

Pride and the Ethics of Aristotle

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Pride is central to Aristotle's understanding of moral virtue. In book 4 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that the *kosmos*, or whole of virtue, is brought to light in the virtue of *megalopsychia*, translated into English as "greatness of soul," and traditionally in Latin as "magnanimity" (*NE* 1123a35; 1124a1-4).¹ The great souled person, "deems himself worthy of great things and is worthy of them" (*NE* 1123a2-3). The great souled person, in other words, is the proud person.

This paper considers pride, or greatness of soul, as central to Aristotelian virtue. It examines Aristotle's definition of greatness of soul and its characteristics: greatness of soul exemplifies the whole of moral virtue; it is grounded in inequality, both psychological and social; and it incorporates a drive toward autonomy and complete self-sufficiency. It also explores the division in the soul upon which greatness of soul appears to rest; the great souled person seems torn between their desire for nobility and the desire to be honored for their nobility. Scholars typically argue that this division in the soul actually points to two different types of great of souled persons: the politically active and the philosophic. I argue, nonetheless, that this division can exist within the soul of a single person, and bring the other moral virtues into being.

I will also analyze the Aristotelian virtues of gentleness and magnificence in light of and in contrast with the Christian virtue of humility to illustrate that greatness of soul, with all of its complexity, is foundational to Aristotle's understanding of moral virtue. I argue that despite the conflict within the soul of the proud person, greatness of soul allows the moral agent to act on behalf of the *polis*. I conclude with a brief discussion of Aristotle's claim that shame is not a virtue.

Greatness of Soul

In book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines moral virtue as a characteristic or an activity of the soul in accordance with reason, a reason that determines the mean between excess and deficiency (*NE* 1106b35-1107a1). Virtue is an internal motion of the soul that culminates in an action that is external, and actions, internal and external, that "hit" the mean, as it were, are virtues, excesses and deficiencies are vices. For instance, Aristotle presents the virtue of courage understood as a mean in the following way. In the external circumstance of danger in battle the passion of fear is aroused in the soul (*NE* 1115a25-30). If the soul is disposed to give in to this feeling of fear, it suffers from an excess of fear, which leads to the vice of cowardice (*NE* 1107b4). On the other hand, if the soul is disposed to suppress or ignore these feelings of fear, it suffers from a deficiency of fear, which leads to the vice of recklessness (*NE* 1107b3, 1116b34-1117a1). If the soul, guided by reason to the mean, is disposed to feel not too much fear nor too little fear but rather the median amount, this leads to the virtue of courage (*NE* 1107a35). Reason determines the mean and then guides the passions to it, which is then followed by an external action of the body (*NE* 1138b21-25).

Aristotle identifies and discusses eleven moral virtues and their corresponding vices in books 2-5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. They are: courage, moderation, generosity, magnificence,

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. All subsequent citations will be taken from this edition.

greatness of soul, ambition, gentleness, friendliness, truthfulness, wittiness, and justice. Of special interest to us is the virtue of greatness of soul, which is discussed in book 4 of the *Ethics*.

Greatness of soul, according to Aristotle, is the mean with respect to claiming great rewards for one's virtue. The excess involves claiming more than one is worth, which is the vice of vanity, and the deficiency involves claiming less than one is worth, which is the vice of smallness of soul. The mean is claiming what one is worth when one is worth great things. As mentioned above, according to Aristotle the great souled person, "deems himself worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them" (*NE* 1123b3). Greatness of soul, therefore, is a mean in a complex way. Although it is a mean with respect to the rightness of the claim—the great souled person claims what they are worth, not more and not less—it is an extreme with regard to the extent of the claim; the great souled person claims the greatest of things (*NE* 1123b 14-17). Thus, greatness of soul is not simply claiming what one is worth. For instance, someone not worthy of much who does not claim much is not great souled, according to Aristotle, but rather moderate (*NE* 1123b6). Greatness of soul, Aristotle therefore argues, "resides in greatness, just as beauty involves a body of great stature: those who are small may be elegant and well proportioned but not beautiful" (*NE* 1123b7-8).

Aristotle argues that the greatest of goods at which "people of worth aim" is the good that we "assign to the gods" (*NE* 1123b19-20). This greatest of goods is the external good of honor (*NE* 1123b18). Thus, according to Aristotle, "the great-souled [...] deem themselves worthy of honor most of all, in accord with their worth" (*NE* 1123b23-24). The passion in the soul, therefore, involved in greatness of soul, is the desire to be recognized in the eyes of others as great by being accorded the greatest of honors. Reason, guiding this passion to the "mean," as it were, leads to a match between the claim and the desert: greatness of soul is to claim great honors that one is indeed worthy of. To desire and claim honors which exceed one's worth is the vice of vanity, whereas to desire and claim honors which are less than one's worth is the vice of smallness of soul.

Wholeness, Inequality, and Autonomy

In Aristotle's discussion of greatness of soul three characteristics come to light: it is comprehensive, it is grounded in inequality, and it pushes toward autonomy.

Greatness of soul is comprehensive in the sense that it can only characterize a person who possesses all of the other moral virtues. Aristotle argues, therefore, that, "[h]e who is truly great souled [...] must be good, and what is great in each virtue would seem to belong to the great-souled man [...] Greatness of soul, then, seems to be like an ornament [*kosmos*] of the virtues, for it makes them greater and does not arise without them" (*NE* 1123b 29-1124a1).

The comprehensive of greatness of soul leads to its second characteristic, namely that it is grounded in inequality, both psychological and social. Psychologically, the great souled person feels themselves at a height, such perspective manifesting a complex relationship to the quality of greatness. Thus, Aristotle begins his discussion by declaring, "[g]reatness of soul seems [...] to be concerned with great things" (*NE* 1123a35). Yet, Aristotle then goes on to ask: "for the sake of what will he do shameful things, he to whom nothing is great" (*NE* 1123b32). Aristotle continues, claiming that "[t]he great souled man is [...] not given to admiration, since nothing is great to him," and "he who is serious about few things is not given to hastiness, nor is anyone ever vehement who supposes that nothing is great" (*NE* 1125a3-5, 15). It appears that Aristotle makes contradictory claims about the great souled person: they are concerned with great and lofty matters but it also seems that to them nothing is great. Aristotle's suggestion is therefore this: the *virtue* of greatness of soul is concerned with great things, but to the proud *person*

nothing is great. The implication is that the proud, or the great souled, look *down* on other things and persons, but look *up* to themselves as that which is great; the proud, or great souled, show a concern for their own greatness and hence superiority over others.²

The result of the concern for superiority is that while the great souled person will do good to others, they will be ashamed to accept a good deed in return, as, according to Aristotle, “the former is a mark of one who is superior, the latter of one who is inferior” (*NE*1124b11). They will also repay favors or benefactions with even greater benefactions to put the benefactor in their debt, and they have a tendency to remember the good deeds they have done but to forget those they have received. This is so, Aristotle explains, because, “he who receives the benefit is inferior to him who performed it, whereas the great-souled man wishes to be superior” (*NE* 1124b14). Hence, according to Aristotle, “Thetis [...] did not speak of the benefactions she had done for Zeus, [...] but only those [she] had been done” (*NE* 1124b16-17; *Iliad* I.503-4). To get along with the proud person, in other words, speak only of the good things they have done for you, not of the good things you have done for them, as “they seem to hear about the former with pleasure, but about the latter with displeasure” (*NE* 1124b15).

The concern for and feeling of height above others points largely to a psychological inequality. Yet, greatness of soul is also grounded in a significant socio-economic inequality. Thus, although Aristotle insists that one must be good, or possess the whole of moral virtue, to be truly great souled, he also argues that, “he who has both goodness and good fortune is deemed even worthier of honor” (*NE* 1124b26). Thus, although goodness is necessary for greatness of soul, it is not sufficient. As Aristotle implies, it also requires goods of fortune such as good birth, wealth and political power to bring it fully into being. The socio-economic aspect of greatness of soul will be more fully illustrated in the discussion of the virtue of magnificence.

An interesting implication of the discussion of the inequality that grounds the virtue of pride is that while greatness of soul initially appears as a form of self-knowledge—correctly comprehending the honors that one is worth—it increasingly appears rather as a form of self-forgetting. In their concern for superiority, the great souled abstract from or ignore what they owe to others as well as their indebtedness to the socio-economic circumstances from which they arise. Such self-forgetting is related to the third characteristic of greatness of soul, namely the drive toward autonomy or perfect self-sufficiency.

The desire for autonomy and feeling of perfect self-sufficiency on the part of the great-souled person is exemplified in three personality traits that Aristotle identifies. The first is that the great-souled are unguarded in speech and truthful; according to Aristotle, “he speaks freely because he is disposed to feeling contempt for others, and he is given to truthfulness, except inasmuch as he is ironic toward the many” (*NE* 1124b29-31). Thus, the great souled do not care about the opinions and feelings of others but rather only about being true to their own, except when speaking to the many who are too low, it seems, to be worthy of access into their world of ideas and thoughts. The second characteristic pointing toward the drive to autonomy is that the great souled are incapable of adjusting their life to live with another—except in the case of a friend—and cannot engage in flattery of someone they do not like (*NE* 1124b31-1125a2). Third, the proud person spends money on unnecessary but beautiful objects, because, Aristotle argues, “this is more the mark of a self-sufficient person” (*NE* 1125a11-13). Superfluity, in other words, is an outward sign of the total lack of neediness, or transcendence of the daily, physical needs.

² See Burger, 2008: 83; Collins, 2006: 63; and Jaffa, 1952: 138, 140.

The Divided Soul

Aristotle's discussion of the essence of greatness of soul along with the personality traits that accompany it brings to light significant problems with the virtue of pride. First, the proud or great souled person claims the greatest of external rewards, which, according to Aristotle, is honor. They have a desire in the soul, therefore, to be recognized as great in the eyes of others. Yet, this implies that the proud are not as superior to and independent of the feelings and opinions of other human beings as they would like to be or think of themselves as being. Again, they seem to lack a certain self-knowledge.

The second problem becomes apparent when Aristotle qualifies the proud person's desire for honor. Aristotle claims that the great souled person, "is not disposed even toward honor as though it were a very great thing, and political power and wealth are choiceworthy on account of the honor they bring [...] But to him for whom honor is a small thing, so also are these other concerns. Hence the great-souled are held to be haughty" (*NE* 1124a16-20). If the highest motivation is not actually the desire for honor, and therefore neither for wealth nor for political power, what are the proud really concerned with? Not stated explicitly, Aristotle's argument remains implicit. Aristotle suggests that the highest motivation of the great souled person is that which Aristotle argues is the motive of all of the moral virtues, namely the noble. According to Aristotle, "[a]ctions that accord with virtue are noble and [done] for the sake of the noble" (*NE* 1120a24). In performing acts of moral virtue, therefore, the proud person seeks to perform actions that, as noble, are ends in themselves or choiceworthy for their own sake without regard to reward.

The proud, it appears, are not simply great souled but are also divided in soul; they are torn between their desire for the noble, and thus for virtue as its own reward, and their desire to be honored for being noble, and thus look on virtue as a means to a reward.³ An example of the division in the soul of the great souled person would perhaps take the following form: "I was courageous in battle because it was noble to be so, and thus courage is choiceworthy for its own sake." Here, the noble pushes toward autonomy. Yet, the great souled also claim: "Now honor me as a reward for my courage, or my service, because it was done without regard to reward. Reward me with honor for not thinking of the reward." Here, the desire for honor pushes toward dependence.

The conflict within the great souled person between their desire for the noble and their desire for honour has led many scholars to argue that Aristotle actually has two conceptions of greatness of soul. For instance, Aristide Tessitore argues that this seeming division in the soul arises because Aristotle is actually speaking of two types of greatness of soul in the single account: a political greatness exemplified by Alcibiades and a philosophic greatness exemplified by Socrates.⁴ Moreover, Tessitore, like Susan Collins, argues that greatness of soul in both its political and philosophic manifestations is at tension with both citizen virtue and the common good.⁵ Howard Curzer eliminates the tension both within the soul and within Aristotle's account by denying that greatness of soul is concerned with honor.⁶ Harry Jaffa also resolves the tension, but in the opposite direction; the great souled person, for Jaffa, is driven by honor and is thus purely political, not philosophic.⁷

³ Also see Salem, 2010: 59-61, 68, 70-71.

⁴ Tessitore, 1996: 31-34. Also see Burger 2008: 85-87, and Arnhart, 1983: 267.

⁵ Tessitore, 1996: 32; Collins, 2006: 63-65.

⁶ Curzer, 2012: 121, 123-27.

⁷ Jaffa, 1952: 121, 126, 141.

Despite this debate among scholars as to whether Aristotle has two conceptions of greatness of soul and whether the account pushes more in one direction than another, a careful reading of the text suggests that for Aristotle the division in the soul apparent in his account of the virtue can exist in the soul of a single person at one time. Moreover, in contrast to Tessitore and Collins, Aristotle suggests that the division within the soul of the proud person can propel them to act for, and not against, the good of their city. Aristotle indicates that this division can exist within the soul of a single person and that such division may actually be positive for the city at the end of his discussion of greatness of soul. Here, Aristotle suggests one significant benefit of pride despite the division in the soul that it seems to engender. In speaking of the vices of smallness of soul and vanity, Aristotle transitions from discussing the rewards for moral action to the doing of moral action. According to Aristotle, “everyone aims at those things which accord with his worth, whereas the small-souled refrain even from noble actions and pursuits, on the grounds that they are unworthy of them [...] But vain people are foolish and ignorant of themselves, and manifestly so; for although they are not worthy, they try their hand at things people honor, and then they are found out” (*NE* 1125a25-30). Greatness of soul, therefore, is now recast as a mean with regard to doing great actions, and not simply with regard to claiming rewards for great actions. Hence, the deficiency is now trying to do less than one is capable of, which is the vice of smallness of soul, and the excess is trying to do more than one is capable of, which is the vice of vanity. The mean is doing what you are capable of, when you are capable of great things.

Aristotle’s suggestion is that pride, or greatness of soul, allows one to do great things for one’s city. It gives one the confidence to embark on noble projects, and hence live up to one’s potential as a human being, serving the collective good of one’s community at the same time.⁸ Pride, it appears, grounds or allows the other moral virtues and hence actions to come into being. It does so despite or perhaps because of the problematic conflict within the soul of the proud. The desire for the noble would allow the proud to contemplate great actions, while the desire to be honored would motivate the actual performance of them.

Christian Humility

Pride or greatness of soul, along with all of its complexity, as foundational for Aristotelian moral virtue comes to light especially against the backdrop of the Christian virtue of humility. Humility is at the core of the Christian understanding of virtue. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia (1910), the virtue of humility can be defined as, “a quality by which a person considering his own defects has a lowly opinion of himself and willingly submits himself to God and to others for God’s sake.”⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, argues that humility, “consists in keeping oneself within one’s own bounds, not reaching out to things above one, but submitting to one’s superior” (*Summa Contra Gent.*, bk. IV, ch. 1v, tr. Rickaby).¹⁰ As these two passages suggest, humility is a foundational virtue for Christians because, removing pride, it allows human beings to recognize and accept God as a superior being that should be obeyed. Thus, inasmuch as humility, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, “keep[s] the mind and heart submissive to [...] God,” it removes the obstacles to faith and allows it to flourish.¹¹

⁸ Also see Salem, 2010: 65.

⁹ Devine, 1910.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The importance of humility to Christian virtue and faith is also illustrated by a brief glance at the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Here, the Jesus of Scripture teaches: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5: 5). Also, to the humble person who tolerates public humiliation and attack, the Scripture says: “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matthew 5: 11). Moreover, the Sermon gives a more nuanced image of humility when it argues that even when one acts virtuously, and therefore in a superior fashion to others, one should hide this to maintain an outward impression of inferiority. In other words, one should not claim recognition of one’s worth from one’s fellows. Thus, Scripture advises, “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them,” (Matthew 6: 1), and again, “when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret,” (Matthew 6: 3-4), Finally, the Scripture says, “whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting [...] But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others” (Matthew 6: 16-18).

Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, pride is central to the understanding of moral virtue in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. The great souled person, as we have seen above, “deems himself worthy of great things and is worthy of them” (*NE* 1123a2-3). Thus, unlike God’s humble servant in the Sermon on the Mount, Aristotle’s great souled person is not one of the meek, would not be in the mood to tolerate public revilement, and does not want to hide it when they’re fasting.

Gentleness and Magnificence

The contrast between Aristotle’s virtue of “gentleness” and Scripture’s remonstrance to “turn the other cheek” is an especially revealing example of how Aristotelian virtue can be understood in opposition to the Christian virtue of humility. Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, Scripture says: “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well [...] I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5: 38-44).

The exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount to resist not evil and to love one’s enemies could not be further from Aristotle’s moral virtue of “gentleness.” According to Aristotle, “gentleness” is the mean with regard to the passion of anger leading to the desire for revenge. When a person or their family is attacked or receives an insult from another, Aristotle argues that the passion of anger is aroused in the soul. If the soul in such situations, listening to reason, feels the correct amount of anger at the right person for the correct length of time, this leads to the virtue of gentleness (*NE* 1125b31-1126a1; 1126a11). If the soul gets angrier than it should at the wrong person for longer than it should, this leads to the vice of excess or “irascibility.” If, however, the soul fails to get angry at whom it ought and when it ought, this leads to the vice of deficiency or apathy (1126a3-9). Aristotle suggests that virtue requires that we rise to our own defense and the defense of our families when he says:

[T]hose who do not get angry at the things they ought
are held to be foolish, as are those who do not get angry
in the way they ought or when or with whom they ought.
For such a person seems to lack perception and even not
to feel pain; since he does not get angry, he seems not apt
to defend himself against an attack. Yet to hold back in

this way after having been treated insolently, and to overlook such treatment of one's kin, is held to be slavish (*NE* 1126a4-9).

Virtue, for Aristotle, as the above passage indicates, does not exclude the passion of anger nor the violence that often results, namely the correct use of force in self-defense when one or one's family is being insulted or attacked. Pride, which leads the reason of the virtuous person to be sensitive to any and all perceived insults or slights against them and those dear to them, is clearly at the root of what Aristotle calls "gentleness." Thus, if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, Aristotle's exhortation is not to present the other for like treatment, but rather to hit your enemy's left cheek even harder.

Pride, or greatness of soul, is not simply foundational to Aristotle's understanding of moral virtue, but the desire in the soul of the proud person to be honored by others for their greatness also spurs the great souled to do great things for their community. This comes to light in Aristotle's discussion of the virtue of *megaloprepias*, or in English translation "magnificence". Again, returning to the Sermon on the Mount, it appears that poverty, closely related to humility, is required for Christian virtue. Near the beginning of the Sermon the Scripture says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5: 3). Lest we think that Scripture refers only to those in psychological need and not material need, it goes on to admonish, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6: 19) And again, Scripture says, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6: 24). The aspersions cast on material riches in the Sermon on the Mount are completely inconsistent with the virtue of magnificence. Aristotle characterizes magnificence, arising from the proud person's desire to be both noble and honored by their community, as the spending by individuals of great sums on projects that benefit the public. The magnificent person is a wealthy person.

The virtue of magnificence comes to light against the backdrop of the virtue of generosity. According to Aristotle, generosity is the mean with respect to the giving and taking of money, and 'more with regard to the giving of it' (*NE* 1119b20-25). The excess in the sphere of money involves too much giving to the wrong people, called the vice of 'prodigality', and the deficiency involves too much taking and not enough giving (*NE* 1119b30-33; 1121b17-18). People who suffer from a deficiency of generosity, Aristotle argues, 'are more serious about money than they ought to be', and can be called 'stingy' when they do not give enough and 'greedy' when they take too much and from the wrong sources (*NE* 1119b30; 1121b20-23, 33-34). It can be inferred that the passion in the soul involved in the virtue of generosity is benevolence. Guided by reason to the mean, benevolence culminates in the external action of generosity. To feel too much benevolence can lead to the vice of prodigality, and to feel too little to the vice of stinginess or greed.

After his discussion of generosity Aristotle discusses the virtue of magnificence. Aristotle defines magnificence as a mean with regard to monetary expenditures, but on a scale greater than generosity and for a public good rather than a private need (*NE* 1122a17-25; 1123a4). Magnificence aims to help or enhance the community as a whole, and not just private individuals and friends. For the magnificent person 'money is no object', as it were.¹² According to Aristotle, '[a magnificent man] [...] is able to contemplate what is fitting and to spend great amounts in a suitable way' (*NE* 1122a35-1122b1). The magnificent man, therefore, focuses on the greatness of the result and not on how much money is spent. Examples given by Aristotle of

¹² For this discussion of magnificence, see Ward, 2011: 273-75.

magnificent acts include equipping a trireme or warship, equipping a chorus, or ‘provid[ing] a feast for the city’ (*NE* 1122a24; 1122b24). Aristotle also includes among magnificence the covering of expenditures ‘that concern the gods—votive offerings, [sacred] buildings, and sacrifices—and similarly too those that concern the entire divine realm’ (*NE* 1122b19-20). There is, therefore, a significant religious aspect to magnificence, and this virtue, it seems, is essential to supporting the religious life of the city. Modern examples of magnificence perhaps would include giving money to found schools, universities, libraries and scholarship funds; financial support to hospitals, medical research and treatment; and giving money to enhance cultural life generally, such as the founding and support of museums, art galleries, theatres and other important sites of cultural activity.

Aristotle situates magnificence between two vices. The vice of excess, or what can be called ‘vulgarity’, does not refer to how much money is spent but rather to when and the way in which it is spent. According to Aristotle, the vulgar person spends large amounts where only a small expenditure is appropriate. For instance, a vulgar person ‘giv[es] a club dinner in the manner of a wedding feast’ (*NE* 1123a22). Such inappropriate spending is not guided by the desire for the noble, but rather to ‘display [one’s] wealth’ (*NE* 1123a25). The vice of deficiency, or what can be called ‘parsimony’, again does not refer to how much money is spent but rather to the way in which it is spent. The parsimonious person will try to do great things for the community economically or ‘on the cheap’, as it were, hesitating to spend throughout the entire process (*NE* 1123a29-30). Constantly grumbling about how much money they are spending, the parsimonious person, according to Aristotle, ‘[a]fter spending great amounts, [...] will destroy the noble for some trifle’ (*NE* 1123a28-29).

Magnificence, Aristotle suggests, is likely to be the product of inherited wealth. Although granting that persons who have amassed their fortunes ‘on their own account’ can make large expenditures for public goods, Aristotle suggests that it is more likely to flow from persons ‘who possess the sorts of resources to begin with [...] through their ancestors or relations’ (*NE* 1122b31).¹³ Also, the virtue of magnificence is exercised not for the sake of the recipient, in this case the community, but rather for the sake of the noble. Unlike the vulgar or the parsimonious, for the magnificent person, according to Aristotle, ‘the most valued work is the great and noble one: for the contemplation of such a work is wondrous, and what is magnificent is wondrous’ (*NE* 1122b16-17)

Magnificence, therefore, differs from generosity with respect to the noble in one significant aspect. Whereas the noble guides the generous person, the magnificent person does not simply look to but seeks to manifest the noble within himself to some extent. Thus, Aristotle claims that, ‘a [generous] person [...] will spend what he ought and as he ought. But in these considerations resides precisely what is great in the magnificent person, that is, his ‘greatness’; for although [generosity] is concerned with these matters, even from an equal expenditure the magnificent person will produce the more magnificent work’ (*NE* 1122b11-13). The magnificent person, therefore, spends large sums on public goods in the noblest way possible because he is concerned with his own greatness and nobility, and wants this to be reflected in and recognized by his own community. That magnificence is contained not simply within the action and its product but is intended to be reflected in the person performing the action, leads Aristotle to claim that magnificence is suited ‘to those who are wellborn, of good repute, [...] for all these things possess greatness and worthiness’ (*NE* 1122b31-32). Aristotle again suggests that

¹³ Also see Jenkins, 1970: 166-67. But see Pakaluk, 2005: 177-78.

magnificence is most likely grounded in a significant socio-political inequality within the community.

The virtues of gentleness and magnificence illustrate that pride, or greatness of soul, is both foundational and exemplary of Aristotle's understanding of moral virtue as a whole. The centrality of pride to his theory of virtue is also revealed in Aristotle's denial that shame, the opposite of pride, is a virtue. According to Aristotle, there is a mean with respect to the sense of shame called "bashfulness" (*NE* 1108a32). The vice of excess, called "shyness," occurs when a person feels shame in everything, and the vice of deficiency, called "shamelessness," occurs when a person is ashamed of nothing (*NE* 1108a34-35). The person in the middle is bashful or modest. Yet, despite the existence of a mean, Aristotle argues that the sense of shame is not a virtue.

Shame, defined as a "fear of disrepute," is not a virtue because it is in fact itself a passion of the soul, and not a characteristic or disposition within the soul toward the passions (*NE* 1128b11-12; 16). It is a passion which is strongly entwined with the body, as shame, like fear of death, has a tendency to produce physical effects: as those who fear death turn pale, those who feel shame blush (*NE* 1128b13-14). Yet, whereas overcoming our fear of death can lead to the virtue of courage, overcoming our sense of shame leads to the vice of shamelessness. Moreover, whereas shame is appropriate to the young because, "[of] the many errors they make, in living by passion, [they] are checked by a sense of shame," it is inappropriate for a mature person as, "we suppose that [they] ought not to do anything that incurs shame" (*NE* 1128b19-22). The same holds true for the person of moral virtue. Thus, Aristotle argues, "to be the sort of person to do anything shameful is the mark of someone base. But to be disposed to feel shame at doing any such thing, and on *this* account to suppose that one is decent, is strange [...] if shamelessness (or not being ashamed to do shameful things) is base, it is still no more the case that he who is ashamed to do these sorts of things is decent" (*NE* 1128b26-33). Being embarrassed, therefore, for acting badly, does not make up for bad actions; moral virtue requires not acting badly in the first place. The sense of shame, in other words, reveals our lack of virtue. It shows that we have desires for base or ignoble things, whereas the virtuous person desires only the right and noble things to begin with, and thus will never feel shame. Moral virtue is not about restraining base desires or feeling bad about them when they are satisfied in immoral action, but rather requires only desiring and doing the moral things in the first place.

When greatness of soul is considered in light of the virtues of gentleness and magnificence, it appears that unlike Christian virtue which is grounded in humility, Aristotelian virtue is grounded in its opposite, pride. Aristotle's proud person looks up to themselves at a height, and views their community as a platform to reveal their greatness. From such a perspective the proud are indignant at all real or perceived slights against their person and family, reacting, perhaps violently, in acts of gentleness, and seek both nobility and honour by lavishing large sums of money on public projects in acts of magnificence. Thus, despite or perhaps because of the division in the soul on which the virtue of pride rests, greatness of soul can bring the other moral virtues into being and lead the proud to do great things for their city. Yet, for all of the benefits greatness of soul can produce, it may be the case that Aristotle brings to the surface unappealing aspects of the virtue—it is grounded in inequality, both psychological and social, and it incorporates a drive toward autonomy and complete self-sufficiency—in order to critique the life of the great souled person so understood, rather than to simply embrace it.

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Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics study guide contains a biography of Aristotle, literature essays, a complete e-text, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. The deficiency of this virtue is called meanness and the excess is ostentation. A munificent man spends gladly and lavishly, not calculating costs, but always for a noble purpose. Magnanimity, the fifth virtue Aristotle discusses, is one of the peaks of virtue. A magnanimous man claims and deserves great honors. Someone who deserves honors but doesn't claim them is low-minded, and someone who claims honors but doesn't deserve them is vain.