

distinctive of divine agency. If convincing, they show that we could have reason to ally ourselves with, even subordinate our wills to, other human persons who do not subscribe to familiar welfare-oriented goodness.

Moreover, his culminating case that his view outdoes competitors in accounting for the central Christian orthodoxy that *God loves us, though God doesn't have to* would be more persuasive if tied to familiar models of human love. I think that this route is open to him. In my view, just as human *ethics* is probably more like the divine ethics that Murphy defends, so ideals of human *love* share more with his conception of divine love. Alongside analogs to political authority, Murphy might have considered comparisons with models of parental love.

To put my central point in a friendlier way, Murphy has more resources than he uses to display the possibility of a compelling God—worthy of worship, allegiance and even love—who nevertheless departs from familiar welfare-oriented goodness. Murphy's God can seem an unpleasant character, who demands obedience in a way that looks arbitrary, or uses a superior position to extract allegiance through a kind of bribery. Murphy works to tamp down this impression, rightly emphasizing appealing aspects of God's character that the view accommodates and makes salient. But there is more that he can say along these lines, and the closer that we can come to understanding God as sharing, rather than departing from, motivations we recognize as good in human beings, the less trouble this sort worry will cause.

I have focused on just one of many possible lines of response to Murphy's rich and intricate argument. Like any good philosophical work, *God's Own Ethics* raises many questions even as it provides important insights. The book is a true achievement worthy of careful study and much discussion.

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In every area of philosophy, novel theories are rare. In normative ethics, for instance, the theoretical terrain seems well mapped out by deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. While fine-tuning and adjustments of each theory continue, it is not easy to find a theory of morality that doesn't fall within these three categories. For this reason alone Linda Zagzebski's proposal of a new moral theory, "exemplarist moral theory" (EMT), is an extraordinary achievement. (Note: in earlier works she takes exemplarism



as a form of virtue ethics, but in this book she presents exemplarism as its own *sui generis* theory.) Of course, if a new moral theory is incoherent, lacks explanatory force, or produces deeply problematic moral views, there is little reason to celebrate it. Fortunately, in this case, while there are some challenges to raise, Zagzebski's theory is coherent, elegant, systematizes and explains much of our moral thought and practice (though certainly not all, as she would acknowledge), and offers important practical insights. Especially refreshing is Zagzebski's attention to the way that theory and practice ought to be, when possible, connected to each other in mutually supporting ways. Early in the book, Zagzebski notes how at least some students who read Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* fail to gain any comprehension because they are unable to find a link between Aristotle's reflections and their lived moral experience. Zagzebski points out, rightly in my view, that ethical theories should be able to connect with our lived experiences as moral agents and guide our lives in some useful way. Her book satisfies this desideratum with characteristic breadth, clarity, and elegance that those who know her work admire her for.

Below I'll identify what I see as four key concepts in Zagzebski's theory that structure the book. I will then discuss two possible objections to her theory. It is worth noting that Zagzebski's book is both interdisciplinary and wide-ranging, covering metaethics, normative theory, moral psychology, and the philosophy of language. The following discussion, therefore, will omit much of her more technical discussions in order to focus on the central themes of her book.

Moral Theory. What is a moral theory for Zagzebski? She gives the following concise statement, "I think of a moral theory as an abstract structure that aims to simplify, systematize, and justify our moral beliefs and practices" (5). A helpful analogy Zagzebski draws on is that of a map. Moral theories are like maps in the following ways: (a) they simplify and ignore certain parts of the terrain, (b) they provide a picture of the layout, and (c) they do not necessarily conflict with each other since, like maps, they may be mapping out different areas of the field.

Moral Exemplars. EMT is, Zagzebski argues, *foundationalist* in the sense that the entire theory is grounded in moral exemplars. Moral exemplars are, "those persons whom we see, on close observation and with reflection, to be admirable in all or most of their acquired traits" (65). The three kinds of moral exemplars are heroes, saints, and sages. Heroes like Leopold Socha risk great harm to themselves to help those in distress. Saints like Jean Vanier exemplify excellent spiritual and moral traits. Sages like Confucius possess wisdom and exemplify both intellectual and moral virtue. Zagzebski argues that we identify these exemplars through the emotion of admiration and can observe them through narratives about them (for example, in books or films), personal experience, or controlled empirical studies.

Direct Reference Theory. Drawing on the work of Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke, Zagzebski argues that to pick out or identify good persons it

is not necessary for ordinary people to know the nature of good persons (what makes them good). Just as before anybody knew the nature of water as H₂O they were able to identify instances of water, we don't need a descriptive meaning of "good persons" before we can properly identify who the good people are. Good people are people *like that*. All we need to know are the "superficial features" of good people to pick them out. We can then proceed to investigate the deeper structure of good people through close observation of their lives.

The Emotion of Admiration. At the heart of Zagzebski's views on the identification of moral exemplars is the emotion of admiration. Admiration is a distinct emotion that helps us track what is admirable. As an emotion it has an object and can more or less fit with its object (the admirable). Admiration, as an emotion, also has a characteristic feel and has motivational power. Since moral exemplars are the foundation of her theory and reflective admiration is the key emotion that allows us to pick out the moral exemplars, admiration is a central part of her theory.

Let me now turn to my first objection, which is that the reliable identification of moral exemplars is far too tenuous to allow moral exemplars to serve as the ultimate foundation of a moral theory. At times Zagzebski seems overly confident about the level of agreement concerning who the moral exemplars are:

I think that we are more certain that Confucius, Jesus, and Socrates are admirable than we are of claims about the good of pleasure, or what human flourishing is, or the good of doing one's duty, or any of the other claims that are used to ground a moral theory. In fact, I think that we are more certain that they are admirable than we are of *what is* admirable about them. (10)

While I myself agree with Zagzebski that these three figures count as moral exemplars, it is not at all clear to me how widespread this view is or how confident people would be about this claim. Would Aristotle have considered Jesus a moral exemplar? And on Confucius's view, the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), by leaving his wife and children, exemplified a grave moral defect. Perhaps even more problematically, people have admired figures like Achilles, Genghis Khan, Hitler, Stalin, and Kim Jong Il. Here Zagzebski might reply that at least for figures like Hitler, Stalin, or Kim, it is unclear how much of the admiration was based on false information; it could very well be that the people that have admired them usually didn't have an accurate understanding of what they were really like. But this idea doesn't seem applicable when it comes to figures like Achilles or Genghis Khan and other violent figures in warrior cultures. It is also worth noting that the last statement of the preceding passage doesn't seem quite right since one's view that someone is admirable appears closely connected to what one finds admirable about her; I will return to this point below.

Zagzebski does acknowledge the possibility of error in identifying exemplars:

This theory is compatible with the view that our identification of exemplars is revisable. Just as we can be mistaken in our judgment that some sample of what we call “water” is really water, we can also be mistaken in our judgment that some person we call paradigmatically “good” is really good. However, I do not think that we could be mistaken about most exemplars for the same reason that we cannot be mistaken that most of what we take to be water is water. That is because there is connection in meaning between good persons and the individuals we identify as good: Good persons are persons like that, just as water is stuff like that.” (16)

The analogy with water, however, seems to break down in a dramatic way since there is little disagreement with regard to the identification of water, but there are much deeper disagreements not only across culture and time but even *within* a given culture with regard to who the truly admirable people are.

The second objection is that the virtues, rather than moral exemplars, seem more fundamental, given some of her core ideas. On Zagzebski’s view, just as the deep nature of water is its molecular structure, the deep nature of moral exemplars is their psychological structure. But what does Zagzebski mean by the deep psychological structure of an agent? Presumably it has to do with their moral character, motivations, and dispositions—in short, the virtues. In fact Zagzebski does identify the virtues as what make people admirable, and therefore, moral exemplars (104–105). But in that case aren’t the virtues more fundamental than the moral exemplars since the virtues are what *make* someone an exemplar?

I think Zagzebski might reply by drawing attention to the way that water—a fundamental item in our ontology—also has a deep structure (being H₂O). But, Zagzebski might note, H₂O isn’t *more* fundamental than water; it’s just what water essentially is. So perhaps the thought is that being virtuous is what moral exemplars essentially are, and while the virtues explain the behaviors and attitudes of moral exemplars, they aren’t more fundamental, though they are essentially connected to moral exemplars. But there are two points that seem to make this analogy between water and moral exemplars problematic. The first is that what we call the virtues—which is the analog of the molecular structure of water—vary widely across culture and time, a point made above. For example, filial piety and ritual propriety are fundamental virtues in China (especially after Confucianism had made its mark) which we don’t find extolled in modern America. Or, we don’t find the virtue of humility widely discussed in ancient Greece, which played a crucial role in medieval Christendom. A corresponding point is that the list of exemplars, as suggested earlier, are also radically different across cultures. Zagzebski does acknowledge something like this possibility and how it might derail her theory: “If it turned out that exemplars have nothing at all in common psychologically, we would probably conclude that admirability is a superficial feature like being colorless and tasteless is for water” (104). But she doesn’t seem to see that there are strong reasons for thinking this possibility is *actual*.

On a related topic, something seems to be off in the way that the superficial properties that help us fix the reference of exemplars are connected to the deep properties of exemplars. Zagzebski identifies the performance of observable acts of heroism or saintliness (and presumably sageliness) as the superficial properties that fix the reference of exemplars and the motivational structures of exemplars (i.e., their virtues) as the deep properties. But this doesn't seem right because our identification of exemplars *includes* things like good motives and intentions. We don't just see a bare act of jumping in the water to save the child's life as what makes someone's action heroic, but jumping in the water to save the child's life *with the motive of saving the child's life for her sake* as the heroic act. Of course, we don't have immediate access to the intention or motive of the agent and so often just assume that such an intention or motive is there. But that doesn't mean that we don't think *the heroic act* isn't partially constituted by those motives or intentions. This is demonstrated by the fact that once we find out that someone jumped in to save the drowning child only because there would be a rich reward, we no longer characterize that behavior as heroic. What this suggests is that even fixing the referent of moral exemplars requires some grasp of what good motives and intentions are. So unlike the way we can identify and fix the reference of water without understanding its deeper structure, we cannot understand moral exemplars without having at least some grasp of the deeper structure of moral exemplars (i.e., the virtues). This poses a problem for Zagzebski's view because it turns out that even the identification of moral exemplars requires some grasp of the virtues, which inevitably leads to deep disagreements about who the moral exemplars are. But one of Zagzebski's central motivations for taking moral exemplars as a foundational starting point was precisely that claims about moral exemplars are less problematic and contentious than claims about human flourishing, duties, or virtues (10).

Exemplarist Moral Theory is a wonderful contribution to moral philosophy that rewards careful study. Our moral lives are deeply shaped by admirable figures, both fictional and real. These figures, whether heroes, saints, or sages, leave a formidable and enduring mark on us, inspiring and guiding us in a world fraught with moral challenges. Zagzebski's book not only captures this significant feature of human lives but also enriches the theoretical landscape by deepening our understanding of an important concept that ought to play a greater role in ethical theorizing. (I would like to thank Tom Carson for very helpful discussions and comments regarding this review.)