Marino, Patricia. *Moral Reasoning in a Pluralistic World.*

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In this engaging, rich, and provocative book Patricia Marino invites us to think carefully about the practice of moral reasoning and moral theorizing. The central question of the book, she tells us, is "how moral reasoning is best understood in a world with varying moral outlooks." (4) The book also aims to establish a normative thesis: "we ought to strive for … a pluralistically coherent moral point of view that honours various values in appropriate ways and applies those values across the board." (149)

Marino's starting point is descriptive – as a matter of fact, she claims, we value pluralistically: "we have a number of common but distinct moral cares … [we] direct those cares at different objects and prioritize among them in different ways." (4) This descriptive thesis, she argues, gives us a *prima facie* reason to endorse value pluralism and principle pluralism – the view that there is a plurality of *fundamental* moral principles. (25)

Marino is well aware of the allure of monism – both value monism and principle monism – and the philosophical urge to reduce the number of values/principles to as few as possible. In chapter 2, she considers some arguments for value monism and claims they are unsuccessful. In chapter 3, Marino argues that we have no reason to "prefer theories with fewer and simpler principles." (60) Indeed, according to Marino we have reason to favor pluralistic theories *with conflicting principles* in order to account properly for the phenomenon of moral regret.

Consequently, she argues, temptations for reduction and systematization should be resisted. In Chapters 4 and 5, Marino develops her account of moral reasoning—*case consistency* and *pluralistic coherence*—which is compatible with a plurality of practically and/or essentially inconsistent principles. In the concluding chapter she claims that we *ought* to conduct our moral reasoning in accordance with the model she recommends and explores some implications of her view for philosophical methodology, the possibility of moral progress, and moral disagreement.

The book is delightfully thought provoking. It challenges some fundamental presumptions about moral reasoning and moral theorizing. It is filled with interesting arguments and examples that helpfully illustrate and illuminate key points. Despite the complexity of the issues under discussion and the vast literature with which the book engages, Marino's writing is admirably accessible and she helps the reader follow her central argument by providing frequent and succinct summaries of what she has done so far and what is to come next. Thus, reading this book is not only intellectually and philosophically stimulating, but also wonderfully enjoyable.

It is impossible to do justice to this book's many thoughtful arguments in this short review. Instead of attempting the impossible, I will focus exclusively on Marino's commitment to principle pluralism, which, I think, is not sufficiently well supported and leads to some difficulties. I will suggest that much of what Marino proposes is friendly to particularism and

that at least some of the difficulties I highlight might be circumvented by endorsing particularism instead of principle pluralism as Marino recommends.

According to Marino, the descriptive thesis that we value pluralistically supports the metaphysical thesis that values are genuinely plural. Most of Chapter 2 of the book is devoted to rebutting arguments against value pluralism. However, the initial move from value pluralism to principle pluralism happens quite quickly (pp. 25-27). Marino lists three considerations to support this move:

> (1) if values are plural, then on the face of it we'll need multiple principles; (2) such multiplicity is indeed necessary, because the reasons we give for the moral judgements and the principles we endorse will not ultimately be reducible to a single kind of consideration … (3) when various considerations apply in a given case, the principles we endorse will typically conflict … the proper activity in such a case is weighing considerations against one another rather than seeking a more general point of view from which our principles can be seen to follow. (25-6)

In Chapter 3 Marino returns to this issue. "If values are plural," she writes, "principles grounded in very different kinds of considerations are not expressible in terms of some single principle – insisting on fewer, simpler principles would lead to error." (63)

I'm not quite convinced by Marino's reasoning here. It seems to me that one can accept a pluralistic axiology *and* principle monism. In fact, there are some well-known examples of philosophers who held this combination of views. E.g., one might accept monistic maximizing consequentialism—that an act is morally right iff it maximizes the good—and value pluralism (e.g., that both pleasure and knowledge are intrinsically good). Or one might accept a Kantian monistic theory according to which the right does not depend on the good – e.g., an act is right iff its maxim is universalizable – and at the same time hold that both, say, good will and pleasure are intrinsically valuable. Such views are compatible with the practice of citing different reasons for our moral judgments either because we may cite different values when giving our reasons or because the reasons we cite need not be the fundamental right-making features. Moreover, such views, as W. D. Ross (2002/1930. *The right and the good*. Oxford University Press.) pointed out, are compatible with the practice of "weighing considerations." In fact, Ross appealed to this feature of Moore's utilitarian theory to provide a "partners in guilt" defense of his own pluralistic theory from the objection that his pluralism offers "no principle upon which to discern what is our actual duty in particular circumstances." (Ross 1930:24)

From the other end of the spectrum, Marino's considerations in support of principle pluralism do not seem to favor pluralism over particularism. Particularists will happily agree that all right-making features "are not expressible in terms of some single principle," that we cite diverse reasons to justify our judgments, and that the practice of "weighing considerations against one another" is perfectly sensible.

So these considerations in favor of principle pluralism do not strike me as very convincing. But Marino also offers a separate argument against monism and systematization more generally. "Because of value pluralism," she writes, "we have no way of knowing when and whether more systematized theories provide better explanations than less systematized ones" and this, she claims, "undermines support for systematicity." (63) The thought here, as I understand it, is that if value pluralism is true, then monistic theories are bound to be false. And if monistic theories are false, they cannot explain anything. Moreover, since we do not know how many values there are, we have no reason to favor more systematic explanations over less systematic ones because the more systematic explanation may "over-systematize" and hence be false. Interestingly, Marino claims that this argumentative move is effective even if we do not accept principle pluralism: "All that is required for this argument" she writes, "is uncertainty about value pluralism. The descriptive thesis is sufficient to put the burden of proof squarely on the defender of systematicity and monism." (68)

It might be helpful to spell out Marino's argument as I understand it:

1. We value pluralistically. [Descriptive claim]
2. If we value pluralistically, then we have a *prima facie* reason to accept value pluralism. [methodological commitment to "conviction ethics" (21) – the view that our moral theory must "fit well" with our considered convictions.]
3. If we have a *prima facie* reason to accept value pluralism, then we have a *prima facie* reason to accept principle pluralism.

4. If principle pluralism is (or even only *might* be) true, we have no way of knowing whether more systematized theories provide better explanations than less systematized ones.
5. If we have no way of knowing whether more systematized theories provide better explanations than less systematized ones, then we have no reason to systematize our moral beliefs.
6. Therefore, we have no reason to systematize our moral beliefs

Consider now premise 4. We know that there are infinitely many theories that are logically consistent with any finite set of data. This is known as the underdetermination thesis. This thesis comes in various strengths. Its most radical form, dubbed by Larry Laudan (1990. Demystifying Underdetermination. *Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science*, 14:267-297.) "The Egalitarian Thesis" and attributed to Quine, states the following:

The Egalitarian Thesis [ET]: every theory is as well supported by a finite set of data as any of its rivals.

The consequences of ET for theory choice are dramatic. As Quine had it, one can hold fast to any theory "come what may". One standard response to ET is that theory choice is not governed solely by deductive logic. *Theoretical virtues,* such as simplicity, familiarity, scope, and fecundity, are often accepted as rational constraints on theory selection. The thought is, roughly, that theoretical virtues are good guides to truth; and so, *ceteris paribus*, we should

favor theories that manifest these virtues over theories that do not. E.g., if two theories T1 (say, Copernican Heliocentrism) and T2 (say, Ptolemaic Epicycles) explain a set of data S1 (say, the motion of the planets), but T1 is simpler than T2, we have (some) reason to favor T1 over T2.

Premise 4 of the argument above seems to go the other way. Unless we know *in advance* that the correct theory is simple, we have no reason to seek simplicity. This construal seems to undermine the role of theoretical virtues in theory choice. There is quite a bit of literature on theoretical virtues which I cannot go into in this short review. I will here only flag that if we give up on theoretical virtues as criteria for theory selection, it is not clear whether, and if so how, we can justify selecting one theory over another.

Be that as it may, the conclusion of the abovementioned argument is compatible with particularism. And if I'm right that Marino's argument for pluralism does not favor pluralism over particularism, then we have yet to have been offered a reason to opt for pluralism rather than particularism.

There may be independent reasons to favor particularism to pluralism. Dancy (1983. Ethical particularism and morally relevant properties. Mind, 92:530-547), for example, provides a fascinating argument for this conclusion based on epistemological considerations and Leibowitz (2011. Scientific explanation and moral explanation. *Noûs*, 45:472-503) provides another. I will not rehearse such argument here. Instead, I wish to point out a challenge to Marino's position which might be circumvented by endorsing particularism.

One of Ross' great contributions to moral theorizing is the introduction of the notion of *prima facie* obligation. Ross recognized that if one is committed to a plurality of principles of obligation, then one's theory may lead to contradiction. For example, consider the following two principles:

(a) One ought not to perform acts of type P

(b) One ought to perform acts of type Q

If types P and Q are not mutually exclusive, there can be an act, *A*, that is of both types. The theory then entails that one ought to perform act *A and* that one ought *not* to perform it. The notion of *prima facie* obligation was meant to resolve this difficulty. While an action *cannot* be both obligatory and not-obligatory, it can be both *prima facie* obligatory and *prima facie* wrong (i.e., not obligatory) because, roughly, an action can be "in some respects" obligatory and in "other respects" wrong. The main Rossian insight, for our purposes here, is that we need two senses of "ought" – for him these are *prima facie* ought and *all-things-considered* ought.

Marino's view, in contrast, is that "we need not include practical or essential consistency in our coherence norms." (29) According to her, the fact that principles like (a) and (b) above issue conflicting verdicts about individual act tokens need not worry us; we needn't precisify these principles to avoid possible conflicts nor need we, like Ross, to appeal to *prima facie* obligation. Instead, Marino insists that each principle states a *genuine* obligation: "In a case in which one

ought to do A and ought to do B but cannot do both, it is possible to say that one ought to do A overall, while still saying that both A and B are genuine obligations." (29) Marino appeals to context sensitive prioritization of principles. In some contexts principle (a) will be prioritized over (b) and in others vice versa. And so "a theory can be fully prioritized without being [practically or essentially] consistent." (29) And treating principles as issuing *genuine* obligations rather than merely *prima facie* obligations enables us to make sense of the phenomenon of moral regret – i.e., that one can (appropriately) regrets failing to have done something one (*genuinely*) ought to have done even though one did what one *overall* ought to have done.

In setting up her view of coherence, Marino writes this:

> "On pretty much any coherence view, we require that the principles and judgments fit together with one another in the simple sense that each judgment must follow from some principle … One minimal constraint on principles is consistency. I take it that logical consistency is required and I don't discuss this further here." (21)

Logical consistency is maintained, according to Marino, as long as we are not committed to a principle and its negation: i.e., "one ought to φ" and "it's not the case that one ought to φ." But arguably if one ought not to φ, then it is not the case that one ought to φ, in which case the principles "one ought to φ" and "one ought not to φ" entail that the act of φ-ing both has *and* lacks the property of being obligatory. I suspect that Marino's way out of contradiction is her prioritization model; if principle (a) is prioritized in a specific context, then, in some sense,

principle (b) doesn't apply. But this seems to be a way to ensure consistency in our norms – there is no situation in which two or more conflicting principles apply – even if we cannot state in advance which principle will be prioritized in each situation.

If this is right, Marino's account ends up being virtually identical to Ross'. Like Ross, Marino makes use of two senses of obligation. According to Ross in each particular situation one *prima facie* obligation is "most stringent" and determines our *all-things-considered* obligation. For Marino, one of the principles that states a *genuine* obligation is prioritized in each situation and determines our *overall* obligation. So, for example, consider a case in which action *A* is of types P and Q and suppose that principle (a) is prioritized and thus one ought not to perform *A*. What should we make of the obligation to perform *A* entailed by principle (b)? Marino insists that one has a *genuine* obligation to perform *A.* But this now seems to differ from Ross' *prima facie* obligation by name only. And if the difference between Marino's and Ross' proposals is solely a difference of nomenclature, it is doubtful that one model can be in a better position than the other to account for moral regret.

Perhaps one way around these difficulties is to abandon principles altogether. Instead of insisting that each morally relevant consideration must be captured by a moral principle, we can instead adopt a particularist model whereby the basic normative concept is that of a reason, or a favorer, and "build up", as it were. It seems to me that by abandoning principles altogether, we might be able to resolve the difficulties due to "inconsistent norms." Moreover, I

think we will be in a better position to account for moral regret without having to identify a second sense of "ought" that differs from *overall* ought.

While one central aim of this book is to develop and defend principle pluralism, Marino seems friendly to a particularist adaptation of her account of moral reasoning. In fn. 31 (P. 124) she writes: "I've tried to talk about how one may improve one's moral view by becoming more case consistent … It is possible to understand these recommendations less in the spirit of a challenge to particularism and more in the spirit of 'here's how to reason using moral coherence if particularism is true.'" Particularists, I suspect, cannot accept Marino's account without modification. For example, her insistence that "each judgment must follow from some principle" seems at odds with a key particularist commitment. Nevertheless, Marino's book aptly demonstrates that a detailed and rich account of moral reasoning can be had even if we move away from the traditional ideals of simplicity and systematicity. Thus, this book is a highly valuable contribution not only to pluralism but to the particularist research program as well.[i]

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