 David Copp, *Morality, Normativity, and Society*', *Canadian Journal of*  
546 *Philosophy* 27 (1997), pp. 423–444.

547 <sup>23</sup> Jon Tresan pointed out that there may be exotic cases that distinguish  
548 them extensionally.

549 <sup>24</sup> I argued this in David Copp, 'Moral Skepticism', *Philosophical Studies*  
550 62 (1991), pp. 203–233.

551 <sup>25</sup> For discussion of related issues, see David Copp, 'Moral Naturalism  
552 and Three Grades of Normativity', in Peter Schaber (ed.), *Normativity*  
553 *and Naturalism* (Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag, 2004), pp. 7–45.

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