

Gwen Bradford, *Achievement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), ISBN 978-0-19-871402-6, 203 pp.

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Achievement clearly plays a significant role in people's lives in some form or another. We admire Nobel prize winners, Olympic athletes, scientists who make groundbreaking discoveries, great novelists, war heroes, musicians, and so forth. But when asked (1) what achievements consist in; and (2) what makes them valuable, giving a comprehensive answer is likely a more complicated task than first thought. These are questions that have not received as much philosophical attention as, for example, the nature of knowledge, pleasure, autonomy, and other typical nonmoral values. This should strike us as odd, given that achievement frequently appears alongside these values on "objective list" or "perfectionist" accounts of what constitutes well-being or a good life for a human.

In this clearly written and well structured book, Gwen Bradford sets the task of answering precisely these questions in one of the first in-depth and systematic accounts of achievement and its value. Although the literature dealing with this topic is relatively small, the book engages with competing views from the likes of Thomas Hurka, Joseph Raz, and Simon Keller. In some respects, Bradford's own position complements that of these competing views. However, the most significant contribution that *Achievement* makes to this debate is to skillfully single out which aspects are worth developing and which are not. Ultimately, the book attempts to demonstrate that the current theories regarding the nature and value of achievement can take us only so far.

In the first chapters of the book, Bradford seeks to give a descriptive account of what achievements consist in by considering their shared characteristics, arguing that contemporary accounts are unsatisfactory in overlooking this similarity. Bradford persuasively argues that for something to count as an achievement in the relevant sense, a number of conditions must be met. First, and least controversially, they must involve the *successful* attainment of one's goal. Although there may be some value to be found in certain failures (Bradford discusses this in the final chapter), and failures may involve some related achievements, achievement is taken to necessarily involve success.

Second, achievement must involve the overcoming of significant difficulty, which Bradford characterizes in terms of "requiring some sufficient degree of *effort*." After all, successfully tying one's shoelace or raising one's arm do not intuitively count as achievements in the relevant sense (i.e., as worthy of admiration). It is likely that this is because they

are easy to accomplish for most people. In one of the most thought-provoking parts of the book, Bradford spends time discussing the relativity of difficulty and its consequences for when something is appropriately labeled as an achievement. It may be that tying one's shoelace or raising one's arm *is* an achievement in some cases, for example, for a war veteran who has been severely wounded and manages to do so after months of rehabilitative training. This calls for a distinction between difficulty-for a particular agent and difficulty in a broader sense: as Bradford puts it, difficulty-for "some typical member of the relevant class of agents." This particular phrase has a number of controversial elements that Bradford could afford to spend more time clarifying. Nevertheless, the point is that there must consequently be a distinction between achievement-for a particular person and achievement-for a person as a member of a broader class.

This captures intuitions regarding extremely talented individuals and the apparent ease with which they compose brilliant scores, write great novels, and so forth. Bradford's own example is of the virtuoso violinist who performs a seemingly difficult piece with little effort. By recognizing the relativity of difficulty, Bradford is prepared to say that the performance is not an achievement-for the virtuoso, but counts as an achievement relative to a broader standard. Correspondingly, raising one's arm *is* an achievement-for the wounded war veteran, but not for most human beings, who, being able-bodied, encounter no difficulty with this task.

But even the successful attainment of a difficult goal will often not qualify as an achievement. Bradford considers a number of Gettier-style counterexamples to a formulation of achievement involving just these two conditions, primarily those that indicate the need for a luck condition. Take the classic example of an archer who attempts to make a significantly difficult shot from a number of yards away from the target. The shot is a poor one, but the wind blows and directs the arrow onto the bull's-eye. In this case, a difficult task has successfully been completed, but we are less inclined to label this an achievement. The thought is that the presence of pure luck undermines the difficulty of the task: it makes the process of achieving the goal easier. There must then be a further condition of achievement, according to Bradford's account. This is what she calls "competent causation," which, very broadly, amounts to bringing about a state of affairs "at least in part through one's own efforts."

It is important that it is *pure* luck that undermines difficulty and whether something counts as an achievement, for it seems that luck can often play an important role here. One way in which this may be the case is the luck relevant to achieving a goal after making a tremendous effort. For example, a sports team may train for weeks or months in preparation for a

prestigious tournament. The arduous training will prime the players to overcome many difficulties they will face, such as defeating a strong opposing team. But it is plausible to think that the team's training, while increasing the *chances* of a win, are not sufficient for winning. Luck might play a role in a number of ways. For instance, our team may be lucky in that even though they are putting in a great deal of effort, the opposing team's defense makes a number of tactical mistakes. In an extreme case, if the opposing team did this constantly so that our team rarely even engaged in the game, we would be less inclined to praise them for a great achievement. But ordinarily these mistakes happen rarely, assuming the teams are fairly evenly matched. This requires a team to have the ability and skill to be ready to capitalize on them when they do occur. Bradford focuses more on luck as a *cause* of an accomplishment, yet luck has further interesting relations to achievement that are not fully explored in the book.

For Bradford, then, achievements are "comprised by a process and product, where the process is difficult, and competently causes the product." One of the many virtues of Bradford's descriptive account of achievements is that it is not overly philosophical or stipulative. On the contrary, her account is intuitive, which is demonstrated through a plethora of clear thought experiments and illuminating examples. Moreover, while "achievement" typically brings to mind accomplishments of great individuals and geniuses that one might feel a million miles from, Bradford's view is highly inclusive insofar as it can account for more modest practical achievements as well—raising children, gardening, doing chores, and so forth—as long as they satisfy the formal conditions she proposes to a high degree.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this book are chapters four and five, in which Bradford discusses the value of achievements, arguing that difficulty should not be viewed as merely instrumental to valuable achievements, but as a constitutive feature. The following example given by Bradford captures this intuition neatly:

*A Tale of Two Novels.*

I. *Smith*. Smith's experience working on his novel was typical for a novelist (if there is such a thing as a typical novel-writing experience). There were ups and downs, periods of writer's block, months of carefully finessed work that ended up not being useful for the book, pressure from the editor, but also enjoyable and productive days, and so on.

II. *Jones*. Jones endured hardships similar to Smith's, and, in addition, suffered major obstacles. His house burned down, along with everything he owned (not to mention several months worth of work on the novel), his dog died, and his wife left him. In addition, Jones suffers greatly from depression, which can make an ordinary day—let alone a productive one—utterly agonizing. Yet Jones has struggled and fought, and, in spite of these obstacles, he has produced his novel, equally as good as Smith's.

The example is intended to demonstrate that there is a strong intuition that Jones's achievement is in some ways a better one than Smith's. The product both novelists produce is of identical value, but the process of achieving it, for Jones, involved encountering and overcoming more difficulty. Bradford's conclusion is that the value of achievements is not simply accounted for by the value of the product, but by the process as well.

In some cases she discusses, the apparent goal is worthless, but the process of achieving it may account for the entire value of the achievement. For example, in the case of mountain climbing, the goal of being on top of mountain has no *intrinsic* worth, yet people find value in the challenge of *getting to the top*. Bradford's arguments for the idea that the process of an achievement matters as much, or in some cases more, than the value of the product are convincing. Moreover, she effectively deals with some forceful objections and possible implications of her position. However, one important point does not receive as much attention as it perhaps deserves.

In the *Tale of Two Novels* example Bradford gives, she argues that Jones's achievement is better than Smith's because Jones had to overcome more difficulty. She states that "the value of achievements increases as difficulty increases." However, there are two different types of difficulty in play in this example, and, crucially, they seem to make different contributions in value. On the one hand, both writers face the difficulty intrinsic to the task of creating a good novel. These are the obstacles essential to the task. On the other hand, Jones experiences a significant amount of extrinsic difficulty. These are obstacles that are non-essential to the task yet still add resistance to the achieving of one's goal (in this case losing his material possessions, ending meaningful relationships, depression).

The suggestion appears to be that intrinsic difficulty and extrinsic difficulty make identical or at least similar contributions to the value of an achievement. Yet, there seem to be cases that challenge this point. Take the example of a tennis match. Simply by engaging in the task, one will have to overcome the intrinsic difficulties of energy preservation, calculated and precise racquet-motions, accurate depth perception, anticipating the opponent's strategy, and so forth. Now let us imagine the match was being played on a rundown court, and the racquets were of an extremely low quality. It might be said that although this certainly makes the task more difficult, these extrinsic difficulties actually *detract* from the value of the game. Moreover, this might not merely be because the intrinsic difficulty would possibly be reduced. Rather, the added extrinsic difficulties may act simply as a nuisance, which doesn't appear to intuitively entitle the players to additional admiration.

To take another example that demonstrates this distinction more clearly, we might consider athletic pursuits such as weight lifting or pole-

vaulting. We do not see these athletes removing fingers or limbs in order to make their task more difficult. Rather, we do see them adding weight to the bar, or raising the height to be jumped: they increase the intrinsic difficulty of their task and not the extrinsic difficulty. I take this to indicate at least part of an explanation regarding the different contributions of value that these two types of difficulty make to an achievement. Of course, one reason why athletes do not remove limbs even though it adds difficulty to their task is that achievement is not the *only* good thing in life—a point Bradford rightly recognizes. Removing limbs would cause significant harm to other aspects of their well-being. However, the point here is that even if it didn't (perhaps the weightlifter temporarily numbed some of his fingers), it is not obvious that the achievement would be of more or equal value to the same task but with the equivalent *intrinsic* difficulty instead.

Bradford does suggest that if the quality of Jones's and Smith's novels differed, this would have an effect on the value of their respective achievements, indicating that overcoming intrinsic difficulty in some way contributes more value than overcoming extrinsic difficulty. I think this is a plausible view, but this distinction is not approached in as much depth as other issues the book deals with. This is somewhat disappointing given the focus on the significant role difficulty plays in the value of an achievement on Bradford's view. Nevertheless, it is one interesting area among many that the book engages with.

Bradford's strategy to justify her claims surrounding the value of achievement are to be found in her defense of a version of (broadly) Aristotelian perfectionism: the view that explains the value of the traditional "objective list" of values by appealing to their relationship with human nature. On this view, achievement is valuable because it is a manifestation of certain capacities that, as Bradford puts it, "*characterize* us as human beings. That is to say, they are the features that make us who we are."

Bradford focuses on capacities that are (1) "near-universal" and (2) "intuitively worth developing" as a way of identifying these perfectionist goods. She defends the claim that "the capacity to exercise our will" is one of these perfectionist goods, and consequently, like Hurka, draws upon the work of Nietzsche to elaborate and support her view regarding the value of achievement—a philosopher who until relatively recently has not received serious attention in analytical philosophy, particularly in ethics. This is a commendable move, and one that adds to the increasing surge of interest in what Nietzsche can contribute to contemporary moral philosophy.

Bradford is less vigorous in her attempt to link Nietzsche with her view than, for example, Hurka. She rightly discusses the importance of the controversial doctrine of the "will to power" in understanding Nietzsche's views on the value of achievement, but does not explore the finer

details of his philosophy relevant to her investigation, nor the contemporary debates in Nietzsche scholarship regarding his conception of the good. However, Bradford admits that she is no Nietzsche scholar, but only attempts to draw interesting parallels with her own view.

*Achievement* is a refreshing and exciting book that explores a severely overlooked topic in such a way that allows a wide variety of audiences to engage with it. Though some aspects of the view proposed may require elaboration and qualification, the innovative arguments produced in this book will be sure to provoke subsequent work in this interesting area.

Darrel Moellendorf, *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change: Values, Poverty, and Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ISBN 978-1-107-67850-7, xi + 263 pp.

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Once, after trying my hand at stand-up, I asked a friend what she thought about my performance. As diplomatically as she could, she noted that the set seemed more like a lecture than a comedy routine. Trying to emphasize the positive, I quickly replied, “At least you learned something—right?” “Well ... I might have,” she said, before finally adding, “except the ‘jokes’ kept getting in the way.” Sadly, I had found myself in an unfortunate nether-realm, offering something neither as humorous as I had intended nor as educational as I would have provided in a more familiar setting.

Fortunately, Darrel Moellendorf is not attempting anything light-hearted in his new book, *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change: Values, Poverty, and Policy*. Instead, Moellendorf takes his task to engage in public philosophy, “an attempt to talk about something of profound public importance, and to do so to an audience that is broader than only academic philosophers” (5). This is a noble quest, much needed in our philosophic pursuits, and perhaps needed nowhere more urgently than in our considerations of climate change. Unfortunately, Moellendorf’s book winds up in a similar no-man’s land to the one I found myself in years ago. With a few notable exceptions, it offers neither enough academic philosophical analysis to provide fresh insights into ongoing theoretical debates nor enough public philosophy to provide a practical philosophic understanding of the defining crisis of our age.

Despite any deficiencies, where Moellendorf falters, he falters in a noble pursuit, more than worthy of the attempt. Moreover, whatever