

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

2014

Divine Motivation Theory: Psychology in the Guise of Ethics

Kayla Emerson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Emerson, Kayla, "Divine Motivation Theory: Psychology in the Guise of Ethics" (2014). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

Divine Motivation Theory: Psychology in the Guise of Ethics

Kayla Emerson

Advisor: Dr. John Capps

Abstract

Linda Zagzebski has recently proposed an ethical theory, based in virtue ethics, that builds in an essential role for God as an exemplar and thus the source of moral motivation. In this thesis, I examine Zagzebski's Divine Motivation theory and argue that it fails to adequately meet the criteria for an ethical theory. I sketch out an alternative that leaves an essential role for God while avoiding the pitfalls of Zagzebski's theory.

I. Introduction

Some ethical theories, particularly modern ones, have been constructed in order to stand independently, without the need for a God. Difficulties such as moral relativism and lack of motivation to act morally arise with such a separation of God and ethics, but many philosophers would rather wrestle with these issues than tie religion closely to morality. Divine Command theory (DC) is an exception, because it is an ethical theory that derives from an omnipotent God, and is meaningless without God. However, DC has some gaping holes revealed by the Euthyphro dilemma. An alternative ethical theory that needs God at its foundation would enhance the discussion.

This thesis will examine Linda Zagzebski's recent combination of virtue ethics and theology into her own ethical theory: Divine Motivation theory (DM). Zagzebski's goal in crafting DM was first to create a secular virtue ethics based on the human desire to imitate. She then works out what such a framework would be like if the Christian God were the one to be imitated. She argues that DM accounts for human moral behavior and also accurately describes

the relationship between God and his creation. DM is a unique solution to an old problem. Zagzebski's approach is compelling in that it neatly sidesteps the Euthyphro dilemma as well as the problem of evil. It is a versatile ethical theory that is not necessarily grounded in religious dogma, yet it can easily be applied to any religion.

However, DM is not a perfect solution. It makes many descriptive claims, but is not prescriptive, and therefore does not seem to fit the criterion of an ethical theory at all. Even granting its status as an ethical theory, it is difficult to see how value judgments can be made, including judgments as to who is a good person and what is a good action. These problems arise as Zagzebski makes assumptions about emotions that seem to contradict reality.

Despite its shortcomings, DM does exactly what Zagzebski intended it to do: create a real-world, virtue-based ethical theory that brings God and religion back into the discussion. This is an important task, and I contribute my own ideas towards that goal. Moral decision-making can be narrowed down to one prescription: love. Understanding this, I begin to outline a new theistically based ethical theory.

II. Building the Divine Motivation Theory

Resistance to theistically based moral theories

Most contemporary philosophers do not build God into the foundation of their ethical theory, despite the compelling reasons outlined later. The most obvious reason for this would be the fact that the average modern philosopher does not believe in God.¹ Zagzebski also claimed that:

[Another] reason for resistance to the idea that morality needs religion is political. We live in a world of many religions, so if morality depends on religion, on which religion

¹ A 2013 survey of professional philosophers indicates that 72.8% are atheists.

does it depend?...In a liberal, pluralistic society religion is a matter of choice; a large area of morality is not.²

The Euthyphro dilemma pinpoints tension within ethical theories that take omnipotent gods as their basis, further undermining support for theistically based ethical theories. The dilemma asks whether God or the good is metaphysically prior. Proposing an ethical theory without God declaring things good is an attractive alternative to puzzling over the dilemma.

Zagzebski takes a familiar approach to easing the resistance to a theistically based ethical theory: “This problem would be solved if morality has a two-tier grounding—one in God, the other in nature. That is the approach of the historically important theory of Natural Law.”³ Zagzebski by no means advocates for Natural Law, calling it “fundamentally an ethic of obligation,” in her book, whereas she is after “an ethic of the good.”⁴

Why propose a theistically based ethical theory?

Given that theistic ethical theories are not widely discussed, a natural question is why one would propose and defend a theistic ethical theory—one that gives a significant role to God or religion—in the first place. Zagzebski addresses this concern in various places. For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, she writes that: “Morality needs religion. And one respect in which it is said that morality needs religion is that the goal of the moral life is unreachable without religious practice.”⁵

Presumably Zagzebski is referring to specifically religious activities that make living a moral life forefront in the mind, or provide accountability: for Catholics, this might mean going to confession; for Muslims, this might mean fasting during Ramadan. Religious practices such as these, it can be argued, facilitate a moral life. In a similar vein, she also notes that “some

² Linda Zagzebski, “Chapter 14: Morality & Religion,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. William J. Wainwright, Oxford University Press, 2005. Pages 345-6.

³ Linda Zagzebski, “Chapter 14: Morality & Religion,” *Oxford Handbook*. Page 346.

⁴ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page xii.

⁵ Linda Zagzebski, “Chapter 14: Morality & Religion,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. William J. Wainwright, Oxford University Press, 2005. Page 344.

religious philosophers maintain that morality needs religion in at least two other respects: (1) to provide moral motivation, and (2) to provide morality with its foundation and justification.”⁶ From this perspective, a secular ethical theory lacks the motivational power of a theistic approach. This, of course, is an empirical claim—but one with quite a lot of empirical support in its favor. Also telling is the second claim: that morality requires religion for “its foundation and justification.” Here the thought is that secular ethical theories have traditionally had trouble defending, in a non-circular fashion, their most fundamental commitments and imperatives. As a result, secular ethical theory has been haunted by relativism and subjectivism. In other words, the normative aspirations of an ethical theory have been difficult to achieve within philosophical frameworks that aspire to be scientifically and naturalistically respectable. Or, as Zagzebski writes: “One important set of arguments that morality needs religion or that moral theory needs theology holds that there is a goal or point to morality, and that point is inexplicable within a naturalistic, autonomous moral theory.”⁷

Beyond these specific points, however, there’s a more general consideration. Given the diversity already present in contemporary ethical theory, and given the ever-present challenge of relativism and subjectivism, it is in our interest to explore all the options, including theistic options. Ethical theories—including consequentialist, deontological, and virtue theories—all come with costs and benefits well known to their detractors and defenders. In this context it makes good sense to re-examine theistic theories as well.

Divine Command Theory

The best-known theistic ethical theory is most likely Divine Command theory (DC), or the view that what God wills defines what is morally good. Perhaps the most famous objection to this theory was raised by Plato in *The Euthyphro*: there is no compelling reason to define moral goodness in terms of God’s will instead of defining God’s will in terms of goodness.

⁶ Ibid. Pages 344-5.

⁷ Ibid. Page 349.

There have been many clever proposals for how to overcome the Euthyphro dilemma, but DC has never been able to step out of the shadow of the dilemma. Much ink has been spilled over the issue, and still DC is no better off. Thus I will follow Zagzebski in largely bracketing DC and exploring alternative theistic foundations for ethical theories.

Zagzebski's move towards virtue ethics

Early in *Divine Motivation Theory* Zagzebski highlights three “puzzles” she wishes her theory to solve. The first puzzle, which she credits to Hume, is that “No representational state [has] the capacity to motivate.”⁸ She largely dismisses this problem—and the skepticism it entails—concluding that the view is “less plausible than what it forces us to give up.”⁹ The second puzzle is about the source of value, and whether value exists outside the human mind. Here she expresses a preference for “a theory that is genuinely distinct from both realism and antirealism.”¹⁰ Her third puzzle is the problem of evil. She places the burden on her theory that it must naturally lead to the conclusion that a perfectly good, omnipotent God would allow evil to exist. She later (in Chapters 7 and 8) tests her theory against these puzzles.

Zagzebski evidently believes that some kind of virtue ethic has the best chance of resolving these puzzles. Building on arguments made by Gary Watson, Zagzebski aims to develop an “interestingly different” virtue ethics that takes virtue as “intrinsically good and explanatorily basic.”¹¹ Initially this is a “Motivation-Based Virtue theory” because having virtuous motivations plays a fundamental role. When Zagzebski subsequently unpacks virtuous motivations in terms of the emotions had by exemplary people, her theory emerges as a full-fledged “Exemplarist Virtue Theory” (EV).

Exemplarist Virtue Theory

⁸ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 8.

⁹ Ibid. Page 10.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 15.

¹¹ Ibid. Page 39.

In her 2010 article “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” Zagzebski describes the advantages of EV:

Exemplarist virtue theory has the theoretical simplicity and power of foundationalism without the problems of a conceptual foundation...Exemplarism puts at the foundation of the theory a crucial element of moral practice and, indeed, of moral experience: the identification of persons we admire and whose admirability is something of which we are confident.¹²

Here is a brief description of how her approach compares with other ethical theories. To begin with, we can categorize different ethical theories in terms of the imperatives they make. A consequentialist ethical theory, for example, can be viewed as requiring us to follow some version of the utilitarian maxim: e.g., act so as to maximize the benefit to the greatest number of people. Likewise, a deontological ethical theory can be viewed as requiring us to follow some version of the categorical imperative: e.g., act in a way that can be universalized. Finally, a virtue ethics recommends that we act as a virtuous person would — raising the obvious question of what makes a person virtuous.

Zagzebski’s answer to this question is that a virtuous person has the right *emotions* in a particular situation, emotions that give rise to appropriate motivations. When we try to act as a virtuous person would, this means that we aim to have the same emotional reaction that they would have; becoming a virtuous person, in other words, is a process of training oneself to respond emotionally in a certain way. Zagzebski dubs her theory an *exemplarist* virtue theory because of the importance of moral exemplars. We aim to imitate not some abstract virtuous person, but some *particular* person: our exemplar.

To illustrate Zagzebski’s point, consider how we often teach children to act morally. We may, certainly, encourage them to consider the consequences of their actions, or to think through some version of the Golden Rule. But we may also, and perhaps more effectively, encourage

¹² Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 56.

them to act like certain well-known exemplars: to be honest like George Washington, to be selfless like Mother Teresa, to be brave like Joan of Arc. Zagzebski believes that since “exemplarism gives an important place to narrative ethics within the structure of the theory,” it has an advantage over other ethical theories.¹³ More generally, we view morality as more than a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis or a logical exercise in applying the categorical imperative. We also expect moral people to have moral emotions: to be outraged by injustice and appreciative of virtue.

Given well-known problems with other ethical theories, and combined with the initial plausibility of her approach, an exemplarist virtue theory certainly deserves further examination.

The move from Exemplarist Virtue Theory to Divine Motivation Theory

Zagzebski formulated EV as the secular groundwork for Divine Motivation theory (DM). She believes that previous attempts to connect God to morality have failed, because morality is always seen as law—either a law that comes from God’s will (voluntarism), or a law that is above even God (intellectualism). Zagzebski states that in her alternative, DM, “God is essential to morality, not because it comes from either his intellect or his will, but because it comes from his motives.”¹⁴ She then claims that “the ultimate paradigm of goodness and the source of value is God.”¹⁵ Therefore, God is the perfect exemplar that should be imitated.

III. Shortcomings of Exemplarist Virtue Theory

DM does not meet the conditions for an ethical theory

¹³ Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 56.

¹⁴ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Page 185.

Zagzebski claims to present a “radical kind of virtue theory.”¹⁶ However, her definition of an ethical theory differs dramatically from the traditional definition (I look at James Rachels’ definition below). Indeed, what Zagzebski calls moral theory is nothing more than an account of human decision-making. DM is an account of human behavior, one that has emotion at its foundation. The usual definition of moral theory is that of a theory that somehow explicates what is right and wrong. DM does not follow this prescription, and therefore is not an ethical theory. Since it is rather an explanation of human decision-making, DM falls under the realm of psychology or anthropology, and not philosophy.

Zagzebski’s conditions for an ethical theory

In her article “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” Zagzebski lists her conditions for an ethical theory: “I think of a moral theory as an abstract structure that aims to simplify, systematize, and justify our moral beliefs and practices.”¹⁷ She claims it is analogous to a simplified map of the enormous domain of morality. While this map is not powerful enough to dictate right and wrong, Zagzebski still gives a few powers to the moral theory: “One of the purposes of the theory is to justify the practices,” since she claims that moral practices pre-date the theory.¹⁸ But one practice might not fit in with other practices, so you might have to change that practice based on the theory. Essentially, it sets up a constant tension between theory and practice.

As a response to this objection, Zagzebski points out that “the issue of the relative priority of theoretical judgments and particular moral judgments is a widely discussed matter in meta-ethics.”¹⁹ Granting that, we are still left with the question as to whether or not DM is truly an ethical theory, as ethical theories are traditionally defined.

DM fits her conditions

¹⁶ Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 41.

¹⁷ Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 42.

¹⁸ Ibid. Page 44.

¹⁹ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 40.

In DM, morality is rooted in emotion. Certain emotions are motive, and motivations that lead to good actions in turn lead to good outcomes. What makes for a good outcome is determined by what actions could be expected from one's moral exemplar. These exemplars, defined by direct reference, are nothing more than the people (or gods) that others naturally, instinctively emulate. There is no ethical theory required to move from moral exemplars to good outcomes, just a theory of human behavior and our natural inclination for imitation.

The only place, then, where an ethical theory could be found in this case would be the foundation of the theory (what everything else in the theory is defined in terms of): motive emotions. By saying that emotions are primary, Zagzebski is denying previous moral theories that claim that either other virtues are primary, or right acts are primary, or "The Good" is primary.

It is a risky move for no other reason than that motives are diverse and fluid. From what I understand of her explanation of motive emotions, I do not see how this could serve as a foundation for any kind of prescriptive moral theory. Others' definitions of moral theory agree with this reading.

Traditional philosophical conditions for an ethical theory

In the introduction to *Ethical Theory*, James Rachels writes:

Ethical theory is customarily divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with the status of ethics: are there objective moral truths, or is ethics based upon nothing more than our feelings and social conventions? The second part concerns its content: in the most general terms, how should we live, and why?²⁰

My main contention is that Zagzebski's theory fails to tell us why we should live in the way she describes. To see this, consider how Rachels describes the first part of ethical theory: here he refers to a "motivational problem" with defending the existence of moral facts, as defined by

²⁰ James Rachels, *Ethical Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1998. Page 1.

Hume. The problem is that “moral beliefs seem to be necessarily motivating,”²¹ leading Hume to conclude that “the rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.”²² Since Zagzebski believes that our motivations are emotions, she would have to agree with Hume that morality does not come from reason. This idea might be incompatible with her mission to create a universal moral theory that is compatible with Christian morality. She is left conceding that Christian moral rules—not just those, but all moral rules—are not conclusions of our reason. This would make all descriptions of morality as reasonable obsolete.

According to Rachels, “An adequate theory of the nature of ethics must, therefore, provide a plausible account of the way that reasons support moral judgments. A chief weakness of emotivism was that it could not do this.”²³ This is also a chief weakness of Zagzebski’s DM.

DM does not fit the traditional conditions

To understand how DM is not an ethical theory, but rather an explanation of human decision-making that is broadly applicable to any (real) ethical theory, consider the following example. Imagine that a person claiming to follow DM is walking down a hallway in her building. She is there at an odd hour, so no one else is around. Something catches her eye against the carpet, and she is surprised to find a \$50 bill on the floor. What does she do?

She has an ethical decision to make. According to DM, the process began when she chose her exemplar. Her emotional response to the situation should mirror that of her exemplar, and these emotions are the motivations that will cause her to act as her exemplar. Let’s look at a few scenarios:

- Scenario 1: The Buddha as exemplar

Always mindful of the teaching of Buddha, she impassively passes the bill by. Money will not make her happy or bring her peace, nor does it have the power to relieve the suffering of others.

²¹ Ibid. Page 3.

²² Ibid. Page 4.

²³ Ibid. Page 7.

- Scenario 2: John Stuart Mill as exemplar

Looking to achieve the most utility, she feels it is her duty to donate the \$50 to the most reputable charity organization she can find.

- Scenario 3: Karl Marx as exemplar

Wanting to be fair, she gets change for the \$50 and distributes it among her working-class peers.

- Scenario 4: Immanuel Kant as exemplar

Desiring to be a truly rational being, she consults her categorical imperative. She concludes that, in order to treat her fellow humans as ends, she must return the \$50 to its original owner.

- Scenario 5: Jesus as exemplar

Recalling the Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12, she feels sympathy for the person who lost the bill. She attempts to find the original owner of the bill.

All of these scenarios describe person who lives according to DM. But the resulting action is no different from a person who follows any of the ethical theories espoused by the exemplar.

Thus, *DM cannot distinguish itself as a unique ethical theory*. In her attempt to create a naturalistic moral framework under which religious ethics can still stand, Zagzebski creates a kind of meta-ethical theory, under which distinct moral theories can be categorized by following distinct exemplars.

Zagzebski claims to be describing a “distinctive kind of virtue ethics.” But DM stops short of being a normative theory, and is merely a description of human motivation to behave ethically in any ethical theory.

How DM does not fit with the role of a philosopher, according to Zagzebski

Zagzebski explains that the purpose of the philosopher is to answer the question: can morality exist outside of a religious framework?²⁴ She attempts to do so in the first half of her book, *Divine Motivation Theory*, by presenting EV as a universal moral theory. However, in trying to generalize ethical decision making, her theory becomes merely an explanation of human imitative behavior, which is *not* the job of a philosopher. Her theory is missing the “ought” that is pivotal to moral theory. The question, then, remains unanswered.

|

What determines who is a “good person”?

In her 2010 article, Zagzebski wrote, “It is an advantage of the theory that what makes a good person good is not given *a priori* but is determined empirically.” The theory has the empirical determination built into its workings: “these concepts [the good, a right act, and a virtue], as well as the concepts of a duty and a good life, are determined by reference to exemplars, which are **identified directly through the emotion of admiration**” (emphasis added).²⁵ I find it doubtful that the “emotion of admiration” can be considered reliable empirical evidence for how to live one’s life.

She says later in the 2010 article:

I assume that our emotion of admiration is generally trustworthy, but I do not assume that we always trust it. When we do, we take the object of admiration to be admirable. A person who is admirable in some respect is imitable in that respect. This is rough because there are many reasons why we do not or cannot imitate the admirable. But the feeling of admiration is a kind of attraction that carries with it the impetus to imitate. The ways in which the exemplar are admirable, and hence imitable, can be used to give us both a way of understanding significant moral concepts and a way of using those concepts as a way of making ourselves and our lives conform to the admirable.²⁶

²⁴ Linda Zagzebski, “Chapter 14: Morality & Religion,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. William J. Wainwright, Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁵ Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 41.

²⁶ Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory,” *Metaphilosophy* vol. 41, Nos 1-2, January 2010. Page 54.

There are a few troubling parts to this summary of exemplarist moral theory. First, consider the concept of trustworthy emotions. Zagzebski gives no basis for trusting our emotion of admiration. In fact, she says the opposite: “The emotions of different people in the same situation often differ. This suggests, but does not force us to the conclusion, that most of the time our emotions are wrong.”²⁷ Emotions are not the kinds of things that stay constant over time, or from person to person. We should therefore expect our exemplars (along with our moral theory) to change over time, and to lack universality, it would seem. But Zagzebski, not wanting to be led to that conclusion, suggests instead that, “it is probably not very useful, either for practical or theoretical purposes, to judge that most emotions are wrong.”²⁸ Again, emotions are all we can use to choose exemplars. This seems to lead to the conclusion that her theory is based on illusory assumptions rather than reality.

In addition to the question of how an exemplar can be labeled as a “good person” is the question of how someone following EV or DM can be labeled as a “good person.” Since Zagzebski takes emotions to be an “intrinsic,” “basic, non-derivative good,” and that “the emotions of an exemplary good person [...] are part of what makes the person good,”²⁹ it would seem only reasonable that, according to EV, good emotions make a person good. But Zagzebski again takes the explanation in a different direction, saying:

I do not intend the sense in which emotions are right or wrong to be a specifically moral sense of right or wrong, and for the most part there is no reason to blame those whose emotions are wrong or to feel guilty when one’s own emotions are wrong.³⁰

She concludes only that “the exemplar’s emotions are intrinsically motivating states that fit their objects,” and that makes emotions “good in the same way that true belief is good,” in an apparently amoral way. Without using emotions to judge whether a person is good or bad, or behaving in a moral fashion, I am left wondering how one judges moral goodness in EV or DM.

²⁷ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 92.

²⁸ Ibid. Page 92.

²⁹ Ibid. Page 83.

³⁰ Ibid. Page 94.

What determines a right or wrong action?

Looking at actions to determine what is morally good in EV or DM is equally unenlightening, as Zagzebski is always pointing back to motive emotions. “The good of outcomes derives from good motives, which is to say, the motives of paradigmatically good persons.”³¹ The good does not derive from the action or from the consequence, but rather from the motive. At face value, this bears some resemblance to Kant’s ethics in that, in order to evaluate the good of one’s action, one must look internally, to the motive or reason for one’s action, rather than externally, to the results of one’s actions. This seems to be a very personal matter, as no one else can truly know your motives. However, since I have just shown that Zagzebski also does not allow motive emotions to determine what is good, we are left with no moral metric once again.

One of the interesting aspects of Zagzebski’s EV theory is that it does not prescribe one set of actions—it is not universal. The morally right action depends on what exemplar one chooses, which Zagzebski believes will usually lead you to the same action, since most ethical theories have some overlap. But, as demonstrated with the scenarios presented earlier, the right action depends on whom one chooses as an exemplar. It is only when everyone agrees on one exemplar that the actions prescribed by the ethical theory become universal.

God’s Emotions: The move from EV to DM

Putting the issues with the judgments of value aside, it is important to look at how emotions track in the transition from EV to DM. In order for DM to be feasible at all, Zagzebski needs to claim that God has something akin to emotional states. It is not widely accepted that God has emotional states, so she has some convincing to do here. Zagzebski begins by presenting her suspicion that the reason that God is often denied any emotionality is not theological, but rather can be traced back to the pre-Socratics.³²

³¹ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 217.

³² Ibid. Pages 205-6.

But even Zagzebski cannot accept that God is capable of *all* emotions, because she rejects those that “seem to imply defect,” such as fear, hope, jealousy and hatred.³³ Interestingly, two of those emotions are attributed to God in traditional biblical translations.³⁴ This inconsistency suggests to me that the issue of God’s emotionality is a more complex issue than Zagzebski would like to admit. She does not explore that question as to whether emotions are God’s motives, but concludes that, “Either way, God’s motives and virtues can have the function that Divine Motivation theory says they have.”³⁵ This is a shaky, unsubstantiated transition to DM, since the entire foundation of EV was emotions as motives for moral actions!

IV. A theistically based alternative to Divine Motivation Theory

Zagzebski takes on an awesome task when trying to propose a theistically based moral theory, built from a naturalistic framework, that can stand with other, well-established ethical theories of our time. While I believe her attempt has some major flaws, her goal is nonetheless worthy of pursuit. Thus, I will now outline my own approach to ethics and ethical decision-making, an approach that may lead to a theistically based moral theory that avoids some of the problems present in DM that I have outlined.

Unlike Zagzebski, I do not wish to start by presenting a naturalistic framework. I believe that any theistically based moral theory is just that—based in God, and not in naturalism. So we shall look there first. And being perhaps more versed in theology than philosophy proper, I shall start with a very basic theological concept: God is love. The virtue of love is not just fundamental to the character of God, but it summarizes his character. Zagzebski acknowledges the fundamental character of love, in the context of her own theory, and points out that, “The

³³ Ibid. Page 207.

³⁴ God describes himself as jealous in Exodus 20:5 (and elsewhere, depending on your translation). As a general rule of thumb, God hates evil and disingenuous things: Isaiah 61:8, Amos 5:21, Zechariah 8:17, etc.

³⁵ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Page 205.

motive that is most clearly divine according to the Christian tradition is love. Motives such as mercy, forgiveness, generosity, and loyalty derive from the central motive of love.”³⁶ Since we are very concerned with what is fundamental when building a moral theory, let us turn away from all those other “motives” and look only at love.

I would like to distinguish my use of the word love from what Zagzebski means when she says love. Zagzebski uses love as just another motive emotion, something that is had by an agent, is felt toward an intentional object, and that places an intentional object under a thick affective concept.³⁷ I do not wish to use love as a motive *emotion*, and I do not wish to even say that love is a *motive*. Love has a motive, and of course an object, but it is an action. Love is selflessness acted upon in the best interest of the beloved. Love of many different categories of things is valuable, but I believe the most fundamental objects of love are persons.

Zagzebski claims that, “In DM theory, God’s primary motivation toward his creation is love.”³⁸ This is the essential reason why personhood is valued: not because it is somehow intrinsically good, but because the development of personhood is motivated by love, according to Zagzebski. In the language of DM, one should love persons because God first had the motive emotion of love towards persons.³⁹ In the language of my own theory, love of persons is synonymous with moral actions.

In Christian ethics, you could call the love of persons the most fundamental moral law. Jesus said:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.⁴⁰

³⁶ Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pages 291-20.

³⁷ Ibid. Page 95.

³⁸ Ibid. Page 324.

³⁹ Compare to 1 John 4:19.

⁴⁰ Matthew 22:37-40. *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

This could perhaps cause us to circle back to a kind of DC, but I do not believe this theory suffers from the Euthyphro dilemma in the same way that DC does. In my theory, one can simply answer the dilemma by saying that we must love because God commands love, but it is not arbitrary and he could not command otherwise because God *is* love.

Generalizing this into a naturalistic ethical theory inclines me towards Kant's Kingdom of Ends. Kant's deontological theory relies on reason rather than emotion in ethical decision-making. Since I have defined love as a kind of selfless action, I believe that any action which would be legislated in the kingdom of ends would be an action that, in the meantime, would be done out of selfless interests.

IV. Conclusion

I believe EV fails on many fronts, mainly because Zagzebski does not do enough work in explaining how people, actions, or motives can be judged as right or wrong. Her move to make emotions primary is bold, and I believe not entirely unfounded, as it seems that emotion could supply the proper motivation for moral action. However, her account of ethical decision-making and moral action appears more and more descriptive the more it is examined. In this way, the EV description of moral action could be seen as the psychological description of ethical decision-making in any ethical theory.

The move from EV to DM could have been more graceful. After spending a significant amount of time explaining how emotions are fundamental because they are good, motivating, and help us choose exemplars, Zagzebski undermines much of her own work by claiming that we should not always trust our emotions, and that it is not important that God have emotions. She gives well-thought-out reasons for her motivation in crafting EV and DM, as well as most of her smaller steps along the way. But all of the pieces do not fit together as well as she could have hoped.

My outline takes some of Zagzebski's thoughts to heart, but it avoids making emotion primary. It is fundamentally a theistic moral theory, but its implementation is similar to Kant's

Kingdom of Ends. It is another attempt at making a theistically based moral theory that could enhance the discussion.