

# Admiration and its Fallibility as a Moral Sentiment

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## Introduction

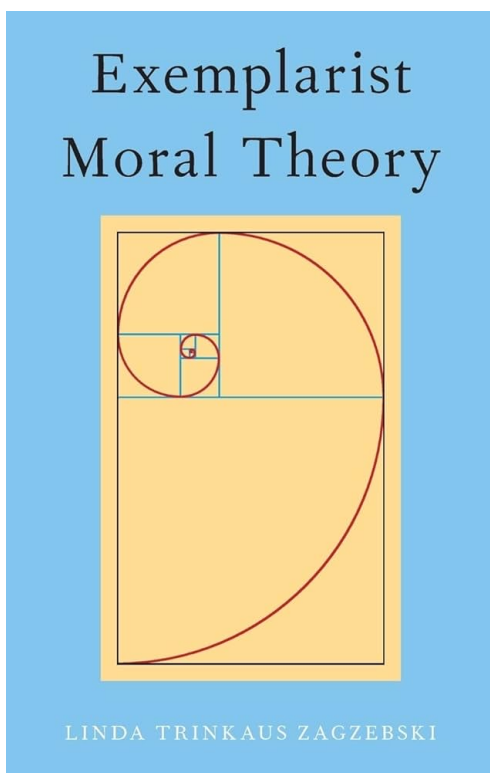
Throughout the history of philosophy, proponents of various ethical outlooks have feuded over the importance of sentiments to moral judgments. Within ethics of virtue, sentiments can be used to describe the impetus for action. One such theory is called exemplar moral theory; in this theory, the sentiment of admiration picks out the good within an exemplary individual. Immanent to this admiration, is a desire to have this good for oneself. Even with this illustrative outline, we are left to wonder: what is admiration and how does it motivate action? What does admiration identify? When is admiration “right” and how will we know?



Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii* (1784)

## Methodology

My methods consisted of reading, note-taking, and then rereading texts in contemporary and ancient moral philosophy. My departure point was a work titled *Exemplarist Moral Theory* by Linda Zagzebski. Putting this text in dialogue with others, I developed a line of questioning to pursue.



## Questions and Illumination

Metaphysical Question:  
What can be said of admiration?



Thick affective concept: admiration says something of both relata in the relation of “admires.” The face value assessment that something is good leads to a desire to emulate.



Admiration does not give or confer goodness onto any object. This would derail its ability to prescribe actions because admiration would be a matter of conditioning.

Epistemological Question: How do we know of admiration?



Knowing of admiration falls in line with belief-forming faculties as a whole ie that we know a particular belief because of the faculty as a whole and we know the faculty as a whole because of a specific belief.



Admiration gives rise to the same kind of habituation that is required for virtue. For one to become good, they must admire and emulate the right motivations and executions of action.

Fallibility Question: Does admiration fail? How so?



In order for admiration to be moral, it must first pick out a range of qualities that do not just fall into the moral domain. This includes natural excellences that one is simply born with.



The failure of admiration can also be examined with reference to a life of flourishing. Living and doing well is not what is aimed at in admiring the wrong individuals.

Bindingness Question: What of admiration binds us to the good?



It does not seem to be within admiration itself. A possible answer looks like the goodness of will; the goodness of will then informs the reflective capacity that aligns our admiration with the good.



Admiration alone is not sufficient to bind us to the good. It appears dependent on the heavy lifting of a reflection mechanism such as reason to both narrow admiration’s scope and bind us to the good.

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## Further information and citations

