

## Μεγαλοψυχία in *Nicomachean Ethics* iv<sup>1</sup>

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At *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123a34-1125a36 Aristotle famously portrays the *μεγαλόψυχος*, the 'great-souled man'<sup>2</sup> with the 'crown' or 'adornment' of all the virtues, who thinks himself worthy of great things and deserving of recognition for them. The passage has generated strikingly divergent views regarding its philosophical significance and even Aristotle's seriousness in writing the passage. While there are certainly difficult aspects to other Aristotelian virtues, the impasse over *μεγαλοψυχία* serves as an instructive reminder of the profound differences separating us from Aristotle. It should also be a warning against too quickly assuming we understand the full Aristotelian perspective on the virtues.

It is not surprising that the modern reader has difficulty appreciating Aristotle's enthusiasm for *μεγαλοψυχία*, particularly when translated as it sometimes is as pride. Christian moral psychology, deeply ingrained in the modern West, has a pronounced aversion to pride (one of the 'seven deadly sins') and promotes spiritual, and often material, humility as an ideal.<sup>3</sup> Even the post-Christian world, moved by a mistrust of greatness and pretense, has generally replaced the self-assurance of the *μεγαλόψυχος* with the scepticism of irony. Beyond the religious anxiety over pride and ostentation, by the 17th century the formerly humble dimensions of ordinary life had become imbued with an inherent dignity and worth.<sup>4</sup> A cultural disposition that appreciates the small and ordinary more than the great and lofty is not conducive to accepting the assertions Aristotle makes on behalf of the *μεγαλόψυχος*. The picture is not black and white, to be sure, and

<sup>1</sup> An early version of this paper was given at the 1989 meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy with the Society for Islamic Philosophy and Science. I am indebted to the editor and an anonymous referee for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The word is variously translated as 'great-souled man', 'magnanimous person', 'high-minded man', but no English term accurately renders the sense of the Greek. The abstract noun *μεγαλοψυχία* is sometimes rendered as 'proper pride' and 'self-respect' (Ross 1959, 202). The untranslatability between languages of certain concepts and beliefs, because 'they are presented apart from that context of inherited texts from which they draw their conceptual life', is discussed by MacIntyre 1985, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Pride and humility are discussed from the perspective of contemporary analytical philosophy in Taylor, G. 1985, 17-52.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, C. 1989, 211-247 shows how modern conceptions of the human good rest on the foundation of 'the affirmation of ordinary life'.

attitudes towards grandeur and greatness differ considerably. R-A. Gauthier notes how 'L'appel de la grandeur n'a jamais laissé l'homme indifférent, mais il est des époques où semble trouver dans les cœurs une résonance particulièrement profonde' (Gauthier 1951, 3). Indifferent we are not, but suspicion would be a more likely response today than resonance.

Of equal significance, and important for understanding all the Aristotelian virtues, is the manner of articulating individual identity in the honor-shame society of ancient Greece. This is so because a radically different understanding of the self separates the modern world from what precedes it.<sup>5</sup> The new conception of individual identity is articulated through a discordance felt between what is on the one hand a person's social identity and what is on the other hand regarded as the true, authentic self, increasingly alienated from its counterpart social identity (Trilling 1972, 31; Held 1990). Moderns take this incongruity for granted since it both underlies our awareness of self and sustains the value we place on individualism. As I shall argue below, this view is at odds with Aristotle's perception of the ethical subject, and is a major impediment to our understanding Aristotle's esteem for the *μεγαλόψυχος*.

This radical shift in the configuration of selfhood and identity poses special challenges for historical investigation of the ancient world. In acknowledging the distinction we are compelled to accept a remoteness in the texts of antiquity, but must be on guard against reducing the unfamiliar to the familiar. As Clifford Geertz says of *doing* anthropology, so too *doing* history of philosophy must aim for 'the enlargement of the universe of human discourse' (Geertz 1973, 14), rather than a narrowing of other's discourse to the confines of our own. Consequently, formulations concerning other cultures, and *a fortiori* the written texts of those cultures, 'must be cast in terms of the constructions' that to the best of our ability 'we imagine [members of that culture] place upon what they live through, the formulae they use to define what happens to them' (Geertz 1973, 15). Following Gilbert Ryle, Geertz dubs this process 'thick description', which requires that we respect and absorb differences between conceptual structures. Charles Taylor describes its purpose as 'articulat[ing] the significance and point that...actions or feelings have within a certain culture' (Taylor, C. 1989, 80). For the sake of brevity and to forestall a debate over moral relativism, I will simply rest these introductory remarks with Phillipa Foot's claim that 'Local truth is the only substantive truth we have' (Foot 1982, 161; see Williams 1985, esp. 156-173). I agree with Foot that this does not entail the inability to form moral judgments or reach moral truths. This contextualist approach, again using Taylor's language, recognizes humans as evaluating creatures who form moral judgments and moral truths consistent with the nexus of evaluations and epistemic limits that comprise the world for them (Taylor, C. 1985).<sup>6</sup> The task of this paper will

<sup>5</sup> Trilling 1972, 19 observes that historians of European culture agree that 'something like a mutation in human nature' took place in the decades surrounding 1600. An impressively full discussion of the formation of the 'modern identity' is in Taylor, C. 1989

<sup>6</sup> In light of the multiplicity of such worlds, it is helpful to keep in mind the observation of Bau-

be to amplify our understanding of the nexus of evaluation that existed for Aristotle and his contemporaries, and thereby to clarify Aristotle's high regard for the *μεγαλόψυχος*.

## II

Aristotle refers to the *μεγαλόψυχος* in a number of his works, but a sustained discussion appears only in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>7</sup> While his other references have aroused little comment, the substantive portrait in the *Nicomachean Ethics* has provoked a long history of dispute. This is largely due to the highly specific characterization (missing in the *Eudemian Ethics*) whose details assault the contemporary sensibilities of many interpreters. It is these details which are especially in need of a richer critical appreciation, and therefore the paper focuses on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The portrait there has earned Aristotle derision and admiration alike. Detractors have found a 'picture [that] is unpleasing' (Ross 1959, 203) with 'features... which repel modern sympathies' (Ross 1949, 663), 'a ponderous joke' (O'Connor 1964, 55) and 'an excellent account of a proud, conceited, condescending snob... not the sort of person one would recommend or aspire to be' (French 1979, 192). Even W.F.R. Hardie, in a clear-headed attempt to 'answer the questions and allay the qualms evoked by Aristotle's portrait', could not bring himself to abandon 'the opinion of Burnet that Aristotle did not mean us to take solemnly, or even seriously, some of the detail of his account' (Hardie 1978, 66; 74).<sup>8</sup> A few have gone so far as to impugn Aristotle's own character, charging him with 'emotional poverty' and failing to be 'a nice or a good man'.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, scholars who defend Aristotle's seriousness in the passage place the *μεγαλόψυχος* far outside the realm of practical affairs: he has 'inner greatness',<sup>10</sup> is an august philosopher possessing theoretical wisdom (Gauthier 1951; see Gauthier and Jolif 1970), and 'a man of the highest speculative power... [who] contemplates the cosmos or beautiful harmony of his own

man 1987, 5 that strategies of the interpreter are of increasing significance to us. The role of the interpreter, he writes, 'consists of translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition... It is concerned with preventing the distortion of meaning in the process of communication. For this purpose, it promotes the need to penetrate deeply the alien system of knowledge from which the translation is to be made (for example, Geertz's "thick description"), and the need to maintain the delicate balance between the two conversing traditions necessary for the message to be both undistorted (regarding the meaning invested by the sender) and understood (by the recipient).'

<sup>7</sup> Among the genuine works, in addition to the two ethical treatises, *μεγαλοψυχία* appears in *An. Post.*, *Pol.*, and *Rhet.* In the ethical treatises some differences of treatment can be found, most notably the distinction drawn at *EE* 1232b17-19 between the worth of those bestowing honor and the worth of the achievements. These collapse into a single formula in *EN* (von Arnim 1927, 63).

<sup>8</sup> See Hardie 1980, 373: 'It is hardly for us possible, on reading what Aristotle says about the great-souled man, to view him as a paradigm of civilized excellence.'

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* and Alasdair MacIntyre in *A Short History of Ethics* as quoted in Hardie 1978, 65.

<sup>10</sup> 'innere Größe', Schmidt 1967, 167. See also Gauthier 1951, 1972, 222.

nature...allow[ing] nothing external to it to dominate his thought or conduct' (Stewart 1892, i 335 f). The most famous modern admirer of *μεγαλόψυχία* is undoubtedly Nietzsche, but he praises it for reasons fundamentally opposed to what lies behind Aristotle's portrait.<sup>11</sup>

Further, interpreters of the passage, diffident and respectful alike, often hold that the character of the *μεγαλόψυχος* contradicts the prescriptions for virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example the claim that virtue is the state (*ἔξις*) 'by which a man becomes good and by which he renders his function (*ἔργον*) well' (1106a23). They construe the contradiction variously, according to what is regarded as man's *ἔργον*. Should the *ἔργον* be acting as a virtuous citizen, the *μεγαλόψυχος* will fall short of virtue as they conceive it because of his disdain for ordinary people (1124a10), his reluctance to do anything for the public good that will not earn him great honor (1124b24), and other 'mainly negative, and sometimes unattractive, attributes' (Hardie 1978, 66). Since it is assumed that the *μεγαλόψυχος* cannot be a virtuous citizen under these conditions, sense for the whole passage is preserved by imputing an ironic jest to Aristotle. On the other hand if man's *ἔργον* is contemplation, the consuming concentration needed for profound thought excuses the *μεγαλόψυχος* from incivility, arrogance, and general indifference to the commonweal. The ephemeral concerns of politics are insignificant for one whose virtue is philosophic rather than civic.

The depth of disagreement is conspicuous, and problems are inherent in each approach. Simply condemning the passage does not explain anything. Attempts to make a contemplative of the *μεγαλόψυχος* do not succeed, as Hardie in my opinion has decisively shown (Hardie 1978). Moreover, philosophical virtue would be an anomaly in the part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* devoted to what are

<sup>11</sup> Kaufmann 1974, 382-384 presented an influential case for Nietzsche's debt to Aristotelian ethics in general, and the 'great-souled' man in particular. Superficially at least the view is attractive, since Nietzsche speaks favorably of aristocratic culture and greatness in men. It is, however, fundamentally wrong. Magnus 1980, 290 attacked it on the grounds that 'Aristotle's ethics scarcely represent a radical departure from the Platonic rational ideal... [for which reason] Nietzsche nowhere in the published writings addresses himself to Aristotle's ethics.' More importantly, Nietzsche's interest in great-souledness comes from a motivation directly at odds with Aristotle's desire to show how a man is to lead a good and virtuous life in the community of the polis. Nietzsche's 'masters' as well as his 'Uebermensch' want to separate themselves from the run of mankind in order to reach spiritual autonomy. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he writes, 'today the concept of "greatness" [Grösse] entails being noble, wanting to be oneself [das Für-sich-sein-wollen], ...standing alone [das Allein-stehn], and having to live independently [auf eigne-Faust-leben-müssen]' (section 212, trans. Kaufmann 1974, 404). Additionally, in contrasting 'greatness of soul' with 'greatness of spirit' Nietzsche writes, 'Greatness of soul [Seelengröße] is inseparable from greatness of spirit [geistiger Größe]. For it involves independence [Unabhängigkeit]; but in the absence of spiritual greatness, independence ought not to be allowed' (Nietzsche 1968, 514). Aristotle's *μεγαλόψυχος* is a man of the polis and seeks neither separation nor spiritual autonomy. Indeed, motivated by that greatest of goods, honor, he incurs a dependence, not independence, on fellow members of the polis. Honor is a hierarchical virtue that cannot exist apart from the recognition of others (Peristany 1966b, 10; Campbell 1964, 309). Nietzschean independence and autonomy are precluded by the very logic of honor

best characterized as social virtues.<sup>12</sup> The case for an Aristotelian jest rests on the apparent oddity of certain characteristics of the *μεγαλόψυχος* coupled with scholars' inability or unwillingness to understand how these characteristics might be construed as virtuous. One thing at least is beyond dispute. Not only does Aristotle explicitly tell us—in *EN* and elsewhere<sup>13</sup>—that *μεγαλόψυχία* is a virtue, but he adds that it is 'complete virtue' (1124a8) as well as a 'sort of crown' or 'adornment' (*κόσμος*) of the virtues (1124a1).<sup>14</sup> Nothing in the text suggests that Aristotle means anything other than what he so straightforwardly says.

### III

Analysis of the passage shows that many things about *μεγαλόψυχία* are unproblematic. Aristotle's initial remarks are straightforward. It is a virtue concerned with great things (1123a34), as its name implies. The *μεγαλόψυχος* is a man who *thinks* himself worthy of great things and in fact *is* so (1123b2). He is distinguished in the Aristotelian taxonomy from the man not worthy of great things, but who thinks that he is (1123b8-9), as well as from the man who despite being worthy of great things thinks himself not, that is one who *sees* himself worthy of less than he is in fact worthy of. That man is *μικρόψυχος*, small-souled (1123b10). The *μεγαλόψυχος* harbors no inconcinnity between self-estimation of worth and his actual worth. In this respect he embodies the virtuous mean (1123b14), and is identifiable with the extreme only in the sense that he concerns himself with great things (1123b13-14). A similar congruity between self-regard and worth is found in the self-restrained man (*σώφρων*) who while worthy of little accepts this fact (1123b5). Since Aristotle associates 'worth' (*ἡ ἀξία*) explicitly with external goods (1123b17),<sup>15</sup> the greatest of which he says is without doubt honor (1123b20), the *μεγαλόψυχος* is a man concerned with honor and dishonor as they rightfully are: *ὡς δεῖ* (1123b21-22). All of this is logically perspicuous, and commentators in general have no trouble understanding this part of Aristotle's analysis.

Remonstrance and puzzlement begin with 1123b26, when Aristotle proceeds to claim that the *μεγαλόψυχος* is included among the best (*ἄριστος*), and that the

<sup>12</sup> See Burnet 1900, 163; Dirlmeier 1956, 354.; Stewart 1892, i 321-322; Jaffa 1952, 123-124.

<sup>13</sup> Since *μεγαλόψυχία* produces correct judgments about great and small goods, it is called praiseworthy (*ἐπαινετόν*) at *EE* 1232a34. At *Rhet.* 1362b13 and 1366b2, passages that cannot possibly be construed as ironical or negative, Aristotle unabashedly includes *μεγαλόψυχία* among several other virtues, including justice, courage, and temperance. And at *Rhet.* 1388a35 Aristotle notes that while envy (*φθόνος*) is bad, emulation (*ζήλος*) is good (*ἐπαικίης*), the latter typifying those wanting good things for themselves on the grounds that they deserve them; his examples are the young and *οἱ μεγαλόψυχοι* (*Rhet.* 1388b3). Aristotle favorably links the *μεγαλόψυχος* with the liberal man (*ἐλευθέριος*) at *Pol.* 1338b3, since both look beyond mere utility in their actions, while at *Pol.* 1328a10 he defends him against the charge of being harsh (*ἄγριος*) because of his spirited nature (*θυμοειδής*).

<sup>14</sup> Translations of Ross 1959, 203 and Irwin 1985, 99 respectively.

<sup>15</sup> ἡ δ' ἀξία λέγεται πρὸς τὰ ἐξωτερικά.

genuinely (*ὡς ἀληθῶς*) great-souled man must be good (1123b27-8). Modern scholars, on the contrary, find the *μεγαλόψυχος* distressingly aloof and indifferent to his fellow citizens. Concerned with receiving honor, he expects—since he genuinely deserves it—only those honors that are the greatest and that are given by the best people; these he will accept as a matter of course (1124a6). Honors from ordinary people are disdained (1124a10). He remains purposely detached from whatever is commonly honored or in which others are in the vanguard, rousing himself only for great honors and achievements (1124b23-25). The *μεγαλόψυχος* prefers doing good to others over having others do good to him (1124b9); indeed he wishes to exclude from his mind favors received, since they would only remind him that he has been placed in an inferior position just because he did receive them (1124b12).

While most people exact honor from others through power and wealth, the *μεγαλόψυχος*, not needing this instrumentality, is indifferent to them and consequently is charged with arrogance.<sup>16</sup> This man appears arrogant, says Aristotle, because he sees not even honor as a great thing (1124a20). This is because unlike most men in the agonistic society of classical Greece, the *μεγαλόψυχος* is not constantly having to prove his *worthiness* of honor.

Other characteristics of the *μεγαλόψυχος* evoke still greater hostility. To be truly worthy of honor, as to Aristotle he indubitably is, the *μεγαλόψυχος* must behave and comport himself in appropriate ways. Many of these are alien to modern readers, appearing at best trivial and superficial in respect to the estimation of honor let alone to virtue: open in hatreds and friendships, speaking the truth, he would not gossip nor speak evil of his enemies (1125a5-7); he would not run away from battle swinging his arms (1123b31); he would have slow movements, a deep voice, and a steady way of speaking. He should not appear over-eager about anything, nor impetuous (*σύττονος*), thus avoiding shrillness (*ὄξυφωνία*) and hastiness (1125a12-16).

Why does Aristotle hold that these characteristics mark a man as *ἄριστος*? In trying to answer this, we ought to begin by noticing the particularity of Aristotle's depiction. Aristotle in contrast to those modern 'theorists [who] have...tended to favor the most general expressions—*good, right, ought*, and the rest' (Williams 1985, 128) offers in *μεγαλοψυχία* a prime example of what Bernard Williams calls a 'thick ethical concept'. Such a concept depends for its characterization on a network of ideas and practices peculiar to a given moral community, for which the

observer [sc. from an alien moral community] does not have a term that picks out just the same things that the locals' term picks out and, at the same time, [the observer] is entirely independent of the interest that shapes their use. (He has, of course, an expression such as 'what they call F', and the fact that he

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle states at *EE* 1232a39 that each virtue makes men contemptuous (*καταφρονητικούς*) of something; courage for example makes men contemptuous of danger.

can use it is important: his intelligent use of it shows that he can indeed understand their use of the term, although he cannot use it himself.)

...[T]here is a condition that has to be satisfied if one is to speak in a certain way, a condition that is satisfied by the locals and not by the observer...[it is the] matter of belonging to a certain culture... [T]he observer is barred from saying what the locals say...he is not barred from recognizing that what they say can be true. (Williams 1985, 144-145)

The remainder of the paper will attempt, by 'penetrat[ing]...the alien system [of Aristotle's] knowledge' (see n6 above) to provide the context in which to recognize that what Aristotle says regarding the *μεγαλόψυχος* is indeed true and why it is true.

#### IV

Aristotle's ethical thought is not driven by the desire for human perfectibility nor the hermetic strictures of creating a meta-ethics. Early in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle contrasts the usual goal of his investigations—theoretical knowledge—with his present purpose. He has undertaken this treatise, he says, not 'that we may know what virtue is...but that we may become good' (1103b26). Proclaiming his purpose in this way, Aristotle overtly embraces the possibilities and limits inherent in the historical contingencies of his time. These contingencies are deeply embedded in the ethical investigation he pursues,<sup>17</sup> and a misreading of Aristotle will ensue if we are indifferent to how extensively the moral traditions and experience of the *polis* shaped the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Adkins 1960, 350).<sup>18</sup>

A.W.H. Adkins, summarizing his discussion of Aristotle, concluded 'It is upon the world-view as a whole that individual judgements depend, and it is by reference to the world-view as a whole that they must be justified' (Adkins 1960, 350). Granting this dictum, a reliable understanding of Aristotelian arguments about the virtues and *what a good man is* requires consideration of the cultural and moral traditions in the 4th century *polis*. We need in other words a sufficiently 'thick description' to accommodate Aristotle's inclusion of *μεγαλοψυχία* in that state (*ἐξίς*) 'by which a man becomes good and by which he renders his function (*ἔργον*) well' (1106a23).<sup>19</sup> We can reach such a description only when

<sup>17</sup> See Cooper 1989, 193: 'It is no purpose of Aristotle's to introduce new virtues (or vices), but to articulate the ones recognized by common sense morality... He was writing for his contemporaries and it is they whom he needs to persuade that the virtue-he is describing is one which they recognize as a virtue and the paramount virtue at that.'

<sup>18</sup> Compare Adkins 1960, 336: 'Aristotle's view of the *aretê* of the whole man is founded...on practical necessities...he is able to justify it not by reference to ideals...but on pragmatic grounds' to which one might contrast Kant: 'Is it not of the utmost necessity to construct a moral philosophy... completely freed from everything which may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology?' (Kant 1959, 5).

<sup>19</sup> Geertz 1973, 9 writes: 'Analysis...is sorting out the structures of signification...and determin-

we have suspended a number of our current perspectives on what constitutes virtue—perspectives which exclude many features of *μεγαλοψυχία* from any bearing on virtue.

How might we go about this? The exegetical challenge is to find resources for the ‘thick description’ of the honor-shame society of 4th century Athens when we are seriously hindered by our inability to talk to the natives, as it were, a consequence of both chronological remove and limitations in and of available primary documents.<sup>20</sup> Any approximation of the world-view of 4th century Athens will have to take into account two salient features which distinguish the modern experience of virtue from the Greek. These are first, the fact that the modern locus of virtue has shifted away from the arena of public life,<sup>21</sup> where virtue is a manifestly social phenomenon, to the ‘inner’ commitments of an autonomous will; and second, that the ancient world’s honor-shame ethos has been largely replaced for us by an ethos of individualism and personalized choice, characteristics of so-called ‘guilt cultures’. Hence in terms of shaping moral identity, the respect and honor that derive from public recognition have been superseded for the private self of modern experience by dignity attained through personal authenticity.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, comprehending Aristotle’s claim that *μεγαλοψυχία* is both complete virtue and the *κόσμος* of all the other virtues requires the assumption that moral identity cannot be articulated independent of the drama of social space.

I believe that we can meet the exegetical demands of a ‘thick description’ by deploying comparative evidence from recent anthropological studies of Mediterranean honor-shame societies.<sup>23</sup> Identifying societies in which the *μεγαλόψυχος* portrayed by Aristotle would not be an anomaly will provide the basis for understanding Aristotle’s high regard for him. My purpose then is to show that the typology derived from such studies can illuminate for us how Aristotle’s *μεγαλόψυχος* came to be considered an exemplar of virtue.<sup>24</sup>

## V

### The fundamental axiological premises of Mediterranean honor-shame societies

ing their social ground and import’.

<sup>20</sup> A recent survey of the role of honor and shame among the ancient Greeks is provided by Lloyd-Jones 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Sennett 1977, 12 notes that ‘the public domain [has become] meaningless’ since social encounters are now viewed in terms of a single self. He states (219): ‘In an intimate society, all social phenomena, no matter how impersonal in structure, are converted into matters of personality in order to have a meaning.’

<sup>22</sup> See Berger 1973, 89-90: ‘Dignity, as against honor...pertains to the self as such, to the individual regardless of his position in society... The concept of honor implies that identity is essentially, or at least importantly, linked to institutional roles. The modern concept of dignity, by contrast, implies that identity is essentially independent of institutional roles.’

<sup>23</sup> Evidence can be found in: Blok 1981, 427-440; Bourdieu, 1977; Campbell 1964; Du Boulay 1974; Herzfeld 1980 and 1985; Peristiany 1966; Walcot 1970.

<sup>24</sup> Virtue, that is, in the ‘civic’ sense and not that of the contemplative.

bear important similarities to those of Greek antiquity.<sup>25</sup> They include the overriding concern with saving face and maintaining reputation; an emphasis on how actions appear to others; and the belief that moral integrity and social worth are closely bound to honor. These are societies, that is, where the modern bifurcation of identity into disparate social and personal realms, an interior and an exterior self, has not taken hold.<sup>26</sup> They are ‘small scale, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance’ (Peristiany 1966, 11). In these circumstances ‘the individual cannot exist simply *qua* individual’ (Campbell 1964, 187). While the sense of identity may be subjective it is always socially defined: what a person ought to be, the ideal self, is a presentation of society.<sup>27</sup> This ideal image is not simply a matter of moral prohibitions but rather comprises a social personality with specific behavioral and material attributes constantly measured by others (Campbell 1964, 307).<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, under these circumstances virtue, in the Aristotelian sense of what it is to be a good man, is socially constituted. There is no indulging in such honor-shame societies in Kantian moral autonomy, and Aristotle isolates even the self-sufficiency of the complete good (1097b8) from any possibility of being construed in socially atomic or individualistic terms:

what we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general for friends (*φίλοι*) and fellow-citizens, since a human being is naturally political (*πολιτικού*) (1097b8-11).

To be ‘naturally political’ is to be not only a member of the community but in an important sense a creation of it. Here, ‘the individual is constantly forced to prove and assert himself...he is constantly “on show”, he is forever courting the public opinion of “equals” so that they may pronounce him worthy’ (Peristiany 1966b, 11).

Individual self-consciousness is inextricably entwined in the nexus of community, seen for example in the Cretan village described in a book significantly titled *The Poetics of Manhood* (Herzfeld 1985). The phrase ‘poetics of manhood’ encapsulates the fact that to the Cretans personal identity (*eghoismós*) does not focus on the self, as the word *egoism*, were it used to translate the modern Greek, would misleadingly suggest. Rather it ‘can only be understood as a *social* cate-

<sup>25</sup> See Peristiany 1966, 178-179, as well as citations in Walcot 1970, 10-13. Parallels in attitudes towards prestige are cited in Campbell 1964, 263.

<sup>26</sup> Or at least not fully; Du Boulay 1974, for example, reveals the tension in some individuals between allegiance to the community’s honor ethos and to the teachings of Christianity.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell 1964, 309 writes: ‘what a man is depends on the evaluation by the community of what a man is alleged to be, or to have done’. Other features of shame morality, such as the evaluation of conduct by comparison and contrast with a model identity, and the shame that results from failure to achieve an ideal are discussed in Morris 1976, 59-63.

<sup>28</sup> Campbell 1964, 307 notes that ‘A man is constantly anxious as to how his actions and qualities will appear in the eyes of others, and how their evaluation of himself relates to the ideal image of how he would wish to appear.’

gory' (Herzfeld 1985, 11). Particularly important to note therefore, is that self-regard is not the individualized cognizance we are wont to assume, but a socially determined value (Herzfeld 1985, 26; Campbell 1964, 307-308). We risk radically distorting this experience of self-regard if we disparage it simply as a preference for (public) appearance over (inner) reality. Such a formulation, notes Gabriele Taylor,

implies that distinction between appearance and reality, between public and private, which is unacceptable within the framework of the shame-culture... Self-respect and public respect stand and fall together... [A] person can assess himself only in terms of what the public thinks of him. (Taylor, G. 1985, 55)

When personal moral identity is founded in communal regard for the individual, the bearer is figuratively speaking always on stage. As Herzfeld incisively puts it, the villagers focus less 'on being a good man than being good at being a man'. This stance, he stresses, demands constant attention on the part of the individual to 'performative excellence', and each of the many confrontations a man engages in must be treated 'in terms of its audience' (Herzfeld 1985, 16 and 80).<sup>29</sup>

The metaphor of performance excellence is an insightful one, particularly so in the matter of attaining honor. Regarding honor, Pierre Bourdieu in his study of the Kabyle of Algeria confirms how

The sentiment of honour is lived out openly before other people. [It] is above all in the action of defending, cost what it may, a certain public image of oneself. ... *honour is the basis of the moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of others*, who has need of others for his existence, because *the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people* (Bourdieu 1966, 208 and 211; emphases mine).

The determination of identity in the reflection of others lies at the heart of the honor-shame value system. It is the key to understanding Aristotle's depiction of the *μεγαλόψυχος*, whose many characteristics described in *EN* iv should be seen in this light. As an example, the *μεγαλόψυχος*' unwillingness to acknowledge favors received ought not be regarded as an arrogant conceit but as a rational way of articulating moral identity in a society whose axiological grid treats granting favors as an indication of superiority and receiving them an indication of inferiority (Campbell 1964, 95; Herzfeld 1985, 155; Pitt-Rivers 1966, 59). The latter can in no way be regarded as an excellence (*ἀρετή*). Similarly, honor requires that a man accept only opponents whose honor is at least 'commensurate with his

<sup>29</sup> "'To be a man" the individual must show himself to be courageous and fearless' (Campbell 1964, 269; my emphases). See the discussions in Sennett 1977 on the notion of the *theatrum mundi*, in which men are 'actors' in the public realm.

own' (Peristany 1966c, 188).

The necessity of public display, of constant public performance and performative excellence engenders a requisite manner of deportment to embody the virtues. Bourdieu's description of how one must act among the Kabyle has striking parallels to Aristotle's evocation of the *μεγαλόψυχος*:

The wise man... is the man who knows how to keep a secret, who constantly proves his prudence and discretion. ... The man who... grows impatient or angry, speaks at random or laughs without reason, is precipitate or uncontrolled, acts without thinking, throws his weight about, shouts, vociferates, in short, abandons himself to his first impulse, such a man is unfaithful to himself, and falls short of the ideals of dignity and distinction, of modesty and shame... The man of honour, on the contrary [takes care] to be worthy of a certain ideal image of himself. Level-headed, prudent, restrained in his speech, he always weighs the pros and cons, he pledges his word frankly and does not evade his responsibilities... (Bourdieu 1966, 210-11).

Bourdieu's description is echoed in other Mediterranean honor-shame cultures as a reading of the literature readily shows. Proper restraint has to be observed while a person is on the social stage, most especially when he has pretensions of leadership or social influence. Restraint can take many forms; it can be a way of expressing superiority (Herzfeld 1985, 76) as well as of promoting the well-being of the community. The refusal of the *μεγαλόψυχος* to exacerbate communal strife by speaking ill of enemies or engaging in gossip, proclivities well known to ancient Athens as the comic poets and orators reveal, has positive benefits for the community. Juliet Du Boulay's study of a village in Euboea illustrates the ubiquity and meanness of gossip and mockery. She writes that

The motivation behind mockery is chiefly the desire to increase personal reputation, and a sense of self-esteem, at the expense of another's. As such, mockery springs from the same complex as curiosity, slander, accusation, quarrels, and so on. However, an inseparable element in this inflation of self-esteem is that, as they say, 'people like to laugh', and this must be taken literally not just to indicate that people like to increase their reputation by destroying that of others, but also that people like to amuse themselves... (Du Boulay 1974, 182; see Campbell 1964, 312).

When it reaches this point the concern over honor has degraded into what Greeks of the 4th century would have called *φιλονικία* or love of winning. The term is used disapprovingly when it suggests the contentiousness and strife produced by one overly attentive to his own victory at whatever social or personal cost to others. Being above all this through confidence in his worth, even though perceived by some as distant and aloof, the *μεγαλόψυχος* refrains from this kind

of divisive social behavior. He is above it, but not inactive in the *polis* inasmuch as he does possess the virtues.

It is important to note that this restraint must also be physically displayed, including how one moves his body and how one speaks. That Athenians of the 4th century recognized this can be seen from the first definition of σοφροσύνη offered Socrates by Charmides; σοφροσύνη he says is, 'practicing everything in an orderly (κοσμίως) manner and calmly—walking in the streets as well as conversing, and doing everything else the same way' (Plato, *Charm.* 159b).

The significance of Charmides' response is that it is his immediate and unreflective answer, not yet subjected to elenchus. As such it aptly reveals what an Athenian listener would willingly accept as neither troublesome nor counter-intuitive, as some later answers in the dialogue will prove to be. Charmides's response would have been unsurprising to an Athenian, and it resonates with Greek admiration for the kind of 'noble forbearance' displayed in the Bronze Charioteer from Delphi, 'restrained and self-controlled even in a moment of great triumph' (Pollitt 1985, 104).

The durability of this view can be found in Roman examples. Cicero in *De Officiis* i 131 recommends that, 'When we hurry we should avoid indulging in excessively rapid movements. These cause heavy breathing, they distort the face, they twist the expression. All these phenomena indicate that self-control is absent.'<sup>30</sup>

The apparent oddness of including slow movement and other physical characteristics as criteria for virtue is better understood when we recognize how the moral agent is an actor in social space, and that appropriate movement is part of the code necessary for public acknowledgment of virtue.<sup>31</sup> Such behavior, or performance to use Herzfeld's term, comprises an important component of virtue, indeed an essential one. The μεγαλόψυχος plays a part just as do the Kabyle and the Cretans; his role if it is a genuine one could not permit anything so unseemly as running wildly from a battle scene. A truly courageous man—which the μεγαλόψυχος must be since he has all the virtues—would not behave in this way, even when taking part in a disorderly retreat. As evidence we can use Alcibiades' description of Socrates' courageous behavior during the flight of the Athenian army from Delium.

[Socrates] and Laches were retreating, while the troops were

<sup>30</sup> Edinger 1974 translation. Vergil illustrates the link between slow movement and honorific distinction. At *Aen.* iv 149-150, Aeneas, greeting Dido prior to the royal hunting expedition, is compared to Apollo when he returns each spring to his birthplace on Delos. In conjunction with his resplendent dignity, Aeneas is remarked to move no less slowly than the god himself: 'haud illo segnioribat/ Aeneas, tantum egregio decus enitet ore.'

The *longue durée* of the association of stately pace with nobility is seen in Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo* (1558) who warns that the nobleman should neither run like a lackey, nor walk as slowly as a bride: 'Non dee l'huomo nobile correre per via, ne troppo affretarsi, che cio conviene a palafreniere e non e gentilhuomo. Non percio si dee andare sì lento, ne sì conregnoso come femmina o come sposa' (quoted in Elias 1978, 76).

<sup>31</sup> On the significance of voice for a man's character, see Demosthenes *Against Pantaenetus*. 52.

scattered in flight, I noticed first how far he outdid Laches in being collected (ἐμφρων), and next I felt—to use a phrase of yours Aristophanes—how he carried himself along there, just the way he does here, 'bearing himself haughtily like a water-bird turning his eyes sideways' (βρεθνόμενος καὶ τὸφθαλμῶ παραβάλλον, *Clouds* 362), calmly looking askance at friend and foe alike, making it clear to everyone even from afar... that he could put up a stout defence (Plato, *Symp.* 221 a-b; translation based on Lamb 1925).

The reference to the *Clouds* offers a telling detail; the verb Aristophanes had employed, βρεθνέει, translated as 'bear oneself haughtily, hold one's head high' is derived from the name of a water-bird (βρένθος), apparently some sort of heron or crane.<sup>32</sup> The image of Socrates moving calmly in the dignified and watchful manner of a long-legged water-bird neatly depicts his 'noble forbearance' in the face of an otherwise chaotic situation. His courage, and indeed his 'great-souledness', are here vividly displayed.

It is helpful to compare Aristotle's remarks on the relation of courage to death with that of μεγαλοψυχία to honor. Courageous people are sometimes said to show a disdain for death (see n16 above). While critics carp at the μεγαλόψυχος' disdain for honors from ordinary people and his expectation of them from the best people, as well as his rousing himself only for great honors, Aristotle is not normally chided for the implications of saying that the courageous person, like the μεγαλόψυχος, is concerned with 'great things' (περὶ τὰ μέγιστα, *EN* 1115a25) and that death is such a thing. Courage does not pertain simply to death, but to death 'in the finest conditions' (ἐν τοῖς καλλίστοις, 1115a30) such as death in war, as the honors given by cities and by monarchs prove (1115a32).

## VI

It has been my intent to show that the μεγαλόψυχος is not an improbable fantasy on Aristotle's part nor a caricature, even though it is unlikely that such men were often actualized. I have tried to suggest instead that Aristotle's portrait is rooted in social reality, and that it is highly congruent with the moral and social dynamics of that society. To be sure, most men in Greek society would not have been sufficiently confident in their own worth to be so unperturbable. With the

<sup>32</sup> Lowell Edmunds, in a penetrating discussion of the original lines from Aristophanes' comedy, demonstrates the link between βρεθνέει and ὑπερήφανος, meaning arrogant or haughty (Edmunds 1987, 9), a common opinion of the μεγαλόψυχος according to Aristotle (*EN* 1124a20). *Clouds* 362 supplies the additional feature of Socrates that he σεμνοπροσωπεῖ, has a grave or solemn appearance. To which Edmunds, arguing that *Clouds* 361-362 show attributes of the historical Socrates, comments 'Questa caratteristica di Socrate era diventata proverbiale già nei primi anni della guerra del Peloponneso... Questi due versi... gli attribuiscono disprezzo, senso di superiorità, derisione, grandiosità affettata'. These are components of what he calls the 'ironia practica' of Socrates (Edmunds 1987, 14). Such a negative picture is at variance with Aristotle's criterion for considering Socrates a μεγαλόψυχος at *An. Post.* 97b20-25, that he was indifferent to the whims of fortune. His discussion there refers to the different meanings the term has.

exception perhaps of Socrates, they were deeply engaged in daily struggles to assert their worth and superiority vis à vis their fellow citizens; even the truly courageous and just could rarely escape the need to reaffirm its recognition. A further intent of the paper has been to demonstrate the descriptive detail necessary to comprehend the matrix of concept and practice that support the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Without comprehending these how are we fully to comprehend the work itself?

Finally we should see μεγαλοψυχία as the κόσμος, crown or ornament, of the virtues because those who possess this complete virtue do not dissolve the benefits their other virtues bring to themselves, family and φίλοι, their fellow citizens and the entire community, with disruptive, divisive, or counteractive behavior. Plato remarks that σοφροσύνη is a κόσμος by virtue of its control of the disruptive and deceptive desires and pleasure (Plato *Resp.* 430e). The μεγαλόψυχος similarly sees his way beyond the disruptions and deceptions of the agonistic life of the polis. He may in fact be the best representative of the victory of co-operative over competitive virtues within the realities of that society. His inclusion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not then a mistake nor should it remain a puzzle. The virtue is genuine and congruent with the logic of socially constituted virtues.

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