Some clarifications about objectivism:
Objectivism says:
- Moral claims are true, independently of us.
- *Basic* moral truths are *universal*: they apply to everyone, regardless of what any person or culture (or deity) feels, thinks, says, etc. about it.

But objectivism need not say:
- Moral claims are *absolute*, in the sense of *exceptionless*: e.g., lying is always wrong.

Objectivism may accept that there are exceptions. It claims only that whether there are these exceptions is itself an objective matter, which has a true answer.

And objectivism need not say:
- Morality requires everyone to do the same thing.

Some *basic* moral truths, which apply to everyone, are *conditional*. For example, it is a true moral claim, which applies to everyone, that if someone borrows money, then he or she should pay it back. But if I borrowed money, while you did not, then I should to pay it back, while it is not the case that you should pay anything back. These latter moral truths are *not* basic; they are derived from the more basic, conditional moral truth, which does applies to everyone. (Compare Harman on "ultimate" moral demands.)

The Argument from Disagreement:
(1) If well-informed, impartial people intractably disagree about some claim, then that claim cannot be objectively true.
(2) Well-informed, impartial people intractably disagree about all ethical claims.
(3) Therefore there are no objective ethical truths.

Shafer-Landau: Is (1) true?
- Isn't there also disagreement in the natural and social sciences? Does it follow that there are no objective truths?

Shafer-Landau: Is (2) true?
- Do people disagree about *all* ethical claims?
- Some moral claims are conditional: e.g., If legalizing marijuana would pose serious problems for public health and safety, then it is wrong to legalize marijuana. People might disagree on whether it is wrong to legalize marijuana only because they disagree about whether doing so would pose serious problems for public health and safety. They might agree about the more basic, conditional principle that *if* legalizing marijuana would pose serious problems for public health and safety, *then* it is wrong to legalize marijuana. (Compare Ayer's claim that we never really disagree in our value judgments, only in the facts of the case.)
- Disagreement is not unusual when people have something at stake: when they're not impartial, or disinterested. For example, disagreement over what the deceased really said in his will tends to be more intense when the deceased left behind a lot of money. The explanation of the disagreement is simply that people have a lot at stake, not that there is no truth of the matter what the deceased's will was.

- Are people *impartial* when they discuss *moral* claims? Usually, people have something at stake in moral claims. For example, slaveowners stand to lose a lot, if everyone agrees that slavery is wrong. People have less at stake in, say, the truths of claims in geometry or astronomy.

The important thing may not be how much disagreement there is. It may be, instead, whether there are methods that, at least in principle, could resolve this disagreement.
- There are such methods in the case of the natural and social sciences. The sciences ask questions that can be settled *empirically*: by observation and experiment.
- But we cannot settle *ethical* questions empirically.

Shafer-Landau's reply:
- The skeptic who argues against objectivism believes that at least one philosophical claim is true: namely, the philosophical claim that no moral claims are objectively true.
- But we cannot settle *philosophical* claims, including the skeptic's claim, empirically.
- Therefore, the skeptic cannot, on pain of contradiction, say that if a claim cannot be settled empirically, then it cannot be true.

The Argument from Occam's Razor:
(1) *Occam's Razor: If some entity or principle isn't necessary to explain what happens, then we have no reason to believe in that entity or principle.* In other words, we should accept the simplest or most economical theory. Examples: Why don't we appeal to witches to explain why people get sick? Or to the turning of celestial spheres to explain why the sun, moon, and other planets travel across the sky in the way they do? Because we can explain what happens without these things.

(2) *No moral truth is necessary to explain why anything happens.* For example, we can explain *why* Hitler and Stalin did what they did *without* appealing to the moral truth that what they did was *wrong*. We only need to appeal to their beliefs and desires, their historical situation, and so on.

(3) *Therefore, we should not accept any moral truths.*

Shafer-Landau's replies:
1. Lots of ordinary objects—e.g., chairs, blackboards—are not necessary to explain what happens. We can explain what happens by appealing only to the molecules that make them up. Should we say that there are no chairs or blackboards?

2. Claims about witches, celestial spheres, etc. are *meant* to explain why certain things happen. Since they are not needed to explain anything, there seems no point in keeping them. By contrast, moral claims are *not meant* to explain why anything happens. Their point is instead to say what *ought* to happen. So it does not follow from the fact that they do not explain anything that there is no point in keeping them.

3. Other claims are like moral claims in this respect, that they are meant to say what *ought* to happen, not to explain why anything happens. There are *epistemic* claims, which are about what we *ought to believe*. For example, we ought to believe that 2+2=4. Do we want to say that this epistemic claim is false, because it doesn't explain why anything happens? Does the Argument from Occam's Razor *itself* depend on an epistemic claim? What follows?