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RECOGNIZING AND EMULATING EXEMPLARS

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Introduction

We all know exceptional people whom we regard as our exemplars. In everyday existence, including moral life, these exceptional people function as a kind of beacon: they help us to see what it means to be a good mother, friend, bird watcher or academic. Paying attention to their lives and actions inspires us to improve ourselves. This makes it quite important to recognize and emulate them. Both this recognition and emulation, however, occur, for a large part, immediately and unreflectively. We are drawn towards certain people because of their lives, their actions and choices, their character, their remarkable talents, and so forth – but it is usually only after having experienced their appeal that we are able to (somewhat) explicate what it is about them that makes them exemplary. Similarly, we regularly find ourselves emulating them without having made a very deliberate choice to do so. Since, then, the way we relate to our exemplars is quite significantly unreflective, it becomes a pertinent question how we should understand the recognition and emulation of exemplars.

These topics have been important in the history of philosophy. Numerous authors, especially (though not exclusively) those working in the traditions of virtue-ethics and moral perfectionism have stressed the theoretical and practical importance of exemplars. Throughout the works of authors as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Scheler, Kierkegaard, Emerson, Nietzsche, Cavell and others we stumble upon passages highlighting the significance of exemplary others in living our lives. Yet, although these authors have developed thoughts that contribute to our understanding of what is involved in recognizing and emulating exemplars, they have not developed a thoroughly systematic account of these issues. Recently, however, such an account has been brought forward by Linda T. Zagzebski (2010; 2015a; 2015b; 2017). The key notion in her so-called 'exemplarist moral theory', which is now generally considered as the most important account of such issues, is 'admiration'. She argues that admiration is pivotal in understanding both 'selecting' exemplars and emulating them. She is not alone in emphasizing the role of admiration in these matters: David

Velleman (2002) has also stressed the importance of admiration for emulating exemplars. Moreover, admiration (as well as envy) as emotion(s) directed towards those who we perceive as being in some way 'above' us has been the object of numerous recent experimental psychological studies (cf. Haidt 2003; Algoe and Haidt 2009; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2011; Schindler, Paech, and Löwenbrück (2015); Van de Ven 2017).

In this article I will explore what is involved in recognizing exemplars and emulating them, and I will do so by critically engaging with the view that admiration is the key to understanding these issues. Although I do believe that admiration is typically involved in recognizing and emulating exemplars, I do not think it is sufficient to explain those phenomena. I will suggest that we need a richer account to understand the recognition and emulation of exemplarity; an account that involves a deep self-awareness, the possibility of identifying with the exemplar, and, crucially, (what I call) 'motivational continuity'.

As some of the examples mentioned in the beginning of this introduction already suggest, I will be reflecting on exemplarity in general. Although there are some really interesting questions that pertain specifically to *moral* exemplarity, this article will explore the fundamental structure of how we relate to exemplars in general.

ADMIRATION AND EXEMPLARITY

In this section I will elaborate the idea that we recognize and emulate exemplars through admiring them. Since Zagzebski's account of these matters is the most systematic and fundamental, I will pay special attention to her views. What is an exemplar? Although it is conceivable to speak of God as 'exemplar' as well as of 'exemplary' chess computers, the paradigmatic case is of human beings who excel in one or more ways. Zagzebski (2017) therefore takes exemplars to be (fictional and real) human beings such as saints, heroes and sages. There are very famous exemplars such as Ghandi, Mother Teresa and Confucius, but some exemplars are everyday people, perhaps quite close to us, and unknown to the public. What they have in common, on this view, is that they are "not just good; they are supremely excellent" (Zagzebski 2017, 2). Zagzebski suggests that we recognize these exemplars through the emotion of admiration. We typically admire those we regard as excellent. Admiration is, so to say, the link that 'ties' us to exemplars. But what is admiration? Niels van de Ven, who is mainly interested in the kind of actions admiration and envy motivate us to do, describes admiration as "a feeling of delighted approval over the accomplishments of another person" (2017, 194). Jonathan Haidt and others (Haidt 2003; Algoe and Haidt 2009; Vianello, Galliani, and Haidt 2010) have offered a more substantive description of admiration, which Zagzebski (2017, 42) summarizes as follows:

It is elicited by acts of charity, gratitude, fidelity, generosity, or any other strong displayof virtue.
It leads to distinctive physical feelings, including the feeling of dilation or opening in the chest, combined with the feeling that one has been uplifted or 'elevated'.
It gives rise to a specific motivation or action tendency: emulation, or the desire toperform the same kind of acts oneself.

Note how this characterization links admiration specifically to *moral* excellence. However, I agree with Zagzebski (2017), as well as, for example, Velleman (2002) and Van de Ven (2017), thatadmiration is not restricted to moral excellence and recognizes excellence in general. Admiration is, moreover, not simply a matter of feeling but it also has a cognitive aspect; it involves a "judgement of admirability" (Zagzebski 2015a, 209).
One worry we can already raise with regard to admiration is that it can be *mistaken* in recognizing exemplars. Zagzebski puts the issue as follows: "We can admire what is not admirable, or fail to admire what is admirable, and if we do either, I assume that we are makingsome sort of mistake. There is a lack of fit between our emotion and its object" (2015a, 207). It is possible (and I guess for most of us quite recognizable) that someone appears admirable, but that, on closer inspection, he or she turns out to be quite mundane or even contemptible. It is also possible that we regard someone as rather plain but that he or she turns out to be exceptional. Such humbling experiences teach us that (what we might call) 'spontaneous admiration' does not always guide us reliably towards moral exemplars.
Another worry with regard to the supposed importance of admiration for recognizing exemplars is that there seems to be deep disagreement about the admirable. It is hardly interesting to point out that different people admire different persons. However, does this fact not undermine, or at least radically relativize, the possibility of speaking confidently about excellence and exemplars? If people admire persons as different as Jesus, Hitler, Socrates, Bin Laden, and Pope Francis, shouldn't we then conclude that we cannot trust admiration as identifying exemplars, and that 'exemplarity' is, ultimately, a vacuous notion? Zagzebski's response – which also applies to the earlier worry about admiration being mistaken – is twofold. First of all, 'spontaneous admiration' is, indeed, not sufficient. As reflective beings, we should always critically reflect on our admiration, asking whether those we admire are actually admirable. She does not elaborate what is involved in such critical reflection, but we can imagine it includesgetting to know the object of our admiration better, which might also include the testimony of others. However – and this is the second aspect of her response – she acknowledges that, despitethis critical reflection, there remains somewhat of a problem here in the sense that it cannot beguaranteed *absolutely* that our admiration is directed towards the genuinely admirable:

I am assuming that the emotion of admiration is generally trustworthy when we have it after reflection and when it withstands critique by others. We have no guarantee that what we admire upon reflection is admirable, but then we do not have any guarantee that our vision or memory is trustworthy if it withstands reflection either. All we can do is the best we can do by using our faculties as conscientiously as we can, and our disposition to admiration is one of those faculties (Zagzebski 2010, 52).

Although we can be mistaken in admiring someone, and although we can never be absolutely certain that our admiration recognizes the genuinely admirable, it is reasonable to suppose that we can trust our admiration in picking out excellence after we have reflected critically on it. And this, I think, a fair response.

Admiration, on this view, is not only key in 'selecting' or recognizing exemplars, there is also an intimate connection between admiration and *emulation*. Psychological studies by Haidt and others (Haidt 2003; Algoe and Haidt 2009) suggest that admiration leads to the emulation of the exemplary other. Schindler, Paech, and Löwenbrück (2015) also found that admiration typically gives rise to emulation. Van de Ven (2017) suggests that admiration leads to a motivation to improve oneself (although he does not explicitly understand this desire for improvement in terms of *emulation*). Zagzebski's account is in agreement with these conclusions. She argues that admiration "gives rise to a specific motivation or action tendency: emulation" (Zagzebski 2015a, 209). However, she is quick to add that this does not imply that there is a *direct* or *immediate* relation between admiration and emulation: we do not necessarily start emulating those we regard as excellent. Even so, there is a close relation between admiration and emulation: "[s]aying that in a state of admiration the object appears imitably attractive highlights two features of the feeling of admiration that I want to emphasize: (1) the object appears attractive, not repulsive or evaluatively neutral; (2) the way in which the object is attractive typically gives rise to the urge to imitate or emulate the object if emulation is possible" (Zagzebski 2015b, 254). *Typically*, then, admiration elicits the desire to emulate.

However, the typical relation between admiration and emulation can be disturbed. In the last part of the quoted passage, Zagzebski notes that the urge to emulate is dependent on (our judgment of) whether emulation is possible. She points out that determining whether it is, hinges on the distinction between *natural* and *acquired* excellences. As forms of excellence, both can elicit admiration, but, crucially, emulation of a natural excellence (*qua* natural) is impossible. I admire the artistic genius of Raphael, but it makes very little sense for me to want to emulate him in this

respect. Zagzebski notes that the distinction between natural and acquired excellences is not very straightforward. Excellence in persons is frequently an interplay of natural talent and, for instance, perseverance. Raphael's artistic virtuosity is the result of natural talent and hard work, as is Messi's excellence in playing football. That means that while I cannot emulate them insofar as they are naturally gifted, I can emulate their perseverance. Zagzebski therefore concludes that "the natural part of an excellence [...] cannot be imitated, but the acquired part can be" (2015b,256).

We might of course wonder whether it is plausible to distinguish between what is natural and what is acquired, even if the distinction is sophisticated in this way. In a discussion that touches upon the topics of this article, Friedrich Nietzsche deconstructs the distinction between natural and acquired excellence in a fascinating way. In discussing what he calls the 'cult of the genius', he argues that the ascription of natural giftedness is the result of our "vanity" and "self-love", which make us believe that the genius' virtuosity is "quite extraordinarily marvellous, a wholly uncommon accident, or, if we are still religiously inclined, a mercy from on high" (Nietzsche 1996, 86). In fact, Nietzsche suggests, if we scrutinize the excellence we are admiring in the other person, we will understand that it is not an instance of natural talent, but the result of a kind of activity that is open to all. He writes that excellence exists in "people whose thinking is active in *one* direction, who employ everything as material, who always zealously observe their own inner life and that of others, who perceive everywhere models [*Vorbilder*] and incentives, who never tire of combining together the means available to them" (Nietzsche 1996, 86). Why, then, do we view him or her as naturally gifted? We do so in order to protect ourselves: "only if we think of him [or her] as being very remote from us, as a *miraculum*, does he [or she] not aggrieve us" (Nietzsche 1996, 86). If we acknowledge that the admirable person's excellence is something that we ourselves could realize as well, we come to see that we are, at best, mediocre beings who have made their lives too comfortable. By ascribing someone natural talent we are letting ourselves off the hook. "To call someone 'divine' means: 'here there is no need for us to compete'" (Nietzsche 1996, 86).

Nietzsche is right to complicate the distinction between natural and acquired excellence, as well as to draw our attention to the psychological mechanisms that might inform our attribution of natural giftedness. However, I think he exaggerates when he argues that the ascription of natural giftedness can be *reduced* to a defensive response. There seem to be genuine cases of extraordinary natural talent. Consequently, it seems right to want to hold on to the distinction.

There is a second way in which the typical relation between admiration and emulation can be disturbed. Instead of eliciting admiration, excellence might also lead to envy. Several psychological studies (Smith and Kim 2007; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009; Lange and Crusius 2015; Van de Ven 2017) have focused on envy as a possible response to excellence, and have distinguished between benign and malicious envy. Whereas malicious envy seeks to bring the other person down and "[wanting] to see the envied person fail in something" (Van de Ven 2017, 194), people experiencing benign envy "feel frustrated that the other person [is] better off, but they also [indicate] being more motivated to do better themselves" (Van de Ven 2017,194).

Zagzebski (2015a, 211) agrees with this picture, writing that there are roughly three different ways in which we can respond to an admirable person. *First,* there is admiration, "a positive feeling that leads to emulation". *Second*, there is what Aristotle called '*zelos*' (benign envy), "a negative (painful) feeling that leads to emulation". *Third*, there is (malicious) envy, "a negative (painful) feeling that leads to desiring to see the admired person deprived of her admired features". Apart from the positive feeling of admiration (which, provided emulation is possible, elicits the urge to emulate), then, being confronted with the admirable or excellent can also be a painful experience. Zagzebski refers to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* for an explanation of how being confronted with the admirable might be painful. Aristotle writes: "Emulation [*zelos*] is pain caused by seeing the presence, in persons whose nature is like our own, of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire; but it is felt not because others have these goods, but because we have not got them ourselves" (Zagzebski 2015a, 210; Aristotle 2006, 1388a30-35). Contrary to what happens in admiration, then, the painful experiences of *zelos* and (malicious) envy entail a comparison of the excellence in another person to my own present situation, and the resulting realization that I am not as virtuous as the other person is what makes it painful.

Although both *zelos* and envy arise from the same (painful) experience, they differ fundamentally. In *zelos* I remain focused on the admirable goods of the other, which motivates me to bridge the gap between my present self and the admirable person by striving to become excellent myself (through emulation). In envy, by contrast, I am primarily focused on the lack of equality between myself and the admirable person. Envy does not lead to emulation because it wants to bridge the gap myself and the other person by bringing the other person down. When I am envious of the other person I do want to improve myself, but I want to bring the other person down.

Thus, although admiration typically leads emulation, there are at least two reasons why this 'natural' connection is disturbed. It might be impossible to emulate the admirable person, and, if we are pained especially by the inequality between our current selves and the admirable person, we might get in the grip of envy. Absent these potential problems, however, Zagzebski points out that we will typically experience the urge to emulate the admirable person.

AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT

In this section I want to bring forward two objections against the view that we recognize and emulate exemplars through admiring them. *First* (3.1), I will argue that although admiration indeed allows us to identify excellence, it does not thereby allow us to recognize exemplars. *Second* (3.2), I will argue that, although her account of the relation between admiration and emulation is careful, the connection she sees between them is still too strong. By critically discussing these ideas, I will bring forward my own account of these topics.

Recognizing exemplars

The point I want to begin with is that we cannot simply identify the excellent with the exemplary. While it may be true that all exemplars are in some way excellent, not every person embodying some excellence is an exemplar. I admire Bernard Williams, Jesus Christ, and my friend who is an excellent bird watcher. I also admire Berlinde de Bruyckere (an artist), Tomas Haake (a drummer), and Gary Anderson (a professional darts player). While I regard each of these as excellent in some respect, I only regard the first three persons as exemplars. I take it that everyone, upon reflection, will be able to distinguish between those who they merely admire and those who function as their exemplars. Everyone has watched in awe how people have done extraordinary things (play the violin this good, being able to climb that particular dangerous mountain, scoring an average of over 100 points in a darts game, and so forth) that they genuinely admire without concluding that this violin player, this mountaineer, and this darts player are their exemplars. I will argue that, to be able to account for this distinction between the excellent and the exemplary, we need to have an account of recognizing exemplariness that goes beyond mere admiration.

It is important to note that Zagzebski agrees that we cannot simply identify the excellent with the exemplary. As we have seen, she points out that the urge to emulate the admirable person does not arise if it is impossible to emulate that person, which is the case when the feature we admire is a natural instead of an acquired excellence. Using Zagzebski's example of a natural talent, "the ability to sing as low as Johnny Cash" (2015b, 255), we should conclude that, on her

view, while Johnny Cash's singing is excellent, it cannot be imitated – that is, he cannot be an exemplar in that respect. Now, although this makes clear that she does not simply identify the excellent with the exemplary, it does follow from this line of reasoning that an exemplar is an admirable person embodying an acquired excellence. In this particular sense, then, she does retain the identity between the excellent and the exemplary.

Even if we accept the distinction between natural and acquired excellence, this is, I am afraid, still not enough to warrant the conclusion that the excellent is identical to the exemplary. The reason is that it is possible to regard someone with an acquired excellence as admirable but not as an exemplar. For example, I admire gardeners for their knowledge of plants, fruits, and vegetables; their insight in the influence of weather conditions on soil and crop; their skills in sowing, pruning, and harvesting, and so forth (all of which, I take it, are acquired excellences). Yet, despite regarding these features as excellences, I do not (presently at least) regard gardeners as exemplars. The distinction between natural and acquired excellence, then, does not make clear what it is that makes a person embodying some excellence an exemplar.

There is another reason why regarding someone as excellent in some respect is insufficient for regarding him or her as an exemplar. There is a sense in which being confronted with excellence can also have a 'devastating' or at least 'inhibitory' effect. I take it that most of us during our lives come across excellences that are so impressive that we just cannot see ourselves ever being or acting like the persons embodying them. Although we genuinely admire them, that is, it is precisely their excellence that prevents them from becoming our exemplars. (We are reminded of Nietzsche's point that this might actually involve a psychological trick to protect ourselves from the painful realization that we lack excellence.)

There are some strong reasons, then, to conclude that, while all exemplars are excellent, not all of those who are excellent are exemplars. This insight has an important consequence for the role of admiration in these matters: while admiration is typically involved in the recognition of exemplars, it is not sufficient. Recognizing exemplars typically involves admiration because admiration typically recognizes excellence, and exemplars are excellent.[1] However, it is insufficient because not all of those who are excellent are exemplars. In what follows I will elaborate what I believe is involved in recognizing exemplarity by discussing three key features of the experience of recognizing someone as an exemplar.

First, recognizing someone as an exemplar involves a deep awareness of myself and of how I compare to the exemplar. For instance, my recognition of Shane Claiborne as being not just an admirable person but an *exemplar* involves the realization that I lack his courage and willingness to get involved with the poor, the powerless and the marginalized in my society.

Recognizing an exemplar makes me acutely aware of who I am and of the fact that I lack (to some degree) the excellences that he or she embodies. By contrast, it is perfectly possible to admire someone without such an awareness. Although *conceptually* the notion 'admirable' implies a relation between persons – there are those who admire and those who are admired or admirable – it seems that in lived experience one can admire someone without becoming aware of how one compares to him or her. As we will see below in more detail, it is plausible to argue that, in admiration, one's attention is turned away from oneself and focused onto the admirable person.

An important reason, then, why I think that Zagzebski's account (and, by extension, any account that makes admiration so crucial) does not really make clear what is involved in recognizing someone as an exemplar is that it is not sensitive enough to these facts. Who the admiring person is and how he or she relates to the admirable person remain remarkably underdeveloped. This becomes especially clear in Zagzebski's discussion of Aristotelian *zelos*: she distinguishes admiration from *zelos*, the latter of which involves the awareness of myself and of how I compare to the other person. Now, there is reason to suppose that her account remains underdeveloped with regard to who the admiring person is and how he or she relates to the admirable person, precisely *because* it focuses on admiration. There seems to be something about admiration itself that prevents us from recognizing someone as an exemplar, precisely because it runs counter to the kind of self-awareness that is needed. That, at least, is argued by Kierkegaard in his illuminating analysis of admiration in *Practice in Christianity*.[2] The key point he seeks to communicate is that "an admirer keeps himself personally detached, consciously or unconsciously does not discover that what is admired involves a claim upon him, to be or at least to strive to be what is admired" (1991, 241). Explaining how admiration fosters this specific form of self-forgetfulness, Kierkegaard writes:

> When one shows a painting to a person and asks him to observe it, or when in a business transaction someone looks at, for example, a piece of cloth, he steps very close to the object, in the latter case even picks it up and feels it—in short, he comes as close to the object as possible, but in this very same movement he in another sense leaves himself entirely, goes away from himself, forgets himself, and nothing reminds him of himself, since it is he, after all, who is observing the painting and the cloth and not the painting and the cloth that are observing him (1991, 233).

Admiration, that is, involves a very intense kind of observation of the admirable object such that one's attention is directed towards the admirable and turned away from oneself. Now, it may

seem as if this line of thought contradicts my claim that recognizing someone as an exemplar typically involves admiration, since that recognition involves a deep awareness of oneself and of how one compares to him or her. I do not think this amounts to a contradiction, although there is a difficulty here. Kierkegaard himself saw this difficulty, and writes that "at the very first moment of the beginning it is impossible to prevent the misunderstanding that goes under the name of admiration, which in one sense is even necessary in order to attract people" (Kierkegaard 1991, 245). Note also that he describes emulation in terms of an attempt "to be or at least to strive to be *what is admired*" (1991, 241). The line of thought here seems to be that, while admiration undermines the kind of self-awareness that is vital for recognizing someone as exemplar, it typically leads to this kind of recognition as an *initial* moment (a first step). And this should not surprise us, given the fact that exemplars embody some excellence(s) and admiration recognizes excellence.

Given how admiration can *prevent* us from recognizing exemplarity, the interesting question therefore seems to be: what happens in a relation of mere admiration such that it turns into a relation in which the other person is perceived as an *exemplar*? However, I think this way of phrasing the question entails the implausible assumption that, once we are caught up in admiration, only a force outside of ourselves can 'break the spell'. While captivating, admiration is not that powerful and not that pervasive. For one thing, as reflective beings we are bound to at least sometimes distance ourselves from our admiration. For another, in the kinds of relations in which I can come to recognize the other as exemplar my attention will be turned towards myself (which is mostly because an exemplar appeals to motivations I already have, as I will elaborate below). I want to suggest therefore that, although admiration initially is a response to perceived excellence, we ourselves can actively prolong it afterwards. That is, when my attention tends to turn towards myself and my (comparative) lack of excellence, I can, as a way of letting myself off the hook, turn my attention away from myself and focus it onto the excellence of the other person. This analysis seems to be entailed in Kierkegaard's remark that "an admirer keeps himself personally detached" (1991, 241) and Nietzsche's claim that "only if we think of him [or her] as being very remote from us, as a *miraculum*, does he [or she] not aggrieve us" (1996, 86), both of which suggest that we can actively direct our attention away from ourselves in order to simply admire the other person. What this means is that, although the recognition of exemplars typically involves admiration as its first moment, we need to resist the temptation to prolong the self- forgetfulness inherent in admiration to actually recognize the other as exemplar.

Second, although we now know that recognizing someone as one's exemplar involves a deep awareness of oneself and (thereby) of one's relation to him or her, we need a more exact

understanding of the *kind* of relation between oneself and one's exemplar. One thing that has become clear is that it is a relation of hierarchy: seeing someone as one's exemplar implies perceiving him or her as being above my current self. I perceive him or her as embodying an excellence that I currently lack. But the analysis of the possibly 'devastating' or 'inhibitory' effects of being confronted with excellence above suggests that I need to be able to *identify* with the admirable person nonetheless. That is, the perceived distance between myself and the other person should not be too great; he or she should be seen as being somehow 'within reach'. According to this line of thought, persons who are perceived as flawless are thereby prevented from becoming exemplars. Instead, an exemplar is perceived as virtuous but imperfect, which makes him or her sufficiently similar to myself. The possibility of identification, then, is a key element in recognizing exemplarity as well.

Third, up to this point I have established that recognizing someone as one's exemplar involves a deep self-awareness (that admiration threatens to make impossible) as well as a relation between oneself and him or her in which one perceives the other as being above oneself while also within reach. However, this still does not seem enough to capture what is involved in recognizing exemplarity. It seems possible that, in being confronted with a virtuous person, the above conditions are met, but that I still do not regard him or her as my exemplar. What is still lacking in this account, I think, is *motivation*. The suggestion I want to bring forward is that regarding someone as an exemplar implies a motivation to resemble him or her in the relevant aspects. Recognizing someone as an exemplar involves what we could call 'motivational continuity' between myself and the other person. That is, an exemplar is someone who embodies an excellence that appeals to motivations I already have. He or she embodies a quality that I desire to develop myself, excels in a project I want to pursue, and so forth. (It is important to stress that although the recognition of someone as an exemplar entails the motivation to resemble him or her, it does not imply that we will be motivated all things considered. As I will discuss in the next section, there might be other (and perhaps stronger) competing desires that prevent me from actually emulating the exemplar. That is, the recognition of someone as an exemplar implies *pro tanto* motivation.)

It might be argued that such 'motivational continuity' is already implied in the fact that I admire the other person, and/or in the fact that I perceive him or her as being above my current self. I do not think this is the case. Take again the example of gardening: I genuinely admire gardeners and regard them as being above my current self in the relevant aspects. Nonetheless, I do not regard gardeners as exemplars and the reason is that their excellences do not appeal to motivations I already have.

Against this line of thought one might object, however, that it is possible to view gardeners as being involved in the general project of promoting beauty and that, when viewed in this way, they do appeal to motivations I already have (provided, of course, that I have a general desire to promote beauty). That is, it seems that, by viewing other people's projects in sufficiently general terms, (almost) any project will appeal to (almost) any person's motivations. Does this not render the idea of motivational continuity as a condition for recognizing exemplars vacuous? I do not think so. To understand why, it is important to see that there are two sides to this issue: the question of the generality of the projects of supposed exemplars, and the question of the generality of my motivations. Let us grant that (at least) some of our desires or motivations – a desire to promote beauty, to excel in philosophy, to be a good father – are quite general in nature. This does not guarantee, however, that I will regard those who can be viewed as excelling in the promotion of beauty, doing philosophy, being a father as my exemplars. The reason why this is so points us towards an interesting feature of motivation in these and other cases: it seems that the motivation to resemble an exemplar is triggered by his or her particularity. By themselves, general projects such as promoting beauty in the world hardly appeal to our motivations – but if they *do*, it is, I think, because of *the particular way* in which *this* person or *that* group of people pursues that project. While some of our desires are quite general in nature and while we can regard people's projects in very general terms, that does not account, I suggest, for feeling motivated to resemble our exemplars. The idea of motivational continuity implies being struck by and attentive to an important degree of particularity.[3]

It is important to see that, although recognizing someone as an exemplar implies that he or she embodies something that is in line with motivations I already have (which accounts for the *recognition* of the exemplar as exemplar), this does not necessarily mean that I am already conscious of these motivations. In fact, one of the significant aspects of the experience of recognizing someone as an exemplar is that through that experience I might become aware of what motivates me in life.

Emulating exemplars

How do exemplars bring out emulation? Several authors argue, as we have seen, that there is a more or less natural connection between admiration and emulation. 'More or less', because there are a number of ways in which this close connection can be disturbed. Zagzebski unpacks the ideas as follows: admiration does not elicit a desire to emulate the exemplar when we judge emulation to be impossible, and when, pained by the awareness that we lack the virtuous traits of

the exemplar, we get in the grip of spite and *ressentiment*. In this section I want to raise some issues with regard to the view that stresses this intimate relation between admiration and emulation.

Before doing so, however, it is interesting to note that Brian Warnick, in a chapter entitled "How Do Examples Bring Out Imitation?", has argued that this is actually the wrong – or at least: uninteresting – question to ask (2008, 53-82). Discussing the results of studies in neuroscience and developmental psychology, Warnick infers that action and perception are so closely connected that we are strongly inclined to perform the actions we observe other people doing (2008, 59-60). He concludes: "The key question in imitation, then, is not why some actions we perceive motivate imitative action; rather, the question is why we do not imitate all the actions we perceive. [...] [W]e should [...] ask why some examples *do not* compel us to action" (2008, 60-61).

This is a thought-provoking suggestion. However, Warnick's way of phrasing it makes clear that he conflates emulation with imitation. This is, to be clear, not a linguistic issue: I am not arguing that there is necessarily a very clear distinction between both notions.[4] What I do argue is that he is mistaken in understanding following an exemplar and attempting to express in one's own life the excellences he or she embodies, as basically the same as imitating another person's accent. The latter, Kristján Kristjánsson argues, is simply a matter of "latching on to it and copying it" (2006, 40). This amounts to "an unsophisticated, undemanding and uncritical – almost infantilizing – model of emulation" (Kristjánsson 2006, 40). In an educational context, Wouter Sanderse points out, there is a distinction between "'becoming like the teacher' and 'becoming like what the teacher exemplifies'"; that is, a distinction between mere imitation and genuine emulation (2013, 36). On Warnick's view, however, this important difference disappears and we are forced to understand imitating another person's gestures as fundamentally similar to the (perhaps humbling, frustrating, and failing) attempts to express the exemplar's courage or honesty in one's own life and actions. That is, I think, deeply implausible.

Returning to question 'How do exemplars bring out emulation?', then, I believe that Zagzebski – and Velleman, who, in an influential paper, writes that "[e]mulation […] flows directly out of admiration" (2002, 101) – is wrong to argue that admiration is the key. I agree that (understanding what is involved in) recognizing an exemplar is a precondition for (understanding what is involved in) emulating him or her. However, we have seen that admiration by itself cannot explain how we recognize exemplars, and that we need a richer account – one that involves self-awareness, identification and motivational continuity. Consequently, we also need a richer account to explain how it is that we emulate exemplars. My basic concern with an account that focuses solely on admiration is that admiration by itself is *insufficient* to explain emulation. Even in situations in which impairing conditions are absent – that is, when we judge that

emulation is possible and we are not in the grip of envy and *ressentiment* – admiration still seems insufficient for emulation.

That admiration by itself is not enough for emulation is also suggested by other authors working on these issues. Let me briefly discuss two examples. *First*, distinguishing between admiration and imitation[5], Kierkegaard writes: "What, then, is the difference between an admirer and an imitator? An imitator *is* or strives *to be* what he admires, and an admirer keeps himself personally detached, consciously or unconsciously does not discover that what is admired involves a claim upon him, to be or at least to strive to be what is admired" (1991, 241). Note that Kierkegaard's account is interestingly ambiguous on this point. On the one hand, he argues (as we have already seen) that admiration fosters a kind of self-forgetfulness that prevents us not only from properly *recognizing* an exemplar but from *emulating* him or her as well. On the other hand, he describes emulation in terms of being or striving to be what one *admires*. We might understand Kierkegaard as bringing forward a now familiar line of thought: although admiration by its nature runs counter to emulation, emulation typically involves admiration as its first moment. Explaining in more detail what is involved in emulation, Kierkegaard writes:

I promptly begin to think about myself, simply and solely to think about myself. When I am aware of the other person, this unselfish, magnanimous person, I promptly begin to say to myself: Are you such as he is? I forget him completely in my self-concentration. And when I unfortunately discover that I am not like him at all, I have so much to do in and with myself that now, yes, now I have forgotten him completely—but, no, forgotten him I have not, but for me he has become a requirement upon my life, like a sting in my soul that propels me forward, like an arrow that wounds me. In the one case, I vanish more and more, losing myself in what I admire, which becomes larger and larger; what I admire swallows me. In the other case, the other person vanishes more and more as he is assimilated into me or as I take him as one takes medicine, swallow him—but please note, because he is indeed a *requirement* upon me to give him back in replica, and I am the one who becomes larger and larger by coming more and more to resemble him (1991, 242-243).

In this rich passage, Kierkegaard describes the difference between admiration and imitation in terms of the direction of our attention. Note, moreover, how closely this understanding of imitation resembles Aristotle's account of '*zelos*': imitation is fundamentally a matter of becoming deeply aware of where one currently stands and the accompanying painful realization that one

lacks the virtuous traits of the exemplar.[6] For Kierkegaard, pain seems to be the motivating force here (aptly illustrated by the images he uses).

Second, Kristjánsson has also argued that admiration and emulation are quite different, and that the former is not sufficient to lead to the latter. Referring to Aristotle's thought, he writes that emulation consists of a kind of "emotional 'distress'" as well as "ambition" and "zeal" (2006, 44). He describes these latter aspects as "the striving to equal or excel over another person and thereby deserve the goods which the other person presently enjoys" (2006, 44).[7] He continues: "The lazy stick-in-the-mud cannot be emulous in this sense, nor can the one who merely admires another – no matter how fervent the admiration is – without making an effort to acquire the admired qualities [...]" (2006, 44). The problem with 'mere admiration', according to Kristjánsson, is that it is "an ethically impotent form of admiration: a strategy for evading a morally motivated, inwardly felt demand for self-transformation" (2006, 41). This line of thought agrees with Kierkegaard that admiration by itself seems to involve an evasive move away from emulation.

These authors call into question the intimate relation between admiration and emulation. And I think they are right: it is quite obvious that admiration is insufficient for emulation. The fact that I genuinely admire gardeners does not imply that I regard them as exemplars, and it evidently does not imply that I will actually emulate them. Naturally, the question now becomes: how, then, *do* exemplars bring out emulation?

Given my understanding of what is involved in recognizing an exemplar, this question is not difficult to answer. Recognizing someone as exemplar is a precondition for emulating him or her and, to recall, involves becoming deeply aware of my current situation (as compared to the exemplar), a relation between myself and the exemplar in which I can identify with him or her, and in which he or she appeals to motivations I already have. The last point is of course pivotal here. Recognizing someone as an exemplar implies that I am motivated to emulate him or her. An exemplar, then, brings out emulation because he or she embodies something that is the object of my existing motivations.

It might be objected that this conception of emulation as resulting from the exemplar's appeal to my existing motivational make-up implies the implausible idea that emulation is inevitable. I do not think it needs to imply this. The fact that I am motivated to perform some action does not mean that I will in fact perform that action. There might be other (stronger or more important) motivations that prevent me from emulating the exemplar. A clear and readily recognizable case is when fear, or a sudden sense of anticipatory shame, keeps me from being helpful in a public situation. Or consider the case when emulating an exemplar involves a rather drastic transformation of my current life. Emulation might then be inhibited by a set of

motivations that is strongly expressive of my *current* life, with its values, cares, and projects. Thus, although recognizing someone as one's exemplar implies that one will be motivated to emulate him or her, it does not imply that emulation is inevitable.

Can we say more about the nature of this motivation? As we have seen, Kierkegaard and Aristotle understand the motivation that is involved in emulating an exemplar as a specific kind of pain. This is a pain that arises out of the perceived distance between oneself and the exemplar. Understanding the motivation that is involved in emulation with Kierkegaard as 'a sting in my soul that propels me forward' is, I think, phenomenologically accurate, but it is important to see that the pain is itself an indication of something more fundamental. The perceived distance between my current self and the exemplar will only be experienced as painful when the exemplar embodies something that I desire or am motivated to obtain or realize. This is what I take Aristotle to express when he writes that "[e]mulation is pain caused by seeing the presence, in persons whose nature is like our own, of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire" (Aristotle 2006, 1388a30-35).[8] Although emulation typically arises out of pain, perhaps there are circumstances in which it is fueled just by the 'positive' motivation of wanting to realize the excellences that the exemplar embodies. This might be possible when the exemplar is perceived to be far removed from my current self, but not too far (since he or she would then stop being an exemplar). (Whether this is the case depends, of course, on who the exemplar is as well as on who I am.) The pain in emulation that is highlighted by Kierkegaard and Aristotle is accompanied by the idea that I myself am capable of realizing the excellences that the other embodies. Perhaps the distance between myself and some of my exemplars, however, is so large that, while they are within reach *in principle* they are so far removed from my current self that they do not, as Nietzsche puts it, aggrieve me. This would imply that, conversely, we experience the encounters with exemplars who are closest to us as most painful.

Conclusion

In this article I have aimed to shed light on the ways in which we relate to exemplars. How do we recognize exemplars? And how do they bring out emulation? I have explored these issues by engaging especially with Linda Zagzebski's important recent work on exemplarist moral theory, which stresses that admiration is the key in recognizing and emulating exemplars. Against this line of thought I have argued that although recognizing and emulating exemplars typically involve admiration, it is not sufficient to explain those phenomena. We need a richer account of the ways in which we relate to exemplars; an account that does justice to experiences that are readily

recognizable: the fact that we become deeply aware of ourselves in recognizing an exemplar, the fact that we are able to identify with him or her, and the fact that he or she appeals to motivations I already have.

In the introduction I wrote that this article is devoted not to an analysis of *moral* exemplarity but of exemplarity in general. It will be clear that the way we understand exemplarity in general has important implications for our understanding of moral exemplarity. Zagzebski draws out one particularly important implication of her own views, writing about her exemplarist virtue theory that "[t]he perennial problem of why be moral does not arise in this theory" (2015b, 266). The reason she believes this problem does not arise is that the foundation of the theory is generated by admiration: "[a]s long as we admire moral persons in the way indicated in Haidt's studies, admiration moves us to want to be moral" (2015b, 266). If what I have written is correct, the issue of amoralism remains a challenge, even when *every* agent in fact admires moral persons. Not only because admiration is insufficient for recognizing and emulating (moral) exemplars, but also, it seems to me, because we cannot be certain beforehand that a desire to be moral is part of every agent's existing motivational make-up.

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1 I write that the recognition of exemplarity *typically* involves admiration, since – although there seems to be a very strong connection between both – I do not want to rule out the possibility of other ways of recognizing exemplarity.

2 Kierkegaard published this book under the pseudonym 'Anti-Climacus'. For reasons of clarity, however, I will refer to Kierkegaard as the author in this article.

3 Admittedly, the idea of 'an important degree of particularity' is vague. However, I believe we cannot phrase it more accurately. It seems impossible to formulate a principle that explains just how general motivations and projects can be to be able to give rise to the motivation to resemble this particular

person.

4 The classical notions '*imitatio*' and '*mimesis*' are rich concepts, which have also been used to refer to the idea of following a model and expressing the excellences he or she embodies in one's own life. This is, for example, the wayThomas a Kempis understands '*imitatio*' in *De imitatione Christi*.

5 'Emulation' would have been more appropriate as a translation of the Danish *Efterfølgelse*, as especially the extensivepassage below makes clear.

6 Drawing on Aristotle, Aaron Ben-Ze'ev distinguishes admiration from emulation in this way as well. He explains that "in admiration the subject's attention is not on her inferior situation, but rather on the object's excellent achievements, which do not hurt the subject's own self-image" (Ben-Ze'ev 2003, 118).

7 Recall that emulation, contrary to envy, does not want to *rid* the other person of his or her goods.

8 It could be argued, however, that regarding a thing as good and knowing that it is highly valued can be separated from actually desiring it. While I believe that argument is plausible, I take it that for Aristotle these cannot be separated.