

# EXEMPLARS' SWAY OVER UNTAKEN POSSIBILITIES OF MY INDIVIDUALITY

## HOW EXEMPLARINESS DIFFERS FROM PERSONAL INFLUENCE AND PARTICIPATION IN OTHERS' LIVES

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### ABSTRACT

To what extent do other persons play a role in my self-knowledge? This paper will argue that we cannot presume to know ourselves without being open to others' impact on us. There are possibilities stemming from our individuality that are still untaken since we cannot grasp them: we need others – as exemplars – to grasp them. This implies that individuality itself is not something steady and static. If it were so, then a change in a few aspects of mine could occur in a very simple way. Indeed, others' impact might give rise to radical *self-reorchestrations* and personal *upheavals*: this means that my individuality is not an 'x' that could easily be grasped. My individuality is not something defined once and for all. Indeed, what defines the innermost sides of my individuality is the *process* itself that leads me to gradually discover myself (self-knowledge) and then shape and reshape myself accordingly (self-shaping): others as *exemplars* are inherent part of this process. Exemplars spur us to reorchestrate ourselves: if we embrace their impact and question our self-knowledge in the light of their influence, we are given the opportunity to understand what we do not know yet about ourselves. It is not a matter of a mere self-interpretation: exemplars turn our certainties upside down so as to make us realize untaken possibilities of ourselves.

### KEYWORDS

Exemplars, self-reorchestration, 'from outside' view on the self, personal individuality, *Umbildung*

### INTRODUCTION

Can I know everything about myself? Can I know myself on my own? These two questions bring to light two pivotal issues related to the formation of our

own individuality: the alleged possibility of a completeness of my self-knowledge and my alleged independence of other persons in my effort of knowing myself. This paper purports to belie these two issues and argue for a thesis that shows how these two questions cannot be treated separately: *other persons as exemplars play a key role in my process of self-knowledge since they make me discover untaken possibilities of myself*. This means that others as exemplars make me discover veiled facets and new layers of my individuality. Specifically, we could not succeed in grasping these layers without others' impact since we simply ignore the existence of such possibilities. The point is that this 'ignorance' does not stem from the subject since the degree of self-knowledge I can gain on my own is restricted. It follows that, if I am not willing to make myself possibly affected by others, the whole meaning of my individuality will remain beyond my grasp. This implies that there is no an outright end of the process of self-knowledge since other persons as exemplars could make me grasp untaken possibilities of my individuality that I otherwise would never grasp. Other persons as exemplars comprehend something that pertains to my individuality without taking place yet: this 'something' is a possibility related to my individuality, but still untaken.

To what extent do other persons play a role in my self-knowledge? This paper will argue that we cannot presume to know ourselves without being open to others' impact on us. There are possibilities stemming from our individuality that are still untaken since we cannot grasp them: we need others – as exemplars – to grasp them. This implies that individuality itself is not something steady and static. If it were so, then a change in a few aspects of mine could occur in a very simple way. Indeed, others' impact might give rise to radical *self-reorchestrations* and personal *upheavals*: this means that my individuality is not an 'x' that could easily be grasped. My individuality is not something defined once and for all. Indeed, what defines the innermost sides of my individuality is the *process* itself that leads me to gradually discover myself (self-knowledge) and then shape and reshape myself accordingly (self-shaping): others as *exemplars* are inherent part of this process. Exemplars spur us to reorchestrate ourselves: if we embrace their impact and question our self-knowledge in the light of their influence, we are given the opportunity to understand what we do not know yet about ourselves. It is not a matter of a mere self-interpretation: exemplars turn our certainties upside down so as to make us realize untaken possibilities of ourselves.

In order to argue for this entire thesis, the paper consists of five parts. The first poses the question as to what view on the self we need to fully comprehend the impact of exemplars on self-knowledge. The second explains

the reason why Max Scheler's thought turns out to be useful for accounting for exemplariness. The third leans on Scheler's stance on this topic so as to understand the nature and compass typical of exemplariness, especially in comparison with models and leaders. The fourth and fifth sections distinguish exemplariness from two other kinds of impact that others can have over me: personal influence and participation. In fact, besides exemplariness, we have to account for other ways through which others' impact plays out. We will argue that exemplariness is the strongest kind of impact, but we cannot restrict our analysis to this form only.

### 1. THE UNDERPINNING FRAMEWORK OF EXEMPLARINESS: WHICH VIEW ON THE SELF IS AT STAKE?

If we intend to demonstrate that others make me understand myself in a way in which I could not even be able to do without relying upon their influence, which view on the self should we appeal to? How can I grasp others' influence? How can I make myself able to be possibly affected by other persons? These apparently shallow questions subsume a valuable doubt: is there a view on the self that enables us to fully comprehend and account for the impact up to others in my effort of knowing myself? If we dodge this doubt, then we should run the risk of unconsciously enlisting a view on the self that perhaps makes us frame this topic in the wrong way. So, which view on the self could set the stage for an overarching comprehension of others' role in my life? In *The Zoo Story* (1959), Edward Albee made this pithy remark: "sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly". This pointer resembles the thesis that this paragraph endeavours to discuss: in order to enable others to let innermost layers of my self emerge, in order to make myself possibly affected by others, I have to labour to *distance myself from myself*.

As long as we keep on referring to a 'from within' view on the self, we could not realize the overarching sway of others over our process of self-knowledge and self-shaping<sup>1</sup>, that is, we cannot fully comprehend the overarching sway of others over our individuality if we keep on thinking about the self as a sort of inner space that we have to dig deeper and deeper in order to track down our alleged true self. Traditional stances on self-knowledge usually push us into thinking about the self as a sort of space we have to investigate. This paper argues that, in order to comprehend how others could impact myself, we have

<sup>1</sup> The expressions 'from within' view on the self and 'from outside' view on the self are coined by the author of this paper.

to shift to a ‘from outside’ view on the self: we are used to ‘from within’ views on the self, that is, epistemological and hermeneutic perspectives on the self. We often tend to think about ourselves as subjects who author and create plans for our lives: within this perspective, we come to know ourselves as masters and authors of our lives and individualities. What if we better knew and shaped ourselves by distancing ourselves from ourselves?

In order to know ourselves, we have to resist the temptation to direct our attention from ‘outwards’ to ‘inwards’: we have to overcome the ingrained habit of thinking about ourselves as an inner space that needs to be investigated. Indeed, we start knowing ourselves on condition that we shift the focus of our attention from ‘inwards’ to ‘outwards’: we have to be attentive to the way in which we are affected by the world, that is, to the way in which our individuality alters through time insofar as we are affected by the world. Being affected by the world means being affected by persons as well as circumstances, events, situations: every single moment and experience of my life affects me and, potentially, makes me change. The point is that I am not able to grasp the entire compass of such potential breaking points if I look at myself ‘from within’. Indeed, I have to reach a maximum distance from myself in order for me to know myself in the light of what affects me in the ‘outward’ world: if I refer only to an alleged ‘inward world’ of my individuality, I look at myself only ‘from within’ and I cannot grasp the potential impact that other persons – as exemplars – could have over me. If I labour to distance myself from myself and look at myself ‘from outside’, then I could grasp the impact of others and, specifically, I could grasp those untaken possibilities related to my individuality. We cannot understand exemplariness’ impact if we still appeal to ‘from within’ views on the self.

It is worth noticing that one could now argue that Ricoeur (1990, 1998), for example, had already argued for a similar ‘from outside’ view on the self: his stance on narrative identity might be regarded as an instance of an approach ‘from outside’. At a closer look, however, the kind of narration Ricoeur talks about inherently concerns what one is or can be. Again, the subject is supposed to focus on her alleged inner space so as to grasp her self through narration. The appeal to narration seems to make the subject distance herself from herself: narration seems to make the subject reach that distance necessary to grasp herself from outside. Nonetheless, the blind spot of Ricoeur’s stance seems to be the unremitting focus on the *identity*: in order to know who I am, I am supposed to spot and weave the narrative threads of my self. I focus on my self and I gain the self I am searching for. Surely, Ricoeur puts in the foreground the narrative identity of ourselves, that is, its dynamic

nature, but the core of self-knowledge keeps on being the effort of knowing our intrinsic identity. With regard to these pointers, it is worth harking back to the contemporary philosopher Guido Cusinato when he deals with Ricoeur's blind spots (Cusinato 2014, 173-205). Cusinato specifies how S. Augustine, much more than Ricoeur, carried out a 'from outside' view on the self since he starts his path of self-knowledge by confessing not to knowing himself anymore, while Ricoeur marks the beginning of his path of self-knowledge by narrating who he is or can become (Cusinato 2014, 181). Furthermore, Cusinato maintains that Ricoeur fails to realize that interpreting myself differently is not enough to become automatically different.

If we try to distance ourselves from ourselves, then we become able to perceive the possible impact that other persons might have over my self-knowledge. This effort entails the awareness that my individuality is possibly open to changes: it is not fixed once and for all. If others as exemplars could radically influence me, then my individuality consists of possible upheavals too: "the unity of the self, which therefore also constitutes its identity, is not something given but something achieved, not a beginning but a goal" (Nehamas 1985, 182). Consequently, I should be willing to reorchestrate myself in the light of self-discoveries since such upheavals make my individuality: personal coherence does not matter, personal *identity* does not matter. What matters is personal individuality and the deepest layers of my individuality better come to light thanks to those persons – exemplars – that radically question what I think about my own individuality: these moments of self-transformation deeply nourish my process of self-knowledge and self-shaping. We are not claiming that personal identity does not matter in the sense that we are endorsing Parfit's stance: "if we are reductionists [...] personal identity is not what matters" (Parfit 1987, 211). Indeed, it is exactly why personal identity as *personal individuality* matters that we are trying to account for the impact that other persons as exemplars could have. The point is that we cannot know ourselves on our own since there are aspects of our individuality that are beyond our grasp: *others as exemplars could make us reach that distance necessary for us to know ourselves, question ourselves and possibly shape ourselves in the light of these self-discoveries, that is, reorchestrate ourselves giving rise to personal upheavals.*

Definitively, it seems necessary to shift our attention from an epistemological-hermeneutic approach to a 'from outside' view on the self. The former focuses on the 'inner' dimension of individuality, while the latter focuses on the 'outward' dimension of individuality. Since we are going to argue that other persons as exemplars play a fundamental role in my process

of self-knowledge, we must refer to a view on the self able to account for the radical impact of an outward element, i.e. exemplars. This view on the self will allow us to regard exemplariness as the keystone and linchpin of the entire process of self-knowledge and self-shaping. On the contrary, if we adopted a ‘from within’ view on the self, we could account for exemplars’ role just in terms of a mere influence, something that does not crucially hold sway over me. But this is what exemplariness does: it crucially holds sway over my self-knowledge since exemplars make me question what I think about my individuality and such an impact forces me to decide whether to reorchestrate myself or not. And this is the reason why we have to endorse a view on the self that ascribes a fundamental role to self-transformations, personal upheavals and self-reorchestrations: exemplariness is the prime source of such changes, as we will discuss.

## 2. WHY SHOULD WE APPEAL TO MAX SCHELER’S STANCE ON EXEMPLARINESS?

So, a ‘from outside’ view on the self sets the stage for an overarching comprehension of others’ impact in the process of self-knowledge. Within the wide spectrum of possible modes of influence, we will argue that exemplariness is the strongest one and we will lean on Scheler’s stance on exemplariness to describe its outstanding bearing. However, this appeal to Scheler might seem a bit strange since there is a wide spectrum of philosophical approaches that tackle the issue of exemplariness, so why should we rely upon Max Scheler’s theses? If we lean on Scheler’s standpoint, we will be able to treat questions that traditional approaches do not even consider. So, which is the hallmark of Scheler’s stance on exemplariness? This paragraph aims at hinting at a few perspectives so as to make clear why we should rely upon Scheler’s stance to comb through exemplariness as the key to self-knowledge and the linchpin of self-shaping: Scheler tethers exemplariness to *individuality* and shifts the focus of our attention from ‘the effort of picking out exemplars’ to ‘the effort of being open to exemplars’ impact’.

Zagzebski (2017) outlines a new kind of moral theory she calls “Exemplarist Moral Theory” that maps the primary set of moral terms – ‘virtue’, ‘right act’, ‘good end’, ‘good life’, etc. – around the features of *exemplars*, to whom we refer directly through the specific emotion of admiration. She argues that making the foundation of a moral theory a set of *persons* rather than a set of concepts has theoretical and practical advantages in addition to spotting a natural way human beings become moral beings.

Moral philosophers often use a descriptivist theory of meaning for moral terms, whereas Zagzebski proposes to define those terms by direct reference to exemplars. What is bravery? It is like that *brave* person. Zagzebski stresses that we find out what makes exemplars good by admiration as the way to distinguish virtues. Exemplars elicit the *admiration* of other persons, a positively valenced apprehension of a person's positive qualities. If I admire a person, then this admiration is a good reason for me to recognize the inherent exemplarity of that person. Admiration *motivates* us to *emulate* admirable persons. Sure, an identification of exemplars is totally revisable and it can be changed or adjusted. What matters is the practical side of admiration, i.e. *emulation*: I emulate those persons that I admire since I think they are exemplars, that is, they embody certain virtues that I have learned to be like those persons. This entails that admiration is motivating and moral learning is grounded in emulation. Therefore, admirability is a signal that aids us in discerning that a certain person is an exemplar. Despite the fact that Zagzebski admits that gifted people are admirable, she excludes them from the exemplars since inborn excellence cannot be acquired by imitating this kind of admirable people. They cannot be *exemplars* since they do not exemplify an excellence that can be learned through emulation. This entails that Zagzebski embraces at least one case where someone can be admirable without being an exemplar.

Admiration is the keystone of her theory: it is a necessary condition for *recognizing* exemplars and then *emulating* them. We could wonder whether it is sufficient and we could argue that Zagzebski's account seems to be monochrome insofar as it relies upon a mere admire-and-emulate model, but what matters most is that this framework ascribes a key role to those coordinates that Scheler will completely put on the sidelines: choice, recognition and emulation. According to Scheler, these coordinates have nothing to do with exemplars, while for Zagzebski they constitute the nature of exemplars. She puts in the foreground questions like 'How to recognize exemplars?', 'Which exemplars should I choose', 'How to emulate them?' and answers them by outlining a dynamic between admiration and emulation: I choose to follow the exemplars that I admire and this act of following turns into an act of emulation. If I find myself admiring that person, then I might choose to be like her and this implies that I labour to emulate her.

So, when dealing with philosophical stances upon exemplars, we are usually faced with theories that mainly spur us to pose such questions: 'How to recognize exemplars?', 'Which exemplars should I choose', 'How to emulate them?'. Scheler will propel us to turn the problem upside down: *how are we*

*affected by exemplars?* Far from being a matter of recognition, Scheler urges us to consider the process of influence typical of exemplars as a pre-logical process by which we find us affected. We have to comb through this mode through which we are affected: exemplars affect me and not you since my individuality is such that it is affected by the individuality of that exemplar. How to account for this dynamic? It is not me who pick out exemplars. Indeed, I am chosen by them. For others could potentially shed light on my individuality, then they become exemplars for me on condition that they have an impact on my own process of self-shaping by making me aware of something crucially regarding my individuality.

Let us proceed with our analysis of stances on exemplariness. As Zagzebski's maintains, her account is inevitably bound up with moral exemplarism in Aristotle's works (Aristotle, NE, VI, 5, 1140a, 24-25). Similarly to Zagzebski's, Aristotelian philosophy spurs us to broach the issue of exemplariness by appeal to those persons who exemplify the virtues we are focusing on. These persons help us to understand what wisdom is, for instance, and guide us through the process of learning a certain virtue and grasping its hallmarks. If we aim at defining what prudence is, for instance, we take into account those persons that we think are prudent. This account does not prevent us from referring also to historical portraits of persons like Pericles, Caesar<sup>2</sup>.

This last remark brings to light a possible reference to another approach towards exemplariness that focuses on recognition, choice and emulation. In fact, the role up to exemplars could be fruitfully related to the literary scope. Just as we find exemplars in real life, so we can find a wide spectrum of exemplars in literature (cf. Nussbaum, 1995). Most of us find subjects to admire and/or emulate in narrative literature no less than in 'real life'. Zagzebski herself acknowledges that literary works could provide readership with a wide range of exemplars. Literature tells us that imagining the lives of others is a daily necessity for human beings since we best learn to understand, care, and behave well with others when we learn about imagining others' lives. So, in literature we find exemplars by *recognizing* them and then we could possibly *choose* to *emulate* them.

Now, if we regard these different and similar perspectives we have just taken into account as the bedrocks of the debate revolving around exemplariness, we could realize the outstanding contribution of Scheler, who makes us completely shift the focus of our attention to the following question: how do exemplars affect my individuality? If we merely focus on recognition, choice

<sup>2</sup> See Plutarch, Parallel Lives.



and emulation, then we are confined to examine what Scheler names 'models'. 'Exemplars' are far more important than models since they nourish one's own individuality: they constitute a fundamental keystone of the whole process of self-shaping and my act of following them does not consist in a mere act of emulation, as the next paragraph will explain. Models – as well as leaders – affect my actions only and their influence does not pertain to the core of my individuality, as we shall see. Scheler spurs us to realize that exemplariness and individuality – and so self-knowledge and self-shaping – are two issues inseparably linked. Exemplars do not affect how I act, indeed, they affect the type of individual I think I am. Scheler makes us understand that the sphere of influence typical of exemplariness is the dimension of *being* rather than the dimension of *acting*.

### 3. EXEMPLARINESS AS THE LINCHPIN OF SELF-SHAPING (CONTRARY TO LEADERS AND MODELS)

Scheler (1911-1921, 1973) maintains that – contrary to *norms* and *leaders* – exemplars do not pertain to actions and universally valid propositions of oughtness. Exemplars primarily refer to the dimension of a To-Be, to a “growth of the being of the person”. What does such a growth consist in and how does it play out? If we take into consideration the novel *Les Misérables* (Hugo 1862), we can easily spot a jumping-off point useful for framing the issue.

The main character, Jean Valjean, is a scoundrel and the forgiveness he receives from a priest, which he robbed, triggers a crucial upheaval that leads him to completely transform his life. This personal upheaval stems from the self-awareness he gained thanks to the priest, who becomes an *exemplar* for him. The words of the priest make Valjean aware of untaken possibilities tethered to his individuality so that he tries to reshape himself accordingly. Hugo brings to light an actual path of personal reorchestration: Valjean examines himself, grasps the crushing impact of the priest and perceives a breaking point in his process of self-knowledge.

He cried, 'I am a wretch!' [...] He could not yield to the evidence of what was going on within him. He hardened himself against the angelic action and the gentle words of the old man. 'You have promised me to become an honest man. I buy your soul. I take it away from the spirit of perversity; I give it to the good God.' [...] He was indistinctly conscious that the pardon of this priest was the greatest assault and the most formidable attack which had moved him yet [...] and that a struggle, a colossal and final struggle, had been begun between his viciousness and the goodness of that man. [...] That which was certain [...] was

that he was no longer the same man, that everything about him was changed, that it was no longer in his power to make it as though the Bishop had not spoken to him and had not touched him. [...] At the moment when he exclaimed 'I am a wretch!' he had just perceived what he was, and he was already separated from himself to such a degree, that he seemed to himself to be no longer anything more than a phantom [...] He actually saw that Jean Valjean, that sinister face, before him. He had almost reached the point of asking himself who that man was, and he was horrified by him. [...] He contemplated himself, so to speak, face to face, and at the same time, athwart this hallucination, he perceived in a mysterious depth a sort of light which he at first took for a torch. On scrutinizing this light which appeared to his conscience with more attention, he recognized the fact that it possessed a human form and that this torch was the Bishop. [...] As the Bishop grew great and resplendent in his eyes, so did Jean Valjean grow less and vanish. [...] All at once he disappeared. The Bishop alone remained; he filled the whole soul of this wretched man with a magnificent radiance. [...] He examined his life, and it seemed horrible to him; his soul, and it seemed frightful to him. (Hugo 1862, 194-199)

Exemplars represent a way whereby I become present to myself and might decide to reorchestrate myself accordingly, as Valjean does. So, how does exemplars' influence work? The first step to face this question requires us to focus on the German term *Vorbild*, as Scheler employs it. As Cusinato (2011) clearly remarks, Scheler seems to ascribe to this term a double meaning. According to its thicker and narrow meaning, it refers to a strength that transforms the individuality of the person who is affected; according to its thinner and broad meaning, it refers to a strength that works through imitation. At the suggestion of Cusinato, the first meaning is translated into the word 'exemplar', while the second into the word 'model'.

First of all, Scheler (1973, 572-575, 583-584) draws a sharp distinction between norms ("*Normen*") and exemplars ("*Vorbilder*"). Following Scheler, what exemplars give rise to is an ideal ought rather than a norm. Norms – and, subsequently, leadership – pertain to universally valid and universally *propositions* of oughtness and such propositions have a valuable *action* as content. On the contrary, exemplars do not pertain to the sphere of mere actions. They refer to the dimension of a To-Be. Leadership is a matter of *doing* something, while exemplariness is a way of *being*. This *ought-to-be* is experienced as an "it obliges me to follow" ("es verpflichtet mich zu folgen"), rather than "I am obliged to follow" ("ich bin verpflichtet zu folgen"). Far from being a "suggestive Kraft", it is a sort of powerful tug ("machtvoller Zug"<sup>3</sup>) that

<sup>3</sup> This concept could be fruitfully related to the approach towards exemplariness that focuses on moral beauty, which consists of the bodily expression of virtues and excellences of the character. Ian Kidd could be

stems from the exemplar. Exemplars draw persons (“Vorbilder ziehen die Person, die sie hat, zu sich hinan”) towards them. We are affected by them without choosing to follow them. We do not actively move towards them. Exemplars are goals-determining (“ziel-bestimmend”), they are not a goal in itself after which we strive or an end that we could even posit. Within this framework, Scheler argues that fidelity (“Gefolgschaft”) is the link that ties a person to the *individuality* of the exemplar. This relation cannot be reduced to a mere imitation (“Nachahmung”) or an effort of copying (“Kopieren”) the exemplar. My individuality is not erased in the light of exemplar’s individuality. Fidelity is the *only* relation where the morally positive personal values of a person *A* can *immediately* bring about the birth of the same personal values for the person *B*:

nothing on earth allows a person to become good so originally and immediately and necessarily as the evidential and adequate intuition [*Anschauung*] of a good person *in* his goodness. This relation is *absolutely superior to any other* relation in terms of a possible becoming good of which it can be considered the origin. It is superior to *B*’s obeying the orders and commands of *A*, because this obedience can never follow from an autonomous and immediate insight into the value of what is commanded, and because this obedience can aim only at *action*, not at the moral tenor and not at all at the being of the person. (Scheler 1973, 574)

Subsequently, the relation of exemplariness strictly preserves the *autonomous* will of the person who achieves fidelity. This happens since the transformation at stake concerns the *being* of the person rather than her willing and acting. Scheler specifies: “the highest *effectiveness* of the good person on the moral cosmos lies in the pure *value of exemplariness* [*Vorbildwert*]” (Scheler 1973, 575). Exemplariness is the primary vehicle for all changes persons could give rise to. And this effectiveness is strongly prior to the kind of effectiveness typical of norms, since it is the person herself that gives rise to a process of transformation (“die Bewegung der Umbildung”, Scheler 2013, 1102) of another person. The morally relevant transformation that stems from exemplariness is fidelity itself (“*Folge*”, “*Nachfolge*”,

regarded as a notable harbinger of this view. Kidd (2017) argues that we need a sort of training path in order to be in a position to grasp what exemplars exemplify. The same training should take place from the perspective of exemplars, who should endeavour to express and display their moral beauty. As Zagzebski points out, “it is a good thing that there are people whose moral beauty attracts us. We are usually drawn to them initially because we admire something easily observable about them – typically acts...physical bearing or speech” (2017, 60).

“*Gefolgschaft*”). Such a transformation is a “*growth* of the *being* of the person” and it occurs by “following” the exemplar a certain person exemplifies:

this ‘following’ is not to be understood in the sense of willing and acting, which aim only at obedience to true commands or pedagogical pseudocommands, or at copying. Willing and acting can consist in this and can be partially heteronomous. ‘Following’, however, is to be understood in the sense of *free* devotion [*Hingabe*] to the content of personal value that is accessible to autonomous insight. (Scheler 1973, 580)

In so doing, we become *like* the exemplar as a person, we do not become what the exemplar is: this entails that we learn to will and do *as* the exemplar wills and does. We do not will what the exemplar wills and we do not act in the same way in which the exemplar acts. So, the growing adaption (“*Hineinbildung*”) of the person to the exemplar has a crushing impact on the process of self-shaping (“*Neubildung*”) and such an impact brings about a radical personal transformation (“*Umbildung*”).

Scheler remarkably stresses how the acts underlying exemplariness are not grounded in acts of willing or imitating. Therefore, judgement and choice do not play any pivotal role here:

our consciousness of an [exemplar] is entirely *prelogical* and *prior* to the comprehension of even possible *spheres* of choice. It would be most naïve to assume that one must judge whether something is or is not an [exemplar] in order for it to become an [exemplar], or that one must judge and state what and who are supposed to be [exemplars] before they can be [exemplars]. (Scheler 1973, 578)

Under the guidance of these remarks, we have reasons for arguing that exemplars pierce the deepest and allegedly inaccessible core of our own individuality and could give rise to profound changes in the awareness of this core since they bring to light untaken possibilities strongly tethered to our individuality<sup>4</sup>. But in order to let us be moved and affected by exemplars we have to dare to call into question the type of individual we think we are. Exemplars’ sway makes room for questions and doubts we have to face at our own risk. Exemplars spur us to give ourselves a new shape: they do not dictate anything to us. Indeed, they guide us beyond ourselves in order for us to understand those possibilities of our individuality that we cannot grasp on our own. The force typical of exemplars consists in their way of looking at us: they are able to grasp something that inherently pertains to us but still does not concretely take place in us. They just provide me with a starting inkling that

<sup>4</sup> The notion of “untaken possibilities” is not part of Scheler’s thought: this paper coins it in order to investigate his thought and better comprehend it.

something that strongly pertains to my own individuality does not actually take place in my life. Surely, I can squelch such an inkling and do not set the stage for a rearrangement of my self. It is up to me.

So, if we lean on these remarks, we could surmise that exemplars primarily concern a specific way of *being* and, *then*, acting and willing. Exemplars – rather than norms and corresponding leaders – play a crucial and pivotal role in the whole process of self-shaping since they affect my self-awareness. This variation in self-awareness spurs me to reorchestrate myself, that is to say, to act and will in a different way. Exemplars spur me to reorchestrate myself since they affect my awareness of my individuality, specifically, of those untaken possibilities related to myself. Exemplariness is the sole manner of influence that affects the process of self-shaping since it turns to the dimension of a *To-Be*. Naturally, other persons might hold sway over me in different manners, besides exemplariness. To this end, it is worth noticing that Scheler himself pinpoints two other modes of influence: others as *models* or *leaders* could influence me. The point is that these two further modes of influence completely differ from exemplariness since the link with individuality – that constitutes the hallmark of exemplariness – completely disappears and recognition, choice and emulation take hold again. Models and leaders do not affect self-knowledge and self-shaping since they directly turn to the dimension of actions. However, models and leaders might make the persons they affect deluded into thinking that their influence actually regards the dimension of their being. The dimension of models and leaders is a matter of *doing* something, while exemplariness is a matter of *being*.

By appeal to Scheler's thought, we could claim that leadership – and corresponding norms – shows its effectiveness in the social and public life, whereas exemplars' effectiveness is more obscure insofar as they strive to shape the deepest layers of individuality. The crucial difference between exemplars and leaders derives from their innermost core: exemplariness' impact depends upon the individuality of the exemplar and the individuality of the person who is affected, while leaders' impact is independent of the individuality of the leader and the individuality of the person who is affected. For Scheler this means that, contrary to the concept of exemplar, the concept of leader is indifferent to values ("wertfrei"): leaders can be saviours as well as demagogues; leaders can be such in a positive sense as well as in a negative sense, like seducers ("Verführer"). In *Vorbilder und Führer* Scheler specifies that, as long as leaders command and there are those who abide by their orders, they are still leaders, it does not matter whether they command a charity foundation or a gang of thieves.

Distinguishing exemplars and leaders seems to be quite easy since leadership is signally grounded in commands and obedience. Unfortunately, it is fairly easy to mistake exemplars for models, but they differ in a radical way. Grasping their hallmarks is an important step in our pursuit of the remarkable impact that exemplars make on the process of self-shaping. *Models'* way of influence *superficially* resembles *exemplars'* way of influence: the former holds sway over the sphere of acting, while the latter holds sway over the sphere of being and, then, acting. Scheler argues that models seduce, while exemplars lead the way. At the suggestion of Cusinato (2014), the Latin verb that better explains models' sway is *seduco*, while the Latin verb that better explains exemplars' sway is *conduco*. The former refers to a movement that heads towards the person who is drawn and lured by the model itself; the latter refers to a movement that takes place by virtue of the cooperation between the person and the exemplar. In fact, the exemplar leads the person beyond herself: they walk together so as to overcome the self of the person. This means that we need to 'empty ourselves out' in order to let the exemplars bear upon us. It is a twofold movement: on the one hand, the exemplar has a huge amount of influence over me and I let me be shaped, on the other hand it is my individuality that guides me through this process of personal transformation. This does not entail that exemplars brush my individuality aside. Indeed, they bolster my confidence in the type of individual who I am, they let my individuality out and nurture it. I could be deluded into knowing who I am and an exemplar is able to shake my confidence to its foundations. It is worth noticing that we do not find us under duress when exemplars bear upon us: it fully depends upon us whether to follow or not to follow the exemplar. Surely, the beginning of this path does not depend upon us: at the beginning we experience just a powerful tug whose influence we cannot master. But such a path keeps on playing out only on condition that we cooperate with the exemplar in shaping ourselves.

In the light of Scheler's remarks and Cusinato's notable insights, we could devise a clear and sound portrait of exemplars and models. Exemplars guide us beyond ourselves in order for us to understand what we mostly care about (cf. Cusinato 2014, 390). On the contrary, models do not make us get away from ourselves: I do not have to come to the fore since I am completely overshadowed by the individuality of the model. We have to resist the temptation to follow models instead of exemplars. It is tempting to let us be moved by models: we do not run any risk if we try to be someone else than us. Models even, while exemplars pick us out among others. Models crush our own hallmarks and differences, while exemplars are able to track them down

and make us stand out. Models force us to fasten our eyes on them and we become blind to ourselves: they make us walk away from the opportunity of going beyond ourselves in order to become present to ourselves. Models make persons equal, while exemplars make persons different. Exemplars let untaken possibilities emerge in order for persons to undertake the path that makes them individuals. Models force us to imitate them, while exemplars give us the chance to cast doubt on ourselves in order for us to grasp the core of our own individuality. Exemplars make us derail in order to find ourselves, while models make us walk down railway tracks and we end up being someone else than us. Exemplariness is the primary vehicle for all changes: Scheler describes “das Vorbildprinzip” as “das *primäre* Vehikel aller Veränderungen in der sittlichen Welt” (Scheler 2013, 1102).<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. THE ROLE UP TO AWARENESS AND HOW EXEMPLARINESS FAR EXCEEDS PERSONAL INFLUENCE**

Exemplars are the sole way whereby I am given the opportunity to unveil untaken possibilities tethered to my individuality. However, we have to keep in mind that other persons' influence is absolutely not confined to exemplariness. As Scheler stresses, we have to distinguish the radical impact typical of exemplars from the impact typical of models and leaders, that is, an impact that pertains to the ‘outward’ dimension only. In order to really understand the hallmarks of exemplariness, we have to go beyond Scheler's thought and keep on spotting the differences between exemplariness and other possible ways of influence. In this sense, this paragraph intends to investigate the issue of awareness linked with exemplariness so as to identify another mode of influence that, just as models and leaders, differs from exemplariness.

Exemplariness seems to entail that a degree of awareness should be somehow involved: in order to let me be affected by exemplars, it seems I have to be somehow aware of such an impact. Sure, there seems to be a wide spectrum of possible degrees of awareness, but exemplariness certainly requires some degree of awareness to come into play. Where is the turning point? That is, at which point does an absence of awareness or a surplus of awareness makes exemplariness turn into something else? Reflecting upon these boundaries that mark the edge of exemplariness will enable us to

<sup>5</sup> For the types of exemplars that Scheler describes see Scheler 2013, 1097-1143. For the axiological background that Scheler appeals to while accounting for exemplariness see Scheler 2013, 39-231. For Scheler's stance on individuality – that acts as background for his argument on exemplariness – see Scheler 2013, 721-965.

distinguish exemplariness from what we propose to name ‘personal influence’ on self-knowledge.

In *Vorbilder und Führer*, Scheler draws an insightful distinction between deeply effective exemplars and exemplars we reflect upon. Scheler argues that deeply effective exemplars work in a similar way of ‘artistic laws’. Artists do not point voluntarily at these laws and, however, they apply them. On the contrary, the more artists drift away from them, the more they become aware of them and their corresponding effectiveness. For Scheler, in the same way in which ‘artistic laws’ work, so exemplars work. This means that we are not fully aware of what is occurring: we are aware of a change that is taking place into us, but we cannot consciously master the way in which it plays out, as Valjean’s experience shows. In the wake of this remark, Cusinato (2014) argues that the more exemplariness plays out in an unconscious way the more it holds sway on the process of self-shaping of a given person. Cusinato maintains that it is not a matter of a subjective purpose, something that sounds like ‘I want to follow that exemplar’. Indeed, it is primarily a matter of a concrete proof: actions speak louder than words and I am now before a person – a *Vorbilder* (cf. Cusinato 2007, 54) – who understands something about my individuality that I have never understood before. Hence, according to Scheler, awareness does not play any pivotal role, at least at the beginning: we are not affected by exemplars if we aim for this and the influence itself does not play out if we aim at mastering it. As Scheler claims, exemplars’ influence is a powerful tug rather than a dynamic we can author. Nonetheless, as Scheler claims, awareness could come into play at a later stage. This means that, even though I cannot oversee the process of influence, I can reflect upon what it is happening to me.

It seems we have reasons for arguing for a double role up to awareness. On the one hand, awareness comes into play when we reflect upon the personal change that exemplars triggered: I cannot master the beginning of this impact and its development, but I can make me aware of what is happening to me. On the other hand, it seems that awareness could play a key role as a necessary condition to let exemplars affect us. Now, the first meaning related to awareness is square with Scheler’s view, while the second meaning *enriches* his view. In fact, we could claim that exemplars manage to bear upon us only on condition that we aim at being *attentive*: this kind of attentiveness seems to be an instance of awareness. It seems to be primarily a matter of attentiveness more than awareness: before awareness comes into play, it arises as attentiveness. I have to be attentive to those opportunities that could question and challenge myself. If I realize that I am a process of self-shaping rather than



a fixed identity that needs to be merely grasped, then I realize that there are circumstances that could greatly nourish this process. As Scheler (1973) and Cusinato (2014) claim, our *Bildung* is inherently an *Umbildung*: we face moments that could radically shape our individuality, we meet persons that could radically bear upon us by virtue of their exemplariness. But we have to be attentive, we have to be ready to question what we think about ourselves. It follows that personal exemplariness involves awareness in a twofold manner: firstly, it takes hold as attentiveness; secondly, it takes hold as a gradual awareness of the impact that an exemplar had or is having on me. But what about the awareness up to exemplars? To what extent are exemplars aware of their influence? Do they have to be aware?

By virtue of previous reflections, we now argue that leaders have to know to be leaders, models can be unaware of their influence, exemplars do not have to know to be such (at least at the beginning) and do not have to want to be such. What does it mean? If I am a leader then I want others to follow my orders and so I have to be aware of the impact I am having on them. If I am a model, my hypothetical influence is not based on commands and orders: it is based on imitation and inherently regards the dimension of actions. Someone could imitate my actions and I might be absolutely unaware that such an imitation is taking place. If I am an exemplar, it is possible that I am unaware of the impact I am having on someone's process of self-shaping: what matters is that exemplars are not such on purpose. The two remarkable differences between models and exemplars concern the sphere of influence and the sphere of choice: models' influence pertains to actions, exemplars' influence pertains to the sphere of being, models could choose to be models, exemplars cannot choose to be exemplars. The fact that exemplars cannot choose to be exemplars follows from the innermost nature of exemplariness, which depends upon concrete proofs rather than subjective plans or intentions. I become an exemplar if my individuality makes someone else aware of untaken possibilities of her individuality. Contrary to exemplariness, I am free to decide to become a model for someone: if you aim at achieving the goal 'x', I can suggest that you imitate my actions since I have already achieved the goal 'x'. Similarly, it could happen that someone imitates my actions since I succeed in achieving the goal 'x' without me being aware that such an imitation is actually taking place. Contrary to models, exemplars do not give rise to something identical: far from urging me to imitate them, exemplars give rise to something new since *they inspire me to reshape myself* in the light of the new self-awareness I gain thanks to their impact over my self-knowledge.

Exemplars aid me in understanding the type of individual who I am and who I shall become, make me question my degree of self-knowledge, make me wonder whether my life is consistent with my individuality, specifically, with those untaken possibilities related to my individuality that exemplars bring to light. However, it seems that we often experience a different and quite superficial impact that other persons have over us: this paragraph aims at arguing that this superficial impact could be named ‘personal influence on self-knowledge’. The previous overview on the degree of awareness involved in exemplariness now enables us to understand the nature of ‘personal influence’. In fact, we are going to argue that personal exemplariness and personal influence share a fundamental trait: the person who helps me to shed light on my untaken possibilities could be completely *unaware* of such impact and could not even strive for it. I am supposed to be as *attentive* as possible so as to recognize their impact and reflect upon it. The crucial difference between personal exemplariness and personal influence consists in the *content* of this impact. A literary exemplification turns out to be useful for immediately comprehending this difference.

The novel *Scharlach* (Zweig 2015) provides an insightful exemplification of personal influence. The main character of this novel is Bertold Berger, who moves from the country to start studying medicine at the University of Wien. Because of many reasons, he neglects to study and absolutely overshadows his fascination for the medical field. What raises interest about this novel is that, suddenly, a *personal upheaval* – an *Umbildung* – takes place: he realizes that he was neglecting his deepest fascination and definitively wasting his youth. What triggers such a turning point, which spurs him to completely transform his life, is a little girl, who lives in the same apartment building. She is greatly sick and he accidentally encounters her. She, as well as her mother, entirely trusts him insofar as they know he is studying medicine. This *climax* of dependability, trust and reliability makes him gradually aware of his individuality so that he modifies his life accordingly. Zweig describes in a masterly way the profound relationship that arises between Berger and the girl. What here matters most is not the end of the story – Berger dies of the same disease the girl recovers from (scarlatina). Indeed, what matters is the exemplification that Zweig provides about ‘personal influence on self-knowledge’. The little girl sheds light on veiled facets of the individuality of Berger, who gains awareness of untaken possibilities of his individuality and reorchestrates himself accordingly. The little girl helps Berger to comprehend those untaken possibilities tethered to his individuality: she makes him

understand that he was not the type of individual he thought he was. It is a radical upheaval that modifies the bedrocks of his self-knowledge.

Exemplars affect me by virtue of their individuality: their *Bildung* affects my *Bildung*. Personal influence refers to a more superficial kind of impact: others affect me but there is no link between my process of self-shaping and their process of self-shaping. It just happens that their actions, deeds or opinions hold sway over me in such a crushing way that they end up influencing my process of self-shaping. When awareness comes into play, I come to realize that the mainspring of this impact is not the inherent root of others' individuality, as it is in the case of exemplars, but something more accidental and superficial. The little girl affects Berger's self-shaping since she shows trust towards Berger's medical competence (personal influence), the priest affects Valjean's self-shaping since he comprehends what he mostly cares about and how he is overshadowing key and veiled aspects of his individuality (personal exemplariness).

## 5. HOW PARTICIPATION DIFFERS FROM EXEMPLARINESS

Personal influence concerns a kind of impact that *indirectly* pertains to self-knowledge – I come to unveil untaken possibilities of my self – and self-shaping – I might decide to reshape myself in the light of this self-discovery; exemplariness concerns a kind of impact that *directly* pertains to self-knowledge – I come to unveil untaken possibilities of my self – and self-shaping – I might decide to reshape myself in the light of this self-discovery. Is direct impact confined to exemplariness? Is it possible that I *radically* hold sway over one's own self-knowledge and self-shaping without being an exemplar? Thanks to Scheler we realized that other persons could make us discover unexpected facets of our individuality and, on the basis of this new stage of self-knowledge, we might decide to reshape ourselves accordingly. This framework implies the following dynamic: the other person holds sway over my self-knowledge and, subsequently, I might decide to reorchestrate myself. This means that I reorchestrate myself in the light of others' influence. A stronger thesis would be that this reorchestration is *co-constituted* by others.

The impact of others is important, but the narrative that I live is also constructed by others, and this is something distinct from exemplariness' impact. Starting from Scheler we argued for a position that accepts that others impact us without making the stronger claim that our life-narrative is not only impacted by others, but co-constituted. The exemplar is someone that motivates me to perform a reorchestration, but a reorchestration *on* myself

that issues from the other would be a stronger argument. The point is that others' influence is not confined to an impact on my process of self-shaping but it also pertains to the role they play in my life-narrative. There are reorchestrations about my self that I cannot perform on my own – as exemplariness implies – and thus for which I need others to *imagine* for me and in this sense give to me. This clearly stands out with children: you need to *image* for them a possibility for their own uniqueness. When I tell a child or a friend “look, you can be this or do this”, I am here not an exemplar. But I am opening a possibility that they could not imagine and that sets the stage for a possible personal reorchestration.

Exemplars make me discover something about myself, a possibility that I could not imagine on my own since I cannot discover the uniqueness uniquely through what is possible for me to imagine about myself. But there are possibilities that I grasp only on condition that others image for me what I myself cannot image, that is: the Other becomes an author in my own autobiography. I will always be defined by the impossibility of imagining myself as otherwise than only the Other can imagine for me, and thus give me as my own possibility of being. *There are possibilities that I cannot imagine for myself but which, once imagined, allow me to reshape myself.* Others play a role in my self-constitution, my self-reorchestration is co-constituted by the imagination of others: our life-narrative, as produced through variation of the imagination, is not only *impacted* by others (exemplariness), but *co-constituted*.

what it is for me to have a life is to be for-myself as well as for-others. A person, as an individual life unfolding in the world (as a who, not a what), is both self-constituting and other-constituted. My life is not only given to me, but given to others as well, much as others have given life to me [...] We need the Other in order to achieve our own proper self-constitution and the Other needs us to likewise achieve her own self-constitution. Neither need (mine for hers, hers for mine) is prior to the other. (De Warren 2017, 218, 222)

How to describe this co-constitution? Sure, this topic deserves an entire investigation, but we could suggest just a few remarks.

Following De Warren and his analysis concerning Patočka's thinking, this reciprocal constitution takes the key form that De Warren names “*participation*” (De Warren 2017, 223): “we are animated by a need for *participation*: to participate *in* the lives of Others and to have Others participate in our own lives” (De Warren 2017, 223). “Participation” is the idea that other persons perform a reorchestration of myself and such a reorchestration gives me an ‘Ich Kann’ that I could not imagine as possible for

myself. The difference with exemplars consists in the fact that exemplars motivate me to perform such a reorchestration, while participation implies that the other person performs such a reorchestration for me. So, we are before two different kinds of influence: on the one hand, others' influence as an impact that spurs me to reorchestrate myself (exemplariness), and, on the other hand, the role that others play in my life-narrative by performing – themselves – a reorchestration of my self. Exemplariness is different from participation since I can *participate in* the life of the other without being an exemplar. Furthermore, participation calls for a sort of *climax* since others' participation in my life intensifies my need of participation: “my need becomes perpetually renewed through her participation. The more the Other needs me to participate in her life, the more my need becomes sharpened to need the Other to participate in mine” (De Warren 2017, 223-224).

Others could *participate in* my life. This kind of participation is a form of “living-in”. In fact, in addition to living *with* others, I live in others and others live in me:

wives, husbands, partners, children, friends, and companions – these are various forms in which the Other lives in me, as participating in the constitution of my own being (and likewise: I live in the Other). Evidently, not every relationship with others has this form of living-in. Indeed, the majority of our daily and professional dealings with others takes the form of living-with. (De Warren 2017, 223-224)

Others live in me since I participate in the constitution of their own being, and vice versa:

what I need of the Other is her need for my participation in her life as well as her need to have her participate in mine. I need the Other to participate in me, and need to be needed to participate in the Other's life. What binds together this dynamic of participation is a mutual interest in the Other's life as an investment of my own life. In this manner, we do not just live with Others, but, in those cases when we directly participate in the lives of Others, we come live in the Other much as the Other comes to live in me. (De Warren 2017, 223)

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Others as *exemplars* help me to grasp untaken possibilities of my individuality and then it is me who decide whether to reorchestrate myself accordingly or not. This means that, in order to let me be possibly affected by exemplars, *I must be willing and ready to reorchestrate myself*. I must be ready to discover new facets of my self, I must be ready to think about myself

differently than I did before and do now. In so doing, I let myself be possibly affected by exemplars, which are the sources of the deepest personal upheavals. If I were not willing to conceive my self differently, I would never be affected by exemplars since they radically question what I think about my individuality.

The account of exemplariness that we provided inherently implies a point that we should highlight: we cannot presume to know and shape ourselves without other persons playing a fundamental role in such processes. Exemplars make me grasp untaken possibilities of my individuality and, if I am willing to conceive myself differently, then I give myself the opportunity to embrace these possibilities in my process of self-knowledge and reorchestrate myself in the light of them. These possibilities inherently and solely regard my individuality, but they inherently and definitively remain beyond my grasp if I do not adopt a 'from outside' view on my self, that is, if I am not willing to question myself in the light of others' influence.

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