

From Moral Worth to Moral Praise: Doing the Right Thing, For the Right Moral Reasons, In the
Right Spirit

By

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Abstract

The literature within moral philosophy about praiseworthiness and moral worth is expansive, with varying philosophers stating varying claims. While it is commonly held that moral praise is merely a symptom of moral worth, I hold differently. The purpose of this thesis is to show that while the moral worth of an act is necessary, it is not sufficient for the praiseworthiness of an agent who performed that action, and thus, the conditions that satisfy moral worth and moral praise are separate from one another. Because of this, we require further information regarding the factors that inform praise that are different from the factors that inform moral worth. By reconstructing, building on, and extrapolating from the contemporary literature about moral worth, I develop an account of moral worth that strictly applies to actions and an account of moral praise that strictly applies to agents. I conclude that there are three factors which determine praiseworthiness that differ from the factors that moral worth is sensitive to, which are doing the right thing, for the right moral reasons, in the right spirit.

Key words: moral praise, praiseworthiness, moral worth, action, agents, reasons, spirit

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The thesis shall consist of the following sections, in the order specified.

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Introduction

Whenever someone performs some action that responds to morality, like donating to charity or going out of your way to help a friend, we are often quick to praise them or to say that their action has moral worth. While it is tempting to believe that judgements of moral worth and moral praise stand and fall together, where any act that has positive moral worth means that the agent who performed the action while be praised for doing so, this is not the case. The process of determining praise is a far more demanding standard than moral worth is. While we can assign moral worth to an action without giving moral praise to the agent who performed the action, it does not seem as if we can praise an agent unless their action has positive moral worth, and although the positive moral worth of an action is necessary, it is not sufficient for an agent to be praised for doing so. From this, it appears that we can ultimately create separate accounts of moral worth and moral praise that each require different factors than one another.

The objective of my project is to show how the moral worth of actions may come apart from the moral praise of agents. Actions have positive moral worth whenever the agent voluntarily and non-accidentally does the morally right thing, including supererogatory acts that come at a large cost to the agent.¹ I will claim that actions can have moral worth even when agents perform the action with improper moral beliefs. But improper moral beliefs immediately disqualify the agent from deserving moral praise. I will ultimately develop an account of the moral praiseworthiness of agents that reconstructs, builds on, and extrapolates from the

¹ The actions that I am concerned with are actions that respond directly to morality and can have positive moral worth, which I will refer to as morally charged actions. I am not concerned with actions that do not elicit any sort of moral reaction, like listening to this or that song.

contemporary literature about moral worth, where I will offer that performing a morally worthy action in the right spirit is the final necessary condition of moral praiseworthiness.

Chapter 1 will present my preferred account of moral worth, which will double as the cornerstone of my account of moral praise. Chapter 2 will investigate the first factor that informs the praiseworthiness of agents, which is doing the right thing. Chapter 3 will examine the second factor, namely performing an action for the right moral reasons. Chapter 4 will explain what the third and final factor that determines praise is, which is performing an action with positive moral worth in the right spirit.

Chapter 1: The Nature of Moral Worth

Moral worth is commonly used to say *something* about an agent or the action that they perform. More specifically, positive moral worth is used to communicate approval of actions that are morally right, granted they meet the proper criteria. Suppose Jason finds a wallet on the ground while walking home. Evidently, the right thing for Jason to do is to return the wallet to its rightful owner, and the wrong thing to do is to steal the money inside the wallet. Right and wrong, however, are only the beginning of how one might morally evaluate Jason's action. Jason returning the wallet out of fear of repercussion, for example, differs significantly from him returning it out of compassion for the owner of the wallet. Jason's act of returning the wallet out of compassion seems to have positive moral worth that his act of returning it out of fear lacks. This shows that an action having positive moral worth is more than just doing what is right. The focus of this chapter is to review the nature of positive moral worth and to explicate an account of moral worth that will act as the cornerstone of moral praise. To do this, I discuss the relationship between moral worth and moral praise. I then determine the factors which positive moral worth is sensitive to. Finally, I examine the correlation between positive moral worth and supererogation. I believe that doing this is necessary to have a clearer understanding of moral praise.

To limit the scope of my inquiry, it is necessary to clarify who the appropriate subjects of positive moral worth and moral praise are. The appropriate subjects are moral agents, namely those within society who are "expected to meet the demands of morality" and who have the capacity to act rationally on their own (Haksar 1998). Moral agents are essentially those who can independently discern between right and wrong and whose actions are directly influenced by

morality. This means that some agents are in fact not moral agents, including young children and psychopaths. This does not, however, give us carte blanche to act in any which way toward them. Although we should still act in good moral standing towards them, we cannot expect this to be reciprocated because of their inability to be directly influenced by morality. This is what T.M. Scanlon (2012) refers to as a moral relationship, where the relationship we have with moral agents is based on “a set of intentions and expectations,” and namely, “what we owe to others and what they owe to us” (6). We cannot expect a child to keep a secret if they do not know why a secret is morally valuable in the first place and we cannot expect a psychopath to help someone in need if they are incapable of feeling sympathy for others. Moral worth is ultimately relative to this specific moral relationship, and we can thus only assign moral worth to actions, or praise and blame to agents, who are a part of this moral relationship.

1.1. Moral Evaluation

Moral worth and praiseworthiness are types of moral evaluative responses, where one responds to actions, and one responds to agents. I hold that moral worth strictly concerns itself with the actions that agents perform, and that moral praise strictly concerns itself with agents based on the actions they have performed. This means that we may only assign moral worth in response to an agent’s actions, and that we may only assign praise to agents based on the actions they perform. Actions can only be assigned positive moral worth or negative moral worth. Suppose Fred does some morally charged action A. If A represents something that is morally right, like donating to charity, then Fred’s action may have positive moral worth. If A represents something that is morally bad, like breaking a friend’s promise, then Fred’s action may have

negative moral worth. Similar to praise and blame, negative and positive moral worth is based on a variety of factors that I will explain within this chapter.

The evaluative response assigned to agents, on the other hand, are in the form of praise or blame. Suppose Fred does some morally charged action A. If A represents something that is morally right, like donating to charity, then Fred may be praised for doing so. If A represents something morally wrong, like breaking a friend's promise, then Fred may be blamed for doing so. Depending on what A is, along with a variety of other factors that I will explain in the following chapters, Fred can either be praised or blamed for doing A. An agent therefore cannot have moral worth or be morally worthy – they can only be praised or blamed. While an agent may be praised because of their morally worthy action, the sole fact that an action has positive moral worth does not follow that the agent will be praised for doing so.

Judgements about positive and negative moral worth and about praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are closely connected. Because of this, I believe it is worth discussing the relationship between moral worth and praise and blame. Moral worth is often taken as a property of actions that directly correlates with the praiseworthiness and blameworthiness of agents who have committed morally charged actions. While they come apart on their own, moral worth will often inform praise and blame. What this means is that an agent can be praised for the action that they have committed only if their action has positive moral worth. On that same note, an agent can be blamed for the action that they have committed only if their action has negative moral worth. In other words, an agent cannot be praised unless their action has positive moral worth, but an action having positive moral worth is not sufficient for an agent to be morally praiseworthy for that action.²

² To limit the scope of my paper, I will exclude blameworthiness and negative moral worth from my research.

From the relationship between positive moral worth and praise, we see that only actions which are morally charged may be assigned moral worth. Evidently, moral worth does not concern itself with actions that are *not* affected by the terms or rules imposed by morality. Moral worth is concerned with determining whether some action that is affected by morality in some capacity is deserving of moral worth. The significance here is that actions may have moral worth if and only if the action that they have committed is morally charged, i.e., whether it responds to morality and to other-regarding reasons. Buying a movie on DVD, for example, is not an action that can have moral worth because buying a DVD is neither morally right nor morally wrong – it is not something that responds to or is affected by morality in any capacity. Volunteering to help those in need, on the other hand, is an action that can have moral worth, where an agent could potentially be praised for doing so, because helping those in need directly responds to and is affected by morality in some capacity. Nevertheless, put in very simple terms that will be unfolded throughout this chapter, positive moral worth is assigned to morally charged actions that are morally right, granted they meet the proper criteria. These criteria will be thoroughly explained in the following section.

1.2 The Moral Worth of Actions

It appears the factors which determine the moral worth of actions are a tad less complex than what determines the praiseworthiness of agents. In this section, I will be discussing the factors that determine the moral worth of actions. For an action to have moral worth, that action must be intentional, voluntary, and free of deception or manipulation. These types of actions are the ones that the agent is morally responsible for committing, ones where no external factor is causing them to act in a specific way (Nagel 1979, 203). For an agent to have had no external

factor causing them to act in a specific way, that action must have been free of manipulation, influence, peer pressure, coercion, or deception from another agent, institution, etc. Suppose, for example, Ella happily donates \$1,000 to a charity because she knows that doing so will benefit many people. In this case, Ella's action has moral worth because she intentionally and voluntarily donated her money, and no external factor was causing her to do so, but her action having positive moral worth is not enough to guarantee that she is praised for doing so. Suppose also, for example, that Simon has donated \$1,000 to charity, but has done so only because someone was holding a gun to his head. Despite doing something that is morally good, Simon's action does not have moral worth because an external factor, namely the gun to his head, was causing him to act in a specific way.

Furthermore, actions that are accidental, lucky, or coincidental will *not* have moral worth (Sliwa 2016, 398). These types of actions are ones that the agent may not necessarily be morally responsible for committing. For example, suppose that someone donates \$1,000 to an online charity, but for some reason, has only done so because they thought they were pressing "Submit Order" on their online shopping cart. Their action obviously does not have moral worth because they were unaware of what they did, despite donating to charity being a morally good thing to do. The fact that what they did was an accident immediately disqualifies their action from having any moral worth.

It is important to note that accidents, luck, and coincidences differ from factors such as impulse or spontaneity. Although some may be under the impression that someone acting spontaneously is equal to them acting unintentionally, I believe this is a mistake. Suppose, for example, Danika is walking to work, and she decides to spontaneously run across the street to help an elderly woman who has fallen. While there were many others around to help the elderly

woman who did not have to cross the road to do so, Danika nevertheless decided to go without giving it any thought beforehand. While the very act of suddenly running across the street was not exactly intentional, Danika is always willing to help whoever needs it, and the action that she spontaneously decided to commit therefore has moral worth. This is different than her being coincidentally located or luckily being across the street; what matters is that, even though she did not give it much thought, her standing disposition is always to help others. If the action which an agent commits is voluntary and unconstrained, then the action that the agent spontaneously executes should not be barred from the consideration of moral worth.

Another key aspect to consider within the discussion of moral worth is control, namely direct and indirect control. According to Thomas Nagel, “It is intuitively plausible that people cannot be morally assessed...for what is due to factors beyond their control” (1979, 203). Andreas Brekke Carlsson similarly argues that an agent’s action may have moral worth for what “they have either direct or indirect control” over (2016, 90). In this sense, direct control refers to actions that agents intentionally decide to commit by their own volition. This includes, for example, pulling over on the highway to help someone change their tire during a blizzard. In this case, you were in direct control of the way you responded to the situation, i.e., you pulled over to help the person on the side of the road despite the freezing cold temperatures and the snow blowing into your face. This means that you were in direct control of your action since nobody compelled you to act this way and you did this through your own volition, and thus, your action may have moral worth.

Indirect control, on the other hand, is a bit more complex. By indirect control, I am referring to a specific event that occurs out of the agent’s direct control but is nevertheless caused by some prior action which was in the agent’s direct control – almost like a consequence

of their initial action. The million-dollar question here is whether an agent is responsible for the consequences of an action they committed which they were indirectly in control of. I contend that an agent is not responsible for the consequences that occur in which they had indirect control over since it ultimately occurred out of their control, despite it being caused by something they did have control over. This is because the consequences that happen out of an agent's direct control too closely resemble luck, coincidence, and accident, and as previously explained, these factors are not compatible with moral worth. Nevertheless, the consequences of the agent's prior action cannot have moral worth since they had indirect control on the outcome of their situation and thus had no intention or underlying attitude of those consequences occurring.

The concept of indirect control here essentially correlates with the intention that an agent has in the moment that they perform an action. Suppose, for example, that Frank decides to tell his mom that his younger sister, Joanna, snuck out because he was angry with her and wanted to get back at her. Their mom then decided to go pick her up, but she finds Joanna unconscious in the driveway. Had Frank not told on his sister, Joanna would not have been able to be saved. However, Frank had no intention of saving Joanna, rather, he had the intention of getting her in trouble. Frank's action would therefore not have moral worth, and he would not be praised for doing so, despite something positive occurring as a consequence of his initial action since he had indirect control of saving her life. It can be said with conviction that what happened is directly attributed to luck, coincidence, or accident, because Frank lacked the intention of saving Joanna's life. From this, we can see that an agent would not be responsible for the consequences which they have indirect control over despite having direct control over their initial action, and thus, their action would not have moral worth.

It is worth noting, however, the asymmetry between positive moral worth and praise, and negative moral worth and blame, which warrants some sort of intention or standing disposition. Suppose, for example, an agent drives home drunk, passes out behind the wheel, and ends up killing a pedestrian that is crossing the street. This agent, like any other moral agent, was aware of the dangers and consequences that could occur from drinking and driving. Although they are not necessarily morally responsible for killing the pedestrian because doing so was out of their direct control, i.e., they had not planned on killing anyone and their action thus does not have moral worth, they are still blameworthy for killing the pedestrian because they were in direct control of choosing to drink and drive. On the other hand, if an action has positive moral worth, it does not guarantee that the agent will be praised for doing so, because their intention alone is not enough to satisfy the conditions that praise requires.

This brings forward an important consideration: what happens when an agent has deliberately performed some morally worthy action, but other existing factors may prevent them from being praised for doing so? Suppose, for example, while scrolling on the internet, Bob comes across an ad for a charity that he would typically not be bothered by, but he decides to donate \$1,000 solely because his dad's credit card happened to be sitting next to him. Had his father's credit card not been there, he would not have donated to this charity. Here, Bob's action may have positive moral worth because donating to charity is a morally good thing to do, and he did so voluntarily. Based on the current literature regarding moral worth, Bob could be praiseworthy simply because his action has positive moral worth, but this does not seem right. Despite Bob technically doing what is morally right, he is not automatically deserving of praise because of the other existing factors, in part because he only did so since his dad's credit card was right beside him and in part because he used his dad's money. From this, we can begin to

see why an agent's action having positive moral worth is not sufficient for them to be praiseworthy for their action.

Finally, the question pertaining to the connection between supererogation and moral worth arises. Although morally obligatory actions like keeping a secret and refraining from hurting another person are morally right actions, we do not typically praise agents for doing what is *expected* or *obligated* of them. There are, of course, cases where doing what is morally required can cause an agent's action to have positive moral worth, including supererogatory cases like sacrificing your leg if the alternative was to kill one person. According to Amy Massoud (2016), an action is supererogatory if and only if "(a) it is morally permissible...; (b) there is at least one permissible option available to the agent that would involve comparatively less personal sacrifice; and (c) an other-regarding reason justifies one in performing it, in spite of the sacrifice" (710). Supererogatory acts essentially go beyond what is morally obligated, and more specifically what is expected, of moral agents. Sacrificing your leg to save a stranger's dog from a burning building, for example, is a supererogatory act because doing so is going beyond their moral obligations since dialing 911 and calling out for the dog would have also been acceptable. Because of this, the actions which agents perform that go beyond what is obligated or expected of them, i.e., that are supererogatory, can have positive moral worth.

In addition, supererogatory acts are optional actions, actions that agents are not blamed for if they do not commit them. This is why supererogatory acts differ "from those acts which fall under the heading of duty," and agents can thus be praised for doing so (Heyd 1982, 1). The supererogatory cases that include major cost or harm to oneself, like the one of sacrificing your leg, evidently differ immensely from cases of every day, common moral obligations, like keeping a promise. The idea here is that following every day, common moral obligations that do

not come at a large cost to the agent does not justify that action having positive moral worth because they are expected of agents to perform. In other words, actions which fulfill moral obligations do not have positive moral worth. Supererogatory cases that do include major cost to an agent, however, can have positive moral worth because they are not expected or obligated of agents to perform since they require some sort of personal sacrifice. I therefore argue that, unless the agent is making a major sacrifice to prevent a great evil from occurring, like jumping into the deep end of a pool to save a drowning child despite being a very weak swimmer, moral worth does not attach itself to every day, common morally obligatory acts, but moral worth does attach itself to acts of supererogation.

The idea of assigning positive moral worth to actions is therefore done by communicating approval of the action that was committed, and is used, at least in some capacity, to make normative judgements about the actions performed by the agents around us. Actions that are committed due to luck, accidents, or coincidences cannot have moral worth. More specifically, only actions that are morally good and which are committed voluntarily and intentionally can have positive moral worth. Moral worth does not attach itself to moral obligations but acts that come at a major cost to the agent, i.e., acts of supererogation, can. Actions that do have moral worth are therefore the ones that are committed within an agent's direct control, including spontaneous or impulsive actions, so long as the agent consistently possesses some positive underlying attitude of doing what is morally right.

The focus of this chapter was to review the nature of positive moral worth and to articulate an account of moral worth that can double as the cornerstone of moral praise, where I have argued that moral worth strictly applies to actions themselves and is thus not concerned with the reasons an agent has for performing their action. To do this, I discussed the relationship

between moral worth and moral praise. Then, I determined the factors which positive moral worth is sensitive to. Finally, I examined the correlation between positive moral worth and supererogation. The key takeaways of this chapter are therefore that moral worth requires more than simply doing what is morally right, and that the moral praise of an agent relies on the positive moral worth of their action, but that moral worth alone is not sufficient for an agent to be deserving of moral praise.

Chapter 2: The Right Thing

Unlike moral worth, moral praise says something directly about the agent itself rather than solely saying something about the action they performed. Whenever we praise an individual for the action they have performed, we are essentially saying that this action reflects well on them, or at least reflects well on their character. This means that praising an agent for their action is “the extent to which the action speaks well of the agent,” and it is determined in virtue of an agent’s specific action (Arpaly 2002, 226). Based on a review of theories put forward by varying moral philosophers regarding moral worth, it appears that praising an agent requires further information than we may have initially believed, including the idea that praiseworthiness is more than simply determining if an action has positive moral worth. Although moral praise relies on whether the action committed has positive moral worth or not, moral worth alone is not sufficient for praiseworthiness. Having said that, there are three specific factors which inform praiseworthiness.

The goal of the next three chapters is to ultimately determine what directly informs moral praise, which will turn out to be doing the right thing, for the right moral reasons, and doing so in the right spirit. To do this, I will build on existing theories of moral worth found in contemporary literature, clarifying any ambiguity or misleading content, as well as filling in lacunae wherever I find it necessary to do so. To achieve this, I will reconstruct specific arguments put forward by philosophers such as Nomy Arpaly, Nathan Robert Howard, James Grant, Julia Markovits, and Paulina Sliwa that pertain to the moral praiseworthiness of agents by identifying their substantive claims. Then, I will elaborate on their explanations to present a clear and satisfactory picture of moral praise. This chapter, however, will focus on the primary factor that moral praise is

sensitive to, namely, to do the right thing, which builds on my own account of moral worth where I will also discuss inverse akrasia.

According to Arpaly (2002), an agent deserves praise for their action only if that action was the right thing to do and that it was done for the right moral reasons (226). Although it is necessary, she argues, for an agent to want to do the thing that is, in fact, right at some point before committing some morally charged action, it is not sufficient on its own to warrant praise. In the same sense, doing what is morally right is necessary but not sufficient for one's action to have positive moral worth, and one's action having positive moral worth is necessary but not sufficient for an agent to be praised for their action. This means that there are further requirements for the primary factor that informs praiseworthiness, i.e., doing the right thing. Some philosophers hold that doing the right thing is for the agent to commit the action that is directly concerned with morality, e.g., the action that helps another individual in some capacity (Sliwa 2016, 396). I hold that, first and foremost, doing the right thing means that your action must **at least** have positive moral worth, since this is a necessary condition for an agent to be deserving of moral praise.

What exactly is the right thing, though? It appears that we require a definition that tells us what the right thing is, one that is independent of motives or the agent's reasons for acting. From a focus on Kant's *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Jeffrie G. Murphy (1967) argues that "a right action is an action in accordance with what a given situation objectively requires – as the making of a promise requires the keeping of the promise" (577). This differs from a *morally good action*, which Murphy explains to be "the right action performed *because* it is the right action – I keep my promise because I respect the moral law that one always ought to keep one's promise" (1967, 577). The significance here is the difference between "*what* the

agent did” regarding the right thing, and “*why* the agent did it” regarding a morally good thing (Murphy 1967, 577). There is a clear right and wrong thing to do in any given morally charged situation, but it is nevertheless based on the situation one finds themselves in and with what that situation requires of them.

Suppose, for example, Shannon goes out of her way to help an elderly woman cross a busy intersection to ensure that she gets to the other side safely. She does this for no other reason other than the fact that she wants the woman to cross the street safely. Suppose now that David sees the same elderly woman struggling to cross a busy intersection once again, but he does not do anything. Assuming Shannon has intentionally helped the woman out and that this was not done accidentally, her action has positive moral worth because she did what she had the most moral reason to do, i.e., to help the elderly woman. Because of this, Shannon acted without reason other than to help, her action had positive moral worth, and thus, she did the right thing. David, on the other hand, did not do the right thing because he acted on non-moral, or prudential, reasons rather than acting on his most moral reasons to help. Nonetheless, an action having positive moral worth is a necessary requirement for doing the right thing, and doing the right thing is a necessary requirement for praiseworthiness. From this, we can see that the right thing to do is what you have the most moral reason to do and insufficient non-moral, or prudential, reason *not* to do, and that this is thus a requirement for praise.

2.1 Inverse Akrasia

To strengthen her claim about moral praise, Arpaly discusses the phenomenon of *inverse akrasia*. As a preface to this part of her argument, akrasia refers to individuals who do the wrong thing against their considered judgement, or in other words, knowing what the right thing is to do

but failing to do it (Aaltola 2016, 117). We experience *akrasia*, for example, whenever we know we should not jay walk, but we decide to do it anyway, or whenever we know we should keep a secret, but we decide to reveal it to another friend. *Inverse akrasia*, on the other hand, refers to individuals doing the right thing against their considered judgement, or in other words, not wanting to do the right thing but still doing it (Arpaly 2002, 227). An agent experiences inverse akrasia, for example, whenever they do not want to brush their teeth, but against their considered judgement, decides to brush them anyways, or when an agent really wants to break their promise to a friend for some reason but cannot bring themselves to do it (Arpaly 2002, 227).

The significance of inverse akrasia is that agents can do the right thing despite not having the desire to do the thing that they are doing, even though what they are doing happens to be the right thing to do. Arpaly explains that an agent must at least have the desire to do what is right in order to be deserving of moral praise, despite not having the knowledge or belief of what the right thing is to do (2002, 226). The fact of the matter is that there is an indispensable difference between an agent who genuinely wants to do the thing that is, in fact, the right thing to do and who does it in comparison to an agent who really does not want to do something but does it anyways, and it happens to be the right thing to do. Suppose Norman, for example, wants to donate to UNICEF because he knows it will help to relieve the suffering of children who are affected by unfair conditions. Suppose also that Kassia, a big fan of capitalism, does not want to donate to UNICEF because she does not feel like it is her job to do so, but she ends up donating because a friend pressured her to donate. While both did the right thing, i.e., donated to charity, and both's action may have positive moral worth, Norman is the one who may be praised and not Kassia. This is because agents who do the right thing against their considered judgement, like Kassia, should not be given the same degree of praise, or should not be given any praise at all, as

the agent who genuinely desired to do the right thing. This also demonstrates why an agent's action having positive moral worth is not sufficient for them to be deserving of praise for doing so.

The concept of inverse akrasia does not apply to individuals who have a sudden change of heart or individuals who unexpectedly find themselves concerned with morality and want to do the right thing. It applies to those who do not what to do the thing that they are committing and who are subsequently not concerned with doing the right thing but ultimately end up doing the thing that is, in fact, the right thing, against their own considered judgement. This clear difference between the intent of an agent's action is necessary for the discussion of praiseworthiness because it facilitates the process of determining who is deserving of praise. That being said, it becomes clear why Norman could be praised and Kassia would not be. Nevertheless, agents who fall victim to inverse akrasia should not be praised for doing the right thing because of the fact that they did not want to initially do the thing they did, which luckily happened to be the right thing. From this, we can see that agents who succumb to inverse akrasia accidentally do the right thing, and accidents are not compatible with moral praise in the same way that accidents are not compatible with the moral worth of an action. What this shows is that inversely akratic acts are *always* accidentally right and are therefore not compatible with moral worth nor moral praise.

In the case of inverse akrasia, it seems as though the agents who do not want to do the thing that they end up doing, which happens to be the right thing to do, are not concerned with morality in the same way that an agent who intentionally wants to commit some specific action because it is the right thing to do. From this, I argue that victims of inverse akrasia do not respond directly to morality, and thus, their desire to do the right thing is non-existent or is not as

strong as those who are directly concerned with morality. This is why those who perform inversely akratic acts should be excluded from the discussion of moral praise since their actions are not direct responses to morality due to their fleeting indifference to committing the action that conveniently turns out to be the right thing to do. That being said, moral philosophers should specify that *doing the right thing* means doing the action which directly responds to morality or doing the action which has moral concern.

Furthermore, the idea of inverse akrasia subsequently brings up the discussion of the positive moral worth of actions and its tight-knit relationship with praiseworthiness. Those who succumb to inverse akrasia, as I have argued, are not exactly concerned with performing an action on the basis that it is, in fact, the right thing to do. Rather, they perform the action, and it subsequently turns out that they have done the thing that was, in fact, the right thing to do, as if it was an accident. This means that those who are intentionally performing an action because they know that it is the right thing to do may be deserving of praise, whereas victims of inverse akrasia will not be, and their actions will not have moral worth either. An agent who deliberately performs an action based on moral concern may be deserving of praise because doing the right thing is to intentionally perform a morally worthy action. From this, it appears that doing the right thing ultimately means performing the action which has positive moral worth, and which responds to other-regarding reasons. Doing the right thing, then, is separate from an act having positive moral worth since moral worth is not concerned with an agent's intentions or reasons for performing their action, rather, it is only concerned with the action itself.

Nevertheless, this shows that the primary factor which informs praiseworthiness is that the agent must have intentionally done the right thing, free of accident and inversely akratic acts. The agent who intentionally does the thing they are doing but does not want to do the thing that

is, in fact, right, but happens to do the right thing, is not praiseworthy for their action. This is because agents who succumb to inverse akrasia have accidentally performed the right action, and thus lack the necessary intention of doing so, which is why they are excluded from the discussion of praise. The right thing to do, therefore, is to perform the action that you have the most moral reason to do and insufficient non-moral, or prudential, reason *not* to do. In addition, agents who have ultimately done the right thing can then potentially be praised for doing so. From this, however, we can see that while doing the right thing is a necessary condition for moral praise, it is not sufficient on its own.

Chapter 3: The Right Moral Reasons

While the idea of doing the right thing may seem rather intuitive, it is not immediately clear what Arpaly means by doing the right thing *for the right moral reasons*. To reiterate Arpaly's central claim, she states that an agent is praised for their action if it was the right thing to do, and if it was done for the right moral reasons (2002, 231). I believe, however, that these specific moral reasons are not entirely explicit within her explanation. The goal of this chapter is to be able to successfully explain what exactly these reasons may be and to elaborate on what it is to act for the right moral reasons. To do this, I aim to ascertain what entails right moral reasons and to then create a connection between Arpaly's theory of praiseworthiness with other philosophers' theories, such as Howard and Sliwa.

So far, I have established what it means to do the right thing, but what exactly does it mean to do the right thing for the right moral reasons? In fact, what exactly are moral reasons? Moral reasons, I believe, are the reasons one has for performing an other-regarding action, reasons which pertain to the interest of other individuals and not to one's own interests. For example, donating to charity *because* it will help those in need. In this case, the moral reason for donating are the interests of those in need.³ Non-moral reasons, or prudential reasons, are the reasons one has for performing a self-regarding action, which pertain to one's own interests. For example, someone donates to charity *because* it will make them look good. This is a non-moral reason because they are not concerned with morality, rather, they have a selfish reason for donating. Evidently, the significance between the two donations is the agent's reason for doing so. This differs from moral worth in the sense that it is not concerned with the reasons an agent

³ Agents are also able to have moral reasons *against* performing specific actions, including moral reasons not to lie to a friend or moral reasons not to steal from others.

has for performing their action, whereas moral praise is. That being said, for an agent to be deserving of praise for donating to charity, they must have at least done so for moral reasons rather than non-moral reasons.

It is important to note that acting based on specific and personal emotions, like guilt or shame, are prudential reasons, and are therefore self-regarding. Suppose Kim is gardening in her backyard when she hears the neighbour's toddler fall into the deep-end of the pool. As she looks around, she notices that nobody is there to save the child from drowning.⁴ However, Kim just got her hair done that morning and was advised by her hair stylist to not wet her hair for the next 48 hours. Kim knows that if she did not at least attempt to help, that she would feel incredible guilty, that she would most likely be shamed by her neighbours, and that she may have to move neighbourhoods. Kim decides that the guilt and shame of not trying to save the child is worse than the alternative, to let the child drown. While saving the child was objectively the right thing to do and thus her action has positive moral worth, Kim was motivated by prudential reasons, and not by the right-making moral reasons that are required for an agent to be praiseworthy of their action. From this, we can see why an action having positive moral worth is not sufficient for the agent to be deserving of praise.

3.1 Motives, Desires, and Goals

Howard (n.d.) shares a similar theory to Arpaly regarding moral worth and states that an agent is subject to praise for performing an action “just when and because [their] motivating reasons are sufficient moral reasons” (3). This is also his definition for *right reasons*. The difference here, however, is he explains that acting with moral worth “depends on more than

⁴ Thank you to Dr. Gordon-Solmon for this great example and for presenting me with this thought-provoking question!

what you do” and that it “depends on your motives” as well as your desires and your goals (Howard n.d., 3). Motives, in relation to moral praise, are the elements that are most closely connected to actions. For any given time that we intentionally perform some action, there is *something* that has pushed us to do it, there is *something* that drove us to perform the action rather than merely contemplating it. This *something* is a motivation to act. Some force, for example, has motivated me to open my laptop and to work on my thesis. That being said, the purpose of motives is that they are what ultimately cause us to act.

Desires, on the other hand, are essentially the things that we want, and there are two types of them. There are first-order desires, which are desires to perform certain actions, e.g., wanting to help those in need and wanting to be a better friend. Then, there are second-order desires, which are desires about first-order desires, e.g., wanting to want to help those in need and wanting to want to be a better friend. Although they may be useful as starting points for action, desires are not sufficient on their own as reasons for why we act because they typically “operate in the background of our practical reasoning” (Howard n.d., 5). Nevertheless, differing desires will likely produce different outcomes if an agent does choose to act on them, for example, donating vs. not donating, but differences in desires will not always alter the overall reason as to why an agent acted in a specific way since agents are not always motivated by their own desires (Howard n.d., 4).

Finally, goals act as forces of motivation. They carry more weight than desires in the sense that goals affect an agent’s decision-making more intensely. In fact, we are always motivated by our goals whereas we are not always motivated by our desires. This is because desires can be fleeting and contradictory. For example, if I have the goal of being healthy this week, then going to the gym every day and cooking myself healthy meals will be a result of me

being motivated by my goal to be healthy. However, if I only have the desire to be healthy this week, then it will be easier for me to not act on it despite desiring to do so because we are not always motivated by our desires. While our goals may reflect the desires that we most strongly identify with, we do not always act on desires. This is why goals influence us to a stronger degree than desires do, and different goals will give rise to different motives (Howard n.d., 6). Goals, in other words, are what our preferred outcome will be in some given situation, which, in the fullness of time, we are directly motivated by.

It is incredibly important to emphasize that motives, desires, and goals are not synonyms of each other. Each of these elements comes apart on their own, have different influences on an agent, and will be the cause of different outcomes. However, motives, desires, and goals often inform one another, and they each have the potential of interacting with each other. An agent, for example, may have the desire to not pay for tuition in the fall. Because of this desire, they now have a goal of completing their thesis before the fall. This means that the agent is now motivated to complete their thesis before the fall because they do not want to pay tuition. What this demonstrates is that that motives, desires, and goals all come into play together whenever we consider the reasons as to why an agent performed a certain action.

The sort of reasoning involving an agent's motives, desires, and goals also applies to discussions of moral praise. Suppose that both A and B want to donate to charity, which means that they share the same desire. A wants to donate to charity with the goal of helping out those who are less fortunate, and B wants to donate to charity with the goal of impressing their romantic partner. Both have the same desire, i.e., to donate to charity, but they are motivated by two entirely different goals, i.e., A wants to help and B wants to impress their partner. A has done the right thing, i.e., donated to charity, and has done so for the right moral reasons, i.e., A

was motivated by the right-making goal to help. On the other hand, B has donated to charity intentionally, which is the right thing to do, but has done so for self-regarding reasons, i.e., to impress their partner. In a very simple sense, this means that A may be deserving of praise while B may not be because of their differences in goals, which is what they were ultimately motivated by. Furthermore, despite both of their actions having positive moral worth, this did not guarantee that both of them are deserving of praise for the action they have each performed.

In addition, Sliwa's (2016) theory of moral worth entitled *The Rightness Condition* becomes useful to the discussion surrounding the importance of motives, desires, and goals. The first feature of her theory, namely the *Conative Requirement*, holds that an agent is praised for the action that they have committed "if and only if it [was] motivated by a concern for doing what's right" and if the agent was "motivated by mental states with moral content" (Sliwa 2016, 394 & 395). She explains that an agent must have *at least* been motivated by a belief that what they were doing was right to avoid accidentally doing the right thing (which again, is incompatible with moral praise). The importance here is that motives ultimately drive us to act. If our goal is one of moral concern but our desire is not, or vice versa, then we are not acting for the right moral reasons. If I, for example, want my friend to get a promotion, but my goal is to be more successful than them, then my desires and goals are not in line with each other since they are not both motivated by moral concern, and my act may lack moral worth, and I may not be deserving of praise. If we are not motivated by a concern for doing what is right, then we evidently run the risk of failing to do the right thing or of doing the wrong thing, which we certainly want to avoid. For philosophers like Sliwa, the only way for an agent to be praised is for them to have been concerned with morality and to thus have been motivated by their goal as well as their desire to do what is right.

Moreover, Sliwa states that for an agent to be praised for their action, their action must have been “motivated in the right way” (2016, 393). The important thing here, she argues, is that the agent must be doing what is right for non-instrumental reasons, i.e., for other-regarding reasons and for genuine and altruistic reasons. In fact, she states that “the agent must care about doing what’s right for its own sake, and not because it would further some other goal” (Sliwa 2016, 396). Sliwa holds that it is important for the agent to believe that what they are doing is the right thing to do and to be motivated to do it because it is the right thing to do. It is not sufficient, she claims, for an agent to be motivated solely by the factors within some situation which ultimately causes them to do the right thing.

Suppose that Wes wants to help build water systems in villages with no access to clean drinking water because he believes it to be the right thing to do since it will provide clean water to multiple surrounding communities. Suppose also that Erika wants to help build water systems in villages with no access to clean drinking water because it will provide clean water to multiple surrounding communities, without a thought for whether that is the right thing to do. Although both are doing the right thing, Sliwa holds that there is a stark difference between both of their reasons for acting; Wes is doing so because he knows it is the right thing to do whereas Erika is only doing so for a specific reason, regardless of whether it is the right thing to do and may not be praised. Nevertheless, Sliwa maintains that it is necessary for the agent to believe that they are doing the right thing in order to avoid accidentally doing the right thing and being accidentally praised for doing so.

Sometimes, Sliwa argues, the Conative Requirement is met, i.e., the agent performed the right action because they were motivated by the right moral reasons, but the agent performed the action “from an ulterior or selfish desire” (2016, 396). It is crucial to note that this is

undoubtedly incompatible with praiseworthiness since praise, like positive moral worth, requires the intention to act with a concern for morality and not with a concern for oneself. What this ultimately shows is that there must be some necessary connection between an agent's goals and their desires, namely that both must have a moral concern if they are to be praised for their action. In fact, Sliwa explains that there must be a link "between an agent's actual motivation and her right action" (2016, 400). If, for example, Alyssa has the desire of donating to charity, but her goal is to use it as a tax write-off, then she will not be praised for her action because her goal was not other-regarding, rather, she was motivated by self-interested goals. The point here is that an agent's goals and desires must align directly with each other for them to be motivated by them and to thus do the right thing for the right moral reasons.

Although it sounds plausible in theory, Sliwa's Conative Requirement does not seem entirely coherent when considering the real-life agents who, as previously mentioned in chapter 1, spontaneously perform morally charged actions without any thought as to why they are doing so. According to Sliwa, agents who suddenly do the right thing would be disqualified from moral praise, despite their stable dispositions to do morally worthy actions. I believe that a more accurate depiction of the Conative Requirement would not require agents to actively believe that what they are doing is the right thing in the moment that they are doing it, but that, if pressed to reflect, the agent must have had the belief that they were doing the right thing because it was right. Otherwise, the many moral agents who do things without a second thought (which is a completely understandable thing to do) would not be able to be praised for the actions that they deserved to be praised for. To stay within focus, however, this will be further addressed in depth in the next chapter.

The second criterion for praiseworthiness is that the agent must have committed the right thing but must have done so for the right moral reasons. If an agent is motivated by non-moral reasons or prudential reasons, i.e., motivated by a goal that is not concerned with morality and that is instead self-interested, then they are immediately disqualified from the ability to be morally praised for their action, despite doing the right thing and despite their act having positive moral worth. For an agent to be praised, they must ultimately be motivated by moral reasons, i.e., motivated by a goal that is concerned with morality. This helps to explain why it is the case that two agents who perform the same action can share the same desire, but be motivated by different goals, which is what directly affects the outcome of the situation and therefore their praiseworthiness. Furthermore, this shows that motives, desires, and goals appear to be the elements that comprise the moral reasons for performing an action. The right moral reasons are therefore a combination of an agent's other-regarding motives, desires, and goals that cause them to do the right thing. Nonetheless, these conditions are not sufficient together for an agent to be deserving of praise. The next chapter will explain why this is the case, where I will present a final necessary condition for moral praise.

Chapter 4: The Right Spirit

As I have explained in previous chapters, philosophers like Arpaly argue that an agent can be praised for their action if they have done the right thing for the right moral reasons. These, however, are not the only factors that inform the praiseworthiness of an agent. In fact, there is another crucial factor which informs moral praise that is often overlooked by moral philosophers writing on the subject. This third and final factor is doing the right thing for the right moral reasons but doing so *in the right spirit*.⁵ I believe that, without discussing this factor, we fail to completely grasp the importance of separating moral worth from moral praise. The goal of this chapter is to carefully examine and clarify what doing something in the right spirits mean by reviewing the theories of different philosophers, including Sliwa (2016), Markovits (2010), and Grant (2023), who have shared their own thoughts on the topic.

4.1 Improper Moral Beliefs

To begin the discussion of what exactly is meant by doing the right thing for the right moral reasons *in the right spirit*, let us review the second feature of Sliwa's Rightness Condition, namely the Knowledge Requirement. Sliwa states that for an agent to be praised for their action, it "requires that knowledge – knowledge of what the right thing to do is – must be part of what motivates the agent to act" (2016, 395). The significance of this requirement, she argues, is that if an agent fails to possess the knowledge of what the right thing to do is, then the concern is that

⁵ Other philosophers like Howard (n.d.), however, state that praiseworthiness "requires not merely doing the right thing for the right reasons... it also requires the right thing for the right reasons *in the right way*" (1). While this is sensible, the use of Howard's language here is rather vague, and he does not provide us with an exact explanation of what he means by "the right way." Having said that, I believe using Grant's (2023) concept of "the right spirit" rather than "the right way" will provide a clearer explanation as to what the third and final factor that determines praise entails.

the agent may have done the right thing by accident “even if she wanted to do what’s right” (Sliwa 2016, 397). This essentially highlights the idea that an agent must have had prior knowledge of what the right thing to do was in whatever morally charged situation they find themselves in.

It is not entirely clear, however, what *type* of knowledge Sliwa is referring to, and whether everyday agents are able to access this sort of information. It is unclear if she means that for an agent to be praised for doing the right thing, they must know exactly what the right thing to do is in their hypothetically complex situation, or if they must have knowledge about specific facts about their situation which can then provide them context as to what the right thing to do is. For example, suppose a fisherman calls the Coast Guard about a booze cruise that is loudly passing by them. Suppose that, unbeknownst to the caller, the booze cruise was sinking, and everyone aboard was too intoxicated to swim, and that their call to the Coast Guard saved all of their lives. For the fisherman to be praised in this case, must he have known about the drowning boat? I would assume so, and I would assume that Sliwa would agree, but it is still not clear what type of specific knowledge she is referring to.

Sliwa nevertheless assures her readers that the Knowledge Requirement does not put praiseworthiness “beyond the reach of epistemically limited agents like us” (2016, 394). Despite making this claim, it seems that the Knowledge Requirement may in fact be impractical, exhaustive, and perhaps even implausible at times. It does seem to be asking a lot from agents who may understandably not be able to know why exactly they acted in a certain way and not in some another way instead. If Sliwa is right, then even agents who are not familiar with moral philosophy would always be capable of reasoning with their alternative options and be able to decipher what the right thing to do is in any morally charged situations. Surely, however, this

cannot be the case as many agents, including myself, often perform actions without any thought behind it – sometimes people just do things without thinking! Until Sliwa clarifies what sort of specific knowledge is required from agents, i.e., knowing facts about the situation or knowing what is right or wrong, I hold that agents are therefore not required to have knowledge of what the right thing to do is in order to be praised for doing the right thing.

Additionally, it is not required that an agent have the knowledge or even the belief that what they are doing is the right thing because that is, more often than not, an incredibly difficult thing to do. Knowing what the right thing to do is in a complex situation for someone who has never studied moral philosophy is not evident. Those who have not been exposed to this sort of education cannot be expected to always know what their possible options are in some situations and will often just do things without any further thought behind it. Also, those who have not taken philosophy courses may not understand the repercussions of their choices because they do not have access to these sorts of epistemic tools. For example, some people will confidently think that letting the 5 people on the trolley tracks die is the right thing to do, and some people will confidently think that the patient should let the violinist live until he is able to perform again. That being said, it does seem like the Knowledge Requirement, and therefore the Rightness Condition, *is* beyond the reach of epistemically limited agents like us, and that we are therefore not required to possess the knowledge of what the right thing to do is.

Having said that, we can examine the agents who “just do” things without exactly having the knowledge that “this is the right thing to do” before doing it – they just do it! In fact, this is evident in an array of everyday, common cases. To do this, let us compare two cases. In the first case, we have Ally, who tips her waitress 25% because she is aware that people working in the front of house in restaurants rely on tips from their customers because they are paid minimum

wage and often experience being yelled at by angry customers. In the second case, we have Stephen, who tips his waitress 25% but does so just because! Stephen had no specific reason to do so, he just did it. As a general rule of thumb, if some specific behaviour is consistent with the way an agent generally treats those around them, and if they consistently do the right thing, then we can say that their action was non-accidental. Because this was not out of Stephen's character, then we can assume that he did not do this accidentally. The significance here is that there is no moral difference in the outcome of Ally and Stephen's case since they both did the right thing, despite Stephen not necessarily knowing why he tipped 25% or why tipping 25% was the right thing to do in his situation. Supposing that this is a morally charged situation, both Ally *and* Stephen are therefore praiseworthy for what they did.

To reiterate, we accept the idea that agents who consistently do the right thing, even without actively thinking that they are doing the right thing, do so with purpose, i.e., them doing the right thing is non-accidental. What about those who do not consistently do the right thing and then suddenly do the right thing? This is when intention, or at least an underlying attitude or later reflection of their behaviour, plays a crucial role in determining if an agent should be praiseworthy for their action. While it still holds that an agent is not required to have the knowledge or the belief that what they are doing is the right thing to do, I believe that those who do not consistently do the right thing should at least possess a general intention of wanting to be helpful in some capacity while performing their action, or that, if pressed for reflection at a later time, they would possess the underlying attitude that their action will be beneficial in some way. What this does for praise is that it helps to rule out accidents from the discussion of agents who do not consistently do the right thing, or agents who do something out of character. Therefore, agents who do not consistently do the right thing may still be able to be praiseworthy for doing

the right thing based on their intention to be helpful or their positive underlying attitude, despite it being out of their character.

Sliwa nonetheless predicted other objections to her overall theory of the Rightness Condition and pre-emptively replied to them by stating that some philosophers will hold that “an agent can be morally praiseworthy as long as she is motivated by a desire to relieve suffering, feed the hungry, help the needy – even if she does not conceive of them as the right thing to do” (Sliwa 2016, 397). In fact, Markovits (2010) states that “it is not necessary that we act on the motive “that it is right” in order for our act to have moral worth,” i.e., “an act can have moral worth even if it is performed in the belief that it is *wrong*” (209). Although I reject Sliwa’s Knowledge Requirement because agents often just do things without thinking and without it being an accident, I also reject Markovits’ claim that we can act on the belief that what we are doing is wrong because these are improper moral beliefs, and to act in the right spirit is to lack any improper moral beliefs. Believing you are doing the wrong thing is an improper moral belief, which means that if an agent does the right thing while believing that they are doing the wrong thing, then they have done the right thing by accident. Since “all parties agree that an [agent] lacks moral [praise] if it is a case of someone’s merely accidentally doing the right thing,” then we can confidently state that those who have improper moral beliefs and do the right thing have accidentally done so (Johnson King 2020, 188). And as we know, agents who accidentally do the right thing are *not* praised for doing so and their actions thus lack moral worth.

To further demonstrate the idea of performing an action *in the right spirit*, Grant (2023) argues against the Belief Thesis, which holds that “[when] you do the right thing, your moral beliefs make no difference to the moral worth of your act” (217). From this, Grant claims that “even if you do the right thing, your act may be morally worthless” based on whatever moral

beliefs you held at the time (2023, 216). In other words, if we accept the Belief Thesis, then an agent can do the right thing while simultaneously thinking they are doing the wrong thing and be praised for doing so. However, this does not seem to be consistent with the factors that determine praise. Believing that you are doing the wrong thing or believing that you are *not* doing the right thing is an improper moral belief, and to be praiseworthy for your action, it must have been performed without the presence of any improper moral belief. I believe that this is also what Grant means by acting in the right spirit, namely to lack any improper moral beliefs while performing some morally charged action.

If we have the belief that we are doing the wrong thing, or that we are *not* doing the right thing, and end up doing the right thing, then we are not praiseworthy for doing the right thing, and our action may become morally worthless because we have accidentally done the right thing. Suppose, for example, Ashton tells his boss that his co-worker, Rylee, is being rude and not doing any of her work, despite Rylee being very kind and being a very hard worker. Ashton, however, is trying to get Rylee fired because he dislikes her and no longer wants to work with her. Their boss fires Rylee because he trusts Ashton, and it turns that Rylee was stealing lots of money from the company, which Ashton was unaware of. In this case, Ashton was trying to get Rylee fired for personal reasons, despite knowing what he was doing was wrong, but had it not been for Ashton, they would not have been able to find out who was stealing all this money. Since Ashton had improper moral beliefs whenever he was performing his action, he is not praiseworthy for his action because he did so in the wrong spirit, and since he accidentally did the right thing, his act lacks moral worth.

The presence of improper moral beliefs immediately excludes agents from the discussion of praise because they have not acted in the right spirit and have done the right thing by accident.

If, on the other hand, we have *deliberately* performed some generous act and have done so with improper moral beliefs, i.e., have done so in the wrong spirit, then we would not be praiseworthy for doing the right thing, but our act might still have moral worth. Suppose, for example, Kate is walking with her boss, and they pass by a homeless person who asks them for spare change. Kate, thinking it would make her look good in front of her boss, gives him \$20. While Kate has deliberately done the right thing, i.e., to donate, she has done so with improper moral beliefs. In this case, since Kate has deliberately done the right thing, and it was therefore not an accident, then her action may have moral worth. Despite her action having moral worth, however, it does not automatically mean that she is praiseworthy for doing so. This specific case is a clear instance of moral worth and praiseworthiness coming apart, where an agent's action can have moral worth, but they are not necessarily praised for their action. An agent therefore cannot be praised for their action if it was *not* performed in the right spirit, but their action may nevertheless have moral worth.

To further demonstrate what doing something in the right spirit entail, Grant puts forward another argument against the Belief Thesis, one that is “based on cases of people who do the right thing for the reasons why it is right but believe that what they are doing is only supererogatory” (2023, 220). Consider the following: “Will takes good care of his children. But he believes he has no moral obligation to do so. He thinks it is supererogatory. He thinks only mothers have an obligation to take care of children. But he takes it upon himself to ensure that the children are properly clothed, cleaned, fed, and the like. And he does this for the reasons why (in fact) it is right” (Grant 2023, 220). Will essentially believes that he is not morally required to take care of his children, but he does it because “he thinks it is morally good to take care of them” and “because they are his children” (Grant 2023, 220). The important thing here is that

Will improperly believes that taking care of his own children is supererogatory, which means he believes that this is not required of him, but he is choosing to do so anyways, and these improper moral beliefs are discrediting his action. Grant argues that “Will’s acts are deficient in moral worth. Perhaps they have some moral worth,” he argues, but “they do not have perfect moral worth” and this is directly impacted by his improper moral beliefs (2023, 221). The purpose of this example is for Grant to show why the Belief Thesis is false on the basis that we may do the right thing for the right moral reasons, like Will does, but we may do so in the wrong spirit based on our improper moral beliefs, also like Will does. Our action can therefore have some moral worth, but it does not guarantee that we are deserving of praise for doing so.

We can now better understand what Grant is referring to by doing something *in the right spirit*. Grant argues that moral beliefs “can affect the spirit in which you do the right thing,” and thus, performing an action with “certain moral beliefs” can “constitute doing it in the wrong spirit” (2023, 230). For example, doing the right thing despite believing that what you were doing was wrong. Likewise, performing an action with “certain moral beliefs” can constitute doing it in the right spirit (Grant 2023, 230). For example, doing the right thing and believing you are doing the right thing or simply doing the right thing *just because*. The significance of doing something in the right spirit is that when an agent does the right thing but does so in the wrong spirit, then their action “lacks perfect moral worth,” and whenever an agent does something in the wrong spirit, then the agent’s improper moral belief discredits their action, even if it was the right thing to do and even if they did so for the right moral reasons (Grant 2023, 230). That being said, for an agent to be praiseworthy for the action that they commit, the agent must lack any improper moral belief, i.e., they agent must have performed the action in the right

spirit, in order to avoid accidentally doing the right thing and receiving undeserving praise for doing so.

In the case of Will, he is acting in the wrong spirit because of his improper moral beliefs, namely that he believes taking care of his own children is supererogatory, despite doing the right thing, i.e., taking care of his children, for the right moral reasons, i.e., because they are his children and because he believes that taking care of them is morally good. Will's improper moral beliefs, i.e., that he is going above and beyond his moral obligation, therefore undermine and discredit his action. In other words, it is not that Will's action is discreditable *per se*, in fact it is the right thing to do, but his improper moral beliefs have directly affected his motive for acting, which discredits his action, which then diminishes his praiseworthiness altogether. As Grant argues, it is only to "Will's discredit that he does the childcare in the belief that it is only supererogatory," which is what causes him to act in the wrong spirit (Grant in *Pea Soup* 2023). Nevertheless, for an agent to be praised for their action, they must have done the right thing for the right moral reasons, and they must have lacked any improper moral belief to have acted in the right spirit.

From the works of Sliwa, Grant, and Markovits, we are presented with two claims. Claim 1 holds that an agent is praised for their action only if the agent believes X. Here, an agent is praised only if they believe or know that they are doing the *right* thing. This means that, according to Claim 1, certain beliefs are necessary for an agent to be morally praised for their action, i.e., the belief that they are doing the right thing. Claim 2 holds that an agent is not praised for their action if the agent believes Y. Here, an agent is not praised for their action if they believe they are doing the *wrong* thing. This means that, according to Claim 2, certain beliefs are sufficient for an agent *not* to be praised for their action, i.e., the belief that they are

doing the wrong thing or the belief that they are *not* doing the right thing. To reiterate my original point, it is not necessary for agents to possess the proper moral belief or knowledge that what they are doing is the right thing for them to be praised for their action.

The significance of these claims is to show that an agent does not need to have the active thought that they are doing the right thing in their given situation, but it is necessary that they lack any improper moral beliefs, e.g., they cannot have the belief that what they are doing is wrong. Furthermore, Sliwa would accept Claim 1 and Claim 2 and Markovits would reject Claim 1 and Claim 2. Grant, I assume, would reject Claim 1 and accept Claim 2, which shows that it is not necessary for an agent to believe that they are doing the right thing, but that it is necessary that they do *not* believe that they are doing the *wrong* thing.⁶ In addition, accepting Claim 2 is sufficient on its own to falsify the Belief Thesis, and this illuminates Grant's overall claim that doing something in the right spirit can allow for an agent to be praised for their right action.

Nevertheless, I believe that, like Grant, it is not necessary for an agent to have the knowledge or the belief of what the right thing to do is. What is necessary, however, is for the agent to *not* have improper moral beliefs. If an agent has improper moral beliefs and ends up doing the right thing, then they have done so accidentally, and those who accidentally do the right thing are not praised for what they have done. For example, someone who spitefully calls 911 to shut down a party they were not invited to but ends up saving the partygoer's lives from a housefire would not be praiseworthy for doing so because they thought they were doing the wrong thing, and accidentally did the right thing. Contrary to Markovits, it *is* necessary that we do not act on the motive that what we are doing is wrong in order to be praised for doing the

⁶ I am disambiguating Grant's argument here about performing an action in the right spirit. I do not believe that he makes this distinction himself, but I do believe that he would agree, and that doing so would help to refine the view he puts forward.

right thing. Contrary to Sliwa, it is *not* necessary that we possess the knowledge of what the right thing to do is, whatever type of knowledge that may be. Agents can therefore be praised for their action even if they did not hold proper moral beliefs as long as they did not hold improper moral beliefs. What this shows is that Grant's concept of moral beliefs, more specifically lacking the presence of improper moral beliefs, is much more reasonable to accept than Sliwa's Rightness Condition, and I therefore endorse Grant's concept of doing something in the right spirit as a factor which determines moral praise.

4.2 Expecting Praise

So far, I have explained that performing an action *in the right spirit* is to have lacked improper moral beliefs, and more specifically, lacking the belief that what you are doing is wrong. However, there is another type of improper moral belief that disqualifies an agent from being praised which I believe is necessary to include in the description of doing the right thing in the right spirit, namely the expectation of praise or expecting some other thing in return for doing the right thing.

Doing the right thing for the right moral reasons, I argue, is not enough if an agent has only done so because they were expecting to be praised for their action. This is what Sorensen (2004) refers to as the Paradox of Moral Worth, where she states that somebody who desires praise can curb their praiseworthiness, or it can take away at least *some* praise (465). She also argues that "someone who seeks praise...is after something importantly different from personal moral goodness, and [is] after something less valuable" than personal moral goodness (Sorensen 2004, 466). This is important, Sorensen argues, because "one might *want* praise without necessarily deserving it" (2004, 466). For example, suppose that Sandy, the multi-millionaire,

donates \$1,000 to an environmental charity. She does this because her goal is to solve ecological issues and knows that doing this will be of great benefit. So far, she has done the right thing for the right moral reasons. At the same time, however, Sandy is also doing this with the belief in mind that she is going to be praised for donating her money. Because of this belief, Sandy is therefore not deserving of praise because she was expecting to be praised as a result of her donation, meaning that she did the right thing for the right reasons but did so in the wrong spirit, i.e., she held improper moral beliefs.

In addition to expecting praise, an agent having the expectation of some other thing after doing the right thing also excludes them from being praised. For example, suppose that Chris pays for Lindsay's tuition because he knows she is struggling financially, and if she does not pay for her tuition, then she has to drop out of university. Chris does so because he wants to see Lindsay receive her degree and he knows that this is one of her goals in life. Suppose also that he has paid for Lindsay's tuition because he wants to impress her romantically and he is expecting their relationship to further develop afterwards. Is he still praiseworthy of his action? Absolutely not! Although Chris has done the right thing and has done so for the right moral reasons, i.e., he was motivated by morally concerned goals and desires, and his action has positive moral worth, he has not acted in the right spirit because of his improper moral belief, i.e., he was expecting his relationship to further develop as a result. Because of Chris acting in the wrong spirit, he is not praiseworthy of his action despite having done the right thing for the right moral reasons.

There is a difference between acting for self-regarding reasons and expecting something out of doing the right thing. The difference is that one can be motivated by the right moral reasons, namely their desires and goals, while also acting for a specific selfish expectation that is

not their primary desire or goal, but instead as a secondary desire.⁷ What this shows is that an agent cannot be morally praiseworthy if they have performed an action with the improper moral belief that they want the acclaim, love, or whatever else that may come along with doing the right thing for the right moral reasons. Performing the right action for the right moral reasons in the *wrong* spirit ultimately excludes an agent from being praised for their action, despite their action having positive moral worth. Therefore, performing the right action for the right moral reasons in the *right* spirit is what allows for an agent to be praised for their action.

Nevertheless, the purpose of this chapter was to show that, while necessary, doing the right thing for the right moral reasons is not sufficient for moral praise. What is further required is to do the right thing for the right moral reasons, but to have done so in the right spirit. To have performed an action in the right spirit is to have lacked any improper moral belief, including the belief that they were doing the wrong thing or the belief that they were going to receive praise or some other thing in return for doing the right thing. I believe that, aside from Grant, it is crucial for moral philosophers to include the factor of doing something in the right way within their current research and within their future literature so that they can fully capture the complex yet powerful picture of praise. If they fail to do this, then they risk omitting necessary information that does not accurately depict the nature of praise.

⁷ Not to be mistaken with a second-order desire. I am simply referring to a desire that stands behind your biggest desire.

Conclusion

What this thesis has shown is that moral worth and moral praise can come apart on their own to provide us with separate accounts that each require different factors. For an action to have positive moral worth, the agent must act from a stable disposition, be in direct control of their action, and be acting voluntarily, free of any luck or accident. An agent's action having positive moral worth is necessary, but it is not sufficient for them to be praised for doing so. What is sufficient for an agent to be praised is what the last three chapters have shown: that the agent must have done *the right thing*, the agent must have committed the action for *the right moral reasons*, and the agent must have committed the action *in the right spirit*. For an agent to have done the right thing, they must have done the thing which they had most moral reason to do and insufficient non-moral reason not to do. For an agent to have performed an action for the right moral reasons, they must have been motivated by their goals and desires to do the right thing for other-regarding reasons and not for self-regarding reasons. For an agent to have performed an action in the right spirit, they must have lacked the presence of improper moral beliefs and must have done so without expecting anything in return. Therefore, if an agent does the right thing for the right moral reasons and does so in the right spirit, then they will deserve praise for doing so.

The research I have conducted and the arguments I have presented throughout my thesis will hopefully be useful for the future work of those who are writing about or studying moral worth and praiseworthiness. I hope that going forward, moral philosophers are able to consider the picture I have painted about moral worth and moral praise, and perhaps even further expanding on it by presenting their responses or objections to it and can thus begin to see the

importance of creating separate accounts of moral worth and moral praise. I also hope that my work can be applied to the everyday lives of those who choose to read this thesis and that they can be positively affected through the way in which they view others around them and the actions they perform, as well as their own actions and ensuring that they do not have improper moral beliefs, for example, whenever they are performing some morally charged action.

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