

GREATNESS OF SPIRIT IN THE ARABIC TRADITION

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Much—if not quite enough—has been written about the development of greatness of soul and its cognate concepts in ancient philosophy and in the European context more broadly. The best-known account of the virtue has been Aristotle’s, but this virtue also featured prominently in the ethical outlook of other ancient philosophers, such as the Stoics, and it is possible to trace its continued trajectory among numerous later philosophers, such as Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, and (with a dash of argument) Kant. Yet what about the Arabic-Islamic context? Virtually nothing seems to be known about the presence of this concept within Islamic culture and the life it led there. My aim in this chapter is to redress this gap by a selective recounting of the life this concept led within the Arabic-Islamic tradition. One of the surprises of this life-story is that there are no less than two concepts that can be identified as interlocutors—to put it as broadly as possible—of the ancient virtue of greatness of soul, concepts whose trajectories converged yet also diverged in critical respects. The focus of one of these concepts (*kibar al-nafs* or “greatness of soul”) was on the right attitude to the self and its merits, and bore a strong affinity to Aristotle’s configuration of the virtue. As thus articulated, this virtue would seem to stand in profound tension with certain elements of Islamic morality. By contrast, the focus of the second concept of virtue (*‘izam al-himma* or “greatness of spirit”) was on right desire or aspiration, and some of its chief architects parsed it more specifically as a foundational virtue of aspiration to virtue. Unlike the first concept, which failed to strike deep roots in Arabic-Islamic ethical culture, the second spread like wildfire through a number of genres of ethical writing. It is the second concept that will form the chief protagonist in this chapter.

Yet before setting out to plot this story, it is important to take a step back and consider what it means to look for this story in the first place—and this includes, above all, what it means to identify its subject.

Identifying the Subject: Two Questions

What kind of question might one be asking when one asks about the presence of this concept in the Arabic tradition? There are various possibilities, each of them hinging on different ways of ways of understanding what it means to pick out the concept at stake.

The most obvious way of understanding the question is as a question about how thinkers in the Arabic tradition responded to one of the articulations of the virtue found in the ancient context, whose intellectual legacy was mediated to them through the large-scale translation of

Greek philosophical texts that took place in the Islamic world from the eighth century onwards. Given the prominence of Aristotle's articulation of the virtue, the most attractive and most natural way of posing the question would be as a question about the Arabic reception of Aristotle's account. How, one would want to ask, did Arab thinkers react to Aristotle's distinctive understanding of this virtue as a quality regulating the attitude to honour and self-worth? Who were the key thinkers, and the key texts? A central part of this task would be to identify the Arabic term through which Aristotle's term (*megalopsychia*) was rendered and to track its textual footprint.

This "natural" way of posing the question might appear an unduly restricted one. Aristotle's configuration of the concept was after all not the sole one available in the ancient context. Even if we say nothing about the differences between Aristotle's own accounts across different works, such as the *Eudemian* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Plato before him had configured it differently in the *Republic*, where he had connected it to intellectual activity.¹ The Stoics after him would configure it even more differently still. Where Aristotle had emphasised the *concern* with honour—however delicately he may have finessed this concern, parsing it as a merely "moderate" attachment resulting in measured pleasure at honour conferred by the appropriate people (*NE* 1124a5-7)—prominent Stoics tipped the virtue sharply away from attachment and toward an attitude of more unqualified detachment, an attitude englobing not just honour but all external goods. The great-spirited man, in Cicero's words, is marked by "disdain for things external, in the conviction that a man should admire . . . nothing except what is honourable and seemly, and should yield to no man, nor to agitation of the spirit, nor to fortune."² As against Aristotle's rather supine image of the great-souled man and more audible accent on passive receiving, Cicero also underscored the active aspect of the virtue and its connection with the performance of "great" and "beneficial" actions. Similarly, while the emphasis on self-worth does not seem to be entirely absent from Stoic views, it appears to be pegged less to the individual moral qualities of the self than to its universal features.³

What even this brief foray calls attention to is that talk of "the" concept of "the" virtue should not lead us to overlook the plurality of ways in which this concept was articulated, and indeed the plurality of terms through which it was expressed in the ancient context (Plato's *megaloprepeia*, Aristotle's *megalopsychia*, Longinus' *megalophrosyne*, Cicero's *magnitudo animi*). If, in fact, we look far back enough to take in the Homeric roots of the concept—as Aristotle himself invites us to do in his *Posterior Analytics*—our sense of the conceptual and linguistic boundaries of the concept will be loosened still further.⁴ This is merely the thin edge of a wedge that can be driven right through to appropriations of the concept much later in philosophical history.

This is not to deny the possibility that these plural configurations may be unified by important conceptual elements that allow us to consider them as instances of a "single" concept which can be recounted as part of the same story. The heuristic premise of this volume is that they can (keeping in mind that the notion of a "single concept" is itself not hermetically sealed but fuzzy around the edges). As Arthur Lovejoy noted in a different context, intellectual novelty is often less a matter of the emergence of entirely original elements, than of a new

¹ I am thinking especially of the remarks at *Republic* 486a; the term there is not *megalopsychia* but *megaloprepeia*.

² Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. and trans. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Book 1, 66.

³ This takes discussion, but I have in mind the kind of idea that finds expression in one of Seneca's *Epistles*: "Reflect that nothing except the soul is worthy of wonder; for to the soul, if it be great, naught is great" (*Epistle* 8, 5). I draw on the translation by R. M. Gummere (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), vol. 1.

⁴ In Homer, a common heroic epithet is *megaletor*. For Aristotle's remarks, see *Posterior Analytics* II.13.97b15–25.

patterning or re-arrangement of existing ones.⁵ Many of the historical configurations of greatness of soul could be seen as different ways of patterning or balancing a limited number of existing elements. Looking at the above configurations, one might identify at least two such dominant elements: an attitude to self-worth (patterned as high appreciation by reference to different conceptions of the self), and an attitude to external goods, including honour (patterned as moderate concern or contempt). The way such elements were patterned by particular philosophers in the ancient context reflected larger differences in ethical outlook. The great French scholar René Antoine Gauthier went so far as to say that greatness of soul was the battleground on which nothing less than “the relationship between human beings and the world” was decided.⁶

Yet having attuned ourselves to this pluralism, it may be easier to then take the step to a different way of receiving the starting question (“What might it mean to ask about the presence of ‘this’ concept in the Arabic tradition?”). We can get to this more immediately by considering the following. Suppose, for a moment, that there had in fact been no history of textual transmission of ancient philosophical writings into the Islamic world. Suppose there had been no textual and cultural links to the ancient world giving authors in the Arabic tradition access to ancient ethical thought. Would it still be possible to ask our starting question?

As will be clear, this last question invites a more probing reflection on what it means to identify the concept at stake. If it is to be possible for us to approach the presence of the concept in Arabic-Islamic culture in terms other than as a question about the reception of ancient thought, it would seem necessary that we have a type of access to the concept that is not exclusively sustained by its articulation in ancient texts—that we have a different kind of grip on the concept that might allow us to recognise it even in cultural contexts untouched by the influence of the Greco-Roman world. Do we? When considering some of the other standard virtues, such as courage or compassion, this kind of cross-cultural identification seems achievable if not entirely unproblematic. (“It is a difficult question,” as Daniel Russell points out, whether “the courage of a Quaker is the same as the courage of a Samurai.”⁷) In the case of our focal virtue, the prospect of such identification would appear highly unpromising. Greatness of soul has sometimes been described, and decried, as a virtue steeped in the specificities of its time, encoding, in one phrasing, “an attitude to one’s own worth that is more Greek than universal.”⁸ It is the Trojan horse of Aristotle’s ethics that belies its universalism and betrays its contingent cultural roots, serving up the image of the Athenian gentleman in one view (MacIntyre) and the repugnant relics of the Homeric hero in another.⁹ This understanding of the tight cultural tethering of the virtue would seem to put paid to the prospects of cross-cultural identification. Greatness of soul could not be divorced from the particular intellectual tradition in which it was textually manifested, and our ability to recognise it in the work of given thinkers would depend on our ability to recognise these thinkers as heirs of and participants in this tradition. Take the case of Montaigne. In the essay “We reach the same end by discrepant means,” his discussion is shot through with invocations of the concept from end to end. Our ability to recognise these as invocations of *that* concept is underwritten not merely by Montaigne’s usage, which throws down direct linguistic bridges to the ancient

⁵ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1964), 3-4.

⁶ René Antoine Gauthier, *Magnanimité: l'idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1951), 303.

⁷ Daniel Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173.

⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 13 (1988), 38; cf. 34, referencing the remarks of Bernard Williams and Stuart Hampshire.

⁹ For MacIntyre’s view, see *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2007), 182, and *A Short History of Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 75-77; for the second point, which is in fact closely linked to MacIntyre’s, see Nancy Sherman, “Common Sense and Uncommon Virtue,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 13 (1988), 102-103.

context (*magnanimité* is one of his nodal terms, though not the only one¹⁰), but more generally by the visible relationship in which he places himself to the ancient literary corpus.

More could be said about this particular case; and the importance of this textual tradition cannot be wholly discounted. Yet the point to focus on here is that once we have taken stock of the more generous boundaries of the concept in the ancient context and taken in the plural configurations of the virtue with their characteristic patternings of core elements, these cross-cultural identifications begin to seem less unimaginable. Kristján Kristjánsson has already offered us one model of what such identification might look like in an interesting essay focusing on the Icelandic sagas. There he proposed that it is possible to recognise a substantial affinity between the concept of greatness of soul articulated by Aristotle and a concept that is central to the moral code presented in the sagas, the *mikilmenni*—variously translated as “great men,” the “great-hearted” or “great-minded.” Like Aristotle’s great-souled, the *mikilmenni* combine great virtue with a strong sense of self-esteem and awareness of their merits. They are likewise flanked by two vicious extremes, the “small-minded” and the “overly ambitious.” Given the heroic overtones that greatness of soul has often been seen to carry, it is not incidental to note the heroic character of saga morality.¹¹

If Kristjánsson is correct, here we have two virtue terms which are connected by sufficient similarities in conceptual content for us to feel warranted in identifying them as cross-cultural “counterparts.” This is one possible model for how such identification could happen—though just how heavily we can lean on this particular instance will ultimately depend on our approach to complex questions about the relative importance of indigenous and foreign elements (notably the influence of Latin literature) in the sagas.¹² It is an interesting question how much cultural luck (to possibly coin a term) is required for such felicitous isomorphisms to emerge. Might this kind of virtue concept have a strong probability of emerging naturally within certain types of social formations? If it did, this would have significant implications for the way we think about the relationship between what is culturally contingent and universal in the concept. In the absence of obvious isomorphic terms, there would still be another possibility if our interest lay in carrying out a cross-cultural ethical conversation. One might undertake a comparison not at the level of the virtue term, but of what I described as its core elements or stakes. Thus, one might try to investigate, for example, whether in a particular ethical culture similar stances were adopted on stakes such as the appropriate attitude to self-worth or to external goods, and whether concordances in ethical stances can be discerned regardless of whether these concordances were codified in a single corresponding term.

Greatness of Soul: An Ancient Virtue and its Fate

¹⁰ Another is *généreux*, which his translator M. A. Screech translates as “magnanimous,” reserving “great-hearted” for *magnanime*.

¹¹ Kristján Kristjánsson, “Liberating Moral Traditions: Saga Morality and Aristotle’s *Megalopsychia*,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1 (1998), 397–422.

¹² This has been the subject of some debate. As Margaret Clunies Ross notes, the simple earlier view that “native traditions taught the Icelanders what to write, but foreign literature taught them how to write it” has given way among saga scholars to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between indigenous and foreign traditions: *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48. See Annette Lassen, “Indigenous and Latin Literature,” in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson, eds., *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2017), for a helpful overview that highlights the importance of Latin literature as a background for the sagas while also underscoring the challenges of mapping this relationship in detail. The view that there are significant resemblances between Aristotle’s ethics and saga morality and that these are not to be explained genetically—reflecting, rather, “the spontaneous combustion of the human spirit . . . giving off identical heat, light, and power in places remotely separated in space and time”—was clearly voiced by one of the earlier scholars to comment on the affinity. See Sveinbjorn Johnson, “Old Norse and Ancient Greek Ideals,” *Ethics*, 49 (1938), 18–36, 36 quoted.

I have been suggesting that there are different ways of understanding what it means to ask about the presence of “this concept” in the Arabic tradition. One way of parsing this is as a question about the reception of the concept of greatness of soul as developed in the ancient philosophical tradition. But there is, in principle, another way, which rests on an ability to specify the identity of the concept in rather broader terms, recognising concepts in other cultures as counterparts of the ancient concept or as members of the same broad family even if they are not genetically related. For want of a better term, I will call this family “virtues of greatness.”¹³

These broad-brush reflections are an important *mise-en-scène* for approaching the Arabic tradition. They provide a general framework in which to fit the key discovery that must organise any telling of the story of the virtues of greatness within the Arabic tradition. This discovery is that there are no less than two Arabic concepts at work within Arabic-Islamic ethical writings that can be identified as interlocutors, to put it permissively, of the ancient concept of greatness of soul. Yet only one of them can be identified as a direct and exclusive genetic descendant of the ancient concept. The other formed the end-product of a more complex intellectual lineage, and its claim of kinship to the ancient concept is grounded less in paternity than in broader affinity of conceptual traits. I have said more about the first concept elsewhere,¹⁴ so here I will quickly summarise the most relevant points in order to focus on the second.

The immediate descendant of the ancient Greek tradition appears in Arabic ethical works as *kibar al-nafs*, which is a direct calque of the Greek term *megalopsychia*, a compound of the Arabic terms for “magnitude” and “soul.” Its parent-texts are a motley crew, and they include not only Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (available in Arabic from around the second half of the ninth century) and Plato’s *Republic* (available in the form of short quotations, excerpts and abridgements from a similar time) but also a constellation of shorter texts of syncretistic bent and of gnarled transmission history which proved widely influential in the Arabic context. Among them is the *Summa Alexandrinorum*, an epitome of the *Nicomachean Ethics* often presumed to have been composed some time in late antiquity; the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Virtutibus et vitiis*, extant in two Arabic translations; an additional “seventh book” incorporated into the Arabic version of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which has been conjectured to derive from a lost commentary by Porphyry; and a short treatise on ethics by a certain “Nicolaus” which was found with the manuscript of the Arabic translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The diversity of parent-texts is to an extent reflected in the way greatness of soul is presented in the Arabic ethical works in which it makes an appearance. These works include al-Fārābī’s (d. 950) *On The Perfect State and The Attainment of Happiness*, where greatness of soul appears (under unmistakable Platonic inspiration) within the roster of qualities required in the philosopher-king. They also include Miskawayh’s (d. 1030) ethical compendium, *The Refinement of Character*, and al-Ghazālī’s (d. 1111) *The Scale of Action*. In both of the latter works, greatness of soul appears in the context of a comprehensive classification of the virtues and vices, filed under the cardinal virtue of courage. Different intellectual influences compete in Miskawayh’s and al-Ghazālī’s definitions of the virtue, but the Aristotelian echoes are strongly audible in both. One picks them up distinctly enough in Miskawayh’s description of the great-souled person as one who “always judges himself worthy of great things while

¹³ This term is also used by Daniel C. Russell but in a rather different context, referring to Aristotle’s virtues of magnificence and magnanimity: “Aristotle’s Virtues of Greatness,” in Rachana Kamtekar, ed., *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ “An Ancient Virtue and Its Heirs: The Reception of Greatness of Soul in the Arabic Tradition,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45 (2017): 688-731.

[indeed] deserving them” and again in al-Ghazālī’s characterisation of him as one who “has the capacity to judge himself worthy of grand things while despising them and caring little about them out of delight in the value and grandeur of his soul.”¹⁵ As in Aristotle, the emphasis on self-evaluation and a high sense of one’s worth is central to the architecture of this virtue.

What will seem puzzling, coming from the history of this virtue’s troubled reception, is that these moral thinkers show themselves entirely insensible of its serrated edges. In modern times, the great-souled person as Aristotle depicts him has been disparaged for a litany of evils—as supine, arrogant, ungrateful. In the Christian context, the tension between greatness of soul and humility, as Jennifer Herdt notes, has often been “seen as capturing the basic tension between pagan and Christian conceptions of virtue.”¹⁶ How could a thinker with such acute religious sensitivities as al-Ghazālī in particular fail to pick up the conflict brewing between this virtue and his own view of the proper attitude to self-esteem as he articulates it elsewhere? Not a sense of one’s “grandeur” but of one’s insignificance and dependence on God is the proper way to relate to one’s merits, he tells us in his magnum opus *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. Both his and Miskawayh’s engagement with the virtue appear curiously perfunctory, hardly overstepping the manicured boundaries of a definition. Overall, the life this concept leads in such works appears atrophied. Greatness of soul seems to shrivel on the vine; the foreign graft doesn’t quite take root.

This, in broad contours, is the story one could tell about the virtue of greatness that forms the direct genetic epigone of the ancient concept. But it is not the only contender in the field. A more full-blooded and flourishing virtue of greatness can be found in Arabic ethical writings. It appears not only in philosophical works on the virtues, but in a number of other genres of ethical writing, including mirrors for princes and works of literature (*adab*). My focus here will fall on its philosophical articulations, and particularly on its development at the hands of two key writers, the 10th-century Christian philosopher Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974) and the 11th-century religious and literary scholar al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī. The next two sections will focus consecutively on their contributions, and my discussion will interleave several sidelights that situate these contributions against ancient philosophical approaches and shore up the intuitive case for conceptual affinity. The final section will then return to the question of paternity and genetic origins for a global comment.

Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī: Aspiring to the Greatest Virtue

Where to look for this virtue? It is Miskawayh himself who gives us a strong lead in this direction. Because in the taxonomy of the virtues that he presents in the *Refinement*, greatness of soul is in fact not the sole virtue to appear whose terms directly engage the concept of “greatness.” One line down, grouped under the same rubric of qualities subordinate to courage, we see another virtue, which Miskawayh designates as *‘izām al-himma*, and which I translate as “greatness of spirit,” reserving further comment on this translation for later. The definition reads: “a virtue of the soul through which it endures both good fortune and its opposite, even the travails experienced at the time of death.”¹⁷ Parsed in these terms, greatness of spirit will remind us of a characteristically Stoic understanding of a similarly-named virtue and indeed of

¹⁵ See, respectively: Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh, *Refinement of Character/Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, ed. Constantine Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1966), 21; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Scale of Action/Mizān al-‘amal*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1964), 277.

¹⁶ Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 40. This particular view, of course, is newly nuanced by the contributions in this volume, including Herdt’s own discussion in chapter 3 and John Marenbon’s in chapter 4.

¹⁷ *Tahdhīb*, 21.

the moral life. Yet this, in fact, is not the only meaning of the term in play, as signalled by a statement appearing in another one of Miskawayh's works, *The Scattered and the Gathered*, in the not-insignificant context of a discussion about the appropriateness of publicising one's own merits. "The great-spirited person (*al-kabīr al-himma*)," Miskawayh writes there, "belittles the virtues he possesses on account of his aspiration to what surpasses them; for however high the level (*martaba*) of excellence that a person acquires, it is nugatory compared with that which surpasses it."¹⁸

The first of these statements associates greatness of spirit with the endurance of fortune; the second with a boundless aspiration to virtue. Bracketing finer-grained questions about the relationship between these apparently incongruous meanings, our purposes here are best served by simply fixing our attention on the second. Because it is this second semantic strand that forms the backbone of a virtue that receives important expression in a wide array of ethical works aligned with the philosophical tradition. Having already found a wedge into this tradition through Miskawayh's brief remarks, all we need to do to drive this wedge more deeply is to turn one generation back to consider the work of one of Miskawayh's older contemporaries and one of the best-known figures of this formative period of Arabic philosophical thought, the Christian author Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. A disciple of al-Fārābī, Yaḥyā's interests span a number of philosophical and theological topics. On the subject of ethics, his most prominent contribution consists of a short compendium running under the same title as Miskawayh's later work, *The Refinement of Character*. In this work, the virtue of greatness of spirit forms a salient concern. Indeed, one might even go so far as to describe it as the virtue that holds the entire project of the book together.

The evidence for this begins to emerge from the very first lines of the book, where Yaḥyā opens by staking out his aims and conjuring his audience. His purpose in detailing good and bad character traits, he explains, is to guide "those whose spirit is so lofty as to make them vie with the people of excellence (*man kānat lahu himma tasmū ilā mubārāt ahl al-faḍl*)," placing the image of the perfect human being before them so as to rouse their longing for this beautiful form (*li-yashtāqa ilā šūratihī*).¹⁹ In seeking to steer readers toward ethical transformation, this remark suggests, it is their existing loftiness of spirit that the book must appeal to so as to get its very project launched. This remark in fact foreshadows the formal definition of greatness of spirit that appears later in the discussion, where Yaḥyā methodically goes through the tables of the virtues and vices to define each in turn. Coming to greatness of spirit, he defines it as a quality that involves "belittling what falls short of the utmost limit among exalted things and seeking lofty stations (*istiṣghār mā dūna al-nihāya min ma'ālī al-umūr wa-ṭalab al-marātib al-sāmiya*) . . . disdaining middling levels and seeking the farthestmost degrees."²⁰

¹⁸ Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Miskawayh, *The Scattered and the Gathered/al-Hawāmil wa'l-shawāmil*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1951), 308.

¹⁹ Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *The Refinement of Character/Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, ed. Nājī al-Takrītī (Beirut and Paris: Editions Oueidat, 1978), 69.

²⁰ Ibid, 91. There are other elements woven into the definition which I am leaving out of the discussion, focusing on what I take to be both the more distinct and the more central strand. One strand that appears both in Yaḥyā's definition and in those of certain other writers concerns the attitude to material goods, and links the virtue to contempt of money and liberality in giving. This strand is present in some of the translated Greek texts in which the concept appears, whether as *kibar al-nafs* or as *'izam al-himma*. See e.g. in connection with *kibar al-nafs* the treatise by Nicolaus in *al-Akhlāq, ta'līf Aristūṭālīs, tarjamat Ishāq ibn Hunayn*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Kuwayt: Wikālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1979), 408, and in connection with *'izam al-himma*, Abu Qurra's translation of the *De Virtutibus et vitiis*, in *Ein pseudoaristotelischer Traktat über die Tugend: Edition und Übersetzung der arabischen Fassungen des Abū Qurra und des Ibn at-Ṭayyib*, ed. M. Kellermann (Erlangen: Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1965), Q4.

Now in this remark Yaḥyā does not specify his reference to the “exalted things” and “lofty stations,” and he appears to leave it open whether these stations should be understood in terms of virtue or in other terms, for example as stations of a social or political kind. Yet he makes the connection with virtue crystal-clear elsewhere, including in his remarks about the corresponding vice, which he defines in terms of “failing to hope in the possibility of attaining the farthestmost degrees and thinking much of paltry levels of the virtues.”²¹ With this formal definition in sight, we will be able to pick up on the repeated appearances the virtue makes throughout the treatise even beyond its suggestive stage-setting, recognising the plethora of occasions on which Yaḥyā implicitly invokes it in framing his ethical appeal. “The person who desires to govern his ethical character must take aim at the utmost limit and farthestmost degree of each virtue, and must not content himself with anything less than that degree.” And again: the perfect human being is one who “does not think much of the virtues he acquires.” The invitation to perfect one’s character is in part constituted as an invitation to be great-spirited.²²

One reason why the equivocation in Yaḥyā’s definition is worth flagging—stations of virtue or stations of a different kind?—is because it points to an important aspect of his discussion in the *Refinement*. As several commentators have observed, one of the distinctive features of this work is the emphasis it places on the social circumstances and identity of persons in determining the relevance of particular virtues and vices.²³ Certain virtues are more relevant to persons of a particular social and political status than to others. Thus, leaders and kings are in higher need of clemency (*ḥilm*) given their greater power to exact revenge, and in higher need of fidelity (*wafāʾ*) given their greater need to command trust from others. Indeed, certain qualities that are vices in people of a certain status may be virtues for people of a different one. Acquisitiveness is one such example—reprehensible in most people but commendable in kings given their need for extensive financial resources.²⁴ As these examples indicate, Yaḥyā’s interest falls disproportionately on the eminent and the great, and on kings in particular. It is in fact kings and people of high standing that he often seems to have in mind as recipients of his ethical address. Greatness of spirit is turn explicitly singled out as a virtue forming the apanage of kings (*min akhlāq al-mulūk khāṣṣatan*).²⁵ And it is then precisely their possession of this virtue that Yaḥyā invokes as the enabling condition of their ethical improvement. It is because kings “have a greater spirit and a stronger sense of pride” that if they set their sights on attaining human perfection, they find it easy to surmount conflicting drives.²⁶

There are two points that are particularly worth bringing out if we wish to place the virtue in full profile. One is the peculiarly elusive position this virtue appears to occupy within Yaḥyā’s philosophical psychology. Like many writers in the Arabic philosophical tradition,

²¹ *Tahdhīb*, 100: *istikthār al-yasīr min al-faḍāʾil*. The specification of these stations in social or political terms is also flagged in the text, e.g. p. 92: this virtue forms the special apanage of kings, and “it is becoming to leaders and great [or high-standing: *ʿuṣamāʾ*] men, and those who aspire to their stations (*tasmū nafsuḥu ilā marātibihim*).”

²² *Ibid*, 121, 123.

²³ For discussions of Yaḥyā’s ethics which touch on this point, see Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), part 3, chapter 5; Sidney H. Griffith, trans., *The Reformation of Morals* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), introduction, and “Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī’s (d. 974) *Kitāb Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*,” in Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Traité d’éthique d’Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā Ibn ʿAdī* (Paris: Cariscript, 1991), introduction; and al-Takrīfī’s commentary in the second half of his edition of the *Tahdhīb*, esp. 249-55.

²⁴ These remarks can be tracked throughout Yaḥyā’s discussion of the virtues and vices in *Tahdhīb*, 82-100, but they are found in special concentration from 101 ff. where he specifically addresses the differential application of the virtues and vices to different kinds of people.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 92.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

Yaḥyā adopts a tripartite view of the soul, distinguishing between the rational, irascible and appetitive faculties (or souls). And although, unlike other prominent writers such as Miskawayh, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī and al-Ghazālī, he does not formally present the virtues and vices by classifying them into cardinal and subordinate and assigning each set to a particular faculty, he offers clear indications regarding the relationship most of the virtues and vices bear to the different faculties.²⁷ Greatness of spirit stands apart among other virtues in speaking to at least two separate faculties. On the one hand, Yaḥyā flags its link to the irascible faculty when he makes the latter the source of the laudable disposition to “disdain lowly things . . . and seek high levels of praiseworthy character traits.”²⁸ Coming from Miskawayh’s classification of the virtue—filed under the cardinal virtue of courage, in turn mapped onto the irascible faculty—this move may not seem surprising. More broadly, the emphasis on striving, competition, and conquest that shapes Yaḥyā’s understanding of the virtue makes the connection to the thymotic part of the soul a natural one.

More surprising might be another association, this time with the faculty of reason. The association is flagged by a pregnant remark Yaḥyā offers in the same vicinity. The rational soul, he writes, is that “through which human beings gain their dignity and acquire the greatness of their spirit, so that they take pride in their soul.”²⁹ The association with reason will also appear natural, however, if we take into account the crucial contribution it makes to the activity identified as the special purview of greatness of spirit, namely the pursuit of virtue. Reason has both an epistemic and a conative role. It is reason that enables us to judge what is right and wrong and thus sets the moral ends we pursue; it is also reason that enables us to actualise these ends by subjugating the other two faculties when they oppose this pursuit.³⁰ At the same time, Yaḥyā appears to extend the link between greatness of spirit and reason beyond the practical domain to include the theoretical activity of reason.³¹

The unusual status of this virtue within the structure Yaḥyā’s psychology is worth highlighting. Yet what should next claim our attention is a point that concerns less its structural position than its conceptual content. I just described the purview of greatness of spirit as the pursuit of virtue. This characterisation brings out a striking aspect of this virtue that readers may already have picked up on, and that comes into view most sharply by considering the distinctive place it occupies within the architecture of Yaḥyā’s ethical address. If greatness of spirit is a quality of character that Yaḥyā can appeal to in order to motivate his audience to the task of self-improvement and get his project off the ground, what that reveals is that this is no ordinary virtue and bears no ordinary relationship to that project. That relationship—as indeed the peculiar tensions it carries—are signalled with special clarity in a passage near the conclusion of the work, when Yaḥyā frames a broad exhortation addressed to the kings of this world. True eminence, *true* mastery, consists in ethical perfection; and therefore it is kings whom it most becomes to possess such perfection. When a king sets himself on this pursuit, “the first thing he must habituate himself to is greatness of spirit; for greatness of spirit belittles every vice in his sight and beautifies every virtue.” When a king has greatness of spirit, it keeps him from “taking pride in his kingship and makes him see his soul and his spirit as having such great value that he does not think much of his kingship,” allowing him to look with scorn upon

²⁷ See *Tahdhīb*, 73 ff.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 79: *bihā sharufa al-insān wa-‘azumat himmatuhu*. Urvoy reads the first part of the phrase *bihā ‘azuma sharaf al-insān* in her edition (*Traité*, 11).

³⁰ *Tahdhīb*, 79: *bihā yastaḥsinu al-maḥāsin wa-yastaqbiḥu al-maqaḥibih wa-bihā yumkinu al-insān an yuhadhdhiba quwwatayhi al-bāqiyatayn*. Cf. the remarks on 81-82 and 117.

³¹ *Ibid*, 118: *idhā irtāda al-insān bi’l-‘ulūm al-‘aqliyya sharufat nafsuhu wa-‘azumat himmatuhu*. Though note the emphasis on the practical, ethical consequences of such theoretical excellence in the continuation of this remark.

the kingship that he normally views as the basis of his greatness, and to perceive that “the soul only becomes great through the virtues.”³²

Several things stand out in this remarkable passage. Set against Yaḥyā’s usual practice, this passage is unusual in not presupposing the existence of greatness of spirit in his addressee. Yet this serves to elicit more plainly what is otherwise implicit in Yaḥyā’s persuasive appeals to it. Greatness of spirit is not one virtue among others. It might instead be more appropriately termed the first of the virtues, or perhaps a meta-virtue, to mark its higher-order role. It is the virtue that conducts one to, and through, the moral life. We might describe it as a virtue of aspiration; it is the virtue of longing for virtue. Such desiderative language is encouraged by Yaḥyā himself in many places. Yet in this passage Yaḥyā’s accent rather falls on the notions of vision, perception and judgement. Greatness of spirit leads us into and through the moral life by sensitising us to the right values and re-orienting our perception so that we see the values of things in their true light. Greatness of spirit “beautifies” the virtues in a person’s “sight.” The great-spirited person “sees” his soul as having great value—value that makes the value of kingship itself, the grandest political station, pale in his eyes.

Anatomised in these terms, Yaḥyā’s account may provoke an important sense of recognition among readers familiar with philosophical history; though in the next moment it will also highlight not only what unites it with some of this history but also what divides it. The last way of parsing the virtue’s effect—in terms of a shift of evaluative vision involving a displacement of judgements about what is great—is particularly evocative in tying Yaḥyā’s account to an element that played a critical if understated role in the structure of ancient conceptions of greatness of soul. The great-souled man, Aristotle wrote in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is not given to wonder, for “nothing is great to him” (1125a3)—a depreciation of external goods finding its correlate in the appreciation of the greatness of his own soul. One might describe this as a displacement of wonder, as suggested by Seneca’s explicit use of this notion at a similar juncture: “Reflect that nothing except the soul is worthy of wonder; for to the soul, if it be great, naught is great” (Epistle 8, 5). *Nil admirari*—unless this is the soul in its higher capacities.³³ “To wonder at” or “admire” is in fact another possible translation for the term “to take pride in” (*i’jāb*) that appears both in Yaḥyā’s last-cited statement about kings as well as his earlier more universal statement about human beings: it is through their rational soul that people “gain their dignity and acquire the greatness of their spirit” and thus “take pride in their soul.” In associating greatness of spirit with the theoretical exercise of reason and intellectual inquiry, Yaḥyā may also remind us of Plato’s conjunction of the two in the *Republic*, as also of certain Stoic views of natural inquiry and its special status as an activity that puts us in contact with the divine element of reason that grounds human greatness.³⁴

What this helps underline, of course, is the emphasis on self-worth that shapes Yaḥyā’s understanding, as it shaped many of the ancient configurations of greatness of soul. Yet this similarity will instantly call attention to a crucial point of difference. Because in Aristotle’s account certainly, the judgement of self-worth that figured at the heart of greatness of soul had a very specific foundation. It was grounded in a justified belief in one’s possession of a virtuous character: in fact “greatness in respect of each of the excellences would seem to belong to the

³² Ibid, 140.

³³ I have fleshed out this point more fully in *Wonder: A Grammar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 154 ff., and *Schopenhauer and the Aesthetic Standpoint: Philosophy as a Practice of the Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 181 ff.

³⁴ As Seneca puts it in the *Natural Questions*: natural inquiry offers the mind a “proof of its own divinity” (Praef. 1.1.12) and allows us to “transcend [our] mortality and be re-registered with a higher status” (Praef. 1.1.17). I draw on the translation by Harry M. Hine (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010). The idea that theoretical inquiry actuates a divine element in humans extends well beyond the Stoics, but the link between this idea and a conception of human greatness seems easier to pick out among them, as I suggested in *Wonder and Schopenhauer and the Aesthetic Standpoint* (see above note).

great-souled person” (*NE* 1123b30). In Yaḥyā’s account, by contrast, the notion of self-worth shows up in a fundamentally different way: less as something based on backward-looking judgements about the excellence one in fact possesses, than as something that itself serves as the basis of forward-looking desires for the excellence one aspires to possess.³⁵ This, in turn, reveals what is perhaps the deepest difference at stake. For Aristotle, greatness of soul is the virtue of one who already possesses the virtues, serving to “augment” them and acting as an “adornment” to them (*NE* 1124a1-2). Were we thus to locate it in the logical or temporal order of the moral life, we would place it at its very ending. For Yaḥyā, by contrast, greatness of spirit is the virtue not of the accomplished *phronimos* but of the moral starter or *viator*; hence its appearance at the curtain-rising moment of ethical pursuit.

Yaḥyā’s account may in fact remind us of an appearance that greatness of soul had made outside the *Nicomachean Ethics*, namely in Aristotle’s discussion of the character of the young and the old in the *Rhetoric* (2.12-13). There, Aristotle had isolated greatness of soul as a distinctive quality of youth. The young are “great-souled; for they have not yet been worn down by life but are inexperienced with constraints, and to think oneself worthy of great things in greatness of soul and this is characteristic of a person of good hopes.”³⁶ In associating this virtue with the young, Aristotle seems to locate it precisely in the early stages of moral development. He also connects it with a sense of zeal, aspiration, and hopefulness that provide crucial counterweights to his more static image of *ne plus ultra* character-possession in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and that appear to draw him closer to Yaḥyā’s understanding.³⁷ Like Yaḥyā’s moral addressees, the young in Aristotle’s description are emulous and driven by an idealistic aspiration for the fine. Hope, we may note, also forms a linchpin concept in Yaḥyā’s account, though it emerges more distinctly in connection with the corresponding vice rather than with the virtue (“failing to hope in the possibility of attaining the farthest degrees”).

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that this passage cannot be taken as a straightforward representation of Aristotle’s view of the virtue. As commentators have observed, Aristotle must here be understood as ascribing to the young not the full virtue, but a “natural virtue” requiring further education.³⁸ In this respect, Yaḥyā’s distinctive emphasis on aspiration invites comparison less readily with Aristotle than with other thinkers in whom this element is foregrounded more strongly, as it is among certain Stoic writers. “Nature brought us forth magnanimous,” as Seneca puts it in one of his *Epistles*, and just as she “implanted in certain animals a spirit of ferocity, in others craft, in others timidity, so she has gifted us with

³⁵ It is telling in this connection to notice Yaḥyā’s use of the language of “entitlement” to frame the point that the king has the “greatest title” (*aḥaqq*) to ethical perfection. See e.g. *Tahdhīb*, 126, 139.

³⁶ I draw on the translation by George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), substituting “great-souled” for Kennedy’s “magnanimous.”

³⁷ In crafting this comparison, much hangs on the view we take about the role of the element of aspiration in the portrait of the *megalopsychos* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Michael Pakaluk, “The Meaning of Aristotelian Magnanimity,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 26 (2004), for an account that goes against the grain of many interpretations in highlighting its centrality. The comparison will also shift if we take into account Aristotle’s articulation of the virtue in other works, such as the *Eudemian Ethics*, where he identifies a sense of this virtue in which it “is an aspect of all virtues” and involves correct judgements about what is great in the ethical sense. See *Eudemian Ethics*, ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and Raphael Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1232a31-33. Another point to underline in comparing Yaḥyā’s account with Aristotle’s in the *Rhetoric* is that Aristotle’s remarks on emulation focus more directly on the striving to attain external goods and less directly on the striving for virtue; though cf. the remark at 2.11.4, which explicitly refers to the virtues as objects of emulation.

³⁸ For clarification of this point, see Gauthier’s remarks on this passage in *Magnanimité*, 30-35; and see Terence H. Irwin, “Ethics in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Ethics*,” in Amélie O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 142-74, for more context on the relationship between the ethical viewpoints of the two works. Kristján Kristjánsson implicitly takes a different view in his *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), chapter 5.

an aspiring and lofty spirit, which prompts us to seek a life of the greatest honour” (Epistle 104, 23).³⁹ An emphasis on the ardent desire for what is great and honourable is similarly at work in Cicero’s discussion of greatness of spirit in *On Duties*, and is indeed mobilised in his key argument that public office provides a crucial context for its exercise. For “greater impulses to achieve greater things are aroused in the spirits of those engaged in public life than of those who live quietly” (Book 1, 73). Plato’s own understanding of greatness of soul, though more narrowly tied to intellectual activity, gave an important place to this desiderative element insofar as this activity was textured by a passionate ardour or *eros* for truth.⁴⁰

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī: Aspiring to the Eternal

Such intellectual reverberations are worth documenting if we wish to place this virtue in conversation with the virtues of greatness articulated in the ancient context. For our present purposes, however, it is important to turn our attention to Yaḥyā’s more immediate context in order to situate his account within its own internal conversation. With this account before us, we have caught hold of a thread that we can follow through to a host of ethical works of philosophical vintage, recognising the distinctive patterns it forms there. A couple of generations later, we can follow it, however briefly, into the work of Avicenna (d. 1037), whose otherwise exiguous output on ethics includes a short treatise devoted to the topic of virtue and vice titled the “Epistle on Character.” This is a work burdened with a vexed transmission history and riddled with textual difficulties that make it inadvisable to lean too heavily on its content. Yet all we need to do at this juncture is to take note of the appearance that greatness of spirit (*‘izam al-himma*) makes in Avicenna’s taxonomy of the virtues and to then note its specification. Greatness of spirit involves doing one’s utmost with regard to things that augment one’s virtue and dignity (*sharaf*), aspiring to what is ever loftier and greater. We will recognise the continuity of this specification with Yaḥyā’s. Coming from Yaḥyā, we may also be able to explain what might otherwise have been Avicenna’s puzzling move to range it with the virtues of the rational faculty (*faḍā’il tamyīziyya*).⁴¹

Looking across to Avicenna’s contemporaries, we can also follow this thread into the work of Miskawayh, as I have already indicated. The appearances the virtue makes are again brief, but not for that insignificant. The context of one of these appearances in the *Refinement* is particularly worth highlighting. “The man of reason and virtue,” Miskawayh writes, “directs his aspiration (*himma*) to the highest stations.” He goes on to rehearse a celebrated and much-contested passage from the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle, having outlined the ideal of intellectual activity, commends it as a way of life that enables us to transcend the human to the divine and “assimilate to the immortals” (*NE* 1177b33). “Even though one is a human being,” Miskawayh reprises, “one’s concerns (*himam*) need not be human,” and one should rather “strive with all one’s powers to live a divine life.”⁴² The highest

³⁹ Trans. Gummere, with modifications.

⁴⁰ In the memorable words of the *Republic* (485b), the philosopher is “in love” with all learning that helps reveal the unchanging reality to him, and indeed “in love with that whole reality.”

⁴¹ Avicenna, “Fī ‘ilm al-akhlāq,” in ‘Abd al-Amīr Shams al-Dīn, *al-Madhhab al-tarbawī ‘inda Ibn Sīnā* (Beirut: al-Sharika al-‘Ālamiyya li’l-Kitāb, 1988), 370 for the association with the rational virtues, and 372 for the definition (*an lā yaqṣura ‘alā* [sic] *bulūgh ghāyat al-umūr allatī yazdādu bihā faḍīlatan wa-sharafan ḥattā yasmū ilā mā warā’ ahā bimā huwa a’zamu qadran wa-ajallu khaṭaran*). Avicenna’s discussion is pockmarked with oddities that I must simply bypass. A helpful compass to the text and its complications is provided by Dimitri Gutas in *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014, rev. ed.), 497-500.

⁴² Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb*, 171; cf. the references to *himma* that appear on pp. 77-90 in a related context. Miskawayh’s quotation of Aristotle’s statement corresponds almost verbatim with the text of the Arabic edition of the *NE* (*Arabic Version*, 561.12-13). Compare also Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s reprise of this same point using

expression of greatness of spirit, these remarks suggest, lies in the pursuit of an ideal understood as an assimilation to or imitation of God.

Far more interesting, however, both for plotting the history of this ethical conversation and for unveiling its richer texture, is the appearance the virtue makes in the work of another writer, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. Until not long ago, al-Rāghib was a figure who tended to be overlooked in many narratives of the Arabic engagement with philosophical ethics, and it is only recently that he has begun to be appreciated not only as an important contributor to this tradition, but also as a seminal influence on other thinkers already featuring prominently in our narratives. Among the latter, the best-known case is al-Ghazālī, whose considerable debts to al-Rāghib's work on the virtues, *The Pathway to the Noble Traits of the Religious Law*, have been copiously documented in a number of studies. Recent scholarship places al-Rāghib in the same generation as Miskawayh and Avicenna, whom it is speculated he may have met, and Miskawayh's work is in fact one of several influences identified as possible tributaries to al-Rāghib's ethical thought.⁴³

The intellectual debts evident in al-Rāghib's *Pathway* run sufficiently deep to locate his work firmly within the horizon of the philosophical tradition. Yet no less important in limning the character of his ethical engagement are the religious commitments that shape this, which already stand plain in the very title of the book. Part of the distinctiveness of al-Rāghib's work lies in its trail-blazing venture to effect a closer rapprochement between philosophical ethics and the Islamic scriptural tradition. With al-Rāghib, as Wilferd Madelung notes, the "Islamisation of Hellenistic ethics" takes a major step forward;⁴⁴ hence, indeed, his appeal to al-Ghazālī, given the latter's preoccupation with a task of the same kind. The hesitation shown by commentators in classifying his work—as a form of religious ethics, philosophical ethics, or indeed literary writing?—mirrors the complex identity of the work and its author. The last characterisation in particular picks up on al-Rāghib's identity as a notable participant in the tradition of Arabic *belles lettres* or *adab*, which was one of several key discursive contexts in which ethical ideas were treated and propagated within the Arabic-Islamic cultural milieu.⁴⁵ The engagement with ethical norms within this tradition was typified by a stronger concern with aesthetic form and persuasive appeal than with analytical rigour or reflective depth, features that are to a certain extent reflected in the intellectual style of the *Pathway*. As Madelung suggests in assessing the philosophical character of al-Rāghib's work, al-Rāghib is "rather a philosopher by conviction than an independent critical thinker," though this assessment would in the view of many unite him with other philosophical moralists such as Miskawayh or indeed Yaḥyā.⁴⁶

Al-Rāghib's interest for us is intimately bound up with this complex intellectual identity, and not least with the theological concerns that leaven his negotiation of philosophical

similar language in *The Arabic Version of Ṭūsī's Nasirean Ethics*, ed. Joep Lameer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 108-114, *passim*. The extent of Miskawayh's familiarity with Yaḥyā's work is a question that attracts different views: Fakhry is cautious (*Ethical Theories*, 107); al-Takrītī is far more confident (*Tahdhīb*, 263 ff.), but his evidence does not seem to me unequivocal. If a degree of familiarity were to be assumed, the interesting question would be why a theme so strongly foregrounded by one writer should have been sidelined by another.

⁴³ Hans Daiber highlights the importance of Miskawayh, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and al-Fārābī as influences on al-Rāghib in "Griechische Ethik in islamischem Gewande: Das Beispiel von Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (11. Jh.)," in *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi: Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, ed. Burkhard Mojsisch and Olaf Pluta (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: Grüner, 1992), vol. 1, 181-192. Wilferd Madelung sounds more cautious about Miskawayh's influence in "Ar-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī und die Ethik al-Gazālīs," in *Islamwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen Fritz Meier zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Richard Gramlich (Wiesbaden, 1974), 161-62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁵ Madelung underlines al-Rāghib's literary identity in *ibid.*, 161; and see Yasien Mohamed, "The Ethical Philosophy of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 6 (1995), 51-52, for a conspectus of different views regarding the intellectual character of his ethics.

⁴⁶ Madelung, "Ar-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī," 161, quoting Richard Walzer's characterisation of Miskawayh.

ideas. These concerns manifest themselves on a number of levels in the way he approaches the main topic of the *Pathway*, the virtues and the vices, whose treatment otherwise betrays significant philosophical debts. They manifest themselves, most basically, in the interest al-Rāghib shows in providing scriptural grounding for the character traits he incorporates into his scheme. Even more fundamentally, they manifest themselves in the overall framework in which he anchors these character traits and locates their significance. The value of the virtues is grounded in their conduciveness to a kind of happiness understood chiefly if not exclusively in otherworldly terms. No less importantly, the pursuit of the virtues is seen as part of a broader conception of human life as finding its fulfilment in the imitation of God, in turn construed through the Qur’anic concept of vicegerency (*khilāfa*).⁴⁷ It is by acquiring the virtues, or what al-Rāghib parses in a more theological diction as the “noble traits of the law” (*makārim al-sharī’a*), that human beings can properly govern themselves and others and thereby live up to the possibility held out in a well-known Qur’anic verse. “Perchance your Lord ... will make you vicegerents (*yastakhlifukum*) in the land, so that He may behold how you shall do” (Q 7: 129).⁴⁸

All of this provides important context for considering the account al-Rāghib gives of the virtue of greatness of spirit. Like many other philosophical writers, al-Rāghib organises his discussion of the virtues by mapping them onto the different faculties of the soul. What will be surprising coming from other writers is his specific decision about where to locate the virtue. Deviating from every other decision we have seen, he classifies it under the appetitive faculty (*al-quwwa al-shahwiyya*). I quote his remarks at length:

One says, ‘So-and-so is great-spirited (*kabīr al-himma*)’ or ‘So-and-so is small-spirited (*ṣaghīr al-himma*)’ when one of them seeks a greater or nobler possession than the other. The one who is great-spirited without qualification is the one who does not content himself with animal desires (*himam*) to the extent of his ability and does not become the slave of his stomach and genitals, but rather strives to deck himself with the noble traits of the Law (*makārim al-sharī’a*), so that he may become one of the vicegerents and friends of God in the present world and one of those who enjoy His proximity in the next. The small-spirited person is the opposite of that. A Bedouin Arab said: The greatness of so-and-so lies in the smallness of the mundane world in his eyes, so that he is not subject to the power of his stomach . . . and he is not subject to the power of his genitals . . . Human beings have a title (*ḥaqq al-insān*) to treat these things with moderation, for even though they are animals through their natural substance, they are angels through their reason and thought . . . It has also been said: A person of great spirit does not content himself with possessions due for return and a life given out on loan. So if you can acquire a permanent possession and an eternal life, do so, for what is perishable is of no consideration. The great-spirited person without qualification is the one who pursues the virtues (*faḍā’il*) not out of a desire for status, for wealth, for pleasure, or for deriving a sense of hauteur and superiority over people.⁴⁹

There are several things to notice in this dense passage, including a number of visible continuities with what we heard earlier from Yaḥyā. We will recognise the connection between greatness of spirit and a desire for what is great or noble, with the latter once again notably specified in terms of the pursuit of virtue. We will also recognise the shift in evaluative perception that accompanies it (a person’s greatness “lies in the smallness of the mundane

⁴⁷ Al-Rāghib introduces this idea in *The Pathway to the Noble Traits of the Religious Law/Kitāb al-Dharī’a ilā makārim al-sharī’a*, ed. Abu’l-Yazīd Abū Zayd al-‘Ajāmī (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2007), 83.

⁴⁸ I draw on the translation of Arthur Arberry with some modification.

⁴⁹ *Dharī’a*, 209.

world in his eyes”), which displaces the value we assign to bodily drives that oppose that pursuit. Greatness of spirit involves a transcendence of such drives and refusal to be mastered by them. A reflexive element of self-worth is also present in these remarks, though it may take a moment to elicit it. It is our nature as human beings that gives us both the right and the obligation—the chameleon term *ḥaqq* allows for both significations—to aspire to the higher life of virtue, in which our specific nature as rational beings finds its fulfilment. Here, too, the notion of self-worth serves to ground less a claim to receive than a claim to strive, and is not so much grounded in virtue as a ground for it.⁵⁰

What will be new is the religious emphasis that shapes the discussion, which transposes the virtue into a theological framework through a number of subtle yet significant moves. Greatness of spirit is expressed in a pursuit of virtue that is grounded in a desire to become close to God; its highest object lies not in this life but the next, which is the good that has greater permanence and thus greater worth. It is not incidental that the relevant shift of evaluative vision flagged in this passage is parsed, less directly as a displacement of the greatness of external goods or physical desires through a perception of the greatness of virtue, than as a displacement of the greatness of the present world through a perception of the greatness of the next. With these revisions, what was a central virtue in the pursuit of the ethical life among al-Rāghib’s predecessors becomes a central virtue in the pursuit of an ethical life understood in thicker religious terms.

Al-Rāghib’s configuration of the virtue is interesting on many levels, and not least for the closer attention it invites to the linguistic status of the concept. This attention is solicited with particular directness by al-Rāghib’s striking decision to locate greatness of spirit within the desiderative or appetitive faculty. The decision seems surprising, as I noted, coming from the very different taxonomical decisions taken by his predecessors. Yet of course it appears rather less surprising set against the dominant conceptualisation of the virtue among al-Rāghib and his fellow thinkers. Greatness of spirit presents itself in their accounts primarily as a virtue of aspiration. While it also speaks to reason insofar as it requires a judgement about the value of its object, and to the spirited part of the soul insofar as the pursuit of this object requires arduous striving, one can in principle see why the taxonomical decision to ground it in a fundamentally desiderative drive would have been appealing. The space for diverging intellectual choices may here provoke an interesting comparison with Aquinas, who faced a similar choice when addressing the virtue of magnanimity in his *Summa Theologiae*, which he defined as a “stretching forth of the mind to great things” (*ST IIaIIae* q. 129 a. 1) and specified as a virtue that governs the passion of hope. Hope addresses itself to a great future good that is difficult yet possible to attain; *qua* good it forms an object of the appetitive faculty; *qua* difficult of the irascible. Magnanimity, in turn, Aquinas placed under the irascible faculty.

Yet while one can see why al-Rāghib’s move would have been “in principle” appealing, I would suggest that in order to read this move in its proper light, we need to locate it more firmly against a consideration of the linguistic meanings of the terms at stake and the facts of linguistic usage. The term I have been translating as “spirit” (*himma*) derives from a verb (*hamma*) whose meaning is simply “to purpose,” “to intend,” “to desire,” “to determine (to do).” This root meaning is reflected in the nouns that derive from it, notably *hamm* (pl. *humūm*) and *himma* (pl. *himam*). Both of these terms also carry the simpler meaning of “purpose” or “concern,” though the latter carries the stronger sense of “ambition” or “aspiration.” These semantic facts make it easier to understand why several writers on the virtues not only associate

⁵⁰ In light of this, it is interesting to note some of the more Aristotelian elements present in the discussion, such as the deployment of the principle of the mean and the identification of two opposing vices, one that involves deeming oneself worthy of (or laying claim to) what one does not deserve (*ta’ahhul al-insān limā lā yastahiqquhu*) and one that involves renouncing what one deserves (*tarkuhu limā yastahiqquhu*). Ibid.

the term *himma* with the notion of “willing” (*irāda*) but indeed subsume the one under the other or even identify the two.⁵¹

Al-Rāghib himself identifies the two concepts in an earlier passage of the *Pathway*. The later Ḥanbalite writer Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) makes *himma* the “terminus” of willing, taking the partner concept *hamm* to represent its beginning.⁵² The context of Ibn Qayyim’s remarks is particularly worth noting. They appear in his seminal compendium of spiritual guidance, *Passages of the Wayfarers*, which formed a commentary on a classic Sufi treatise composed by a writer living in the same century as al-Rāghib, al-Anṣārī al-Harawī’s (d. 1089) *Stations of the Journeyers*. Both works offer a detailed exploration of the spiritual stations structuring the believer’s interior progress toward God. Greatness or loftiness of spirit, significantly, represents one of these stations. No less significantly, its meaning is defined in terms that will instantly remind us of the ones we heard from al-Rāghib, as a single-minded drive toward what is highest whose proper object is God and which involves re-orienting one’s desire away from what is mundane and ephemeral to what is otherworldly and eternal.⁵³

These resemblances are telling—furnishing, among other things, important indications about the diffusion of the religious construal of the virtue through different types of religious discourse, including ones with weaker intellectual links to the philosophical tradition watering al-Rāghib’s ethical thought. In doing so, they evoke interesting questions about the wider cultural reach of the virtue and indeed about its intellectual foundations. Yet here we may focus our attention on a simple point which the above helps elicit more sharply concerning the character of the virtue and its precise status within the religious ethic. This is a point that stands out especially plainly in Ibn Qayyim’s last formulation. Greatness of spirit, his remarks suggest, may simply be described as a virtue of right desire, whose proper expression lies in the re-orientation of desire toward God and the next life. Yet this, of course, is an orientation that gives the religious life its most elementary identity. Greatness of spirit is thus not merely central to the religious ethic but indeed codifies the most basic values that constitute it.

Having isolated this broad significance of the virtue and the equally broad meaning of its root term, we will be able to pick up on the resonance of this virtue among a number of writers, including ones who do not formally identify greatness of spirit as a separate virtue. The most striking case here is al-Ghazālī, who represents one of the more enigmatic contributors to the Arabic-Islamic history of the virtues of greatness. One enigma, as noted earlier, concerns his apparent endorsement of the ancient virtue of greatness of soul—designated through the Arabic term *kibar al-nafs*—while failing to flag the conflict it poses to his understanding of the ethics of esteem and self-esteem. With al-Rāghib’s account of the alternative virtue of greatness of spirit before us, there will be another enigma in the fact that al-Ghazālī, despite his unfeigned enthusiasm for the latter’s work, should have passed over this particular virtue in silence in his own taxonomy. Yet even if greatness of spirit does not feature formally in his classifications of the virtues, its vocabulary registers pervasively throughout his work, and so do the fundamental values it codifies.

⁵¹ They also make it somewhat easier to explain the special challenges the term *himma* poses on the level of translation. Matters are relatively simple when *himma* appears in compound form (*‘izām/‘uluww/bu’d al-himma*), where it lacks a grammatical object. Yet many of the writers who discuss the virtue deploy the term in more complex syntactical structures, essentially converting the compound into a verb-noun structure in which the verb governs an object. We have already seen examples of this, e.g. Yaḥyā’s reference to “those whose spirit is so lofty as to make them vie with [more literally: who have a spirit that rises to vying with] the people of excellence (*man kānat lahu himma tasmū ilā mubārāt ahl al-ḥaḍl*).” In the effort to preserve a certain degree of consistency in the English while not entirely riding roughshod over the Arabic, some awkwardness is unavoidable.

⁵² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Passages of the Wayfarers/Madārij al-sālikīn*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 2010), 750. And for al-Rāghib, see *Dharī‘a*, 94.

⁵³ See the discussion in Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij*, 750-52, and al-Anṣārī, *Stations of the Journeyers/Manāzil al-sā’irīn* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966), 31.

The term *himma* thus appears on numerous occasions in the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* in the context of al-Ghazālī’s characterisations of his spiritual ideal. This is an ideal which at its most basic demands severing one’s worldly attachments and attaching oneself exclusively to God. It demands ceasing to devote oneself (*iṣīrāf hammihi*) to the satisfaction of animal desires like food and drink or sex, relinquishing one’s ardour (*qaṭ‘ al-himma*) for mundane objects such as wealth, social status, or family life, and instead dedicating oneself wholeheartedly to God (*al-iqbāl bi-kunh al-himma ‘ala’l-lah*).⁵⁴ It also demands seeing the relative values of the present world and the next in their true light: wrongdoers whose hearts have been blinded, al-Ghazālī observes in one place, “make light of the next world and magnify (*yasta ‘zimu*) the mundane world, and their concern (*hamm*) restricts itself to the latter.”⁵⁵ No less interestingly, the telltale vocabulary and basic meaning of the virtue feature in several prophetic traditions that al-Ghazālī invokes in the course of his discussion. Asked about the identifying marks of the believer and the hypocrite, the Prophet is reported to have said: “The believer’s preoccupation (*himmatuhu*) lies in prayer, fasting, and worship; the hypocrite’s preoccupation lies in food and drink, just like an animal’s.” In the crucial context of praising the quality of renunciation (*zuhd*), al-Ghazālī quotes the following prophetic tradition: “When a person gets up in the morning and the mundane world is his main concern (*hamm*), God brings his affairs into disorder and scatters his means of subsistence . . . but when a person gets up in the morning and the next world is his main concern (*hamm*), God gathers his concern for him and preserves his means of subsistence for him.”⁵⁶

The core messages and distinctive vocabulary of these statements thus indirectly thematise what other writers identify more formally and directly as an independent virtue. In doing so, of course, they reflect the breadth of the concept in ways that raise interesting questions about what it is for the virtue to be “present” as a subject of ethical reflection and indeed what it is to set the boundaries of the concept.

Greatness of Spirit Against its Sources

In the above, I traced out the development of the virtue of greatness of spirit among several writers associated with the philosophical tradition, focusing on Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. One of the differences between these writers concerns the broader framework within which they locate the virtue—the ethical life (Yaḥyā) as against the religious life (al-Rāghib). In both cases, this virtue emerges as one with a foundational role within the good life as these writers conceive it.

Yet here it is finally time to confront a question that arises naturally from the stage-setting remarks with which I began this chapter. There I outlined two ways of understanding what it might mean to look for “the” concept of greatness of soul in the Arabic tradition. One (the more obvious one) is as a question about the reception of ancient articulations of the concept in the Islamic world, and as a quest for a genetic story grounded in the historical facts of textual transmission. Another is as a question about the presence of a concept, or concepts, that could be identified as counterparts of the ones articulated in the ancient context or as members of the same larger family even in the absence of genetic links—an approach that presupposes a different and broader grip on the concept at stake. In the course of my discussion, I called attention to several similarities connecting the Arabic accounts of greatness of spirit to

⁵⁴ Such remarks are diffused throughout the *Ihyā’*, but the above draws on passages from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences/Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1356–57, 16 vols.), vol. 9, 1743 and vol. 8, 1371 (the context of the latter remark is a discussion of the Sufi view of the means to knowledge).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 1359.

⁵⁶ Respectively, *ibid.*, vol. 8, 1464, and vol. 13, 2441.

the articulations of greatness of soul within the ancient tradition. These kinds of similarities will add fuel to the natural question: why not take this story in the most obvious manner—as a story of genetic descent?

My answer to this question will have to be put briefly here.⁵⁷ On the one hand, the presence of a genetic influence from the ancient tradition cannot be wholly excluded from this story. At the broadest level, it admits no doubt that many of the writers surveyed above developed their ideas, including their ideas about greatness of spirit, in close interaction with ethical concepts encountered in translated ancient texts. More to the point, a noteworthy fact is that our focal term, *ʿiẓam al-himma*, makes an appearance in no less than *two* of the translated texts mentioned earlier as key vectors of ancient ethical thought in the Islamic world: the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Virtutibus et vitiis* and the treatise by “Nicolaus.”

Yet among other things, it is not evident that the particular enunciation of the virtue we tracked above—as a virtue, fundamentally, of aspiration, and aspiration to virtue—features prominently in these translated texts. A fuller telling of the genetic story of this concept, I would argue, would have to range beyond the Greek philosophical influence to include at least two other intellectual tributaries. One, which I will only mention by name, is the Persian cultural tradition, which percolated deeply within Arabic-Islamic culture after the collapse of the Sasanian empire and the assimilation of its peoples into the world of Islam. The other, which is both the most robust and most intriguing, is the influence of the values of pre-Islamic Arab society.

These values, as scholars have often noted, never entirely died out with the appearance of Islam, partly owing to the pre-eminent position that pre-Islamic literary material, especially poetry, continued to occupy within the later Arabic literary tradition.⁵⁸ A linchpin figure in the development of this tradition was the 9th-century scholar Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), who will serve as my chief informant here. Ibn Qutayba’s works include an extensive literary anthology of anecdotes and extracts of poetry entitled *Springs of Information*. The book is organised under ten main rubrics or books covering topics as diverse as war, friendship, and women. One of these books, running under the title “The Book of Nobility,” is dedicated to a discussion of noble and eminent men and their characteristic qualities. Featured within this list of qualities we find the following: “loftiness of spirit and self-endangerment in pursuit of exalted things (*al-himma al-sāmiya . . . li-ṭalab al-ma ʿālī*).”⁵⁹

Ibn Qutayba’s exposition of this quality will provoke a sense of recognition unfolding on several levels. Most importantly, we will recognise the powerful link drawn between the notion of greatness or loftiness of spirit and aspiration. Greatness of spirit is a quality that makes one aim high and desire great things, as illustrated by a report about the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. “I have a yearning soul,” he is reported to have said; “it kept on yearning for the position of governor, then when I attained this it yearned for the position of caliph, and then when I attained this it began to yearn for paradise.”⁶⁰ As the continuation suggests, such greatness of spirit also expresses itself in contempt of money and thus material goods. This remark is important for foregrounding another element that will seem intimately familiar to us, identifying the next life as the highest object of aspiration. Another anecdote cements this point even more firmly. The poet al-ʿAttābī, we hear, was told that so-and-so is great-spirited (*ba ʿīd al-himma*), and he commented in reply: then “his sole objective is paradise.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ I set it out more fully in my forthcoming book on the topic, *Virtues of Greatness in the Arabic Tradition*.

⁵⁸ See e.g. the relevant remarks by Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Richard Walzer in “Akh̄lāk,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., accessed on September 20, 2016 at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0035.

⁵⁹ Ibn Qutayba, *Springs of Information/ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1996), vol. 1, introduction, p. fāʿ.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 231.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 233.

Paradise is not the only object included within the scope of the virtue as its meaning is unravelled by the anecdotes and poetic extracts Ibn Qutayba adduces. Greatness of spirit, as ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s remark again intimates, finds expression in political pursuits, as well as military exploits. It also expresses itself in the pursuit of honour and glory, as indicated by another saying: “Let the one whom it pleases to live pleasantly be content, and let one who desires renown be striving.”⁶² The accent placed on striving in this last statement registers recurrently throughout the discussion. “Honour lies wrapped in the garments of toil,” as one poet puts it.⁶³ Greatness of spirit involves a readiness to endure hardships in order to attain the great objects one aspires to. In this respect, it is shaped not only by what one desires, but also by what one renounces.

This is but a sampling of the dimensions the concept carries within Ibn Qutayba’s discussion. But having recognised its affinities with the concept of greatness of spirit as articulated by writers of a philosophical orientation, what will be equally important is to take stock of its sources. A simple look at the character of the material Ibn Qutayba draws upon in the *Springs* is instructive. This material includes sayings and poetry whose sources range from prominent religious and political personalities of early Islamic history to poets living in pre-Islamic times. This is also reflected in Ibn Qutayba’s discussion of greatness of spirit, which contains long extracts of poetic verse, many of them composed by poets living in the pre-Islamic era.

Having discerned these textual bridges to the pre-Islamic Arab context, it will not be difficult to recognise in Ibn Qutayba’s account a set of values that were central to this context and to the ethical code that animated it. In a way of life shaped by activities of fighting and marauding, the qualities prized as excellences included an ability to endure hardships with fortitude and confront dangers with courage and self-assurance. The exemplary individual was one capable of renouncing the lower for the higher—able to launch himself on noble undertakings that would bring glory without regard for possible losses or lesser goods. This meant, above all, a readiness to lavish the most precious possession, one’s very life, heroically conquering one’s inner resistance in pursuit of noble deeds. It also meant spurning a life of pleasure and material comforts in favour of a life of noble striving. “Staying at home, in the neighbourhood,” as M. M. Bravmann observed in an illuminating study of the spiritual and ethical background of early Islam, “is considered a dull, inferior sort of life, devoid of all noble purpose.” The noble life is not a sedentary life characterised by comfort and tranquillity. It is an arduous life of venturing abroad in pursuit of conquests and fighting.⁶⁴

We will recognise the presence of these notions in some of the verses included in the *Springs* that were already cited. Particularly telling in this connection, however, is another verse adduced by Ibn Qutayba, ascribed to the pre-Islamic poet Ḥātim al-Ṭā’ī. The poet expresses his scorn for the kind of person “whose sole desire and aspiration (*hamm*) in life is to obtain clothes and food, who sees hunger as a torment and whose mind, once sated, remains blank from lack of desire (*hamm*).” The admirable person is rather the one “who marshals his spirit (*hamm*) and launches himself boldly on terrors and on fate (*dahr*) . . . if he dies, his glory lives on, and if he lives, he does not sit by abject and dishonourable.”⁶⁵ Reviling the indolent stay-at-home whose only interest is a life of pleasure and comfort, Ḥātim praises the high-minded person who desires more out of life and who ventures out on self-endangering activity that may lead to his death but will bring a harvest of glory.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 232.

⁶⁴ M. M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 32; and see generally the discussion at 32-38.

⁶⁵ *Uyūn*, vol. 1, 233-34.

This vocabulary will instantly refer us to the signature linguistic pattern associated with our focal virtue. Bravmann himself makes the move from this basic pattern to the fullness of a trait in a set of remarks that shine a crucial beam of light on the place of this trait within the pre-Islamic Arab ethic. He identifies greatness of spirit (*ba'īd al-himma*) as one of the key epithets bestowed on the Arab hero, commenting: “the word *himmah* itself signifies ‘noble ambition’, and the adjective *ba'īd* expresses the particularly high degree of this ambition.”⁶⁶ This term, it will be noticed, is a slight variant of the ones that featured in the philosophical accounts we examined above, in which the virtue was designated through a compound incorporating the term “great” (*‘aẓīm* or *kabīr*). *Ba'īd* literally means “far.” As Bravmann suggests, it was precisely this literal meaning that stood behind the evaluative status of this epithet as a term of praise. Given the value carried by a life of roving and wandering among pre-Islamic Arabs, what is geographically near (*adnā*) denotes what is also inferior in an evaluative sense; what is far (*ba'īd*) denotes both what is geographically distant and *also* higher in an evaluative sense. Hence the fact that the term *ba'īd al-himma*, whose concrete primary meaning was “a man whose aspiration is directed towards distant regions,” underwent a semantic shift and came to carry the broader meaning “a man actuated by noble ambitions.”⁶⁷

The great-spirited or far-spirited person is thus the one who realises the core ideals of the ethic just outlined—the one who rejects a life of material comfort in favour of a heroic life of hardship and noble undertakings. It is in this conception, I would suggest, that the most potent seeds of later articulations of greatness of spirit are to be found. They were not the only ones. These seeds would intermingle with several others, and they would undergo important modifications as they were transposed to the soil of the Islamic faith and came into contact with an intellectual climate enriched by the influences of other traditions, such as the Persian and the Greek. Transposed to the ethical landscape of Islam, for example, the value attaching to honour and glory among pre-Islamic Arabs would lose ground to (or be reconfigured as) a concern for honour bestowed not by human beings but by God. The evaluative contrast between far and near among pre-Islamic Arabs would be redrafted as a contrast between the mundane world (*dunyā*) and the next.⁶⁸ Seasoned by the influence of the ancient philosophical tradition, the concern with noble undertakings (*makārim*) embedded in this ideal would be scripted more distinctly as a concern with the cultivation of virtue.

These kinds of reconfigurations may remind us of the conceptual and evaluative shifts that marked the trajectory of the Greek concept of *megalopsychia* as it migrated from the Homeric world to the ancient Greek *polis*, and from its Achillean to its Socratic and other philosophical embodiments. The parallels would repay closer scrutiny. The fact that in the Arabic context, as in the Greek, the relevant virtue begins life as a heroic quality does not seem incidental. In plotting these parallels we may have the beginnings not only of a local story about the trajectory of one culture-bound virtue or another, but of a more universal story about the emergence of the virtues of greatness as a distinctive schema within the macrocosm of human values.

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⁶⁶ Bravmann, *Spiritual Background*, 32-33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

⁶⁸ Once again I am indebted to Bravmann’s discussion here.

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