

Admiration, emulation, and the description of character

Vasalou, Sophia

DOI:

[10.5406/jaesteduc.54.3.0047](https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.54.3.0047)

License:

None: All rights reserved

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Vasalou, S 2020, 'Admiration, emulation, and the description of character', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 47-69. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.54.3.0047>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

This document is the Author Accepted Manuscript version of a published work which appears in its final form in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, copyright © 2020. Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. The final Version of Record can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.54.3.0047>

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Admiration, Emulation, and the Description of Character

Sophia Vasalou

1

The experience of admiration has become the focus of renewed philosophical attention in recent times, singled out by many as an emotion with an important role to play in the moral life. Taken as it stands, this is a claim that invites distinctions, given the complex ways in which this emotion concept features in our ordinary experience and expressive habits. We speak of admiring a person's integrity and selflessness, but we also speak of admiring their wit or sense of humour, their fine figure or taste in furnishing. We pause to admire paintings and we watch on admiringly as athletes pull off extraordinary performances. Sometimes we let ourselves be coaxed into declaring the person we admire most—often (though not in 2018) a person at the helm of a powerful nation.¹ Not *all* experiences of admiration are relevant to ethics: that much seems clear. To admire, taken most broadly, is to register value, and however permissively we might mark the boundaries of the ethical domain, there are certain values we would leave outside it.²

Yet such distinctions accommodated, the experience of admiration has been assigned a special moral significance most readily parsed in terms of its motivational effects. As an emotion that registers not merely value but excellence, its significance has been tied to its capacity to move us beyond the contemplation of excellence to its active pursuit. As Plutarch puts it in a linchpin passage of his *Lives*: “the sight of the statue of Zeus at Pisa” does not draw out the “desire to *be* a Pheidias.” Virtue, by contrast, “by the bare statement of its actions, can so affect men's minds as to create at once both admiration of the things done and desire to imitate the doers of them.”³ This basic intuition has focused many recent engagements of the topic in both philosophical and psychological circles. Linda Zagzebski's recent work, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, is a case in point, spelling out a bold theory in which the emotion of admiration provides the foundation on more levels than one, and certainly on the level of motivation. If every emotion has its “action tendency,” the action tendency of admiration is to move us to emulate.⁴

Taking my starting point from this intuitive claim, my aim in this paper is to put forward a different understanding of the transformative effect, and thus the moral significance, of the emotion of admiration. Convinced that admiration moves us, I am less certain than some of its other advocates about how this moving power should be understood—and whether as a power to effect the kind of change usually claimed for it.

Whether admiration stimulates efforts to emulate, and whether these efforts are successful, are of course empirical questions, to which first-person experience and anecdotal evidence are relevant but which they could not decide. On a proper empirical level, it is worth noting that these questions seem surprisingly far from settled.⁵ I will not try to steal a march on these debates by settling them from the armchair through first-person or anecdotal scepticism. In fact, my aim will not be to defend a position of thoroughgoing scepticism at all. Instead, beginning from an acknowledgement of the ways in which persons of outstanding moral character move us, my aim will be to secure a more basic yet not less important sense in which this motive power can be articulated. This is a sense that is tied less immediately to the forms of our character, than to the forms of our language.

A good way of framing this line of inquiry is by considering some of the ways in which the intuitive claim about admiration's emulative effect might be, and indeed has been, doubted. One kind of doubt may seem easy to disarm. To the objection, "I know many who admire the virtuous—not just in the 'cold' sense involved in answering potted questions about who we admire most, but in a 'hot' sense, passionately—yet have been left unchanged," the most obvious response would be to qualify the claim more finely. The claim is not that admiration always changes us, but that it typically does, or is likely to do so if certain conditions are met; and the investigation of these conditions is an empirical question.⁶

Yet there are other doubts that may put up greater resistance. Plutarch's point offers a way of articulating one of them, picking out a difficulty that appears to flow from the very phenomenology of the experience. If the desire stimulated by the emotion of admiration has the fundamental form of an imperative not to perform a certain kind of action ("the things done") but to be a certain kind of person ("the doers"), admiration gives us a goal that is likely to be perceived as exceeding our immediate capabilities. As such, it is more likely to lead to despair than to galvanise to action. This point can be connected to a critical perspective offered by Kristján Kristjánsson, who singles out two reasons why admiration may fail of its typical effect—two dangers to which the project of emulation seems constitutionally vulnerable. One is that admiration may degenerate into "mere hero worship and uncritical grovelling at the feet of the presumed exemplars." Another is the "threat of moral inertia," when admired exemplars "are seen as standing so high above the learner that idolising them becomes disempowering . . . rather than uplifting." What makes these possibilities particularly troubling is that they are more likely to arise in the cases that matter most: cases of outstanding moral greatness.⁷

So are there ways in which this type of danger might be obviated? Part of the solution, Kristjánsson argues in one work, lies in what we might call a recalibration of the relationship between reason and emotion, or an education of the latter's cognitive content. The mute gasp of admiration wrenched by an ostensive "this!"—in which our awed attention is fixed on individual persons in all their particularity—must be replaced by a more judicious attention to the qualities or ideals these persons instantiate. Faced with particular exemplars, we must be able to explain "*what it is about them* that makes them worthy of such emulation" and thus to specify the particular virtues they display. These qualities must at least "*in principle*, be recognizable and morally justifiable, independent of the role model."⁸

Articulation, this suggests, is key to cementing the link between admiring excellence and seeking to acquire it. The road to emulation must pass through a capacity to describe character. This "Aristotelian" strategy might also go some way toward providing a remedy

for the internal phenomenological difficulty isolated above. To be a different kind of person may seem a goal unachievably large. But having broken down the “kind” to its constitutive elements, it may not seem quite out of reach.⁹

Kristjánsson’s analysis forms the immediate backdrop of the line of reflection I want to pursue and the more “basic” understanding of the transformative effect of admiration I will be developing. Agreeing with him about the importance of articulation as a stage in the progress of admiration, my focus will fall on the place it occupies in the phenomenology of this emotion as the object of a natural desire. Even more basic than (though still a central part of) the drive to appropriate the admired excellence of another’s character as our own, I will suggest, is the drive to appropriate it in language: to represent and communicate this excellence to others. Yet considered closely, this re-presenting or “mimetic” project carries challenges, which raise questions about the adequacy of the vocabulary of the virtues for its execution. Reflection on these challenges allows us to form a clearer and more nuanced view of this descriptive task, including the limitations endemic to it. It also allows us to raise on new terms the question about how the encounter with extraordinary excellence can take us beyond this basic form of narrative mimesis to the full-fledged emulation that involves embodying such excellence not merely in speech but in our own actions and character.

In pursuing this line of reflection, I will take as my central reference point George Eliot’s best-known novel, *Middlemarch*. This is a novel that stands out not only for the spectacular gallery of richly developed moral characters it incorporates, but also because of the powerful representations of *outstanding* character—of outstanding beauty and indeed greatness of character—it offers. At the same time, it stands out for the significant if subtle invitations it extends to the reader to consider how, and whether, our experience of these outstanding characters might be transforming us.

2

Eliot’s name has often been linked to a particular understanding of the mission of literature: to contribute to the extension of sympathy. Her aim as an artist, as she viewed it, was “to stir men’s hearts to sympathy,” an aim linked to the broader aspiration of opening people’s hearts to the ordinary or commonplace. “Paint us an angel, if you can,” yet do not “banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands.” This type of openness involved a double subversion, extending not only to the commonplace but to the ugly as commonly conceived—for surely “things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome”—and indeed to what we would normally experience as morally repulsive. Art must teach us to feel “not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness.”¹⁰ Selfishness, in *Middlemarch*, there is certainly aplenty, and some of the chief protagonists that carry that drama forward—above all the swanlike but glacial and narcissistic Rosamond Vince and the shrivel-hearted pedant Casaubon—are distinguished by the different kinds of egotism they embody, which trace a path of destruction across other people’s lives.

Yet *Middlemarch* would not be the memorable and gripping tale that generations of readers have found it to be were it not for a rather different cast of protagonists who speak not so much to the paradigm of the commonplace, ugly, and repugnant, as to the paradigm of the beautiful and the good. In this class one would have to place mild-mannered Caleb Garth, whose self-effacing devotedness—to a cause for which the shopworn word

“business” will here have to serve as shorthand—and generosity to others often seems foolishly unmindful of his own interests and those of his family. They include his daughter Mary Garth, not the least of whose virtues—besides those Eliot pointedly names for us, such as self-deprecation and gritty honesty (“her reigning virtue”)¹¹—is her loving appreciation of her father’s virtues and her loyalty to her family. But above all, and here I’d like to clear a space, they include the figure who can be legitimately regarded as the central protagonist—one might almost say the reigning icon on the shelf—of the novel, Dorothea Brooke.

Viewed against Eliot’s characterisation of her mission, Dorothea seems striking in more ways than one—striking, more specifically, as an apparent deviation from it. In her, Eliot gives us a character who couldn’t be furthest from the paradigm of the commonplace, the ugly, and the ethically flawed. It is interesting to speculate how differently Dorothea might have impressed the reader if some of these connections had been weaker or severed. Yet as things stand, in *Dorothea* the different kinds of beauty are found united. Her physical beauty—a beauty of a very particular kind, one “thrown into relief by poor dress” (5), in which self-forgetfulness and utter unconsciousness of beauty form a defining element—not to mention her elevated social status, are wedded to a beauty of character that we are invited to attend to from the earliest moment of our reading experience, and that indeed speaks not simply to the reference frame of beauty but that of greatness.¹² Eliot already primes us to attend to it by her evocation of Saint Theresa of Avila in the book’s Prelude, where she alludes to the possibility that “spiritual grandeur” might be “ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity” and thereby fail to be reflected in a manifestly “epic life” in ways that anticipate the story’s denouement. This religious—indeed hagiographical—association emerges again in the body of the novel, where it textures the responses of the (interestingly few) characters in the novel who visibly register Dorothea’s nature and thereby perform the vital function of mediating our responses as readers. This includes, above all, Will Ladislaw, whose fascination with Dorothea is from the very first imbued with a sense of reverence that makes him want to “fall at [her] feet and kiss her robe” (180), tracing a distancing “halo” (181) around her which causes him to bristle at the “desecration” of those who draw too near whether by physical contact or even by verbal description, as does his painter friend Naumann. “[T]here was grossness in his choice of the most ordinary words, and what business had he to talk of her lips? She was not a woman to be spoken of as other women were” (180-181). The sense of distance registers even more openly (indeed cuttingly) in one scene, where Dorothea’s passionate moral appeal to her uncle to improve the living conditions of his tenants arouses in Will a sense of “admiration . . . accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness” reflecting his perception of “a certain greatness in her” (321). Over the novel’s progression (though pointedly late in it), Will’s admiration for Dorothea acquires the more recognisable character of a romantic passion, yet it is throughout informed by a clear perception of and sensitivity to her moral qualities.¹³

It is a greatness that takes shape most evidently as a quality of feeling and desire: as an ardour that is distinguished by its moral character and idealistic element, its orientation to an inchoate yet imperious notion of the good, the just, and the noble, whose defining challenge and struggle is to achieve particular form. Dorothea longs to “make her life greatly effective,” to lead a “grand life” in which the simplest things will “mean the greatest things” (23), she is “enamoured of intensity and greatness” (6). Her passion is in part a hunger for an end to which she can pour herself out in infinite devotion and with a “loving reverent resolve” (162). It is this idealistic ardour that leads her to marry the starched middle-aged

scholar Casaubon, to whose intellectual project she hopes to elevate her life by contributing, a costly mistake (if one can speak of mistakes) that will test her nature by fire, and force her to revise her exalted notions about the ends of life. Yet as the above scene indicates, this quality of feeling—and the greatness of Dorothea’s nature—is in large part tied to a passionate orientation to and absorption in the lot of others, and a capacity for sympathy in which Eliot’s moral concerns as a novelist are most directly mirrored.

The above categorisations—the ugly and the bad versus the beautiful and the good, or the paradigm of sympathy versus the paradigm of admiration—are of course crude. Despite the associations picked out above, *Middlemarch* is no hagiography, and all of its protagonists are seen undergoing necessary development. This includes Dorothea, whose woefully misguided ascription of a “great soul” to Casaubon (16) points to one of many ways in which her idealism stands to be tempered and corrected—though part of the triumph of her character must surely be how *little* she ultimately changes (not least in her childlike faith in the goodness of others) in the face of her crushing experiences and how much of her idealistic ardour she manages to preserve to the last. Dorothea, likewise, does not exclusively speak to our admiration; she has suffering and illusion enough to speak strongly to our sympathy. Yet for the purposes of this reflective exercise, I will have to simply help myself to the assumption that she is not only intentionally held up for admiration but indeed succeeds, with many of the novel’s readers, in commanding it. And in any case, I will have to declare that with me, whether intentionally or not, she has succeeded. Her success is not contingently related to the fact that I’m here talking about her at all.

Because what have I been doing above, as I briefly introduced this novel and its most notable protagonist? Certainly this was no attempt at a neutral presentation. Even in this all-too-brief introduction I have been inevitably drawn toward a presentation or representation of its protagonist that would be adequate to the depth of the response it arouses in me, and which I will continue to call “admiration” even though it may sometimes seem that the “cold” uses of this word render it unfit for its more passionate senses. If I was to avail myself of Hume’s more generous understanding of the passions as bleeding into each other like colours,¹⁴ I would be inclined to call it a mixture of three or four pigments: awe, reverence, love, and (maybe this is not a separate tincture) a kind of longing. Some of these emotions are emotions of approach; others emotions that incorporate a sense of distance.¹⁵ Call it the phenomenology of admiration: it makes one wish to hold something at arm’s length (delighting in its distance and elevation), yet also to draw nearer. Will Ladislav once again channels this response for the reader: hungry for Dorothea’s presence, he nevertheless rejoices in the sense of her inaccessibility, in the fact that she is not there to be “obtained as an everyday possession” (387). It is from the second element of this phenomenology—the impulse of approach—that the thesis “admiration stimulates emulation” derives its truth. To put it as basically as possible, the admiration aroused in me by the spectacle of extraordinary moral beauty makes me want to somehow hold on to it. It makes me want that it should not pass; that I continue to relate to it. This is what Louise Rosenblatt calls the “efferent” way of reading: efferent because it involves a desire to “carry something away.”¹⁶ But how can I relate to a spectacle continuously? How can I hold on to it? How can I make it my own? (And here the impulse of distance speaks in me: is there no irreverence in this desire to possess?)

This is the far from academic root from which the question “does admiration produce emulation?” derives its urgency: from an anxiety that even the most powerful experiences of value can nevertheless manage to leave us unchanged. I will return to this

anxiety. Yet the point to notice here is the simplest form of approach that, short of an instantaneous conversion of moral personality, remains open to us in the moment and that admiration often naturally drives us to pursue; and this is to make the object of our admiration the subject of talk. It is this kind of mimesis—not an emulation of character but a narrative representation of it—that I was beginning to carry out above. What admiration makes me want to do is share it with others. This is *one* way in which I can continue to relate to its object and take possession of it. And sharing my admiration means explaining why it is justified—explaining *what it is about the person* that arouses this response in me. The impulse to describe character is thus one important form that the “action tendency” of admiration may take. The fact that our ability to explain or justify our admiration—to name its reasons—may come after the moment of admiration itself and constitute an achievement is what lends Linda Zagzebski’s foundationalist view of admiration part of its truth.¹⁷ But it also points to the limits of its truth; because when we seek to justify our response and name our reasons, the reasons we reach for will inevitably be existing terms of praise that could already be recognised as reasons by others.

For philosophers it will be obvious that these reasons will be most naturally parsed in terms of the specific terms of praise and dispraise that we know as the virtues and vices. Kristjánsson makes this clear in framing his prescriptive counterpart (“*we should explain our reasons*”) of my own view (“*we naturally want to*”). Yet how far, now, do these terms take us? When I seek to possess the grandeur I perceive in Dorothea’s character by narratively re-presenting it to others, I find that the vocabulary I have come to know as the standard virtues gives me trouble. Certainly, in this descriptive effort, I gratefully make use of the words that Eliot offers me in her own narrative representation, and some of these correspond to recognisable terms of virtue. (If I had any doubts left that she intended me to admire this figure, such terms would vaporise them). What I partly fall in love with after all, in falling in love with this character, are Eliot’s words. She gives me words like “generosity,” “kindness,” “childlike simplicity”; she names for me the “open ardent good will” which was Dorothea’s “usual state of feeling” (181). Yet Eliot’s work would hardly have the power it has if it only told (and told in a moral diction), and did not show. Can I extend her telling in this direction? To these descriptors I might try to contribute others, closer to the core constellation of the virtues: “compassionate” as a sentimental deepening of “kind,” “sincere” as a more inclusive representation of the meanings of “simple.”

Yet none of these descriptors appear adequate to my purpose. Even taken jointly, I cannot fully recognise the grounds of my admiration in them, and they seem incapable of serving as reasons I could present to others in sharing and justifying it. They seem so thin as to be not only uninformative but positively misleading. Above all, they tell us nothing about the modality in which Dorothea instantiates them, and of the emotional and cognitive texture of the overall character in which they take their place. I would know nothing about Dorothea’s way of being compassionate if I didn’t know how it connects with her passionate longing for some good all the more magnificent for being indefinable, with her yearning for “what is perfectly good” (323) and her belief in “glorious things in a blind sort of way” (183). I would know nothing of her compassion if I didn’t know how it could be wrested, wondrously without remainder, out of a rearing anger and justified pride through an act of self-conquest, its gentleness the product of an excruciating yet then perfect submission.¹⁸ I would know nothing of her loyalty—most remarkably manifested in relation to her husband—if I didn’t know how it aligned with all these other elements. I would say the same about some of the other characters in the novel whose beauty captivates me, such as Caleb

Garth, whom I briefly introduced as “mild-mannered” and generous to the point of foolishness.

In all cases, the vocabulary of the virtues—including core virtues like “kindness,” “generosity,” or “compassion”—does not serve me when I seek to explain *what it is* about the person that attracts my admiration. What is the significance of this point? I already noted Kristjánsson’s argument about why articulation, and more specifically articulation parsed in terms of the virtues, matters. He has not been alone among virtue theorists in this emphasis. Glossing Hume (and in conscious opposition to certain emotivist construals of his account), Annette Baier has written about Hume’s insistence that “moral evaluation . . . be shared and articulated.” She writes: “the moral viewpoint is very different from that of the lover, whose ‘object’ is a concrete unique person. ‘Desire this passionate lover to give you a character of his mistress: He will tell you, that he is at a loss for words to describe her charms’ (‘The Sceptic,’ *Essays*, p. 162). The moral evaluator cannot be at a loss for words to describe what she approves—she must be able to ‘give you a character for’ what she approves in you.” Moral evaluation centres on “generally recurring human characters or character traits, ones we have names for” and can “make explicit.”¹⁹ Is this my mistake, then—the lover’s mistake to which, as we saw, Will Ladislaw preceded the reader? “[T]here was grossness in his choice of the most ordinary words . . . She was not a woman to be spoken of as other women were.” But what kind of mistake is this?

Here is one possible answer: it involves a mistaken view of what the virtue terms are “for,” their purposes or uses. The virtues are simply general standards or measures we use for assessing people’s character, a kind of set checklist with circumscribed functionality. Just as a prospective groom in a more traditional world than our own might appraise a potential bride by running down a list of criteria such as “Are her looks overall to my taste, is her manner demure, is her family upstanding, is her dowry satisfactory?” or just as a prospective buyer might appraise a house by checking it against an index of fixed considerations such as “Is the plumbing in order, does the living room face on the south side, is the garden big enough for a play area?” so we apply the virtues as measuring sticks to people with a view to obtaining information of a well-defined and limited sort. Their purpose is not to provide us with a holistic understanding of a person’s character (just as the groom would not, let us hope, hold that their checklist amounts to an exhaustive description of the object of their concern). “To describe someone’s character,” as Joel Kupperman notes, not without polemical intent, “is not to go down a checklist of qualities that the person either simply has or simply lacks.”²⁰ (It is polemical because this is a balkanising attitude that Kupperman appears to think virtue-centred ethics, as against *character-centred* ethics, inevitably implicates us in. Character description as “genre criticism”: is it x, y, or z?) On the prevailing view that virtues are threshold concepts, applicable to those whose relevant responses are *good enough* rather than maximally so, one can see even more clearly why the mere application of such concepts should be experienced as a minimally informative and highly limited way of delineating individual character.²¹

I don’t disagree entirely with this view. Nor would I disagree with its practical application in the immediate case: certainly, were I required to bring a checklist of the standard virtues to the characters of *Middlemarch* in this spirit and ask whether Dorothea is compassionate or generous, or Caleb mild-tempered or kind, I would naturally answer in the affirmative. My main disagreement with this view concerns its claim regarding what virtue terms are “for”—or perhaps more precisely, the limited view it incorporates regarding the kinds of reasons and contexts that might lead us to undertake the task of character

description. Because to be sure, when we evaluate people, it may often be against specific interests or perspectives, as in the examples above. Evaluating a person as a prospective employee, we might be on the watch for the independence, imagination, or cooperativeness she displays. Evaluating a person as a prospective counsellor or therapist who might help us through a difficult time, we might be on the look-out for empathy, discretion, and intelligence. Can we ever evaluate a person from *no* perspective at all, with no *interest*, whether self-regarding or other-regarding? Reading Hume, we might be led to doubt this. Yet perhaps the closest we come to it is precisely in the rarefied context of a literary experience like the one I have been describing, where the response to moral character is divorced from any obvious possibility of being directly affected by it.

In such a case, the effort to give an account of a particular character to others seems unconstrained by all ends but one: to be adequate to the passionate vision whose object it was. But perhaps that is not yet entirely precise. In communicating this passionate judgement, it is not descriptive adequacy to an inner vision I want; what I want is to convert others to my vision and my judgement. I want my reasons to become reasons for them. And for this, I need to reach far beyond checklists of the virtues and formulaic uses of their vocabulary. For this purpose, in fact, I need something closer to the infinite subtlety and richness of the language Eliot first used to place this picture of moral beauty before me and make it blaze to life. I need to become an artist myself, showing and not wholly telling, and sometimes finding some of the greatest mimetic power not in direct ascription but in qualified and indirect forms of speech that communicate the limits of what can be said. Not: "Dorothea was simple," but maybe: "One of the most beautiful qualities in her character was a certain kind of open simplicity that was contagious to those she spoke with . . ." I must also be ready to move away from the "standard virtues" to make use of the host of expressive terms and structures my language makes available to me. The description of character, as James Montmarquet suggested in a judicious riposte to situationist distortions, is "more an art than any part of a science."²² The description of *great* character even more so given the passionate judgement and persuasive aims that orient it. (Don't balk at "passion"; if emotions are ways of seeing value, a passionate judgement of character will be the way of seeing that sees it most truly.)

This view (or mode) of character description can be taken as a corrective, on the one hand, to a tendency to which philosophers would seem to be especially exposed, singling out particular virtue terms for special treatment and assigning them a quasi-sacramental status that sets them apart from the rest of language. Listing off some of the qualities we esteem, Hume was happy accepting that this list might run into a "thousand more of the same kind."²³ Philosophers in recent times have been more anxious to take instruction from Socrates' amused scepticism in the *Meno* about letting the virtues build up to a "swarm" (72a). This anxiety springs from understandable methodological scruples, but the above suggests that a more balanced view may be needed which gives greater acknowledgement to the status of even the most "standard" virtue terms as part of ordinary language, a wild and open-ended space they share with myriad other terms of praise and blame.²⁴ This is compatible with holding that there may be particular purposes served by focusing discussion on some terms to the exclusion of others, for example securing a more visible unity to the subject that in turn secures a moral community and upholds its continuity, and providing a more stable focus for the task of moral education.²⁵

What I therefore learn from reflecting on the imperative of re-presenting character generated by my passionate response to it is something about the nature of this act of

mimesis and the type of articulation it demands. If there is any mistake, this suggests, it is the mistake of taking an excessively restrictive view of the nature of this task and the resources appropriate it, as also of the facility with which one should expect it would be possible to execute it. Articulacy, here, is an accomplishment of the highest order. If I am “at a loss for words” (Hume’s point about the tongue-tied lover), it is simply that I am at a loss for words—I with my all-too-limited command of the linguistic skills required for this exacting task. “The limits of what can be said” (to reinvoké my earlier expression) are limits of what can be said by me. Assuming perfect command of these skills, complete articulacy would be realised.

Yet even without claiming such command for myself, I might still feel that this account of the challenge I confront when I seek to articulate my admiration of a moral beauty like that of Eliot’s characters leaves out something important—that the limitation may somehow not be all on my side; or again, that it may not be a contingent type of limitation. One must tread carefully here, as there are inherent dangers, of which the “Hurray-Boo” emotivism Baier was keen to deflect from Hume may not even be the greatest. Some of the more hardnosed philosophers of our times would find this kind of emotivism far less offensive than another, more “enthusiastic” (in the old malignant sense) type of hand-waving that gestures not to what “lies in yourself” and in “your own breast”²⁶ as moral and linguistic subject, but to something that lies in the object itself, and indeed has the character of pointing beyond it. It is noteworthy in this connection that despite his emphasis on the need for articulacy, Hume himself made room for something less than perfect articulacy in our moral judgements, a point notable not least for the far-from-hardnosed vocabulary in which it was couched. Even after the origins of all our responses to character have been accounted for, “there still remains something mysterious and inexplicable, which conveys an immediate satisfaction to the spectator, but how, or why . . . he cannot pretend to determine.” While we must still trust in these responses, we may concede they form “a part of ethics, left by nature to baffle all the pride of philosophy.”²⁷ What Hume had in mind had to do with a particular person’s bearing or manner—a kind of “grace” that seems resistant to “telling” and only susceptible to showing.

It is a different focus that organises one of the boldest recent defences of the place of the inarticulate or ineffable in the moral life, which is the one advanced by Kristjánsson in a number of papers thematising the notion of awe.²⁸ In the most recent, he distinguishes between two different kinds of emotions that may be aroused by exemplars. One can be appropriately termed “admiration,” but the other, he argues, is best approached as a species of awe.²⁹ What does it mean to say these emotions are *distinct*? The most important distinction lies in their target and cognitive content. The target of the first is a particular person and the acts of virtue she exhibits. The target of the second, by contrast, is not personal but transpersonal: it is directed to the transpersonal beauty of virtue, to the *ideal* that person embodies. Put simply, these two emotions involve different ways of seeing an object: awe is when we see past the particular person—past the *thisness* of this individual—to the ideals which she embodies yet which transcend her. Kristjánsson unabashedly owns the Platonic associations. He also draws out the implications of this position for the question of articulacy. In awe, we see a “truly great moral ideal that is mystifying or even ineffable in transcending more mundane, everyday human experiences.”³⁰

It is an interesting question how this claim relates to Kristjánsson’s earlier argument about the need for articulation, for explicitly specifying the qualities that make exemplars admirable and worthy of being emulated. Are they compatible—particularly when

exemplars arouse what Kristjánsson would describe as “awe”? How does the experiencing-an-ideal-as-ineffable in the one case relate to the naming-an-ideal in the other? Can we find an ideal ineffable yet still name it? Perhaps the simplest answer to this question is that we can name something while being aware that we have not thereby said everything about it. Yet the follow-up (and for our purposes more relevant) question is whether to be aware that we have not said everything means that it cannot be said. Does Kristjánsson’s account provide us with a way of making that distinction more confidently? On one level, it simply seems to take that distinction as basic, using it as a criterion for distinguishing between the two emotions he discusses. Part of the challenge would seem to be whether we can ground the concept of “transcendence” used to frame the point. In what sense are these ideals transcendent? Here, theologians of different traditions are in a better position when framing their claims about the limits of language as a medium for representations of God.

Yet might the problem here be the insistence on looking for a way to mark the distinction that is independent of experience? Even the most committed metaphysical accounts of transcendent realities after all begin from experiences, as developments or explanations of them—as attempts to account for something experienced *as* transcendent or in some way surpassing. Central to the phenomenology of this kind of experience is a perception of distance. The true lover in the *Phaedrus*, who is reminded of transcendent beauty by the beauty of a particular boy—who experiences that beauty *as* pointing or transcending—chooses to leave the boy untouched. (Metaphysics as an explanation of experience.) Yet notice that this instinct of distance co-exists in the lover with another, more creative (and more pedagogical) instinct, which is to elicit that supernal beauty in the boy more fully and help him instantiate or imitate the divine ideal more completely. Admiration, I suggested earlier, has a complex phenomenology which incorporates both an element of approach and an element of distance. It is the first that drives me to speak, narratively representing a character of extraordinary beauty in ways that might make my reasons available to others and convert them to my vision. But deepened or modulated sufficiently (a modulating that Kristjánsson would say must be reflected in a change of vocabulary), what admiration also demands of me is that I come to a point where I must say “words fail me” and fall silent. Part of what it *is* for me to experience a certain kind of moral grandeur as transcendent is for me to experience it as beyond the limit of direct speech. This acknowledgement of limit can be seen not as an abandonment of the concern with conversion but as a continuation of it. To be fully converted, you may have to pick up the book and see for yourself. I will be content if I have succeeded in giving you reasons to do that.

This might seem to raise an obvious question, which neither Hume’s nor Kristjánsson’s real-life encounters with the great and the good court. For the means by which *I* gained access to the particular embodiments of moral beauty I have been discussing was precisely through the narrative representation of another. How then could my understanding or vision of this beauty be coherently described as incommunicable? The answer one gives to this question will depend on one’s philosophical aesthetics. Schopenhauer, for example, thought that literary artists provide access to supra-rational Platonic Ideas by means of particulars, using words to mediate something inherently beyond speech.³¹ Yet even those who don’t accept Schopenhauer’s florid metaphysics could follow him in the accompanying claim (which provides important explanatory glue) that the execution of this task depends on a mobilisation of the imagination on the part of both writer and reader. The text does not fully determine my experience. What I see in a book is

partly what emerges through my own imaginative participation. This is also to give a reason why not every reader whom I point to the book to “see for himself” is guaranteed to be converted, or to experience it with the deeper kind of admiration that places it, for him too, beyond words.

3

Starting from a common view about the relationship between admiration and emulation, and a somewhat less common view about the role of rational articulation in cementing this link, I approached this link from a different direction by focusing on a type of mimesis that seems more basic yet nevertheless central to the unfolding of the passionate response to the beauty of character. Admiration makes us want to communicate this beauty—yet also to acknowledge the limits of this possibility. Yet especially if we take this acknowledgement seriously, this analysis will now revive with new urgency one of the questions from which I began. Admiration makes me desire that its object, and my relationship to it, should not pass. Yet how can I always be in relationship to it? How can I hold on to it? The most basic way I *do* have of holding on to it—by speaking—is ultimately a reminder of how incompletely I possess it.³² What is left to me, a fortiori, once I’m done speaking? It may be, as the literary critic Wayne Booth remarks, that “[e]very work of art . . . determines to some degree *how at least this one moment will be lived*. The quality of life in the moment of ‘listening’ is not what it would have been if we had not listened.”³³ Yet will it determine the quality of life in the moments that follow? Will I live differently after the book is shut? Has it changed me? Real change here would seem to mean going beyond mere narrative mimesis to real-life emulation in the flesh and blood of one’s character and actions.

Booth himself, though deeply invested in this possibility, considers it a difficult question, taken as a question of proof, and taken as a question about the life we live *outside* the book. Central to his attempt to bridge this gap (between inside and outside, during and after) is a reconstruction of reading experience that is significant for placing the notion of emulation or imitation at its heart. To read and understand a fictional narrative is in itself to perform a kind of role-playing or mimesis. Focusing on the case of the intellectual virtues, he draws on a passage from Joyce’s *Ulysses* which shows its protagonist, Stephen, engaging with philosophical puzzles about his sensations with pyrotechnic virtuosity to illustrate the way in which narratives involve an imitation of mind and call forth such an imitation in the reader. This passage “imitates the mind of an extraordinarily philosophical hero . . . and I must become philosophical if I am to follow him.” A person who read this passage would have to “think like Stephen, *as he read*—to the extent that he understood him at all.” In this moment of “emulation [one is] moved, in however slight a degree, *toward* the character of a philosophical man.”³⁴

In Booth’s view, it is an easier matter to affirm the after-effects of such momentary emulations in the case of the intellectual virtues. With the moral virtues, by contrast, the waters muddy. “A tale of great moral courage may lead me to a private oath to be more courageous, only to discover the next day that I am still a coward.”³⁵ Yet the distance between the two cases should not be exaggerated, not least because, on a plausible Aristotelian view, the virtues of character are deeply enmeshed with virtues of mind. The reader who follows Dorothea in that terrible scene midway through the book (352-53) when, stung by Casaubon’s cruel rebuff of her tenderness, she lets herself unfold to the full

height of her self-righteous anger before forcibly conquering it into “resolved submission,” follows not a sequence of mindless feelings but of passionate thoughts that turn on a trenchant assessment of her husband and their relationship. “And what, exactly, was he? — She was able enough to estimate him—she who . . . shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please him.” Nevertheless, the imitation at stake here is more evidently an imitation of feeling, as this scene again illustrates. When I follow this scene, following Dorothea’s inner struggle through the deepening night, I follow a movement from righteous anger to the agonising reassertion of pity that reflects more than anything a quality of will, and that strikes me most powerfully for its ability to succeed without remainder. Throughout the novel I follow, I imitate, many such movements. Near the close of the novel, Dorothea’s sister expresses curiosity about how her relationship to Will Ladislaw developed. “Can’t you tell me?” Dorothea gently rebuffs her: “No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know” (675). The reader who has taken in the narrative has been feeling with Dorothea all along. To the extent that the novel “imitates the mind” of an extraordinarily noble-hearted hero, I must also “become noble-hearted if I am to follow him.”

In reading we emulate—yet how far, to return to our question, does this help us bridge the gap between before and after? Why think such momentary emulations of feeling leave something behind? This emulative account of reading experience may help explain why the literary encounter with noble heroes may, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, make a person “*feel* himself a better man while reading.”³⁶ But how far does this translate into *being* a better man once the reading has ended? One answer to this question is essentially a position of faith: we simply *have* to believe that powerful experiences do not leave us untouched. A somewhat less fideistic alternative is suggested by a different element of Booth’s account. Because while Booth is concerned to highlight the emulative transformation we undergo in the living present of reading experience, he makes a reframing of desire central to his account of this transformation. “Narratives . . . both depend on and implant or reinforce patterns of desire.” Drawing on a notion of second-order desire associated with Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor, he suggests that what we acquire from the stories we are told is a “desire to become a different kind of desirer.”³⁷ What Joyce’s reader enters into in taking in, or taking on, the philosophical flight of his central hero is a desire to think like this hero that, to the extent that this thinking flows from an intellectual character incorporating a committed desire for such exercise of thought, incorporates a desire for such committed desire. By the same token, what I enter into in taking on the passionate movements of Dorothea’s mind in the scene just outlined, or in that other shattering scene near the novel’s close where, newly aware of her love for Will Ladislaw and persuaded of his attachment to Rosamond Vincy, she overcomes herself to display the most extraordinary generosity toward Rosamond, is a series of choices that reflect a deep-seated pattern of values and desires. When I *feel with* Dorothea, I *will* with her—I want the things she wants.

Now it is an interesting question, as Booth is aware, whether narratives can really “implant” new desires *as against* “reinforcing” existing ones and helping them take root. Certainly, if you pick up *Middlemarch* because of my promise of conversion, it is a conversion you must will already have desired. It is an interesting and difficult question more broadly, what it means for desires to be wholly “new” and to be “implanted.” But it seems to me no major compromise to accept that *some* kind of desire must be presupposed in this case, and to understand the accomplishment in terms of a reinforcement or indeed a

specification and refinement of such desire. Desires can after all be vague and inchoate. Different circumstances may occasionally make me wish I was a better kind of person. Transient moments of admiration—provoked perhaps by illuminations of goodness I see in particular acts of others, or if I am lucky enough to have flesh-and-blood exemplars put in my way, in the mode of being of others—may kindle that wish again at other moments. What the sustained encounter with concrete embodiments of moral beauty achieves is provide focus and substantive content to that inchoate desire. In this regard, art has the advantage over life in at least two ways. It enables me to inhabit the viewpoint of a person in ways normally unavailable to me; I do not observe Dorothea Brooke from the outside but I experience what it is like to be a person with a beauty of spirit as extraordinary as hers. But also, it can (even if it usually, especially in our days, does not) put at my disposal representations of outstanding character that far surpass the embodiments of moral character I am ever likely to meet in real life. This has to do not just with the rarity of real-life exemplars, but with the selectiveness central to the artist’s activity of creative representation, which enables her to present particular things in idealised ways (this was Schopenhauer’s core intuition, and, but for its metaphysics, it is not a new one). We never see Dorothea in the bath or in bed with the flu, or out of temper after a bad night’s sleep; everything we see is significant and ordered to an end.

In this regard, what such narratives accomplish can be compared to the development of what Adam Smith called the standard of “absolute perfection,” which he argued we use in determining the merit of actions or character, including our own, and which he contrasted with the standard that is “commonly attained in the world.” One of the most interesting questions here is the epistemological one: how does the former emerge, if by definition it does not coincide with our general experience? In answering this question Smith evokes a heavily Platonic notion of art as mimesis of a divine archetype. Like artists, we keep on adding brushstrokes, refining the outlines, improving the pigments, “the slow, gradual . . . work of the great demigod within the breast” continuing day by day. Experience may not give us that image in one fell swoop, but it is nevertheless, Smith suggests, through a person’s piecemeal observations of experience—“observations upon the character and conduct both of himself and other people”—that it is formed. Depending on the “delicacy and acuteness” of the person’s sensibility, these piecemeal observations and stroke-by-stroke improvements may eventually build up to an image of absolute perfection whose exquisite beauty inspires the deepest sense of reverence and love.³⁸ The type of fictional representation of character I have considered here can be located against this context, as a contribution to this empirical crucible that will be all the more powerful for having been already shaped by the artist’s reverent and loving moral vision.

What such fictional narratives do, then, is help desires not merely take root but take shape, crystallising our highest standards and ideals. The emphasis on ideals implicit in this view might arouse suspicion from certain quarters. Whether it is good to be nourished on a diet of ideals, and of high ideals, is a question that has been attracting a good deal of debate of late, and much philosophical opinion is currently turned against it.³⁹ This is also one way of asking whether, to the extent that Dorothea Brooke is ultimately, and despite her imperfections, an image of moral greatness rather than mere goodness, company like hers (as against other possible fictional and non-fictional companions’) is one we should seek all things considered. Although my sympathies lie against that opinion, I cannot hope to settle this debate here, and in fact what I *can* say, in the context of my specific thread of inquiry, may seem like a mere restatement of these sympathies.

Because, to return to the main question I have been pursuing, it might be asked again at this juncture whether the kind of refinement of desire I have described as a “less fideistic” account of after-effects gives us enough of what we seek when we seek to establish how a narrative might change us. Does the fact that my desire now has clearer content and greater immediacy still say anything about what I *do* when I close the book and put it aside? We’re back to “real emulation” and “*real* change,” looking for effects that we can touch and taste. We all want these effects, of course, as “desirers to become a different kind of desirer.” Yet leaving such tangible effects to the scientists, why stubbornly discount this refinement and reinforcement of desire as in itself a non-negligible change and achievement? What we desire, and aspire to, is after all constitutive of who we are.⁴⁰ This is one reason, though it would require unpacking, why it seems to me that we could not sever our relationship to surpassing ideals without grave loss. Yet I would also take this one step further, as a response both to the question how such narratives may “really” change us, and why ideals cannot or should not be sidelined—and here is where my response may carry the air of a restatement.

Will Ladislaw, once again, as so often in the novel, helps channel this response at a particular moment in the development of events when he finds himself living in Middlemarch yet banished from Dorothea’s presence. It may seem strange, Eliot writes, but the thought of marrying Dorothea—of finding satisfaction for his passionate devotion in this tangible manner—had no “arresting power” over him. Will, “a creature who cared little for what are called the solid things of life and greatly for its subtler influences,” instead “made a sort of happiness for himself out of his feeling for Dorothea.” For him, “to have within him such a feeling as he had toward Dorothea, was like the inheritance of a fortune,” regardless of what others might say about its “futility.” Eliot’s comment, in a distinct authorial and authoritative voice, is worth noting. “Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion” (386-387).

I mentioned channelling; because it is hard, in reading these lines (as in those other lines I quoted, offered by Dorothea herself), not to instantly relate them to one’s own experience as a reader, to the extent that one has been led to share in Will’s passionate vision of Dorothea’s character. Regardless of what will happen when we finally put the book aside, and even though our admiration incorporates a desire to hold on to this spectacle of moral greatness, what is clear, if we can momentarily bracket that possessive desire, is the value we attach to our experience of that spectacle itself. It has value *as* an experience of value, its value derivative from the greatness of its object. Yet a moment’s reflection, I believe, will also reveal that part (not the whole) of what gives us satisfaction in this experience is the very fact that we are having it at all. What this shows, of course, is that we consider the sensitivity to character—the capacity to register, appreciate, and respond to the best kind of character with appropriate emotion—not merely a *means* to the cultivation of virtuous character but one of its constituents in its own right. It is as Hume said: “The very sensibility to these beauties [of character] . . . is itself a beauty in any character.”⁴¹ This explains why we not only delight in Will’s passionate recognition of Dorothea outstanding character, but indeed consider it the clearest token of the quality of his own. It is probably the case that few of us, the world being as it is, can become great; but a world with few great people would be a significantly poorer place if besides greatness it lacked people capable of appreciating and responding to it—like Will, with a mixture of admiration, reverence, and passionate love. Among the many possible defences of “reverence” as a

virtue, the one that still needs to be more robustly made is one that takes the greatest kind of human excellence as a cardinal domain for its exercise.⁴²

Conclusion

Beginning from a common intuition about the link between admiring excellence and acquiring it, I sought to engage this link by focusing on one rather more basic form of imitation or mimesis to which the admiration of beauty of character naturally drives us, and this is an attempt to descriptively represent it to others. This mimetic project, fundamentally motivated by a desire to convert others to one's reasons, is attended by challenges of different kinds and origins, each of which yields a different type of insight. Reflection on these challenges—which I structured around Eliot's best-loved novel, *Middlemarch*—tells us something important, on the one hand, about the different varieties of character description, and about the nature of this particular yet important strand. The description of character, here, is not a science but an art, one that demotes the standard virtues to the status of merely one, often not maximally expressive, tool among others. On the other hand, for the kind of admiration that may be provoked by exemplars of outstanding moral greatness such as those found in *Middlemarch*, the limitations to which this expressive project is subject may reflect something more fundamental about the nature of the experience. How *do* such encounters—with outstanding moral beauty or spiritual grandeur—change us? How does narrative mimesis become real-life emulation? In answering this question, we need to foreground the role of such encounters in giving focus and content to desire, helping us hone what Adam Smith called our standard of “absolute perfection.” Yet we also need to recognise that the sensitivity to beauty of character is not merely a *means* for the formation of finer character but one of its very constituents.

¹ In recent years Barack Obama has consistently topped Gallup polls asking Americans to name the man most worthy of their admiration. Diana Onu, Thomas Kessler and Joanne R. Smith, “Admiration: A Conceptual Review,” *Emotion Review* 8 (2016), 218.

² A typical way of marking these boundaries involves distinguishing between natural and acquired excellences, as does Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski in *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 35-40. This is most interestingly contrasted with the view expressed by Hume: see *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 3rd ed.), 261-268. The fallibility of admiration—the fact that we can admire the wrong things—raises separate but related questions, which inform Terence H. Irwin's discussion in “The Moral Significance of Admiration: Nil Admirari? Uses and Abuses of Admiration,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 89 (2015), 223-248.

³ Plutarch, *Eight Great Lives*, trans. John Dryden, rev. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 2 (emphasis added).

⁴ See, indicatively, Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, chapters 1 and 5. Compare, again indicatively, from an empirical perspective, the oft-cited study by Sara B. Algoe and Jonathan Haidt: “Witnessing Excellence in Action: The ‘Other-Praising’ Emotions of Elevation, Gratitude, and Admiration,” *Journal of Positive Psychology* 4 (2009), 105-127.

⁵ As Onu et al. observe, most existing studies, remarkably, focus on participants' *intentions* to improve rather than their actual behaviour: “Admiration,” 226-227.

⁶ See the relevant comments in Onu et al, “Admiration,” 227-228. As Kristján Kristjánsson points out, “‘typically’ leaves considerable room for exceptions”: “Emotions Targeting Moral Exemplarity: Making Sense of the Logical Geography of Admiration, Emulation and Elevation,” *Theory and Research in Education* 15 (2017),

25. Onu et al. outline some of the main areas of current disagreement about the emotion, including its action tendency, among empirical psychologists. Another response to this objection might be: it depends what you mean by “unchanged.”

⁷ Kristjánsson, “Emotions Targeting Moral Exemplarity,” 23-24.

⁸ Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 102 (emphasis added), 110. This feature of Kristjánsson’s view pits itself directly against Zagzebski’s foundationalism.

⁹ And not *just* because to name is in itself an exercise of power.

¹⁰ Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 1985), 238, 260, 202.

¹¹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Wordsworth, 2000), 93. All in-text references that follow will be to this edition.

¹² Throughout this essay I speak diffusely of the “beauty” of character because this seems to me the most intuitively appropriate vocabulary for my purpose. Panos Paris provides a more robust defence of the appropriateness of this vocabulary in “The Empirical Case for Moral Beauty,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 2017 (doi: [10.1080/00048402.2017.1411374](https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2017.1411374)) and “On Form, and the Possibility of Moral Beauty,” *Metaphilosophy* (forthcoming).

¹³ A simple illustration of this is in *Middlemarch*, 181, where what Will finds “beautiful” in Dorothea is the look of “anxiety and beseeching” she turns on her husband which expresses her “duteous preoccupation” with him—a look whose meaning Will treasures even as he despises its object.

¹⁴ *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 2nd ed.), 366.

¹⁵ Many of these emotions—particularly admiration, awe, and reverence, and also wonder—have often been seen as forming a continuum, its segments distinguished, *inter alia*, by their emotional valence of pleasant/painful (yes/no) and actuating tendency of approach or retreat, though different theorists would mark the boundaries differently. For one suggestive if discussable schema, see William McDougall, *Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Dover, 2003), 49-50, 110-116.

¹⁶ Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 13, though Rosenblatt’s particular concern seems to be with the motives that might *bring* one to literature rather than those that might be *generated* by it.

¹⁷ This is a central thesis of her *Exemplarist Moral Theory*; see especially, *apropos* the derivation of the virtues, chapter 4.

¹⁸ Dorothea’s disposition to hauteur is a central element (and source of conflict) in her personality; the most striking illustration of its defeat by pity is found in the astonishing scene at 352-53.

¹⁹ Annette C. Baier, “The Contemplation of Character,” *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 191.

²⁰ Joel J. Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13; and for the following point about “genre criticism,” see 106.

²¹ This view is defended by Christine Swanton in *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and nuanced by Daniel C. Russell in *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), chap. 4.

²² Montmarquet, “Ramsify (by All Means)—but Do Not ‘Dumb Down’ the Moral Virtues,” in Mark Alfano, ed., *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 141.

²³ *Enquiries*, 199.

²⁴ This may then entail seeking a more balanced understanding of the relationship between linguistic and psychological space—between the acknowledgement that “character can be *described* in infinitely many ways” and the claim that “the virtues are not ways of speaking about character, but real traits” of which there can be infinitely many, as Russell insists in *Practical Intelligence*, 172.

²⁵ This would be the most obvious way of bridging my account and Kristjánsson’s perspective as outlined earlier. Compare the discussion in Sophia Vasalou, “Educating Virtue as a Mastery of Language,” *Journal of Ethics* 16 (2012), 67-87.

²⁶ In the well-known locution of the *Treatise*: 468-469.

²⁷ *Enquiries*, 216.

²⁸ “Emotions Targeting Moral Exemplarity,” and “Awe: An Aristotelian Analysis of a non-Aristotelian Virtuous Emotion,” *Philosophia* 45 (2017), 125-142.

²⁹ I bracket here the complications introduced by Kristjánsson’s engagement with the specific term injected into the discussion by Haidt, namely “elevation.” Like Kristjánsson, I think “admiration” is perfectly in order for the phenomena for which Haidt reserves his preferred term.

³⁰ “Awe,” 132.

³¹ See, briefly, Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), vol. 2, chap. 37.

³² The consequences of following Kristjánsson’s emotional diagnostic are also not irrelevant here. If the action tendency of wonder has been debated—whether it moves or immobilises (see e.g. Sophia Vasalou, *Wonder: A Grammar* [Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2015])—the understanding of the action tendency of awe has often leaned toward the latter. Martha C. Nussbaum’s view is typical: “In wonder I want to leap or run, in awe to kneel”: *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54.

³³ *The Company We Keep*, 17; cf. the more suggestive formulation of 202 (emphasis added): “it determines *who [the reader] is to be* for the duration of the experience.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

³⁶ Quoted in Jonathan Haidt, “Elevation and the Positive Psychology of Morality,” in Corey L. M. Keyes and Jonathan Haidt, eds., *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 275-276.

³⁷ Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 272.

³⁸ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), 291-292; cf. the earlier remarks at 33.

³⁹ Russell provides an important expression of this opinion in *Practical Intelligence*, chapter 4, esp. 4.3, as does Howard J. Curzer in his “Against Idealization in Virtue Ethics,” in David Carr, James Arthur, and Kristján Kristjánsson, eds., *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). See also the discussion Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, chapter 9.

⁴⁰ Compare Zagzebski’s apt remarks in “The Moral Significance of Admiration,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 89 (2015), 209: “We define ourselves, not just by what we are, but by that to which we aspire. What we hope to be is in a real sense an aspect of what we are.”

⁴¹ *Enquiries*, 209.

⁴² Projects that would provide such a defence with natural starting points include Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Susan Neiman, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), chap. 8.