Educating through Exemplars: Alternative Paths to Virtue

Michel Croce & Maria Silvia Vaccarezza

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Michel Croce & Maria Silvia Vaccarezza[*]

(University of Genoa)

Abstract. This paper confronts some basics of Zagzebski's exemplarism with the debate over the unity-disunity of the virtues, so to endorse a pluralistic exemplar-based approach to moral education (PEBAME). We argue that PEBAME constitutes an important practical reason for character education not to settle the dispute among unitarist and disunitarist in moral philosophy. To do so, first we show how two concrete examples taken from Italian nineteenth century history (i.e. Giorgio Perlasca and Gino Bartali) satisfy Blum's definitions of "moral hero" and "moral saint" (1988). Then, we offer a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of moral heroes and moral saints for character education, according to four criteria derived from PEBAME: admirability, virtuousness, required-reflection, and imitability. In particular, we argue that, on the one hand, saints and heroes do not substantially differ in their fulfilment of the admirability and the required-reflection criteria; on the other, the saint is largely superior to the hero for what concerns virtuousness. Thus, what allows us to conclude that both the unitarist and the disunitarist exemplars are fundamental to character education is the heroes' superiority to saints in imitability, which deserves a special role in our analysis because of its importance for education.

Introduction

The human enterprises of both self-improvement and education through virtue cultivation have been largely underestimated in the last few decades among moral philosophers (Russell 2015: 17). Nor has it been very much considered that people keep referring to "this" person as a good model for courage and to "that" person as a great example of compassion, although it seems pointing to exemplars still is one very effective way to remind ourselves the kind of person we wish to be.

This paper inquires the role exemplars play in moral education by drawing insights from two different but intertwined debates, namely that on the conditions for being moral exemplars and that on the unity-disunity of the virtues. We are not going to defend any strong theoretical view about either of them; rather, we aim to show that fruitful considerations for moral education will come about at the crossroad of the two debates, no matter how we are to settle those issues in moral philosophy. In Section 1 we set the ground for our argument by recalling the core claim of exemplarism and explaining why this perspective is beneficial to character education. We also introduce the two debates and provide the basics of our pluralistic account (PEBAME) of exemplars. Section 2 offers two paradigmatic cases of exemplars, taken from Italian twentieth century history, and shows how they fulfill the requirements for being considered respectively as "moral hero" and

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[*] The authors contributed equally.

"moral saint". In Section 3, we analyze the effectiveness of moral heroes and moral saints for character education according to the criteria provided by PEBAME.

If our analysis hits the target, it shall become evident that endorsing this pluralistic account, which values both kinds of exemplars, is more beneficial to character education than trying to settle the debate on the unity-disunity of the virtues and hence limiting the range of moral exemplars to either kind or the other.

Section 1. Exemplarism-based character education

This paper takes looking at exemplars as the core of a powerful pluralistic approach to moral education. In order to figure out what "looking at exemplars" means, we can refer to the recent work of Linda Zagzebski, who defends an exemplarist virtue theory. Exemplarism, as Zagzebski conceives it (2006, 2010, 2012, 2015), is a non-standard foundationalist view, in that the foundation is not conceptual: roughly, the basic idea is that we pick moral exemplars by direct reference to exceptional individuals identified through the emotion of admiration, that is, by "pointing to" exceptional figures (see Zagzebski, 2010: 50-51)[1].

Despite the many objections that might be moved to such a theory, exemplarism has several advantages for the purpose of this paper. First, unlike most other moral theories, it restores exemplars as the key to individuate, classify, and cultivate the virtues. We cannot take it from granted: on the one hand, standard forms of virtue ethics have not paid that much attention to the role of exemplars. On the other, deontologists do not commit themselves to talking about exemplars, as they are not willing to concede that reasons for acting can be drawn from outside the rational agent, without falling into a heteronomous account of morality. Secondly, exemplarism explicitly aims at providing the scientific community with a theory capable of having practical and educational implications. What is most interesting with exemplars, as exemplarism conceives them, is their capacity of motivating us becoming good: encountering a moral exemplar, in person or through narratives, elicits our admiration and can be one of the most significant moral experiences

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[1] The theory conceives any moral concept or term as derivative from this non-conceptual foundation, as Zagzebski holds in the following quote: "A virtue is a trait we admire in an admirable person. A right act (an act that a person would have most moral reason to do) in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable person would take to be most favored by the balance of reasons in circumstances C. A duty (an act it would be wrong not to do) in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable person would feel compelled to do in C in the sense that if he did not do it, he would feel guilty for not doing it. A good state of affairs (more precisely, that subset of states of affairs that can be the outcome of human acts) is a state of affairs at which admirable persons aim" (Zagzebski 2010: 54-5).

of our whole life, capable of changing its course. As Iris Murdoch would have said, morality is not primarily a matter of struggling in order to act well, but has to do above all with admiring and loving the right people[2]. Thirdly, exemplarism provides a convincing phenomenology of admiration. Indeed, it grants both that we can be mistaken about the exemplars we naturally admire, and that we are in the position to revise our judgments upon reflection[3]. Finally, through this phenomenology of admiration, exemplarism clarifies the role of emulation in character education[4]. We consider this particular advantage of the exemplarist theory worth a remark, for emulating models is one of the most relevant aspects to inquire for those who work in education. Indeed, it is quite common to hear things like "be yourself, don't emulate anyone!", so that emulation sounds as a dangerous behavior typical of insecure people. In contrast, exemplarism points out that emulation, far from being a "bad habit", is the standard behavior we adopt towards a person we admire and we want to imitate. Thus, whether or not we emulate authentic exemplars rests on our ability to identify them through admiration, and emulation is in itself innocent of our misidentifications.

But let's ask now: who is a moral exemplar? Here the first debate – namely the one concerning the nature of exemplars – comes into play. Should we think of exemplars as morally perfect people[5], or just as virtuous persons who display some virtues to an exceptional degree? It seems as we can gather the spread-out variety of moral exemplars into two big families, namely moral heroes and moral saints. Heroes represent the model of the single-domain exemplarity. Most interpreters consider single-domain exemplars to work only in the sphere of courage, as they are virtuous in situations where others do feel fear or terror; hence, they exemplify the virtue of courage at an exceptional degree. No attention is apparently paid to the possibility of there being generous, humble – and so on – models of

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[2] See Murdoch 1971: 89: "We act rightly 'when the time comes' not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments".

[3] This is what happens when, for instance, we figure out that the so-seeming exceptionally generous businessman who always gives huge amounts of money to the needy is actually doing money-laundering or so. The natural admiration we had towards him is something we are not anymore willing to concede once we know about his deceit. The businessman case is actually an unlucky case, where the subject is deceived by a dishonest model, and it seems that the exemplarist can easily account for that. However, there might be situations where we just naturally admire the wrong person due to an internal failure of our natural emotion of admiration: for instance, we might admire people who like risking their own life merely for fun, or who bet impressive amounts of money on football games. It is in such cases that the role assigned by exemplarism to reflection proves essential.

[4] While admiration is the fundamental moral emotion enabling one to detect the outstandingness of a moral exemplar, emulation is the behavior one adopts to imitate her. Such as ancient Greece's mimesis, thus, emulation is of the utmost importance, since it allows one to become moral through the repetition of virtuous acts; it nevertheless must be practiced cautiously, since it is always possible to direct it towards the wrong models, whose attractiveness is not due to their moral goodness but to other, non-moral, or even immoral, features.

[5] See McGinn 1992.

the single-domain exemplarity. On the contrary, we take these cases as possible, yet we concede that moral excellence in any of its forms (e.g. exceptional generosity, exceptional honesty, exceptional humility, etc.) might necessarily involve a certain degree of courage. On the other hand, saints represent the model of the exemplarity without qualification, as they are supposed to possess all the virtues. Most interpreters acknowledge the exemplarity of both models[6], while others tend to assign priority either to the saint or to the hero[7]. Some, finally, seem to have an even broader account, since they include among the exemplary other categories or subcategories[8].

Therefore, following Blum's terminology (1988), we define the moral hero as someone who displays (1) a moral project, (2) morally worthy motivations rooted in her own system of motivation, (3) willingness to face risk or danger, and (4) possession of one virtue at a non-standard level. On the other hand, the moral saint is required to display the four previous features plus (5) faultlessness as lack of unworthy desires and attitudes.

Here we come to the point where the debate concerning the unity of the virtues problem (UV) crosses the issues at stake. Why so? Because if a moral exemplar displays unworthy desires or attitudes, she cannot possess all the virtues, as strong unitarists hold[9], yet he might still consistently be a moral hero, according to disunitarists. Simply speaking, unitarists follow Aristotle in claiming that in order to have a real virtue one needs to possess all of them, whereas disunitarists argue that one can possess a genuine virtue without displaying others. Among unitarists, we can number Irwin (1988), Annas (1993), Wolf (2007), and Russell (2009). In contrast, Foot (1978), Nagel (1979), Williams (1982), Walker (1993), Badwhar (1996) and McDowell (1998) are fundamentally disunitarists, since either they do not believe the virtues to be mutually compatible (what Badwhar calls *Mutual Incompatibility of the Virtues*, and Walker *Conflict Assumption*) or they claim there is no need for a virtue to be genuine to be accompanied by all others (*Mutual Independence of the Virtues*, in Badwhar's words)[10]. Obviously, both sides have very good reasons to put forward. Unitarists typically root their claim in the need of practical wisdom – the intellectual virtue responsible for shaping character in all its expressions – for any single virtue to be a genuinely good acquired trait instead of merely a natural one. Disunitarists, on the other

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[6] This former group includes, among others, Blum (1988) and Urmson (1958).

[7] Adams (1984), McGinn (1992), and Wolf (1982) belong to this latter group, in that they focus almost exclusively on moral saints. Obviously, this does not exclude in principle that they acknowledge the exemplarity of other models, such as heroes.

[8] E.g. Zagzebski (*forthcoming*) has a threefold account of exemplars. In particular, she distinguishes among the hero, the saint and the sage, where the last category includes those who display wisdom at the utmost degree.

[9] See Blum 1988: 51.

[10] Badwhar's own position amounts to a *Limited Unity of the Virtues* view, in that she claims the existence of a virtue in a particular domain of a person's life does not imply the existence of that (or any other) virtue in any other domain, but requires the absence of vice in most other domains. See Badwhar 1996: 308.

hand, quite often appeal to experience, that clearly shows how it can be perfectly possible, due to temperamental reasons, to be, say, honest but fearful, or tactful but intemperate, and so on. More radically, disunitarists often claim there are, at least occasionally, incompatibilities among virtues: it can be impossible, at times, to behave both frankly and tactfully, e.g. when telling the truth to someone will hurt them. As already stated, this paper will not broadcast any fight between the two competing accounts just sketched, precisely because we endorse that a more comprehensive picture of what is a moral exemplar gives better explanation of how exemplarism can work as a theory for character education. We do need to notice that the moral saint fulfills the UV requirements, whereas only disunitarists can consider the moral hero as an authentic exemplar model.

By summing up what we have been saying so far, we have outlined the advantages offered by an exemplarist perspective on character education, identified two main kinds of moral exemplars, and we are assuming the exemplarity of both is not under question. However, our aim is that of combining an exemplar-based approach to moral education with the tradition of Aristotelian character education in which exemplarism itself is rooted, so to develop a pluralistic exemplar-based account on moral education account (PEBAME). Thus, PEBAME shall share some features with standard virtue ethics, while having some peculiarities of its own.

Now, what does it mean to become morally good, that is, virtuous, in a standard virtue-ethicist perspective? Following the Aristotelian tradition (see Sherman 1997; Steutel-Carr 1999) we take it not as being primarily concerned with grasping the right principles of conduct and applying them to the situation at hand; thus, not as something that can be learnt "by heart". Rather, as the "cultivation of a range of sensibilities to the particularities of moral engagement, involving crucial interplay between the cognitive and the affective" (Steutel-Carr 1999: 12). Also, in line with Aristotelianism, we have it as central that "Character is caught through role-modelling and emotional contagion" much more than taught (Kristjánsson 2015: 21). This latter remark grounds the central role of exemplars and paves the way for an integration between "standard" virtue ethics and exemplarism when it comes to character education.

Therefore, three claims central to PEBAME arise out of combining exemplarism with Aristotelian character education: (i) the *virtues* or their constituents are the aims of character education – i.e. priority is assigned to aretaic notions over deontic ones; (ii) *imitation* of exemplars is the main way of achieving this aim; (iii) educating to imitation requires the educator (a) to elicit the pupils' *admiration* by presenting them with genuinely good and

imitable models and (b) to foster their capacity for *reflection* upon prima facie admiration[11]. It is worth noting that our approach is meant to be pluralistic, in that we aim at demonstrating, on the basis of these three claims, that we need not endorse the primacy of either view in the unitarist-disunitarist debate, nor in the moral saint-moral hero one. Thus, we will evaluate whether and how pointing to the two kinds of exemplars identified so far meets the following four criteria: virtuousness, admirability, imitability, and required-reflection needed to make sure of their genuine exemplarity.

In the following section, we introduce the exceptional figures of two Italian Holocaust rescuers, Gino Bartali and Giorgio Perlasca, and evaluate if they satisfy Blum's conditions for being, respectively, a moral hero and a moral saint. In Section 3, we analyze their stories according to the criteria just offered to show their significance for PEBAME. In conclusion, we reconsider the soundness of our broad thesis, namely that defending PEBAME constitutes an important practical reason not to settle the dispute among unitarist and disunitarist in moral philosophy.

Section 2. Two study cases: Giorgio Perlasca and Gino Bartali

Let us consider the moral hero case first. Giorgio Perlasca (1910-1992) was an Italian man who worked as a meat merchant before deciding to join Fascism. He fought for Italy in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1938) first, and for General Franco in the Spanish Civil War (1939) later. Thanks to the latter experience, he received a safe conduct valid in all Spanish embassies around the world. This fact changed his life and that of thousands of people years later. In fact, when Nazis forced Miklos Horty to abdicate the regency of Hungary and started mass deportations in 1944, Perlasca was in Budapest and found shelter in the Spanish embassy through the safe conduct. He started to work for the ambassador. When he left the country not to recognize the Nazi's Hungarian government, Perlasca forged documents and pretended to be appointed by the Spanish government as the ambassador's deputy. His sham was so successful that he was able to rescue more than 5000 people squashed in several Spanish buildings in Budapest. After the war, Perlasca went back to Italy where nobody believed his story until 1987, when some women he rescued found and visited him in Padua and told his deeds[12]. Among many celebrations and honors, he has been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 1987.

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[11] The proposed approach does not follow the genetic path for cultivating virtue, i.e. from admiration to virtue through emulating exemplars. Rather, it is meant to illustrate the strategy for educating children in virtue from the educator's point of view.

[12] Not even his wife believed him for a long time (see Deaglio 2014).

Perlasca seems to fulfill all the requirements for being a moral hero. Indeed, (1) he no doubt displayed a moral project, namely rescuing as many people as possible from Nazi's barbarity, (2) supported by morally worthy motivations, such as his deep repulsion for racial segregation[13]. It should be evident from our short summary of Perlasca's story that (3) he had to face serious risk almost every day from November 1944, when he "replaced" the Spanish ambassador, to 16 January 1945, when Soviets were almost encircling Budapest and he received a letter of gratitude from a lawyer whom he saved[14]. Finally, (4) he did display two virtues at a non-standard level: courage and humility.

As concerns courage, it seems sufficient to report the main episode occurred on 30 November 1944. Right after the Spanish ambassador had left Budapest, Perlasca saw that Hungarian police officers were evacuating the Spanish houses where the Jews were staying. Therefore, he stopped them by mentioning an official appointment letter from Spain that conferred authority to himself on the ambassador's behalf. The Spanish government never wrote this letter; hence, he knew that he only had a few hours to create a reliable fake before Hungarians disclosed the fraud. He exposed himself to the point that either his attempt succeeded or he would be caught – that is an expression of non-standard courage.

As concerns humility, set aside several testimonies included in Deaglio's biography of Perlasca, recall the touching description of his arrival to Budapest train station with his wife in 1989, where he was invited to receive the Star of Merit. Perlasca says that he stuck out the window to look at the station and, after he noticed the crowds waiting, he thought something very unusual was about to happen. He did not even imagine that all those people were there just to thank and welcome him. We assume that this episode discloses an expression of non-standard humility.

Despite the excellence and the enormous result of his deeds, his young support to Fascism and his voluntary recruitment in two different and questionable wars prevent us from considering him as a moral saint. Indeed, both facts express a lack of virtue, since it is widely accepted that Italian Fascism became a dictatorship much before the promulgation of racial laws in 1938 and the wars Perlasca took part in[15].

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[13] Deaglio reports that Perlasca supported Fascism until the promulgation of racial laws, and that he disapproved Mussolini's alliance with Hitler and the intervention of Italy in WWII (2014: 16-17).

[14] See Perlasca's diary in Deaglio (2014): ch. 6 and pp. 92-93. Actually, the lawyer knew that Perlasca was not Spanish and that the appointment letter from the Spanish government was a fake. Thus, he wrote the letter of gratitude also to let him know that Soviets were in town and to give him some sort of proof that he helped the Jews despite his Fascist past track record.

[15] Obviously, these remarks only serve the purpose of distinguishing between the notion of moral saint and that of moral hero. The authors of this paper have no intention to disregard or underestimate the moral value of Perlasca's deeds. The very fact that we thought of him as a perfect model for the moral hero should support this claim.

Let us see now the story of our moral saint, the Italian cyclist Gino Bartali, whose extraordinary athletic and human values are not as well-known as other Holocaust rescuers. Gino Bartali was born in Florence in 1914, and was a champion road cyclist. He won the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France several times, becoming a most popular and much admired sportive national hero. He was also a devout Catholic, and close friend to the Archbishop of Florence Elia Angelo Dalla Costa, who married Bartali and his wife Adriana. After the German occupation of Italy in September 1943, Dalla Costa, who has been recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 2012, together with Rabbi Nathan Cassuto organized a network aimed at rescuing Jews. Bartali, who was a courier for the resistance, came to play an important role in this operation: he took advantage of his celebrity as a cyclist to transfer forged documents from one place to another by hiding them in the handlebar and seat of his bicycle. Bartali went back and forth between Florence and Assisi, where forged documents were produced, at least 40 times in two years, covering a distance of approximately 370km each. When he was stopped and searched, he pretended to be covering such long distances for training purposes, and specifically asked not to touch his bicycle, since the different parts were very carefully calibrated to achieve maximum speed.

After the war, Bartali seldom spoke of his underground work during the German occupation, not even to his wife and children. Hence, many of his courageous endeavors still remain unknown. He only accepted to be interviewed by Sara Corcos, who worked for the CDEC (Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea) in Milan, as soon as she told him she was related to the family of Rabbi Cassuto. However, he refused to be recorded, for, he said, had been motivated by his conscience and therefore did not want to have his activity documented. In 2013, Yad Vashem recognized Gino Bartali as Righteous Among the Nations[16].

Being one of the most important champions of his times and, what counts more, rescuing several Italian Jews to the risk of his life are Bartali's most astonishing achievements. However, not only was Bartali a great sportsman and an exemplar of courage, selflessness, and humility. Besides that, we come to know from several sources, he was also a morally exceptional man with regard to almost all the aspects of his personal and public life, such as family, bike races, friendship, relationship with supporters, and so on. Two further episodes are worth telling, for they illuminate the kind of person Bartali was[17]. The first is a story of rivalry and friendship. Bartali's main opponent, Fausto Coppi, was

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[16] The source of most of this information is Yad Vashem website: http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/righteous-sportsmen/bartali.asp; Section: The Game of Their Lives. The Stories of Righteous Among the Nations Who Devoted Their Lives to Sport.
[17] Both episodes, as well as many others, are reported in the catalogue of the exhibition "Un diavolo di campione, un angelo di uomo. L'avventura umana di Gino Bartali", courtesy of the Polisportiva Gagliarda, San Benedetto del Tronto (AP).

about winning the Giro d'Italia when, during a particularly hard stage, he fell to the ground and, being hurt, started crying, since stopping there would have meant losing the whole race. Bartali, who was a couple of metres ahead of him, realized what was happening. Thus, he turned his bike back and reached Coppi, ordering him to get up and finish the stage. So Coppi did and eventually won the Giro d'Italia. That's one of the reasons why, after a long-life rivalry, an elderly Coppi said Bartali had been his best friend ever. The second episode concerns the very last moments of his life, when he explicitly asked to be buried with poor Carmelite clothes, according to a saying he was very fond of: "the last dress has no pockets"[18].

To sum up, Bartali proved to be courageous, righteous, humble, as well as loyal, devoted to his beloved wife Adriana and to his children and friends, faithful to God, honest and, finally, detached from material goods. So, we are confronting with a person who seemed to possess as many virtues as a human being can do, so fulfilling Blum's requirements for being a moral saint. Bartali, thus, helps us having a close look at a contemporary moral saint, whose description, offered in Section 1, he certainly fits.

Section 3. How heroes and saints fit PEBAME

All we have said about Perlasca and Bartali should set the ground for evaluating whether moral heroes and moral saints like them fit PEBAME. The most clear-cut and straightforward way to do it is to inquire how they meet the four criteria outlined in Section 1. The upshot of such an analysis is not that of assessing which is the superior or more authentic form of moral exemplarity. Rather, we aim to clarify what educators should care about the most when presenting children with heroes or saints.

Let us consider admirability first. Both heroes and saints fulfill this criterion by definition, that is by virtue of their being moral exemplars. Going back to our stories, the first way in which we can make sense of the exceptionality of Perlasca's and Bartali's deeds is their being worthy of admiration. Nonetheless, their stories allow us to highlight an important difference in admirability between heroes and saints. Indeed, the former – unlike the latter – are such that the complexity of their character might include non-virtuous nuances by definition. In the case of Perlasca, novices might be attracted, for instance, by

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[18] *Un diavolo di campione*, p. 40.

his military allegiance to Fascism rather than by his courage and humility[19]. On the contrary, there seems to be nothing in Bartali's story that they might improperly admire.

Some might wonder why this difference should not amount to undermining the hero's admirability. To address this objection, notice that character education is grounded in the principle that virtuous characters are "caught rather than taught"[20]. This expression is meant to convey the idea that the privileged way for educating others is letting them be naturally attracted by exemplars through their admirability and virtuously influenced by them. In light of this principle, it seems unquestionable that both heroes and saints satisfy the first criterion insofar as children "catch" their virtuous traits.

Nonetheless, the difference in admirability significantly affects the amount of reflection that the educator is required to possess when presenting children with moral exemplars, as we will argue soon. Since virtuousness too has an impact on the required-reflection criterion, it is reasonable to take the former into consideration before analyzing the latter.

From what we have argued so far, it should be evident that moral saints are superior to heroes in at least one main respect of virtuousness. Indeed, by definition the former are more virtuous than the latter, as they possess all the virtues and hence lack vices. This fact is important for character education because, as Kristiánsson points out, educating to an overall virtuous life is more valuable than merely cultivating or helping children cultivate single virtues[21].

On the contrary, given the hero's limited virtue, once the young understand what makes him/her admirable, they can easily associate different heroes to different virtues. Hence, it becomes easy for the educator to recall "this" or "that" hero's deeds and suggest the young whom they should try to imitate in particular circumstances, as it can happen with Perlasca's courage and humility.

Furthermore, when presenting the young with a hero, the educator can decide to adopt an alternative educational stance and direct them to the virtue by stressing the hero's vices. There are at least two possible ways to do so. On the one hand, she can lead the young to figure out that a particular vice impeded the hero from living a more accomplished life either by directly pointing out the bad consequences arising out of such a vice in the hero's story or by asking them to evaluate whether anything bad for the hero's life flew from her vice.

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[19] There is always some bravery in volunteering that untrained people might admire without wondering whether the reasons for such a decision make it morally good.
[20] Kristiánnson 2015: 21.
[21] See Kristiánsson 2015: 17.

On the other hand, she might direct the young's attention to those habits that heroes have been able to correct by themselves through time and that could have prevented them from becoming exemplars. In Perlasca's case, for example, the educator could point out that the very idea of pretending to be the official representative of the Spanish government and the rescue of thousands of Jews in the Spanish properties could not be imaginable if Perlasca did not dismiss the Fascist ideals.

These considerations on educating the young to virtue by working with vices demands both the young's and the educator's time and effort. Yet, such an educational approach is definitely more fruitful than just educating through the saint's virtues because it helps developing the young's moral imagination[22], whose proper cultivation represents a fundamental educational task. Thus, pointing to the hero's vices clearly shows in an effective and imaginary-nourishing way how immoral behavior degrades life. If so, then the saint is superior to the hero for what concerns the criterion of virtuousness. Nonetheless, the hero can satisfy the criterion of virtuousness as well if the educator succeeds in letting the young understand the limits of the hero's virtue – that is, what prevented him/her from becoming a saint.

Now, let us clarify why the required-reflection criterion rests on the previous ones. It is wise to think of it as a twofold criterion including both an error-preventing reflection (EPR) and a virtue-detecting reflection (VDR) depending on what the young are supposed to do with the educator's support.

EPR amounts to all they need to do in order to make sure that they are not admiring the wrong traits of the exemplar, as anticipated with the admirability criterion. We argue that the more they are required to reflect on the exemplar's traits the lower is the degree to which the exemplar satisfies EPR, for we assume that their reflective abilities might not be developed enough to produce a reliable analysis of the exemplars. To this respect, it seems plain that the saint is superior to the hero in that he lacks any vicious traits that they can mistakenly admire, as we have shown for Bartali's case. Thus, no particular caution nor reflection is required to both the young and the educator when dealing with moral saints. In contrast, making sense of the hero's vicious nuances may often require a long-term guidance on the educator's part, as the analysis of Perlasca's development from Fascist ideals to exemplary courage demonstrates.

On the other hand, VDR pertains to the reflection needed for detecting the exemplar's virtues. In this regard, the main difference between heroes and saints pertains to the

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[22] On the importance of moral imagination, see Murdoch 1971, 1994; Nussbaum 1983, 1985; Sherman 1998; Lovibond 2011; Chappell 2014.

educational value of identifying virtues via reflecting on vices. This task, as already argued, requires both the young to exercise their moral imagination and the educator to supervise such a complex process. Furthermore, only heroes – because of their moral imperfection – enable this educational practice. Therefore, we can conclude that saints and heroes complement one another in the required-reflection criterion: saints fare better in error-preventing reflection, whereas heroes allow the young to practice their moral imagination in detecting virtues through reflecting on the risks of pursuing vices.

Finally, consider imitability. This is the most attractive feature of moral heroes, what makes them fundamental to moral education. Indeed, once the novices understand what makes the hero extraordinarily admirable, then they straightforwardly get an exemplar of some specific virtue to imitate. Heroes like Perlasca have a clear advantage for what concerns imitability than saints. Indeed, they are models worthy of imitation for their virtues, but also human beings close to our imperfect condition in their non-virtuous traits. They possess what Kristiánsson calls "mixed traits" (2015: 14). In contrast, saints like Bartali might look too far away from our ordinary experience and hence less imitable. The educator might need effort to help the young figure out that even saints are human beings close to us and that they might also have lacked a particular propensity towards virtue in their early days, so it is not impossible for anyone to aspire to the full virtue.

Therefore, when pointing at the saints, the educator should counter discouragement by reminding the young that, as Kristjánsson puts it, "Becoming virtuous in a given sphere does not mean taking on virtue wholesale but, rather, gradually moving closer to an ideal" (Kristjánsson 2015: 15). When indicating the exemplarity of a hero, however, he/she must avoid the excess of fragmentation by keeping in mind that what counts most for education is "the overall strengthening of the whole system", much more than the exclusive nourishing of individual virtues (Kristjánsson 2015: 17).

It should now be evident why character education should not endorse any exclusionary solution to the debate on the unity-disunity of the virtues. Indeed, we showed that both the saint and the hero are fundamental for educating the young to the virtue: the saint constitutes the ideal model to look at and can be closer to the young's experience than they expect, whereas the hero is easier to imitate and allows them to reflect on the dangerous effects of vices.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have suggested a comparative analysis aimed at providing support for our hypothesis, namely that there are strong reasons for holding that the dispute between unitarists and disunitarists need not undermine the importance of both heroes and saints for character education.

So, character education should be more open and pluralist than moral theory, since the latter has to do with establishing an ideal, while the former with dealing with individuals who display "mixed" traits, and who need to undertake the process of resembling that ideal. In such cases, an analysis of "imperfect" or intermediate states of character, such as the Aristotelian one of incontinence and intemperance, can prove essential to education. The same holds for the importance of analyzing vices for developing a good character education strategy. Both these aspects, indeed, have the advantage of getting the models closer to the novice's experience and to show how the imperfections of character must be gradually overcome so to avoid the negative consequences they normally bring about.

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