

## EGZEMPLARY BEHAVIOUR AND SPIRITUALITY

Ivan Koprek

Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

### SUMMARY

*In this time of pluralism and effectiveness, it is rarely, if ever, in our daily lives, as just as the broader social circles, spoken of the right upbringing, the virtues and the exemplary behaviour - a „role model“. While an admirable person presents us the character we can readily look up to, we recognize a call to follow certain values this person ideally-typically lives by. Regarding that fact, the explicit role models, primarily the people who lived their deep spirituality (for an instance, the saints!) greatly contribute to a healthy development of one's personality and a genuine understanding of ethics.*

**Key words:** ethics - spirituality role model – ideal – virtues - exemplary behaviour - upbringing

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### INTRODUCTION

In a time of pluralism and effectiveness, it is rarely in our daily lives, as just as the broader social circles, spoken of the right upbringing, the lasting virtues and examples of the good practice - the exemplary behaviour, a „role model“... What seems to have vanished is the concrete spirituality and the talk of moral ideals and role models in the upbringing. Which place in ethics and spirituality is occupied by role models and ideals?

In Greek language, for a model they used the word "typos" – a type. "A type" is actually a model (norm) according to which something is aligned, or harmonized. Choosing a person as a role model means adopting the values he or she stands for. To choose someone for a role model means to embrace the same values that person stands for. To have a role model in an individual implies a desire to become similar once to that person or the character we chose to look up to. Without any role models, there would be no process of identification with others. Moreover, that process is vital for building one's personality.

### THE PHILOSOPHY ON THE MEANING AND THE PURPOSE OF ROLE MODELS

The question of role models and ideals seems to have been raised lately only in theology (perhaps just in discussions on the topic of worshipping the saints!) and some aesthetic theories. Most certainly not in the practical life and ethics. A kind of exception could be the thoughts of the French philosopher and Nobel Prize winner for literature, Mr. Henri Bergson.

In development of his thought, Bergson distinguished between what arises in human life from coercion ("repression") and what arises from ambition ("aspiration"). Coercion is derived from the social order and the law to which the individual in a community is subjected to and which requires routine and automatism from its subjects. The aspiration, on the other hand, comes from

higher souls who are connected with the momentum of the spirit entering a world of freedom and love that transcends psychological and social mechanisms.

Two different forms of morality are directly connected with "coercion" and "aspiration": the "closed" morality of every social conformism and the "open" morality of holiness. In essence, "closed" morality is directed towards social conservatism. As such, it is in fact an expression of the stagnation of "life momentum (elan)". The "open" morality is of a mystical nature and realized by the "call of a hero" (l'appel du heros). Heroes are saints and mystics. They are essentially rare, but there is an imperceptible echo of such heroism in every human being. When a heroic personality appears somewhere, the closed morality of society with its system of duties becomes imbued with "life momentum (elan)". Such morality is not merely socially sane, but also truly humane. We are all deeply inspired and attracted to those who have accomplished their humane mission. Those who transmit the values on which the world and humanity rest are the greatest heroes. Originally, as saints - in fact, the role models in a genuine love.

In the first half of the 20th century, the philosopher Max Scheler developed his thoughts on ethics of the role models, but also on love and values. In Scheler's concept of philosophy, especially ethics, the role models have an important function. Namely, according to Scheler, human identity and human life are both characterized by the process of transformation and formation which every human being faces on its own. This process can be encouraged, and is encouraged, only by the strength of a role model, (Cusinato 2012) since every man needs another as a role model, both for growth and development, as through another human being as a role model the identity of the individual is constituted. The influence of a role model should, therefore, be understood as the call for development of the human identity – an essential element of education.

After Scheler's excerpts on the meaning of the role models (actually ideals!) the thoughts of Maria Zambrano Alarcon, Hanna Arendt and later Michael Foucault emerged, in which ethics is identified with a kind of pedagogy, but also, unfortunately, a kind of distorted "spirituality". On the whole, such ethics, and then pedagogy, increasingly renounced its value-mediating task by decreeing to the role models and true spirituality, and finally reduced itself to what Foucault calls "self technology," in fact - got entangled in the networks of individualism and anti-humanity.

A couple of years ago (2017!), a book by an American philosopher Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski appeared in public, entitled "The Exemplarist Moral Theory" and seeking to present an original moral theory of the role models based on direct reference to examples of goodness. It was all about the so-called "Exemplary moral theory" (ethics of role models!) in which role models are connected, as Zagzebski claims, with admiration - a motivating emotion whose cognitive content provokes "imitation" to actually replicate the desired behavior. The emotion of admiration simply helps us to discover or recognize a person's excellence and to experience someone worthy of admiration. In other words, admiration gives us a privileged epistemological approach to certain character traits of the moral "role model" which are crucial for our own personality growth.

Zagzebski explains his theory of admiration (actually, inheritance) of moral examples (role models) according to the "theory of direct reference" developed in his philosophical excerpts by Hilary Putnam and Samuel Kripke. In this sense, Zagzebski examines examples of moral role models: heroes, saints and sages. In doing so, he analyzes and explains the examples of Leopold Soch - a man who saved Jews in Ukraine during World War II; Jean Vanier - the founder of the Community for people with mental disabilities (the "Ship Ark") which provides many with a home in a familiar atmosphere; and Confucius, a Chinese sage. The hero embodies courage, the saint embodies Christian benevolence (*caritas*, *agapê*), and the sage embodies wisdom.

Zagzebski proposed "moral exemplarism" as a variant of an ethic of virtue (Aretic ethics!). According to her theory, virtue is "a deep and lasting acquired quality of a person we admire in our mind, and it consists of a mood to have a certain emotion that drives us forward and directs our action towards the goal and a certain success in achieving that goal." (Zagzebski 2017).

The proponents of the ethics of virtue believe, according to the tradition of Aristotle's thought, that the easiest, fastest and most common way to learn is by imitating the role models. By identifying with them, we accept and develop the virtues they exemplify. (Datterl, Guggenberger, Paganini, 185-202) Therefore, it is a question of a certain kind of pedagogy. Namely, the ethics of virtue helps us in what sort of person we

should be(come) and not what we should do. Therefore, it is considered that ethics of virtue, unlike today's popular deontological and consequentialist ethics that focus on actions, is actually more focused on a human, ie. is "more humane."

## THE CRISIS, THE MEANING AND THE POSITION OF THE ROLE MODELS

The time we live in is marked not only by a crisis of ethics but also by a crisis of role models. Starting from the basic cell of human society - the family, children today do not understand the meaning of true role models. They often do not recognize them in their parents, and if there are no attractive role models in their everyday environment, many young people today are turning to the virtual world. That virtual world, however, offers various information about people from the world of pop, sports, etc. - in fact, the "idols" who, for often quite dishonorable reasons, have been carefully created to provoke a desire to be imitated and followed. At the same time, young people are scarcely able to distinguish the carefully created "image" of their idols in the media from reality of who those people are as individuals, in such a scale that they tend to believe those "popular people" are as they are presented - ideal in every way. This is the tipping point in adoration where the young actually become victims of the "idolatry".

Unlike choosing a role model, idolatry kills development and prevents the growth of one's personality. Namely, the word "role model" comes from looking and means: "the one being looked at", as if admired. Not only is one looking at the other for a role model, one is also absorbed and remembers the role model's behavior, speech and reaction in certain situations. That is why the role model becomes a sort of an inner model, a measure, according to which people are spiritually shaped fulfilling their social roles.

Regarding that, we may conclude that role models can play several important roles:

By mentioning the role models as examples we consider moral rules or beliefs acquired independently of those role models. One can, for an example, be completely convinced that it is morally right to help those in need, so the story of the Jesuit Father Cvek and his diligent care for the elderly, poor and marginalized citizens of Zagreb city is given as an example. If the role models from a certain speech or a theory have that inclination, then one can speak of the "illustrative exemplarism."

Scientific research shows that a person's social environment impregnates its personality. The role models give us a drive to achieve, inspire us to work on eliminating our own shortcomings and to establish goodness in ourselves. When it comes to the role models in the audience, one wants to awaken and strengthen the

intention to act morally good or excellent. There is, for example, a belief that it is morally right to act boldly, decisively, and for such an example, one may narrate the actions of a German Bishop Clemens August Count von Galen who publicly opposed the euthanasia program pursued by the National Socialists in his time. Telling his life story, we want to awaken a thought in every mind in the audience: he did it and I should too! When our role models have such a stimulating role in a speech or presented theory, then they may be named the "motivational and mimetic exemplarism".

There are no moral true role models without deeds, particularly concrete deeds that stand out, without the courage to stand up for some vital principles or values and persevere in it. We tend to say: a person acts morally good and righteous if does like this one here or that one there, pointing to a specific moral model - for example, Mother Teresa and her actions.

Our role models, after all, have an empathic power. A discovery of the so-called "mirror neurons" guide us directly to this conclusion. (Rizzolatti, Gallese, 223-246) The structure of functioning shown to us by "mirror neurons" seems to allow us to feel the suffering ourselves when we encounter the suffering of others. Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran, a professor of neuroscience at the University of California, San Diego, calls "mirror neurons" the "foundation of civilization." (Ramachandran, 291) Namely, in the sense of civilization, "mirror neurons" have enabled us to transfer knowledge and skills, because looking at the way something is being done, we are, thanks to our mirror neurons, able to repeat it. Repetition or imitation enable expansion and progress through faster transfer of knowledge and morals. The ability to identify with others has enabled us, and still allows us to connect with people around us.

Role models, furthermore, can inspire, show, guide, encourage, measure and shape the value system in a community or a person in a direct or indirect way. Role models also help develop the structure of thoughts that shape decisions and other actions and behaviors.

At the heart of a term of "values" there are attractively motivating moments while norms are restrictively obligatory. Values (valuables) have an orientation and a regulatory function. They are something that simply affects us, something we cannot directly control, but also something that, when affected by, leads us to a specific experience of freedom.

If we are talking about values, we are discussing emotionally charged representations of something desirable. In this sense, values have more performative and less prescriptive power. They are less tied to the norm, law, regulations, ie. objectivity, and are considered as more subjective and individual. Values are certainly related to norms, but their original meaning is to show the way, motivate, establish and expand human dimension of spirituality.

## **SPIRITUALITY AND THE MEANING OF A ROLE MODEL**

The discussion of values (valuables) indicates that we need credible persons, role models as figures who represent true values. To choose a certain person as a role model means to adopt the values he or she firmly stands for.

In the individualistic and egoistic outgrowths of today's society (in the flood of so-called "selfies"!), this concept of healthy role models is easily lost. In the religious tradition, values are passed on in a specific way by authentic role models - the saints.

Historical overview of the veneration (the inheritance) of saints, for an example in the Catholic Church, from the earliest cult of martyrs from the first centuries to the modern witnesses of love and expressionists of mercy, that issue remains certainly too broad a topic for this brief reflection. Therefore, we do not intend to deal with a theological or historical account of the development or meaning of the worship of saints, but we will show by a short decree why the community and individuals need saints as true role models; that is, why we need saints as role models at all.

Firstly, it should be noted that the very term of "a saint" causes today a certain gap in society. It is almost a foreign word to us. However, within this term of "a saint" we are presented with the image of a person full of virtue, courage, endurance, self-control, true joy, dynamism and spiritual strength that lasts...

In the Catholic spiritual tradition, saints are widely offered to people as models worth of imitation, but also as their free advocates between them and the God, that is, as protectors and helpers in various areas of human life. Namely, in the worship of saints, the Church places emphasis on the model of exceptional exemplary and imitation, although, perhaps, at the level of popular piety, so that their dominant protective role and the role of helpers in the everyday problems of individuals and communities is much noticed and cherished. The heroism and stoicism of selfless and sacrificial love, which is greatly admired at even by those who do not believe, is always rooted in concrete selfless love.

An authentic veneration of saints always includes following their example. A valid example of the virtuous life of the saint favors a development of the character of the individual according to their extraordinary lifestyle. A character consists of two components: righteousness and holiness. Righteousness is primarily manifested in our attitude and actions toward the world/the God given nature with all its creatures and other people around us, while holiness manifests in the course of our friendship with God. Every Christian is openly invited to realize his own holiness and find himself in that holiness through his filial relationship with God, as his creator and redeemer. This is ultimately both the real goal and a genuine task of the true Christian spirituality.

## CONCLUSIONS

A long time ago, the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) noticed the fact that upbringing is actually living a role model for the young and practicing love - nothing more! Each one of us needs an example – the "role model", as stated by the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura (1977).

Choosing role models and identifying with them can be a good psychological and pedagogical method of upbringing as early as it is introduced in the child's parental home and the broader family. Unfortunately, the fast pace of today's life and the relentless race for earnings make it impossible for parents, the infant's first educators, to spend enough time with their offspring in a meaningful socialization. More often, most of our young people and children today are quite free to choose media-placed content that appeal to them as interesting to embrace as their favorite role models. In most cases, it is a matter of transmitting purposely-created images and offering false "role models", in fact - the "idols".

Wrong choice of the life role models - "idols", not only impairs our health, but also negatively affects our success, productivity and life energy. We will achieve complete success in life and preserve the good health of an individual and the entire social community only when we follow healthy role models. It ultimately depends on our spirituality as well. For, when one begins to question action, belief, thinking and expression, to look at one's own life, not only in a material but also in a spiritual context, it begins to strengthen in a deeper

respect for oneself as a human being and the life in general. Regarding that fact, the "ethics of exemplarism" or "the ethics of virtuous example" certainly has its rightful place, meaning and value.

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Correspondence:

Professor Ivan Koprek, PhD

Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb

Jordanovac 110, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

E-mail: ikoprek@ffrz.unizg.hr