

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE EXCELLENT  
AN EXPLORATION OF MORAL EXEMPLARISM  
THEORY

By

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Title of Study: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE EXCELLENT: AN EXPLORATION OF MORAL EXEMPLARISM THEORY

Major Field: PHILOSOPHY

Abstract: Dr. Linda Zagzebski's virtue theory, Exemplarist Moral Theory, proposes that through the emotion of admiration we seek moral exemplars who we then emulate and become virtuous ourselves. It is those whom we have admiration for upon reflection that we consider to be exemplars. However, admiration is an emotion and thus is susceptible to cultural forces and other problems. My hypothesis is that if admiration is a tool that allows us to detect moral goodness, then there needs to be a natural orientation to the good that human beings naturally have. I use Thomas Aquinas moral anthropology and Philippa Foot's naturalized virtue ethics to give this claim a theoretical background. I then use this theoretical background to make arguments that will hopefully vindicate the emotion of admiration and also Zagzebski's moral theory. My research gives an overview of Zagzebski's theory, then brings up some problems with the faculty of admiration. Next, I outline Aquinas's and Foot's virtue ethics before finally applying their theories to the problems I brought up previously.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Zagzebski's Moral Exemplar Theory .....	1
2. Zagzebski's Virtue Epistemology.....	3
3. Problem and Solutions .....	4
4. A Problem in Christian Ethics .....	7
5. What Do I Want to Gain Out of This Paper?.....	9
II. ZAGZEBSKI'S MORAL EXEMPLAR EXEGESIS .....	11
1. Introduction.....	11
2. Framework: Theory of Direct Reference.....	12
3. Theory of Direct Reference and Exemplars.....	13
4. Exemplars and Moral Terms.....	21
5. Emulation and the Good Life.....	23
6. Conclusion .....	26
III. DIFFICULTIES FOR MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY .....	27
1. Introduction.....	27
2. Aristotelian Problem .....	28
3. Cultural Problem.....	30
4. Humean Problem .....	44
5. Moral Luck Problem.....	47
6. A Problem in Christian Ethics as Well .....	52
7. Conclusion .....	57
IV. AQUINAS, FOOT, AND THE ORIENTATION TO THE GOOD.....	60
1. Introduction.....	60
2. Aquinas's Metaphysics.....	61
3. Aquinas and the Natural Law .....	66
4. Aquinas on Virtue.....	75
5. Conclusion on Aquinas .....	90
6. Philippa Foot and <i>Natural Goodness</i> .....	90
7. Conclusion on Foot.....	96

Chapter	Page
V. EXEMPLARISM AND SOLVING THE ISSUES.....	98
1. Vindicating Exemplarism .....	98
2. Solving the Issues .....	109
2.1. Solving the Aristotelian Problem.....	110
2.2. Solving the Cultural Problem.....	113
2.3. Solving the Humean Problem .....	117
2.4. Solving the Moral Luck Problem.....	118
3. Solving the Problem in Christian Ethics.....	121
4. Conclusion .....	125
 VI. CONCLUSION.....	 127
 REFERENCES .....	 134

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1. Zagzebski's Moral Exemplar Theory**

In Sergio Leone's classic western, which this essay appropriates its name from, there are three characters the film follows: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. All of these characters are introduced by a title, but it is only after they have done some act which signifies their title is correctly given. What leads to this phenomenon where we can point to someone and say, just by looking at their actions, *that* is a good person? It seems that ever since we were young, we were always concerned with heroes and people who do the good, we would even consider these heroes and people as "good people." We find these sorts of people in fiction and stories, such as Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, Gandalf, Harry Potter, and in (nearly) any comic book. There are great people in history too; Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Holocaust-rescuers, and of course, many others. In religion, you do not have to look far to see many good people such as Jesus, Confucius, Buddha, many of the saints that are canonized in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, along with other holy people that have been part of other religions.

However, what do all these people have in common? We could paint a broad stroke and say that all of them are "good people." But what makes them good? Certainly,

there is a difference between the goodness of Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, and Luke Skywalker? What about Buddha and the Holocaust rescuers? We also do not want to discredit the goodness of one person or group in comparison to another, as that would be disingenuous to our judgment that all of these are good people.

This is exactly what Dr. Linda Zagzebski deals within her ethical theory known as “Exemplarist Moral Theory.” Simply put, this theory claims that through the emotion of admiration we detect and thus imitate exemplars of excellency. According to Zagzebski, moral exemplars are not just great; they are excellent.<sup>1</sup> The saint, sage, and the hero are all forms of exemplars according to Zagzebski. What’s even more interesting about her theory is that we are more certain about them being admirable than what makes them admirable.<sup>2</sup>

Zagzebski’s ethical theory is foundational in structure, which means that it is constructed out a single point of origin.<sup>3</sup> She sees this as an advantage amongst the other ethical frameworks, as there is simplicity and elegance, along with a concrete foundation, which is the people we admire upon reflection.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned earlier, these exemplars are identified on the emotion of admiration. The emotion of admiration drives the theory, and exemplars are what she calls “the hook.”<sup>5</sup> The identity of exemplars is easier to conceptualize than any grounded moral theory—the people mentioned above are easier to identify than the definitions of happiness, the good life, or moral duty.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Zagzebski, Linda. *Exemplarist Moral Theory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

2. Ibid, 10.

3. Ibid, 8-9.

4. Ibid, 10.

5. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 8.

6. Ibid, 10.



Instead of defining both value and deontic terms and then finding people who fit into these definitions, Exemplarist Moral Theory proposes moral terms as indexical. This is based on the theory of direct reference developed by Putnam and Kripke, which essentially refers to terms by demonstratively explaining things. Moral language is defined in reference to paradigmatically good people. This goes past a mere descriptivist account, which is beneficial when creating a moral theory. For example, a virtue is “a trait we admire in an exemplar. It is a trait that makes a person like that admirable in a certain respect.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Zagzebski’s Virtue Epistemology

Zagzebski argues that epistemology and morality have always been intertwined.<sup>8</sup> We can connect this to her moral exemplarist theory, as she develops epistemological structures through a virtue-based approach. This will be a different approach to most epistemic theories, as they take act-based moral theory as their models. Zagzebski will argue for a virtue-based epistemic theory, which will have certain advantages over a belief-based theory. These will parallel the advantages that a virtue-based ethical theory has over an act-based one.<sup>9</sup> Whereas most contemporary epistemological structures use either a deontological or consequentialist basis for justifying one’s beliefs, Zagzebski focuses on the inner character of the person.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 21-22.

8. Zagzebski, Linda, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-2.

9. *Ibid*, 1-2.

10. *Ibid*, 7-8.

Her virtue epistemology may be able to shed some light on her virtue ethics and moral exemplar theory. There are two reasons that this might be useful. First, Zagzebski's main goal in her virtue epistemology is to take Aristotle's *phronesis* and turn it into an epistemological theory. Aristotle connected the intellectual virtue *phronesis* to all other virtues, and Zagzebski does the same. In current debates about epistemology, there seems to be a push that it is not strictly rule-governed, which puts into question the idea of Justified True Belief. This can be applied to morality as well, as many moral theorists are saying that morality is not necessarily rule-governed either. Using *phronesis* in both of these areas may be able to break free from rule-based epistemology and morality, as *phronesis* gives us insights into particular situations in our experience.

Second, since admiration is an emotion, it will be important to see how Zagzebski defines the concept of emotions. According to Zagzebski, emotions have affective components that are supposed to "fit" their object. More importantly, emotions could be a reason for doing an action. Many argue that virtue is tied into having the right motives and dispositions which justify an action. Zagzebski defines a justified reason for doing an act as "the basis of which a rational person can act or believe."<sup>11</sup> If we take this definition of reason to be true, then it does not need to hold that certain propositions are true, but only that a rational person would use it in supporting a belief. It is not on the basis if propositions are true but that a rational person would accept them as justifications for an action.

If we admire someone epistemically, then we must believe that their beliefs are true—and how they form beliefs must be the correct way of forming beliefs that we then

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11. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 139-40.

act on.<sup>12</sup> It is through the emotion of admiration, which has an affective component, that can be the basis for one's beliefs and actions. We will see how her views on emotion and *phronesis* enter into her work, both in her exemplar theory and responding to the problems that will be brought up in this paper.

### 3. Problems and Solutions

However, Zagzebski could run into some problems that Aristotle ran into in his own virtue ethics. Aristotle defines virtue as a mean between extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency. How one understands this mean relative to themselves is “by which a person with practical judgment [*phronesis*] would determine it.”<sup>13</sup> However, it is only by the access of a virtuous person or practical judgment can we come to know the mean between the extremes. It seems that we would need to seek out a practically wise person by already being practically wise. How does one figure out who is a virtuous person without this virtue?

Even though Zagzebski's understanding of direct reference theory may be able to solve this charge normally brought against Aristotle, this raises some potential problems in her own ethical theory. For Zagzebski, admiration is not something we choose based on coming to know who is admirable, it is something we naturally do. We then develop our understanding of morality based on those exemplars we naturally admire. This means her theory depends on trusting our faculty of admiration. How does one trust it? Is it a reliable guide, despite people and nations who have admired Hitler, Stalin, and Nero?

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12. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 147.

13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), 1106b35.

Part of this paper will explore just this issue with Zagzebski's moral theory. Framing this as a more epistemologically charged question, we can ask: Are we able to accurately track morally excellent people? How do we guarantee that admiration will track moral goodness? Since admiration is an emotion, it is susceptible to being molded by cultural and societal forces. How confident are we in the emotion of admiration?

Zagzebski claims that there are two ways in which we can respond to things we call "good"—either by admiring them or desiring them.<sup>14</sup> Since admiration is an emotion, she argues that emotions have objects. It is on reflection we see if said emotion "fits" the object it is "gravitating towards."<sup>15</sup> However, if our conception of good is skewed towards something that is not (such a Hitler being a good person) then our reflective judgment will confirm our feeling of admiration. There needs to be a fundamental basis which justifies our admiration for virtuous people, while also enabling us to say that admiration for vicious people is morally wrong.

Aristotle argues that emotions have to fit the circumstance in order to hit the mean. This presupposes that there is an objective rationale which sets this mean in place that we strive to hit. However, he claims that we judge this mean "by which a person with practical judgment would determine it."<sup>16</sup> This means that the mean cannot be found *a priori* and must come from finding the virtuous person. According to Zagzebski, it is through the emotion of admiration that we detect these practically wise people. However, Aristotle would say that since admiration is an emotion there is a vice/deficiency for it and that admiration has an appropriate mean. However, to find the mean, we need to find

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14. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 30.

15. *Ibid*, 32-3.

16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a 1-2.

the virtuous person and detect them by admiration, thus giving us a problem of epistemic circularity. Exemplar moral theory does not solve this problem, but only magnifies it.

One way to solve the issue is to argue that people have a natural detection for goodness. However, it is not just some subjective goodness, but perhaps an objective good that is not dependent on one's personal preference. Saint Thomas Aquinas's moral anthropology suggests that we have a natural orientation to the good. This basic desire will hopefully give us a capacity to recognize the good when it appears before us.

Another person who may help us with this problem is Philippa Foot. She, like Aquinas, argues that humanity has a natural desire for goodness and happiness. Although she looks at it from a more naturalistic and atheistic framework, she may be able to shed some light on this problem as well. I hope that these philosophers' naturalized virtue theories can create a theoretical basis from which we can claim that humans have a natural capacity to detect moral goodness when encountered in other people.

#### **4. A Problem in Christian Ethics**

In her opening chapter of *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, Zagzebski discusses how Christian ethics is a natural candidate for an exemplarist approach because of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the moral exemplar in Christian teaching.<sup>17</sup> This leads to the second problem, which builds off the first one. Within the Christian worldview and metaphysics, Jesus Christ is seen as the perfect representation of human goodness and the perfect incarnate good. We encounter the perfect incarnate good through narrative accounts. Although we may have a natural propensity to admire this perfect goodness when we encounter it, do the discrepancies between narrative accounts, both canonical

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17. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 23.

and apocryphal, make it impossible, or even highly unlikely, for Jesus to be a moral exemplar?

In Bart Ehrman's book *Jesus Before the Gospels*, he examines different interpretations of Jesus throughout history, specifically how he was remembered when the gospels were being written. One of the ways he goes about this is through the idea of both individual and collective memory, as he hopes to answer his own question by way of understanding how memory works. "When we remember the past, whether we are thinking simply our individual thoughts or are reconstructing our previous history as a collective whole, as a society, we do so, always and necessarily, in light of our present situation. The past is not a fixed entity back there in time."<sup>18</sup> This means that our memory, in a way, is malleable and helps us with our present situation. However, he also will ask and answer if changing these stories as they were told and retold is necessarily a bad thing, as we seem to change stories depending on certain situations and who we are telling it to.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is no different from those who wrote the gospels and their apocryphal counterparts.

Ehrman gives examples of how Jesus is remembered by the earliest Christians, whether it be through the apocryphal gospels or the discrepancies of the canonical ones. However, this all proves the point to my question; these interpretations and memories are vastly different from the peace-loving, kind, gentle, savior of humanity that we are presented with today, and they often contradict this portrayal. Perhaps Ehrman will say

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18. Ehrman, Bart. *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented their Stories of the Savior* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 7.

19. *Ibid*, 13.

that these different interpretations do not matter, but they certainly make it more difficult to imitate an exemplar from a religion that says things like “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an *example*, so that you might follow his steps.”<sup>20</sup> The gospels and epistles are filled with imagery and verses telling us to be like Christ; but how are we to do so if we cannot even know who he truly was? I hope Ehrman’s conclusion can give us some light on this answer. Perhaps Zagzebski has the ability to answer this in her own way, too.

## **5. What Do I Want to Gain Out of This Paper?**

My main goal is to answer both of these questions and provide an understanding of who we are as people. This paper brings many of my interests together; ethics, metaethics, philosophy of religion, and moral education. However, what is the question behind the questions of this paper? Quite frankly, I want to understand how people become good people. Is there something innate in us that draws us to some eternal good that is showcased by exemplars? Is it possible for there to be some objective right and wrong that is emulated, commanded, and adhered by the best people throughout history and fiction?

The first question is definitely being driven by the latter question and the more fundamental issues it raises. But what drives the second one? I think it would be a bit of an overstatement to say that the status of Christian Ethics is at stake, but it certainly could be a bit shaken by these questions. Jesus, whether you are a devout Christian, or just interested in religion, is a character many people look up too. It is not an understatement to say he may be the most impactful person to ever exist. However, for most of history he

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20. 1 Peter 2:21, my emphasis.

has only existed in terms of stories, which were passed down in oral traditions to subsequent generations, and now lives in the collective memories of those all over the world. Can we truly be like Jesus without fully knowing who he actually was? Is any religion where an individual is at the cornerstone able to withstand this scrutiny? I hope to come to a firmer foundation on this question, as I believe it will be fundamental to Christian ethics that claim we need to be like Christ. How can we be like him if we do not even know who he is? I hope to answer this deeper question by answering the one's above.



## CHAPTER II

### ZAGZEBSKI'S MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY EXEGESIS

#### 1. Introduction

Dr. Linda Zagzebski has developed a theory that she calls Exemplarist Moral Theory. Zagzebski's "theory of theory" is that moral theories help track moral progress.<sup>21</sup> They also are abstract structures which justify, systematize, and simplify our moral beliefs and practices. Theories help us understand the domain of morality as a whole.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, she claims that her theory is foundational in structure, meaning that it is constructed out of a single point of origin.<sup>23</sup> Like most foundational theories, Moral Exemplar Theory has the advantage of simplicity and elegance when compared to other moral theories.

The foundation for Zagzebski's theory is the people we have admiration for upon reflection. Exemplars are identified by the emotion of admiration, as Zagzebski points out that it is easier to identify exemplars than conceptualize any grounded moral theory—Jesus, Socrates, and Confucius are all easier to identify than happiness, the good life, or doing one's duty. In fact, we are more certain about them being admirable than what

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21. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 4.

22. *Ibid*, 5-7.

23. *Ibid*, 9.

makes them admirable.<sup>24</sup> The emotion of admiration drives the theory, while exemplars are the “hook.”<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Framework: Theory of Direct Reference

The framework on which Zagzebski builds her theory is from Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke’s theory of direct reference. The theory of direct reference goes against the prior descriptivist accounts in semantics. According to the descriptivist theory, to know the meaning of a word is the ability to grasp a descriptive concept that corresponds to the meaning given in a dictionary. The user of the term would then designate whatever fits the description. A user who grasps the concept does two things: they (a) mentally grasp that description of the concept and (b) refer to objects that satisfy the description. When people are talking about specific concepts, they are referring to the things in the world that fit the description in their head.<sup>26</sup>

However, this reference scheme comes into problems with proper nouns, such as “water” or “dog.” We can refer to things as a certain kind without going through a descriptive basis or meaning. We do not need to define water as H<sub>2</sub>O because H<sub>2</sub>O was not an essential description of water until recent centuries, yet we do not think the discovery of H<sub>2</sub>O changes the meaning of the word “water.” Instead, direct reference theory explains more natural terms, meaning that speakers can refer to whatever is the same kind of thing indexically. Water is whatever is the same liquid as *that*, “dog” is whatever is the same species of animals as *that*.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 10.

25. *Ibid*, 8.

26. *Ibid*, 9-10.

27. *Ibid*, 11-12.

This means that semantic success is not from understanding the descriptive basis, but the ability to connect to other speakers in the community who can identify  $x$ , while also connecting to those who understand  $x$ 's deeper features. Using the example of dog above, semantic success does not need to be able to grasp the concept of dog in its deeper features, such as biological specifics. Instead, one can be able to identify a dog as whatever the species of animal like *that*. One can then connect their concept of dog to experts who know what makes a dog a dog.

An implication for the semantic success of direct reference theory is that meaning is determined outside of the mind of the individual speaker. Putnam argued that the concepts of our thoughts and speech when talking about natural terms is independently determined in two ways: (1) It is determined by the way the world is. An example he uses is H<sub>2</sub>O, and how when we think or talk about "water" we are determined to think about H<sub>2</sub>O because the fact that water is H<sub>2</sub>O is not an idea of our minds. (2) What we talk about also depends upon a linguistic network in which ordinary speakers defer to experts. Zagzebski wants to understand how this semantic externalism may be applied and defended for moral terms.<sup>28</sup>

### **3. Theory of Direct Reference and Exemplars**

Both Putnam and Kripke applied this theory to linguistics and epistemology, but Zagzebski believes the theory has validity in the moral sphere. Much like direct reference protects against a form of skepticism of natural kinds, so too does exemplarist ethical theory protect against a form of moral skepticism. "What makes somebody good is

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28. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 14.

having the properties that make that person good.”<sup>29</sup> Zagzebski states that when we see moral terms such as “good,” “good person,” “virtue,” “duty,” and “good life,” they are generally treated with a descriptivist account that Putnam and Kripke both rejected. “Moral philosophers have almost always attempted to identify the conceptual content of moral terms descriptively, and to identify the referents of the terms by the satisfaction of the given descriptions.”<sup>30</sup> She cites two problems that arise from this descriptivist account: (1) a lack of an agreed-upon definition of a moral term, which leads to disputes because certain things do not fit a descriptivist account. (2) A skeptical outlook that stems from a lack of an agreed-upon definition. She hopes that using Putnam and Kripke’s theory of the semantics of natural kind terms can avoid descriptivist problems in moral theory.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of giving a descriptivist account of moral terms, Zagzebski proposes that these basic moral terms are anchored in exemplars of moral goodness, and then directly referenced by people.

Good persons are persons *like that*, just as gold is stuff *like that*. Picking out exemplars fixes the reference of the term “good person” without the need for descriptive concepts. It is not necessary for ordinary people engaged in moral practice to know the nature of good persons—what makes them good. In fact, it is not necessary that anybody knows what makes a good person good in order to successfully refer to good persons, any more than it was necessary that anybody knew what makes water *water* in order to successfully refer to water before the advent of molecular theory.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Zagzebski, Linda. *Divine Motivation Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 52.

30. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 14.

31. *Ibid*, 14-15.

32. *Ibid*, 15.

Zagzebski argues that there must be a socially recognized ability to pick out “instances of a relevant kind.”<sup>33</sup> According to her, for moral exemplars, we have a multitude of different abilities that are a part of our daily practices, such as telling and retelling narratives of moral exemplars. Through narratives, both of fictional and non-fictional people, we come to see people who are (and who are not) worth imitating. Zagzebski believes that exemplars are these people, the ones that we tell stories about in hopes to imitate them. “Exemplars are those persons, the persons who are most imitable or most deserving of emulation. They are most imitable because they are most admirable.”<sup>34</sup>

Since admiration is an emotion, it might be important to see what she thinks an emotion is. Zagzebski’s position is that an emotion is “a state that has both cognitive and affective aspects that are not separable states.”<sup>35</sup> Affective states are an instance of “conscious feeling.”<sup>36</sup> “An emotion is a state of feeling in a certain *way* about something or *at* something or *toward* something of a certain description.”<sup>37</sup> Emotions are conscious feeling with intentional objects, and it is this intentionality that separates them from moods and feeling. The intentional object of an emotion is what Zagzebski refers to as “thick affective concepts.” This is when the agent represents the intentional object of their emotions with their emotion. “The thick properties of the situation are properties of the intentional object of the feeling, not the cause of the feeling.”<sup>38</sup>

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33. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 15.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 59.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 60.

38. *Ibid.*, 61.

A thick concept is acquired through experiences of having a certain emotion in situations in which an intentional object was presented directly to an agent's consciousness. An example of this would be the judgment of something or someone being funny or amusing. We associate the emotion of humor and joy with an intentional object, such as a comedian, or a movie. Throughout our experience, the judgment of something being amusing gets associated with the emotions of joy and humor. The primary use of the emotion continues to be derived from the experience of that emotion. "One cannot possess a thick concept without being in, or having been in, a state that is both cognitive and affective."<sup>39</sup> Affectivity, however, is necessary but not sufficient for an emotional state to be motivating. Affectivity is necessary because it is what gets us going, but it is what the emotion is directed at that motivates us.<sup>40</sup> "There has to be something specific in the world around us toward which affect is directed in order for us to have anything to which to respond."<sup>41</sup> Zagzebski uses the example of pity. In a state of pity, someone is seen as pitiful, and the feeling of pity motivates one to respond to the emotion of pity, usually by taking action, such as stopping the suffering which is causing the pity.

Continuing, there seems to be an evaluative aspect of emotions. A judgment such as "they are pitiful" is an evaluative judgment expressing the emotional state of pity.<sup>42</sup> According to Zagzebski, when we make these evaluative judgments, we are in an intrinsically motivating state. Moreover, this judgment expresses a state that is "both

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39. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 64.

40. *Ibid*, 71.

41. *Ibid*.

42. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 75.

cognitive and motivating in such a way that the two aspects of the state are not detachable.”

<sup>43</sup> “An emotion is good or right or fitting just in case a state of affairs has the thick property that the agent sees it as having in the emotional state.”<sup>44</sup> An emotion is good in the sense that it “fits” its intentional object.

It is through the emotion of admiration that we can seek out exemplars. According to Zagzebski, there are two ways in which we can respond to things we call “good.” We can either admire them or desire them.<sup>45</sup> Admiration is at the heart of Zagzebski’s theory, as she hopes that it can “derive the good in the sense of the desirable from the good in the sense of the admirable.”<sup>46</sup> Admiration, like all emotions, has objects, which separates them from moods and feelings.<sup>47</sup> Emotions have objects, and we judge that emotions should fit their objects. This means that what (or who) we admire may or may not be admirable. Admiration also has an affective component, contrasting it from other emotions. Zagzebski believes that admiration is not only affective but motivating as well.<sup>48</sup>

Zagzebski argues that because of this motivating concept, the person who is admiring will want to emulate the person at whom the emotion is directed.<sup>49</sup> This applies to moral and non-moral categories. Zagzebski cites a study by Johnathan Haidt who studied the emotion of admiration from a psychological point of view. However, Haidt calls desire to emulate those who do moral acts “elevation.” “For the other-praising

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43. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 75.

44. *Ibid*, 76.

45. *Ibid*, 30.

46. *Ibid*, 31.

47. *Ibid*, 32.

48. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 33.

49. *Ibid*, 43.

emotion, [Haidt] invents the term elevation that he says arises from witnessing the moral excellence of others that does not benefit the self.”<sup>50</sup> Zagzebski concludes that the invented term “elevation” is just another term for what she is describing in her theory of admiration. The studies of Haidt and his colleague Algoe indicated

that both the emotion they call “elevation,” directed at exemplars of moral excellence, and the emotion they call “admiration,” directed at exemplars of non-moral excellence such as skill and talent, motivate the subject to emulate the person at whom the emotion is directed in some way, with the difference that admiration for natural talent energizes the people to work harder to succeed at their own goals, whereas elevation leads them to emulate the moral goals of the other.<sup>51</sup>

Although there are some differences between Haidt’s view of elevation and Zagzebski’s view of admiration, such as Haidt focusing on moral actions that do not benefit the self, such as generosity, charity, etc.,<sup>52</sup> Zagzebski finds his study to be pertinent to her theory of admiration.

Next, taking this understanding of admiration, we can start to see how we are supposed to respond to admired people. Admiration involves an awareness of a superior good in another person.<sup>53</sup> Zagzebski claims that the focus of the emotion (admiration) needs to be on the person’s possession of the admired good itself, which will allow the admirer to feel uplifted, and then want to emulate the admired person. She says that the admired person is not a competitor but an “ideal self” in this instance.<sup>54</sup>

What is important is just that we do have an ability [to differentiate between people to imitate and who not to], and that we have it prior to the development of evaluative concepts. I [Zagzebski] surmise that the move

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50. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 40.

51. *Ibid*, 41-2.

52. Zagzebski argues that one can still feel motivated to act like another person whose actions you benefit from. She argues that Jewish people rescued in the Holocaust were “elevated” by their rescuer’s acts. *Ibid*, 42.

53. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 55.

54. *Ibid*.



from “I want to be like R and not like S” to “R is better than S” is not only genetically primitive, but also basic to moral thinking.<sup>55</sup>

This imitation is ingrained in us at an early age, we become reflective of whom we want to imitate even before we have the ability to make evaluative concepts.

But who exactly are exemplars? Zagzebski claims that we admire people who have developed traits, not necessarily people with inborn talents and skills. We admired acquired excellences differently than natural talents and characteristics. Zagzebski suggests that “we admire the person for performing admirable acts when we believe that the source of the act is something internal to the person’s psychology, and it is acquired rather than inborn.”<sup>56</sup> What this means is the exemplars cannot be naturally gifted at being excellent, but they have to acquire it. This is because, in order for someone to be an exemplar, one has to be imitable. Natural talent, although impressive, only inspires us to work harder, not to copy or imitate that specific talent. An exemplar and what makes them excellent must be able to be achieved by those that admire them.

Some other stipulations are necessary to be called an exemplar. First, exemplars need to have opportunities to be exemplary. Many would agree that without certain opportunities the exemplars would not be allowed to rise to moral heights.<sup>57</sup> Next, exemplars need to be consistently admirable. Zagzebski proposes that

the root of the idea of a trait of character is in our disposition to admiration. We admire persons who have a strong and consistent disposition to act admirably more than persons who act admirably inconsistently ... if most people do not act consistently, it follows that most people are not exemplars.<sup>58</sup>

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55. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 53.

56. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 62.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, 63.

According to Zagzebski, exemplars need to be people who are consistent, and able to rise to moral heights in opportunities they are given. More importantly, they need to be imitable, so people who admire them can also rise to moral heights when opportunities come their way.

Furthermore, Zagzebski surmises that we do not need to wholly *a priori* know what makes an exemplar worthy of admiration. “The question for exemplarism is whether we know in advance of observation that being an admirable person consists in having the same deep psychological structure as these exemplars.”<sup>59</sup> However, we do not need to *a priori* know “the sameness of admirability. is the sameness of deep psychological structure as the exemplars we have identified.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, she opts to say that the identity of exemplars is determined by our reflexive admiration, our observation of them, and finding out what it is that we admire about them.<sup>61</sup>

Zagzebski defines exemplars “as those people whom we see, on close observation and reflection, to be admirable in all or most of their acquired traits.”<sup>62</sup> One of the primary ways of transmitting observational data of exemplars is through narratives and stories.<sup>63</sup> Zagzebski believes that fictional stories of exemplars are just as important and beneficial to moral development as historical exemplars. “What exemplars do for us and our moral conceptions is largely irrelevant to their actual existence.”<sup>64</sup> Other ways in which exemplars can be observed is by personal experience and can even make the

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59. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 65

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, 66.

64. Ibid.

exemplar more personal to us. This also gives us a personal look at who the exemplar is, not just what they are like.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4. Exemplars and Moral Terms

Zagzebski argues that the meaning of “good person” is determined by exemplars who are outside the mind. Exemplars, or the admirable persons, are those whom we refer directly to through the emotion of admiration and through socially constructed networks for linking speakers in a community to exemplars. The meaning of terms related to the moral life are determined by characteristics of moral exemplars.<sup>66</sup> However, the meaning of an exemplar, which is a good person who we admire, can change over time, it is not a fixed essence. What exemplars do have in common, though, is that they are admirable.<sup>67</sup> What this means is that there is not a fixed standard that an exemplar needs to conform to achieve in order to become an exemplar. Instead, what makes people like Jesus, Socrates, Gandhi, and Buddha all exemplars despite living in different times, places, and teaching different principles is that they all are admirable.

Observation leads us to start admiring them, as we admire their behavior and characteristics. This admirable behavior needs to endure over time, along with being consistent, this is what Zagzebski refers to as a deep disposition in the exemplar’s psychology.<sup>68</sup> “A good trait of character is *a deep and enduring acquired psychological disposition that is the source of acts and other behaviors that we find admirable.*”<sup>69</sup>

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65. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 68.

66. *Ibid*, 100.

67. *Ibid*, 104.

68. *Ibid*, 106.

69. *Ibid*, 107.

Connecting these two definitions, Zagzebski calls virtue a “deep and enduring acquired trait that we admire on reflection and which includes a motive disposition.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Zagzebski, exemplars have positive characteristics that they then act on, which is what she calls virtues.<sup>71</sup> Virtue is an acquired excellence of the person “in a deep and lasting sense” through habitual processes.<sup>72</sup> Virtue has two components, a motivational component, and a success component. A motive is an emotion that initiates and guides an action to produce a desired end. “A motivation is best defined, not as a way of acting in circumstances specifiable in advance, but in terms of the end at which it aims and the emotion that underlies it.”<sup>73</sup> Motivations can become essential parts of a person’s character that provides them with a certain direction that leads to appropriate actions in given circumstances.

This brings us to the second component regarding virtue, which is a success component. The motivational component means that we have an end, whether it be internal or external. “A person does not have a virtue unless she is reliable about bringing about the end that is the aim of the motivational component of the virtue.”<sup>74</sup> Zagzebski claims that both of these components can be subjected to the admiration test. She connects these to exemplarism by defining a motive disposition as “a component of a virtue [that] is a disposition to have an emotion like that of an exemplar and to aim to bring about the end the exemplar has.”<sup>75</sup> Virtue, then, is an acquired trait that we admire

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70. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 108.

71. *Ibid*, 110.

72. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 135-6.

73. *Ibid*, 136.

74. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 110.

75. *Ibid*, 108.

upon reflection, which consists of being able to direct one to a certain end and reliable success in reaching that end.<sup>76</sup>

## 5. Emulation and the Good Life

“Exemplars not only show us what morality is, but they make us want to be moral, but they show us how to do it.”<sup>77</sup> Moral exemplarism focuses on a guide to moral training, both on the outside, such as moral education, and the inside, as we attempt to improve ourselves morally. Exemplarism teaches us to be moral by the process of imitation.<sup>78</sup> “Emulation is a form of imitation in which the emulated person is perceived as a model in some respect.”<sup>79</sup> We seek our desired self in admired person, which makes us want to emulate them. Through the imagination, we can start to take on those roles and ideals that exemplars show us, which helps us start to become closer to the ideal.<sup>80</sup> “We would not be able to see the exemplar as an ideal self without a basic similarity in psychic structures between ourselves and the exemplar.”<sup>81</sup>

One of the goods that Zagzebski describes in *Divine Motivation Theory* is Rawls’s idea of the good for human beings. Exemplars, who are paradigmatically good people that we want to emulate, have certain motives which connect to the things that are good for us. These can be certain emotions, health, knowledge, friendships, peaceful communities, etc. However, just because something is good does not explain why it is

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76. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 113.

77. Ibid, 129.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid, 131.

80. Ibid, 136-7.

81. Ibid, 138.

good. “If something can be good for an x and not for a y, there must be different standards for x’s and y’s, and that standard needs to be specified.”<sup>82</sup>

Zagzebski argues that this “standard” is inherited from the Greek conception of the *telos*, which she defines as “a form of good that is more basic than its means or constituents. A *telos* is a final end.”<sup>83</sup> If the standard is a *telos*, then to say that something is good for us is either as a means of achieving the *telos* or as a requirement for the *telos*. However, according to Zagzebski, a *telos* cannot be the intrinsic good, as final ends cannot be the most basic form of the good. “The *telos* must be related to intrinsically good motivational states that have *telos* as their end. What is good for us in this sense is extrinsic.”<sup>84</sup>

Zagzebski connects the idea of “what is good for us” to the exemplary good person. “What is good for us...be derived from an exemplar of goodness.”<sup>85</sup> She says that the good person can serve as a “standard of perfection against which the rest of us are measured.”<sup>86</sup> What is good for us is to emulate the exemplar. This then connects to the Aristotelian idea of *eudemonia*, or human flourishing, which many virtue ethics say is what is intrinsically good for us. Instead, Zagzebski defines human flourishing as living the kind of life the exemplar desires or aims.<sup>87</sup>

Another central claim in Zagzebski’s exemplar theory is Aristotle’s understanding of the virtue known as *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Aristotle connects *phronesis* to the

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82. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 110-11.

83. Ibid, 111.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid, 113.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid, 113-14.

moral virtues. Aristotle claimed that one cannot have the moral virtues without *phronesis*, and that one who has it has the moral virtues.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Aristotle contends that *phronesis* is a social operation, both in the manner of acquisition and operation. As we have seen, virtue is learned by imitation. We imitate those in the community that are practically wise.<sup>89</sup>

Interestingly enough, Zagzebski's virtue ethics differentiate between acts such as one who has a good will and acts from a good will.

An act has a form of value when it is the type of act a virtuous person would do, but it is even better if it is produced in the same way that a virtuous person produced it, that is, with a virtuous motive.<sup>90</sup>

It seems that we must not only do actions that exemplars do, but also create in us similar dispositions and wants of ends. This is done by *phronesis*, which deliberates between good ends and motives and how to fulfill those ends. If we strive to emulate an exemplar, we need to systematically understand how they see/saw the world.

Zagzebski also argues that we want to have models of good lives, both for practical and theoretical reasons. In terms of practicality,

we want to have an idea of the kind of life to which we can aspire, and the kinds of lives worthy of being the goal of people to whom we are connected by family or community, or whose lives are affected by our financial choices and our choice of political leaders.<sup>91</sup>

In terms of a theoretical desire, Zagzebski raises the question “what is the connection between a good life in the sense of an admirable life or a life of virtue, and a good life in the sense of a desirable life, or a life of happiness or flourishing?”<sup>92</sup> Moral Exemplar

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88. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 211.

89. Ibid, 228-31.

90. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 28-9.

91. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 156.

92. Ibid, 156-7.

Theory's answer to this, of course, is that "a desirable life is one that a good person would desire." But what is a desirable life? Using the theory of direct reference, we can see that it is a life desire by persons *like that*.<sup>93</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Zagzebski's Moral Exemplar Theory is a virtue theory that supposes we seek out exemplars and imitate them. Using the theory of direct reference as her framework, Zagzebski is able to build a theory in which we define moral terms by admirable people. "In exemplarism, I have proposed that we have initial referential intentions applied to indexically identified objects—admirable persons or persons *like that*."<sup>94</sup> Indexically identifying exemplars is through the emotion of admiration, which is an affective state that has an object—people that we admire upon reflection.

Admiration has also a motivational component, as it leads us to emulate the admired person. Since we see the exemplar as the image of the ideal self, it gives us a standard to strive towards. Doing actions and seeing the world as the people we admire make us more virtuous. Through emulation of the exemplar, we can come to have a life that is desired, as it is a life that the exemplar desires.

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93. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 159.

94. *Ibid*, 221.



## CHAPTER III

### DIFFICULTIES FOR MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

#### 1. Introduction

Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory is constructed out of a single point of origin, which is the people we admire upon reflection.<sup>95</sup> Although this may be more concrete than other complicated ethical theories, its simplicity does not make it immune and without its share of criticisms. One may raise an issue with the foundational structure of the theory, which are the people for whom we have admiration for upon reflection. This is what this section is set out to do; to raise issues within Zagzebski's moral theory by casting doubt on the adequacy of the foundation on which the theory rests. We will then see if the problem can be avoided within a religious framework, namely Christianity, or if the problem is exacerbated.

What if our emotions become distorted, or they go astray? There is certainly a malleability to emotions, and admiration is not an exception to this rule. An emotion can either fit or not fit its object. As we discussed in the first section, emotions correlate to "thick" affective concepts. Humor and amusement are a good example: someone can judge something as either humorous or not humorous, and the emotion that one would feel that correlates this judgment would be amusement. However, an emotion is only

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95. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 9.

operating properly when it fits an appropriately correlated judgment; amusement would be properly fitted to a comedian, but not a funeral. The judgment has to be correct in order for the emotion to work properly and “fit” its correct object. However, admiration is not a sacrosanct emotion and has been inappropriately matched with despicable figures throughout history. Nazi Germany’s admiration for Hitler, or many people’s admiration for Andrew Jackson and Christopher Columbus. We want to admit that these people are wrong, and to some degree, evil. Yet, whole people groups and countries admired them. Is this enough to discredit Zagzebski’s theory? How does one know admiration is a reliable guide to the admirable given the possibility it could go wrong?

## **2. Aristotelian Problem**

Zagzebski’s moral theory may run into a similar problem Aristotle has with his own moral theory. Aristotle defines virtue as a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. How one understands this mean relative to themselves is “by which a person with practical judgment would determine it.”<sup>96</sup> Aristotle goes on in book VI to discuss practical judgment [*phronesis*] as a virtue, so there seems to be a circularity problem. In other words, we cannot know the mean apart from having access to the discerning capacities of someone who has a fully developed virtue of practical wisdom. But this means that, prior to possessing the virtue ourselves, our ability to correctly identify what is virtuous depends on guidance from one who already possesses virtue. But how do we discern who that is? It seems as if identifying who is virtuous requires some prior understanding of what virtue consists in. But if we are not yet virtuous

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96. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b35.

ourselves, our understanding depends first on submitting ourselves to the guidance of one who is already virtuous.

Aristotle defines virtue as a disposition and differentiates it between feelings and predispositions in nature. We have the ability to cultivate virtue by habits, as none of the virtues are given to us by nature. “I am speaking of virtue of character, for this is concerned with feelings and actions, and among these there is excess and deficiency, and the mean.”<sup>97</sup> Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions. Aristotle describes feelings as “those things which are accompanied by pleasure or pain.”<sup>98</sup> We have a natural disposition to have certain feelings and emotions, but they are not what makes us morally praiseworthy or blameworthy.<sup>99</sup> It is when the feeling is connected with an action, then we are able to be morally responsible for our character. According to David Bostock, the full doctrine of the mean should be

[that] each virtue is associated with a particular feeling or emotion, and this indeed is what distinguishes one virtue from another. But the virtuous disposition is one which involves a harmony between emotion and reason; both pull in the same direction.<sup>100</sup>

Since virtue has to do with emotions and feelings, then there must be a mean for our emotions. In fact, Aristotle’s discussion over certain virtues throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to bend this way. For instance, when he is discussing courage, he claims there needs to be the right amount of fear the courageous man needs to have. He can neither be too bold nor too cowardly.<sup>101</sup> Since admiration is an emotion,

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97. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b16-18.

98. Ibid, 1105b 23-24.

99. Ibid, 1106a 8-10.

100. Bostock, David, *Aristotle’s Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.

101. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk III.9.

there needs to be a mean for it if we are to achieve the virtue of being admirable or being like those whom we admire.

If we take Aristotle's definition of virtue, then to be virtuous, we need to tailor our emotions to fit their objects in the way a practically wise person would. However, in order for us to know how exactly our emotions should be tailored to the given situation, we need to know how a practically wise person would do so. How do we find a practically wise person? If it is by the virtue of practical wisdom, then it seems that there is a circularity problem. Or if it by a capacity to recognize practical wisdom where it exists, then we also have a problem: practical wisdom is a virtue, and until we, ourselves, are virtuous, we need the guidance of the practically wise person to accurately identify instances of virtue.

Aristotle's virtue theory is not the only theory that is prone to this problem, however, as it seems that we run into the same circular problem in Zagzebski's moral theory. Since admiration is an emotion, it has its own vices of excess and deficiency. We can either admire the right and wrong people. It is only through admiring the correct person that we can accurately admire and become virtuous. How are we to know what the correct "mean" of admirability is without finding the right person to admire? For one to find out who should be correctly admired we need to have admirability properly in line with reason.

### **3. Cultural Problem**

Furthermore, what if we admire the wrong people? We may have a natural capacity to admire, but what if we were put in a society that admires evil people? Even Aristotle brings up this point that there are certain cultures where one cannot cultivate the

virtues properly, and some may need to be brought up correctly straight from childhood in order to become virtuous.<sup>102</sup> Both Aristotle and Zagzebski allude to the notion that emotions are malleable to some degree. Even in Aristotle's own virtue theory, we tailor our emotions to hit the mean, whether it be the correct use of fear in courageous moments, or the right shame to know that some actions are wrong.<sup>103</sup> For Zagzebski, emotions need to fit their right object. If they do not fit their right object upon reflection, then we change our emotional disposition towards that object.

Zagzebski is aware of this worry, as she discusses Nazi Germany's admiration for Hitler. She cites this study done by Claudia Koonz regarding the moral consciousness of the Nazis. In this study, it seemed that the Nazis agreed about many of the other people that we would find admirable.

The problem, in Koonz's view, is that human beings have the capacity to rule out of the moral community whole classes of persons, and many groups of people in history have exercised that capacity, leading to genocide and other heinous crimes.<sup>104</sup>

Zagzebski's own hypothesis on this matter is a bit more intentional. First, a Nazi would have to reflect upon his admiration for Hitler and compare Hitler with other people he admires. Through this comparison, then, the Nazis would have figured out that Hitler should not have been admired because of inconsistencies in the disposition of admiration.<sup>105</sup> Zagzebski goes on to suggest that, although there are discrepancies of who we admire, we do not say that maybe the Nazis are right, and we are wrong. "We trust

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102. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk II.3.

103. Ibid, 1128b 15-22.

104. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 47.

105. Ibid.

our dispositions to feel admiration and contempt when they survive reflection over time, and I think we are right to do so.”<sup>106</sup>

However, is Zagzebski correct in this assessment? Can one merely compare two different exemplars and stop admiring the worse one? Nazism is an extreme example in history, but it still raises problems for Zagzebski’s theory. I believe the Nazi’s admiration for Hitler was stronger than she leads on, at least strong enough to withstand a comparison of a morally good person against Hitler. Jean-Paul Sartre’s book, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, is an intriguing discussion over how anti-Semite’s think and rationalize their beliefs. His focus here is the relationship between anti-Semites and the Jewish community. Of course, Sartre’s approach could be applied to other relationships between discriminated groups their discriminators. However, Sartre’s point, and the point that is necessary for this section, is that anti-Semites, Nazis, or any other people who discriminate against others, have a deeply rooted worldview that makes another group an enemy to the overall good. As we have briefly seen and will further explore, culture and the people around us have a crucial role in our moral development and our worldview.

One may say that anti-Semites just have differing opinions that were given by either terrible exemplars or an awful upbringing. If we show this anti-Semite a better exemplar to follow that does not discriminate against the Jewish community, then he will no longer have anti-Semitic dispositions. However, Sartre sees a critical problem with the framing of this problem, as it does not have to do with just mere “opinion.” The word opinion could just boil down to nothing more than certain points of views or tastes, and that all points of views and tastes are equally valid, since “all tastes are natural; all

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106. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 47.

opinions are permitted.”<sup>107</sup> Of course, much like Zagzebski, one would want to say that anti-Semitism and discrimination are more than just a natural, let alone justified, taste or opinion.

Sartre first opens the discussion of anti-Semitism and its infection in people’s lives. I quote him at length below:

At the same time, accustomed as have been since the Revolution to look at every object in an analytic spirit, that is to say, as a composite whose elements can be separated, we look upon persons and characters as mosaics in which each stone coexists with the others without that coexistence affecting the nature of the whole. Thus anti-Semitic opinion appears to us to be a molecule that can enter into combination with other molecules of any origin whatsoever without undergoing any alteration. A man may be a good father and a good husband, a conscientious citizen, highly cultivated, philanthropic, *and* in addition an anti-Semite. He may like fishing and the pleasures of love, may be tolerant in matters of religion, full of generous notions on the condition of the natives in Central Africa, *and* in addition detest the Jews. If he does not like them, we say, it is because his experience has shown him that they are bad, because statistics have taught him that they are dangerous, because certain historical factors have influenced his judgment. Thus this opinion seems to be the result of external causes... [those who study these causes] succeed in revealing a strictly objective situation that determines an equally objective current of opinion, and this they call anti-Semitism, for which they can draw up charts and determine the variations from 1870 to 1944.<sup>108</sup>

In this quote, Sartre is suggesting what this section has been stating up to now: upbringing and those around you have critical importance in how you will be shaped morally. As stated earlier, this is more than just what actions are right and wrong, but *who* is right and wrong. Anti-Semites see the world, history, and statistics, in a certain way that justifies their discrimination. Notice here how anti-Semitism is just another part of their experience, just like being a father or the enjoyment of fishing: they see nothing

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107. Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 7.

108. *Ibid*, 8-9.

wrong with their prejudice. This is especially troubling, since anti-Semites may not only filter history and statistics but other people as well, such as “better exemplars” that should correct their prejudices. Is it actually possible for someone to remove their lens if they find nothing wrong with it, since it may be just another part of their daily life?

Pertaining to the anti-Semite’s worldview, Sartre says that

It has become evident that no external factor can induce anti-Semitism in the anti-Semite. Anti-Semitism is a free and total choice of oneself, a comprehensive attitude that one adopts not only toward Jews but toward men in general, toward history and society; it is at one and the same time a passion and a concentration of the world. No doubt in the case of a given anti-Semite certain characteristics will be more marked than in another. But they are always all present at the same time, and they influence each other.<sup>109</sup>

Anti-Semitism creates a distorted lens of how one sees the world, history, and people. This lens may even profligate Zagzebski’s problem by distorting how one sees other exemplars and could be a problem for her correction by comparing moral exemplars solution she proposed above. For example, if a Nazi admires Hitler and Jesus, they may only see the similarities (whatever those might be) in their character. Jesus showing compassion and love to those in his moral community may be the same as Hitler showing similar attitudes towards his own moral community. Even discrepancies between the two would be filtered through the Nazi’s admiration for both. This filtration of exemplars becomes even more apparent when one may try to build a bridge between traits found in the discriminated community and the Nazi’s moral community, as he would not consider a Jewish person to possess any exemplary traits due to their supposed moral status. Furthermore, anti-Semitism is not just a rational calculation, but a passion according to Sartre. The emotions of hate and anger are certainly involved in any discrimination, and

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109. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 17.



these precede the facts that call forth this anger and hatred. However, for Sartre, the word “facts” have a double meaning, as these emotions can also feed upon the “facts”—or how the anti-Semite interprets the world—to the point that he “interprets them in a special way so that they [the Jews] may become truly offensive.”<sup>110</sup>

However, one may be able to solve this issue by bridging the gaps between the discriminated and the discriminators, perhaps by showing that there are similar positive traits that one shares with another. However, Sartre does not think that this applies to a solution. Again, if we remember that anti-Semitism is a passion that creates a distorted lens, then even positive traits, even ones that are admirable, will be seen in a negative light. He states that

a man who finds it entirely natural to denounce other men cannot have our conception of humanity; he does not see even those whom he aids in the same light as we do. His generosity, his kindness are not like our kindness, our generosity.<sup>111</sup>

The anti-Semitic’s prejudice even affects his positive traits that he may have, such as kindness and generosity and any other regularly esteemed virtues.

This tainting of traits also apply to how the anti-Semite might see the positive characteristics of Jews. Sartre says further,

to the anti-Semite, intelligence is Jewish; he can thus disdain it in all tranquility, like all the other virtues which the Jew possesses. They are so many ersatz attributes that the Jew cultivates in place of that balanced mediocrity which he will never have.<sup>112</sup>

Even the virtues which might be admirable to the anti-Semite are distorted and even disdained because they belong to the discriminated community. The anti-Semite would

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110. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 17.

111. *Ibid*, 21-22.

112. *Ibid*, 23.

rather be mediocre in the “right” group than virtuous in the “evil and wrong” group. According to the anti-Semite’s thinking, a person’s virtue comes from being in the right community and correct side of history—not by qualities that actually make him a good person.<sup>113</sup> This discrimination not only belittles the Jew but raises the anti-Semite’s self-esteem and worth.

By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I [the anti-Semite] affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. This elite, in contrast to those of modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a *thing*.<sup>114</sup>

Sartre believes that the anti-Semite gets his privilege from the very group he wishes to destroy, as without this group he would be like anyone else in France.<sup>115</sup> It seems that this lens not only distorts our view of certain people groups, but traits that one may find admirable.

Deeply-rooted worldviews like anti-Semitism, or any other forms of racism, can distort our view of qualities, which is exactly what we admire in certain people, so much so that we want to have and imitate these characteristics. However, if certain cultures can distort positive qualities seen in discriminated groups, such as a generosity found in the Jewish community is not the same “true generosity” that the anti-Semites display, then can a connection be made between these two groups? Taking Zagzebski’s argument that one corrects their admiration for an exemplar by comparing them to another, what if that other exemplar is associated with these qualities the anti-Semite deems as “evil” or part

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113. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 23.

114. *Ibid*, 27.

115. *Ibid*, 28.

of the community outside of the moral community. Worse, what if the other exemplar is a part of that community?

Sartre says further that “if the Jew did not exist the anti-Semite would invent him”<sup>116</sup> and compares the worldview of the anti-Semitic to Manichaeism, a belief that there is an inherent battle between good and evil. The anti-Semite, and the Aryans, are on the good side, and the Jews are on the side of evil. Further, the anti-Semite believes that evil may be a sort of metaphysical component of the Jewish community and that they are only able to do evil.<sup>117</sup> Sartre continues and says

underneath the bitterness of the anti-Semite is concealed the optimistic belief that harmony will be re-established of itself, once Evil is eliminated. His task is therefore purely negative: there is no question of building a new society, but only of purifying the one which exists.<sup>118</sup>

What is interesting to note here is the fact that anti-Semites may have similar goals as a virtuous person would have, such as the desire to make the world a better place.

However, their version of a better world involves something heinous and awful, which is bringing about the destruction of a certain people group. Although the anti-Semites and the virtuous person have similar views, it may only be similar in name, as it is fundamentally different in kind by the very means sought to achieve it. This could also prove difficult for Zagzebski, as maybe a comparison between two exemplars may come down to their end goals, and the one with the nobler goals may be the better exemplar.

The anti-Semite believes that one makes the world a better place by getting rid of the Jewish community, and thus through that lens view Hitler as an exemplar since he has the admirable traits to achieve that goal. However, the anti-Semite will view people like

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116. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 13.

117. *Ibid*, 39-40.

118. *Ibid*, 43.

Nelson Mandela as lacking this trait, since the end goal of making the world a better place does not have the final solution in his means. It would seem that one would need to judge the means by which they bring about the virtuous goal, and not merely the goal itself, in order to correctly judge who you should emulate.

Continuing, Sartre says that the anti-Semite acts with tact, or the “[adoption of] a certain conception of the world, one that is traditional, and synthetic; one for which *he can give no reason*.”<sup>119</sup> Both the Jew and the anti-Semite act with this sort of tact, and Sartre has mainly been focusing on the anti-Semite’s tact. Tact is “in no sense *critical*, and we might add that it takes on its whole meaning on in a strictly defined community with common ideas, mores, and customs.”<sup>120</sup> However, the anti-Semite’s tact is unnatural, as it slides into particularism. “For the name of this tact [particularism], the anti-Semite denounces him [The Jew] as a particular case and excludes him from the national community.”<sup>121</sup> Certain worldviews, especially ones that single out a community or people as “evil” will exclude these people groups as particular cases and therefore out of the national (i.e., moral, in Koonz’s verbiage) community. Thus, the anti-Semite’s worldview does not even consider those he prejudices against as people in the moral community. They may in fact obstruct making the world a better place for the moral community. This problem that Sartre brings up aligns closer to Koonz’s view on the matter, as the Nazis were able to agree on who is an admirable person while still being able to exclude people from the moral (or what Sartre calls the “national”) community.

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119. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 124.

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid, 125.

This problem seems that it cannot simply be solved by merely comparing exemplars to one another, it is a deeper seeded issue.

Finally, Sartre wraps up his discussion over the worldview:

Let us recall that anti-Semitism is a conception of the Manichaeic and primitive world in which hatred for the Jew arises as a great explanatory myth. We have seen that it is not a matter of isolated opinion, but of the total choice that man in a situation makes of himself and of the meaning of the universe. It is the expression of a certain ferocious and mystical sense of real property.<sup>122</sup>

Anti-Semitism is a worldview, and not merely something we can explain away through reasoning or appealing to better moral exemplars. It is a lens through which people see the world, history, and other people. As we have seen, it is also a way in which people can judge qualities, regardless of if they are positive or negative characteristics. Sartre's characterization of the anti-Semite's distorted lens further exacerbates Koonz's problems that Zagzebski tries to explain away. As we have seen, this may be a much more difficult and troubling issue.

There are even less horrific cases that accentuate this problem with Zagzebski's theory. Think of people like Christopher Columbus, a once-celebrated hero who has a federal holiday named after him. Who is now reviled as an evil man, with people wanting to change the holiday from "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous People Day?" Statues that celebrated this once revered figure are now being asked to be torn down, and there seems to be a lot of controversy around this plea. In an article that discusses Columbus' controversial acts, explaining why the historical figure draws so much controversy nowadays, it concludes with this:

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122. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 148.

This historical record has cast Columbus' legacy under a cloud of controversy. Protests at Columbus Day parades, efforts to eliminate him from classroom curricula and calls for changing the federal holiday have all followed. Beginning in 1991, dozens of cities and several states have adopted Indigenous Peoples' Day, a holiday that celebrates the history and contributions of Native Americans—rather than Columbus.<sup>123</sup>

Many people see Columbus' atrocities and failures as more than enough reason to no longer celebrate him but instead celebrate those people groups, he tormented and held prejudice against.

However, this is not a cut and dry issue. There are still people who see Columbus as an exemplar. Some may see Columbus as just a product of his time, as the ideas of democracy and freedom, which were products of The Enlightenment, were not yet pertinent in his own society, and therefore should not be judged by these standards.<sup>124</sup> Instead, these flawed exemplars may show us how far we have grown as a society, but we can still respect their positive attributes.

Andrew Jackson is in a similar boat, as he is another figure in history that is veiled in controversy. The seventh president of The United States has a terrible history with respect to enslaved people and Native Americans, yet we still see his face on the twenty-dollar bill and there are still statues of him. Jackson's legacy is enshrined in discussion regarding his bravery, challenge of the political establishment of the time, military expertise, and dedication to westward expansion and exploration.<sup>125</sup> Yet, he

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123. "Why Columbus Day Courts Controversy," last modified October 9, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/columbus-day-controversy>.

124. "Getting rid of Columbus Day entirely is a sad development," Oct 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/10/14/we-could-abolish-columbus-day-we-shouldnt/>.

125. "Why Andrew Jackson's Legacy Is So Controversial," last modified August 29, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/andrew-jackson-presidency-controversial-legacy>.

strongly supported and profited off, slavery. Not only that, the brutality of the trail of tears is one of the darkest stains on American history, as he created and enforced the horrific Indian Removal Act, which resulted in the forced displacement of nearly 50,000 Native Americans.<sup>126</sup>

Admiration for people like Christopher Columbus and Andrew Jackson leads one to see a consistency amongst cultures and their admired heroes and connects this discussion to Sartre's own over anti-Semitism. The ability to see another people group as outside the moral realm is an unfortunately ubiquitous thread in all societies. Much like the Jewish population was seen as another so too does the Native American population at the time of Jackson's presidency and Columbus's voyage to the Americas. Sartre's discussion regarding admiration for the Nazi's can be in the same boat as admiring Columbus and Jackson; only by trivializing their policies and views on other people can we actually find them admirable. Many, if not all, would agree that what the Nazis, Columbus, and Jackson did were horrible and atrocious acts that should not be downplayed. Yet, it would seem that to hold these people as some sort of examples that we should follow and imitate would be to whitewash their obviously immoral deeds.

Even people like Thomas Jefferson, a revered and often favorite president to many people, cannot escape this controversy. As a founder of America and the writer of the Declaration of Independence, he is seen as an important figurehead in American history. Yet, he owned slaves, and like many of his contemporaries, probably thought certain groups of people less than he was. Interestingly, Zagzebski writes about Jefferson, too, as a way of discussing the "unity of virtue" thesis. Here she discusses that Jefferson's

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126. "Why Andrew Jackson's Legacy Is So Controversial".

attitude towards freeing his slaves was complex but was motivated to free them.

However, due to his profligate lifestyle, he was always in debt and unable to free them because of this.

This seems to show how the vice of overspending can prevent one from having the full virtue of justice...Jefferson seems to have been a just person, far better than most, but it could be argued that he was not able to be fully just given his problems with money.<sup>127</sup>

Although she does not offer a “unity of virtues” thesis, she says this is an interesting case where a vice with respect to one disposition can harm potential virtues with respect to other dispositions from being fully expressed.<sup>128</sup>

With these and many other, controversial characters in mind, we find it hard to say whether we can call them exemplars or near exemplars. We have seen some people who truly idolize them, whether it be in statues, dollar bills, or their enshrining in history. These figures are also reviled by many, and there seems to be a lot of discussion about tearing down monuments, replacing their faces on monetary notes, and foregoing the rose-tinted glass surrounding their portrayals for a more honest, and vicious, portrait of them.

These controversial characters may further problematize Zagzebski’s theory. If people who live in the same society cannot even agree if certain people are admirable, what hope is there for moral exemplar theory? Even though it was mentioned why these people are controversial, some still believe there is good reason to admire them. Some argue that although they held certain beliefs that are wrong and outdated, that is no reason

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127. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 120.

128. Aristotle has a lot of controversy surrounding his own views of slavery and slaves, as he thought it was a natural process in human society. Much ink has been spilt over his views of slavery and justification for it. However, we still regard him as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, thinker(s) in Western thought.



to stop idolizing them. We can still believe them to be good people because of what they promoted, and what they were able to do, while still holding these erroneously and awful beliefs. Although this section is not here to defend or condemn these people, it still highlights an extensive problem within Exemplarism Theory; how do we know who to admire, and to find contempt for? This is controversial on a societal basis but proliferates when you look at it from culture to culture. Even if all these people are, or at one time were, admirable, it still goes back to the original problem, what if we admire the wrong person?

Since almost all people are a mix of positive and negative traits, admiration will almost always be extended to people despite negative traits, which can be excused or treated as of lesser importance. For example, we may say that despite many of these figures' relation to minority groups, their respected and admirable traits outweigh their outdated and unethical viewpoints. However, an issue for Zagzebski is that we first admire then extract from the exemplar a fuller analysis of what makes them admirable. If we admire Jackson or Columbus despite their mistreatments of Native Americans, our analysis will function by trivializing their mistreatment, leading one to conclude that this mistreatment might be made light of if that person did many great acts. If these people are exemplars or admirable people despite having overseen the marginalization of whole people groups, then marginalizing whole people groups must not be that bad according to those who admire or look up to them.

#### 4. Humean Problem

David Hume and his empiricist view of morality could also undermine Zagzebski's moral theory by adding to the cultural problem discussed above. Hume is famous for saying that reason can never motivate the will, only passions can.

Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore are not conclusions of our reason.<sup>129</sup>

Here we see that Hume argues that reason cannot move us to act morally, in fact only passions can. More than that: reason cannot tell us what is moral, values are contingent on passions. Although I may give one reason for saying why someone should not be admired, that may not be enough for someone to admire them, they need certain sentiments towards the exemplar in order to emulate them. Zagzebski and Hume both note that emotions are what drives people to act morally. For Zagzebski, it is the emotion of admiration, which has both an affective and motivating component. Hume argues that the passions are what drives our "moral sense."

Another principle that drives what we deem virtuous or vicious is the notions of pleasure and pain. "The chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain, and when these sensations are remov'd, both from our thought and feeling, we are, in a great measure, incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition."<sup>130</sup> Hume goes on to say that

moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives

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129. Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.1.1.6.

130. *Ibid*, 3.3.1.2.

us satisfaction, by the survey of reflection, is of course virtuous; as everything of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious...virtue and power of producing love or pride, vice and the power of producing humility or hatred.<sup>131</sup>

We seem to associate pleasure, love, and pride with what characteristics we deem as virtuous, and pain, hate, and humiliation with what we deem as vicious.

Hume differentiates between natural and artificial virtues. “I have already hinted, that our sense of every kind of virtue is not natural; but that there are some virtues, that produce pleasure and approbation through artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind.”<sup>132</sup> Natural virtues are actions that we approve of that do not depend on social conventions or agreed upon social rules. Artificial virtues are those that vary from culture to culture and are agreed upon a good for their success in impersonal cooperation.<sup>133</sup>

Through the force of sympathy, and the cumulative effects on society, we come to have a “sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues.”<sup>134</sup> This allows us to sympathize with actions that tend to promote the goodness of mankind. Hume uses the example of justice, which he deems as an artificial virtue. Justice, according to Hume, is merely an artificial invention that makes people moral.<sup>135</sup> In fact, most of what we deem as virtuous is just approving actions that benefit mankind.

This presumption must become a certainty when we find that most of those qualities, which we *naturally* approve of, have actually that tendency, and render a man a proper member of society: While the

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131. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.3.

132. Ibid, 3.2.1.1.

133. Cohon, Rachel. “Hume’s Moral Philosophy,” last modified August 20, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-moral/#artnat>.

134. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.10.

135. Ibid, 3.3.1.9.

qualities, which we *naturally* disapprove of, have a contrary tendency, and render any intercourse with the person dangerous or disagreeable.<sup>136</sup>

Although it seems that we naturally approve of certain actions and virtues, it is merely only because they benefit society in some way, or make that person a proper member of society.

Hume does mention that we have these natural virtues, which are self-esteem, goodness and benevolence, and natural abilities such as prudence and wit. These natural virtues also arise out of the force of sympathy, except that they do not depend on any positive effect on society. Again, these are deemed as virtues because we 1) approve of them, and 2) they produce pleasure. “Our approval arises as the result of sympathy bringing into our minds the pleasure that the trait produces for its possessor or for others.”<sup>137</sup> Virtue is something that we merely approve of because of its ability to produce pleasure, either to its owner or to others around them.

The problem this lends for Zagzebski’s theory is that virtue is by far and large a social convention for Hume. While there may be natural virtues, they seem very dependent on society as well. As we have seen, these too depend on pleasure and approval, not merely any sort of admirability. Take military might as an example, which is a form of self-esteem and pride, which is a virtue for Hume. Although there has been much destruction to human society, many people are still in awe of the spectacular heroes of war. A “more immediate sympathy” is able to override this sense of shame and distaste for war heroes and call them virtuous.<sup>138</sup> Again, if we admire war heroes despite War’s destructive nature, and even terrible actions that these heroes have done, our analysis of

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136. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.10.

137. Cohon, “Hume’s Moral Philosophy.”

138. Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.2.15.

these heroes may trivialize these immoral acts. This could lead one to conclude that destruction, war crimes, and immoral acts are justified as long as that “more immediate sympathy” is able to override that sense of distaste.

Connecting this back to the controversial characters of history example we may start to see a problem. Whenever we see controversial people become exemplars for a few people, it further shows our capacity to admire may be off and culturally dependent. I argue that Zagzebski wants to say something stronger than admiration is merely sympathy mixed with pleasure and approval. Hume provides two critiques in regard to Zagzebski’s theory: (1) virtue is partially determined by social convention and is widely influenced by it. (2) Any idea of what is virtuous, and likely to be admirable, is determined or influenced by social convention. Although Zagzebski may be able to push back on Hume’s first critique, his second still stands firm—if one’s understanding of what is virtuous is merely a social convention, then one will admire people whose actions display these culturally dependent virtues.

## **5. Moral Luck Problem**

Another problem Zagzebski faces is one of moral luck, which is something similar which Aristotle deals within his virtue ethics. At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discusses the ways in which we can acquire happiness, otherwise known as *eudemonia*. *Eudemonia* is acquired through one becoming virtuous, but there also seems to be a bit of luck involved. I quote Aristotle at length below:

Nevertheless, it appears that there is an additional need of external goods, as we said, since it is impossible, or not easy, to engage in beautiful actions if one is not equipped for them. For many things are done, as if by instruments, by means of friends and wealth and political power, and those who lack certain things, such as good ancestry, good children, and good looks, disfigure in their blessedness; for someone who is completely ugly

in appearance, or of bad descent, or solitary and childless is not very apt to be happy, and is still less so perhaps if he were to have utterly corrupt children or friends, or good ones who had died. So as we said, there seems to be an additional need of this sort of prosperity, which is why some people rank good fortune on the same level as happiness, while others give that rank to virtue.<sup>139</sup>

It would seem for someone to become happy, they would need external goods that are mainly outside of their control, whether it be good ancestry, looks, or the longevity of good children and friends. If *eudemonia* relies heavily on luck, then the same could be said about virtue.

Although we have a natural ability to acquire the virtues, they are not innately in us.<sup>140</sup> This means that we need someone to show us how to become virtuous, which is why Aristotle stresses the importance of moral education. We do not accidentally stumble into becoming virtuous by doing virtuous actions, but there has to be an intent and reason for doing said actions.<sup>141</sup> As was noted in the Aristotelian problem above, one needs a person with practical wisdom to guide them on becoming practically wise, and therefore virtuous. Furthermore, one can only become virtuous if one can imitate the way a virtuous person does just, temperate, or any other virtuous action.

Additionally, as we have seen, how are we to know who is the virtuous person? Certainly, this goes back to our circularity problem mentioned above. However, assuming that we can find these virtuous people, there still is a problem regarding moral luck. Aristotle recognizes that there seems to be a bit of luck with upbringing and education as well, especially how it pertains to one becoming virtuous.

It is the same way in the case of the virtues, for by acting in our dealing with people some of us become just, others unjust, and by acting in

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139. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a 32-b8.

140. Ibid, 1103a 22-5.

141. Ibid, 1105a 18-35.

frightening situations and getting habituated to be afraid or to be confident, some of us become courageous and others become cowards.<sup>142</sup>

Aristotle goes on to say that the right habituation does not happen whenever we start to want to become virtuous, it starts in our childhood. “It makes no small difference, then, to be habituated in this way or in that straight from childhood, but an enormous difference, or rather all the difference.”<sup>143</sup> Even your childhood recurring environment is purely a matter of luck; one does not get to choose their upbringing.

Again, this sort of moral upbringing seems to be largely out of our control, yet it plays an enormous role in our moral character and development, which then plays a part in our ability to achieve happiness or flourish.<sup>144</sup> Continuing his discussion Aristotle again stresses the importance of a correct moral education and upbringing.

For the sort of virtue that belongs to character is concerned with pleasures and pains, since it is on account of pleasure that we perform base actions, and on the account of pain that we refrain from beautiful actions. Hence it is necessary to be brought up in some way straight from childhood, as Plato says, so as to take delight and feel pain in those things in which one ought, for this is the right education.<sup>145</sup>

Again, there seems to be a stress on the right upbringing for one to become virtuous. More importantly, Aristotle says that this moral education is the *right* education.

As this section implies, there seems to be a lot of luck involved, and much of how you turn out morally seems to be out of your control. This is not a small difference, but Aristotle says this makes all the difference in our moral lives. Those who are lucky are under the tutelage of virtuous parents and teachers and become virtuous, so they did not

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142. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b 14-18.

143. Ibid, 1103b 23-5

144. Two different definitions of *eudemonia* are happiness or human flourishing. Whatever the more accurate definition may be, the point still stands.

145. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b 8-14.

need to determine who the virtuous person is. Those who are unlucky end up not virtuous and would not be able to determine who the virtuous person is even if they wanted to. How are we to assign moral blame to someone if they are not brought up with the right moral education or upbringing? What if they live in a culture that focuses on actions that are deemed as “good” which are connected to pleasure? What if this culture instills different values on certain actions, which relates back to the cultural problem that was discussed earlier? Certainly, intuition tells us that we want to say moral value and character is immune to these sorts of problems, but luck dictates so much of it, it may be hard, if not impossible, to assign any sort of responsibility for one’s character and value. This is a colossal problem, not just for Aristotle and Zagzebski, but for moral philosophy in general.

To help further this specific problem, Bernard Williams says that

the idea that one’s whole life can in some such way be rendered immune to luck has perhaps rarely prevailed since, but its place has been taken by the still powerfully influential idea that there is one basic form of value, moral value, which is immune to luck and—in the crucial term of the idea’s most rigorous exponent— ‘unconditioned.’ Both the disposition to correct moral judgment, and the objects of such judgment, are on this view free from external contingency, for both are, in their related ways, the product of an unconditioned will.<sup>146</sup>

Although we want to say that our values, who we are, and what we become are all immune to luck, that may not be the case. Williams and Thomas Nagel, another philosopher who introduced the idea of moral luck, argue that four different types of luck influence our character and ethical choices. However, we are only going to deal with two forms of moral luck. The one we have been discussing is what Nagel defines as

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146. Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20.



constitutive luck, which is “the kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament.”<sup>147</sup>

Another form of luck is circumstantial luck, which boils down to the kind of problems that one faces.<sup>148</sup> Nagel likens this to a Nazi collaborator in 1930’s Germany who is condemned for war crimes and committing morally atrocious acts, even though their presence in Nazi Germany was beyond his control. On the contrary, he may have lived quiet and even exemplary lives if they moved outside of Germany before 1929.<sup>149</sup>

As we have seen, moral luck seems to enter Aristotle in these two ways; it is largely not up to us how we turn out, but more so with our own upbringing and education (or lack of). And second, even if we do learn how to be virtuous through our upbringing, we may never get the chance to display these virtues. Suppose there is someone who learns what courage is, and even how to act courageously in any given situation. However, due to terrible circumstances, never gets to display this knowledge, would we then say this person was courageous? Of course not.

Furthermore, we can connect this with the Nazi collaborator that Nagel uses as an example, which might be able to connect the other problems we have mentioned. What if someone’s upbringing and education tell them that following national policy, no matter what the policy demanded, was deemed as courageous, and even virtuous. They, then, followed the Nazi regime in 1930 Germany. Could we assign that person blame for committing atrocious acts? Following one’s nation could be courageous, say, in Russia or

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147. Nagel, Thomas, “Moral Luck.” Published 1979, (found at oemmndcblldboiebfnladdacbfmadadm/https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil1100/Nagel1.pdf), 3.

148. Ibid, 3.

149. Ibid, 2.

America, which helped liberate people from the Holocaust. However, then, even these nations did immoral things during and after World War II.

This seems to be a problem for Zagzebski too, in the fact that it may just boil down to luck of who we see as our exemplars. Even if the emotion of admiration is nonmalleable to cultural forces, there still may be a problem with who it latches on to. What if the best person someone meets or hears about in our lifetime is only Hitler, Stalin, Robert E. Lee, or Andrew Jackson, can we prescribe blame to the person imitating them? What if our moral education told us that the traits these people exhibit are, in fact, virtuous, and we should act like them, is it possible to say that this is wrong? Even though exemplars show us how we ought to live, there is still luck in the fact of who our exemplars may be. In effect, Zagzebski has to hold that there is some native human faculty of admiration that is immune to luck and, when employed reflectively, reliable regardless of upbringing. Even those raised by Nazis will, upon reflection, be able to discern that Hitler is not admirable.

## **6. A Problem in Christian Ethics as Well**

We can sidestep these issues if there were a default exemplar of goodness, one which everyone should admire. An institution that lifts an exemplar and encourages its members to see the exalted one as an exemplar independent of the individual's feelings of admiration, one which tells everyone that this is someone who you should admire, even if you personally do not want to. This is what many religions, especially Christianity, argues. Christianity has an exemplar, namely Jesus Christ, that should sidestep many of these issues. Within Christian Ethics, there is an emphasis to imitate Christ in our actions, beliefs, and desires. Although there may still be a cultural influence over who we admire,

Jesus seems to be the prime example that the Christian religion would want us to follow. Jesus' exemplarship bypasses many problems dealing with luck and cultural malleability. Although we may latch onto human exemplars, Christianity proposes a uniform exemplar that everyone can and should imitate. Even though we may have different moral education, Jesus is our example that we should be striving for. Some would even posit that there is no luck involved, since God can speak to us through natural theology and showcase Christ as the supreme exemplar to follow.<sup>150</sup> Even Zagzebski explains how Christian Ethics a natural candidate for an exemplarist approach because of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the moral exemplar in Christian teaching.<sup>151</sup>

However, despite common belief, all of these problems that were described above still arise in Christian Ethics. Since we have no record of the historical Jesus, we rely heavily on the canonized narratives we call the gospels. We could ask the apparent skeptical questions, such as can the gospels be legitimate resources to knowing who Jesus is or was? How do we know these are actually written by the disciples of Jesus? Many other questions can put the gospels in question. However, let's say, for the sake of the argument, that the gospels are legitimate resources to knowing who Jesus was and that they are actually written by his disciples. We still run into the same issues for Zagzebski's moral exemplarism theory, even when it is developed within a Christian context, and even on the assumption that the gospels are genuine first-hand accounts of Jesus' life.

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150. Romans 1.21-23.

151. Zagzebski, Linda, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 23.

To see why, let's consider some insight of Bart Ehrman in his book *Jesus Before the Gospels*, which takes a look at how Jesus is remembered by his disciples and other noncanonical gospel writers. Ehrman examines different interpretations of Jesus throughout history, specifically how he was remembered when the gospels were being written. One of the ways he goes about this is through the idea of both individual and collective memory, as he hopes to answer his own question by way of understanding how memory works.

When we remember the past, whether we are thinking simply our individual thoughts or are reconstructing our previous history as a collective whole, as a society, we do so, always and necessarily, in light of our present situation. The past is not a fixed entity back there in time.<sup>152</sup>

Even in today's time, Jesus is remembered much differently. Ehrman gives two examples of contemporary books that were written about Jesus, the first is Reza Aslan's *Zealot*, which shows Jesus as a Jewish Zealot who was staging a coup against the Roman government in preparation to take back his homeland. The second is Bill O'Reilly's *Killing Jesus*, which showed a Jesus who was upset that the Jewish people had to pay tribute to the Roman authorities. According to O'Reilly, Jesus' main concern, and message, was that he wanted smaller government and lower taxes.<sup>153</sup>

This shows two things: first, there are wildly different ways people interpret Jesus' life and mission, whether it is from a religious aspect or not. Although these are just two extreme cases, I am sure there are many more different interpretations of Jesus' life and teaching between these two views. Second, and more importantly, Jesus' own life and teachings seem to be somewhat culturally malleable for a given goal or purpose. The

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152. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, 7.

153. *Ibid*, 21-22.

way he is seen and remembered has a lot to do with the culture around you, and this is what Ehrman stresses in his book: different people remember Jesus differently. This also means that our memory, in a way, is malleable and helps us with our present situation or to provide specific reasons and answers.<sup>154</sup>

Ehrman says that, ultimately, his point is that

[the] invention of memories of Jesus is not simply a modern phenomenon. It has always been going on. From the very earliest of times. As far back as we have recorded memories of Jesus, we have widely disparate accounts of his words and deeds. And the events of his life. And the events of the lives of those who knew him.<sup>155</sup>

This further puts us in a bind: if we are unable to have an accurate portrait of Jesus, can we actually imitate him? Does imitation depend on individual reconstruction based on pre-existing assumptions about what is admirable? How are we to trust the portraits of Jesus if we do not have any actual historical evidence of who he actually was?

Furthermore, if Jesus is the central figure of Christianity, why are there so many different portraits of him?

Because of these skeptical questions, the same problems found originally can still apply. How are we to know what portrayal of Jesus to admire, especially with the plurality of portraits? Which portraits of Jesus should we admire? Will we choose a portrayal based on some natural faculty of admiration that orients us to the portrait that is a fitting object of admiration, or will our choice of portrayal be a matter of cultural conditioning and luck? What if we got the ones that were not accurate to him as a person, but only were conceived to push the gospel writers' own personal agendas and theological readings? This could come back to the Aristotelian problem of circularity, as we do not

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154. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, 13.

155. *Ibid*, 25.

know what sources to trust, as even the canonical accounts could have just been chosen for own personal agendas and not for an accurate representation of Jesus' character. This leads to the cultural problem, in the fact that so many people have wildly different viewpoints of Jesus and who he was, even the gospel writers. Jesus' divinity is focused extensively more in the Gospel of John than in any of the synoptic gospels, are we to discount the Johannine account because of these discrepancies? Even Luke's treatment of Jesus is different from that in Mark's account, the former having the Sermon on the Mount and the latter having little to say about any ethical teaching.

Perhaps Jesus is just a malleable figure that we can use to justify our own idea of virtue, as this could be a Humean problem. We see certain actions as virtuous, and so we latch onto a Jesus that does or approves of those actions. We definitely see this in both Aslan's and O'Reilly's contemporary accounts of Jesus. Perhaps the gospel and New Testament writers did the same thing, using Jesus as a conceived character to justify what they deemed themselves to be virtuous and good.

Finally, perhaps there's a bit of moral luck involved in this too. What if we do not encounter the correct portrait of Jesus, can we then never become virtuous or good? What if the portraits of Jesus we have at our disposal are apocryphal, made up, or just plain wrong? Even if we admire this portrait, can we actually be imitating the same Jesus an Eastern Orthodox monk, or a Franciscan Father, is?

Although it may seem that Christian ethics has a way out of the problems raised in Zagzebski's theory, it in fact has to deal with the same issues. Although Jesus is a central figure that many, still to this day, want to imitate and live like, there are just many problems that throw his very character into skepticism. How Jesus is remembered has

been a problem since the very beginning of the gospel writing process, and it still is an enormous problem today. Without an accurate portrait of Jesus, we may not be able to actually practice any sort of Christian ethic or duty.

## **7. Conclusion**

How do all of these problems relate to Zagzebski's theory? As we stated, there seems to be a circularity problem within Zagzebski's theory that Aristotle faces in his own ethical theory. In order for someone's faculty of admiration to be virtuous in the sense of being disposed to latch onto fitting objects and the genuinely admirable they first need to admire the right person, such that their emotion is shaped accordingly. This is because, like all emotions, there seems to be a correct and incorrect way of using them, or what Aristotle called an excess, deficiency, and a mean. Emotions have to correctly fit their objects to be considered right. However, there needs to be someone to show us how to calibrate our emotions and emotional responses correctly. Admiration is the central emotion in Zagzebski's theory, so the same rule applies here. In order for someone to know what the right "fit" is in the emotion of admiration, they need to admire the right person to show them that. This is the same problem Aristotle faces in his own theory when discussing how to become virtuous by finding the virtuous person.

Second, there seems to be something culturally malleable about our emotions. Admiration has definitely been an emotion that can, and has, been corrupted by culture before, as we have seen with Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and many other terrible and dark times in history. Even today, the battle rages of who is actually admirable, whether it be Robert E. Lee, Christopher Columbus, or Andrew Jackson. Not even people within

cultures can agree who is, and who is not, admirable; is there any chance that admiration can lead us to become virtuous people if admiration is this socially impressionable?

Third, Hume argues that even though reason can dictate who should be admired, it will still be the passions that tell us what to do. Although the Nazis can see why their admiration of both Hitler and Jesus can be strenuous, passions can still allow one to have this sort of cognitive dissonance. This is because reason can never get us to do anything, but only give supporting evidence to the passions. Although we may tell people who is and who is not admirable, if a certain culture believes them to be so, then they will continue to admire them.

Finally, this may all summate to moral luck. People may just be in the right position or the right place to be able to imitate exemplars of moral goodness. Much like the Nazi collaborators who could have left Germany in 1929, we cannot be held culpable of who are exemplars are or what they did, for better or for worse. This, mixed with the cultural malleability of emotions, leads us to not be held accountable for who we imitate and admire.

These problems are not displaced, but exacerbated, in Christianity. The differing portraits of Jesus, both canonical and apocryphal, make it all the more difficult to imitate an exemplar. This problem exacerbates when one realizes that there are not just multiple portraits, but they come from malleable source material. One can merely “create” a portrait of Jesus that seems to fit with one’s own moral and ethical codes. How Jesus is remembered has been a problem within Christianity since the very start of the religion, and it seems that whether it be the gospel writers or news analysts, everyone has a different portrait of Jesus in mind.



Zagzebski assumes that admiration leads us to admire the good, and even though it can be culturally impressionable, there is some baseline goodness that will always motivate the emotion. Even though we do not know who we should admire, our desire and base knowledge of goodness will have us pick out the right person to admire. More needs to be said about this base desire of goodness, and that is what the next sections seek out to do; to make a case for our desire for goodness that is beyond any sort of cultural malleability or dependency. A desire for goodness that allows us to say that one person should be admired over another, and a goodness that can guide us through these problems that this section has raised.

## CHAPTER IV

### AQUINAS, FOOT, AND THE ORIENTATION TO THE GOOD

#### **1. Introduction**

Thomas Aquinas is a medieval philosopher who argues that our rational intellect and will, when working properly, orients us to desire the good. For Aquinas, all human action is purposive and goal oriented, and the goal of every human being is happiness and flourishing. This first part of this section will highlight important details of his metaphysics, natural law theory, and virtue ethics to show that human beings are naturally oriented towards the good by their reason. The second section will explore the problem of vice and a disordered rational intellect. In the last section, I proposed several problems to Zagzebski's moral exemplar theory, and I believe Aquinas's own answer to this difficult problem will be crucial to solving the ones that were discussed in chapter two.

The second part of this section will be to highlight a similar, yet more contemporary theory of natural goodness argued by Philippa Foot. Foot proposes a version of ethical naturalism, which puts forth the thesis "there are objective, mind-independent facts and properties... moral naturalists hold that these objective, mind-

independent moral facts are natural facts.”<sup>156</sup> Although and atheist, she drew heavily from both Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s virtue ethics. According to Foot, the three essential features of virtue are 1) it is a disposition of the will, 2) it is beneficial to its possessor and/or others, and 3) it is corrective of some bad human tendency.<sup>157</sup> This section will give a brief overview of her work in her book, *Natural Goodness*, and will provide a contemporary counterpart to Aquinas’s virtue ethics above. My main reason for having Foot in this section is to show that both a theistic and atheistic ethical theory can propose that human beings are naturally oriented to the good.

My hope is that Aquinas and Foot’s theories that human beings are naturally oriented to the good can serve as a fundamental basis for the emotion of admiration, which is the crux of Zagzebski’s moral theory. The relation between the rational intellect and the will is crucial to solving the difficulties brought up in the previous chapter. Chapter four will then apply these arguments and show how exemplarism can be vindicated in light of the theories and critical discussion that attempts to solve the issues in Aquinas’s work.

## **2. Aquinas’ Metaphysics**

Aquinas argued for a hierarchy of being, which is based on Aristotle’s three divisions of the soul and his own personal belief in Christian metaphysics. At the top of this hierarchy is God, then angels, humans in the middle, then animals, and plants at the

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156. Lutz, Matthew and James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/naturalism-moral/>>.

157. Hacker-Wright, John, "Philippa Foot", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/philippa-foot/>>.

bottom. Much like Aristotle, Aquinas claims that we are rational animals, meaning that we are the only beings that possess both physical bodies and immaterial intellects. “In the hierarchy we bridge the gap between material and immaterial creatures. In an important sense, we live in two worlds; the physical world of rocks and trees and the immaterial world of the intellect.”<sup>158</sup>

Aquinas follows in Aristotle’s distinction between form and matter and divides human beings between the material matter and intellectual, immaterial substance. Further, all human beings are also members of the same species, as we have the same essence of “rational animality,” which comes from the rational form.<sup>159</sup> According to Aquinas, reason is the highest capacity in the human being, the other two being vegetative and sensory powers. Intellective powers are bestowed on humans, angels, and God. Although human beings are the best of the sensory animals, we are the lowest intellectual creatures. With our intellectual capabilities, human beings can grasp abstract concepts like justice and virtue, yet to understand these concepts we require many repetitive examples.<sup>160</sup> We need our sensory components in order to understand both the world around us and these abstract concepts. This is why, according to Aquinas, the body is so important; it allows us to observe different examples in order for us to grasp a certain concept. Without the body, our intellectual souls would not be able to gather knowledge.<sup>161</sup>

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158. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 13.

159. *Ibid*, 16.

160. *Ibid*, 17.

161. Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I 75.1 (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html.BZ1749.T5>).

Aquinas holds the medieval claim that being is identical to goodness. “Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea.”<sup>162</sup> This is what is known as the Convertibility Thesis, as it holds that “everything is good (1) insofar as it exists and (2) to the extent to which it actualizes the capacities unique to a member of its natural kind.”<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, every being desires its own good.

The Philosopher says (Ethic. i): Goodness is what all desire” ...a thing is desirable only in so far that it is perfect, for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual...Goodness presents the aspect of desirableness, which being does not present.<sup>164</sup>

All beings desire their perfection and goodness and do actions that aim for or achieve this goal. Further, Aquinas states:

Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness, as it is clear from A [1]. Hence it follows that every being as such is good.<sup>165</sup>

The second part of the Convertibility Thesis is a bit more complicated, as existing things can be bad, and this relies on an argument through functionality. An example of this is that of a knife. A knife’s function is to cut, and if it cuts well, it is a good knife. However, if it slices bread poorly, or is not sharp, then it is a bad knife. Furthermore, a tree can be a bad tree if it does not produce fruit, and animals can be bad in this sense if they are born without hind legs. Aquinas can argue this because things are not good simply because they exist, but they must also exist as fully actualized members of their species.<sup>166</sup>

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162. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 5.1.

163. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 24-25.

164. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 5.1.

165. *Ibid*, I 5.1,3.

166. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 25.

No being can be spoken of as evil, formally as being, but only so far as it lacks being. Thus a man is said to be evil, because he lacks some virtue; and an eye is said to be evil, because it lacks the power to see well.<sup>167</sup>

We will discuss this more in our section over Aquinas's virtue theory, but a virtue is an actualization of a potential inherent in man's nature as a human. Lacking a virtue is to be incomplete—having less being, and therefore less good, than one's nature disposes us to have. We can evaluate something as good or bad in relation to its function: a knife is good if it can cut well, an animal is good if it has legs to run and hunt, a tree is good if it produces fruit. According to Aquinas, these things are good to the extent that they exist, but “they are bad insofar as they fail to actualize the natural capacities that follow directly from their essences.”<sup>168</sup>

Human beings are no different, as they also have a function and can be evaluated as good or bad in relation to carrying out that function. However, the Thomists argue that this universal point has a special force for rational agents, as we have a certain amount of control over how, or even whether, we actualize our capacities. Much like the examples of a fruitless tree and the legless animals, human beings can be bad in a deficient way if they lose certain capacities, like hearing or seeing. However, they can also be bad by choosing to not actualize certain capacities, like the ones to acquire virtue. “Being moral is, for Aquinas, a matter of properly actualizing the capacities we have *by nature* and can control, and free will is what allows us to choose how we are going to actualize and direct those capacities.”<sup>169</sup>

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167. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 5.3 ad 2.

168. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 25.

169. *Ibid*, 26.

Finally, although the human rational soul is joined to the body, it also has operations that are “per se” apart from the body. Aquinas holds that

Now only that which subsists can have an operation “per se.” For nothing can operate but what is actual: for which reason we do not say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.<sup>170</sup>

Through our intellect, we can know both corporeal and incorporeal things.<sup>171</sup> Through the senses, the intellect is able to understand and grasp concepts. Aquinas says further that “the body is necessary for the action of the intellect, not as its origin of action, but on the part of the object; for the phantasm is to the intellect what color is to the sight.”<sup>172</sup>

Through the sense data the body gives the intellect, the rational soul transcends the matter into abstract thought, which is what Aquinas calls phantasms. This intellective cognition is the rational soul’s proper activity, and this is what makes the rational soul independent from the body.<sup>173</sup> Although the intellect is able to grasp and know certain concepts and other forms, it is unable to do so without the senses and therefore needs the body to obtain knowledge. Through experiencing particular objects the intellect can abstract universal, intelligible concepts.<sup>174</sup>

Finally, Aquinas claims that the human soul is unable to be corrupted. Aquinas claims that a thing can be corrupted in one of two ways, either in itself or accidentally.<sup>175</sup> To accidentally corrupt something means to add or take away something, and since the

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170. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 75.2.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid, I 75.2 ad 3.

173. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 34.

174. Ibid, 34-5.

175. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 75.6.

rational soul cannot lose or acquire something, it cannot be corrupted in this way.<sup>176</sup> Further, since the rational soul is self-subsistent, it is unable to be corrupted, even when the body is corrupted.<sup>177</sup> This will be more important as in discussions further, but this shows that, although Aquinas holds that the soul needs the body, it is still independent of it because the matter cannot corrupt the form. Its proper activity—intellective cognition—is also independent, somewhat from it, because the body cannot add or take away from its proper activity. The intellect depends on the body to function, not to exist.

Aquinas's metaphysics indicates that man is a rational creature that needs its physical body to help understand both the natural world and abstract concepts like justice, virtue, and goodness. More importantly, Aquinas proposes the Convertibility Thesis, or the idea that being is identical with goodness, meaning that the more something actually exists, the greater it is. Human beings lie in the middle of the hierarchy of being, as we are material beings with the highest degree of being because we have intellects. This conjunction allows human beings to perfect themselves through actions which are in line with their rational essence. Through reason, we can become fully actualized members of our species, which then, in turn, will allow us to achieve our end of becoming happy and flourishing people.

### **3. Aquinas and the Natural Law**

Aquinas claims that “the good of any thing with a standard and measure consists in its conforming to that standard or measure. That is why we say that a thing is well

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176. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 75.6.

177. *Ibid*, I 75.6.



disposed when it has neither more nor less than it ought to.”<sup>178</sup> Aquinas has a principle called the *duplex regula*—or the double-sided rule, which is human reason itself and the Eternal Law. “Now there are two rules of the human will: one is proximate and homogenous, viz. the human reason; and the other is the first rule, viz. the eternal law, which is God’s reason, so to speak.”<sup>179</sup> The fundamental rule of the human will is the eternal law, which Aquinas calls God’s reason, and rationality is proximate to this law. Actions which conform to the eternal law are considered morally good. “The goodness of the human will depends on the eternal law much more than on human reason: and when human reason fails we must have recourse to the Eternal Reason.”<sup>180</sup> Further, Aquinas, much like Augustine, define sin as an act against the eternal law<sup>181</sup> and “the eternal law is the standard for distinguishing morally good from sinful actions,” and ultimately “moral virtue from vice”<sup>182</sup> Austin surmises that “by its participation in the first rule [divine reason], human reason is the proximate rule of the human will.”<sup>183</sup>

According to Aquinas, the natural law is the human’s participation in the eternal law.<sup>184</sup> The natural law gives us a natural inclination to provide for oneself and others, and gives us the ability to discern good from evil, and Aquinas claims that this is an

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178. Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*. In *Aquinas: Basic Works* edited by Jeffery Hause and Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2014), 1.13 reply.

179. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 71.6.

180. *Ibid*, I.II 19.4.

181. *Ibid*, I.II 71.6.

182. Austin, Nicholas, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 45.

183. *Ibid*.

184. Aquinas, Thomas. “Treatise on Law,” (*Summa Theologica I-II*). In *Aquinas: Basic Works* edited by Jeffery Hause and Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2014), I.II 91.2.

imprint of God's light in us.<sup>185</sup> This law also allows us to abide by rules and measures that promote or prohibit certain actions. We also imitate God's legislative characteristic by dictating the precepts of the law onto ourselves and others.<sup>186</sup> For our purposes, this section will discuss the importance of the natural law as it relates to the overarching argument, which is that the natural law orients us to the good.

For starters, Aquinas claims that the natural law is a disposition when we prescribe it either to our actions or through our practical judgments.<sup>187</sup> This includes using both the general and universal precepts of the natural law in our own particular moral dilemmas and cases. Our reason grasps the universal rules of the natural law and applies it to our certain cases. There are universal precepts that everyone knows in both theoretical and practical reason. In theoretical knowledge, there are several indemonstrable first principles, such as certain *a priori* truths.<sup>188</sup> Aquinas holds that the law of non-contradiction is an indemonstrable first principle, not only in theoretical reasoning but practical as well. He holds that practical rationality's version of this law is that "we should do and seek good and shun evil."<sup>189</sup> Aquinas holds that everyone naturally seeks their own good while avoiding evil.

Since good has the nature of end, and evil the nature of the contrary, reason by nature understands to be good all the things for which human beings have a natural inclination, and so to be things to be actively sought,

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185. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 91.2.

186. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics* 153-4. See also Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, I.II 91.2.

187. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.1.

188. Aquinas would not call them that, but he does describe these indemonstrable precepts as "self-evident propositions as such when their predicates belong to the nature of their subjects, although such propositions may not be self-evident to those who do not know the definition of the subjects" Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 94.2.

189. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.2.

and understands contrary things as evil and to be shunned. Therefore, the order of our natural inclinations orders the precepts of the natural law.<sup>190</sup>

This quote connects the metaphysical schema described above to his natural law theory, human beings are naturally oriented towards the good by their reason, which is guided by the natural law. Some examples he gives are things such as self-preservation, familial desire, and also the want to live in harmony with other people and know the truths of God.<sup>191</sup>

Further, Aquinas claims that nearly all virtuous acts belong to the natural law, as he states that “everyone has an inclination from one’s nature to act in accord with reason. And this is to act virtuously. And so in this regard, all virtuous acts belong to the natural law.”<sup>192</sup> Because we are rational creatures, as it is our “specific form” according to Aquinas, everyone has an inclination to act in accord with reason, which means to act virtuously.<sup>193</sup> However, there is a small caveat that Aquinas puts at the end of his response in the third article. He states, “If we should be speaking about virtuous acts as such and such, namely, as we consider them in their own species, then not all virtuous acts belong to the natural law.”<sup>194</sup> Aquinas’s stipulation is that there are some actions which are not dictated by the natural law, but humans have been able to discover through the power of their reason that enables them to live righteously. An example here could be the moderation of naturally good desires, such as food, drink, and sex. He also hints that

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190. Aquinas, “Treatise on Law,” I.II 94.2.

191. Ibid.

192. Ibid, I.II 94.3.

193. Ibid.

194. Ibid.

hitting a personal, self-indexed virtuous mean between the vices of excess and deficiency could be seen in this light as well.<sup>195</sup>

Aquinas holds that the natural law is the same for all human beings. This is on the basis that, since every human being has a similar rational nature that subordinates itself to the natural law, the natural law must be the same for everyone. Our similar natures incline all human beings to act in accordance with reason and follow the precepts of the natural law. However, Aquinas differentiates between general and particular principles, as reason advances from the former to the latter.<sup>196</sup> Although he maintains that the general principles are known and are required to be followed by all rational human beings, there seems to be some flexibility in how one moves from the general propositions to particular acts.

[T]he truth or rectitude regarding the general principles of both theoretical and practical reason is the same for all persons and known in equal measure by all of them...But the truth or rectitude regarding particular conclusions of practical reason is neither the same for all persons nor known in equal measure even by those for whom it is the same.<sup>197</sup>

Continuing on in the fourth article, Aquinas argues that certain dispositions and even circumstances allow for docility of how to follow the natural law in particular cases. An example for this is the general rule that you should return things you borrow. However, on returning a borrowed knife, you find that the person wants to murder somebody with it. Since giving back the knife would cause harm to the hypothetical victim, you refrain from returning it. Even though you went against a general precept to return things, you still followed the natural law in this particular case by doing and seeking good, which, as

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195. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," II 94.3 ad 3.

196. Ibid, I.II 94.4.

197. Ibid.

we have seen, Aquinas holds is the most fundamental principle of the natural law in practical rationality. Though the general principles and their applications in particular instances will be mostly the same for everyone, there will be exceptions on how one follows the natural law in particular actions.

Aquinas's final article in *Summa* I.II.94 is pertinent to our discussion thus far, as he discusses whether or not the natural law can be changed, whether it be through certain emotions, evil habituation, or an evil natural disposition which perverts the rationality of some people, allowing some wicked people to ignore the natural law in particular cases. Aquinas uses the example of Germanic tribes that thought stealing was morally permissible, which clearly goes against the natural law.<sup>198</sup> This example frames the question of whether or not the natural law can be excised from the hearts of human beings, which Aquinas affirms that it cannot.

The main arguments of the article that Aquinas deals with is that sin has the ability to excise the natural law from our rationality as it can [1] destroy both the law of righteousness (which is the natural law) and [2] the law of grace. Further, and more pertinent to the Germanic tribe's example, [3] humans have done many things contrary to the natural law. Aquinas holds to what he has argued earlier, arguing that there are

very general precepts, precepts everyone knows, and more particular secondary precepts, which are like proximate conclusions from first principles. Therefore, regarding general principles, the natural law in general can in no way be excised from the hearts of human beings.<sup>199</sup>

Aquinas is arguing here that nothing, not even the power of sin, can wipe out the universal truths our similar rationalities can give us.

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198. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.4.

199. Ibid, I.II 94.6.

However, he is not affirming that sin has no effect on reason's ability to deliberate from the natural law. He says further that "the natural law is wiped out regarding particular actions insofar as desires or other emotions prevent reason from applying the general principles to particular actions, as I have said before."<sup>200</sup> Sin has the power to corrupt our ability to apply general principles to particular actions, and even to corrode approximations that were made in light of the natural laws general principles, which would explain why the Germanic tribes thought that stealing was morally permissible. He concludes by saying that "sin wipes out the natural law regarding particulars but not in general, except perhaps regarding secondary precepts of the natural law."<sup>201</sup>

Aquinas affirms here something that is pertinent to our conversation regarding Zagzebski's moral theory. Aquinas affirms that, as such, a basic orientation to the good and right remains for all people despite the distorting effects of cultural or evil influences. In our example in the last section, I used Nazi Germany, and many would use this example to claim that sin or evil dispositions could corrupt the rational faculties knowledge of the natural law. Moreover, Aquinas already established that actions which go against the Eternal Law, the derivative source of the natural law, are sinful acts.<sup>202</sup> Acts which guide us away from our natural inclinations are sinful and vicious acts, and it would be a bit arbitrary to say where this corruptive power starts and stops.

But why would this corruptive power be arbitrary? Aquinas holds that sin could be in the reason in one of two ways, either by erring by not knowing the truth, and by commanding the lower powers, the appetites, to act against their natural inclinations,

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200. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.6.

201. Ibid.

202. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 21.1.

thereby having reason fail to put them in check.<sup>203</sup> Sin can also disrupt the connection between reason and its proper object, which is the knowledge of the truth, and the truth in practical matters is the generalized precepts of the natural law which guide our own ethical thinking. How, then, could the Nazis still be considered rational if sin or evil habituation could fully corrupt their ability to understand the natural law? If what Aquinas is saying here is correct, then it would seem that sin could corrupt the rational faculty so much that one would not know the precepts of the natural law. How does Aquinas get out of this problem?

Aquinas's answer to this objection is dated, especially given how different his metaphysics is to our own contemporary views on the matter. In the *Summa*, Aquinas claims that sin is handed down generationally, starting with our first parent, which is Adam. Since Adam was inclined to sin, all his offspring, humanity, will have the same inclination to sin. However, this only corrupts our sensory and vegetative appetites, as the rational soul is not transmitted generationally but is given to us by God. Sin primarily corrupts the lower parts of the soul "proximately" and only the will "remotely." Since the will, the rational appetite, is part of the rational soul, it cannot be fully corrupted by the power of sin.<sup>204</sup>

However, Aquinas gives another answer elsewhere, as when he deals with the question of whether sin diminishes the good of nature. In I.II Q85 he says that "the good of human nature is threefold. First, there are principles of which nature is constituted, and

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203. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 74.5.

204. Ibid, I.II 83.4 ad 1. Perhaps an adaptation of this Thomistic argument could be that our behavioral dispositions are a function of evolution and are heritable, but our knowledge of the natural law derives from the exercise of reason.

the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul.”<sup>205</sup> He continues on by saying the other two naturally good parts in our nature are our natural inclination to virtue and the gift of original justice. Sin completely destroys the gift of original justice and diminishes our inclination to virtue. However, “the first mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed or diminished by sin.”<sup>206</sup> This first mentioned good is the general precept of the natural law.

Additionally, Aquinas states that “sin cannot entirely take away from man the fact that he is a rational being, for then he would no longer be capable of sin. Wherefore it is not possible for this good of nature to be destroyed entirely.”<sup>207</sup> This answer to our question may be a bit more helpful to our current discussion, as it seems if our rationality is completely destroyed by the powers of sin and vice, we would not be rational creatures at all. Surely, those who followed the Third Reich were still rational agents capable of acting rationally, even if much of what they did under the influence of the Nazi ideology was irrational.

Connecting this back to what Aquinas states about the precepts of the natural law and his views on habit could also help us better understand what he means when he says that the natural law could not be wiped away from the minds of men. If we remember that every human being acts towards their own perceived good, then reason’s ability to follow the generalized precept of the natural law could still be said. It could be that their perceived good is the good that they are following, even if it is going against their natural inclination to virtue. Much like a smoker who no longer cares about the health risks of

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205. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 85.1.

206. Ibid.

207. Ibid, I.II 85.2.



smoking could still be following the general principle of the natural law by seeking good (relief he gets from smoking) and shunning evil (not feeling the relief).

#### **4. Aquinas on Virtue**

In his ethical theory, Aquinas connects the natural law, the cardinal virtue of prudence, and habitual moral virtues together. First, reason knows the general principles of the natural law, and through the power of prudence applies these general precepts into particular cases. By setting our ends correctly, meaning to act in accordance with reason's legislative powers, we are able to deduce what actions are in accordance with reason and those that are not. The moral virtues then control the appetites to desire the good and to do good acts. According to Aquinas, every being desires its own perfection, and virtue is what enables human beings to obtain their own perfection. Virtue is what perfects our capacities, and it is through the rational soul we become virtuous (or vicious) people. This section will lay out Aquinas's account of virtue and how it connects to human's desire for goodness.

The intellectual virtue, prudence, otherwise known as practical wisdom, aims at perfecting our intellectual capacities, which are aimed at truth. Further, it enables human beings to make good judgments about what we should do, and this in turn controls and empowers the will accordingly do desire things that will contribute to our overall goodness and happiness.<sup>208</sup> Regarding prudence, Aquinas holds that it is

a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters not only what a man does, but also how does it; to wit, that he do it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion. And, since choice is about things reference to the end, rectitude of choice requires two things: namely, the due end, and something suitably ordained to that due end. Now man is

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208. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 137.

suitably directed to his due end by a virtue which perfects the soul in the appetitive part, the object of which is the good and the end. And to that which is suitably ordained to the due end man needs to be rightly disposed a habit in his reason, because counsel and choice, which are about things ordained to the end, are acts of the reason. Consequently an intellectual virtue is needed in the reason, to perfect the reason, and make it suitable affected towards things ordained to the end; and this virtue is prudence. Consequently prudence is a virtue necessary to lead a good life.<sup>209</sup>

Aquinas claims that prudence is one of the most crucial virtues necessary to living a life that is oriented with right reason, since it is the virtue that allows us to do good deeds in relation to our good ends. Not only that, but it also perfects our reason, which empowers us to carry out our function by living in accordance with reason. Although this may seem recursive, prudence perfects the rational capacities as they are related to our ultimate end, which is to live a flourishing and good life.

Next, Aquinas discusses the relationship between prudence and the moral virtues. In the quote above, there is an obvious connection between practical wisdom and making choices that allow one to live a good life, and Aquinas follows Aristotle's treatment of prudence by putting it in close relation with the moral virtues.

The moral virtues are so called because they are located in or involve the appetites—and our moral character concerns the good, which is the object of appetite. That is to say, as an intellectual virtue, prudence is aimed at the truth, but as a director of the appetite and its movements, prudence is aimed at the truth about the good that is to be done, and that good is the object of the moral virtues.<sup>210</sup>

As was stated above, practical wisdom moves us to the truth, however, it is also the conductor of the appetites and its movements. A will that is guided by prudence will aim itself as the truth about the good that should be done. As practical wisdom perfects the intellect, so moral virtues perfect the appetites, “whose object is the good as loved or

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209. Aquinas, *Summa*, 57.5.

210. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 138.

desired.”<sup>211</sup> This connection goes further though, as Aquinas says one cannot have the moral virtues without prudence because “it is a habit of making us choose well.”<sup>212</sup>

Since prudence orients our intellect to the good, the prudent agent will desire what is good. Our final end, happiness, can only be achieved through a habitual formation of desire towards the good that is judged worthy of pursuit by a correctly working rational intellect and desired by a correctly ordered rational appetite. A correctly working rational intellect will deem that perfecting one’s capacities is a means at achieving one’s happiness. A habit that perfects a human being’s capacities, what Aquinas calls a virtue, will be considered a good habit, while a bad habit distorts the human’s nature capacities and desires for good.<sup>213</sup> Virtue is in accordance with our nature, and anything that is unsuitable for it is deemed a vicious or evil.<sup>214</sup>

Aquinas differentiates a “human act” from an act of a human. Human acts are intentional and orient the agent to some end, while an act of a human is just something that may be done without a purpose or mechanically, such as winking (a human act) versus blinking (act of a human).<sup>215</sup> Habits are the principle for a human act, and are acts which are “performed in a manner proper to or characteristic of human and proceeding from reason and will.”<sup>216</sup> As we said, repetitive actions which enable the agent to flourish can be evaluated as good habits, while those that lead to destructive tendencies can be

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211. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 138.

212. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 58.4.

213. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 41.

214. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 49.2.

215. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 26.

216. *Ibid*, 27.

deemed as bad. We evaluate agents based on these qualities, as they modify and qualify the person who has them.<sup>217</sup>

Nicholas Austin identifies four ways in which Aquinas defines a habit, as a habit is a “quality or disposition that is stable, operative, valent, and nature-directed.”<sup>218</sup> In terms of stability, one must possess the quality in order to have it. We would not consider someone who, on occasion, gives money to charity, charitable. Someone who actually continually gives away money, time or energy to causes will actually be deemed as charitable. Repetitive actions develop one’s character virtuously or viciously, depending on how they act in accordance with right reason.<sup>219</sup>

Next, habits need to be operative, meaning that they are disposed towards acts of operations. Going back to Aquinas’s metaphysics, everything is always on the spectrum of potentiality and actuality, and habits are neither, as they lie somewhere in the middle. “A habit lies midway between potentiality and actualization.”<sup>220</sup> Austin compares this to a child who is learning to play the piano (potentiality), and after years of playing can play it very well and expresses the capacity to do so when the musician sits at a piano to play (actualization). It would seem that the skill of playing the piano well remains dormant until it is utilized, as is not always in “being.” Aquinas calls a habit a “first actuality” of a capacity, in that it begins to perfect a potential, such as the ability to play the piano, while “second actuality” of a capacity is the completion of the capacity, meaning a habit is “midway between pure potentiality and perfect act.”<sup>221</sup>

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217. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 28.

218. *Ibid*, 29.

219. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 49.2

220. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 29.

221. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 50.4 ad 2.

Next, habits that are virtuous and vicious are either good or bad, as they are never neutral and says that they are

dispositions whereby someone is disposed well or ill...For when the mode is suitable to the thing's nature, it has the aspect of good: and when it is unsuitable, it has the aspect of evil. And since nature is the first object of consideration in anything, for this reason habit is reckoned as the first species of quality.<sup>222</sup>

This leads into Austin's last point, which is that habits are nature-directed, which include both the valence and operative qualities of habits. Aquinas says, "as we have said above, habit implies a disposition in relation to a thing's nature, and to its operation or end, by reason of which a disposition a thing is well or ill disposed thereto."<sup>223</sup> Being nature-oriented means that it moves us in a direction either to fulfill our natural capacities or not, and more importantly, we can evaluate if these are in fact good or bad habits by how they are fulfilling our ultimate ends. Austin sums it up nicely:

Virtuous habits do not diminish but improve our capacity to act from reason and will. A virtue cannot be a modern habit, since the more something is done from modern habit the less it is done from reason; it must a habitus since virtue, as principle of a human act, is nothing other than a perfection of the rational powers of agency.<sup>224</sup>

Acting from reason and rationality is the human being's natural operation and acting virtuously perfects this power. By acting and performing good habits we can start to become a virtuous agent who maximizes his capacity to exercise his rational powers which orient us towards actions that fulfill our natural desire and want to flourish and become happy.

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222. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 30.

223. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 49.4

224. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 32.

Aquinas calls virtue both “the perfection of a capacity” and “a habit ordered to action.”<sup>225</sup> As was seen in the piano example above, virtue starts from a capacity within human nature to acquire the virtue, which is then traced in two stages of its actualization. First, the natural capacity to acquire the virtue is perfected, and second, the perfected capacity issues in virtuous action. By the virtue going through this two-fold process of actualization, it is set up as a “pivotal role in the teleological, or actualization-directed, picture of human flourishing.”<sup>226</sup>

However, if human beings are naturally oriented to the good, why do they sometimes go wrong, developing vicious character traits instead of good ones? Just as virtue affects both the intellect and the will, so too does vice. As stated above, human beings have the ability to develop vicious and sinful dispositions of character, and even the ability to pursue lesser goods at the expense greater ones. Why is this the case, especially if people have a natural orientation to the good in both their rational intellects and wills? In terms of this project, how does someone, like the Nazis, come to admire Hitler?

Vice is the opposite of virtue, but also differentiate between sins; vices are a type of disposition or inclination toward what is not suitable for a human being to do, while sins are “disordered acts.”<sup>227</sup> Vice, much like virtue, is a disposition and a habit, but one that disposes us to act badly. Moreover, Aquinas makes note that having a vice is not sinful, but when someone commits a bad act because of a vice, then it is a sin. A sin is an action that is contrary to right reason, as it opposes actions and dispositions that

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225. Aquinas, *Summa* I.II 55.1-3 and 55.2 ad 1.

226. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 132.

227. *Ibid*, 96.

contribute to the fulfilment of the ultimate end.<sup>228</sup> Much like virtue is acquired when we the intellect and the will are working properly, so vice is acquired when the rational intellect and appetite are disoriented. This disorientation could be in the intellect, the passions, or the will. All actions involve the will, even sinful and vicious ones, so in a sense, all sinful actions are a result of an improperly oriented will. Our question mainly applies to sins and vices that result from an improperly working will, so I will only focus on that part of Aquinas's hamartiology.

In any of the different types of sins, there seems to be the tension that the will can ignore the rational intellect's deliberation that one good is greater than another. This seems pertinent to the question above: how could one admire vicious people at the expense of virtuous ones? This has to do with what Aquinas calls sins of the will, one that lead the agent into doing acts from "deliberate wrongdoing."<sup>229</sup> Since the will's basic orientation is to desire the good that the properly working intellect judges worthy as pursuit, the will is "out of order when it loves more the lesser good [at the expense of the greater one]."<sup>230</sup> According to Aquinas, we choose evil knowingly, meaning that we choose to pursue a lesser good at the expense of a greater one.

According to Aquinas, every act has some sort of goodness,<sup>231</sup> so human beings will be drawn to do nearly every act. However, some actions are greater than others, such as virtuous acts are better than vicious ones. However, an improperly oriented will is not choosing evil for its own sake, as this would go against the most fundamental principle of

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228. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 97.

229. *Ibid*, 104.

230. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 78.1.

231. *Ibid*, I.II 18.4.

the natural law. When the agent chooses a vice, or admires a vicious exemplar, they are choosing a lesser good that is judged as greater than an actually better good. This means that the agent does not choose evil for its own sake, but rather for the sake of obtaining a lesser good. Since humans are always oriented towards the good, they must see some good in their desired act. Much like the smoker we discussed earlier, they desire stress relief, despite knowing that smoking causes poor health issues. Even though we may do something we know is wrong, we see some goodness from it that we hope to obtain.

The agent who acts from deliberate wrongdoing does so and eventually regards the lower goods as a greater good because of habit. This eventually redacts down to sins of the intellect. “The origin of the disordered preferences lies in the intellect’s presenting disordered alternatives to the will again and again until the disordered preference is inculcated within the will; over time, the will acquires a misshapen or disordered preference.”<sup>232</sup> A habitualization of preferring and choosing a lesser good at the expense of a greater one creates a disordered will, which in turn creates a sin done from deliberate wrongdoing.

Yet, the problem redacts to sins of the intellect, and either (1) the will ignores the intellect’s actual preference of a greater good and chooses the lesser good or (2) the intellect falsely judges a lesser good to be greater, or more worthy of pursuit and desire, than a greater one. How does this happen? As I have stated before, this is germane to our current discussion in Zagzebski’s moral exemplar theory, and if Aquinas can answer this difficult problem, we could apply it to our own vindication of admiration.

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232. DeYoung, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 106-7.



How does (1) happen, how can the rational appetite ignore the intellect? This is even more confusing, as

The intellect presents to the will as good certain things or actions under certain descriptions in particular circumstances, and the will wills them because it is an appetite for the good and they are presented to it as good. For this reason, the intellect is said to move the will not as an efficient cause but as a final cause, because its presenting something as good moves the will as an end moves an appetite.<sup>233</sup>

It seems here that the will can't simply ignore the intellect, as the will is moved by the intellect. Eleonore Stump defines the will as a "bent or inclination," incapable of making its own judgments towards perceived goods. Therefore, the problem is not a problem with the will ignoring the problem, but desiring lesser goods, which is exactly what our second problem entails. The implications of this are far more reaching, however, as this means that the intellect, which is inclined to goodness, can actually desire vicious or evil things. We have seen this hinted at in Aquinas's account of vice and sin, but the problem originates in the intellect.

However, the will does exercise some degree of efficient causality over the intellect, going so far as the ability to adopt or to reject a particular belief. The will can also exercise this authority over the intellect by directing it to attend to some things or ignore other things, or even to stop thinking about something altogether.<sup>234</sup> However, this is only on the basis that the intellect judges these things as good, such as to be distracted, or to stop thinking about a sad advertisement that wishes you to donate to a charity for orphans. The connection between the will and the intellect is extremely close and is difficult to see where one stops and the other starts. However, what is most important for

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233. Stump, Eleonore. *Aquinas* (Routledge, New York, NY: 2005), 278.

234. Stump, *Aquinas*, 279.

this discussion is the notion that the will is an appetite for the good, so there needs to be a perceived good that the intellect must desire.

On Aquinas's account, the will wills only what the intellect presents at that time as good under some description. Acts of the will, then are for something apprehended as good at a particular time in particular circumstances, as distinct from something which is good considered unconditionally or abstractly.<sup>235</sup>

Eleonore Stump continues on further:

If the intellect does present something to the will as good, then, because the will is an appetite for the good, the will wills it—unless the will directs intellect to reconsider, to direct its attention to something else, or to stop considering the matter at hand. The will's doing this is, of course, a result of the intellect's presenting such actions on the part of the will as good, and such an act on the part of the intellect may itself be a result of previous acts on the part of the will directing the attention of the intellect.<sup>236</sup>

The important thing here that Stump points out is that it is the intellect that first must perceive something as good for the will to desire after it. The only thing the will can do is direct the intellect's attention to something else, namely, another perceived good.

However, the intellect will have the final say because it will judge whatever good as the one which is to be desired. Of course, this is not just a conversation between the intellect and the will, as the passions are also a part of this deliberation process. However, for simplicity's sake, the intellect has the final say in which perceived good is greater than another.

Stump uses the idea of incontinence to stress a very useful point that is relevant to our current problem with Zagzebski's moral theory. In the case of incontinence, the intellect represents something as good which the will is not willing.

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235. Stump, *Aquinas*, 281.

236. *Ibid.*

Aquinas would say that the intellect, influenced by the will, is in fact being moved by opposed desires to represent the thing in question as both good (under one description) and not good (under a different description), so that the intellect is double minded.<sup>237</sup>

It would seem that the intellect can become double-minded, as it is not always clear on what it desires. However, with the push of the passions, and higher order ends and desires in certain circumstances, the intellect may be driven to perceive lower end goods, even vicious actions and dispositions, at the expense of greater ones.

The idea of double mindedness is an important notion when discussing how the intellect can become corrupted. “The reason these morally wrong choices can have the effect of misprogramming the intellect in both its speculative and practical parts is explained by the will’s ability to exercise control over the intellect—in this case, indirect but immediate control.”<sup>238</sup> As we have seen, the intellect proposes the perceived good (as opposed to what really is good) to the will, and this perceived good is what the will wants. I could continue writing this paper, or I could stop and watch television. My favorite show is about to be on in the next 10 minutes, and I decide that is a better good than finishing this paper despite my approaching deadline. The intellect judges watching television as the greater good, the will wills it, sets my appropriate end, and then carries out steps to complete this end.<sup>239</sup>

Although my example may just be a bad or lazy choice on my part, there may be other cases, such as sin and viciousness, that this is applied too. How can the intellect judge these as worthy things to pursue? First, the intellect must approve of the vicious act, as the agent must see something good in the act itself. I may like to watch television

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237. Stump, *Aquinas*, 283. See also Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 17.2 and 17.5 ad 1.

238. Stump, *Aquinas*, 356.

239. See Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 19.3

to relax or escape the dread of deadlines, but if I come that I judge putting off responsibilities a good, then my rational appetite will desire it. This consent to sin and viciousness may be an act of the appetitive power, but reason's approval precedes sinful and vicious acts.<sup>240</sup> If I do this repeatedly, I will obtain the character trait of sloth and laziness, which is not only a vicious character trait but also one of the seven deadly sins. The cause of my vicious state of sloth is that there was some apparent good that was (1) judged by the intellect and (2) desired by the will, so therefore both the intellect and the will play a role in sinning and obtaining a vicious character disposition.<sup>241</sup>

Next, the intellect, when questioning whether or not this is an actual good worthy of pursuit, it will fall back onto the descriptions of why it was deemed good in the first place. The intellect will then command the will to desire and will the perceived good.

So in a case in which the will wants what in fact is not good, as a result of the command of the will the intellect directs its attention to just the evidence which supports the goodness of what the will wants and turns away from any countervailing evidence.<sup>242</sup>

The description of what is good about the perceived good misprograms the intellect to the point that it deems lesser good as better than greater actual ones. "The misprogrammed intellect allows the will to want as good what it might have rejected before the misprogramming of the intellect; and the warped will, in turn, misprograms the intellect further."<sup>243</sup>

Aquinas's explanation above answers our question of how one can choose lesser goods at the expense of greater ones. This also has implications for exemplarism, as the

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240. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 74.7 ad 1,2,3.

241. See Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 75.2.

242. Stump, *Aquinas*, 356-7.

243. *Ibid*, 357.

same process can come about when choosing a vicious exemplar, albeit a bit more complicated. The admirer could be in a state of double-mindedness, seeing both positive and negative traits in an individual he may want to admire. Analogous to the case of desiring viciousness, the intellect will ultimately decide that the vicious exemplar is worthy of admiration. The intellect then judges two things regarding the vicious exemplar: (1) the positive traits that the exemplar does have make him worthy of admiration and (2) the vicious dispositions he possesses are minimized or outweighed by the positive traits the vicious person possesses.<sup>244</sup> This will then lead the will to do two things (1) adopt or imitate the positive traits that the exemplar has and (2) ignore the vicious dispositions or justify them in light of the positive traits. When confronted with any countervailing evidence that this exemplar is not worthy of admiration, the admirer will fall back on his judgments and will to justify that vicious exemplar as worthy of admiration.

But why is this wrong, not necessarily in terms of the obvious wrong of someone admiring Hitler, but in terms of Aquinas, and how does it connect back to Zagzebski's exemplar theory? This connects back to Aquinas's metaphysical schema that permeates his natural law and virtue theory, which all points to the fact that human beings desire goodness. However, this is not merely a descriptive account of who we are or how our rational intellect and wills work, but a normative theory which claims that these people

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244. Although this mischaracterization of the exemplar may require some of the good that is not based on Zagzebski's overarching theory, this is explaining why people's reflective admiration may still be oriented to a vicious exemplar. This could be an explanation of why people, even upon reflecting whether that exemplar is worthy of admiration, may still deem them to be despite their obvious vicious traits and moral shortcomings.

who are not acting in accordance with reason and the natural law are wrong,<sup>245</sup> and therefore should not be admired.

As we saw in Aquinas's metaphysical account of human nature, a human being's *differentia* is rational, and a good human being is one who actualizes their capacity for rationality.

[A]nything is naturally inclined to an operation appropriate for it in accordance with its form...And so since the rational soul is the proper form of a human being, every human being has a natural inclination to act in accordance with reason. And this is act in accordance with virtue.<sup>246</sup>

In this quote we see Aquinas connect his metaphysics, natural law theory, and virtue ethics all in one. All human beings are inclined to act in accordance with reason and acquire virtue, so one can say that a good human being is a moral human being.

Further, Aquinas is not giving us a mere descriptive account of human nature and ethics, but a normative one. This is needed for our exemplar theory as well, as we want to say who are and are not exemplars. Going back to Aquinas's metaphysical sketch, a human being's form is the rational soul, and from this soul there are things that are known naturally by us all, such as the ability to perfect our capacities through the virtues.<sup>247</sup> From this we can judge people as virtuous and vicious, and in Zagzebski's terms, worthy of admiration or disapprobation.

Aquinas claims that evil implies privation, something that is done not in accordance with reason. Whereas virtue perfects these the human being's capacities, vice and evil destroy them.<sup>248</sup> The human being's nature gives us a natural desire to perfect

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245. Stump, *Aquinas*, 68.

246. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.3.

247. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 63.1.

248. *Ibid*, I.II 18.5 ad 2.

our capacities, and it seems that we would judge those who have done this successfully by acquiring certain virtues as good people who are worthy to follow, that is, if our intellect is working properly. A correctly working intellect will be able to judge that those who have only a few redeeming traits, but corroded capacities through vice and evil, are not worthy of pursuit.<sup>249</sup>

The perfection of our capacities is what every human desires, that is, until the judgment of lesser goods disorients our intellects and rational wills. However, moral exemplars show us that a virtuous lifestyle is possible, and more importantly, that they themselves are worthy of pursuit because they have perfected the human being's capacities, an innate desire that is human to us all. Aquinas claims that the cardinal virtues are what perfects the human beings' capacities, I quote him at length below:

[W]e find that there are four cardinal virtues. For the formal principle of the virtue of which we speak now is good as defined by reason; which is good considered in two ways. First, as existing in the very act of reason: and thus we have one principle virtue, called "Prudence." Secondly, according as the reason puts its order into something else; either into operations, and then we have "Justice"; or into passions, and then we need two virtues. For the need of putting the order of reason into the passions is due to their thwarting reason: and this occurs in two ways. First, by the passions inciting to something against reason, and then the passions need a curb, which we call "Temperance." Secondly, by the passions withdrawing us from following the dictate of reason, e.g. through fear of danger or toil: and then man needs to be strengthened for that reason dictates, lest he turn back; and to this end there is "Courage."<sup>250</sup>

Those who embody these virtues are worthy of admiration, and we call them exemplary figures that we are able to identify through the emotion of admiration. The emotion of

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249. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 58.3.

250. Ibid, I.II 61.2. My translation uses the word "Fortitude", but I thought "Courage" was a more accessible word.

admiration may be the human being's first detection of the human good that connects their basic desire to become virtuous to people who embody what they want to become.

## **5. Conclusion on Aquinas**

As we have seen, Aquinas offers a metaphysical schematic which permeates his natural law theory and virtue ethics. He begins by claiming that we have a rational soul which is able to control both our sensory and rational appetite. He also claims that we have a natural inclination to the good, and virtue is that main good that human beings are inclined to pursue, as this perfects our rational capacities. The precepts that allow us to know what the good is and to follow it comes from the natural law, which is man's derivative participation in God's Eternal Law. By applying the general principles of the natural law, which is to pursue good, or the perfection of our being by becoming virtuous, into particular cases. Sin and evil can corrupt us and make us into vicious people, but it can never fully corrupt our rational faculty to the point that we will not be able to desire goodness or discern the good at the least in some basic form.

## **6. Philippa Foot and *Natural Goodness***

Although Foot draws from Aristotelian virtue ethics, she differentiates from both Aquinas and Aristotle saying that practical rationality should not be seen in a desire-fulfillment theory, meaning that practical reason should not be used to justify actions that one has done to satisfy personal desire. However, much like Aquinas, she sees a close connection between practical rationality and the will. Much like Aquinas, Foot also sees the relationship between these two, ultimately putting practical rationality as the thing that guides the rational appetite (to connect it to a Thomistic framework).<sup>251</sup>

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251. DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 138-9.



What I want to stress at this point is that in my account of the relation between goodness of choice and practical rationality it is the former that is primary. I want to say, badly, that there is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will.<sup>252</sup>

What Foot is proposing here is that our conception of practical rationality must be derive from the conception of the human good, not the other way around.

Foot argues that moral reasons, such as telling the truth, helping a friend, or keeping a promise, are on equal grounds of justification as self-preservation and the “careful and cognizant pursuit of other innocent ends.”<sup>253</sup> What Foot means here is that moral reasons are not overriding, and, although morality may be something can justify and explain actions, it is just one of many considerations people take when explaining an action. She writes that “the evaluation of human action depends...on essential features of specifically human life.”<sup>254</sup> The human will must be assessed by many of these considerations, “especially against facts about what humans need...on Foot’s view, then, our conception of practical rationality is inevitably tied to what is good for human beings, and must answer to facts concerning what is good for human beings as a species.”<sup>255</sup>

As stated earlier, Foot proposes a view of ethical naturalism, meaning that moral goodness is an aspect of what makes us good as human beings.<sup>256</sup> Foot defines natural goodness as that “which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations, [that] is intrinsic or ‘autonomous’ goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the ‘life form’ of its species.”<sup>257</sup> This

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252. Foot, *Natural Goodness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

253. Ibid.

254. Ibid, 14.

255. Hacker-Wright, John, "Philippa Foot."

256. Ibid.

257. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 26-7.

conception of moral goodness as natural goodness is based off her idea that objective features of living things makes them good members of their specific species. She uses the example of a tree and explains that a tree is good insofar as its roots are below ground and collect water, leading the tree to have green leaves and flourish.<sup>258</sup> Much like natural kinds, we too can evaluate human beings by how their certain features and capacities are.

I believe that evaluations of human will and action share a conceptual structure with evaluations of characteristics and operations of other living things, and can only be understood in these terms. *Life* will be at the centre of my discussion, and the fact that a human action or disposition is good of its kind will be taken to be simply a fact about a given feature of a certain kind of living thing.<sup>259</sup>

Foot argues that our evaluation of these capacities of organisms will be from an objective and normative standpoint, meaning that we assess what is normal for that organism to do in the backdrop of its species. Much like we make the evaluative assessment that a tree's roots are good or bad depending on their ability to take in water, we will be making a normative judgment that the tree is good or bad. If the tree has roots which can take in water, it is a good tree, if it has poor roots that cannot take it water, we not only consider the tree a bad tree, but also defective. For Foot, there is no difference between evaluative and normative judgments. Much like we would connect the judgment that a tree is bad if it has bad roots, we would say a human being is bad depending on certain defective capacities.<sup>260</sup> Foot argues that there are objective features of living things that make them good members of their respective species, and human beings are no different. "The norms

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258. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 30-1.

259. *Ibid*, 5.

260. *Ibid*, 47.

which determine what makes something a good member of its kind [Foot] calls ‘natural norms.’”<sup>261</sup>

But what are the human being’s natural capacities that one judges as either good or bad? Much like Aristotle and Aquinas, Foot acknowledges that human beings are rational animals, which complicates how we describe our own species. One way in which everyone evaluates human beings is how well reason and rationality is applied to justifying actions.

Let us start, therefore, with the fact that there is this great difference between human beings and even the most intelligent of animals. Human beings not only have the power to reason about all sorts of things in a speculative way, but also the power to see grounds for acting in one way rather than another, they can ask why they should.<sup>262</sup>

According to Foot, every living thing possesses some form of agency which require the individual to fulfill these “objective norms” that are required for it to live and thrive, and human beings are the same way. Much like Aristotle and Aquinas, Foot argues that plants and animals do not set goals or ends, they are merely responding to natural inclinations towards goods needed for survival, such as food and reproduction. Human beings are different, as we can deliberate on what goods one should follow and have valid reason for doing so.<sup>263</sup> “We are capable of responding to reasons in a distinctively explicit way, inasmuch as we act on some understanding of which things are good.”<sup>264</sup> We evaluate the norms of human beings by how well their reasons are for acting, meaning that we are evaluating their natural inclination to act for good ends.

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261. Hacker-Wright, John, "Philippa Foot."

262. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 56.

263. *Ibid*, 53.

264. Hacker-Wright, John, "Philippa Foot."

But what, exactly, is the objective norms that human beings are judged by? According to Foot, it is to reason well and act towards good ends. “Human good must indeed be recognized as different from good in the world of plants or animals, where good consisted in success in the cycle of development, self-maintenance, and reproduction. Human good is *sui generis*.”<sup>265</sup> Human beings are able to act on reason, and others are able to assess whether or not the actions was good or bad in light of these justifications. Foot uses the example of a man who needs to cash a check to avoid a late fee but is bedridden with a fever. Although the man has reasons for doing both actions, there is an overriding “should” that comes from his usage of practical rationality, and the only rational thing to do is to stay inside and rest.

For the actions of anyone who does not  $\phi$  when  $\phi$ -ing is the only rational thing to do are *ipso facto defective*. It does not matter whether we say that he acts irrationally, or rather say ‘acts in a way that is contrary to practical rationality.’ In either case it is implied that he does not act well.<sup>266</sup>

According to Foot, not using practical rationality, or using it poorly, is a human being’s natural defect, much like a root that does not collect water well.

Human beings have the ability to set goals and ends for themselves and promote actions which bring about that goal. If someone’s reason is defective and chooses bad ends, or does not do what is rational, then we would say that those are bad ends or actions which that person has done. Foot puts this in a naturalistic way, showing that the same way we talk about plants and animals is the same way we talk about human beings and their capacities. Much like we use the same conceptual basis to judge all trees, plants, and animals as good depending on how well their natural capacities work, there are many

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265. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 51.

266. *Ibid*, 59. Her example starts on 57.

universal capacities that can be a criterion for human beings, and the ability to reason well is one of them. Other criteria include mental capacities, imagination, the ability to understand language, and even the five senses. We would judge that a lacking of these abilities a “natural defect” which connects the schema that Foot was using earlier when discussing animals and plants. Although human beings are more complex and are “freed from certain kinds of obedience to nature,”<sup>267</sup> we still use the same evaluative process and judge these natural capacities to be good, because they are natural and not defective. Furthermore

But how does this relate to virtue? So far, it would seem that Foot, much like Aquinas, emphasizes our ability to be rational creatures who can promote good ends and do actions that accomplish those ends. Also, like Aquinas, she stresses that we have a natural desire to promote our own good, and although this is not a teleological argument like one found in Aquinas, it is one of natural inclination, simply as asking “why” something would do a certain action, such as a flower moving towards the sunlight. One of the main capacities that sets us apart from other animals is our ability to reason, and for the sake of her argument, the ability to reason on practical matters. Our ability to achieve ends allows us to flourish and go for what we see as good.<sup>268</sup> If one of our natural capacities is practical rationality, then we need dispositions that can better this capacity in order for us to achieve our ends in the best possible way. Foot defines virtue as

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267. Hacker-Wright, John, "Philippa Foot." An example of this that Foot uses is the natural capacity to reproduce, which every animal has. Non-rational animals are driven by this instinct, yet some human beings give it up for certain lifestyle's, like Catholic priests. We would say that the inability to have children is a natural defect, but freely choosing not to have a family can be seen as something good and valuable. See Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 42-3.

268. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 56.

something that “if someone possesses it, his actions are good; which is to say that he acts well. Virtue bring it about that one who has them acts well.”<sup>269</sup> Virtue is goodness of the will, the ability to act well and do good acts.

Furthermore, Foot argues that we speak of good people in light of his rational will.<sup>270</sup> According to Foot, and much like Aquinas above, goodness can come from four different principles: (1) the nature of an action itself, (2) the end for which the action is done, (3) relation to the agent’s judgment of whether he or she is acting badly or well, and (4) circumstance.<sup>271</sup> If any one of these principles are suspect, or lacking in sufficient reason for being “good,” then the action itself is not good.

In the absence of any defect it will, however, be said to be good in its operation, just as a normal, healthy child will come to have what we call good balance, to walk well, to talk well, and to relate well to other children.<sup>272</sup>

Our ability to reason through choices is natural to us as human beings, and the ability to reason actions through this list of criteria will know if it is a good act or not. “Rational choice should be seen as an aspect of human goodness, standing at the heart of the virtues rather than its own.”<sup>273</sup> Virtue enables us to reason and act well, which strengthens our natural capacities towards goodness.

## **7. Conclusion on Foot**

Foot is a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalist, which means that rationality is at the heart of her views on ethics and moral realism. She equates evaluative judgments with normative judgments, meaning that in the same way we would evaluate a tree whose

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269. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 12.

270. Ibid, 66.

271. Ibid, 72-3.

272. Ibid, 73.

273. Ibid, 81.

roots cannot gather up water a bad tree, we would say that the tree is defective and should not be a model for other trees. We find something wrong with its natural capacity to gather water. The same schema works for human beings, despite us being more complex. Much like Aquinas, Foot emphasizes our ability to reason and strive for certain goals, which in turn lets us deliberate actions to achieve those goals. Our capacity for practical rationality is a natural capacity, just like the ability for trees to gather water with their roots. If a person's rational capacity is off, or if they desire poor goals or bad ends, we will say that their capacity to reason is defective. Further, this points to Foot's emphasis on a rational will, which is our ability to act well. Our practical rationality bends to this, and what is good and natural for human beings is what our will strives towards. Virtue is what allows practical reason and the rational will to work in conjunction well with each other, and it is no surprise that human beings have a natural desire to become virtuous, because that will enable us to fulfill our natural capacity for goodness. To sum it up, our desire for goodness can only be fulfilled with the virtues, which can only be obtained through rational choice.

## CHAPTER V

### EXEMPLARISM AND SOLVING THE ISSUES

#### 1. Vindicating Exemplarism

Although it may seem that the deck is stacked against Zagzebski's exemplar theory, there may be some hope that we can find a basis for her claim that admiration cannot be so corrupted or led astray that one is unable to detect and spot virtuous exemplars. This section will argue that admiration can be supported and vindicated by the conceptual basis that was laid out in both Aquinas's and Foot's virtue ethics. My argument is that their virtue ethics suppose some base level normativity that is essential to our nature. If this is true, then it may seem that we are naturally oriented to the good in such a way that when presented with clear, strong, examples of goodness, we recognize it and respond to it—we are drawn to it—even if we possess socially conditioned or learned dispositions that function to mask or redirect that response. To put another way, cultural indoctrination that is contrary to the good is always working against a contrary natural impulse in a way that cultural teachings in line with the good are not. As we saw in the previous chapter, both Aquinas and Foot argue that we have a natural orientation to the good. This groundwork that was laid out in Aquinas's and Foot's theory will hopefully bolster Zagzebski's moral theory. Although we have a natural desire for goodness, it would only work a natural capacity to recognize goodness when presented with it.



My first argument goes as follows:

- I) If we have a natural inclination to goodness, then we have a tool which recognizes goodness when one is presented with it.
- II) We have a natural inclination to goodness.
- III) Therefore, we have a tool which recognizes goodness when one is presented with it. This tool is the emotion of admiration.

Admiration may be the first conscious recognition of the good qualities in others and is based off our natural orientation to the good. As we saw in Aquinas's metaethics of good, the intellect judges things as good. Stump differentiates between two sorts of good here, one of general, natural orientation to good things, and another bent towards cognized goods which have been deemed as good on reflective judgment.<sup>274</sup> The natural appetite to good may bring us to admire certain people with good characteristics, but a sustained judgement based on reflective analysis will provide one a rational appetite to admire that person, which is exactly what Zagzebski argues for.

However, we need to distinguish between two things (1) an attraction to what *seems* good to us (2) our discernment of the good. If only (1) is natural to us, then Zagzebski's problem is unresolved. However, the Thomistic framework we have discussed suggests that everything that seems good to us really is good in some sense, just lesser degrees of good in relation to other goods that we could pursue. We have seen how the intellect and the will play a role in choosing lesser goods at the expense of greater ones, as the intellect will compartmentalize and justify the lesser good as worthy pursuit, and the will desires and pursues it. When confronted with any sort of counter evidence, the will can choose to ignore it, but only if the intellect judges that ignoring the evidence is good in the first place. Thus, the intellect and the will habituate choosing a

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274. Stump, *Aquinas*, 279.

lesser good and justifying the choice on the grounds that the good it does have are worth desire and pursuit.

The example we gave was a smoker who chooses to smoke for the relief they get, ignoring the counter evidence that smoking causes serious health problems. However, applying this to the emotion of admiration will be more pertinent to Zagzebski's own theory. As the Thomistic metaphysical sketch has shown, every human being has some degree of goodness, such as some redeeming qualities or traits. People can perceive these traits and admire them, since humans are naturally drawn to admire virtuous dispositions and those who exhibit them. However, if this potentially admired subject does also have terrible vicious qualities, then there will need to be a discussion between the rational intellect and will to decide if this person is worthy of pursuit. The intellect will have the final say, since it is the mover of the will and points to the goods that the will will ultimately desire. The intellect will judge that this person is worthy of admiration despite their character traits, which will either be ignored, justified, or downplayed in light of the admirable character traits the person does actually possess. Then, this process becomes habitualized in the admiring person's own faculty of admiration, and thus admiration becomes defective.

Further, our subjective view of the good can go wrong, but only in a certain way: a prioritization of the goods. There can be a disconnect between what a person pursues and what is genuinely good, but the disconnect is never total. The question that is pertinent is whether this disconnect becomes so dispersed and consistently chosen that admiration becomes an unreliable starting point for moral reflection. Further, can someone's rational faculties become so bad or defective that they are incapable of

responding to admirable exemplars? Zagzebski's moral theory could handle the occasional outlier, but the question is whether the faculty can become so corrupted by cultural forces that there can be widespread attachment to non-admirable exemplars with no one noticing-or no way to effectively distinguish between a virtuous exemplar and a vicious one.

Aquinas argues that happiness is the good that every human being strives for and that every one of their actions points towards. According to Aquinas, one way of achieving happiness is through perfecting habits through virtue. Therefore, in order for us to become happy, we must become virtuous. Although there may be some disagreement on Aquinas's central claim that happiness is what everyone strives towards with their actions, this does not prove that everyone merely strives for some subjective view of goodness. Instead, Aquinas focuses on our capacity to reason, which every human being is able to do. Our capacity to reason is our greatest tool, as we can use its powers to actualize our perfection. Every being desires its own perfection, and human beings are no different. As stated above, one way in which we obtain our perfection is through the virtues.

Additionally, I noted that human beings always choose their (perceived good) as something to pursue, because they will always see something good in it. Although this may be a case for relativistic thinking, Aquinas holds the opposite. He knows that there are greater and lesser goods, and people who follow lesser goods usually do it at the expense of greater ones. However, this is not normal, and this usually means that there is something wrong with the basic orientation of the human being.<sup>275</sup> If our faculty of

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275. Aquinas, *Summa* I.II 78.2,3,4.

reason is acting correctly, we will usually pursue the greatest goods possible. Our intellect can judge which goods are greater than others, say, the good between eating healthy and unhealthy. Since the rational appetite desires one's own goodness, it works with the intellectual capacity to judge whether some goods are worthy objects of pursuit. A well-working rational faculty that is cultivating the virtues in pursuit of the good will aim at the greater goods, while a faulty rational faculty will seek lesser goods at the expense of greater ones.

Additionally, Aquinas' natural law theory states that there is a fluidity in our rational faculty that depends greatly upon the circumstance. The practical universal principle of the natural law is that one is to pursue the good and shun evil. However, this will look different in particular circumstances, such as not returning a knife to a friend who wants to murder somebody with it.<sup>276</sup> Moving from universal to particular acts will require some flexibility in one's practical reasoning, but the main tenant that remains is doing good and seeking good. If one's subjective understanding of good does not match up with the universal principle of goodness, then there is a problem with the particular instance the agent is in and is therefore committing an act against the universal law and not following the natural precepts of practical rationality.

Foot has a similar answer that is relevant to this question. Foot argues that how one pursues is through the rational will which decides whether the perceived goods are worthy objects of pursuit. Foot has a more naturalistic approach to virtue ethics as we have seen, and accounts for different facets of life to be the judge of whether or not actions can be morally justified, such as commitments to either family or religious affairs.

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276. Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," I.II 94.4.

Furthermore, Foot's whole thesis revolves around the idea of an objective good, which is something that is good for a species of its kind. Human beings are rational creatures and have a rational intellect and will to guide them in moral concerns. Ends that fall in line with correctly working intellects and desired by correctly working rational wills will be deemed good, while ends and "goods" that are desired by faulty human faculties will be deemed as bad or defective. Actions are then judged as good or bad in light of their aimed at goals. Again, our evaluative judgments are the same as normative ones, so if we say something is bad it follows that it should not be pursued or desired by a correctly working rational will. A correctly working rational will is one that is conducive to human flourishing, much like a correctly working root is conducive to a flourishing plant or tree.

The problem of whether a person's rational faculty can be so corrupted or defective that they are incapable of responding to admirable exemplars is a difficult one to answer. However, on the Thomistic sketch provided I would have to say no, at least not widespread enough that engulfs all of humanity. The closest ruination of the emotion of admiration was in Nazi Germany. However, I think a more pertinent example comes in the aftermath of Nazi Germany in the Nuremberg Trials, specifically that in the person of Franz Stangl, a commandant of the Nazi extermination camps Sobibor and Treblinka. Stump uses him as an example of how the intellect and will work together to eventually justify and will goods that, at one point, the agent would not have desired or thought of as good.<sup>277</sup> To put it in a Thomistic framework, Stengl was disgusted at the Nazi's treatment of the prisoners, but desired to stay within ranking and good standing with the officers, so he chose to ignore, and eventually justify, the atrocious acts. During his trial and eventual

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277. For Stump's discussion see: Stump, *Aquinas*, 356-8.

imprisonment, he was so sure that he was doing the right thing that he did not feel shame for what he did despite being convicted for participating in crimes against humanity. Stump uses this example to showcase how someone's orientation can become so defective that not only does the agent's intellectual rationality judge goods as proper, but he also no longer feels shame for what he does. If we apply this case to our own question of whether a person's admirable faculty can become so corrupted by cultural forces, the answer seems to be a resounding yes.

However, I would argue that this, and Nazi Germany, could be an outlier, a horrific and terrible one at that. I say this because we do not see the Nazis or Stangl as good or outstanding people to be admired, but something to be exemplified as the purest form of evil that human beings can become. The Nazis and Stangl are deplorable people in history, and a warning of how awful human beings can become if corrupted. Although there are some people who believe that the Third Reich were right in their final solution, we see these people as not only defective but morally disgusting and vile. I think our current view of Nazis show that the faculty of admiration still works, as we judge the Nazis as deplorable. Furthermore, although Stengl was corrupted by his compartmentalizing and justification of the atrocious acts, there could be some people who expressed remorse for their actions (or inactions) during the Nuremberg trials. Take Oscar Schindler for example, someone who eventually felt compassion for the Jewish people and rescued over a thousand people from being sent to concentration camps.

To summarize the first argument, we have a natural inclination to goodness which is manifested by the emotion of admiration. A person whose faculty of reason has been ruined by evil or natural defectiveness, still pursues what they perceive as good and what

really is good in a narrow sense, but they are not pursuing good all things considered. This dichotomy shows the kind of error to which humans are susceptible: not complete misidentification of the good with the bad but an attraction to lesser goods at the expense of greater ones. Our base orientation to the good can only be distorted, it cannot be destroyed. The fundamental precept of the natural law “do good and shun evil” is, in a sense, embedded into our very form as human beings,<sup>278</sup> our very nature orients us not only to want the good but to see the good for what it is when we encounter it. Further, this dictum may be a standard of judgment of whom to imitate and who to not. Since we all begin with a natural inclination to good, we can evaluate and judge who is pursuing good in their particular circumstances and who is not. By doing this, we can admire the virtuous person who is perfecting his own capacities while feeling vindicated disapprobation towards the vicious person who is corroding his own capacities.

My second argument is the core argument of my entire thesis and goes as follows:

- I) If something exhibits these universalized good characteristics, then since we are inclined to good, we will naturally be drawn to those things which exhibit the good characteristics.
- II) Virtuous exemplars exhibit these universalized good characteristics, and it is through admiration that we detect these people.
- III) Therefore, we have a natural inclination to virtuous exemplars who exhibit universal good characteristics that all of us are inclined towards.

Our inclination towards good enables us to pursue good ends that we deem as good under the supposition that it will enable us to actualize our perfection and allow us to flourish. The rational appetite, like all appetites, is oriented to the good, and the rational intellect decides if certain ends are worthy of pursuit. If something inhibits us to cultivate the virtues, which are what allows human beings to flourish, then we will be

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278. Aquinas, “Treatise on Law,” I.II 94.2,4.

moved to pursue those things as ends. Putting this in the framework as exemplarism, we can see that a virtuous end would be the pursuit of becoming like an exemplar. Moreover, using our intellectual capacities, we can deduce if this is a good end or not, in light of whether this pursuit will enable us to flourish and perfect ourselves.

But how do we know what exemplars are worthy of pursuit and which are not? A way to frame this in a Thomistic sense is how do we know what good things and objects are worthy of pursuit and desire? The answer to the latter will apply to the former. As was stated in Aquinas's metaphysics, natural law theory, and virtue ethics, human beings are naturally oriented towards the good. We saw Stump differentiate this from natural good in general and particular goods judged by reflexive judgment. Exemplars seem to fit both of these goods, as we are naturally drawn to good people in general, and then upon reflecting upon people we have admiration for, we judge if they are or are not worthy of admiration and imitation.

An intellect that is working properly, which is one that is guiding the will in acquiring virtuous habits which, in turn, will perfect the human capacities of rationality, will seek out moral exemplars who are or who have fully perfected the capacities of a human being. Aquinas holds that all human beings have the same capacities, since all of us fall under the genus of rational animal.<sup>279</sup> Further, much like every act has some sort of goodness, so too does every human being, not only by extension of their existence but also that everyone is a mixture of both bad and good traits. I take this to be based off a basic understanding of Aquinas's Convertibility Thesis.

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279. See Aquinas, *Summa*, I 76.5.



However, it should be noted here the Stump argues that being and goodness are not correlative to one another, that is, on a 1:1 basis. Further, neither is to be identified with any one particular characteristic on which the other intervenes,<sup>280</sup> such as calling a Nazi good because he, on occasion, shows compassion to his comrades. Stump says

The small amount of goodness that must supervene on even the mere existence of a thing is not enough to call that thing good. In fact, if the thing falls too far short of the full actualization of its specifying potentiality, it is bad (or evil) considered as an instance of its kind, even though there is goodness in it.<sup>281</sup>

By this reading of the Convertibility Thesis and applying it to moral exemplarism, it seems that one cannot justify their admiration for vicious people, or even people who possess some virtuous character traits<sup>282</sup> because these positive traits, whatever they may be, do goodness does not supervene on only one specific trait. Goodness supervenes on a character that has perfected the natural capacities of a human being by being in accordance with reason, and since there are obvious flaws in all these questionable exemplars, they obviously have not perfected all their rational capacities and therefore should not be admired.

Further, the Convertibility Thesis is the basis for Aquinas's metaethics, and we can use normative judgment to deem people as worthy of admiration. The basis for this judgment is our natural capacities of rationality and the desire to perfect these capacities and anyone who does not do this, or actively did the opposite, is not worthy of

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280. Stump, *Aquinas*, 71-2.

281. *Ibid*, 74.

282. I take some examples to be controversial people in history that were once revered and respected. See chapter two for a discussion of these people.

admiration.<sup>283</sup> Stump says:

On Aquinas's views, an object *a* has goodness (to an extent) as an *A* if and only if *a* has the property of having actualized its specifying potentiality (to that extent). In particular, moral goodness supervenes on rationality in such a way that if any human being is morally good (to any extent), that person has the property of having actualized his or her capacity for reason (to that extent); and if any human being has that property (to that extent), he or she is morally good (to that extent),<sup>284</sup>

Moral exemplars have done this, that is why they are exemplary, and we can easily identify them. People like Jesus, Buddha, many of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Saints of Christendom, and others have, to put it in a Thomistic sense, developed traits that have actualized their rational capacities to a certain extent and, by doing this, have acquired moral goodness. If someone lumped people like Christopher Columbus and Andrew Jackson into this same group, we would immediately spot something wrong with this list, as they would be outliers, since there were obvious moral flaws that one would have to glare over or justify to make sense of why they should be on a list of exemplary people. The faculty of admiration, then, does not merely work as a detective tool for

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283. Using this Thomistic framework does not mean that we are leaving Zagzebski's moral theory behind and gravitating towards a whole new one. The admirability of certain persons is the starting point of moral theory for Zagzebski, but it does not follow that our judgments of who is admirable is above critique and, as we have seen, without difficulties. Instead, it means that our basic understanding of morality starts with admiration, proceeds through analysis of those we admire upon reflection, and builds into a more extensive moral theory of what makes these people good based on these exemplars, but then can come back and refine specific judgments of admirability. As long as the collective human judgments of admirability are not systematically corrupted, such a process can effectively identify the failures in our faculty of admiration, even though that faculty is the starting point of the process. People like Andrew Jackson and Christopher Columbus are good examples of this, as they were once revered in American History but no longer receive the same respect and admiration they once had. Their vices and atrocities are no longer made in light of their great acts that they did. Our collective admiration for them has gone through major critique and identified the failures of these once revered figures, even if the starting point was in fact our admiration of them in the first place.

284. Stump, *Aquinas*, 71.

moral goodness that one wants to imitate, but, if working properly, also acts as a filtration device against things like vicious character traits that destroy our capacities, we have a natural desire to perfect. Admiration not only judges that someone is good enough to imitate, but also judges that one does not want to become like someone else.

Moral exemplars are not always happy, but they do have dispositions and characters of the human good. This, in fact, is what connects every moral exemplar; their ability to exemplify virtuous character and dispositions that all human beings naturally want to pursue. To connect it back to Zagzebski's theory, this is an inference made based on the examination of exemplars, not a condition for qualifying a person as an exemplar. This inference may be discovered upon reflection and then sustained in the admirer's lifetime. As my argument suggests, anything which characterizes this good is worthy to be pursued as an end, such as the desire to be like an exemplar is worthy of pursuit because correctly working rational faculties would say that that is a worthy pursuit. Furthermore, correctly working rational wills will desire to be like an exemplar who showcases these desired goods, since we naturally want to also have these dispositions of character. Anyone who does not want to be like an exemplar, or who does not think that a virtuous person is an exemplar, would be an outlier and perceived as incorrect, and could actually have a faulty rational faculty of intellect and will. Even people whose exemplars are in fact vicious people could in fact have incorrectly working rational faculties as well.

## **2. Solving the Problems**

Now that we have a basis for admiration, the natural inclination to goodness and virtue that is in our rational faculties, we will take a look at how to potentially solve the issues that were brought up in the second chapter. As was mentioned in the second

chapter as well, the problems may still be pertinent amongst religious circles, and we used Christianity as an example. My hope is that the same answers have the ability to solve the same problems that are in the philosophy of religion that I previously brought up.

### **2.1. Solving the Aristotelian Problem**

The Aristotelian problem was one of circularity, as Aristotle claims that the way in which we become virtuous is by hitting a relative mean, a mean “by which the person with practical judgment would determine it.”<sup>285</sup> The problem arises, however, in knowing exactly who the person of practical wisdom is, let alone being able to accurately know what a virtue is, and Aristotle runs into deeper problems, as he discusses *phronesis* as a virtue, which has its own self-indexed standard of virtue dependent on the person. It would seem that, in order for someone to seek out a practically wise person to learn how to cultivate the virtues, they would already need the virtue of *phronesis* to determine who would be a virtuous teacher. Emotions, such as admiration, have a mean between vices of excess and deficiency, so it would seem that we need to tailor our emotions to fit their objects in a way that a practical person would, since we do not want to admire the wrong person.

Austin highlights this circularity problem in his own discussion between the virtues and prudence: “we seem to have a vicious circulatory: prudence is the measure of moral virtue, and moral virtue, which consists in right appetite, is the measure of prudence.”<sup>286</sup> It would seem that prudence and the moral virtues have a mutual

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285. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b35.

286. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 51.

interdependence on one another, and we have seen this in our discussion over the rational appetite and intellect.<sup>287</sup> However, prudence needs the moral virtues, I quote Aquinas at length below:

Other intellectual virtues can, but prudence cannot, be without moral virtue. The reason for this is that prudence is the right reason about things to be done (and this, not merely in general, but also in particular); about which things actions are. Now right reason demands principles from which reason proceeds to argue. And when reason argues about particular cases, it needs not only universal but also particular principles, whereby he understands that he should do no evil...so, in order that he be rightly disposed with regard to the particular principles of action, viz. the ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits, whereby it becomes connatural, as it were, to a man to judge aright to the end. This is done by moral virtue: for the virtuous man judges aright of the end of virtue, because 'such a man is, such does the end seem to him' (Ethic. Iii, 5). Consequently the right reason about things to be done, viz. prudence, requires man to have moral virtue.<sup>288</sup>

It would seem that the morally virtuous person, someone we would call an exemplar, can perceive what ends are worthy to pursue because they are truly good. By pursuing these ends he is able to reason well about what actions are needed to accomplish these ends. Aquinas seems to address this circularity problem in his own writing, as he says "Reason, as apprehending the end, precedes the appetite for the end: but appetite for the end precedes the reason, as arguing about the choice of the means, which is the concern of prudence."<sup>289</sup> This leads into another circularity problem, one in which the rational appetite desires a certain end that is judged by the rational intellect as good. However, the rational appetite needs to direct the intellect to the certain end, leading to infinite regress of interactions between the will and intellect. What is Aquinas's solution? Aquinas says that

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287. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 65.1 ad 3.

288. Ibid, I.II 58.5.

289. Ibid, I.II 58.5 ad 1.

There is no need to go on indefinitely, but we must stop at the intellect as preceding all the rest. For every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will.<sup>290</sup>

Every act of willing is preceded by some apprehension done by the intellect, but not all apprehension is preceded by an act of the will.<sup>291</sup>

Further, Aquinas claims that the moral virtues pre-exist in reason, and through the power of prudence applies the universal principles (the moral virtues) to particular circumstances in which they are needed. He says:

Now the good of the human soul is to be in accord with reason...the ends of moral virtue must of necessity pre-exist in the reason...in the practical reason, certain things pre-exist, as naturally known principles, and such are the ends of the moral virtues...about these is prudence, which applies universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters.<sup>292</sup>

As prudence finds its measure in the right appetite for the end, the end finds its measure in reason's natural inclination to pursue good and shun evil, which is reason's intuitive first principle of the natural law. "Natural reason [is] known by the name of, 'synderesis' appoints the end to moral virtues."<sup>293</sup>

Although there seems to be a circularity problem, the rational intellect's natural knowledge of the good, otherwise known as Synderesis, is the answer to the Aristotelian problem at hand, which is the habit that allows us to understand the general moral first principles. This is based on our inclination to our own goodness and connects to the fundamental precept of the natural law, which is the one should pursue good and shun evil. Our ability to grasp the precepts of the natural law through natural reason, which

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290. Aquinas, *Summa*, I 82 ad 3.

291. See Stump, *Aquinas*, 282.

292. Aquinas, *Summa*, II.II 47.6.

293. Ibid, II.II 47.6 ad 1.

inclines us towards our own good in which we can set ends that our rational appetite desires, gets us out of this infinite regress.

Applying the Thomistic understanding of Synderesis we can solve the circularity problem that arises in Zagzebski's own theory. Admiration may be the human being's first understanding of goodness when one is presented with it, and this could be Synderesis applying the fundamental principle of the natural law, as we admire those who (1) are good and (2) seek good themselves. By using our natural intuition of the good, we can find exemplars who desire good ends that we ourselves would want to desire and then take actions that will develop our dispositions and habits to accomplishing those ends. This starts with the faculty of admiration, which is, at first, naturally disposed towards morally excellent people.

## **2.2. Solving the Cultural Problem**

The cultural problem comes down to the idea of an entire culture admiring the wrong person by virtue of socialization, such as the Nazi's admiring Hitler, or people admiring historical figures like Christopher Columbus and Andrew Jackson. Zagzebski discussed Nazism's admiration for Hitler in her own work and suggested that one way this issue could be solved is that someone could compare Hitler to other people he/she admires and would no longer admire Hitler because of the inconsistencies in the disposition of admiration.<sup>294</sup> Even though there may still be discrepancies in who we admire, we do not say that the Nazis are right for admiring Hitler, and we are wrong for not doing so. "We trust our dispositions to feel admiration and contempt when they

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294. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 47.

survive reflection over time, and I think we are right to do so.”<sup>295</sup> We then cast into doubt about this “mere discrepancy” that Zagzebski calls the Nazi’s admiration for Hitler, especially as it roots itself deeper into the worldview of those people who admired Hitler and other awful people.

Although I discussed this problem in terms of Stengl and how the intellect can become distorted, maybe a more pertinent question is: why are justified in trusting our dispositions to admiration when they survive reflection over time? I argued that admiration, which is one of the most basic manifestations of our orientation to the good, cannot be completely destroyed. A natural orientation of the person to toward the good, one that speaks both a desire for and a recognition of it when it presents itself to us clearly cannot be annihilated completely, just distorted or twisted. This justifies the hope that sustained reflection on its judgments over time will correct the distortions.

I think a better and more pertinent question in this section is “why do people admire those such as Hitler, Columbus, and Jackson, despite their obvious negativity towards other people groups?” From a virtuous, or even neutral, perspective, the ability to admire people who are so evil would be something impossible. However, this does not discount Zagzebski’s moral theory, but only that sometimes people admire the wrong person, they are in fact still admiring the person who exemplifies what they see as good. What’s necessary to differentiate here is the admiring someone for who they actually are and admiring a person under a false description. Admiring someone for who they are could mean to actively reflect on their character and judge what positive and negative traits they actually possess, along with whether they are truly virtuous. Admiring

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295. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, 47.



someone under a false description could be justifying or compartmentalizing any negative characteristics somebody has, much like Stengl did by ignoring the Nazi's euthanizing practices in camps he was overseeing. Over time, admiring someone under a false description justifies any sort of negative attributes while exaggerating their good ones. Again, this is based on Aquinas that everyone pursues their own good, and for Aquinas that usually means at the expense of a greater good, namely, following an actually virtuous exemplar.

As I have argued, the emotion of admiration is an evaluative tool that gravitates one towards its desired object, and in terms of admiring an exemplar upon reflection, it evaluates that person as good and motivates one to become like the exemplar. We would never admire someone we thought was something evil or bad, but someone that was good. Even if one did admire someone who was in fact evil, it would only be in virtue of some good quality, or some mischaracterization of the person in terms of good qualities. This is similar to Aquinas's discussion about people who strive after bad goals or ends and pick up vicious habits along the way. Furthermore, he claims something similar in his discussion over the natural law, in which he argues that an evil person still follows the natural law since the general precept to pursue good is still intact, the particular application of it is gone, even the ability to proximate the natural law in particular cases. If this is the case, usually done through the correlative faculty of reason, then, in this case, the Nazis, would have switched lesser goods for greater ones, as they still saw something good about Hitler's leadership.

In less bleak cases, such as for people who admire Columbus and Jackson, I think you could answer this in the same way. People who generally call these people personal

heroes are usually seen as having something wrong with their rational faculty. We would say that, although they are important historical figures, their crimes and atrocities against minority groups outweigh any positive traits that they may possess. While they could have some positive traits, such as leadership capabilities, courage, wisdom, etc. we would say there are better people who exemplify these qualities while also not committing the same atrocities that these two people did.

This is what I think Zagzebski means when she says to compare admired people; it's the difference between admiring people like Columbus and Jackson and actually admirable people who demonstrate the same virtues, such as Dwight Eisenhower. Although we may see some positive traits in people like Columbus and Jackson, there are many different people who exemplify the same traits that are more worthy of one's admiration. If someone still wants to hang on to their admiration for either of these two historical figures, we, again, would have an inclination that something may be wrong with other parts of the human psyche, such as their faculty of admiration is being overridden by other affective states. This goes back to our distinction between admiring someone as they are and as they have been perceived, and the admiring of both Columbus and Jackson speak to that. Perhaps those who admire these figures grew up with a false narrative of these people which are tied back to memories of their youth. An attack on their perceived heroes could also be an attack on those who saw Columbus and Jackson as heroic figures, and admiration for these people can tie into a familial bond. Even if these tied in experiences are not a conscious association, it may be what triggers a defensive response and has the person double down on their admiration for Columbus and Jackson. Although Columbus and Jackson had some traits that could be directed

towards the human good, their actions and atrocities definitely did not show it, and one who inspires to be like them would not lead an exemplary life. One could even reflect and ask what they want their own legacy to be like, and I doubt that many would want a legacy like Hitler, the Nazis, Columbus, or Jackson.

### **2.3. Solving the Humean Problem**

The Humean critique of Zagzebski connects with the previous problem, as he states that virtue is by and large a social convention. His virtue theory gives two critiques in regard to Zagzebski's theory: (1) virtue is partially determined by social convention and is widely influenced by it; (2) any idea of what is virtuous, and likely to be admirable, is determined or influenced by social convention. As we have seen, the answer to the cultural problem above gives push back on his second critique, meaning that admiration, if it is connected to our natural inclination towards objective good, may be able to go beyond social convention. However, the first one still stands but will be dealt with below.

First, Aquinas holds that everything is good in so far as it exists, including actions<sup>296</sup> so a human being will be drawn to every act. However, it is our natural desire and response to an action perceived goodness which draws us to do it, so the value of the virtuous act is outside of the agent. The goodness or badness of the quality is not dependent on the perception of the agent, the agent only rationalizes if said characteristic is judged worthy of pursuit. The Convertibility Thesis in Aquinas keeps virtue and moral acts from merely being a social convention. Through our form of rational animal, we are able to naturally be drawn to acts that will perfect our capacities. This is done whether a

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296. Aquinas, *Summa*, I.II 18.4.

culture says it is correct or not. Virtue and its value are independent of cultural malleability because of our natural inclination to objective good that is manifested through virtuous actions.

Connecting this to exemplarism, then, every human being displays some sort of positive characteristic, no one is fully corrupted by sin and vice. However, the descriptive nature of “a virtuous person” or a “vicious person” will come with a normative judgment of whether perceiver wants to be or not to be like that person. People who are not acting in accordance with reason and following the precepts of the natural law are wrong, and thus should not be admired. Since all of us know the natural law in our practical reason, we can use it as a tool to judge whether people are or are not worthy of admiration. Hume’s skepticism of reason’s abilities to motivate the agent in any way is well known, but even if he was right, he still supposes that there are natural virtues, and one could say that moral exemplars do actions that produce benefits for themselves and the others around them. Since we are naturally drawn to our own goodness, we will naturally seek to possess the natural virtues as well.

#### **2.4. Solving the Moral Luck Problem**

One of the most difficult issues in all of moral philosophy is the issues of moral luck, and Zagzebski’s moral theory falls prey to it. The problem with Zagzebski’s theory in regard to moral luck is that much of our moral development seems outside of our control, such as the society we grow up in, or those we are around to admire, such as parents and other authoritative figures. Aristotle stresses that it is the right moral education that makes all the difference on if someone can become a virtuous person.<sup>297</sup>

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297. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b 8-14.

This could apply to Zagzebski's theory by saying that it may be admiring the right people that makes all the difference in becoming a virtuous person or not, but if the people we are around is largely outside of our control, how does one reconcile this? What if someone grew up in a white supremacist family in a US town and all the role models one is presented with are in the local KKK chapter, couldn't that person's faculty of admiration be systematically shaped by upbringing to latch onto white supremacists as exemplars? The intellect would initially judge the KKK members as good and would present the desire to be like them to the rational appetite, which would then will to be like them, thus creating a cycle that mirrors Stengl's descent into the justification of crimes against humanity. The admirer of the white supremacists develops his understanding of morality and virtue in terms of the white supremacists he admires. How does one solve this perennial issue?

My answer to this, just as the others, rests on what Aquinas argues: that we have a natural inclination to the good. Even if cultural condition shapes the faculty of admiration to latch onto the white supremacist exemplars, the natural goodness orientation could lead that person to also latch onto truly good exemplars<sup>298</sup>—and the reflective comparisons between the two exemplars should act as correcting method, as this is what Zagzebski proposes in her own theory. In terms of the Thomistic framework I have been working with, both the rational will and the intellect desire objective goodness, no matter

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298. Although their luck could be so bad that they have no morally good exemplars in which to admire. But the faculty of admiration would still be working if they were admiring someone who they judge as good. If they were to encounter these truly good exemplars later in life, then that could act as a correcting method for their exemplar-less society's influence on their faculty of admiration. Moral luck is a difficult problem not only for this theory but many moral theories.

how corrupted the faculties become. While the white-supremacist-in-the-making could continue judging the others in his community as virtuous and morally good, willing to be like them, the will's natural orientation of the good could point the intellect in the direction of another good person he admires, and this could be one of the exemplary people that we have mentioned. Here, the intellect could judge the KKK member as worse in comparison to the true moral exemplar, and the person would then desire to be like the more virtuous person.

I assume each of them would say that since it is in our rational faculties that each person has, this is unaffected by moral luck in some basic, fundamental way. One could still become a virtuous person and seek out good people despite living in vicious societies, like the ones Aristotle described. If every human being, whether they are in a virtuous society or a vicious one, all have the same dispositions toward the good and a rational capacity that enables them to seek out good ends. Although they may choose lesser ends for greater ones, they are still held responsible for this.

In fact, someone who had a rough upbringing that was out of their control is taken into consideration when judging their actions and their lives as a whole. We would find it a sort of defect, or something to take pity on, someone who did not have a good role model or exemplar growing up. Although we would find this person still responsible for their character and how they are acting, we find that this is a lamentable lifestyle. The base desire for goodness would still be incorruptible by luck, however, as this person would still be admiring who they saw as best in their life or striving towards things they

perceive as good. Although our temperament, capacities, and inclinations<sup>299</sup> may be subject to luck, our desire as rational human agents for the good is unaffected by it. In any circumstance, someone would always be choosing their own perceived good and shunning their perceived evils.

### 3. Solving the Problem in Christian Ethics

These issues all arise in Christian ethics as well, as one cannot sidestep this issue just because there is an independent moral exemplar who everyone is called to admire. This is because we rely heavily on the canonized narratives of the gospels to tell us who Jesus was, and these narratives are diverse and ambiguous enough to allow for alternative portraits; we are dependent on their accounts. Further, our own reading of Jesus' character could be suspect to cultural influence, meaning that the way we view him is malleable. Even if the same problems are solved in the same way as mentioned above, a question could be asked: which portrait is the right one to choose and admire?

Although more of a question for New Testament scholars dealing with issues of authority and the canonization process, the problem can be restated as to why there are multiple different portraits, and why these are considered better than the other ones.

Francis Watson, a New Testament scholar, says that:

the fourfold canonical gospel is not simply the work of the four individual evangelists. It is the (relatively) final resolution of a problem of how to stabilize the proliferating mass of oral traditions and written texts that claimed to represent the original truth about Jesus. It is an attempt to impose order in response to the threat of chaos.<sup>300</sup>

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299. Here, I assume Nagel means what one likes or enjoys, not fundamentally desires.

300. Watson, Francis. "The fourfold gospel" in *The Cambridge Companion to The Gospels*. Edited by Stephen C. Barton (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

Although the gospels were written in the first century, they were not composed and canonized until the second century.<sup>301</sup> By then, there were countless other gospels and written literary works about the life of Jesus, many of which we now label apocryphal or gnostic. Although I will not give a theory of canonization in this section, I hope that what we have discussed can play some role as to why the gospels according to Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were chosen instead of the others.

A bit of context before discussing why they were chosen might be important. The gospels were written and told orally in the first century, mainly by people in the Jewish milieu. “This clear plurality in the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus is not unprecedented from the viewpoint of the canon as a whole and development in early Judaism.”<sup>302</sup> What Stephen C. Barton is emphasizing here is that the plurality of accounts was a cornerstone in early Judaism storytelling and recounting of history, and we see this in the Old Testament’s historical writings

This implies something important about the nature of biblical and related literature: that its main concern was not to give a single, fixed account of the past, but to provide authoritative, scriptural resources to enable Israel (and subsequently the Jews) to live *from the past in the present with a view to the future*. For this to be possible, multiple retellings and ongoing elaborations of the oral and literary inheritance were essential.<sup>303</sup>

The gospel writers come from the same cultural background, and this can be seen in their writing style. They were not concerned if their experiences of Jesus matched up with one another, but were more concerned that Jesus, a man who impacted each of them in a significant way, was able to be known by future generations.

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301. Watson, “The fourfold gospel,” 35

302. Barton, Stephen C. “Many gospels, one Jesus?” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*. Edited by Markus Bockmuehl (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 177.

303. Ibid, 177-8.



For the present purposes, most biblical scholars agree that the gospel of Mark was the earliest gospel, which the writer for the gospel of Matthew then took and expanded on it, recanting their own personal experiences of Jesus. Next, Luke expanded on both accounts and added his own testament, along with what he saw as the continuation of Jesus's ministry in the first-century church, what we now call the book of Acts.<sup>304</sup> This shows that transcribing and telling the story of Jesus had the same dynamics that were shaped by the Jewish precedence of storytelling.

The story of Jesus, told and retold, provided authoritative, scriptural resources enabling believers in Christ to 'follow' him, as the first disciples had done, in subsequent generations. The remembrance of Jesus was not a way of 'fixing' him in the past, but of encountering now, in the present, the one who had been with the disciples then.<sup>305</sup>

The story of the gospels, as we have seen from their historical and ethical impact, have done just clearly that; it has enabled people all across generations and the world to hear the story of Jesus and want to be like him. Because of this personal impact he had on people, both in the first century and now, it was inevitable that there would be multiple expressions of the "revelatory impact he made on those who came to know him before and after the resurrections."<sup>306</sup> This impact was personal and affected many people then as it does today. Of course, this connects back to what we have said about admiration, as someone who exemplifies all the characteristics that we strive for will have this sort of impact because humans have a natural tendency to talk about the good people who they want to imitate. Because of this impact, "one gospel was not only inevitable but also necessary."<sup>307</sup>

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304. Barton, "Many gospels, one Jesus?," 174-6.

305. Ibid, 178.

306. Ibid, 179.

307. Ibid.

Stephen Fowl sums it up nicely, and I think it is worth quoting at length sums up nicely what I have been trying to get at:

What the Gospel of John says about itself might be extended to the entire canonical collection: ‘Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:30-1). According to this statement, what is written in the fourfold canonical gospel is not intended to be comprehensive; it would take an infinite number of books to do full justice to everything that Jesus did and said and was (cf. Jn 21:25). Nevertheless, what is written within the canonical limit is *sufficient* for its purpose, which is not to satisfy curiosity but to engender life by representing Jesus in his identity as the Christ. Further books might be written, but they are not needed. The one thing that is needful is to be found only within the canonical limit.

Obviously, the gospel writers, both within the New Testament canon and outside of it, admire Jesus and judge him as someone worthy to tell stories of and write about.

However, perhaps reflecting on and comparing portraits and writings of Jesus set the canonical limit, like what Zagzebski proposes we do when deciding on which exemplar is better and more worthy to imitate. The reason why there is a canonical limit is that these four books exemplify his goodness better than any of the other apocryphal and gnostic gospels. Although these four were canonized nearly a hundred years later, their examples of Jesus’ goodness and its ability to bring people to faith in him as their Lord and savior (and thus, exemplar) may be better and more appropriate than the other gospels that were written at the time. If the gospels were chosen only for their moral content, to make people better by wanting to imitate Jesus, then I would say that they have successfully achieved their goal, despite not all Christians having lived admirable lives themselves. But how could that be? Christianity has inspired countless people to live admirable lives, such as the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox saints, or the letter writers that Foot discussed in her own book. The lives of Jesus himself, the saints, and others who profess to imitate

Jesus have inspired many people of different nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds. Jesus' recorded life and ministry have inspired people to try and make the world a better place, and although there may be a plurality of portraits, they only confirm that he was an admirable person worthy to be imitated.

But what about those portraits that we deem as canonical, or those views of Jesus that are twisted and distorted for one's own personal gain? I think the emotion of admiration and evaluation will work the same here as it does when we meet non-exemplary people. There will be those who admire such portraits of Jesus, as there are those who admire Hitler. But such admiration will be in tension with the full palette of admired people and may not survive honest reflection. Portraits of Jesus that do not fit in with our natural grasp for good will fall by the wayside, or they may not agree with our moral intuition. That could be one reason why the church authority chose to canonize the four gospels rather than the others; they were the best showcase of Jesus's admirable qualities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Here, I have attempted to argue that our natural inclination to goodness is the fundamental basis for the emotion of admiration. Admiration lets us naturally detect those who exemplify virtues that we ourselves want. Both Aquinas and Foot argue for this natural desire for goodness and virtue, and admiration seems to be the emotion that points us in this direction. I have then attempted to answer the questions and problems that were brought up in chapter two, in hopes that I can answer them from the standpoint of natural goodness. Finally, we have taken this approach to a problem in Christian ethics, but I think that the same answers can be applied to this field. My hope is that our

inclination to good will allow us to admire the right people, and while admiration does go astray, it is still working because those people are going after what they perceive as good qualities. However, rational people would say that this is not the norm, meaning that these people were sacrificing lesser goods in light of greater ones.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In my introduction, I ended it by asking why this project is important to me. Not only did it bring together many of my philosophical interests, but it also helped me answer the fundamental question that drove the whole project: how do we become good people? What drives us to seek and imitate exemplars, a phenomenon that has been integral in human history and society since their conceptions? Is it possible for there to be some objective right and wrong that is emulated, commanded, and adhered to those we call moral exemplar, and if so, what is it? This project, although philosophically important not only to myself but others (I hope), was also personal in trying to answer these deeper questions that drove me to pursue an answer in Zagzebski's moral theory. I can say that without a doubt many of these questions have been answered, but many more remain; ones that will hopefully lead into future projects and research, but it is good to have a fundamental basis and framework which to work from.

This project started by working our way through Zagzebski's moral theory. Her decision to base the theory around the people that are admired upon reflection and the emotion of admiration gives it a simplistic, yet intuitive framework that is accessible to those philosophically versed and those who are not. Admiring an exemplar leads one to imitating them, and this is, in turn, leads one to becoming virtuous. Zagzebski argues that

there are two ways in which we can deem things as good, either in a sense of admiring them or desiring them.<sup>308</sup> Since admiration is at the center of her theory, she hopes that it can “derive the good in the sense of the desirable from the good in the sense of the admirable.”<sup>309</sup>

Despite the simplicity and accessibility in Zagzebski’s proposed theory, the project was spearheaded by the question of whether the faculty of admiration could be an actually reliable source that one could put trust in to point to morally good people? While one reflects on those they admire, maybe upright religious leaders, great leaders of morally good social changes, or those who inspired them to live a better life, one cannot help but see times in human history when the faculty of admiration has gone astray, such as in Nazi’s admiration for Adolf Hitler. This is where the tension arose: could the emotion of admiration be vindicated as a goodness detector despite instances where it has been corrupted.

The corruptibility of admiration was the thesis’s main problem, but not the only issue that casts the emotion of admiration into doubt. We considered a perennial problem in Aristotle’s virtue theory and applied it to Zagzebski’s own theory. The Aristotelian issue was one of circularity; one uses the cultivated virtue of phronesis to detect a virtuous person that will teach that person to become virtuous. In order for someone to know what the right “fit” is in the emotion of admiration one must admire the right person to show them how to correctly fit an emotion to its object.

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308. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, 30.

309. *Ibid*, 31.

The problem further persists in Hume, who argues that virtue is largely a social convention, and if someone is a moral exemplar that is supposed to be admired for certain reasons, and if reason (1) cannot generate moral vigor and (2) virtue is a social convention, then admiration will only be able to detect those who their culture deems virtuous. There is no universalizing admiration if the Humean problem persists. Finally, the last problem is one of moral luck. What if someone was raised in a culture or society of racist, vicious people? This would have to have some effect on the malleable properties of the emotion of admiration, right? Could we really blame someone for admiring a KKK member if that's all they grew up around? On what basis or grounds could we say, then, that there is objectivity in identifying exemplars if the emotion is so pliable to cultural forces?

Our answer, and eventual vindication, came in Saint Thomas Aquinas's metaphysical sketch and ethical theory. His moral anthropology proposes that humanity is naturally oriented toward the good, and that everything is good in virtue that it exists. This is based off his Convertibility Thesis, a medieval doctrine which holds that being is identical with goodness. All creatures desire to maximize their capacities, and human beings are no different. We are rational creatures, and we desire to perfect our rational capacities, thus obtaining goodness through this perfection. The way we acquire our perfection is through virtuous habits, which perfect our capacities.

However, this mere sketch does not solve the issues above since one could still perceive vices as virtues and ignore true virtues. Yet, Aquinas argues that not only do we have a base inclination to pursue what we perceive as good, we also know what is good. Aquinas is a natural law theorist, and the fundamental principle of the natural law is to

“pursue good and shun evil.”<sup>310</sup> This fundamental principle is known by all rational creatures, so there is a sense in which we know what the objective good is, despite our independent and subjective views of it. Aquinas holds that all moral virtues belong to the natural law, and by cultivating them we are following the natural law. Thus, this completes the idea all human beings, no matter how corrupted their faculties become, know that cultivating moral virtues is an objective good.

A problem still persists, why don't people do this if it known by all? For Aquinas, this is a problem with the orientation of the rational intellect and the rational appetite. Both of these have a natural orientation to the good, the intellect judges what is good, and the rational will wills that good to be pursued. The intellect can go wrong in its judgment, and sometimes even be guided by the will to choose another, sometimes lesser, good. Further, since everything has some goodness attached to it in virtue that it exists, human beings will be attracted to do any act. The intellect can thus judge between two acts, one virtuous and one vicious, and if he deems the vicious one as greater than the virtuous one, the intellect will direct the will do that vicious act. Through the process of habitualizing this act and constantly choosing it over the objective virtue, someone can thus create a disordered, vicious intellect and will. The will can also have the intellect ignore certain deficiencies in their chosen good, or the intellect can justify and compartmentalize the vicious acts good. Whatever it may be, the faculties of the intellect and the will can so be corrupted that one can lose their natural orientation to objective and virtuous good.

So how does this apply to admiration, and more importantly, how does it vindicate it? For one, a Thomistic view supposes that no one can be so corrupted that

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310. Aquinas, “Treatise on Law,” I.II 94.4.



their orientation to the objective good can be totally severed. Although someone has a disoriented intellect and will, it may still be working properly since that person is pursuing what they perceive and judge as good, just not what actually is good. One is always oriented towards virtues, and by extension for moral exemplarism, virtuous exemplars, because the connection to the objective good, the perfection of rational capacities, is embedded into our very form and nature as a human being.

Although there may be times in history when it seemed like there were times when the emotion of admiration went awry and failed its job, in the grand scheme of things, it did not. Not many people admire Hitler or Stalin any longer, and if they do, we think that there is something wrong in their orientation as a human being. Aquinas's virtue theory ground a base level normativity where we not only are drawn to goodness (desire), but we judge if it is worthy to be desired (admiration). If virtue is an objective good to be pursued, and both Aquinas and Foot agree it is, then it should be pursued.

Aquinas's metaphysics and virtue ethics vindicate admiration on this normative basis, and admiration may be the first, fundamental capacity by which human beings can recognize and desire goodness. Admiration leads one to not only judge something as good and worthy of imitation (if it is an exemplar) but drives the person to imitate the judged exemplar. If we have a base understanding of the good by way of the natural law, then one will be able to recognize moral exemplars no matter how corrupted the faculty gets.

So how did this project answer those fundamental questions? We become good people by virtue of our natural inclination to become good people. This is not enough, however, as to use a trite expression, "no man is an island." If we are naturally inclined to

the good, we will be naturally drawn by those who exhibit virtuous capacities. These people not only show us how to be virtuous, but that it is possible to perfect our capacities (to put it in a Thomistic sketch). We become good people by surrounding ourselves with good people and imitating who they were and what they did. This inclination to the objective and virtuous good is also what drives the emotion of admiration to recognize exemplary good people. The traits we desire will be exemplified in the people we admire. If we surround ourselves with great people who strive to make themselves better, we will do so too.

Is it possible for there to be some objective right and wrong that is emulated, commanded, and adhered to those we call moral exemplar, and if so, what is it?

My final question raises an answer in the grounding problem of philosophy, and whether or not morality can be objectively grounded. How does exemplarism on the basis of a Thomistic ethical and metaphysical theory, ground the good? As stated, natural facts are moral facts, and what is good is embedded into our nature. Our flourishing and happiness are what usually grounds this in virtue theory, but those words have become so convoluted and have diverged into something subjectively principled; both suffer from semantic satiation. However, perhaps exemplarism can become the new grounds in which to ground objective goodness in. Perhaps what one achieves when one is virtuous is not happiness or flourishing, but the ability to be exemplary. I think this would be a much better word to ground human good in, because, as Zagzebski points out, it makes intuitive sense. Many people argue if happiness is necessary or sufficient for virtue, but I do think that being exemplary is necessary for virtue. This is grounded in the Thomistic and Foot

naturalism that was sketched out in the third chapter, and I do not have sufficient (or necessary) space to develop it here. That will be for another project.

Finally, Zagzebski does mention that exemplarism may give rise to new answers in the grounding problem, and I gave a brief overview of how it could as well, but what are some other avenues of research that exemplarism could produce? Many metaethical issues remain, and exemplarism could explore, and perhaps answer, some of these perennial problems.<sup>311</sup> Some other areas I would like to apply exemplarism in philosophy of religion and seeing what virtues or character traits all great religious leaders have. My hypothesis is that there would be overlapping traits which are found in all religions, which could lead to a better understanding of what moral virtues human beings are naturally drawn to. This could lead into a Kantian framework of religious thinking, one in which morality is the basis of all religions, and these fundamental virtues are exemplified through religious exemplars that we are inclined to admire. I think these are interesting avenues of research that exemplarism could find new perspectives in. However, these avenues are beyond the scope of my thesis, so I will not develop them here. Whatever the avenues may be, exemplarism offers an interesting perspective that can shed new light on old questions, thus is the nature of philosophy.

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311. See Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* chapter 8.

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