

# MAGNANIMITY: IN SEARCH OF THE LOST VIRTUE



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**Definition:** (Random House)

1. generous in forgiving an insult or injury; free from pettiness.
2. showing noble sensibility; high-minded.  
[1575-85; < L magnanimus = magn (us) large, great + -animus, adj. der. of animus - mind, soul (OED)
1. Great in courage; nobly brave or valiant. Of qualities, actions, etc.: Proceeding from or manifesting high courage
2. High-souled; nobly ambitious; lofty of purpose; noble in feeling or conduct. Now chiefly: Superior to petty resentment or jealousy, loftily generous in disregard of injuries.
3. In Aristotle the word (by modern translators rendered ‘greatsoul- edness’, ‘highmindedness’) expresses the attitude of one who, rightly conscious of his own great merits, is indifferent to praise except from those whose approval is valuable, regards the chances of fortune with equanimity, and, while ready to confer benefits, will seldom condescend to accept them. Loftiness of thought or purpose; grandeur of designs, nobly ambitious spirit. *Now rare.*
4. Nobility of feeling; superiority to petty resentment or jealousy; generous disregard of injuries.

**Thesaurus:** (Random House)

1. Only a truly magnanimous man could forgive such an insult: forgiving, free of vindictiveness, generous, large-hearted, liberal; charitable, beneficent, philanthropic, altruistic, unselfish, princely.

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**VICE:****Pusillanimous:** (Random House)  
(pyue suh lan’uh muhs) adj.

1. lacking courage or resolution; cowardly; faint-hearted.
2. indicating a cowardly spirit.  
[1580-90; < LL pusillanimis mean-spirited = L pusill (us) very small, petty + -animis -spirited, -minded (OED)
1. Lacking in courage and strength of mind; faint-hearted, mean-spirited, cowardly.
2. Of qualities, actions, etc.: Proceeding from or manifesting a want of courage.

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**Magnanimity**, which implies a reaching out of the soul to great things, is the virtue which regulates man with regard to honors. The magnanimous man aims at great works in every line of virtue, making it his purpose to do things worthy of great honor. Nor is magnanimity incompatible with true humility. “Magnanimity”, says St. Thomas, “makes a man deem himself worthy of great honors in consideration of the Divine gifts he possesses; whilst humility makes him think little of himself in consideration of his own shortcomings”.

*Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Virtue” > “Fortitude”

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**Summa Theologica**

Thomas Aquinas

NewAdvent.org

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3129.htm>

**QUESTION 129. MAGNANIMITY**

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**ARTICLE 1. WHETHER MAGNANIMITY IS ABOUT HONORS?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that magnanimity is not about honors. For magnanimity is in the irascible faculty, as its very name shows, since “magnanimity” signifies greatness of mind, and “mind” denotes the irascible part, as appears from *De Anima* iii, 42, where the Philosopher says that “in the sensitive appetite are desire and mind,” i.e. the concupiscible and irascible parts. But honor is a concupiscible good since it is the reward of virtue. Therefore it seems that magnanimity is not about honors.

**Objection 2.** Further, since magnanimity is a moral virtue, it must needs be about either passions or operations. Now it is not about operations, for then it would be a part of justice: whence it follows that it is about passions. But honor is not a passion. Therefore magnanimity is not about honors.

**Objection 3.** Further, the nature of magnanimity seems to regard pursuit rather than avoidance, for a man is said to be magnanimous because he tends to great things. But the virtuous are praised not for desiring honors, but for shunning them. Therefore magnanimity is not about honors.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (*Ethic.* iv, 3) that “magnanimity is about honor and dishonor.”

**I answer that,** Magnanimity by its very name denotes stretching forth of the mind to great things. Now virtue bears a relationship to two things, first to the matter about which is the field of its activity, secondly to its proper act, which consists in the right use of such matter. And since a virtuous habit is denominated chiefly from its act, a man is said to be magnanimous chiefly because he is minded to do some great act. Now an act may be called great in two ways: in one way proportionately,

in another absolutely. An act may be called great proportionately, even if it consist in the use of some small or ordinary thing, if, for instance, one make a very good use of it: but an act is simply and absolutely great when it consists in the best use of the greatest thing.

The things which come into man’s use are external things, and among these honor is the greatest simply, both because it is the most akin to virtue, since it is an attestation to a person’s virtue, as stated above (103, 1 and 2); and because it is offered to God and to the best; and again because, in order to obtain honor even as to avoid shame, men set aside all other things. Now a man is said to be magnanimous in respect of things that are great absolutely and simply, just as a man is said to be brave in respect of things that are difficult simply. It follows therefore that magnanimity is about honors.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Good and evil absolutely considered regard the concupiscible faculty, but in so far as the aspect of difficult is added, they belong to the irascible. Thus it is that magnanimity regards honor, inasmuch, to wit, as honor has the aspect of something great or difficult.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Although honor is neither a passion nor an operation, yet it is the object of a passion, namely hope, which tends to a difficult good. Wherefore magnanimity is immediately about the passions of hope, and mediately about honor as the object of hope: even so, we have stated (123, 4,5) with regard to fortitude that it is about dangers of death in so far as they are the object of fear and daring.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Those are worthy of praise who despise riches in such a way as to do nothing unbecoming in order to obtain them, nor have too great a desire for them. If, however, one were to despise honors so as not to care to do what is worthy of honor, this

would be deserving of blame. Accordingly magnanimity is about honors in the sense that a man strives to do what is deserving of honor, yet not so as to think much of the honor accorded by man.

## **ARTICLE 2. WHETHER MAGNANIMITY IS ESSENTIALLY ABOUT GREAT HONORS?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that magnanimity is not essentially about great honors. For the proper matter of magnanimity is honor, as stated above (Article 1). But great and little are accidental to honor. Therefore it is not essential to magnanimity to be about great honors.

**Objection 2.** Further, just as magnanimity is about honor, so is meekness about anger. But it is not essential to meekness to be about either great or little anger. Therefore neither is it essential to magnanimity to be about great honor.

**Objection 3.** Further, small honor is less aloof from great honor than is dishonor. But magnanimity is well ordered in relation to dishonor, and consequently in relation to small honors also. Therefore it is not only about great honors.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 7) that magnanimity is about great honors.

**Answer that** According to the Philosopher (Phys. vii, 17, 18), virtue is a perfection, and by this we are to understand the perfection of a power, and that it regards the extreme limit of that power, as stated in De Coelo I, 116. Now the perfection of a power is not perceived in every operation of that power, but in such operations as are great or difficult: for every power, however imperfect, can extend to ordinary and trifling operations. Hence it is essential to a virtue to be about the difficult and the good, as stated in Ethic. ii, 3.

Now the difficult and the good (which amount to the same) in an act of virtue may be considered from two points of view. First, from the point of view of reason, in so far as it is difficult to find and establish the rational means in some particular matter: and this difficulty is found only in the act of intellectual virtues, and also of justice. The other difficulty is on the part of the matter, which may involve a certain opposition to the moderation of reason, which moderation has to be applied thereto: and this difficulty regards chiefly the other moral virtues, which are about the passions, because the passions resist reason as Dionysius states (Div. Nom. iv, 4).

Now as regards the passions it is to be observed that the greatness of this power of resistance to reason arises chiefly in some cases from the passions themselves, and in others from the things that are the objects of the passions. The passions themselves have no great power of resistance, unless they be violent, because the sensitive appetite, which is the seat of the passions, is naturally subject to reason. Hence the resisting virtues that are about these passions regard only that which is great in such passions: thus fortitude is about very great fear and daring; temperance about the concupiscence of the greatest pleasures, and likewise meekness about the greatest anger. On the other hand, some passions have great power of resistance to reason arising from the external things themselves that are the objects of those passions: such are the love or desire of money or of honor. And for these it is necessary to have a virtue not only regarding that which is greatest in those passions, but also about that which is ordinary or little: because things external, though they be little, are very desirable, as being necessary for human life. Hence with regard to the desire of money there are two virtues, one about ordinary or little sums of money, namely liberality, and another about large sums of money, namely “magnificence.”

In like manner there are two virtues about honors, one about ordinary honors. This virtue has no name, but is denominated by its extremes, which are philotimia, i.e. love of honor, and aphilotimia, i.e. without love of honor: for sometimes a man is commended for loving honor, and sometimes for not caring about it, in so far, to wit, as both these things may be done in moderation. But with regard to great honors there is “magnanimity.” Wherefore we must conclude that the proper matter of magnanimity is great honor, and that a magnanimous man tends to such things as are deserving of honor.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Great and little are accidental to honor considered in itself: but they make a great difference in their relation to reason, the mode of which has to be observed in the use of honor, for it is much more difficult to observe it in great than in little honors.

**Reply to Objection 2.** In anger and other matters only that which is greatest presents any notable difficulty, and about this alone is there any need of a virtue. It is different with riches and honors which are things existing outside the soul.

**Reply to Objection 3.** He that makes good use of great things is much more able to make good use of little things. Accordingly the magnanimous man looks upon great honors as a thing of which he is worthy, or even little honors as something he deserves, because, to wit, man cannot sufficiently honor virtue which deserves to be honored by God. Hence he is not uplifted by great honors, because he does not deem them above him; rather does he despise them, and much more such as are ordinary or little. On like manner he is not cast down by dishonor, but despises it, since he recognizes that he does not deserve it.

**ARTICLE 3. WHETHER MAGNANIMITY IS A VIRTUE?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that magnanimity is not a virtue. For every moral virtue observes the mean. But magnanimity observes not the mean but the greater extreme: because the “magnanimous man deems himself worthy of the greatest things” (Ethic. iv, 3). Therefore magnanimity is not a virtue.

**Objection 2.** Further, he that has one virtue has them all, as stated above (I-II, 65, 1). But one may have a virtue without having magnanimity: since the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3) that “whosoever is worthy of little things and deems himself worthy of them, is temperate, but he is not magnanimous.” Therefore magnanimity is not a virtue.

**Objection 3.** Further, “Virtue is a good quality of the mind,” as stated above (I-II, 55, 4). But magnanimity implies certain dispositions of the body: for the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3) of “a magnanimous man that his gait is slow, his voice deep, and his utterance calm.” Therefore magnanimity is not a virtue.

**Objection 4.** Further, no virtue is opposed to another virtue. But magnanimity is opposed to humility, since “the magnanimous deems himself worthy of great things, and despises others,” according to Ethic. iv, 3. Therefore magnanimity is not a virtue.

**Objection 5.** Further, the properties of every virtue are praiseworthy. But magnanimity has certain properties that call for blame. For, in the first place, the magnanimous is unmindful of favors; secondly, he is remiss and slow of action; thirdly, he employs irony [Cf. 113] towards many; fourthly, he is unable to associate with others; fifthly, because he holds to the barren things rather than to those that are fruitful. Therefore magnanimity is not a virtue.

**On the contrary,** It is written in praise of certain men (2 Maccabees 15:18): “Nicanor hearing of the valor of Judas’ companions,

and the greatness of courage [*animi magnitudinem*] with which they fought for their country, was afraid to try the matter by the sword.” Now, only deeds of virtue are worthy of praise. Therefore magnanimity which consists in greatness of courage is a virtue.

**I answer that,** The essence of human virtue consists in safeguarding the good of reason in human affairs, for this is man’s proper good. Now among external human things honors take precedence of all others, as stated above (1; I-II, 11, 2, Objection 3). Therefore magnanimity, which observes the mode of reason in great honors, is a virtue.

**Reply to Objection 1.** As the Philosopher again says (Ethic. iv, 3), “the magnanimous in point of quantity goes to extremes,” in so far as he tends to what is greatest, “but in the matter of becomingness, he follows the mean,” because he tends to the greatest things according to reason, for “he deems himself worthy in accordance with his worth” (Ethic. iv, 3), since his aims do not surpass his deserts.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The mutual connection of the virtues does not apply to their acts, as though every one were competent to practice the acts of all the virtues. Wherefore the act of magnanimity is not becoming to every virtuous man, but only to great men. on the other hand, as regards the principles of virtue, namely prudence and grace, all virtues are connected together, since their habits reside together in the soul, either in act or by way of a proximate disposition thereto. Thus it is possible for one to whom the act of magnanimity is not competent, to have the habit of magnanimity, whereby he is disposed to practice that act if it were competent to him according to his state.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The movements of the body are differentiated according to the different apprehensions and emotions of the

soul. And so it happens that to magnanimity there accrue certain fixed accidents by way of bodily movements. For quickness of movement results from a man being intent on many things which he is in a hurry to accomplish, whereas the magnanimous is intent only on great things; these are few and require great attention, wherefore they call for slow movement. Likewise shrill and rapid speaking is chiefly competent to those who are quick to quarrel about anything, and this becomes not the magnanimous who are busy only about great things. And just as these dispositions of bodily movements are competent to the magnanimous man according to the mode of his emotions, so too in those who are naturally disposed to magnanimity these conditions are found naturally.

**Reply to Objection 4.** There is in man something great which he possesses through the gift of God; and something defective which accrues to him through the weakness of nature. Accordingly magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God: thus if his soul is endowed with great virtue, magnanimity makes him tend to perfect works of virtue; and the same is to be said of the use of any other good, such as science or external fortune. On the other hand, humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency, and magnanimity makes him despise others in so far as they fall away from God’s gifts: since he does not think so much of others as to do anything wrong for their sake. Yet humility makes us honor others and esteem them better than ourselves, in so far as we see some of God’s gifts in them. Hence it is written of the just man (Psalm 14:4): “In his sight a vile person is contemned [Douay: ‘The malignant is brought to nothing, but he glorifieth,’ etc.],” which indicates the contempt of magnanimity, “but he honoreth them that fear the Lord,” which points to the reverential bearing of humility. It is therefore evident that magna-

nimity and humility are not contrary to one another, although they seem to tend in contrary directions, because they proceed according to different considerations.

**Reply to Objection 5.** These properties in so far as they belong to a magnanimous man call not for blame, but for very great praise. For in the first place, when it is said that the magnanimous is not mindful of those from whom he has received favors, this points to the fact that he takes no pleasure in accepting favors from others unless he repay them with yet greater favor; this belongs to the perfection of gratitude, in the act of which he wishes to excel, even as in the acts of other virtues. Again, in the second place, it is said that he is remiss and slow of action, not that he is lacking in doing what becomes him, but because he does not busy himself with all kinds of works, but only with great works, such as are becoming to him. He is also said, in the third place, to employ irony, not as opposed to truth, and so as either to say of himself vile things that are not true, or deny of himself great things that are true, but because he does not disclose all his greatness, especially to the large number of those who are beneath him, since, as also the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3), “it belongs to a magnanimous man to be great towards persons of dignity and affluence, and unassuming towards the middle class.” On the fourth place, it is said that he cannot associate with others: this means that he is not at home with others than his friends: because he altogether shuns flattery and hypocrisy, which belong to littleness of mind. But he associates with all, both great and little, according as he ought, as stated above (ad 1). It is also said, fifthly, that he prefers to have barren things, not indeed any, but good, i.e. virtuous; for in all things he prefers the virtuous to the useful, as being greater: since the useful is sought in order to supply a defect which is inconsistent with magnanimity.

#### ARTICLE 4. WHETHER MAGNANIMITY IS A SPECIAL VIRTUE?

**Objection 1.** It seems that magnanimity is not a special virtue. For no special virtue is operative in every virtue. But the Philosopher states (Ethic. iv, 3) that “whatever is great in each virtue belongs to the magnanimous.” Therefore magnanimity is not a special virtue.

**Objection 2.** Further, the acts of different virtues are not ascribed to any special virtue. But the acts of different virtues are ascribed to the magnanimous man. For it is stated in Ethic. iv, 3 that “it belongs to the magnanimous not to avoid reproof” (which is an act of prudence), “nor to act unjustly” (which is an act of justice), “that he is ready to do favors” (which is an act of charity), “that he gives his services readily” (which is an act of liberality), that “he is truthful” (which is an act of truthfulness), and that “he is not given to complaining” (which is an act of patience). Therefore magnanimity is not a special virtue.

**Objection 3.** Further, every virtue is a special ornament of the soul, according to the saying of Isaiah 61:10, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation,” and afterwards he adds, “and as a bride adorned with her jewels.” But magnanimity is the ornament of all the virtues, as stated in Ethic. iv. Therefore magnanimity is a general virtue.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 7) distinguishes it from the other virtues.

**I answer that,** As stated above (Question 123, Article 2), it belongs to a special virtue to establish the mode of reason in a determinate matter. Now magnanimity establishes the mode of reason in a determinate matter, namely honors, as stated above (1 and 2): and honor, considered in itself, is a special good, and accordingly magnanimity considered in itself is a special virtue.

Since, however, honor is the reward of every virtue, as stated above (103, 1, ad 2), it follows that by reason of its matter it regards all the virtues.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Magnanimity is not about any kind of honor, but great honor. Now, as honor is due to virtue, so great honor is due to a great deed of virtue. Hence it is that the magnanimous is intent on doing great deeds in every virtue, in so far, to wit, as he tends to what is worthy of great honors.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Since the magnanimous tends to great things, it follows that he tends chiefly to things that involve a certain excellence, and shuns those that imply defect. Now it savors of excellence that a man is beneficent, generous and grateful. Wherefore he shows himself ready to perform actions of this kind, but not as acts of the other virtues. on the other hand, it is a proof of defect, that a man thinks so much of certain external goods or evils, that for their sake he abandons and gives up justice or any virtue whatever. Again, all concealment of the truth indicates a defect, since it seems to be the outcome of fear. Also that a man be given to complaining denotes a defect, because by so doing the mind seems to give way to external evils. Wherefore these and like things the magnanimous man avoids under a special aspect, inasmuch as they are contrary to his excellence or greatness.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Every virtue derives from its species a certain luster or adornment which is proper to each virtue: but further adornment results from the very greatness of a virtuous deed, through magnanimity which makes all virtues greater as stated in Ethic. iv, 3.

#### **ARTICLE 5. WHETHER MAGNANIMITY IS A PART OF FORTITUDE?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that magnanimity is not a part of fortitude. For a thing is not a part of itself. But magnanimity appears to be the same as fortitude. For Seneca says (*De Quat. Virtut.*): “If magnanimity, which is also called fortitude, be in thy soul, thou shalt live in great assurance”: and Tully says (*De Offic. I*): “If a man is brave we expect him to be magnanimous, truth-loving, and far removed from deception.” Therefore magnanimity is not a part of fortitude.

**Objection 2.** Further, the Philosopher (*Ethic. iv, 3*) says that a magnanimous man is not philokindynos, that is, a lover of danger. But it belongs to a brave man to expose himself to danger. Therefore magnanimity has nothing in common with fortitude so as to be called a part thereof.

**Objection 3.** Further, magnanimity regards the great in things to be hoped for, whereas fortitude regards the great in things to be feared or dared. But good is of more import than evil. Therefore magnanimity is a more important virtue than fortitude. Therefore it is not a part thereof.

**On the contrary,** Macrobius (*De Somn. Scip. I*) and Andronicus reckon magnanimity as a part of fortitude.

**I answer that,** As stated above (I-II, 61, 3), a principal virtue is one to which it belongs to establish a general mode of virtue in a principal matter. Now one of the general modes of virtue is firmness of mind, because “a firm standing is necessary in every virtue,” according to Ethic. ii. And this is chiefly commended in those virtues that tend to something difficult, in which it is most difficult to preserve firmness. Wherefore the more difficult it is to stand firm in some matter of difficulty, the more principal is the virtue which makes the mind firm in that matter.

Now it is more difficult to stand firm in dangers of death, wherein fortitude confirms the mind, than in hoping for or obtaining the greatest goods, wherein the mind is confirmed by magnanimity, for, as man loves his life above all things, so does he fly from dangers of death more than any others. Accordingly it is clear that magnanimity agrees with fortitude in confirming the mind about some difficult matter; but it falls short thereof, in that it confirms the mind about a matter wherein it is easier to stand firm. Hence magnanimity is reckoned a part of fortitude, because it is annexed thereto as secondary to principal.

**Reply to Objection 1.** As the Philosopher says (*Ethic. v, 1,3*), “to lack evil is looked upon as a good,” wherefore not to be overcome by a grievous evil, such as the danger of death, is looked upon as though it were the obtaining of a great good, the former belonging to fortitude, and the latter to magnanimity: in this sense fortitude and magnanimity may be considered as identical. Since, however, there is a difference as regards the difficulty on the part of either of the aforesaid, it follows that properly speaking magnanimity, according to the Philosopher (*Ethic. ii, 7*), is a distinct virtue from fortitude.

**Reply to Objection 2.** A man is said to love danger when he exposes himself to all kinds of dangers, which seems to be the mark of one who thinks “many” the same as “great.” This is contrary to the nature of a magnanimous man, for no one seemingly exposes himself to danger for the sake of a thing that he does not deem great. But for things that are truly great, a magnanimous man is most ready to expose himself to danger, since he does something great in the act of fortitude, even as in the acts of the other virtues. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethic. ii, 7*) that the magnanimous man is not *mikrokindynos*, i.e. endangering himself for small things, but *megalokindynos*, i.e. endangering himself for great things. And

Seneca says (*De Quat. Virtut.*): “Thou wilt be magnanimous if thou neither seekest dangers like a rash man, nor fearest them like a coward. For nothing makes the soul a coward save the consciousness of a wicked life.”

**Reply to Objection 3.** Evil as such is to be avoided: and that one has to withstand it is accidental; in so far, to wit, as one has to suffer an evil in order to safeguard a good. But good as such is to be desired, and that one avoids it is only accidental, in so far, to wit, as it is deemed to surpass the ability of the one who desires it. Now that which is so essentially is always of more account than that which is so accidentally. Wherefore the difficult in evil things is always more opposed to firmness of mind than the difficult in good things. Hence the virtue of fortitude takes precedence of the virtue of magnanimity. For though good is simply of more import than evil, evil is of more import in this particular respect.

#### ARTICLE 6. WHETHER CONFIDENCE BELONGS TO MAGNANIMITY?

**Objection 1.** It seems that confidence does not belong to magnanimity. For a man may have assurance not only in himself, but also in another, according to 2 Corinthians 3:4-5, “Such confidence we have, through Christ towards God, not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves.” But this seems inconsistent with the idea of magnanimity. Therefore confidence does not belong to magnanimity.

**Objection 2.** Further, confidence seems to be opposed to fear, according to Isaiah 12:2, “I will deal confidently and will not fear.” But to be without fear seems more akin to fortitude. Therefore confidence also belongs to fortitude rather than to magnanimity.

**Objection 3.** Further, reward is not due except to virtue. But a reward is due to confi-



dence, according to Hebrews 3:6, where it is said that we are the house of Christ, “if we hold fast the confidence and glory of hope unto the end.” Therefore confidence is a virtue distinct from magnanimity: and this is confirmed by the fact that Macrobius enumerates it with magnanimity (In Somn. Scip. I).

**On the contrary,** Tully (De Suv. Rhet. ii) seems to substitute confidence for magnanimity, as stated above in the preceding Question (ad 6) and in the prologue to this.

**I answer that,** Confidence takes its name from “fides” [faith]: and it belongs to faith to believe something and in somebody. But confidence belongs to hope, according to Job 11:18, “Thou shalt have confidence, hope being set before thee.” Wherefore confidence apparently denotes chiefly that a man derives hope through believing the word of one who promises to help him. Since, however, faith signifies also a strong opinion, and since one may come to have a strong opinion about something, not only on account of another’s statement, but also on account of something we observe in another, it follows that confidence may denote the hope of having something, which hope we conceive through observing something either in oneself – for instance, through observing that he is healthy, a man is confident that he will live long. or in another, for instance, through observing that another is friendly to him and powerful, a man is confident that he will receive help from him.

Now it has been stated above (1, ad 2) that magnanimity is chiefly about the hope of something difficult. Wherefore, since confidence denotes a certain strength of hope arising from some observation which gives one a strong opinion that one will obtain a certain good, it follows that confidence belongs to magnanimity.

**Reply to Objection 1.** As the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3), it belongs to the “magnanimous to need nothing,” for need is a mark of the deficient. But this is to be understood according to the mode of a man, hence he adds “or scarcely anything.” For it surpasses man to need nothing at all. For every man needs, first, the Divine assistance, secondly, even human assistance, since man is naturally a social animal, for he is sufficient by himself to provide for his own life. Accordingly, in so far as he needs others, it belongs to a magnanimous man to have confidence in others, for it is also a point of excellence in a man that he should have at hand those who are able to be of service to him. And in so far as his own ability goes, it belongs to a magnanimous man to be confident in himself.

**Reply to Objection 2.** As stated above (I-II, 23, 2; I-II, 40, 4), when we were treating of the passions, hope is directly opposed to despair, because the latter is about the same object, namely good. But as regards contrariety of objects it is opposed to fear, because the latter’s object is evil. Now confidence denotes a certain strength of hope, wherefore it is opposed to fear even as hope is. Since, however, fortitude properly strengthens a man in respect of evil, and magnanimity in respect of the obtaining of good, it follows that confidence belongs more properly to magnanimity than to fortitude. Yet because hope causes daring, which belongs to fortitude, it follows in consequence that confidence pertains to fortitude.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Confidence, as stated above, denotes a certain mode of hope: for confidence is hope strengthened by a strong opinion. Now the mode applied to an affection may call for commendation of the act, so that it become meritorious, yet it is not this that draws it to a species of virtue, but its matter. Hence, properly speaking, confidence cannot denote a virtue, though it may denote the conditions of a virtue. For this reason it is

reckoned among the parts of fortitude, not as an annexed virtue, except as identified with magnanimity by Tully (De Suv. Rhet. ii), but as an integral part, as stated in the preceding Question.

#### **ARTICLE 7. WHETHER SECURITY BELONGS TO MAGNANIMITY?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that security does not belong to magnanimity. For security, as stated above (128, ad 6), denotes freedom from the disturbance of fear. But fortitude does this most effectively. Wherefore security is seemingly the same as fortitude. But fortitude does not belong to magnanimity; rather the reverse is the case. Neither therefore does security belong to magnanimity.

**Objection 2.** Further, Isidore says (Etym. x) that a man “is said to be secure because he is without care.” But this seems to be contrary to virtue, which has a care for honorable things, according to 2 Timothy 2:15, “Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God.” Therefore security does not belong to magnanimity, which does great things in all the virtues.

**Objection 3.** Further, virtue is not its own reward. But security is accounted the reward of virtue, according to Job 11:14-18, “If thou wilt put away from thee the iniquity that is in thy hand...being buried thou shalt sleep secure.” Therefore security does not belong to magnanimity or to any other virtue, as a part thereof.

**On the contrary,** Tully says (De Offic. I) under the heading: “Magnanimity consists of two things,” that “it belongs to magnanimity to give way neither to a troubled mind, nor to man, nor to fortune.” But a man’s security consists in this. Therefore security belongs to magnanimity.

**I answer that,** As the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 5), “fear makes a man take counsel,”

because, to wit he takes care to avoid what he fears. Now security takes its name from the removal of this care, of which fear is the cause: wherefore security denotes perfect freedom of the mind from fear, just as confidence denotes strength of hope. Now, as hope directly belongs to magnanimity, so fear directly regards fortitude. Wherefore as confidence belongs immediately to magnanimity, so security belongs immediately to fortitude.

**It must be observed,** however, that as hope is the cause of daring, so is fear the cause of despair, as stated above when we were treating of the passion (I-II, 45, 2). Wherefore as confidence belongs indirectly to fortitude, in so far as it makes use of daring, so security belongs indirectly to magnanimity, in so far as it banishes despair.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Fortitude is chiefly commended, not because it banishes fear, which belongs to security, but because it denotes a firmness of mind in the matter of the passion. Wherefore security is not the same as fortitude, but is a condition thereof.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Not all security is worthy of praise but only when one puts care aside, as one ought, and in things when one should not fear: in this way it is a condition of fortitude and of magnanimity.

**Reply to Objection 3.** There is in the virtues a certain likeness to, and participation of, future happiness, as stated above (I-II, 05, 3,7). Hence nothing hinders a certain security from being a condition of a virtue, although perfect security belongs to virtue’s reward.

#### **ARTICLE 8. WHETHER GOODS OF FORTUNE CONDUCE TO MAGNANIMITY?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that goods of fortune do not conduce to magnanimity. For according to Seneca (De Ira I: De vita beata xvi): “virtue suffices for itself.” Now magnanimity

takes every virtue great, as stated above (4, ad 3). Therefore goods of fortune do not conduce to magnanimity.

**Objection 2.** Further, no virtuous man despises what is helpful to him. But the magnanimous man despises whatever pertains to goods of fortune: for Tully says (De Offic. I) under the heading: “Magnanimity consists of two things,” that “a great soul is commended for despising external things.” Therefore a magnanimous man is not helped by goods of fortune.

**Objection 3.** Further, Tully adds (De Offic. I) that “it belongs to a great soul so to bear what seems troublesome, as nowise to depart from his natural estate, or from the dignity of a wise man.” And Aristotle says (Ethic. iv, 3) that “a magnanimous man does not grieve at misfortune.” Now troubles and misfortunes are opposed to goods of fortune, for every one grieves at the loss of what is helpful to him. Therefore external goods of fortune do not conduce to magnanimity.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3) that “good fortune seems to conduce to magnanimity.”

**I answer that,** As stated above (Article 1), magnanimity regards two things: honor as its matter, and the accomplishment of something great as its end. Now goods of fortune conduce to both these things. For since honor is conferred on the virtuous, not only by the wise, but also by the multitude who hold these goods of fortune in the highest esteem, the result is that they show greater honor to those who possess goods of fortune. Likewise goods of fortune are useful organs or instruments of virtuous deeds: since we can easily accomplish things by means of riches, power and friends. Hence it is evident that goods of fortune conduce to magnanimity.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Virtue is said to be sufficient for itself, because it can be without even these external goods; yet it needs them in order to act more expeditiously.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The magnanimous man despises external goods, inasmuch as he does not think them so great as to be bound to do anything unbecoming for their sake. Yet he does not despise them, but that he esteems them useful for the accomplishment of virtuous deeds.

**Reply to Objection 3.** If a man does not think much of a thing, he is neither very joyful at obtaining it, nor very grieved at losing it. Wherefore, since the magnanimous man does not think much of external goods, that is goods of fortune, he is neither much uplifted by them if he has them, nor much cast down by their loss.

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## XI. MAGNANIMITY AND HUMILITY

Four-Square / by Joseph Rickaby, S.J.

<http://www2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/foursq11.htm>

St. Thomas makes magnanimity and humility two distinct virtues; the former he ranks under fortitude, the latter under temperance. These divisions of virtues are not wholly arbitrary: one division is more in accordance with the nature of things than another. Still there is some room left for difference here as elsewhere in a matter of classification. Much depends on the point of view from which the matter is studied. Now the aim of these addresses is practice rather than theory. In the conduct of those who are aiming at the practice of the virtue, magnanimity readily passes into pride, while the man who would be humble may become a sneak, a mean-spirited creature, from taking no account of magnanimity. We shall be more easily at once magnanimous and humble if we make of magnanimity and humility one two-sided virtue, a mean between two excesses, as fortitude itself

is a two-sided virtue, checking two passions which go in two opposite ways, checking the passion of fear that it pass not into cowardice, checking again the passion of impetuosity lest it transgress into foolhardiness. The two-sided virtue of humble magnanimity and magnanimous humility may be called by the name of either of the constituents, as there is no one common name to include both. This arrangement will be found helpful in practice, and I flatter myself it is not so very deficient in point of theory.

Magnanimity, in common parlance, is taken to be a certain generosity in ignoring petty annoyances (which is rather longanimity), as also in forgetting and forgiving, not taking advantage of your enemy when you have him in your power. But the conception of magnanimity originally laid down by Aristotle, and afterwards adopted, or perhaps we should rather say adapted, by St. Thomas, embraces a much wider field. The matter of magnanimity is honor, which is also the matter of humility. The magnanimous man is defined to be "one who deems himself worthy of great honor, and is so worthy indeed," being a thoroughly good man, exalted in virtue, and therefore deserving also to be exalted in honor, which is the meed of virtue. Such a man accepts high honors as his due, makes little account of small compliments, and, conscious of his own real inner worth, is unmoved by affronts and ignominies put upon him by persons who do not understand him and are incapable of measuring his greatness. The mark of the magnanimous man is serenity. A certain portly habit of body, if nature has so endowed him, becomes him well. Aristotle says of him, apparently having some particular person in mind, that "his gait is slow, his voice deep, his utterance grave and leisurely." Those are separable accidents, to be sure, but where they are present they are expressions of character. The magnanimous man then is worth a great deal, and takes himself for all that he is worth. He has re-

ceived God's spirit" or something analogous in the natural order to the gift of the Holy Ghost" that he may know the things that are given him of God (II Cor. ii, 12).

We must not conceive the magnanimous man to be a god to himself, wrapped up in the contemplation of his own excellences. Being high in all virtue he is far from being wanting in the virtue of religion. He glorifies God for whatever he has, and owns it all to be the gift of God. His high thoughts turn not about himself, but about God. He is lofty minded for what he discerns in God primarily, and secondarily in himself by the sheer gift and grace of God. And here we have the defense of the magnanimous man meeting a grave impeachment preferred against him. It has been said of him that he is certainly not conscious of any ideal that he can not reach" not at all the man to confess that when we have done all things we are still useless servants (Luke xvii, 10). This is said with some apparent reference to a sermon of Newman "Discourses to Mixed Congregations," on "The Religion of the Pharisee. The Pharisee is there presented as having an ideal and having come up to it, and consequently living in serene self-complacency. By this argument the magnanimous man would be a self-righteous Pharisee, far removed from the standard of Him who was meek and humble of heart (Matt. xi, 29). The accusation may be leveled with some justice against the pagan magnanimous man depicted in the pages of Aristotle. Aristotle thought of man in relation to man, not in relation to God, and described and classified his virtues accordingly from a human, social standpoint. He saw no harm in a man who was much the superior of his fellows making the most of that superiority, and glorying in himself as of himself. St. Paul, better taught of God, thought otherwise (II Cor. iii, 5). Everything good in man comes from God; and when it is all reckoned up, human goodness does not come to much in the sight of God. Shall man be justified in comparison with God? Lo, the stars are not

pure in his sight; how much more is man rottenness, and the son of man a worm! (Job xxv, 4-6). True magnanimity, that is to say, the magnanimity that parts not company with humility, but coalesces with it in the unity of one virtue, bears honors gracefully, and insult unflinchingly, from a consciousness of internal worth. This is our glory, says St. Paul, the testimony of our conscience (II Cor. I, 12). This internal worth, however, the magnanimous man refers to the source from whence it comes, and unto God he gives the glory. The secret of his marvelous virtue is his habit of practical discernment between the abyss of nothingness within himself and the high gifts, also within him, which come of the bounty of God. Magnanimity, and therefore also humility, imports grandeur and elevation of mind. The magnanimously humble man thinks a great deal of God, and not too much of man, whether of himself or of his neighbors. He is clear of the weakness of human respect. He is not afraid of men, least of all wicked men. In his sight the malignant is brought to nothing (Ps. xiv, 4). As Aristotle humorously puts it, "he is not the man to bolt and run away, swinging his arms." He harbors in his heart a certain noble scorn for the impertinence of aggressive wickedness and the pomp and pride of evil powers. He takes a trifle for a trifle, and a fool for a fool. He is not easily excited. He will meddle only with big things, and with little things as they bear on big things. Altogether, the magnanimous man is a formidable antagonist to the powers of evil. When the official of a persecuting government said to St. Basil, "I never met a man so unmanageable as you are," the saint replied, "Perhaps you have never yet met with a Bishop." He is known in the Church as S. Basilius Magnus, which may be rendered St. Basil the Magnanimous.

Of humility the pagan world had little or no conception. They had not so much as a name for it. Christianity had to coin a Greek name, and to elevate the meaning of the Latin word

humilitas, which signified originally baseness, meanness. The nearest pagan equivalent for humility was a virtue which they named modesty, or good form: it consisted in not taking airs and making yourself offensive by swaggering in company. This overlooking of humility was due to the imperfection of pagan ideas about God. The gods of the ancient world gave poor examples of morality: they were not holy gods, but powerful beings who used their power to their own gratification. Walk before me and be perfect, as God said to Abraham (Gen. xvii, 1), would have sounded a strange precept given by a pagan deity to pagan ears. Consequently the pagan was little in the habit of contrasting his own moral weaknesses with the transcendent holiness of the Supreme Being. Many a pagan must have thought that in point of moral goodness Jupiter and Apollo were not his superiors: they were materially better off than their worshiper, not holier. In fact the pagans regarded their gods much as the poor nowadays regard the rich. Humility is not inspired by an attitude of mind like that. The ground of humility is the utter inferiority of human nature to the divine, and man's dependence upon God for all that he has, even his very existence. "Humility," says St. Thomas, "seems principally to imply subjection to God: humility principally regards the reverence whereby man is subject to God." Humility then is the proper posture for every created mind to assume in presence of its Creator. To say that man is created to pay to God reverence and obedience, is to say that man is created to be humble. The first of the beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit (Matt. v, 3), is a blessing on the humble. The poor in spirit, says St. John Chrysostom, are the humble and contrite of heart; and he quotes for this explanation Isaias xxvi, 2: Upon whom shall I look but upon him that is poor and contrite of spirit, and trembleth at my words? The fear of the Lord, so continually extolled in the Old Testament, is nothing else than humility. Of the sinner whose foot is the

foot of pride, it is said: The fear of the Lord is not before his eyes (Ps. xxxv, 2, 12).

Both humility and pride consist in habits of mind rather than in habits of external conduct. When it comes to outward behavior, humility shows itself as obedience, pride as disobedience. Children in confession accuse themselves of "pride," meaning disobedience: therein these little ones are good theologians. Inculcating humility St. Peter wrote: Be ye subject to every human creature for God's sake, whether to the king as excelling, or to governors as sent by him...fear God, honor the king (I Pet. 13-17). How far men generally are from honoring authorities in Church and State for God's sake; how the fear of God is ceasing to be before the eyes of men, is patent to every observer. Such is the fruit of a godless education, which is truly an education in pride. Humility, as we have seen, was not on the list of pagan virtues. We are lapsing into paganism. It is more and more the way of the world to put man in the place of God. Where this substitution becomes complete, humility vanishes, and pride takes its place, pride and disobedience and anarchy. Such is the way of Antichrist, the man of sin, the wicked one, or more literally, the man of lawlessness, the lawless one, who is lifted up above all that is called God, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God (II Thess. ii, 3, 4, 8). When God is put out of His place as governor of human society, and man will hear but of man alone, when reverence is perished off the earth, and fear of superhuman powers, and awe of a world to come, the ground is prepared for socialism. Socialism will not be built four-square on the cardinal virtues; it will not rest on Christ the Rock, but on the sand of incoherent speeches, and violence, and blasphemy. When Socialism is set up we may look for the rain and the floods, and the winds, and the great fall (Matt. vii, 26, 27).

Whatever man be in comparison with his fellowman, he is little enough compared with God. This is motive for humility even for the highest and holiest of creatures. We sinners on earth have the further motive of our sins, and not only our sins, but what is almost more humiliating, our proneness to sin; and besides our sinfulness, our ignorance. We know so little, we can know so little, that school after school of philosophers have fallen into the plausible error of maintaining that the human mind has no hold whatever on truth as it really is, but wanders in an enchanted maze which it has constructed for itself. The Church has never countenanced that skeptical, idealist philosophy. Indeed the transition is easy from ignorance to omniscience. The position that man knows nothing of reality may be amplified into this, that there is no reality anywhere outside and away from human thought: then man's thought constitutes all that can be called reality, and man is as God, author of all, knowing all. The orthodox view, which is also the view taken by ordinary mankind, is that man does know a little truth, touching the world and its Creator; but for one thing that man knows there are a thousand things beyond his conjecture, known only to God, who knows all. Man, then, is very ignorant before God, in his present condition. The reward promised to his fidelity is the sight of God, which will be the dispelling of his ignorance, so far as ignorance can be dispelled from a finite mind. To aid man to this goal, God has been pleased to reveal to him sundry truths, some of which he could not have found out for himself at all while others he might have found, but could not have held with firm certainty. These are the truths of the Christian revelation, embodied in the Creed. So learning them, man is, as our Savior says, quoting Isaias, taught of God (John vi, 45; Isai. xiv, 13). He is as a child in God's school, God's school being the Church. The first requisite in a pupil is docility. God expects man to lend a docile ear to His teaching as given in the Church. Unless ye become

as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as this child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xviii, 3, 4). This virtue whereby we receive the teaching of God in the Church is called faith. The faith of an intellectual man is a great abasement of his understanding before God, a great act of humility, in these days especially, when science is widening and criticism is so keen. Yet after all it is not science, not criticism, that makes the difficulty of faith, but the neglect of prayer. Prayer is essentially an act of reverence to God, and therefore of humility: it is a profession of our total dependence on Him, a confession of our own insufficiency and consequent need of Him: it is usually a confession of our sins besides and an imploring of His pardon. Humility begets humility. The humility of prayer engenders and fosters the humility of faith. If a learned man loses his faith, it is not because of his learning as such, but because much study has left him prayerless. At the same time it must be confessed that study and mental acumen, as they remove many difficulties against faith "the shallow cavillings of the half-educated" so they raise other difficulties. As you mount the hill you see other hills, which from the valley you do not see. Therefore, as the high-strung, nervous organism needs much prayer to withstand sensual temptation, so the highly trained intellect needs prayer and Sacraments in abundance to surmount what God detests even beyond sensuality, namely, intellectual pride. Through such pride fell Lucifer. The intellect that comes nearest the angels must have a care that it, too, imitate not the sin of the angels. A keen inquirer must ever remember that, unlike science, faith is no intuition of genius, no product of elaborate reasoning, but is ultimately an obedience to the voice of God speaking in the heart, which voice must be heard in all humility. The ear of the proud is deaf to that still, small voice. To the Pharisees, because of their pride, Our Savior said: Ye

shall seek me and not find me, and where I go ye can not come (John vii, 34).

Finally, I must repeat, humility, obedience, faith are ever high-minded and noble hearted, because they bring one in touch with God. The author and finisher of our faith, who endured the Cross and despised the shame, and now sitteth at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. xii, 2), He who was meek and humble of heart (Matt. xi, 29), is likewise the typical magnanimous man.

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### **Aquinas's Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness**

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This paper compares Aristotle's and Aquinas's accounts of the virtue of magnanimity specifically as a corrective to the vice of pusillanimity. After defining pusillanimity and underscoring key features of Aristotelian magnanimity, I explain how Aquinas's account of Christian magnanimity, by making *human dependence* on God fundamental to this virtue, not only clarifies the differences between the vice of pusillanimity and the virtue of humility, but also shows why only Christian magnanimity can free us from improper and damaging forms of dependence on the opinions and standards of others, enabling us to avoid the moral pitfalls of both pusillanimity and presumption.

#### **I. Introduction**

Almost a decade ago, I headed off to graduate school in philosophy. My first year was something approaching sheer misery – due partly to the extremely challenging and high-pressure work. But the worst of my misery was

self-inflicted: I battled, for most of that first year, an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. As a result, I spoke in class only when I was forced to give a presentation, plagued by fears that others would think my ideas were silly, or stupid, or both.

When I later confessed this to a colleague, he said he felt the same way in grad school. (Why didn't anyone warn me?) He also told me the official name for my neurosis: 'Imposter Syndrome'. When afflicted, you are certain that you were accepted (for graduate studies or a new job or whatever) by some terrible mistake. It is therefore only a matter of time before everyone realizes that you are in fact completely unqualified to be there. So you slink around trying to stay unnoticed lest you be unmasked as the imposter that you are and summarily dismissed in disgrace.

It might be easy to dismiss this sense of inadequacy as a part of any normal learning experience – or part of the sometimes painful process of 'growing up' that we all have to do. Unfortunately, it continues to plague some people well beyond the crucible of self-formation that is our college or grad school experience. And while I have a hunch that this area of struggle may be exacerbated in gender-specific ways and perhaps also by certain theological emphases, it remains a general moral danger. When Imposter Syndrome becomes a chronic condition, rather than a passing episode, it can cripple our ability to use our gifts and fulfill our potential for worthwhile achievements. We become habitual self-underestimators, we believe our self-disparaging comments about our worth and abilities, and as a result, we fail to live up to all we are called to be.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas calls this condition the vice of pusillanimity. Pusillanimity means "smallness of soul"; its "faintheartedness" shrinks back in the face of challenge and difficulty. Its main effect is inaction: we

neglect to develop our talents and fail to stretch ourselves toward the fulfillment of our potential. If you are sure you can never achieve anything worthwhile, much less something great, then why bother even to try?

Pusillanimity may seem like a mere problem of misperception rather than a moral vice. As Aristotle describes them, the pusillanimous "seem not to be evil people, since they are not evil-doers, but to be in error." Nevertheless, he continues, "this belief of theirs actually seems to make them worse. For people seek what they think they are worth; and these people hold back from fine actions and practices...because they think they are unworthy of them."<sup>1</sup> The problem with the misperception is that we tend to live up to – or in this case, down to – our self-image.<sup>2</sup>

Adding to this problem, many of those plagued by a chronic sense of inadequacy think of their condition as a form of humility. I will argue that pusillanimous despair over one's worth and abilities should not be mistaken for the virtue of humility, especially since pusillanimity can be as morally and spiritually dangerous for some as presumption and pride are for others.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, I will show that pusillanimity and presumption, unlike humility, both ultimately depend on an untruthful view of the human person.

My task in this essay is to analyze pusillanimity and to recover the virtue that provides a remedy for it. Aristotle includes this vice and its opposing virtue, magnanimity (*megalo-psuchia*), in his catalogue of moral habits; Aquinas follows suit in the *Summa Theologiae*. One might reasonably expect that Aquinas, as a Christian theologian working with a very different list of virtues and vices and an equally different vision of human moral perfection and our means to it, would have an account bearing little if any similarity with that of a pagan philosopher, even *prima facie*. Yet Aquinas is clearly indebted to Aristotle's



discussion of these traits, to the point of modeling his cure for pusillanimity on that paragon of Aristotelian pride, the *megalopsuchos* or great-souled man. What a deeper look at these two thinkers will reveal is how radically transformed the initially similar accounts of these moral habits become in the context of Aquinas's Christian commitments. In that context, Aristotelian magnanimity – notwithstanding its merit in counteracting pusillanimity – will turn out to be more a vice than a virtue, and Christian humility – which Aristotle cannot countenance as anything but baseness and vice – becomes for Aquinas not only a virtue but an essential complement to magnanimity.

The key transformative feature of Aquinas's account of pusillanimity and magnanimity is its acknowledgment of our fundamental relationship of dependence on God. Only an acknowledgment of our dependence enables us to grasp the true worth of the self and to live up to our full potential. It is precisely this feature, unavailable to Aristotle, which yields a full remedy for pusillanimity.

First I will lay out a three-fold analysis of the vice of pusillanimity. Then I will consider Aristotle's insights about it and the virtue which is its remedy, insights which Aquinas's account can also affirm and incorporate. Finally, I will consider how locating this set of traits in a Christian context nevertheless demands a further and quite radical transformation of magnanimity from its Aristotelian form, a transformation in which magnanimity partners with humility to yield a fuller and more final cure for both its opposing vices, pusillanimity and presumption.

## II. Pusillanimity: Diagnosing the vice

In Aquinas's account of pusillanimity, he uses the parable of the talents in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to illustrate it.<sup>4</sup> We have has certain resources or gifts or talents which

we neglect to use. We keep them buried in the ground where no one can benefit by them, including ourselves. What would motivate us to do this? Three fundamental reasons, I think, which partner with fear and despair to hold us back from worthwhile achievements and cripple us in the face of challenges.

First, pusillanimity results from measuring our value in comparison to others, and negatively so. The faint-hearted person is one who, when considering some action, looks around, sees others doing a much better job, is certain that she will look inferior in comparison or fare poorly by their standards or expectations, and therefore decides not to make the attempt. She shrinks back from acting because her measure of herself and her contributions depends on a 'horizontal' standard of comparison. Moreover, her worries about others' opinions and expectations of her can additionally trap her into measuring her worth by the wrong standards of greatness. According to both of these comparative measures, she finds herself wanting.

Further, pusillanimity results from the wrong sort of self-reliance. In contemporary America, independence is *the* premier virtue. Each of us is valuable and valued for 'autonomous' achievement, not for depending on others for help. For the pusillanimous person to ask for assistance – and therefore to admit that she needs it – would be to admit her inadequacy to others, something which she cannot bear to do. Yet because she is certain that she could never act successfully on her own either, she shrinks back from the attempt altogether. Her insistence on a completely individualistic ideal of human action, coupled with her negative comparisons of herself with others and her dependence for esteem on their apparently unachievable standards of worthiness, cripples her incentive to act.

## III. Aristotle's Remedy: *Megalopsuchia*

In both Aristotle and Aquinas, the vice of pusillanimity is opposed to the virtue of magnanimity by way of deficiency. Faintheartedness is opposed to magnanimity's greatness of heart, its confidence in facing difficult achievements, and its love of truth that blocks fear about what others might think. According to Aristotle's account of *megalopsuchia*, there are three key ways the magnanimous person differs from his pusillanimous counterpart.

First, the magnanimous person aims at great acts of virtue, and his desire for honor spurs him on to attempt things genuinely worthy of honor. (On this, both Aquinas and Aristotle agree.) However, the magnanimous person is not a slave to the desire for human honor and acclaim – in fact, he despises them if they come from unworthy sources or for things for which honor is not genuinely due. He attempts and achieves great things because they are appropriate expressions of the excellence that he has, not because he craves affirmation from others or desires glory.<sup>5</sup> The Philosopher's view of magnanimity simply does not make much of human opinion. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, Aquinas's gloss says that the magnanimous person "is more solicitous about truth than about human opinion...He does not depart from what he ought to do [either by excess or deficiency] because of what others think."<sup>6</sup> Because of his allegiance to truth, including the truth about himself, the magnanimous person rises above the anxieties of a comparative view of his own worth.

Further, Aristotle emphasizes that honor is genuinely due to moral excellence – great deeds of virtue – rather than wealth, good birth, or power.<sup>7</sup> The magnanimous person has a "moderate attitude" about riches and the like, because he "does not regard honor as the greatest good", but rather the virtue which makes one genuinely worthy of it. Greatness is not measured by celebrity status or by how much the *hoi polloi* are impressed by one's

wealth; Aristotelian magnanimity has a more noble view of what makes one truly great.

Lastly, Aristotle's magnanimous person is not the Lone Ranger when it comes to accomplishing great acts of virtue. Without a doubt, the magnanimous person seeks to be self-sufficient, but self-sufficiency in Aristotelian terms contrasts sharply with an American-style denial of our dependence on others. Human excellence depends on receiving a good upbringing in a city with good laws and cooperating with others to rule and defend the city. Even in the limit case of contemplation, Aristotle says it is more easily sustained in the company of friends who share one's good character.<sup>8</sup> To be human is to be social by nature, and our acts of virtue find their place in this structure of human interdependence.

In summary, Aristotle's magnanimous person acknowledges that he depends on others to become virtuous and to exercise virtue, but he is appropriately independent of their opinions and their standards of greatness in assessing his own worth. Because of this, he is able to avoid the damaging forms of comparative self-value and self-reliance that are the pitfalls of pusillanimity.

And yet, the magnanimous person, on Aristotle's account, does not give us a model of virtue that a Christian could embrace. Although Aristotle's *megalopsuchos* moves beyond a comparative self-value in one way, and certainly beyond a negative comparative self-assessment, his sense of his own excellence still depends on thinking of himself as superior to others. For example, the magnanimous person likes to do favors for others but not to receive them, because benefitting others is a sign of his superiority while receiving help is "slavish" and "inferior". He is patronizing in his behavior toward others who are beneath him. As Aristotle says in the *Eudemian Ethics*: "Contempt seems particularly the special characteristic of the magnani-

mous man...He would be pained if denied honor and if ruled by one undeserving.”<sup>9</sup> It is, therefore, no accident that in Aristotle’s world the *megalopsuchos* must be a man.

Thus, even though he measures greatness primarily in terms of virtue, the magnanimous man’s excellence is still valued at least in part because it supercedes that of others whom he outdoes, despises, and condescends to, so that even his gait and tone of voice show him to be above their help, their daily concerns, and their frivolous opinions. The measure of greatness remains inherently comparative, and the standard of comparison is still emphatically horizontal. Further, while he is loyal to the truth about himself above unworthy human opinions, the truth in question is still the truth according to unaided human wisdom, which remains fundamentally incomplete.

Finally, although the magnanimous man’s self-sufficiency is defined, for Aristotle, within the parameters of human beings’ social and interdependent nature, Aristotle’s paragon of virtue never gets beyond an ethic of human self-reliance. Individualistic autonomy is left behind, but human autonomy remains. Virtue is achieved with the help of others who provide good legislation and good upbringing, but this *human* effort, here collectively considered rather than narrowly individualized, is both necessary and sufficient for the greatest achievements of human excellence.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. Aquinas and Acknowledged Dependence

Aquinas, as a Christian thinker, cannot therefore merely subsume Aristotle’s account of the moral virtues into his own. His commitment to a creative, providential, and redeeming God demands a transformation of this Aristotelian virtue. A comparison of the two accounts will show why Aquinas, as a Christian, concludes that Aristotle’s remedy for pusillanimity – for

all its truth and moral insight – nevertheless fails to liberate the self from a fundamentally comparative self-value and from limiting and incomplete measures of greatness.

From the perspective of a Christian moral vision like Aquinas’s – one that comprehends more than human wisdom and human agency – Aristotelian magnanimity fails to go far enough to ultimately free the self from the improper dependence on human standards and the opinions of other people which are pusillanimity’s main pitfalls. In another way, however, from this perspective the Aristotelian virtue also goes too far in claiming independence for the self and falls into pusillanimity’s opposite vice, presumption. While pusillanimity claims too little for the self; presumption claims too much, neglecting to acknowledge that its virtuous achievements are the fruit of an unmerited gift and that the self is ultimately dependent on one greater than itself for all its worth and goodness.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically enough, Aquinas uses Aristotle’s own notion of friendship to explain how Aristotelian magnanimity is actually presumption:

As the Philosopher says (*NE* iii.3 1112b25), ‘What we can do by the help of others we can do by ourselves in a sense.’ Therefore since we can think and do good by the help of God, this is not altogether above our ability. Hence it is not presumptuous for a person to attempt the accomplishment of a virtuous deed; but it would be presumptuous if one were to make the attempt *without confidence in God’s assistance*.<sup>12</sup>

#### ***Aquinas’s Remedy: Magnanimitas.***

While Aquinas draws heavily on Aristotle and his insights in constructing his own account of Christian magnanimity, his insistence on

human beings' fundamental relation of dependence on God transforms this virtue and provides the key to fully overcoming pusillanimity. For Aquinas, magnanimity is only a virtue, and only compatible with Christian humility, when it is a virtue of acknowledged dependence *on God*. In contrast, pusillanimity and presumption are both failures – albeit in different directions – to depend on God in our attempts to do good.

Magnanimity is a wholehearted readiness to attempt the great acts of virtue to which we are called, however impossible or daunting the task may seem and however much the attempt may 'stretch' us. According to Josef Pieper's description, magnanimity "always... decides in favor of what is, at any given moment, the greater possibility of human potentiality for being."<sup>13</sup>

The main difference between Aristotelian and Thomistic magnanimity is that for Aquinas, this virtue and its operation are possible only through God's gift of grace – a gift for which we are dependent on a God who is greater and more powerful than we are. Magnanimity is thus fundamentally conceived in terms of vocation and stewardship: it is a response to God's call, and willingness to use his gifts. As Aquinas says: "Magnanimity makes us deem ourselves worthy of great things *in consideration of the gifts we hold from God*; thus if our souls are endowed with great virtue, magnanimity makes us tend to perfect works of virtue...".<sup>14</sup> The apostle Paul expresses the heart of magnanimity when he says, "I can do *everything – through Christ who gives me strength*."<sup>15</sup>

With this general conception in mind, we can see how Aquinas's account of magnanimity transforms Aristotle's understanding of self-reliance, self-value, and the measure of greatness.

*Self-reliance*. In the *prima secundae*, Aquinas privileges Augustine's definition of virtue: it is "a good quality of the soul by which we live rightly...*which God works in us without our help*."<sup>16</sup> Virtue, for Aquinas, is a gift of grace, not something we accomplish on our own. So when he frames magnanimity as a part of fortitude, he describes the confidence of a magnanimous person as a hope and faith *in someone who is willing to help us*.<sup>17</sup> We can have hope about accomplishing good, especially when this is difficult, because we need not make the attempt relying solely on our own power. Thus even as he uses Aristotle's account of magnanimity, Aquinas consistently emphasizes *God's* power to work good in and through us, and not our *own* ability.<sup>18</sup> Like Aristotle, he assumes that one needs to be a person of great resources to have this virtue, but the nature of those resources – i.e., grace – and the sense in which they can be our own – i.e., through the friendship of charity – become radically different.

Magnanimity thus requires trust, not in ourselves, but in God's assistance. As Dietrich von Hildebrand puts it,

The question whether I feel worthy to be called is beside the point; that God *has* called me is the one thing that matters. Having abandoned all pride and all craving for being something of my own resources, I shall not doubt that God, from whom I receive everything, also has the power to lift me up and to transform any darkness into light.<sup>19</sup>

For God's power in us to be efficacious, we must be willing to receive God's gracious assistance, to receive it as a gift, and to trust that what is needful will be given. Precisely because magnanimity depends on God's power and trusts his goodness, it protects us from smug presumption on the one hand and pusillanimous despair on the other. Both vices are caused by a view of the self and its accom-

plishments without the aid of grace. The first takes the form of thinking our own power is sufficient for goodness so that we are independently worthy of honor; the second thinks that since we are absolutely helpless and hopeless on our own there is no doubt that God, from whom I receive everything, also has the power to lift me up and to transform any darkness into light.<sup>20</sup>

For God's power in us to be efficacious, we must be willing to receive God's gracious assistance, to receive it *as a gift*, and to trust that what is needful will be given. Precisely because magnanimity depends on God's power and trusts his goodness, it protects us from smug presumption on the one hand and pusillanimous despair on the other. Both vices are caused by a view of the self and its accomplishments *without the aid of grace*. The first takes the form of thinking our own power is sufficient for goodness so that we are independently worthy of honor; the second thinks that since we are absolutely helpless and hopeless on our own there is no reason to even try to be good. Thus to the presumptuous person, God says, "You *cannot* do this on your own"; and to those overwhelmed by a sense of their own inadequacy, God says, "You don't *have to* do this on your own."<sup>21</sup>

Following Aquinas's reconception of magnanimity in terms of vocation and stewardship, this virtue points beyond the self in two ways. First, we are gifted by God because we are called for service in his kingdom, according to his purposes. The gifts are given, not just for us, but also for God and for others.<sup>22</sup> When the pusillanimous person shrinks back from using her gifts, this may have more than personal repercussions: if her calling is to use her gifts to help others and meet their needs, then her neglect will be their loss as well. Pusillanimity makes the world a poorer place.

And furthermore, because the magnanimous person depends on God's power and goodness

for her great achievements, she must also give credit where credit is due. Her greatness points to God's greatness and gives God glory. What is repugnant to many of us in Aristotle's portrait of the magnanimous man – the way he glories in his own "self-produced"<sup>23</sup> superiority – is thus rejected on Aquinas's account.

The false sense that when it comes to virtue and the pursuit of a vocation, we are on our own, for better or worse, leads to presumption or pusillanimity. If, on the other hand, we position ourselves as dependent on God and assess our abilities in terms of his gifts to us, we avoid both forms of improper independence. So much for self-reliance.

*Self-value.* Turning to our second point, Aquinas's account of magnanimity also radically undermines the *comparative value of the self*.<sup>24</sup> that even Aristotle's account does not fully escape. The standard of comparison on Aquinas's account is emphatically 'vertical': the measure of our worth does not ultimately depend on how we stack up against others. When we see ourselves in relation to God, we realize that both magnanimity and its complementary virtue of acknowledged dependence, humility, are necessary for living in accord with a truthful view of ourselves.

As Aquinas puts it, "There is in us something great which we possess as a gift from God, and something defective which accrues to us through the weakness of our nature."<sup>25</sup> As to our weakness and inadequacy, humility lives in acknowledgment that human beings are separated from God by an almost unbridgeable chasm between Creator and creature. God is the source of all being and goodness; without God, we are not just defective we are nothing at all.

But importantly, for Aquinas, this is not the whole story about us. Human beings are also the crown of creation and can participate in the divine life of God himself. With God's

power and grace, we are capable of moving mountains, raising the dead, truly loving another person. To live according to this view of ourselves is magnanimity. Both virtues are required to tell the whole truth about us.

Both virtues tell the truth about us by positioning us first and foremost in a relationship of acknowledged dependence on God, not in a relationship to other people. Humility says, “apart from [God],” I am nothing and “[I] can do nothing”; magnanimity says, “He has called me by name, and I am his”; therefore, he is “able to do immeasurably more than all I ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within me.”<sup>25, 26</sup>

What magnanimity and humility do together, through their recognition of who we are *with* and *without* grace, respectively, is to free us from measuring our ultimate worth in terms of how we compare with others.<sup>27</sup> If my ultimate accountability is to God, then any assessment of my worth and abilities vis-à-vis others is conditioned and limited by my standing before him. Acknowledging this new “vertical” measure of our worth and works relieves the anxiety and despair that paralyzes the pusillanimous person into inaction.<sup>28</sup>

*The measure of greatness.* The third and last point at which Aquinas moves beyond Aristotle’s account regards the measure of greatness. Just as the measure of our self-worth and our capacities was transformed by grounding magnanimity in our dependent relationship with God, so also is the standard of what counts as greatness. Part of the problem for the pusillanimous person lies in the standard of greatness by which she measures her abilities. Magnanimity is not about doing great things as the world defines greatness. The great-heartedness of the Christian does not seek honor on the world’s terms, and it does not need to showcase its achievements for the world to applaud. It ultimately seeks the glory of God, and appreciates human

honor only insofar as it bears witness to true virtue. Our greatest achievements are the ones to which God responds, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”<sup>29</sup>

A supernatural perspective is crucial here, because being great for God may very well cost us dearly in terms of worldly greatness. Christ’s greatness was shown through the way he dignified women and children, the sick, the sinful, the lowborn and the poor – the very ones Aristotle’s *megalopsuchos* disdains and seeks to rule over and outdo. Measuring ourselves ultimately by God’s standard of greatness allows us to break from seeking the approval of others’ when this is necessary, for the world sometimes mistakenly heaps shame on those deserving of great honor, and may even mistake virtue for vice?<sup>30</sup>

Aquinas has Christ himself in mind as the exemplar of virtue as he writes the ethical portion of the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>31</sup> But I think it might also be helpful to think of the example of Mary at the annunciation when trying to understand how Christianity transforms Aristotelian magnanimity.<sup>32</sup> Her example helps us see how magnanimity is not only a virtue of acknowledged dependence, but also one compatible with humility, which the Greeks thought of as mere debasement. Using this example also provides a stark contrast to the classism and sexism inherent in the Greek account: Christian magnanimity is not only for a male, upperclass, moral elite; great acts are now open to anyone willing to answer God’s call and accept his grace.<sup>33</sup>

At the annunciation, Mary shows us that true greatness comes from looking to God for one’s ultimate sense of worthiness, and the greatest achievements of virtue come from relying on God’s power working in us. Paradoxically, Mary is greatest, most favored, and capable of both great virtue and great suffering for God’s sake when she recognizes her absolute dependence on God, her status as a hand-

maid.<sup>34</sup> She does not even refer to herself by her own name in the *Magnificat* and most of her song relates the great deeds of God. Yet at the same time she proclaims without hesitation that all generations to come will call her blessed – more honor and glory than any of us is likely to achieve.

Throughout the account, Mary's source of self-appraisal is emphatically vertical: Elizabeth, *moved by the Holy Spirit, confirms* Mary's favor with the Lord and honors her for the greatness of her position,<sup>35</sup> as was previously announced *by the angelic messenger from God*.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, her reputation in her lifetime was likely of little account (she was from Nazareth in Galilee, of all places), if not shameful because of her pregnancy out of wedlock. Mary sees herself rightly when she looks to the true source of her worthiness, her honor, and her ability to do great things. She is great on account of what the Lord has done for and through her. And she proclaims it in vibrant song.

The mistakes of the pusillanimous person are threefold: *to whom* they are listening, *against whom* they are measuring themselves, *on whom* they are relying. In contrast, Mary could privilege Elizabeth's words of honor over the shame from her townsfolk because she knew where she stood before God. Greatness for her was fundamentally defined by God's favor and not by the expectations of others. Moreover, she accepted the great task to which she was called out of absolute trust in God's power and dependence on God's grace.

To conclude, the effect of Aquinas's transformation of Aristotelian magnanimity is to turn our eyes beyond human power and (mere) human opinion. Aquinas introduces into magnanimity a new kind of other-relatedness and another layer of dependence that transforms both our view of ourselves and our relationships with others. Rather than claiming for

itself a false independence from God which denies that virtue is a gift, Christian magnanimity finds in its dependence on God freedom from improper and damaging forms of dependence on the opinions and standards of others. God's estimation of us is the most important measure of who we are and what we can (and cannot) do. Without this measure, our comparisons of ourselves with others can lead to faint-hearted pusillanimity as easily as to the presumptuous superiority of Aristotle's *megalopsuchos*. In the end, the comparison between Aristotle's paragon of virtue and Christ – the perfect exemplar of Christian virtue – is about as striking as one could imagine. Servais Pinckaers' description of Christ is especially for the pusillanimous among us:<sup>37</sup>

Jesus had a far keener understanding of human nature than did the legalistic Pharisees. This is revealed in his way of treating the sick, whom he cured even on the Sabbath, in his attitude toward sinners (for whose sake he risked his reputation), and toward the children who were being brushed aside by his disciples...

In each one – in the rich Zacchaeus as in the thief on the cross – Jesus sought what we might call the primordial human being, even as he [or she] has come forth from the hands of the Creator, an image to be restored...He would have us understand what we too easily forget – the innate nobility of ourselves and others...

[In each of us, Jesus sees] with kindness and clear-sightedness, *the person in whom weakness and sin are countered by divine potentialities*.<sup>38</sup>

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NOTES

3. *Nichomachean Ethics* iv.3, 1125a20-25. Trans. T. Irwin. Hereafter *NE*.
4. Anthony J. Hoekema describes this as a problem especially for Christians in *The Christian Looks at Himself* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1975), chapter 1. For the point made specifically here, see p. 14.
5. Aquinas and Aristotle both argue that the vices opposed to magnanimity by excess are closer to the mean of virtue than the vice of deficiency (pusillanimity), as is also the case for Aquinas with fortitude in general. Also, I am here glossing over the differences between pride and presumption. Technically, pride is opposed to humility, and has primarily to do with the desire for excellence, while presumption is opposed to magnanimity and is about attempting acts of virtue that are proportionate to our power. As with pusillanimity and its root, *acedia* (the capital vice of sloth), however, there are intimate links. (For instance, pusillanimity's inaction is listed as a 'daughter' sin of *acedia* in *Summa theologiae* II-II 35, 4 (hereafter *S.T.*); nowadays we mistake the effects of *acedia* for sloth itself). Interestingly, pusillanimity and *acedia* can both be rooted in a kind of obstinacy that results from pride – where we privilege our opinion of ourselves and our worth over God's. For humility and pride, see *S.T.* II-II 61-62; for *acedia*, see *S.T.* II-II 28 and 35; for magnanimity and its opposed vices, see *S.T.* II-II 129-133. There are also links to the theological virtue of hope here, as it lies in a mean between presumption and despair (*S.T.* II-II 120-21) with respect to the divine good (our *end*). Acts of virtue, which are magnanimity's primary concern, are goods that are *means* to the end.
6. Matthew 24 and Luke 19. All Scripture references are from the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated. For Aquinas's own reference to these texts, see *S.T.* II-II 133 *resp.* Especially when one takes 'talents' in the wider modern sense, I think this parable is an excellent way to capture magnanimity and pusillanimity. Of special note is that in one version of the parable, the allotment of talents is the same, and in the other gospel version, the allotment is unequal, although the conclusion of both parables is the same: God expects us to use whatever gifts are given for him.
7. *In NE* lect. x [779].
8. *In NE* lect. x [773]; *NE* iv.3, 1124b25-30.
9. *NE* iv.3 1124a20-25.
10. *NE* x.7, 1177b1; *NE* ix.9, 1169b15 ff.
11. *EE* iii.5; 1232b10 ff.
12. Necessary and sufficient in terms of agency, that is; of course the 'assistance' of external goods and some good fortune is also required for virtue and *eudaimonia*. I say 'the greatest' because magnanimity is, for Aristotle, the 'crown' of the moral virtues (*NE* iv.3, cf. *S.T.* II-II 129, 4 ad 3).
13. There is a difficult question here about whether the virtue of magnanimity, on Aquinas's account, is possible only for the Christian (or less restrictively, only the theist). I think a plausible case can be made for both sides. (No less than basic theism will suffice, however, given that magnanimity requires acknowledging one's dependence, for the gifts received on God (*S.T.* 129, 3 ad 4).)
 

On the one hand, Aquinas's magnanimity might be possible for non-Christian theists. Aquinas categorizes the virtue of 'religion' as a *moral* virtue, and places it under the *cardinal* virtue of justice (paying what is due) which has both an acquired and a grace-infused form. Religion's principle acts include acknowledging through sacrifice and devotion that one owes one's being and governance to a higher being or first principle (*S.T.* II-II 81 ff.; sacrifice itself is described as required by the natural law) so the sense of dependence acknowledged in these acts may be enough to make magnanimity



possible even for a basic theist. In his definition of virtue (*S.T.* I-II 55, 4) and his discussion of whether true virtue is possible without charity (*S.T.* II-II 23, 7), Aquinas deliberately includes acquired virtues in his catalog of human perfections through the use of virtue as an analogous term.

On the other hand, in Aquinas's own presentation of it, magnanimity looks very much like it will only comfortably fit those who are Christians. In the virtue of religion the dependence regards one's existence itself, not the gifts and talents that accrue in addition, and the latter is the focus of magnanimity. Aquinas's own examples of magnanimity are evidence that he is thinking of magnanimity's gifts' (where 'gift' contrasts with what is by "nature" – see *II-II* 129, 3 ad 4) in terms of those bestowed not as part of our created nature but by the special aid of grace. Moses is called, for example, despite his stuttering (a natural defect) and equipped with miraculous powers (beyond the power of his nature) to deliver God's commands to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Magnanimity is also essentially partnered with humility, which is often touted as an exclusively Christian virtue, and which is explicitly patterned after Christ's own example (Philippians 2). Moreover, the treatise on courage itself, in which Aquinas's account of magnanimity is located, explicitly stresses the role of grace in acting according to virtue (see n. 18 below).

My own conclusion is that even if there are reasons to think that basic theism might be sufficient for magnanimity on Aquinas's account, his own view that true virtue in the strict sense is informed by charity, a theological virtue surpassing our natural powers and infused only by grace (*S.T.* II-II 23, 2 and 7), combined with his choice of examples and his idea, taken from Aristotle, that magnanimity is about acts of *great* virtue (see also notes 13

and 22), leads me to conclude that he is thinking of magnanimity as pertaining to gifts 'that surpass our nature,' that is, those that are given as a special dispensation of grace.

14. *S.T.* I-II 130, 1 ad 3; my emphasis.
15. Pieper, *On Hope*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 28. I think the best way to read this sense of possibility is in agent-relative terms, rather than limiting magnanimity to the disposition to perform acts at the limit of human power in general. Aquinas's account of the virtues consistently opens them up to a wider range of practitioners – for example, courage as endurance and suffering rather than military aggression is available not only to the strong, but also to the powerless. Making the measure of possibility agent-relative would make magnanimity a virtue for all of us, saint and novice alike. Widening the range of possible practitioners would also rightly cut against Aristotle's implicit restriction of this virtue to free, educated, upper-class males only. I readily acknowledge that Aquinas himself may not have fully grasped just how radical a change his account makes possible.
16. *S.T.* II-II 129, 3 ad 4; my emphasis.
17. Philippians 4:13; my emphasis.
18. *S.T.* I-II-55, 4.
19. *S.T.* II-II 129, 6; emphasis added. Here Aquinas echoes the treatise on the passions: "Since hope regards a possible good, there arises in a person a twofold movement of hope; for a thing may be possible to one in two ways, *viz.* by one's own power, or by another's.... Properly speaking, he is said to await that which he hopes to get by another's help as though to await (*expectare*) implied keeping one's eyes on another (*ex alio spectare*), insofar as the apprehensive power, by going ahead, not only keeps its eye on the good which one intends to get, but also on the thing by whose power he hopes to get it..." (*S.T.* I-II 40, 2 ad 1). In ad 3 he clarifies the connection between hope and con-

- confidence, describing the latter as a “movement of the appetite” that follows upon one’s belief that one can get that for which one hopes.
20. This is a theme already developed in his account of principal act of fortitude – namely, martyrdom – which gives endurance priority over aggression, and requires the “copious assistance of divine grace” not only to perform the act but also to take delight in it. For a more detailed discussion, see my “Power Made Perfect in Weakness: Aquinas’s Transformation of the Virtue of Courage,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11-2 (Fall 2002).
  21. *Humility: Wellspring of Virtue* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1990), p. 51-2, published as an excerpt from his book, *Transformation in Christ*.
  22. Magnanimity and humility together give us realistic hope: as Josef Pieper writes, “Magnanimity directs...hope to its true possibilities; humility, with its gaze fixed on the infinite distance between God and [human beings, reveals the limitations of these possibilities and preserves them from sham realization” (*On Hope*, p. 29).
  23. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas describes the magnanimous person’s “attention” as “taken up with the good of the community and God” (lect. x [779]).
  24. The term is David Homer’s, in “What it Takes to be Great: Aristotle and Aquinas on Magnanimity.” *Faith and Philosophy* 15:4 (Oct. 199.8), pp. 415-444.. Homer makes much of the ‘stewardship’ reading of magnanimity, a reading with which I concur, but he does not appear to extend the range of practioners of this virtue as I do, since on his description the magnanimous are those capable of “extraordinary acts of virtue” (p. 421).
  25. On this point I am particularly indebted to Robert C. Roberts, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982). In chapter 5, “Humility as a moral project,” he challenges the idea that the way to self-value is the achievement of comparative excellence (p. 70).
  26. *S.T.* II-II129, 3 ad 4.
  27. John 15:5; Isaiah 43:1, paraphrased; Ephesians 3:20-21.
  28. The verses from Ephesians are particularly evocative of magnanimity, as they bring the concepts of glory and honor into relation with magnanimity’s proper source and end – God. (“Now *to him who is able* to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, *according to his power* that is at work within us, *to him be glory* in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”) Both Aquinas’s and Aristotle’s accounts center this virtue on the proper desire for honor, a desire that occasions special moral difficulty. Presumption, the first vice opposing magnanimity by way of excess, is concerned with power. The other two vices opposed to magnanimity by way of excess, however, concern honor (ambition) and glory (vain-glory) specifically. The fact that there are *three* vices of excess in Aquinas’s account is a clue that magnanimity, with its regulation of the desire for power, honor, and glory, addresses areas of perennial and serious human weakness.
  29. In contrast to Aristotle’s exclusive focus on honor, Aquinas’s account also changes the focus of magnanimity by defining it as a part (integral and potential) of the cardinal virtue of fortitude, which is concerned with fear and daring and located in the irascible appetite (along with humility and the natural passions of hope and despair). For a hilarious and brutally honest account of comparative self-value, and how it can block one’s ability to fulfill one’s vocation, see Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), p. 116, especially this excerpt in which

- she describes the inner voices that hinder her from writing: “If you are not careful, [radio] station KFKD will play in your head twenty-four hours a day, nonstop, in stereo. Out of the right speaker in your inner ear will come the endless stream of self-aggrandizement, the recitation of one’s own specialness, of how much more open and gifted and brilliant and knowing and misunderstood and humble one is. Out of the left speaker will be the rap songs of self-loathing, the list of all the things one doesn’t do well, of all the mistakes one has made today and over an entire lifetime, the doubt, the assertion that everything one touches turns to shit, that one doesn’t do relationships well, that one is in every way a fraud, incapable of selfless love, that one has no talent or insight, and on and on and on.”
30. Aquinas follows Aristotle in saying that magnanimity deals properly with the desire for honor, since honor attends great works of virtue. Notably, however, in Aquinas’s account, honor loses much of its status as a competitive good, following the emphasis on measuring the self by a vertical, rather than a horizontal standard. So, Aquinas says, honor is to be accorded to all people, and not just those who excel others in some way. He quotes Paul’s famous exhortation to imitate the humility of Christ (Phil 2; cf. also 1 Peter 2:17) to argue that there is always some basis for honoring another. As David Homer puts it, Aquinas adds to Aristotle the concept of “respect[ing] the worth and dignity of a human being simply *qua* human being” (p. 424). Others are to be honored, Aquinas says (*S.T.* II-I1103, 2 *resp.*) “simply on account of some excellence they have, which is honored for itself, and *not in a comparative way.*” Moreover; if all are worthy of honor in some respect, then all should ultimately refer their honor to God as the ultimate source of our being and goodness.
31. Matthew 25:23.
32. Examples abound: Christ himself was mocked by Roman soldiers before his crucifixion; David Hurne calls humility a “monkish virtue” – *i.e.*, a vice; for the ancient Greeks *tapeinos* indicated debasement (humility was a kind of slavishness), and so on. Aquinas himself uses Augustine’s analysis of the Roman virtues as splendid vices in *Civitas Dei* chapter V when discussing vainglory. He also warns of overly esteeming the opinions of others in *S.T.* II-II 129, 3 ad 4 where he says that we shouldn’t honor others so much that we fail to do what we ought or do something we ought not to do for their sake or approval.
33. As he says in IIIa, Prologue: Christ “showed unto us in his own person the way of truth...”
34. Luke 1.
35. Aquinas does not use Mary as an example. (In the treatise on grace he uses Peter (*S.T.* I-II 111, 4 ad 1) as an example of one receiving a gift that “surpassed his nature” as he delivered his Pentecost sermon; he also uses Peter as an example of presumption (*S.T.* II-II 130, 2 ad 3) and Moses as an example of avoiding pusillanimity (*S.T.* II-II 133, 1 ad 4)). If the example of Mary is plausible, it supports my move to ‘open up’ this virtue further than Aquinas himself did explicitly, making it available not only to males and moral saints, but to all Christians, both male and female, both novice and saint. I also address the point of opening up the virtue of fortitude in the final section of my “Power Made Perfect in Weakness: Aquinas’s Transformation of the Virtue of Courage.”
36. The Greek, *doula*, can literally be translated “slave” or “servant.”
37. “Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (cf. Luke 1: 41-45).
38. Luke 1:28-30. As the example of Elizabeth shows us, listening to God and his voice can mean listening to *others*

through whom God speaks. What magnanimity frees us from is *merely* human opinions and standards. Thanks to Lambert Zuidervaart for bringing this point to my attention.

39. *Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 89-90, my emphasis.
40. I am grateful for helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper offered by my colleagues at Calvin College, and especially John Hare; the constructive criticisms of two anonymous referees; the comments of conference participants at the Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture conference of Nov.-Dec. 2001 where I first presented the paper; and the work of Mary Keys and John O'Callaghan, whose reflections on this topic have enriched my own.

## Magnanimity

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnanimity>

The magnanimity of Alexander towards the captive Porus. Magnanimity (derived from the Latin roots *magn-* great, and *anima*, soul) is the virtue of being great of mind and heart. It encompasses, usually, a refusal to be petty, a willingness to face danger, and actions for noble purposes. Its antithesis is pusillanimity. Both terms were coined by Aristotle, who called magnanimity “the crowning virtue.”

Noah Webster's 1828 *Dictionary of the American Language* defines Magnanimity as such:

**MAGNANIMITY**, n. [L. magnanimitas; *magnus*, great, and *animus*, mind.] Greatness of mind; that elevation or dignity of soul, which encounters danger and trouble with tranquillity and firmness, which raises the possessor above revenge, and makes him delight in acts of benevolence, which makes

him disdain injustice and meanness, and prompts him to sacrifice personal ease, interest and safety for the accomplishment of useful and noble objects.[1]

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considered it the suitable virtue for a great man, arising from his other virtues.[2]

Edmund Spenser, in *The Faerie Queen*, had each knight allegorically represent a virtue; Prince Arthur represented “magnificence,” which is generally taken as a synonym of “magnanimity” .[3] The uncompleted work does not include Prince Arthur's book, and the significance is not clear.

Democritus states that “magnanimity consists in enduring tactlessness with mildness”.

As an adjective, the concept is expressed as “magnanimous,” e.g. “She is a magnanimous woman.” An example of referring to one as magnanimous can be seen in Hrólfs saga kraka where King Hrólfr Kraki changes the name of a court servant from Hott to Hjalti for his new-found strength and courage, after which Hjalti refuses to taunt or kill those who previously mocked him. Because of his noble actions, the king then bestows the title Magnanimous upon Hjalti.

One form of magnanimity is the generosity of the victor to the defeated. For example, magnanimity has been codified between societies by the Geneva Conventions.

Magnanimous relief efforts can serve to offset the collateral damage of war.

C. S. Lewis, in his book *The Abolition of Man*, refers to the chest of man as the seat of magnanimity, or sentiment, with this magnanimity working as the liaison between visceral and cerebral man. [4] Lewis asserts that in his time, the denial of the emotions that are found in the eternal, the sublime, that which

is humbling as an objective reality, had led to “men without chests.”

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## **The Life of Virtue - Magnanimity**

by Robert Verrill OP

<http://godzdogz.op.org/2009/08/life-of-virtue-magnanimity.html>

In order to be virtuous, it is necessary to have emotional responses that are appropriate for the situations in which we find ourselves. Because certain types of situation occur more frequently than others, certain virtues may more readily be displayed than others. Perhaps one of the less frequently observed virtues is magnanimity, the virtue pertaining to great honor. Whilst most of us are capable of deeds worthy of some level of praise, few of us manage to accomplish truly great deeds, the sorts of achievements that are remembered for generations to come.

There is a virtue associated with small honors – it would be wrong to despise honor and it would be wrong to love honor too much – but Aquinas is very clear that the virtue of magnanimity is not to do with small honors, but only with great honors. The magnanimous person sets their mind on achieving great things. When faced with the prospect of attaining a difficult good, they possess a certain resolve and hope which means they are not afraid of success, of being brilliant, and they undertake their great deeds with a noble dignity. They know they are worthy of great honor, but they don't feel the need to remind others of this fact.

This doesn't mean that the magnanimous person lacks the virtue of humility. Magnanimity makes a person deem his or herself worthy of great honor only in consideration of the gifts received from God. Humility on the other hand, is revealed in a different sort of situation, the kind in which a person's weaknesses are exposed. So the person who acts

magnanimously in a situation in which they excel, may also act with humility in another situation if that is appropriate.

Aquinas says that all the moral virtues are connected and if someone possesses one, they possess them all. However this has to be qualified, by adding that the moral virtues are connected only as regards their principle of origin rather than the act of virtue itself. Thus, all virtues are connected because they stem from prudence and grace – if we have these, then whatever task we undertake, whether great or small, we will have the disposition to exercise the appropriate virtue.

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## **Teenage Magnanimity and the Beautiful**

Doug McManaman

August, 2004

[http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/mcm/mcm\\_18magnanimity.html](http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/mcm/mcm_18magnanimity.html)

Anyone who has worked with teenagers knows that the happiest and most emotionally healthy of them are those who aspire after great and honorable ends. And certainly not all of them do. It is not uncommon to see hordes of teenagers loitering every night at the local Tim Horton's, Country Style, or mall, doing very little with their lives if anything at all. This rather pusillanimous existence is by no means limited to teenagers. Many adults have settled for a very small existence, which usually includes but does not seem to go far beyond a house with a well manicured lawn, a colorful garden, a cottage perhaps, and sometimes a life that deliberately excludes children, but not pets. These things are not evil in themselves. Rather, it is the lack of aspiration towards what is worthy of great honor that is small and deficient.

The virtue of magnanimity, which perfects the emotion of hope, involves a stretching forth of the mind to great honors. An emotionally

whole life involves such a stretching forth to the great.

Most teenagers are under the impression that striving after great honors is about the pursuit of financial success or great wealth. The reason is that financial success is what our culture tends to honor most. In a hedonistic culture in which pleasure is regarded as the principal good, a life in pursuit of pleasure is the only life that makes any sense; for wealth buys pleasures.

We honor great athletes, but athletic achievement is not great,"at least not absolutely. A great athlete is not necessarily a great man. Neither is an intelligent and well educated man necessarily great and worthy of honor. Moral excellence is greater and more worthy of honor than is athletic and even academic excellence. But magnanimity is about the pursuit of great honors, and persons are honored principally on account of their virtue. Magnanimity is thus not so much the pursuit of Olympic gold, or musical stardom, or financial success, much less fame and international repute, as it is the pursuit of great moral achievement.

Recently, TEEN PEOPLE Magazine (April, 2004) profiled a number of teenagers, some of whom are engaged in the pursuit of great and honorable projects. Whether or not everyone of the teens featured was truly magnanimous is highly questionable, but the virtue of some is not. For example, eighteen year old Laura Greer wrote and published The Foster Care Guide for Kids that answers questions that kids going into foster care might have. She discovered the need for such a book while volunteering at a local shelter for abused children. After searching for a suitable children's book or pamphlet explaining foster care and finding nothing, she decided to write her own. Long hours of research, interviews, and training courses, led to the creation of a 40-page book in both English and Spanish,

which was published thanks to \$35,000 in donations which she raised. The Child Welfare League of America is currently overseeing national distribution of the Guide. Fourteen year old Gregory Smith founded International Youth Advocates, an organization that promotes nonviolence education for children around the world. One of his projects raised close to one million dollars, and part of that went to build a school in Kenya that will unite the children of three warring tribes. He was also nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Ashlee Simpson, a nineteen year old singer and actress, works with Operation Smile. She helps raise money for reconstructive surgeries for underprivileged children in developing countries born with cleft palates and lips.

Now every virtue brings a certain beauty to human character, but magnanimity adds a certain luster over and above the others, giving them an added greatness, thus raising the stature of human character. That is why we can discern in the eyes of these young people who are examples of magnanimity a depth of beauty and a joy that is directly related to their noble aspirations.

The magnanimous do not despise wealth or great repute, but regard them as useful for accomplishing deeds of virtue. That is why they do not love them so much that they are willing to forgo virtue for their sake. Hence, an emotionally healthy and truly magnanimous person is neither very joyful at obtaining such goods, nor terribly grieved at their loss.

### **Magnanimity and its Excesses (presumption, vainglory, ambition)**

In order to refine our understanding of this virtue and better appreciate what it is and isn't, let's glance briefly at its excesses. Firstly, magnanimity is not incompatible with humility. Magnanimity involves the recognition in oneself of something great which comes from

God, namely divine grace and one's natural gifts; but the magnanimous recognize their own defects and the weakness of human nature, that is, their inclination to sin and complete dependence upon divine grace. The magnanimous are inclined to deem themselves worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts they hold from God. But humility allows them to keep their own deficiency at the forefront of their minds. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "Humility makes us honor others and esteem them better than ourselves", for we see some of God's gifts in them, gifts that we don't have.

Confidence in oneself and others is a part of magnanimity, but confidence in oneself can be inordinate by way of excess. This is presumption, and it is rooted in an inaccurate assessment of oneself. The presumptuous tend to what is above their power. Their hope in themselves is disordered, because their love for themselves is disordered. That is why presumption tends to go hand in hand with personal pride, the inordinate love of one's own excellence.

The quest for honor can be inordinate in a number of ways, for example, when a person desires the recognition of an excellence that he does not have, thus wanting more than his fair share of honors, and when a person desires honor for himself without referring it to God. The latter amounts to a lack of gratitude, which is a part of justice. Finally, the quest for honor is inordinate when it is pursued for the sake of being honored, as if to rest in the honor itself. This is ambition. But the truly magnanimous do not love themselves more than others; rather, they love the other as another self, and for God's sake. They desire the recognition of their own excellence only to the degree that it would profit others. But the heart of the ambitious rests in honor itself, without reference to the profit of others.

Vainglory is the inordinate desire for glory (to be known by others). Such desire for glory is inordinate when it is desired for its own sake, rather than as being useful for something greater, for example, that God may be more known and loved by others, or that human beings may be made better on account of such knowledge. Mother Teresa, for example, was very well known, but she did not desire such reputation, and yet her renown made innumerable people better.

Vainglory is particularly dangerous in that it renders us presumptuous and too self-confident, and presumption blinds us to the need to seek counsel from others. That is why vainglory begets disobedience, boastfulness, hypocrisy, contention, obstinacy, discord, and interestingly enough, the love of novelties. The vain strive to make known their excellence by showing that they are not inferior to others. And they do this in a number of ways. Since intellect is the most superior power in man, the vain will strive to show intellectual superiority. Thus, they do not readily give up their opinion when confronted with evidence of its weakness and inferiority. This is obstinacy, an excessive or stubborn attachment to one's opinion. And since the will is also a superior power, the person who strives to make known his excellence will exhibit a stubborn attachment to his own will. Such a person rarely agrees with others. This is discord, which begets quarreling or contentiousness. And a contentious person can hardly be expected to obey the commands of his superiors. Thus, he is inclined to disobedience. Finally, vainglory begets a love of novelties. For the vain wish to stand out from the rest, so they are given over to novelties which tend to grab our attention and call for greater admiration.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It is very easy to get trapped in this culture, like getting trapped in the strong current of a river. Those so caught are carried along with-

out thinking, allowing others to do their thinking for them, living merely to be comfortable, no longer wrestling with the big questions, and eventually falling into a kind of despairing cynicism about human beings and the world. But after seventeen years of teaching, I have come to realize that there is one thing that I am able to see better than any of my students, and that is their gifts. It is a wonderful experience having eyes for their gifts, because it is a source of never ending wonder to me. And young people can do great things with their lives with just a little imagination, a recognition and appreciation of their own gifts, and a determination to cultivate a magnanimous character. If young people desire to be truly happy”and not just contented,”they need to reach out and grab onto a branch, climb out of the water, and begin climbing to greater heights. For happiness is directly related to upward movement, that is, to the pursuit of what is truly larger and greater than oneself.

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### **Magnanimity, Athletic Excellence, and Performance-Enhancing Drugs**

Michael W. Austin

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<http://74.125.113.132/search?q=cache:xKP7YidfeggJ:janusblog.squarespace.com/janusbloglibraryofpapersd/Austin.magnanimityandsport.doc+Magnanimity%2Bvirtue&cd=30&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

In recent decades, there has been a much-discussed revival of virtue ethics in moral philosophy, inspired in large part by the writings of Aristotle and G.E.M. Anscombe’s influential paper, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’. While much attention has been paid to the theoretical merits of virtue ethics in relation to other perspectives in normative ethics, comparatively very little attention has been given to the application of virtue ethics to contemporary moral issues. This paper focuses on the Aristotelian virtue of magnanim-

ity and its implications for athletes, with the intent of developing a clearer and more accurate understanding of both athletic and moral excellence. Given that the aspiration for greatness is shared by many athletes, analyzing the implications of the virtue of magnanimity for their motivations and actions is both philosophically interesting and practically worthwhile. Ultimately, the following analysis leads to the conclusion that athletic excellence as it is conventionally understood, without moral excellence, has very little value.

It could be objected that sport is not a fitting topic for philosophical reflection, as there are more important moral issues to consider, given the current state of affairs in our world. The latter part of this objection is surely true. Moreover, sport often distracts people from attending to more important moral and social issues. For example, more attention is often given to one’s favorite sports team compared to the current war in Iraq, genocide in Darfur, and so on. However, as William Morgan points out in his *Why Sports Morally Matter*, sports deserve to be taken seriously, in part because it is through arguing about sports that many people first learn to generalize, form arguments, and respond to counter-arguments. Moreover, debates about gender, race, economics, patriotism, justice, and drugs arise in the context of discussions of sport, and it is the case that new insights about these issues may be gleaned from considering them in that context. If this is right, then one is led to agree with Morgan that the problem is not that we take sports too seriously, but rather that we do not take them seriously enough. What follows, then, is an examination of some of the moral opportunities and moral challenges present in sport.

The paper’s first section contains a brief description of a neo-Aristotelian version of the virtue of magnanimity. The second section explores the implications of this conception of magnanimity for the character and actions of



athletes. The final section considers how the magnanimous athlete responds to the moral challenges present in sport by focusing on the issue of performance-enhancing drugs. By considering the virtue of magnanimity and its implications for athletes, one important aim of this paper is to provide support for the intuition that a great athletic performance achieved via dedicated training is superior to one that is at least in part the result of using performance-enhancing drugs. In so doing, I offer what I take to be an important part of the anti-drug case in sport, namely, the reasons athletes themselves have for not using performance-enhancing drugs, grounded in considerations of excellence of character and the relative value of athletic excellence as it is conventionally understood.

### **The Virtue of Magnanimity**

Magnanimity has been translated by interpreters of Aristotle in numerous ways. Literally, the term means great-souledness, but it has also been rendered as 'pride', 'high-mindedness', 'superiority', and 'dignity'. Consider Aristotle's description of the magnanimous person. The magnanimous person thinks that she is worthy of great things, and is in fact worthy of such things. She values herself properly, according to her actual worth, rather than too much or too little. Such a person is particularly and primarily concerned with receiving honor, since this is the greatest of the external goods. She does not desire honor for small things or from all people. Rather, she desires honor from virtuous people for doing great things. She is justified in looking down on others, because she accurately perceives their lack of greatness, though she will be self-deprecating with ordinary people. She also overlooks past wrongs done to her rather than holding grudges, and will not speak ill of her enemies, except to their face. The magnanimous person excels at all of the virtues. Magnanimity, or greatness of soul, not only requires the presence of all of the other vir-

tues, but it also enhances those virtues. As Aristotle puts it, 'Greatness of soul, then, seems to be a sort of adornment, as it were, of the excellences; for it augments them, and does not occur without them.'

Some contemporary philosophers have found Aristotle's conception of this virtue morally objectionable. As John Casey puts it, the 'magnanimous (or 'proud') man has not proved to be the most durably popular of Aristotle's ethical portraits'. According to Casey, this is because the magnanimous man offends the spirit of equality. While it is true that some of what Aristotle says about magnanimity is troubling to the modern mind, there is much to be admired in Aristotle's description of this virtue. Particularly relevant to athletes is the desire for honor that the magnanimous person possesses, specifically honor for doing great things. Many athletes aspire to athletic excellence, but the magnanimous athlete will also aspire to and exemplify moral excellence.

### **The Value of Athletic Excellence**

On a conventional view, the primary if not sole criterion of athletic excellence is victory. People admire demonstrations of athletic skill that are part of a losing effort, but it is those who win championships that are thought of as truly great athletes. As it has been conventionally understood, then, athletic excellence is the display of athletic skill in defeating one's opponent. However, an examination of magnanimity in the context of sport leads to the conclusion that athletic excellence as it is conventionally understood, without moral excellence, has very little value.

In his book *The Perfect Mile*, Neal Bascomb chronicles the competition between three men—Roger Bannister, John Landy, and Wes Santee—to be the first person to run a mile in less than four minutes. Bannister's success as the first man to break the four-minute barrier

is well-known, but another feat of excellence was accomplished by the Australian runner John Landy two years after Bannister's record run and subsequent defeat of Landy in a head-to-head competition at the 1954 Empire Games in Vancouver. During the mile race at the 1956 Australian Championships, Landy was running in third when the second place runner, Ron Clarke, fell to the track as the field of runners jockeyed for position roughly halfway into the third lap. As the rest of the runners pushed on, Landy stopped and checked to see if Clarke was severely injured. Despite an injury to his arm from Landy's spikes, Clarke said that he was fine and took off after the field. Although he had lost seven seconds and forty yards, Landy began to sprint in pursuit of the leaders. By the first turn of the final lap, he had gained back twenty-five yards, and during the last turn he sprinted past the leader to win the race by twelve yards.

Landy's actions demonstrate two kinds of excellence, athletic and moral. Certainly the victory was an act of extraordinary athletic excellence, given the physical and psychological barriers to overcoming such a large gap in the second half of an elite-level one-mile race. But it is just as clear that Landy's behavior is demonstrative of moral excellence, insofar as he was willing to risk sacrificing victory in order to come to the aid of a fellow athlete. For the magnanimous athlete, the opportunity for an act of extraordinary moral excellence that the race provided has far greater value than the opportunity for demonstrating conventional athletic excellence by merely winning the race. Along these lines, Bascomb reports that a journalist at the time called the race Landy's greatest triumph, even though it was not his fastest time (he ran 4:04.2, and had run 3:59.6 against Bannister) and that he had been a hero on that day to every person sitting in the press box. If Landy had merely won the race, the events of that day would have had much less value, all else being equal.

This shows that conventional athletic excellence has very little value relative to moral excellence. Moreover, if (via a brief thought experiment) all of the moral excellence is removed from Landy's race but he still wins, there is very little of value that remains. That is, conventional athletic excellence possesses very little value. Additionally, if winning is all that matters in sport, then athletes and teams would constantly seek out inferior opponents in order to increase the probability of victory. They do not do this, and victories over vastly inferior opponents are often seen to be hollow. The fact that it is not a common practice to seek out inferior opponents provides some additional support for the view that conventional athletic excellence has very little value.

### **The Value of Moral Excellence**

An exemplary athletic performance is in part a display of excellence with respect to physical skill. Some excel at athletics (in part) by virtue of natural ability, and many marvel at such individuals. However, it is arguably the case that more than mere athletic excellence is desired. People admire what is required for an individual athlete to be able to perform at the elite level. And this is where moral excellence comes into play.

There is an interesting connection between moral excellence and athletic excellence. All athletes, at least all who must undergo difficult training, have the ability to carry out praiseworthy second-order volitions when certain first-order desires are in conflict (call this the Frankfurt ability). The Frankfurt ability is in part what people rightly admire about the character of such athletes, and this ability is in fact necessary for the possession of true moral excellence, given human nature. Hence, it will be useful to examine this ability.

Human persons have first-order desires, such as the desire to run a marathon. However, humans also have the ability to form sec-

ond-order desires, i.e. desires that have as their object some first-order desire. People can want to have a particular first-order desire. Joan can want to want to run a marathon, even when she has a conflicting first-order desire, such as the desire to sleep later every day. When an individual wants a particular desire to be effective, to be what in fact moves her to act, she has a second-order volition. When Joan wants the desire to run a marathon to move her to do what is required to train for and complete a marathon, she has a second-order volition.

Those who carry out second-order volitions that endorse a physically or psychologically difficult path that is also morally excellent are to be admired. Sport offers numerous opportunities to form and carry out such second-order volitions and act on them, when first-order desires are in conflict. For example, a cross-country runner may want to win an upcoming race and may also have the desire to eat donuts for breakfast every day. Given that his desire for donuts has the potential to thwart his desire to win an upcoming race, he forms the second-order volition to endorse and act upon his race-winning desire rather than his donut-eating desire. There are of course other more significant desires that many athletes may give up in order to achieve their athletic goals. For example, athletes may give up a large portion of their free time, recreational pursuits, money, and even social aspects of life in pursuit of their goals. What is admirable about the Frankfurt ability is the difficulty in refraining from satisfying some first-order desires in order to satisfy others, especially when doing so requires picking the desire that will be fulfilled in the more distant future relative to the desire that is foregone. For the magnanimous athlete, success in choices of lesser significance (eating donuts) can be conducive to success in choices that are more momentous (self-control in her most important relationships).

Clearly possession of the Frankfurt ability is not sufficient for the possession of a morally virtuous character overall, much less for having the virtue of magnanimity. For example, in the United States National Football League, Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Terrell Owens exemplifies this ability in his dedicated training regimen, but does not seem, at least according to public perception, to exemplify many of the moral virtues, including magnanimity. Recall Aristotle's description of the magnanimous person as someone who overlooks past wrongs done rather than holding grudges, and that such a person will not speak ill of his enemies, except to their face. Given how Owens has spoken quite negatively of his teammates in the past, there is evidence that public perception with respect to his lack of virtue is correct. Owens has displayed amazing levels of athletic skill, but his apparent lack of certain moral virtues causes him to receive much less admiration than he would otherwise obtain. Even if Owens is one day a member of a championship team, he will receive much less honor than he would if he exemplified moral excellence, and rightly so. This provides further support for the conclusion that without moral excellence, athletic excellence has very little value.

However, possessing and exercising the Frankfurt ability can be quite conducive to moral growth and moral excellence. The magnanimous athlete not only pursues excellence in her sport, but she pursues and achieves moral excellence in other areas of life. Sport can and likely will have intrinsic value for the magnanimous athlete, but it will have much greater instrumental value for her, because her primary aim will be to use sport as a vehicle for morally virtuous action and her own continued moral growth. Given the time and effort that is required for attaining conventional athletic excellence, and the potential fruitfulness of sport as a means for moral expression and development, the magnanimous athlete will wisely use sport for these

ends. Fortunately, the very character traits that may be developed and expressed via sport – courage, self-control, unselfishness, and perseverance – are precisely those traits that are conducive to conventional athletic excellence. However, victory without these traits has very little value, so the magnanimous athlete uses sport to develop the Frankfurt ability and then employs it in other realms of her life. For example, she might employ this ability and exercise self-control when offended by a friend or family member, rather than lashing out in anger. Or she might acquire the capacity to put the interests of others ahead of her own interests in the context of team sports, and then exercise this virtue in other realms of life when doing so is feasible and appropriate. Doing so may make her a better friend, spouse, or parent. A requirement of many types of excellence—moral, athletic, and otherwise—is this ability to endorse and act upon certain second-order volitions when one’s first-order desires are in conflict, rather than being at the mercy of particular first-order desires and perhaps regretting the future consequences of this fact. The magnanimous athlete develops this ability as an athlete, and then employs it in other realms of life as she develops her character. In this way, sport can truly be conducive to one’s overall moral development and level of flourishing. If sport did not afford these opportunities, if it was not morally demanding in the above ways, then sport and victory in sport would possess very little value.

Another trait of the magnanimous athlete is that she uses the external goods and influence achieved via her sport for the service of the common good. One obvious way to do this is through charitable giving and service. For Aristotle, the most important external good for the magnanimous person is receiving honor from virtuous people for doing great things. The external good of honor can be employed to influence others in service of the common good. The honor given to athletes

because of their athletic performances coupled with the honor they may receive for their morally praiseworthy actions in other realms of life can be used to involve others in working for the common good. For example, U.S. speedskater Joey Cheek donated the \$US 40,000 bonus he received from the United States Olympic Committee for winning gold and silver medals at the 2006 Olympics to Right to Play, an international humanitarian organization that uses sport and play to improve the lives of children in underdeveloped nations. Cheek has also been instrumental in securing another \$US 360,000 for Right to Play through sponsors and web donations to the Joey Cheek Challenge.

The non-elite athlete may not be able to perform acts of extraordinary athletic excellence, though he may still aspire to and achieve acts of athletic skill. However, the opportunity for moral growth and even magnanimity remains open to him. He may pursue moral excellence by seeking to transfer the virtues developed via his sport to other realms of life, as described above. The non-elite athlete may also express his virtue in service of the common good, through running for charity, for example.

In sum, moral excellence will be more important to the magnanimous athlete than conventional athletic excellence, because she correctly understands the value of each. It follows that she will not engage in what she considers to be an immoral action for the sake of a better athletic performance. She will pursue physical, intellectual, and perhaps aesthetic excellence via her sport, but this pursuit will be primarily motivated and governed by a morally excellent character.

### **Magnanimity and the Moral Challenge of Performance-Enhancing Drugs**

In view of the above it is clear that sport can play a positive role in moral development. But

sport also presents many moral challenges to athletes. One of the most ubiquitous and widely discussed of these moral challenges is the use of prohibited performance-enhancing drugs.

How will the magnanimous athlete respond to this moral challenge? Will an elite magnanimous athlete call her Maggie-use prohibited performance-enhancing drugs? Given Aristotle's requirement that the magnanimous person will possess and excel at all of the other moral virtues, Maggie will not use prohibited performance-enhancing substances in order to improve her athletic performance. In an era where the use of such substances is both tempting and too common, this claim is significant.

What reasons are there for thinking that Maggie will not dope (that is, use performance-enhancing drugs)? In order to answer this question, we must first attend to a different one: What reasons do athletes have for doping? First, athletes dope in order to win. They may be seeking an advantage over their competitors, or they may believe that they have to dope in order to compete with their rivals who engage in the practice. Some athletes also use performance-enhancing drugs in order to obtain the external goods available through success in sport, such as fame, money, and the honor given for athletic victories.

Maggie's approach to the issue of performance-enhancement is important and informative, as are her actual choices with respect to this issue. Her approach also sharply contrasts with the reasoning of athletes who dope. For Maggie, the relevant question is this: How can I combine moral and athletic excellence in my character and in my life? While many of the arguments used to justify a ban on doping face certain problems, they are relevant to Maggie's decision, given that such a ban exists in her sport. The following

points are offered as reasons Maggie has for refraining from doping, rather than reasons for the current doping bans, though the second and third points below also serve as reasons against the legalization of drugs in sport.

One reason Maggie has for refraining from doping is that doping constitutes cheating. If a substance is banned in her sport, then Maggie will not use that substance to enhance her performance, because of the unfair advantage that she would gain and because doing so would constitute cheating. In his description of the magnanimous person, Aristotle claims that such a person will not treat people unjustly, because doing so is shameful and not worthy of honor. It would be inconsistent with her character to treat others unfairly, and using banned substances would give Maggie an unfair advantage over her competitors.

Second, given that virtue for Aristotle is a lifelong project, some performance-enhancements, even if they were permitted in her sport, would be ruled out for Maggie if they could lead to premature death or have other anti-flourishing effects. If Maggie's health is placed at significant risk by using a particular performance-enhancing substance, then from her perspective this is sufficient for not using that substance. It is irrational to place one's health at risk for the sake of conventional athletic excellence, especially at the expense of one's moral integrity. For the same reasons, Maggie would also refrain from participating in some sports, perhaps, depending on the level of risk involved. For example, Maggie might not prolong a career in boxing if doing so carries a significant risk of hindering her rational capacities later in life, given the importance of such capacities for human flourishing. According to Aristotle it is reasonable to risk one's life for great things, and this is something that the magnanimous person is willing to do. It is reasonable, when the

circumstances require it, to risk one's life for moral excellence. However, this is not the case with respect to conventional athletic excellence.

Third, Maggie prefers depending on certain traits to produce an excellent athletic performance, such as courage, discipline, and perseverance. If she enhanced her performance by doping, she might have less need for depending on these virtues. Instead of doping, Maggie will opt for more difficult or more effective training methods. Relatedly, Maggie wants the cause of her athletic performance and success to be of the right sort. Hard, effective training and proper nutrition are the result of morally praiseworthy traits, such as self-control, discipline, and courage. But what sense can be made of the claim that blood doping or taking steroids is the result of some morally praiseworthy trait, especially when using them constitutes cheating? For Maggie, athletic contests are opportunities for the development and display of moral excellence and receiving deserved honor for that excellence as it is displayed in the sporting context. In his discussion of magnanimity, Aristotle claims that 'Those who possess [external goods] without excellence are neither justified in thinking themselves worthy of great things nor correctly called great-souled; for neither is possible without complete excellence'. Unlike the athlete who dopes in order to win, Maggie would not want the honor that is given for conventional athletic excellence, unless it is also given for the moral excellence that is connected to her athletic performance. Moreover, to receive honor and not deserve it is of no interest to her, because receiving honor based on the misperception that Maggie competed within the rules has no value for her. In her view, to think oneself worthy of honor without adequate justification is irrational.

An objection to the foregoing is that it is unrealistic, or perhaps overly moralistic.

What elite athlete would be willing to sacrifice athletic performance and give her opponents an advantage for these types of reasons? Perhaps very few athletes would in fact be willing to sacrifice a measure of athletic success, fame, and fortune in this way. However, recall Aristotle's belief that it is difficult to be truly magnanimous. That few would be willing and able to make such sacrifices is unsurprising, given the demands of magnanimity.

In view of the above discussion of athletic and moral excellence, the truly great athlete, the magnanimous athlete, believes that athletic excellence as it is conventionally understood, without moral excellence, has very little value. And given the conclusions drawn from the cases of John Landy and Terrell Owens, the nature of the virtue of magnanimity as it applies to athletes, and the manner in which the magnanimous athlete responds to the moral challenge of performance-enhancing drugs, there are several reasons for thinking that this belief is true.

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NOTES

41. Anscombe, G.E.M. (1958) 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy*, 33,124.
42. Some examples of a virtue-based approach to applied ethical issues include Hursthouse, R. (1991) 'Virtue Theory and Abortion', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 20,3; Boonin, D. (2000) 'How to Argue Against Active Euthanasia', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 17,2; Fletcher, D. (2003) 'Gambling and Character', *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 17,1; and Walker, R. and P. Ivanhoe, eds. (2007) *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (New York, Oxford University Press).
43. Morgan, W. (2006) *Why Sports Morally Matter* (New York, Routledge): 208.
44. Aristotle might disagree with at least some of my interpretations and arguments. My intent, however, is to work from an Aristotelian starting point and then make progress in understanding both athletic and moral excellence, rather than to seek to be faithful to Aristotle's views and their implications.

45. Horner, D. (1998) 'What it Takes to be Great: Aristotle and Aquinas on Magnanimity', *Faith and Philosophy*, 15,4.
46. Aristotle, (2002) *Nicomachean Ethics*, commentaries and translation by S. Broadie and C. Rowe (New York, Oxford University Press):119, 148-151 (1107b20, 1123a35-1125a35). Quotations are from this translation.
47. Ibid. 1124a1-5.
48. Casey, J. (1990) *Pagan Virtue: An Essay in Ethics* (New York, Oxford University Press): 200.
49. Landy could not have won the race without some moral excellences, such as courage, perseverance, and the Frankfurt ability rightly employed (see below).
50. See Boxill, J. (2003) 'Introduction: The Moral Significance of Sport', in J. Boxill (ed.) *Sports Ethics* (Malden, Mass., Blackwell, 2003).
51. Frankfurt, H. (1971) 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68,1.
52. For more on this type of approach to sport, see Reid, H. (2002) *The Philosophical Athlete* (Durham, N.C., Carolina Academic Press).
53. See NE, 1123b20-25.
54. NE, 1123b30-35.
55. This is essentially a virtue ethics version of the argument from harm against doping. On putting one's sporting life in the context of one's entire life, see Schneider, A. and R. Butcher (2000) 'A Philosophical Overview of the Arguments on Banning Doping in Sport', in T. Tännsjö and C. Tamburrini (eds.) *Values in Sport* (New York, E and FN Spon, 2000). On doping and harm, see C. Tamburrini 'What's Wrong with Doping?' in *Values in Sport*; and Miah, A. (2004) *Genetically Modified Athletes* (New York, Routledge).
56. NE 1124b5-1124b10.
57. Ibid, 1124a25-30.
58. Ibid, 1124a1-5.
59. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for the journal for helpful comments which improved the final version of the paper. I would also like to express my appreciation to Heather Reid for providing excellent comments on a previous version of the paper.

## Magnanimity

### *Divine Intimacy*

<http://www.catholic-pages.com/prayers/289.asp>

O Lord, give me a generous heart, capable of undertaking great things for You.

## Meditation

1. Whoever aspires to sanctity should have a generous, magnanimous heart, which is not satisfied with doing little things for God, and tiny acts of virtue, but is eager to do great things and give great proofs of love. Just as there is no sanctity without heroic virtue, so it is impossible to attain to heroism without performing great acts of virtue.

Some think there is pride and delusion of the devil in fostering great desires, or in wanting to do great things for God. There would be, certainly, if in this we sought honor for ourselves, or praise from others, or if, in trying to do great things, we were to neglect the small details of our daily duties. The virtue of magnanimity, on the contrary, inclines the soul to do great things for God, but never to the detriment of obedience, humility or the fulfillment of duty. Generous souls, precisely in this domain, will often meet with arduous, difficult things which call for much virtue, but which usually remain hidden from the eyes of others. In circumstances such as these we are often tempted to give up, under the pretext that it is not necessary to push virtue to such extremes; we excuse ourselves, saying that we are neither angels nor saints. St Teresa of Jesus says, "We may not be; but what a good thing it is for us to reflect that we can be if we will only try, and if God gives us His hand!" (*Way of Perfection*, 16). The Saint strongly insists that those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life should not nourish petty desires, but generous ones, nor should they fear to emulate the saints; she affirms with authority, "I have never seen any courageous person hanging back on this road, nor

any soul that, under the guise of humility, acted like a coward, go as far in many years as the courageous soul can in a few” (Life, 13).

2. The contrary of magnanimity is pusillanimity, or faintheartedness, a defect which prevents souls from accomplishing great things through excessive fear of failure. Certainly, of our own volition, we should not rashly attempt to do what is beyond our strength. This too, is a defect, evincing imprudence and presumption which displease God. But when, in particular circumstances, and after sufficient examination, we see clearly that Our Lord wishes of us certain acts of virtue or some special work, we should not refuse, however difficult it may seem to be. Can God not give us the strength to do what He asks? Why do we doubt Him? A pusillanimous person who withdraws on such occasions, under the pretext that he does not feel capable of doing so much, may believe that he is humble; but in reality he is a coward, proud, and lacking trust in God. He is a coward because, overly preoccupied with himself, he fears failure, he is afraid to expose himself to the criticism of others, he dreads fatigue and sacrifice. He is proud because he relies more on his own erroneous judgment than on God and His grace. The humble soul, on the contrary, although conscious of his nothingness, trusts in God; convinced of his weakness, he is still more convinced that God can make use of him to accomplish great things. The truly humble person is never pusillanimous, but always magnanimous: he is not afraid to encourage himself to attempt great things for God, and this very attitude helps him greatly to make progress. “The soul may not have the strength to achieve these things at once,” says St Teresa of Jesus, “but if it takes its flight it can make good progress, though like a little unfledged bird, it is apt to grow tired and stop” (Life, 13). It is natural to our weakness to stop, but if we have great confidence and great love, we shall soon know well how to spread our wings. The more

confidence we have in God, the stronger we shall become with His divine strength. The more intense our love, the greater will become our capability of doing arduous things for God. “Perfect love,” says St Thomas, “undertakes even the most difficult things” (III Sent. D. 29, q1, a8). Sustained by confidence and love, we shall be able to soar very high without fear of dangers or falls.

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