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Exemplars and nudges: Combining two strategies for moral education

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ABSTRACT

This article defends the use of narratives about morally exemplary individuals in moral education and appraises the role that 'nudge' strategies can play in *combination* with such an appeal to exemplars. It presents a general conception of the aims of moral education and explains how the proposed combination of both moral strategies serves these aims. An important aim of moral education is to make the ethical perspective of the subject—the person being educated—more structured, more salient and therefore more 'navigable'. This article argues why and how moral exemplars and nudge strategies are crucial aids in this respect. It gives an empirically grounded account of how the emotion of admiration can be triggered most effectively by a thoughtful presentation of narratives about moral exemplars. It also answers possible objections and concludes that a combined appeal to exemplars and nudges provides a neglected but valuable resource for moral education.

What role should morally exemplary individuals (or 'exemplars') play in moral education? In line with virtue ethical approaches to moral education, prominent authors focusing on moral character education (e.g., Lickona, 1991; Wynne & Ryan, 1993) have stressed the importance of moral role models. Kohlberg (1987) also stressed the value of interacting with role models, who embody higher stages of moral reasoning, as a pedagogical method. Recently, a number of philosophers (e.g., Kristjánsson, 2006; Zagzebski, 2015, 2017) and psychologists (e.g., Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008) have analyzed the role that an appeal to moral exemplars can play in this respect. In this article we will contribute to this growing field of study by appraising the role that so-called 'nudge' strategies can play in *combination* with an appeal to exemplars. Can nudge strategies improve the effectiveness of the use of moral exemplars in moral education? Or are there legitimate moral objections against the use of nudges in this context? Using insights from nudge theory, we will defend the use of empirically informed nudge strategies to improve the chances of success of educating people morally by appealing to exemplars. In doing so, we will defend a view of moral education and moral agency that addresses the concerns of nudge theory's critics.

Summarily, our view is this: moral education can and should make the ethical perspective of the subject—the person being educated—more structured, more salient to his or her first personal perspective and therefore more 'navigable'. If the generic aim of nudge strategies is to structure the subject's choice context to improve the quality of her choices, then the complementary role of moral exemplars is to enhance this 'navigability' (Sunstein, 2016, p. 44). Just as well-designed roads, cars and GPSs facilitate safe driving through traffic, so too can moral exemplars help people when they are steering through their morally relevant choices. When told well, stories involving moral exemplars can reveal—from the inside— how they have structured their *own* choice situations. People we admire prompt us to seek to understand them, and their moral choices, from their own points of view. This allows us both to understand the role exemplars can play in moral education and to address objections to using nudge strategies in moral education.[1]

Our discussion will proceed as follows. First, we outline what we take to be the two main aims of moral education. Next, we analyze the role that moral exemplars can and should play in moral education. In the third section, we will explain the basic idea of nudging and explain why moral exemplars themselves can be understood as examples of a nudge strategy. In the fourth section, we motivate our proposal to use nudge strategies to further enhance the educational impact of moral exemplars. Next, we show why our combination of these two 'moral technologies'—with both exemplar stories and nudges serving as techniques to make people behave more morally—can meet the aims of moral education that we outlined. Finally, we consider the ethical concerns that could be raised against our proposals and respond to them.

Two main aims of moral education

Before examining our specific proposals for achieving the main aims of moral education, let us describe what we take to be the two main aims. First, moral education aims to equip people with the capacities they need to engage with the ethical defined in the most expansive and least controversial way. Bernard Williams has described this 'minimal notion' of the ethical as follows:

> [It is] the capacity shown, in some form or other, by humans in all cultures to live under rule and values and to shape their behavior in some degree to social expectations, in ways that are not under surveillance and not directly controlled by threats and rewards. Call this … (the minimal version of) living in an ethical system. (Williams, 2002, p. 24)

This minimal notion of the ethical is relatively theory-neutral: all major normative ethical theories should be able to agree on it. One aim of moral education is to bring about capacities of people to live under an ethical system in this minimal sense.

However, since talk of capacities is ambivalent between mere capacity possession and its excellent exercise, moral education should aim not only to equip people with these capacities, but also develop these capacities to functionally adequate levels. The result is that people come to observe those everyday norms and rules—against harming others, deception and for fidelity, truth telling and benevolence—that make a social life in a shared social space possible. Any plausible technique in moral education should achieve at least this.[2] This connects to Durkheim's claim that moral education aims to inculcate morality, a set of socially shared precepts demanding specific kinds of behavior or simply 'a body of rules that govern us' (Durkheim, 2012, p. 54). Moral education is about enculturation (Wynne

& Ryan, 1993) and motivating members of a group to follow that group's shared normative guidelines (Carr, 2008). According to Durkheim, successful moral education fosters discipline (people see what society commands of them) and group attachment (individuals see those obligations as desirable, good or ideal).

However, a moral education that causes people only to comply with functionally adequate standards of decency and sociality would be lacking. Prevailing norms and rules may be inadequate, or they may change; hence the need for people's capacities for critical distance and reflection to be robust and stable. We therefore take the second aim of moral education to be the development of this more critical aspect of moral agency. This can be spelled out in three ways.

First, morality involves not only the attainment of ordinary standards or norms, but also striving towards ideals that transcend the ordinary and recognizing those who come closer than most to realizing these ideals (Strawson, 1961). A moral education that ignores this would leave its subjects ignorant of an important aspect of morality. Secondly, such ideals offer a distinct source of moral *motivation* in their own right (Velleman, 2002). Moral agents can be motivated by ordinary moral norms, but also by aspiring to achieve moral ideals. A moral education that ignores the latter would fail to take advantage of this important source of moral motivation. Because adhering to such ideals involves going beyond the collectively shared 'body of rules', it requires independent thinking about what is socially required and expected. Third, moral agents are also equipped with the capacity to behave ethically when the surrounding social norms break down, are incorrect, or need to be creatively reinterpreted. If people were only educated to conform to existing norms, then they would be ill-equipped to handle any of these situations. These three aspects correspond to what Durkheim (2012, pp. 111–127) calls 'autonomy', a third source of moral motivation next to discipline and group attachment. They also fit Kohlberg's view of moral education as stimulating people to move towards more critical and independent stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1976).

Each of these more critical aspects of moral agency also characterizes morally exemplary individuals. Such exemplars trigger admiration because they exceed ordinary expectations in three distinctive ways. First, they outstrip the ordinary demands of morality in the face of socially prevailing standards and thereby show the importance of ideals in addition to social norms of decency and sociality (see also, Durkheim, 2012, p. 93). Second, they are morally creative and give us new insight into the ethical demands of ideals and how they can motivate people to do the right thing. Third, they maintain decency in the face of a contextual decline of standards. In each case, their morally admirable behavior surpasses the average level of moral attainment and reveals the critical distance exemplars have towards prevailing social norms, which they transcend or reinterpret when deemed necessary.[3] They possess genuine moral and practical wisdom, enabling them to apply 'the right virtue in the right amount in the right way at the right time' (Narvaez & Bock, 2014, p. 142). Because they can inspire other people, they should not be ignored in moral education. But how exactly should we appeal to moral exemplars in moral education?

Moral exemplars in moral education

Moral exemplars have a long-standing role in moral education. For example, teachers themselves can be positive role models (or can invite such role models to a class) revealing to

students what it means to be a moral person. In his discussion of character building strategies that can be employed in schools, families and so on, Thomas Lickona (2004, p. 22) stresses the need for young people not only to hear and talk about moral values, principles and goals but also be exposed to grown-ups 'who are visibly committed to high ideals and engaged in actualizing them more fully'.

Psychologists have long known that moral exemplars can stimulate praiseworthy behavior by others. Perhaps the most intensively studied behavior is altruism, where positive role models have been shown to have durable desirable effects (Rushton, 1975). A field experiment conducted by Rushton and Campbell (1977) showed that people who observed a positive role model were more likely to donate blood, not only immediately after the exposure, but also in different settings six weeks later.

One important way in which being confronted with moral exemplars can turn one into a better moral agent is through admiration. A growing body of evidence in social psychology suggests that admiration for moral exemplars plays an important role in motivating people to act morally. For example, Immordino-Yang and Sylvan (2010) found that participants who were exposed to stories about the virtuous acts of others spontaneously mentioned in subsequent discussion the desire to be a morally better person and perform noble actions. They therefore called admiration a 'profoundly motivating' emotion (Immordino-Yang & Sylvan, 2010, p. 110).

This emotional reaction to moral exemplars also has behavioral effects. Both Algoe and Haidt (2009) and Schnall, Roper, and Fessle (2010) found a connection between admiration and a desire to emulate those being admired. When prompted to report their experiences of admiration and asked about the motivational impact of this emotion, participants showed a stronger desire to emulate.[4] Cox (2010) surveyed a group of American college students on a trip to Nicaragua and found that those who experienced morally elevating experiences on the trip were significantly more likely to engage in volunteering behavior than those who did not report such experiences.

Inspired by this empirical work, philosopher Linda Zagzebski (2015, p. 209, 2017) argues that a desire to emulate should be viewed as one of the 'fundamental features' of admiration. Without taking a stand on the conceptual question of whether a desire to emulate is conceptually tied to admiration, we think that the available evidence supporting an empirical correlation between the two suffices to show why moral education should include an appeal to moral exemplars (see also, Croce & Vaccarezza, 2017, pp. 6–7).

We emphasize that a desire to emulate the person being admired should *not* be understood as a desire to copy her. The latter is often an inappropriate response to moral exemplars, because mature moral agents ought to take into account the difference between their own characters and that of the exemplar (Williams, 1995, pp. 189–190). Williams cautioned against 'moral weightlifting': placing oneself in situations that test one's own character traits, potentially to the point of failure, by copying the reasons of one's ideal moral adviser. A morally decent, but unexceptional, person ought to recognize her own relative limitations in comparison to the moral exemplar. Similarly, when moral exemplars advise others about how to act, they ought to tailor their advice to fit the moral capacities of those others (Thomas, 2006, p. 85; Williams, 1995, p. 190). For this reason, simply copying the actions of moral exemplars could be a source of moral error.

Of course, the inappropriateness of simply copying moral exemplars does not imply that people do not, in fact, try to copy exemplars to no ill effect: perhaps they just get lucky, or

the case is an easy one. Still, there is good reason to think that admiration does not typically lead to a desire to copy. Investigating the motivational effects of both admiration and benign envy (envy that involves a desire to raise oneself to the level of the object of envy), Blatz et al. (2016) found that benign envy motivates people to copy the envied person and achieve short-term and specific goals, whereas admiration motivates people to achieve more long-term and abstract goals.[5] Admiration thus tends to motivate people to emulate the achievements of the admired person or moral exemplar in less direct ways.

Nudge strategies in moral education

If narratives featuring moral exemplars can trigger admiration and the desire to emulate exemplars, can we use nudge strategies to enhance their effectiveness?[6] Before proposing some nudge strategies that do exactly that, we first need to provide an overview of nudge theory.

To understand what a nudge is, consider the following definition by Thaler and Sunstein (2008, p. 6): 'any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives'. A nudge strategy, then, is a deliberate intervention in some choice architecture predictably to influence people's behavior, without making use of the conventional strategies of coercing, sanctioning or incentivizing. This intervention is typically based on empirical evidence from psychology and behavioral science about the interaction between choice architectures and people's psychological set-up.

The main proponent of nudge strategies, Cass Sunstein (2014), has a broad conception of nudging. Sunstein (2016, pp. 26–27) identifies no less than 13 strategies each of which he describes as a 'nudge': (1) setting default rules; (2) making information available; (3) simplifying complex tasks; (4) specific information that warns; (5) specific information that reminds; (6) increasing ease of use; (7) personalizing information; (8) framing and scheduling choices; (9) rendering options salient; (10) taking advantage of social norms; (11) making use of public recognition; (12) moving from nudging to boosting; and (13) pre-committed 'self-binding'.[7] The proposals we set out below make use of several of these types of nudges, most notably (2), (3), (7), (8), (9) and (10).

On a narrower conception of nudges, they steer people's behavior not by merely informing or rationally persuading them, but by tapping into specific arational psychological mechanisms, emotions, cognitive biases and heuristics (Bovens, 2009, p. 208). On this account, strategy (2)—and perhaps also (4) and (5)—are not actually nudges. In our view, arational and rational mechanisms often jointly influence behavior. Think of how people's interpretation of and response to information heavily depends on how it is framed and which elements are made salient. If one deliberately uses salience to present specific information in empirically informed ways and thus basically employs strategy (9), this does qualify as a nudge, even on the narrower conception. As we will show below, this is exactly what (stories about) moral exemplars can and should do.

So why would anyone use nudges? The strongest argument for nudge strategies, that also justifies their use in moral education, is what we call the 'argument from ubiquity'. Every choice we make—and every educational setting—takes place within specific choice architectures that influence behavior, whether consciously designed or not (Sunstein, 2016, p. 76; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p. 83). If choice architectures are inevitable, why not consciously

design and structure them to bring about better choices? If, in the context of moral education, we know that specific frames are more conducive to moral learning, why not deliberately choose those that most effectively achieve the aims at hand?

Like Thaler and Sunstein, we believe that the ways in which we structure choice situations ought to be informed by scientific knowledge of people's psychological—cognitive and emotional—features that predictably influence their choices. Nudge strategies can help remedy those situations where people's psychological set-up predictably leads them astray—failing to live up to society's standards and their own professed values and ideals—and more reliably achieve the goals of moral education that we set out above.

We will discuss three distinct ways to understand the relation between (stories about) moral exemplars and nudge strategies. In the next section we will show that exemplar stories themselves can be understood as nudge strategies. In the section that follows, we will show how exemplar stories can be enhanced (so as to increase their desired behavioral impact) based on nudging strategies. Finally, exemplar stories can reveal how moral exemplars use nudge strategies to be better moral persons.

Why exemplar stories are effective nudge strategies

When narratives embedding moral exemplars are used in moral education, as they often are[8] morally relevant considerations are framed in ways that highlight their salience. Instead of abstractly presenting moral principles, ideals or theories, exemplar stories refer to concrete others who in specific situations had the courage to do what was right and even go beyond the call of duty. Rosa Parks' defiance of segregation law and the discriminatory practices of her time provides a vivid and impactful way to illustrate the moral importance of equality. This is more effective than providing general statistics, for example, about the number of people suffering under such discriminatory practices. Moral exemplars are typically embedded in narrative structures whereby certain features of the choice situation are highlighted and others rendered less salient. As such, exemplar stories are *already* nudges. They employ at least the following nudge strategies from Sunstein's list: (2) making information available; (7) personalizing information; (8) framing (moral) choices; and (9) rendering options salient.

Which psychological mechanisms do exemplar stories exploit? The behavioral effect that results from narrating exemplar stories—emulating exemplars—is not achieved merely by informing subjects about some historical event or explaining the reasons behind the moral exemplar's actions. Instead, it is the focus on a single, salient case that enables exemplar stories to trigger emotional responses that motivate action. They exploit the 'availability heuristic' (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973): more immediate, recent and vivid information comes to mind with greater ease and has a larger behavioral influence than less immediate, recent and vivid information. By making use of salience and emotion, exemplar stories thus predictably generate desirable outcomes more effectively than the mere provision of abstract information and arguments.

One might object to using framing effects and triggering emotions to influence how people respond to exemplar stories. Some ethical theorists, notably consequentialists, are unhappy with what they take to be unhelpful contingencies of our psychological makeup that make morally irrelevant features seem salient when they are not. (That is, when their relevance is judged from a consequentialist perspective.) Think of Peter Singer's (1972, p. 232) concerns about the role that distance can play in moral judgement. In Singer's famous

example, we can easily be motivated to our duty of immediate rescue when we see a toddler who has fallen into a pond in close proximity. But what explains our failure to respond in the same way to the fate of distant strangers? Singer implies that psychologically irrelevant factors such as 'distance' intrude here. While we agree that distance is irrelevant if it is no obstacle to urgent action, the issue is not about spatial distance, but about knowledge and variation in its degree of concreteness and abstraction.

More detailed, concretized knowledge aids altruism while less detailed, more abstract knowledge impedes it. We do not view this as a potential obstacle to ethical aims, but as a point to be exploited at the service of them. The key issue is how morally relevant knowledge is framed. An appeal to exemplars, embedded in a narrative, frames this knowledge such that it can be appreciated 'from the inside'. It gives the person being educated insight into how the moral exemplar found certain features of a morally problematic situation salient such that their actions seemed, from their perspective, ethically mandatory. It is not that exemplars do not face conflict or struggle. However, the depth of their moral understanding is such that they bring the correct resources to bear on the problem to hand. With the salient features conceptualized, the action that is called for appears to them as something they were obligated to do. Even when they perform heroic acts, they feel they are simply doing the right thing (Archer & Ridge, 2015).

So, while framing effects in themselves may not be morally relevant, we argue they can stimulate subjects of moral education to see things through the eyes of a concrete other and rethink (the relevant norms, ideals and duties in) the situation at hand. Admiration—the emotion triggered by exemplar stories—does exactly this: it makes people focus on long term goals and thus expand and transcend their often all too narrow focus (Blatz et al., unpublished).

Improving the use of exemplar stories through nudge strategies

Given what we now know about the psychological mechanisms that trigger (moral) behavior, we will describe in this section how an empirically informed use of nudge strategies enhances the effectiveness of exemplar stories. We distinguish between two sets of nudge strategies that can enhance the use of moral exemplars: the first relies on more general psychological insights about what drives moral behavior, the second focuses specifically on the role of admiration.

Creating more affective stories

First, psychologists have long known that 'without affect, information lacks meaning and won't be used in judgment and decision making' (Slovic, 2007). Affect has a largely automatic and unreflective impact on behavior and can be elicited by visual images, but also by using specific words, sounds and memories to trigger people's imaginations. How people react to a specific case (a crime with a victim or an exemplary act with a beneficiary) depends more on how they intuitively feel about it than how they reason abstractly about it (Haidt, 2001). Stories that play into this fact are thus likely to generate a more significant emotional response, which in turn generates a more significant tendency to act.

Empathy, sympathy, compassion, sadness, pity and distress—all of which can be triggered through a vivid representation of beneficiaries—have each been shown to be powerful

motivations for helping behavior (Batson, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2011). Narratives about the suffering of concrete others, and the heroic acts of exemplars in response, engage people in ways that abstract principles or mere facts do not. Vivid language and a detailed picture of the circumstances trigger emotional responses and bring about desirable behavioral effects.

Consider the finding that people donate more to charity after having been presented with concrete examples about recipients with whom they can easily empathize as opposed to the same cases presented via abstract figures and statistics (Behavioural Insights Team, n.d., p. 9). This enhanced emotional involvement has been labeled the 'identifiable victim effect' and has received both laboratory and field confirmation (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). By contrast, using abstract and impersonal data creates less emotional involvement and even 'psychic numbing' (Slovic, 2007). When constructing narratives about moral exemplars, one should thus focus not only on the moral exemplar, but also on her beneficiary. One can, for example, present Oskar Schindler's heroic story by focusing on the number of Jews he managed to rescue in World War II (over 1200) or by focusing on the effect of his actions on an actual family that was saved. The latter frame will elicit more affect and hence serve as a nudge strategy that elicits more inspiration.

Why does making exemplar stories more affective also render them more effective? First, affect triggers interest. We are interested in things that trigger our emotions and vice versa: emotions are more intense for important topics (Frijda, 1988). Second, affect—in its more specific form of emotion—also triggers specific motivations (Frijda, 1988). Third, events that are affectively laden are remembered better at a later time (Hamann, 2001). If an exemplar story triggers more affect, it is thus more likely to be remembered at a later time and in another situation.

Creating more relatable stories

The second set of nudge strategies one can use to enhance exemplar stories relates to the finding that these stories should be told so that people can relate to them.[9] One challenge is to understand how exemplars, who generally perform exceptional deeds in extreme circumstances, can come to motivate people to perform less exceptional deeds in quite ordinary circumstances.

In fact, authors have argued that 'close-by' exemplars (in terms of one's everyday experience) are more likely to trigger admiration and the desire to emulate than more 'distant' saints who 'might look too far away from our ordinary experience and hence appear to be less imitable' (Croce & Vaccarezza, 2017, p. 13). Croce and Vaccarezza (2017) argue that heroes, who display one or two virtues to an exceptional degree, are more 'imitable' than saints, who are flawless without qualification (see also, Zagzebski, 2017, chapter 3).

Because, as we have seen, imitating is often not the appropriate response to exemplars, we argue that relatability is what matters. When moral exemplars turn out to have flaws or at least idiosyncrasies, experience moments of weakness and are revealed to be human, they are more relatable than the all too perfect, godlike and out-of-reach creatures that populate hagiographies. Quite like abstract statistics, stories about the unambiguously virtuous will not be likely to get under people's skin, have them think, help them avoid moral errors and spur them into doing good.

Moral exemplars can be 'close' or 'distant' in both a psychological sense (similarity in terms of personality and character traits) and a physical sense (being among our relatives,

acquaintances or friends) (Croce & Vaccarezza, 2017, p. 17). Levinson (2012) argues that role models from our neighborhood, church, or family can actually inspire by virtue of their 'ordinariness' rather than their greatness.

Still, even when characters are distant, physically speaking, well-told stories can produce changes in the brain (increasing oxytocin levels) correlated with moral behavior. In his studies, Zak (2015) combines evidence about people's physiological responses to stories with surveys and post-narrative behavior (such as donating money to a related cause). Stories are found to motivate prosocial behavior, when they succeed in generating attention and emotional resonance (see above), making people care about the characters and drawing you into the story (narrative immersion). In short, the more relatable exemplar stories are, the more they will succeed in promoting moral behavior.

Triggering admiration

The third set of nudge strategies that can be used to enhance the use of exemplar stories relates to the growing body of evidence that such narratives elicit admiration and thereby foster the desire to emulate the exemplars. How should narratives be framed so as to induce most admiration?

To trigger the most admiration, it is useful to look at its antecedents: admiration arises from the perception that someone exceeds a standard (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). In the case of moral exemplars, focusing on the many things that someone did that went over and above the call of duty will trigger more admiration. Interestingly, the same idea about making a story more affectively laden (providing concrete details) can help in achieving this result. A story about Nelson Mandela can focus on his abstract accomplishments, or on his personal struggles and the hurdles he had to surmount. These details can help show that many of his actions went far beyond the call of duty, providing examples of a person exceeding standards.

On the other hand, framing can also produce counter-productive results depending on the audience at hand. Consider moral rebels who do not comply with prevailing ethical norms that are, in fact, defective. While a disengaged third person reacts to the moral rebel with 'admiration and respect' (Monin et al., 2008, p. 76), those who were involved in the same situation but who complied with the defective norms have a different response. They reported negative emotions and resented rather than admired the rebels (Monin et al., 2008). This finding mirrors one of the findings in Stanley Milgram's famous (1965) studies on obedience. While those who read these studies applauded the participants who refused to cooperate in administering electric shocks to the victims, those who had administered such shocks responded negatively to these rebels in debriefing. According to Monin et al. (2008, p. 87), this reaction may arise from people viewing the acts of the rebels as an implicit rejection of their behavior, which threatens their self-confidence.

Minson and Monin (2012) provide further evidence for this claim in studies investigating the reactions of meat-eaters to vegetarians. A significant proportion of respondents reacted with 'do-gooder derogation' (putting down others who represented themselves as more morally insightful than other people). This was even more likely when they expected vegetarians to view themselves as superior to meat eaters or when they imagined the vegetarians' moral judgment of meat eaters. Crucially, the negative reaction seems to stem from feeling threatened by more 'morally' motivated people. This reaction is independent of the truth about whether or not eating meat is a moral issue or whether vegetarians do, in

fact, view themselves as morally superior to meat eaters. What matters is the feeling that a person is being judged by others as lacking an appreciation of the 'correct' moral standards. Whether exemplars succeed in triggering admiration thus depends strongly on how they are presented to the audience.

Similar evidence can be found in the reactions of privileged teenagers to hearing Peter Singer's (1972) arguments in support of the claim that privileged people should donate large amounts of their incomes to charities that assist the global poor. As Seider (2009, p. 230) shows, rather than increasing support for these charities, these arguments made the students *less* empathetic to the plight of the global poor than they had been at the start of the class.

These three studies all suggest that exemplar stories do not trigger admiration in these cases. In fact, they have a negative effect on moral motivation when people feel their moral self-image is threatened by the behavior of people who are presented as morally condescending towards them. One way of utilizing this finding for moral education would be to construct narratives about moral exemplars carefully and ensure that people are only presented with stories where the behavior of the exemplar cannot be interpreted as an implicit criticism of their own behavior.

Another possibility is suggested by the finding that when the non-rebels engaged in a self-affirmation exercise prior to reading the rebel story, they no longer responded negatively to it. Before being presented with a story, they were asked to recall a recent experience in which they had 'demonstrated an important quality or value' (Monin et al., 2008, p. 86). This group did not respond negatively to the rebels and in fact declared them especially moral (Monin et al., 2008, p. 86). Asking people to engage in a self-affirmation exercise prior to reading stories of moral exemplars thus enhances the intended educational effect of exemplar stories.

The way in which exemplar stories are presented thus impacts their motivational results. Another example of this lies in the finding that role models were more likely to be motivationally inspiring when they were viewed as both relevant (the role model is judged to be similar to the participant) and attainable (the participant believes she too could achieve what the role model has achieved) (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). While this study focused on non-moral role modeling, Han (2016) found the same results hold for moral exemplars. This provides us with another way in which we can influence the motivational power of exemplar stories. If educators ensure that exemplar stories are relevant and attainable then they are more likely to have the desired motivational results.[10]

Moral exemplars, nudge strategies and the aims of moral education

In this section, we explain how the above proposals can contribute to the realization of both aims of moral education, as previously outlined: (1) enabling people to uphold society's norms and standards; while (2) developing people's critical and creative capacities.

First aim: enabling people to uphold norms

With respect to the first aim, combining insights from nudge theory and the use of moral exemplars can increase the chances of people meeting the basic standards of decency and sociality in their society. Even when they have internalized these standards, people may fail to conform to them due to the force of psychological mechanisms such as akrasia, laziness

or the tendency to conform. While we all know, for example, that we should help people in need, we often find ourselves not even upholding this minimal standard. Think of the 'bystander effect' where people are less likely to offer any help to a victim when others are present. How can our proposed nudge strategies help here?

Moral exemplars can serve as reminders—Sunstein's nudge strategy (5)—about what morality demands. Stories about moral exemplars who exceed social norms and expectations can remind people of those very norms and motivate them to uphold them. Think of how students react when hearing the story of teacher Ray Coe, who decided to donate his kidney to one of his pupils, Alya Ahmed Ali. Instead of immediately donating their kidneys as well, they will typically be inspired to perform less exceptional but still praiseworthy acts of kindness. In general then, nudges can be said to provide vivid cues that can help people bridge the gap between 'knowing what to do' and 'actually doing it'. As shown before, the more affectively narrated moral exemplars are more likely to be remembered (when confronted with a moral dilemma that resembles the narrative) and therefore more likely to remind people about what morality demands and motivate them to act accordingly.

In addition, moral exemplars can serve as an 'anchor' that effectively raises the bar for doing good. If we hear about people donating half of their income to charities and about the concrete beneficiaries of their altruism, giving away 5% suddenly seems much more doable. Singer explicitly hopes to change social norms—Sunstein's nudge strategy (10)—about giving behavior by providing more exposure to good examples. Instead of keeping acts of altruism secret, bringing them out in the open and recognizing their admirable character—Sunstein's nudge strategy (11) of making use of public recognition—Singer (2015, p. 9) hopes to create a culture more conducive to giving. Once that is in place, one can expect people's tendency to conform to others to play a role in motivating them to adhere to social norms.

Nudge strategies can also reduce the cognitive costs of practical decision-making by 'routinizing' many ethical choices. The good life surely does not consist in facing constant ethical challenges and struggling with problematic ethical dilemmas on a daily or even hourly basis. None of us can control our fate and whether or not one finds oneself in morally unlucky contexts. Constitutive and circumstantial bad luck aside, virtuous people try so to structure both the contexts in which they find themselves and their routine decision-making to increase the likelihood of sound ethical decision-making. While moral education should equip us with the skills necessary for making hard and even tragic choices, it should also be based on the idea that the moral path often runs quite smoothly, without too many obstacles. In fact, it reveals the third claim we want to make about the tight connection between moral exemplars and nudge strategies, namely that moral exemplars typically use (self-) nudge strategies to facilitate their moral decisions and be better moral persons.

In this respect, we agree with both R. Jay Wallace (2001) and Susan Wolf (2007) that ethicists have neglected the 'minor virtue' of 'cleverness'. This refers to an agent's capacity efficiently to realize her ends. Cleverness certainly does not suffice for virtue, but it is necessary for it. Since this domain of the clever is focused on the effective realization of one's ends (whatever these may be), it lends itself to being reinforced by nudge strategies. Since mere cleverness can also help the immoral to reach her goals, it is particularly important to set aspects of the choice architecture—such as defaults, information and salience—in ways that reinforce those goals that any agent ought to endorse: namely those of the everyday norms of the minimally ethical. Given our commitment to these norms, we do our best to

follow the lead of moral exemplars who design their choice environments in such a way that adherence is easy and temptation (to break these norms or let go of their commitment) avoided.

Second aim: enabling people to break, bend and exceed norms

With respect to the second aim of moral education, societal norms of decency and sociality might need to be critically challenged. Moral education should enable people's capacities to criticize and even break norms (or creatively bend them) in certain circumstances. If one has the bad moral luck to find oneself in an occupied country during the Second World War, the general deterioration of norms may make it hard to uphold the minimal norm of fidelity to one's neighbors (since this would require risky behavior). A white Christian priest in the US during the Civil Rights era might want to make the difficult decision to participate in Martin Luther King's march at Selma. These acts of courage can be inculcated by using moral exemplars positively to frame how such exemplars may well have exceeded expectations, but still felt they had no choice but do exactly that.

In practice, nudge-enhanced exemplar stories typically achieve both aims at the same time. Because much reasoning in ethics—as in everyday practice—is threatened by the informational complexity that might bear on decisions (Thomas, 2011, pp. 159–160), the key point is that nudge strategies reduce cognitive costs (Sunstein, 2016, p. 61). Our strategy of combining moral exemplars and nudge strategies thus consists of: (1) using nudge theory so to structure choice situations as to make good decision-*making* less costly; thereby (2) freeing up resources for critically challenging existing norms.

When aiming to educate someone into the minimally ethical, we believe the path to morality ought to be designed to be the path of least (cognitive) effort. Virtues and intentions themselves can function as planned pre-commitment strategies, at least on the understanding that they are not necessarily situationally robust without reinforcement. To achieve this robustness, individuals and societies should pay more attention to how to manage choice contexts. Interestingly, one hallmark of the virtuous is exactly that they are careful not to place themselves in situations that impede or inhibit their capacity for virtue (Goldie, 2004, chapters 3 and 4). In short, they make use of the nudge strategy of (3) simplifying complex tasks.

There are two ways in which nudges—and thus also nudge-enhanced stories—can increase the reflectiveness that is key to moral education's second aim to know when it is right to break the norms. The first is indirect. Most nudges facilitate people's choices by tapping into more automatic and less reflective cognitive processes. However, by doing so, they reduce cognitive effort and free up people's limited 'mental bandwidth' (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). A well-told story, like a well-designed piece of equipment (think of a smartphone's interface), intuitively reveals its purpose and how to deal with it. Instead of making you ponder on irrelevancies, they allow you to focus and reflect on what really matters. Second, nudges can trigger attention and reflection on what matters more directly as well. When people get distracted, face small obstacles and are lazy or weak-willed, nudges can help them get back on track. Like reminders that pop up when you are wasting too much time online in the office, so too can exemplar stories prompt you to rethink your priorities.

In both cases, the combination of exemplar stories and nudges helps people (re)orient and (re)conceptualize their ethical demands. Research shows that exemplar stories trigger a desire to become a better person (self-improvement) by eliciting admiration, which is

not only energizing in generating a desire to emulate but also makes people reflect and deliberate (Onu, Kessler, & Smith, 2016). In addition, exemplar stories can trigger elevation ('admiration for virtue', which produces a desire to be virtuous) and inspiration (which encourages to reconsider and set new goals) (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Immordino-Yang & Sylvan, 2010; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

In sum, the two moral technologies—moral exemplars and nudge strategies—are more than complementary; they are convergent and mutually reinforcing. While nudges towards the minimally ethical target cleverness, we accept that practical reasoning not merely concerns how to achieve one's pre-given ends (means-ends reasoning) but also the choice of one's ends. This may involve 'constitutive reasoning': set yourself a goal (of having a pleasant evening, for example), imagine some constitutive solutions to that problem, and be motivated accordingly (Wiggins, 2000). This kind of reasoning is not merely instrumental and its results can be indeterminate because one's capacity for imagination is so important to it. Because it draws upon the capacity imaginatively to rehearse solutions to problems, it is important in appreciating the role that moral exemplars can play in moral education. Our two strategies, then, are mutually reinforcing.

Ethical concerns about nudge strategies

While the use of moral exemplars is uncontroversial, our endorsement of nudge strategies in moral education may give rise to concerns. The more general nudge literature, after all, is replete with objections. In what follows, we outline these objections and show why they do not apply to our proposals.

First, there is a concern about the direction into which people should be nudged (Hausman & Welch, 2010). An oft-heard criticism is that nudge strategies are objectionably paternalistic (Grüne-Yanoff, 2012; Sunstein, 2016). When others steer your behavior into a specific direction, they are imposing their goals and values upon you, which is putatively illegitimate in a liberal society. In our view, this does not pose a serious challenge to our proposals, because we have explicitly limited ourselves to nudges as moral strategies geared at the two aims of moral education set out above. To the extent that you endorse these, there is no reason to be particularly worried about the direction of the nudge strategies proposed here.

Second, there is a persistent concern about the techniques involved in nudges that critics call both manipulative and a threat to people's rationality and autonomy (Bovens, 2009; Grüne-Yanoff, 2012; Hausman & Welch, 2010). Subjects who are nudged supposedly act for the wrong reason or even no reason at all. Their actions are not spurred by their reflective judgements or reasons, but by the combination of largely automatic, unreflective psychological mechanisms (such as salience or some emotional response) and irrelevant tweaks in choice settings.[11]

A third and related concern questions whether nudges can be *moral* technologies. The concern is that nudge-based action cannot be genuinely moral action. Unless one is a full-blooded consequentialist, the intentions and reasons behind actions matter, morally speaking. What moral education should be striving for is not to generate specific behavioral effects—which is the primary aim of nudge strategies—but stimulating people to perform the right actions for the right reasons. The actions that nudges, heuristics and biases generate can thus not be genuinely moral.

In response to the second and third objection, both of which center around the supposed inadequacy of nudges as moral strategies, we have three replies.

First, we appeal once again to the 'argument from ubiquity'. Since stories about moral exemplars have to be told in *some* way, framing effects will inevitably have an impact. If this is the case, what exactly would be gained, in terms of moral quality of action, if we set aside nudge strategies altogether? People will still be influenced by a combination of the irrelevant characteristics of their choice architectures, the stories they are told and their psychological set-up. So, unless one wants to drop exemplar stories in moral education altogether, why not frame them so that they predictably steer behavior in desirable directions?

Second, what exactly is less moral about deliberately telling an exemplar story so as to maximize the impact they are meant to have anyway? Our focus here has been on how nudges can help trigger moral emotions such as admiration that undoubtedly constitute good reasons for the actions motivated by them. There is nothing 'irrational', 'heteronomous' or 'less moral' about acting out of admiration or elevation, even if these are triggered by specific ways of framing exemplar stories.

This is not a compromise with the psychological irrelevancies of our human condition that impede the demands of the good—as some consequentialists imply. Taking advantage of our psychological setup allows moral education to frame situations in ways that make ethical decisions more accurate and more robust. On our account of moral agency, the nudge strategies we have proposed can indeed be called 'moral technologies'. The admiration they trigger does not lead to quasi-automatic copying but can make people reconceptualize situations and rethink their long-term goals and ideals.

Third, as we have stressed, nudge-enhanced exemplar stories can actually induce people to focus reflectively on ethical demands, either directly by prompting ethical reflection or indirectly by making everyday decisions less cognitively demanding and thereby freeing up cognitive space for more demanding choices. Successful moral education facilitates 'moral navigation': it places subjects in a position to navigate their way through ethical choices, both simple and complex. This image of 'moral navigation' suggests that much of ethical thinking is taken up by the correct conceptualization of the choice situation. A correct framing of the issue takes the moral subject close to the correct answer—if the issue of deliberation arises at all. Well-designed choice situations, then, qualitatively improve ethical decisions. Nudges form part of a wider set of self-management strategies for agents who have their own characteristic limitations.

If nudge strategies increase the 'navigability' of our ethical landscapes and help agents with this metaphorical 'mapping', then what is the role of moral exemplars? Are they 'beacons' or landmarks on the landscape by which the moral agent orientates herself? We think that metaphor is unhelpful because we do not think that the role of exemplars in moral education is to provide clear-cut directions for subjects to follow. Exemplars do not function as examples that agents can simply copy. As foci of moral attention, they do motivate us to try and understand their motivations from their own points of view.

Contrast two kinds of imagining: acentral and central imagining. If you imagine Martin Luther King on the bridge at Selma you can represent to yourself an imagined scene containing King (acentral) or you can imagine the scene from the point of view of King—centered on you, the imaginer (central) (Wollheim, 1974). In our view, narratives that nudge people towards better moral decisions should invoke central imagining: seeing ethical choices as framed from the perspective of morally exemplary people themselves.

This also helps to address perhaps the main concern about exemplar stories in moral education, namely that they impose excessive ethical demands that are actually de-motivating. Morally exemplary people exhibit the feature of moral depth (Archer & Ridge, 2015) and often experience acting virtuously as practically necessary for them—an expression of their moral character (Archer, 2015). The imaginative attempt to see things from their points of view is not, however, as we have stressed, mere imitation: the ethically less deep cannot and should not simply copy those with a deeper understanding. Nevertheless, they can come to appreciate how a person's character is expressive of her moral outlook such that some kinds of actions might be practically necessary for the exemplar but beyond the reach of the less exemplary.

In fact, we believe that morally exemplary people exhibit two sets of 'meta-virtues' that enable them to succeed in: (1) managing the situations in which they find themselves; and (2) reflectively managing their cognitive resources (Goldie, 2004). It is a hallmark of moral exemplars that they manage the situations in which he or she finds themselves—so far as circumstances permit. Specific decisions, in particular situations, may be influenced by the person's overall conception of what is worthwhile not merely in this situation, but across situations (Wolf, 2007).

Conclusion

Over the last few decades, moral education research has moved away from a predominantly cognitive approach to an emphasis on character formation and virtue embodiment (Carr, 2008; Revel & Arthur, 2007). In line with this evolution, we have stressed the role played by moral emotions such as admiration in moral education. We have referred to empirical insights from psychologists to inform the academic discussion of moral education and propose new ways to translate theoretical insights about moral agency and education into practice—a translation that is often lacking (Revel & Arthur, 2007). Specifically, we have demonstrated that, as moral educators inevitably present information in some way to those they seek to educate, they should do so in ways that most effectively realize the two overall goals of moral education.

In short, we have suggested a twofold strategy that appeals both to moral exemplars and nudge strategies, but in different ways. First, the admiration that moral exemplars instill can motivate people to respect the everyday norms of the minimally ethical, which is further supported by nudge strategies that make the minor virtue of 'cleverness' more effective and less cognitively costly. Second, people can be nudged towards the critical dimension of moral thinking and agency by using narratives that embed the central imagining of what it is to emulate a morally exemplary person. In our view, this combination of nudge strategies and exemplar stories provides a fruitful and promising way of achieving both aims of moral education.

Notes

1. Moral education can obviously be targeted at individuals at different levels of cognitive, emotional and moral development. Obviously, we are not claiming here that moral exemplars and the admiration they can trigger are the only or always the most appropriate pedagogical methods in moral education. It goes without saying that different strategies are more suitable for toddlers for example.

2. Williams's use of a 'minimal' conception of the ethical implies that *at least this* is, uncontroversially, identifiable as an ethical system. That is independent of the claim about the extent to which people inculcated into any such system live up to its demands. The latter has to represent a psychological commitment that is, on any reasonable understanding, more than 'minimal'. Living under the ethical is always an achievement even if that achievement varies by degree. Hence our further point that a moral education must bring all citizens up to functionally adequate standards.

3. While this characterization of moral exemplars may seem somewhat arbitrary, we believe it fits both conceptual work on moral exemplars and common sense. For example, the 23 moral exemplars with diverse backgrounds and goals, whose stories are told by psychologists Colby and Damon (1992), are all characterized by their exemplary moral reasoning and how committed they live out their moral convictions and principles, even if it implies standing up to or rectifying injustices. Lickona (2004, p. 21) summarizes the five criteria used by Colby and Damon to identify moral exemplars as follows: '(1) a sustained commitment to moral ideals; (2) a consistency between one's ideals and means to achieving them; (3) a willingness to sacrifice self-interest; (4) a capacity to inspire others; and (5) a humility about one's own importance'.

4. Algoe and Haidt (2009) distinguish between elevation (roughly moral admiration) and admiration (all other forms) and treat these separately. This does not impact on the point we are making here, as both were found to be connected to a desire to emulate.

5. For a justification of the distinction between benign and malicious forms of envy, see [van de Ven (2016)].

6. To avoid repeating the cumbersome phrase 'narratives embedding moral exemplars' or 'stories featuring moral exemplars' we will abbreviate this for convenience to 'exemplar stories'.

7. In our view, this expansive list can certainly be made more parsimonious: for example, items (4), (5), (7) and (9) might all be folded into (2). Of course, different strategies can be combined: pre-commitment works well in combination with social norms, for example. Sunstein calls this 'mixing and matching'.

8. Of course, exemplar stories can serve other purposes, such as historical accuracy, besides being used as an educational strategy. In this respect, they differ from other nudges, whose sole purpose is to change people's behavior. Within an educational setting though, exemplar stories are generally used for this latter purpose. Often, this happens quite loosely in the hope that these stories trigger admiration, inspiration and subsequently, moral behavior. Amongst the more systematic approaches are the method of 'Other-Study', where the teacher presents an exemplar, selected for example from an online repository such as *Virtue in Action* (www.virtueinaction.org) and then asks students to reflect on the exemplar's strengths of character, the obstacles she had to overcome, etc. (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2014, pp. 302–303). Lee (2014, p. 338) mentions exemplar stories as one of the five methods for moral character education used in Korea, adding that teachers can reconfigure those stories and the ways in which they are presented on the basis of the content, the class's starting point and the desired goals. Our aim here is to draw on nudge theory to understand more specifically how to present these exemplar stories so as to generate genuine moral action and serve the main aims of moral education. Damon and Colby (2015, p. xvi) even develop an 'exemplar methodology', in which case studies of moral exemplars are analyzed in light of the 'profound and moving insights into moral commitment that can be uniquely valuable for the rest of us'.

9. We thank an anonymous referee of this journal for pressing us to develop this point further.

10. Peter Singer himself seems to have understood this message. Instead of relying exclusively on abstract moral arguments and hypothetical thought experiments, he uses more and more concrete examples of how donating to charity can alleviate the plight of the poor. His most recent book (Singer, 2015) is full of examples of how people have come to donate substantial parts of their incomes. Each of these stories is set up with care so as not to invoke guilt trips and try to persuade you, the reader, that helping others is not merely good for them but also good for you.

11. Like an anonymous referee of this journal rightly pointed out, critics could argue that nudge strategies may undermine people's reflective capacities in the longer run, incentivizing people to think less for themselves and rely more on others and the environment to guide them. We know of no empirical evidence in support of this claim. Also, remember the 'argument from ubiquity': even in the absence of intentional nudges will people be influenced by less reflective processes and small aspects of the choice architecture.

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Disclosure statement

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