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TITLE

Be like This.

Norms, Examples, Documents and Indexicals from a Neo-Aristotelian Perspective

ABSTRACT

I propose an account of exemplarity based on the (neo-Aristotelian) ontological distinction between individuals and properties, and on the corresponding semantic distinction between singular terms, which single out individuals, and predicates, which designate properties. I shall focus on indexicals as paradigmatic singular terms. For instance, ‘this man’ is an indexical whereas ‘man’ or ‘red’ are predicates. I shall define an example as an individual used as a constituent of a predicate, as when one says “The color of my car is *like this*” pointing at a particular sample. An example, so understood, is a sort of virtual finger or wand, which turns an individual singled out by an indexical (‘this’) into a predicate (‘like this’). I shall develop this conception of exemplarity in order to account for the normative force of examples. First, I shall characterize a normative claim as a sentence that connects a subject to a predicate through a deontic verb (should, ought, must, can, may...). Then, I shall call ‘normative exemplarity’ the case in which the predicate of a normative claim is an example, as when one says ‘You should behave *like this man*’ pointing at Socrates. Finally, I shall argue that some norms can be enforced within a certain community through normative exemplarity, provided that the relevant features of the exemplar individual (that to whom the indexical refers in the expression ‘like this’) remain accessible to the members of the community. I shall show that, if the exemplar individual does not exist anymore, the community can still keep such norms in force by relying on documents that allow the community’s members to steadily preserve the relevant features of that individual. Ultimately, understanding such processes of generation and preservation of examples can contribute to explain how normative systems emerge from the historical content of the times.

TEXT

“A certain view of the world, as containing objects variously propertied, located in a common space and continuing in their existence independently of our interrupted and relatively fleeting perceptions of them” (P.F. Strawson, *Perception and Its Objects*, § 1)

“The theory of being, the theory of knowledge and the theory of statement are not truly separable; and our duality necessarily appears in all three, under different forms” (P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 47)

This paper proposes an account of exemplarity and of its connections to normativity and documentality. It does so within the theoretical framework developed by Peter Strawson’s in his neo-Aristotelian project of a descriptive metaphysics. In § 1, I shall outline this framework, which aims at providing us with a unitary account of being, knowledge and language. In § 2, I shall build up an account of exemplarity within this framework, by relying on the notion of an indexical. In § 3, I shall connect the issue of exemplarity to that of normativity, thereby introducing the notion of normative exemplarity. Finally, in § 4, I shall highlight the dependence of normative exemplarity on a basic layer of shared memories, recordings and documents, namely, documentality.

1. The neo-Aristotelian project of a descriptive metaphysics, which Peter Strawson developed since his book *Individuals* (1959), is an attempt to discover the structure of the world starting by analyzing the functioning of thought and language. What Strawson calls “the world” is our shared version of the world, that is, what beings like us ordinarily experience as *our* world. From this perspective, Strawson individuates the ordinary use of language as “the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy” (1959, 9). He labels his metaphysics as “descriptive” since he aims to *describe* what the world is for beings provided with perceptual, cognitive and linguistic systems like ours, instead of forcing us to conceive of the world by revising our basic ways of experiencing it.

It is worth noting that Strawson, unlike Dummett (1991), is not arguing that a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, *philosophy*. He

does not try to reduce ontology to semantics. He just argues that semantics is our best *way to philosophy*, thereby leaving room for the possibility that an ontological investigation revises the semantic insights with which it started.

Strawson's main linguistic way to ontology is the subject-predicate structure, that is, a structure constituted by two linguistic expressions (S, P) that introduce two non-linguistic terms (S*, P*) into a sentence (which attributes P* to S*). He observes that in language there are special kinds of non-predicable expressions that normally work only as subjects, not as predicates (cf. 1959, 174). The basic non-predicable expressions are singular terms, which introduce *particulars*, that is, entities that we can localize in the shared unified spatiotemporal framework of our experience: "particulars have their place in the spatio-temporal system, or, if they have no place of their own there, are identified by reference to other particulars which do have such a place" (1959, 233).

The singular terms that usually introduce particulars are indexicals and proper names. Among indexicals, one can distinguish between *pure indexicals*, as for instance 'I', and *demonstratives*, as for instance 'this'. While a pure indexical introduces a particular by relying only on the context in which it is uttered, a demonstrative requires supplementation by something like a gesture (cf. Kaplan 1989). If I say 'I' in a certain context, a listener who is in that context can directly identify me as the relevant particular. By contrast, if I say 'this', a listener can identify the relevant particular only if, in saying 'this', I point at something.

For what concerns proper names, I treat them as terms containing an unnoticed indexical component: a hidden 'this' that, through a causal-historical chain, points to the particular to which the name was originally associated by some baptism (cf. Kripke 1980). Given that demonstratives are a sort of *indexicals*, and given this account of proper names as containing an unnoticed *indexical* component, I will henceforth treat indexicals as the paradigmatic singular terms by means of which we introduce particulars in our sentences.

According to Strawson, the basic particulars are bodies and persons. *Bodies* are "three-dimensional objects with some endurance through time" (1959, 39). *Persons* are special bodies to which we attribute not only spatiotemporal locations (and physical or phenomenal properties), but also experiences and mental states. In Strawson's terms, what is in fact ascribed to persons consists of "actions and intentions (I am doing, did, shall do this); sensations (I am warm, in pain); thoughts and feelings (I think, wonder, want this, am angry, disappointed, contented); perceptions and

memories (I see this, hear the other, remember that)” (1959, 89).

Events in turn are particulars, but they sharply differ from bodies with respect to their identification, that is, the epistemic state whereby a person can single out a particular. A person can wholly identify a body just by experiencing its *spatial parts or properties*, whereas the whole identification of an event also requires the experience of its *temporal parts or properties*. In other words, one can instantaneously experience a body as a whole, whereas the experience of an event as a whole necessarily unfolds in time. For instance, the ontological difference between a particular body like a tiger and a particular event like a flood is that “the flood is not wholly present throughout each moment of its existence – at each moment only a part of the flood is present, not the whole flood – whereas the whole tiger is” (Crane 2001, 36). According to Strawson, events are ontologically less basic than bodies since we can identify whatever body without referring to any event, whereas most events can be identified only by referring to the bodies involved in them. For instance, “a death is necessarily the death of some creature” (1959, 46).

As noted above, all particulars share the feature of being introduced into ordinary subject-predicate sentences by singular terms, that is, expressions that can only be used as subjects, not as predicates. We cannot say ‘*T* is Socrates’ unless *T* is another expression referring to Socrates; yet, in the latter case, we have no longer an ordinary subject-predicate sentence but an identity statement. An expression introducing a particular can contribute, at most, to the constitution of a predicate, but it cannot be a predicate on its own. For example, ‘*T* is older than Socrates’ is an ordinary subject-predicate sentence in which the expression ‘Socrates’ contributes to the constitution of the predicate (i.e. ‘is older than Socrates’) that is attributed to that particular *T*. As we shall see in § 2, the use of singular terms as constituents of predicates plays a crucial role in the functioning of exemplarity.

As particulars are introduced by subjects, which are singular terms, so properties are introduced by predicates, which are generic terms. A predicate introducing a certain property *P* allows us to construct several subject-predicate sentences sharing the form ‘*x* is *P*’, in which the values of the variable *x* introduce different particulars that share the same property (e.g., ‘Socrates is a philosopher,’ ‘Kant is a philosopher,’ ‘Wittgenstein is a philosopher’). Just as, at the linguistic level, predicates *are of* subjects but the latter *are not of* the former, so, at the ontological level, properties *are of* particulars but the latter *are not of* the former.

Strawson conceives of the property as a *universal*, that is, a feature that can be possessed by several particulars thereby functioning as “a principle of collection of like things” (1959, 226). In

the domain of properties, we can distinguish between *monadic* (or intrinsic) properties, which are possessed by a certain entity on its own, and *relational* properties, which are possessed by a certain entity in virtue of its relations to other entities. For example 'being red' is a monadic property while 'being in face of the cathedral' is a relational property.

To sum up, in ordinary subject-predicate sentences, the subject introduces a particular and the predicate introduces a property, that is, a universal. More generally, Strawson calls *individuals* the entities that are introduced by subjects into genuine subject-predicate sentences. He is inclined to treat individuals as the entities that primarily exist in our world, since he considers the linguistic functioning of subjects as a clue of the existence of what they introduce. The subject is, indeed, a linguistic expression that has a certain degree of completeness. By introducing a term, the subject implicitly suggests or presupposes the existence of such a term. By contrast, the predicate introduces a term without suggesting or presupposing any existence at all. For example, in the sentence 'The Sun is yellow,' the subject 'The Sun' suggests that there is something identifiable as the Sun regardless of the following predicate, whilst the predicate 'is yellow' does not suggest any existence unless it is paired with a subject. The subject commits itself to the existence of a certain entity, whilst the predicate commits itself to existence only if it specifies a feature of an entity whose existence has already been suggested by a subject. From this perspective, the subject has a semantic privilege, which Strawson traces back to an ontological privilege of what the subject introduces into a proposition, namely an *individual*.

Since particulars, in virtue of their being introduced by subjects, play a key role in our subject-predicate sentences, they can be treated as the basic individuals of our world. Yet, in our language, also expressions introducing universals can play the subject role. For example, we can say "red is my favorite color", and we can even use the derived word "redness" so as to emphasize the fact that an expression introducing a property can play the subject role. Thus, universals seem to be in turn individuals, to the extent that they are introduced by expressions that can play the subject role in a subject-predicate proposition.

Still, Strawson doubts that universals are genuine individuals. Although the use of language is our best way to ontology, some linguistic expression can be ontologically misleading. Indeed, individuals are not only introduced by subjects, but also introduced within sentences *that cannot be satisfactorily paraphrased into sentences about particulars*. For example the putative individual introduced by the expression 'anger' does not seem to be a genuine individual, since a sentence that

has ‘anger’ as subject can normally be satisfactorily paraphrased. As Strawson puts it: “the paraphrase of, say, ‘Anger impairs the judgment’ into ‘People are generally less capable of arriving at sound judgments when they are angry than when they are not’ seems natural and satisfying” (1959, 231).

In this sense, Strawson’s distinction between individuals and universals can ultimately be related to the Aristotelian distinction between substances and attributes (cf. Wiggins 2001). What primarily exists in our shared world are *individuals* such as particular objects or persons or events. *Properties*, as universals, are just features of individuals. From this perspective, *facts* or *states* are to be understood as nothing but connections between individuals and their properties (cf. Crane 2001, 39). For instance, this flower is an individual, yellowness is a property, and that this flower is yellow is a fact.

The basic distinction between *individuals* and *properties* at the level of being corresponds to the distinction between *singular terms* and *predicates* at the level of language, and to that between *singular thoughts* (or “mental files”, cf. Recanati 2012) and *concepts* at the level of knowledge. In sum, at the level of being, there are *individuals* having *properties* (and this constitutes *facts* or *states*); at the level of knowledge, we single out individuals through *singular thoughts* and we ascribe properties to them by associating singular thoughts to *concepts* (and this constitutes *propositions*); at the level of language, we express the association of singular thoughts to concepts through the association of *singular terms* to *predicates* (and this constitutes *sentences* or *statements*).

2. Proper names such as ‘Socrates’ or ‘Pericles’ and indexicals such as ‘I’ or ‘this’ are paradigmatic cases of singular terms, whereas adjectives such as ‘red’ or ‘human’ are paradigmatic cases of predicates. However, some predicates are special in that they do not correspond to a specific word such as ‘red’ or ‘human’. Instead, such special predicates consist in the combination of a singular term, typically an indexical, with the *magic* preposition ‘like’. I metaphorically characterize ‘like’ as *magic* since it is a sort of virtual finger or wand, which points at an individual singled out by an indexical (‘this’) turning it into a predicate (‘like this’). I argue that this is what an example is: an individual *magically* metamorphosed into a predicate. Note that there is a double *magic* at play in such a metamorphosis. First, something at the level of being, namely an individual, is turned into something at the level of language. Second, the

individual is not turned into its corresponding element at the level of language, namely a singular term; instead, it is turned into a predicate, which has the individual as its constituent. In sum, the predicate introduces a feature by relying on an individual that possesses this very feature.

Jane Heal (1997, 619) calls such predicates “indexical predicates” and she argues that they allow us to discover and appreciate the richness and subtlety of the world, and its variety of aspects and features, in a manner that is precluded to thought that only resorts to non-indexical predicates. She states that “thought without indexical predicational content lacks something central to human thought, namely the sense of ourselves not only as placed in an extended spatio-temporal world but also as placed in a world containing an immense range of aspects, features and kinds, on which our present grasp is partial and incomplete” (1997, 638).

The point is that our present grasp on the variety of features of our world is partial and incomplete inasmuch as we only use the concepts directly expressed by the words of our language. Yet, indexical predicates allow us to somehow overcome such limits of our language, thereby arguably overcoming Wittgenstein’s famous claim that “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (1922, 5.6).

Here is the core of exemplarity: turning individuals into indexical predicates. Remember that, in the Strawsonian framework outlined in § 1, individuals are not only bodies and persons but also events and actions. The latter can be understood as events that are up to persons: events that reveal themselves to be “intentional under some description” (cf. Anscombe 1957 and Davidson 1980). Thus, one can construct indexical predicates by pointing at particular actions thereby expressing “ways of engaging in actions” (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 427).

In sum, there is a variety of individuals that can be turned into indexical predicates through the ‘like this’ formula, namely, the magic wand of exemplarity. Still, this magic wand is not as simple to use as it might seem at a first sight. One points at a certain individual saying ‘like this’. Is this sufficient to construct an indexical predicate? Unfortunately, it is not. ‘Like this’ might mean ‘like the color of this’ or ‘like the elegance of this’ or ‘like the courage of this’ and so on and so forth.

Here, we face a problem analogous to what Devitt (1981) calls “qua problem”. According to Devitt, to fix the reference of an indexical term (e.g. ‘this’) requires knowing *what sort of*

individual we are pointing at (see also Wiggins 2001, 126). Likewise, to fix the meaning of an indexical predicate (e.g. ‘like this’) requires knowing *what sort* of property we are considering.

That being the case, examples are not completely independent of concepts. For instance, we need the concept ‘color’ in order to use a certain individual, say, a certain flower, as an example of a certain shade of color, namely as a sample (cf. Goodman 1968, 52-56 and McDowell 1994, 57). In order to properly construct an indexical predicate, it is not sufficient to say ‘like this’ while pointing at a certain particular. In the case we are considering, for instance, one should say ‘like this color’.

Still, in spite of its dependence on a certain concept, an example can help us to refine this concept to a degree of subtlety that the concept alone could not reach. Furthermore, one might try to overcome the dependence of examples on concepts by relying on series of examples and contextual factors. For instance, if a speaker points to a series of different things having the same color and says ‘like this’ each time, a rational listener could infer that the speaker means ‘like this color’ in spite of the fact that the speaker does not make an explicit use of the concept of color. Thus, a series of examples, unlike a single example, seems to be capable of functioning independently of concepts and even leading us to grasp the corresponding concept. However, for the sake of simplicity, in what follows I will focus on single examples rather than on series of them.

In the first instance, an example can function as a helpful device of semantic parsimony. Instead of saying ‘A triangle is a shape with three straight sides and three angles’, one can say ‘A triangle is a shape like this’ pointing at a particular triangular shape. In this case, one can choose whether to resort to an example (i.e. a ‘like this’ structure) or to a description (i.e. a combination of concepts).

Furthermore, there are cases in which starting from an example leads us to formulate the proper description. For instance, one can start by saying ‘gold is like this’ pointing at a certain piece of matter and thereby pursuing her research on the stuff *like this*, up to the discovery that gold is the chemical element having 79 as its atomic number. In such cases, the example is a heuristic means to the end of discovering the proper description. As Heal puts it, “if we lacked capacity for and willingness to use indexical predications we would be incapable of open minded revisions and extensions of our repertoire of predicational notions. Moreover we would be incapable of the initial identifications (‘being magnetic is this property’) which enable us to

do the experiments and observations in the light of which we build and improve our nonindexical grip” (1997, 638).

Still, there are cases in which the example is something more than a mere device of semantic parsimony or a mere heuristic means to the end of discovering the proper description. In such cases, one cannot choose between the example and the description, or give up the example when one has achieved the proper description. Indeed, in such cases, there is no description that can reach the degree of subtlety provided by the example, which reveals itself to be *essential* to our capacity to entertain and express a certain thought.

As argued above, examples rest upon indexicals, and, in fact, a similar phenomenon also occurs in the case of indexicals. John Perry (1979) has highlighted the latter phenomenon criticizing the claim that indexicals are nothing but convenient (though dispensable) linguistic devices for picking out items for which we accidentally lack context-independent expressions. He considers cases in which substituting an indexical in a sentence changes the thought expressed even if the item picked out remains the same. Noticing a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor and thinking ‘a shopper is making a mess’ is not the same as acknowledging that *I* am that shopper and thinking ‘*I* am making a mess’. Perry (1979, 3) calls this phenomenon “essential indexical” and uses it to show that indexicals play an essential role in thought and language.

In the wake of Perry, I call *essential example* the case in which an example plays an essential role in thought and language. I argue that an essential example does so by providing us with an indexical predicate that one could not replace with a concept (or with a description understood as a combination of concepts).

If one asks me how a certain kind of wine tastes, I can either try to describe the taste by resorting to a description or bring her a glass of wine saying ‘it tastes like this’. The latter option is not equivalent to the former inasmuch as its degree of subtlety cannot be reached by composing concepts into a description. Here, the ‘like this’ formula provides us with an essential example.

Secondary properties such as tastes, smells, sounds or colors (cf. Jackson 1982) supply interesting cases of essential examples. Yet, the domain of application of essential examples is much wider than that. Aesthetic properties such as ‘vividness’, ‘delicateness’, ‘triteness’, ‘dumpiness’ (cf. Sibley 1959) often require essential examples. For instance, it is hard to

express what a certain delicateness amounts to by only resorting to concepts and descriptions. In order to properly grasp a certain delicateness, we should point at a certain object that instantiates such a delicateness and say ‘the delicateness I mean is like this’. Indeed, the very concept of delicateness seems to be something that one does not normally acquire just by learning its definition. Rather, one acquires it by considering a series of examples.

A similar discourse can be made for what concerns moral properties such as ‘virtuous’, ‘brave’, ‘vicious’, ‘coward’. In Plato’s dialogues, Socrates often criticizes his partners when they try to build a definition by means of an example. For instance, he criticizes Lachetes who tries to define courage by considering the example of a brave soldier (see *Lachetes*, 190b). Yet, especially in the so-called Socratic dialogues (i.e. those written by Plato during his youth), such a sharp refusal of examples often ends up in “aporethic” conclusions: ultimately, the definition of the value which the debate has been about cannot be found. This suggests that maybe examples are not as unhelpful as Socrates states. When a definition cannot be found, an example can provide us with a good surrogate (arguably, the *best* surrogate) for the missing definition. This is what essential examples do.

If this is right, examples can play an important role in our relation to aesthetic and moral properties. In this sense, examples can contribute to normativity, inasmuch as aesthetic and moral properties are normative properties, namely *values*, which provide us with criteria of evaluation. For instance, grasping the concept ‘delicate’ provide us with a criterion that allows us to establish whether something is delicate or not, that is, to *evaluate* something with respect to its delicateness. Likewise, grasping the concept ‘courage provide us with a criterion that allows us to establish whether somebody is brave or not, that is, to *evaluate* something with respect to its courage.

This leads us to consider an *indirect* way in which exemplarity can be related to normativity: essential examples allow us to grasp aesthetics or moral concepts that can lead us to formulate normative statements. Yet, there is also a way of *directly* relating normativity and exemplarity. Examples can enter in normative statements not only *indirectly*, by means of aesthetic or moral predicates, but also *directly*, that is, as genuine constituents of such statements. This I what I call *normative exemplarity*, which shall be the topic of the next section.

3. Normative exemplarity occurs when the predicate provided by exemplarity through the ‘like this’ formula is directly used into a normative statement, that is, a statement containing verbs such as ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘can’, ‘may’ or imperatives. Here are some instances of normative exemplarity: ‘You should behave like this’, ‘One ought to act like this’, ‘Be like this’.

In so characterizing normative exemplarity, I presuppose that the normative attitudes that verbs like ‘ought’ or ‘can’ express are a basic endowment of human beings – they are part of the *sensus communis* of human beings, to anticipate a notion that I will introduce below. This presupposition abruptly solves the classic Humean-Moorean is/ought problem by stating that the *ought* is a constitutive component of our *is*. Arguing for this point is far beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I limit myself to assume this as a working hypothesis. However, I want to point out that I am happy with this hypothesis, inasmuch as it fits well with the idea that human beings share a basic set of emotions, which can function as shared *evaluative* devices supporting the use of verbs like ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘can’, ‘may’ or imperatives. In his essay *Freedom and Resentment*, Strawson (1962) prefigures this point by arguing that our sense of freedom rests upon basic emotions such as resentment, guilt, indignation. Likewise, I contend, the sense of right and duty that we express through verbs like ‘ought’ or ‘can’ rests upon such basic emotions.

Normative exemplarity, so understood, is an informal sort of normativity, which is as widespread in the human culture as – I guess – underestimated in philosophical reflections. First of all, normative exemplarity plays an important role in education and socialization by triggering processes of imitation (cf. Tarde 1890, Piaget 1945, Girard 1961). Aristotle himself, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, conceives of moral education as a matter of acquiring the proper dispositions and habits through imitation of the proper examples, rather than as the intellectual grasping of ideal values. In this sense, normative exemplarity provides us with a link between Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s metaphysics and Aristotle’s attempt to build up an alternative to a Platonist ethics. From an Aristotelian perspective, virtue is no longer an abstract form to be grasped intellectually, but rather a way of behaving ‘like this’ (pointing at the relevant actions and people).

Still, at this point, a Platonist might raise a worry of circularity about this formulation of the Aristotelian conception. If being *virtuous* is acting ‘like this’ (pointing at *virtuous* actions and people), then normative exemplarity requires a preliminary grasping of the value of virtue

in order to select the proper examples. Therefore, an Aristotelian example-based ethics would reveal itself to rest upon a Platonic form-based or value-based ethics. This is what one might call *the hard problem of exemplarity*: how can examples ground values if examples require values themselves for their functioning?

As suggested, in a Kantian vein, by Alessandro Ferrara (2008, 24), we need something like a *sensum communis* for this purpose, that is, something “that all human beings share” – or, in Strawson’s terms (1962, 25), “the general structure or web of human attitudes and feelings”. Without something like a *sensus communis*, an example-based ethics would fall prey of some sort of conventionalism or relativism or utilitarianism, according to which the exemplary individuals are chosen by convention (conventionalism), or relatively to the peculiarities of a certain community (relativism), or in order to achieve some practical benefit (utilitarianism).

Ferrara traces back such a *sensum communis* to a feeling of the promotion of life, a sense of flourishing of a human life. I am quite sympathetic with this point (especially in connection to what I have said above about emotions), but here I do not need to commit myself to this. I limit myself to assume that such a *sensus communis*, whatever its nature, allows us to select the proper individuals in order to turn them into examples, thereby constituting moral and aesthetic values through normative exemplarity. Instead of preliminarily grasping and sharing an entire system of values, as a Platonist account would require, we just share, so to say, a sort of moral and aesthetic nose, namely the *sensus communis*, which allows us to select the proper examples by means of which we can constitute our moral and aesthetic values.

If all of this is right, normative exemplarity helps us to explain why works of art, pictures and narratives (both historical and fictional) are so important for the functioning of a society. The reason is the extraordinary capacity of such works to produce normative exemplarity (cf. Freedberg 1989, Nussbaum 1990, Engel 2016). This also sheds some light on why such works play an important role in Aristotle’s conception, which exploits exemplarity as a source for ethics. Conversely, works of art, pictures and narratives are strongly criticized by Plato, who overtly distrusts exemplarity in defending his view of values as eternal forms.

Still, Plato’s criticism of examples, especially those provided by works of art, pictures and narratives, is not completely misplaced. Indeed, normative exemplarity can play a key role not only in education, but also in advertising and propaganda. The latter forms of communication apparently supply us with descriptive statements (e.g. ‘this is such and such’) while covertly

making normative statements (e.g. ‘you should be like this’). In such cases, the potential for a surreptitious persuasion lies in the fact that normative exemplarity does as if it was making a descriptive statement while in fact it is making a normative claim. Thus, in such cases, normative exemplarity functions as undercover normativity, normativity with the semblance of description, normativity in descriptive disguise. In this sense, normative exemplarity can be a dangerous social device, inasmuch as it can contribute to spread normative claims without a corresponding awareness of the normativity of such claims on the part of their recipients.

On the one hand, normative exemplarity, both in its virtuous and its vicious applications, reveals itself to be to be a key component of an *informal normativity*, which, in the functioning of human culture, plays a complementary role with respect to the *formal normativity* provided by the explicit rules and laws that constitute legal systems. On the other hand, legal systems themselves can resort to normative exemplarity, for instance when they treat some legal judgments as exemplary cases, namely precedents, to which future judgments shall make reference (cf. Lowrie and Lüdemann 2015). In such cases, a legal system incorporates normative exemplarity by committing judges to a claim that states ‘you should judge like this’ (pointing at a past legal judgment), instead of stating ‘you should judge according to a given set of principles’ as laws usually do.

Still, in order to effectively claim ‘you should judge like this’, one might have a way to point at the relevant ‘this’. That is to say that normative exemplarity requires the epistemic accessibility of the particular object (the ‘this’) which the formula ‘like this’ exploits. In the case of legal systems, this object is a past legal judgment, which is normally accessibly through documents. Yet, the epistemic accessibility of the ‘this’ is a requirement not only for normative exemplarity within a legal system, but for normative exemplarity in its generality. That is why the issue of normative exemplarity is strictly connected to that of documentality, as I shall argue in the next section.

4. So far, I have characterized exemplarity as the capacity to turn a particular into a predicate through the ‘like this’ formula, and normative exemplarity as the combination of exemplarity with normative expressions as for instance imperatives: ‘act like this’, ‘behave like this’, ‘be like this’. Still, all of this can function only if the ‘this’, the exemplary individual, is accessible to us. More specifically, a norm expressed through an example requires some sort of

acquaintance between the exemplary individual and the members of the community in which that norm is aimed to be in force.

The point is that the relevant examples here at play are those that I have dubbed ‘essential examples’, that is, examples that cannot be replaced by some description or combination of concepts. That is why, for what concerns essential examples, a proper epistemic relation to an example requires some acquaintance relation to the individual (the ‘this’) on which that example relies through the formula ‘like this’.

This issue can be easily addressed if the individual that is relevant for exemplarity is an object with which we can easily be acquainted in many different contexts. Consider the indexical predicate ‘majestic like this’ (pointing at the Sun). Since the Sun is something that we can easily perceive in many different occasions, the functioning of this predicate does not seem to be threatened by a permanent lack of acquaintance with the relevant individual. Yet, most individuals that are relevant for normative exemplarity are not long-lasting entities such as the Sun, but rather transient entities such as human actions and lives.

This leads us to highlight another dimension of dependence that characterizes exemplarity. On the one hand, in § 2 and § 3, I have focused on the dependence of exemplarity on the concept to be exemplified, or at least on some sort of *sensus communis* that allows us to select the relevant individuals that instantiate the features to be exemplified. On the other hand, in this section, I shall focus on the dependence of exemplarity on the very individual that plays the role of the example (the ‘this’) in the ‘like this’ formula. We can conceive of such dependence in two different ways, namely, a strong or *existential* way, and a weak or *documental* way.

In the former way, the example (just as the norm that relies on it) remains valid only if the relevant individual keeps existing. In short, the ‘like this’ formula can function only if the ‘this’ *exists*. That is why I call it *existential* dependence. Yet, I argue, this is a too strong requirement for exemplarity, whose role in our social and cultural life would be much littler than it actually is if the validity of an example would disappear when the exemplary individual goes out of existence. Indeed, in our social and cultural practices, we rely on many examples in spite of the fact that the exemplary individuals are no longer there (or, even, have never been there, as in the case of fictional characters).

This suggests that the right dependence between an example and the corresponding exemplary individual is not existential dependence but rather *documental* dependence. The latter involves that an example can survive in spite of the disappearance of the exemplary individual provided that there is some *document* that preserves the features of this individual that are relevant for the functioning of the example. In the wake of Maurizio Ferraris' (2012) documentality theory, by 'document' here I mean traces, inscriptions, pictures, recordings, and even the psychological memories that can be socially shared and preserved within a certain community. Given a certain exemplary individual, what matters for normative exemplarity is the capacity of a certain document to preserve the relevant features that warrant the functioning of this individual as an example. In other words, what matters is the capacity of a document to allow us to meaningfully say 'like this' pointing at the relevant individual, in spite of the fact that that individual no longer exists. Historical narratives, portraits, statues – and then also sounds recordings, photographs, films – are all documents that can play (and have actually played and keep on playing) a key role in the preservation of examples in spite of the disappearance of the relevant exemplary individuals.

This involves an important difference between formal normativity, which is based on laws, and informal normativity, which is based on examples (see § 3 above). The former is much easier to be preserved and handed down than the latter since laws are much easier to preserve and handed down than the relevant features of exemplary individuals. Surely, also laws usually require documents for their preservation, but in this case the document is nothing but the transcription of the law itself; the document, so to say, inherits the formal character from the law that is to be documented.

By contrast, for what concerns informal normativity, the document is much more than a mere transcription of the norm. The norm just says something such as 'act like this', but the document is not a mere inscription saying 'act like this'. Rather, the document embodies the 'this' that warrants the functioning of the 'like this' formula on which normative exemplarity rests upon. Thus, in order to preserve normative exemplarity, we need to take care of the documents that embody exemplary individuals. In this sense, normative exemplarity allows us to highlight the (often unnoticed and yet crucial) link between the normative asset of a certain society and the cultural heritage that this society inherits from its history.

At the end of the day, we can go back to our Strawsonian (Neo-Aristotelian) image of the world with the aim of summarizing how normative exemplarity can enrich it. Strawson's world is a world made of particular individuals. Among such individuals, there are persons, who are capable of thought and language, whereby one can single out other individuals by means of singular terms, thereby ascribing properties to them by means of predicates. That is Strawson's picture. My attempt to enrich this picture consists in highlighting a special class of predicates, which are introduced by saying 'like this' while pointing at a certain individual. First, such predicates allow us to better recognize and appreciate the variety of properties of the individuals that inhabit our world. Furthermore, such predicates bear upon our social life inasmuch as they enable norms that exploit the 'like this' formula pointing at the particular actions or lives of other individuals. That is what I have called normative exemplarity. I have also argued that, from a historical perspective, the proper functioning of normative exemplarity requires another class of individuals, namely documents, which preserve the relevant features of the exemplary individuals (and therefore the functioning of the 'like this' formula) in spite of the fact that the latter no longer exist. With the help of documentality, normative exemplarity anchors the norms that underlie our social life in the variety of individuals that inhabit our natural world.

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