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WHAT SHOULD BE? NAVIGATING MORAL EXEMPLARITY AND ITS CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Abstract

This essay explores the notion of moral exemplarity, positing that our morality is underpinned by moral exemplars – paradigmatic examples of virtuous individuals or actions. Theoretical precepts of moral exemplarity are explored across historical and contemporary contexts, including the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Stoic and Christian ethics, and recent works of Alexandro Ferrara and Linda Zagzebski. This essay debates the necessity of moral exemplars, the intrinsic moral and epistemic exemplarity, and the distinction between categorical and hypothetical exemplarity, as well as referencing the paradoxical Kantian dismissals of moral exemplarity. It critiques current accounts of moral exemplarity and proposes a transcendental explanation, culminating in an examination of the "exemplarist categorical imperative."

Keywords: Exemplar; Moral Exemplarity; Kant; Categorical imperative; Sensus communis

WAS SOLLTE SEIN? MORALISCHE EXEMPLARITÄT UND IHR KATEGORISCHER IMPERATIV

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht den Begriff der moralischen Exemplarität und geht davon aus, dass unsere Moral durch moralische Exemplare – paradigmatische Beispiele tugendhafter Personen oder Handlungen – untermauert wird. Theoretische Grundsätze der moralischen Exemplarität werden in historischen und zeitgenössischen Kontexten untersucht, darunter die Philosophien von Platon, Aristoteles, die stoische und christliche Ethik sowie neuere Arbeiten von Alexandro Ferrara und Linda

Zagzebski. Der Aufsatz diskutiert die Notwendigkeit moralischer Exemplare, die intrinsische moralische und epistemische Exemplarität und die Unterscheidung zwischen kategorischer und hypothetischer Exemplarität und verweist auf die paradoxe kantische Ablehnung der moralischen Exemplarität. Er kritisiert die gegenwärtigen Darstellungen der moralischen Exemplarität und schlägt eine transzendentale Erklärung vor, die in einer Untersuchung des „exemplaristischen kategorischen Imperativs" kulminiert.

Schlüsselwörter: Exemplar; moralische Exemplarität; Kant; kategorischer Imperativ; Sensus communis

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The purpose of this essay is to investigate the possibilities and prospects of moral exemplarity. It is the belief that our moral theory is founded on moral exemplars, or paradigmatic examples of (ultimately) good people, deeds, or behaviors. We can consider moral saints or extraordinary brave acts. Such moral exemplars are typically found in religious or mythological contexts, but we also have profane moral exemplars. Moral exemplars serve as a foundation for moral theory in several ways. The most obvious is that we have a moral obligation to emulate moral exemplars. We should act like X, where X is a moral exemplar. Alternatively, we could say that we should emulate relevant aspects of the life or behavior of a moral exemplar.[1] Moral exemplars, on the other hand, ground a moral theory in the sense that they are necessary for formulating moral law or key moral concepts such as "good," "virtue" or "duty". These two demands on exemplarist moral theories are intertwined. One point I'd like to make is that the second sense, that of grounding moral law, is more important.

From ancient times to the present, there have been numerous accounts of moral exemplarity. Moral exemplarity can be found in Plato, Aristotle, Stoic, and Christian ethics. In certain circumstances, virtue ethics can be expressed in moral exemplarist terms. Plato believes that all Forms participate in the Good, which is the ultimate source of all Being. Forms, as paradigms of sensible things, seem to have a moral dimension inherent in their

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[1] One reviewer noted that the concept of "acting like "a moral exemplar is problematic because it may not be possible to directly imitate their life due to differing circumstances. I agree that this notion is complex and that direct emulation of anyone's life is unwise. Instead, we should emulate the *relevant aspects* of the moral exemplar's life. However, identifying these relevant aspects can be challenging. This is where the surrounding story plays a crucial role in highlighting these aspects.

ontological origin. We are going to look closely at two contemporary accounts of moral exemplarity proposed by Alexandro Ferrara in his book *The Force of Example* (2008), and Linda Zagzebski in her *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (2017).

Before discussing Zagzebski's and Ferrara's accounts, I'd like to introduce a few terminological distinctions about exemplarity in general, which will allow us to situate moral exemplarity in a broader context and spell out the issues I'd like to discuss in this essay. Illustrative examples can be distinguished from normative exemplars or paradigms. Despite the fact that I argued in my book *The Philosophy of Exemplarity* (2023) that this distinction is merely provisional and ultimately untenable, I maintain it in this essay. The terms "paradigm" and "exemplar" emphasize the normative aspect of their respective referents. The point I make in my book is that any example is, to some extent, also an exemplar, and vice versa.

1. Moral and Epistemic Exemplarity

The primary terminological distinction I want to make is between *moral and epistemic exemplarity*. In general, the goal of epistemic exemplarity is to define concepts using exemplars regardless of their moral significance. Take, for instance, the concept of red color. It can be defined by referring to a paradigmatic red sample or swatch, which we'll call the standard red. If a color or something has the same color as the paradigmatic red, it is red. Of course, some degree of deviation can be considered, but not always. From a moral standpoint, the concept of red is neutral. Things in red are not morally superior to things in other colors. There is no moral obligation to produce red things.

As previously stated, the goal of moral exemplarity is to define moral concepts through reference to exemplars. In broader terms, moral exemplarity seeks to provide and justify moral law through references to moral exemplars. One might wonder why we need moral exemplars at all. Couldn't we define moral concepts as we would any other term? What is the difference between the exemplarist definition of red and the exemplarist definition of good? Within the epistemological account of exemplarity, we could define both terms in some ways. The standard red allows us to identify red things, whereas the standard good (the exemplar of good, the good) allows us to identify and distinguish between good and bad things. Isn't this enough? This definition of good is insufficient for establishing moral law.

Differentiating between good and bad is insufficient to justify the moral law. If "good" were equal to "red," we'd have no reason to prefer good things over bad things, or to follow good exemplars rather than bad exemplars; similarly, there is no reason to prefer red things over blue things. This is known as the moral motivation problem. It seems that such motivation needs to be rooted in moral exemplars.

2. The Categorical-Hypothetical Distinction

Let us now turn our attention to another terminological distinction that will help us understand the difference between moral and epistemic exemplarity. It is the distinction between *hypothetical and categorical exemplarity*. Our starting point is Ferrara's influential claim that exemplary is "what is as it should be" (2008, p. 3). The normative force expressed in this "should" can be interpreted in two ways. Let exemplar *X* be an example of property *p*. Then, according to the hypothetical reading, *if* something, something else, is called *p*, it should/must be like *X*. There is no moral compulsion here. However, we can disregard the hypothetical if-clause and consider the categorical force of the "should": *X* should be followed because p is worth following. Property *p* represents some kind of good (for instance, just society, a good life, a heroic deed, love, self-sacrifice for others).

The categorical-hypothetical distinction clarifies the distinction between moral and epistemic exemplarity. Our question is, why should an exemplar be followed in the categorical sense? This is to ask why an exemplar is good or what makes it good. This issue will occupy us in this essay. However, there are some related issues: What is the exact normative force of this "should" or "should be followed"? Should an exemplar be replicated, copied, imitated, or reproduced all the time and in all circumstances? One plausible answer is that circumstances do matter. But then we risk reverting to hypothetical/epistemic exemplarity.

3. Kant Against Moral Exemplarity

This essay seeks to investigate the prospects of moral exemplarity in broadly Kantian terms (here I follow Ferrara's account as we shall see in a moment). This is a paradoxical methodological commitment because Kant repudiated the idea of moral exemplarity. He argued that if one employs *examples* in the moral realm, they must be judged as good by the moral law

which is – and this is crucial – independent of any examples. He writes in the *Groundwork*:

> Nor could one give worse advice to morality than by trying to get it from examples [*von Beispielen*]. For every example of morality that is to be represented to me as such must itself be previously judged in accordance with principles of morality as to whether it is worthy to serve as an original example [*ursprüngliches Beispiel*], i.e., as a model [*Muster*]; but it can by no means by itself supply the concept of morality. (Kant 2002, p. 24, 4:408)

Kant contends that moral principles determine what is exemplary, not the other way around. Individual cases are preceded by moral law. If this is the case, exemplarity cannot provide a justification for moral law in the categorical sense. The *categorical imperative* is Kant's sole justification for moral law. This is a purely rational law that is not based on anything empirical or sensible, not even moral examples. To foreshadow the direction of my argument, we can offer an exemplarist account of the notion of the *maxim*, which is essential from the key formulation of the categorical imperative.

4. Zagzebski's Exemplarist Moral Theory

Let us look at two of the most important contemporary accounts of moral exemplarity, proposed by A. Ferrara and L. Zagzebski. Both present complex theories that cannot be discussed in depth here. I will only address the issue of identifying moral exemplars. I begin with Zagzebski's account because it is more straightforward in terms of identifying exemplars. She maintains that admiration is "the primary way we identify exemplars" (2017, p. 3). This is a broadly Aristotelian suggestion: "There is nothing more basic than admiring and desiring in our attitudes toward what we call good" (2017, p. 30). The only difference between her and Aristotle is that he considers the desirable (*eudaimonia*) to be more fundamental and the admirable to be derived from it. As we will see, Ferrara follows Aristotle in this regard.

According to Zagzebski, admiration can identify not only an exemplar but also its relevant psychological traits, "something in her psychology that leads to acts we admire" (2017, p. 61). In general, admiration identifies exemplar *X* together with her feature *p*, due to which *X* is good. Zagzebski emphasizes that admiration has a rational component. We recognize exemplars through "reflective admiration" (2017, p. 65). The emotion is not triggered when we see a specific person or witness a deed. A broader context is

required. A narrative that has shaped the experience of admiration is needed in order to identify an exemplar. The identification is the result of a reflection on this narrative.

The emotion of admiration is postulated to explain why we adopt this or that moral exemplar, which is pivotal for the current discussion. Zagzebski, however, does not provide an exemplarist explanation of admiration. Of course, Zagzebski characterizes the emotion and provides several examples of moral exemplars identified through admiration (Confucius, Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, and others). However, the ultimate reason we have adopted them is because we admire them. Zagzebski provides examples of people we admire (examples of exemplars, in a sense), but no examples of admiration itself. Moral exemplars are the results of admiration rather than the emotion itself.

Another issue is that admiration is reflective in nature. Exemplars are discovered by reflecting on an immediate experience of admiration. This reflective constraint is intended to rule out situations in which one is seduced to admire someone who may obscure her true moral nature (e.g., a populist politician or a religious sect leader). However, once again, the principle of this reflection cannot be defined in exemplarist terms. Furthermore, such a definition would be circular in any case. To determine whether a prospective exemplar is suitable for this role, i.e., is morally good, the ability to tell bad from good is required. But it is precisely this ability that we wish to account for in exemplarist terms.

Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory lacks an exemplarist foundation for moral law. To be fair, Zagzebski's primary objective isn't to provide such a foundation. She uses a map analogy to clarify her objective. As a result, her aim is to create a map of the moral domain that depicts the relationships between fundamental moral terms such as good life, good nature, virtue, and actual moral practice. However, the goal of such a map is not to identify, i.e., define each of these terms independently of the theory, that is, independently of each other (2017, p. 7). Our moral practice, according to Zagzebski, is to identify moral exemplars through the emotion of admiration. Her theory establishes a link between these two terms, "admiration" and "exemplar," without providing explicit independent definitions of them.

5. Ferrara's Force of Example

Let us now turn our attention to A. Ferrara's account of exemplarity in his book, *The Force of Example* (2008) and subsequent papers. His emphasis differs slightly from that of Zagzebski. He hopes to create an account of exemplary normativity that will inspire people from various traditions and contexts. The emphasis is not so much on exemplary individuals and their actions as it is on political institutions, social movements, or constitutional essentials (2008, p. 22), as well as on mores and ways of life. The most striking feature of such exemplary normativity is its universalism in the absence of law (2008, p. 68). Ferrara adapts Kant's notion of *sensus communis* to develop this type of universalism.

Kant does not specify whether sensus communis is a regulative or a constitutive principle. The constitutive interpretation is out of the question in this context. Sensus communis, as a constitutive principle, would have a specific goal. According to Ferrara, sensus communis is "a universal capacity to sense the flourishing of human life" (2019, p. 149). This flourishing is not a predetermined goal, but rather a guidepost for our reflective judgment. "Exemplary normativity operates such context-transcending through 'the force of the example,' and sensus communis is what makes it intelligible how an exemplary action originating in one context can inspire people in another context […], sensus communis is what validates [these changes]" (2019, p. 159), writes Ferrara. As a result, sensus communis promotes and confirms exemplars that encourage people to enhance the quality and flourishing of their lives.

Although this interpretation casts sensus communis as a regulative principle, there is still an underlying motivation for selecting a specific exemplar, namely the flourishing of our lives. As a result, this exemplary normativity does not advance any unconditional imperative. It is nevertheless something that *should* be in the categorical sense and sensus communis can validate it. This normative account of exemplarity is denied by Kant in his *Groundwork*.

6. The Normative Force of the "Should"

To assess Ferrara's account, we must first clarify the normative force of the "should" and, of course, the concept of human flourishing. In terms of the latter, Ferrara proposes four main dimensions: coherence, vitality, depth, and maturity, to which he later adds finitude, embodiment, and gender. We

won't go into specifics here (which Ferrara provides). It is critical for this discussion that he does not explain these dimensions in exemplarist terms (as Zagzebski doesn't with her notion of admiration). To anticipate, my suggestion is an exemplarist account of the notion of human life flourishing that lies at the core of sensus communis.

The normative force of this "should" depends on whether sensus communis is a constitutive or a regulating principle. The constitutive reading is strongly suggested by Kant's discussion in Chapter 21 of the *Third Critique*. So, what is sensus communis constitutive of? I follow insightful suggestions by J. Derrida and H. Allison. Derrida writes: "reason commands us to produce (*hervorbringen*) in ourselves a common sense for more elevated ends" (1987, p. 116). The moral demand in the categorical sense is to produce or enhance the faculty of common sense that facilitates achieving elevated ends. But this demand leaves unspecified what such elevated ends actually are. Sensus communis, in this reading, could constitute an agreement within the universal community about these elevated ends. Allison offers a useful distinction in this respect: "It is necessary to distinguish between two distinct 'oughts' involved with taste. One [. . .] is the demand for agreement connected with the claim of taste. It is this ought that presupposes a common sense, and it is quite independent of morality. The second ought connected with taste is the demand to acquire the faculty itself" (2001, p. 159). The first demand, or sense of the "ought" - or "should" in our case - is aimed at a specific agreement within the community. This is an aesthetic or epistemic demand. The second "ought" or "should" is the demand to develop the cognitive faculty itself. To be more specific, this is a moral imperative to acquire and develop common sense, defined as the ability to promote exemplars. In more general terms, this is a moral demand to develop our ability to recognize, adopt, and use exemplars in our cognitive practices. It is the demand to develop exemplarity itself. Kant, in his *Groundwork*, advocates for the moral obligation to foster one's talents. In his words, "all the faculties in him should be developed, because they are serviceable and given to him for all kinds of possible aims" (Kant 2002, pp. 39–40, 4:423). Developing one's cognitive capacities can be understood as the flourishing of one's life (understood more in a transcendental sense than a biological one).

Before we get into the specifics of this demand, let us take a step back. In my *Philosophy of Exemplarity*, I provide an epistemological account of exemplarity. I argue that the reason for the emergence of a certain exemplar cannot be accounted for within the practice of using this exemplar. The

reason for the emergence of an exemplar is obscure. There is no sensus communis that precedes, explains, or justifies the introduction of an exemplar. Rather, sensus communis is a result of social practices that achieve an intersubjective agreement in promoting an exemplar. This is true for the epistemological account of exemplarity that is based on hypothetical normativity. This hypothetical character bestows ultimate universality on it. The epistemological account of exemplarity can accommodate any exemplar, regardless of its origin or moral value.

However, in the case of moral exemplarity, the reason for introducing an exemplar is important. We adopt moral exemplars because they are good in the moral sense. Moreover, sensus communis cannot be the result of promoting an exemplar, rather, it must precede and justify this introduction. As we have seen, Zagzebski and Ferrara, in their own ways, do explain why we adopt this or that exemplar. Both accounts are, in a sense, Aristotelian in nature. Zagzebski reinterprets the notion of *eudaimonia* as that what we admire. Ferrara's account is more in line with the Kantian concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom reinterpreted as reflective judgment.

Reinterpreting these concepts in exemplarist terms, in my opinion, is critical for categorical normativity. Even if there were exemplarist explanations for admiration and flourishing – such as exemplars of these concepts – the problem of moral motivation would remain unresolved. What I'd like to propose is a transcendental explanation. Exemplars are introduced for a variety of reasons, but the overarching goal is to improve our cognitive abilities. As a result, there is a categorical moral imperative to adopt such exemplars that could be effective in expanding our knowledge. In the remainder of this essay, I will expand on this idea in broadly Kantian terms.

7. Exemplarist Categorical Imperative

Kant says that "An example [*Exempel*] is a particular [*besonderer*] case of a *practical* rule, insofar as this rule represents an action as practicable or impracticable, whereas an instance [*Beispiel*] is only a particular [*Besondere*] (*concretum*), represented in accordance with concepts as contained under a universal (*abstractum*), and is a presentation of a concept merely for theory". However, Kant insists that it is not in the power of examples to establish a maxim of virtue. He argues: "For a maxim of virtue consists precisely in the subjective autonomy of each man's practical reason and so implies that the law itself, not the conduct of other men, must serve as our incentive."

(Kant 1991, §52, p. 268, 6:480) The argument is that a particular case in its singularity is neither a (subjective) maxim nor an (objective) law. There is no autonomy in the imitation of a particular case.

The point of dealing with examples, as opposed to singularities, is that they are particulars that express something universal. In Kant's framework, this movement between the singular and the universal, in both directions, is enabled by the power of judgment. In the first *Critique*, Kant states that "the sole and great utility of examples [is] that they sharpen the power of judgment". And further: "examples are the leading-strings of the power of judgment" (A134/B173). Now, the task of reflective judgment is to find the universal when only the particular is given (Kant 2007, p. 15, 5:179). Applying this idea to particular examples, we can infer that the power of judgment allows us to discover a practical rule embodied in a given exemplar. We deal with a universal practical rule rather than with a particular case. Thus, there is subjective autonomy on two levels: selecting a specific case (the exemplar) and performing the movement from this specific case to the universal rule. This rule is subjective, that is, it is a maxim. Reflective judgment is then appropriate for progressing from a specific example to a universal maxim.

After we've established the link between examples and maxims, or *subjective* practical principles, we can move on to *objective* universal laws. The *categorical imperative* expresses the relationship between subjective maxims and objective laws. In its most basic form from the *Metaphysics of Morals*, it is as follows: "Act upon a maxim that can also hold as a universal law." (Kant 1991, p. 51, 6:225). Kant, as is well known, offers several other formulations of the categorical imperative – with and without the concept of the maxim – and maintains that they all express the same moral law (cf. Arvan 2012). The categorical imperative serves as a kind of litmus test or touchstone to determine whether a maxim is morally permissible.

My key point is that if the categorical imperative can test the permissibility of a maxim, it can also test the permissibility of an exemplar. As a result, we have an objective categorical reason for adopting and using an exemplar. The categorical imperative can be restated in terms of exemplars (rather than maxims):

Adopt only exemplars that can express a universal law.

Before going into more detail about this *exemplarist categorical imperative*, I want to make clear that it is consistent with Ferrara's definition of exemplarity, which is that an exemplar is something that is as it should be. We

have already discussed the precise significance and force of this "should." We can now be even more precise. This should primarily apply to exemplars and only secondarily to singulars modeled after them. We *should* adopt exemplars that express the universal, according to our exemplarist categorical imperative. There isn't any immediate demand or obligation that these examples *should* be copied or imitated.

According to the categorical imperative, we should act on maxims – that is, adopt exemplars – that everyone else could act on or adopt in relevantly similar circumstances. Furthermore, such exemplars must be ones that everyone could reasonably wish to adopt. This is a *social* aspect of the demand for universality. An exemplar should be for everyone, at least in principle. Adopting an exemplar must not result in any performative contradictions. In this sense, exemplars must adhere to sensus communis (here "communis" is understood to mean "communal"). Hence, the demand is to adopt such models that everyone else could have used to improve their cognitive abilities. I always provide an exemplar also for everyone else. There is no room for private exemplars. Such an exemplar would be analogous to Wittgenstein's beetle in the box. That is, the concept of a private, personal exemplar (for me only) has a problematic moral status.

There is another, say *objective*, aspect of the universal law formulation. We should adopt only those exemplars that express a universal concept or law. Exemplars or their particular features can be imitated without having any universal concept in mind. The exemplarist categorical imperative says that a suitable exemplar must always express a universal concept. Mere imitation (of a singular thing) has no moral value.

8. Moral and Epistemic Exemplars

Let us return to the specific exemplars (examples of exemplars) that we discussed previously. The standard red serves as an epistemic exemplar. The life story of Francis of Assisi is an exemplar of the good, the standard good. He is a moral exemplar. Both exemplars pass the exemplarist categorical imperative test. Every rational being can reasonably wish to adopt both exemplars. There is no performative contradiction in wishing them to adopt. We can say both *should* be adopted. But should they be followed or imitated? There is no epistemic or moral imperative to produce red things or to paint things red – as previously stated. What about moral exemplars like Francis

of Assisi? Should his life be followed or imitated? Do we have the duty to act in in a manner similar to Francis' life?

The answer is that there is no command requiring us (or any rational being) to emulate Francis' life (e.g., to live in poverty). We are free to follow any exemplar that meets the exemplarist categorical imperative.[2] When deciding how to act (making a moral choice), there is another choice, a meta-choice (a transcendental choice) of selecting an exemplar. This meta-choice pertains to both moral and epistemic exemplars. We have the choice to use the standard red or the standard blue (the standard meter or the standard foot). In the epistemic domain, this is the choice of a measuring instrument. Different measuring instruments yield different results.

I want to emphasize that moral choices differ. One may be considering whether to be concerned for the well-being of the poor – or to tell the truth or lie. One can employ various moral exemplars, such as Jesus or Francis. The ultimate outcome of this meta-choice is the same: One is obliged to be concerned for the poor or tell the truth. No one ought to adopt a moral exemplar that would allow telling a lie or disregard others (e.g., Jacob who deceived Isaac, Peter who disowned Jesus, or King Ahab with Jezebel who were known for their greed, corruption, and disregard for the well-being of others, particularly the poor). These exemplars fail the exemplarist categorical imperative test. In epistemic exemplarity, different exemplars lead to different pieces of knowledge (e.g., "this is red", "this isn't blue"). In moral exemplarity, different morally permissible exemplars should ideally lead to the same action.

However, there are occasions when different exemplars can be used, resulting in different actions. The same can be said of the maxims expressed by these exemplars. These are typically moral dilemmas. Recall the dilemma between not killing human beings and serving the homeland in times of war. One can adopt Jesus or King David as moral exemplars, expressing the maxims "never kill any human being" and "always defend your homeland against adversaries." (It is important to note that not everything King David did expresses a morally permissible maxim, such as orchestrating Uriah's

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2   In this sense, any action that follows or emulates an exemplar that meets the requirements of the exemplarist categorical imperative is not morally commanded (*lex praeceptiva*), but only morally permissible (*lex permissiva*). For this distinction cf. Kant's Fourth Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1991, p. 49, 6: 223). For a useful discussion, see Th. Ebert's paper "Kants kategorischer Imperativ und die Kriterien gebotener, verbotener und freigestellter Handlungen" (2004).

murder.) The exemplarist categorical imperative, and moral exemplarity in general, are undetermined in the sense that any exemplar that passes the test can be adopted. Moral exemplarity isn't here to solve all moral dilemmas, but rather to expose them. A choice between two opposing actions is restated as a meta-choice between two competing exemplars.

In general, the exemplarist categorical imperative is the sole moral motivation for adopting exemplars, both epistemic and moral. However, we must consider why the categorical imperative has been adopted in the first place. Kant's response is that the motive is a non-natural, rational, a priori feeling of respect for the moral law. Respect for the moral law is a problematic and heavily criticized notion (cf. Westphal 1991). It is difficult to imagine a feeling being rational and non-natural. It is ultimately just postulated and thus unsubstantiated. Our exemplarist categorical imperative, in contrast, is not based on such a problematic notion. The only reason for adopting and following the exemplarist categorical imperative is to enhance one's (and thus everyone else's) cognitive capacities, which can be thought of as life enhancement. However, this enhancement isn't ungrounded. It refers back to the epistemological account of exemplarity. This enhancement consists of adopting the proper account of exemplarity.

Plato's theory of forms can be taken as such an account of exemplarity. As previously stated, all Forms participate in the Form of the Good. Forms taken as paradigms/exemplars are good because of their participation in the Form of the Good. They are perfect exemplars. Their moral value stems from their ability to facilitate our true knowledge (*Rep.* VI, 508e–509a). Sensible things participate in their respective Forms, and it's those Forms that participate in the Good. However, because sensible things are imperfect copies of the Forms, they can't fully embody the Good in the way the Forms do. What is inherently good aren't sensible things but only Forms sensible things participate in. Because Forms are eternal, the meta-choice of selecting the right exemplars/Forms has been made once and for all.

To conclude, moral exemplarity is not about necessarily following moral exemplars, but rather about providing a categorical reason for adopting exemplars, both epistemic and moral. Moral and epistemic exemplarity aren't on the same level. Moral exemplarity is concerned with the meta-choice of exemplars and thus provides a justification for adopting exemplars. Such justification cannot be provided within epistemic exemplarity, which is about following examples regardless of why they were introduced. In my *Philosophy of Exemplarity*, I conclude that "there is a moral demand to be

true to oneself and to others. In our context, this is the demand to acquire and develop an epistemological account of exemplarity. Then there is also a moral demand to develop the [epistemological] account of exemplarity." (2023, p. 146). This present essay can be taken as an extended commentary on this moral demand.

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