Nomy Arpaly. *Unprincipled Virtue.* Oxford University Press. 2003. pp. vii-203. (e.g., pp. xi. – 186.)

Nomy Arpaly's *Unprincipled Virtue* is a significant and exciting contribution to our understanding of moral psychology and moral responsibility. It is bursting with innovative examples, compelling arguments, and ideas important for a broad range of issues in normative theory. Its central task is to offer a theory of moral worth, a theory of when (and to what extent) agents are praiseworthy or blameworthy for their actions.

The first chapter argues that the work of moral psychologists—and more broadly, philosophers of agency— in capturing important facets of moral agency has been impoverished by reliance on overly simple examples. Arpaly offers numerous imaginative and compelling examples to make the point. Her stated aim is "not to give a counterexample to any particular theory"— though one might justifiably think she does this to accounts of Christine Korsgaard, Michael Smith, and J. David Velleman in the first chapter alone— "but to present some complexities in moral life that I think have not been given their due attention" (7). In many of the examples she provides, there is a gap between the apparent conscious, deliberative control exercised by the agent and the motives that lead the agent to act. Yet, our reactions seem more attuned to the non-conscious processes of the agent than the conscious ones. This gap is explored in chapter 2, where Arpaly argues that consciousness consideration of a reason for action is neither necessary nor sufficient for something to count as a good reason, or for it to justify an action. In chapter 3, she articulates and defends her theory of moral worth, and in chapters 4 and 5, she evaluates alternatives to her view and considers apparent problems for her theory.

The centerpiece of the book is chapter 3, on the moral worth of actions. On Arpaly's account, the moral worth of an action is determined by the praiseworthiness (or blameworthiness) of the agent in performing the action. Praiseworthiness/blameworthiness is settled by the agent's responsiveness to moral reasons in the considered case. For an agent to count as responsive to moral reasons (in the praiseworthy sense), two conditions must be satisfied. First, the agent must "have done the right thing for the relevant moral reasons— that is, for the reasons for which the action is right" and second, "an agent is more praiseworthy, other things being equal, the deeper the moral concern that has led to her action" (84). Blameworthiness is understood in largely analogous terms (acting from "sinister" reasons), though it also includes an "absence of concern for morally relevant factors" (108).

One of Arpaly's innovations is to emphasize that responsiveness to moral reasons need not be conscious, explicit, or understood as such by the agent. As she puts it, an agent needs to be responsive to moral reasons *de re*, not *de dicto*. For example, Huckleberry Finn is praiseworthy for freeing the slave Jim, even though Huck views himself as failing to be responsive to what he views as the moral reasons (including rights of property, harming Jim's owner, etc.). Huck's praiseworthiness derives from his being responsive to moral considerations (moral reasons *de re*), even though he explicitly thinks he is disregarding moral reasons (*de dicto*). For Arpaly, Huck's self-understanding has no privileged status in determining his praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. Arpaly uses this account of moral reasons responsiveness to explain a wide range of cases, from the possibility of a praiseworthy Ayn Rand devotee who cannot successfully rid herself of acting altruistically, to our unwillingness to praise a murderer for sparing someone on morally spurious grounds. Her emphasis on responsiveness to moral

reasons *de re*, conscious or not, is an important one, and I suspect that it will come to be promulgated throughout the literature on reasons responsiveness.

Another intriguing development is her suggestion that actions that are attributed to virtues of character be interpreted as stemming "from a markedly deep morally relevant concern" (95). This approach has at least two notable upshots. First, it appears to avoid some of the troubles with virtue-theoretic trait attribution recently highlighted by Gilbert Harman, John Doris, and others. Second, it pulls together talk of virtues with the language of moral worth, and by extension, moral responsibility. Virtue, moral worth, and moral responsibility are all partly determined by whether an agent is acting from moral concern or not. For Arpaly, moral concern is marked out by least three features: having a characteristic motivational structure, a complex of connected emotional attitudes or reactions, and a cognitive element that involves perceiving what is morally salient. Thus, deep moral concern need not be reflected in one particular attitude (e.g., hot passion or a cool state of mind), but is instead connected with an agent's psychology in varied and complicated ways.

Just how tight Arpaly intends the connection between depth of moral concern and praiseworthiness is not clear. In one formulation it is a moral reasons responsive agent's depth of moral concern that settles the praiseworthiness of the agent. For example, she claims "The more moral concern it requires to take the right course of action in a certain situation, the more praiseworthy an agent is for taking it and the less blameworthy an agent is for not doing so" (91). Taken one way, this formula leads to some puzzling results.

Consider the case of an Extraordinarily Morally Concerned Agent (EMCA). One day, the EMCA encounters a conundrum whose correct outcome has some, but only very little moral desirability over any alternatives (e.g., whether to scold a peer for a misdeed). Due to the

complexity of the details involved in the case, only our EMCA, armed with her extraordinary depth of moral concern could (with considerable time and effort) resolve the conundrum and act in a way that is responsive to the relevant moral reasons, without forgoing her other moral obligations. On the formulation just mentioned, if the EMCA spent the time to resolve the conundrum and act accordingly (and she will, for she is extraordinarily morally concerned), she would be *extraordinarily* praiseworthy, much more so than agents making tremendously morally desirable decisions requiring great but not extraordinary moral concern. (Let us assume these other agents are not also forgoing their other moral obligations). Such circumstances might permit, for example, Miss Manners-like actions to be considerably more morally praiseworthy than say, a doctor volunteering her skills in a war-torn country (or any cause with high moral desirability that requires only merely great moral concern). This is a significant departure from ordinary moral thinking, it seems to me.

A natural solution would be to emphasize the *ceteris paribus* clause Arpaly mentions in an earlier formulation (84). Fleshing out such clauses is always a tricky business, and no less so here. On the one hand, if the moral desirability of the action plays a role in the moral worth of the agent, this would be a significant departure from the agent-oriented focus of her account. On the other hand, she could claim that in cases of equal moral desirability, differences of moral concern generate differences in praise and blame-worthiness, and across cases of varied moral significance, there is no metric to judge comparative moral worth. However, we can and do make comparative judgments of moral worth (e.g., "non-violent protests are more praiseworthy than violent protests"). Inasmuch as this is right, her account seems to miss a piece of our moral thinking.

As Arpaly herself might say, I do not take it that this is so much a counterexample to her view as much as reflection on something deserving more attention.

There is much to admire about this compact book, including the writing. It is elegant, even beautifully written. Unencumbered by the usual density of citations and footnoted qualifications, it makes for a brisk, enjoyable read. In some cases this virtue is also a vice. Relevant philosophical works are not always cited. For example, in her discussion of theories that treat autonomy at, or prior, to the moment of action as a condition on blameworthiness, there is no discussion of the related literature on "tracing theories" in debates about free will and moral responsibility. Similarly, in her discussion of racism and blame, there is no acknowledgement of how her views closely parallel prominent positions in the existing literature (e.g., Jorge Garcia's "The Heart of Racism"), nor any attempt to reply to existing criticisms of it. When combined with her admirable openness for further development in the views she does identify as targets, it is not always clear whether she thinks her critical analyses are applicable to an existing view, or whether they are admonishments against potential views. This becomes especially significant in the last two chapters when she considers an alternative to her account of moral worth. Her imagined interlocutor is someone she calls "the autonomist." Many of the examples make it clear that she has in mind a particular interpretation of Frankfurt. In other places, though, it seems that she has in mind something much broader, perhaps even most non-Strawsonian compatibilists.

Even if the professional targets are not always obvious, what is refreshing is Arpaly's consistent application of her theory to a wide range of "real world" and "philosophy world" cases, from run-of-the-mill racists, to Tourette's Syndrome cases, to subjects of hypnosis, to victims of nefarious neurosurgeons. Her discussions of these cases are often insightful, frequently novel, and unusually rewarding.

Unprincipled Virtue is a compelling and thought-provoking piece of philosophy by a wonderfully creative philosopher. It is necessary reading for anyone concerned with moral psychology and the nature of moral responsibility. It would make an excellent text for both advanced undergraduate courses and graduate courses, and it deserves careful study by a wide range of professional philosophers. I highly recommend it.

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