## INTRODUCTION

When we survey the rich terrain of ancient ethics and the different visions of the best human character that flourished within it, there is one element—one virtue within these visions—that stands out as particularly distinctive. This is a virtue usually translated as "magnanimity" or "greatness of soul." For philosophical readers, its most familiar expression is the one it received at the hands of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In an evocative portrait, Aristotle had enshrined the great-souled person or *megalopsychos* as an image of the highest ethical accomplishment. One might call it an image of greatness, as its very name suggests. Greatness of soul was the virtue of a person who possessed all the virtues to a great degree, and whose self-knowledge was reflected in an awareness of the "great things" he was worthy of, above all honour. Looking back, one can already see this virtue occupying an important place among earlier writers, including Plato, who identified it as the philosophical virtue *par excellence* in the *Republic.* Under shifting names, under different configurations, the virtue would also feature prominently in the ethical outlooks of a number of other ancient thinkers and schools, notably the Stoics. In later times, it would continue life under a variety of guises among philosophical and theological thinkers, from Aquinas to Descartes, and from Hume to Emerson. Refracted in the virtue—its content shifting with them—were larger conceptions of the good life and the nature of human greatness.

Some of the stages of this long history are more familiar to us than others. The sharpest spotlight has often fallen on Aristotle's account, which has fascinated readers almost as much as it has divided them, and still attracts fresh readings and re-negotiations. In recent times, there has been increasing attention to other episodes of its development, both within the ancient world and in later periods, enriching our perspective on the identity of the virtue and furnishing us with new material for chronicling the life it led over the course of intellectual history.[1] Yet to someone considering this broader scene, what will be striking is that most of what we know about the virtue tends to be focused on the European context. Among the many lives this virtue has led in philosophical and theological history, one in particular remains conspicuously unwritten. This is the life it led in the Islamic world and the Arabic tradition.

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[1] See especially the forthcoming collection of essays, *The Measure of Greatness: Philosophers on Magnanimity*, ed. S. Vasalou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press).

This may not be entirely surprising, given how many swathes of the vibrant intellectual history of the Islamic world still remain plunged in darkness. Yet there is much to suggest that such an investigation would be worthwhile. This was a world, as we know, that opened its doors wide to the ancient philosophical legacy early in its history, through a large-scale translation movement that saw an extraordinary array of Greek philosophical and scientific texts translated into Arabic between the eighth and tenth centuries. The response this legacy provoked among Muslim intellectuals was composite. Often amicable and appreciative—as Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), one of the founders of Arabic letters, put it, "knowledge is the object of the believer, and it profits him whatever the source from which it may be drawn"—their engagement with this legacy was also marked by moments of tension and high conflict[2]. It is the conflict that has frequently shaped prevailing views of the place of philosophy in the Islamic world. In the past, such views have rallied around the spectacular career of the eleventh-century theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), and the truculent campaign he appears to have waged against the philosophers, notably in his celebrated work *The Precipitance of the Philosophers*.[3] This picture has begun to loosen its scholarly grip, and a changing view of al-Ghazālī's own relationship to philosophy has been among the many tributaries to its reversal. In recent times, several readers have re-directed attention to al-Ghazālī's indebtedness and continued appreciation of the philosophical tradition.[4]

Many of the writings and re-writings of the status of philosophy in the Islamic world have focused, unsurprisingly, on issues of metaphysics. These were the issues that apparently channelled al-Ghazālī's own discomfort in *The Precipitance.* What about ethics? If we were interested in building a more inclusive picture about the status of philosophy and calibrating more finely the balance of amity and conflict that characterised Muslim thinkers' transactions with it, it is clear that this could not be achieved without taking into account these thinkers' engagement with the ethical elements of the ancient tradition. Ethics has sometimes seemed an unpromising subject to commentators addressing the history of philosophy in the Islamic world. "Falsafa," as Peter Adamson matter-of-factly notes in a conspectus of the Arabic tradition, "is not particularly known for its contributions to ethics."[5] The intellectual giants of Arabic philosophy, such as Avicenna (d. 1037) and Averroes (d. 1198), devoted their immense energies to other areas of philosophical inquiry and mostly turned a cold shoulder to ethical topics. Those works of philosophical ethics that *were* written sometimes seem to lack the intellectual élan that gives sparkle to works in other areas. Even among writers with overt religious commitments, conflict does not seem to be in the air to make it crackle. In his famous autobiography where he discusses his relationship to philosophy, notably, al-Ghazālī treats

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[2] See Ibn Qutayba, *Springs of Information/ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1996), introduction, p. *sīn.* Ibn Qutayba himself had an ambivalent relationship to the philosophical tradition and its rationalistic methods.

[3] Or *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, as it is often known. See Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), for a defence of this alternative translation (Appendix B) and also, more broadly, for an account that contributes to the re-reading of al-Ghazālī's relationship to philosophy.

[4] A key stimulus for such re-readings was Richard Frank's seminal account of al-Ghazālī's cosmology in *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazâlî and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992), but since that time they have gathered apace. For useful pointers to this scholarship, see Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5-7.

[5] Peter Adamson, "The Arabic tradition," *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, ed. John Skorupski (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 63.

ethics with comparatively velvet gloves. Yet is it possible that by looking closer—and by posing more specific kinds of questions—we might get a different view?

These larger perspectives and questions about the place of ancient philosophy in the Islamic world lie in the backdrop of the present book, which began life as an attempt to answer a simple question. Among the many ethical ideas that thinkers in the Islamic world confronted in the Greek texts that reached them in translation, how did they respond to this one—to the virtue of magnanimity or greatness of soul? This is a virtue that occupied a special place in the ancient tradition, embodying a conception not only of goodness, but indeed greatness. No less important, this was a conception that has often been viewed as unusually expressive of the distinctive socio-cultural milieu in which it was articulated. How did Muslim thinkers make sense of this distinctive virtue? What story could one tell about the reception of this part of the ancient ethical tradition in the Islamic world?

To the extent that the backdrop sketched out above—regarding the place of philosophy in the Islamic world—was shaped by questions about conflict, such a story would seem calculated to engage it especially strongly. For conflict has in fact been a salient theme in the trajectory this virtue has traced across philosophical and theological history. This conflict has been palpable among recent philosophers, even among votaries of Aristotle's ethics, who have taken turns decrying his depiction of greatness of soul for a litany of moral evils. The focus of such criticisms has often been the flawed mode of self-evaluation and deficient humility exhibited by Aristotle's exemplar. Yet this conflict has also been palpable in the reactions of earlier eras, not least within theological circles, as suggested by the history of the Christian engagement with the ancient tradition. The tension between greatness of soul or magnanimity and humility, as Jennifer Herdt remarks, "is often seen as capturing the basic tension between pagan and Christian conceptions of virtue."[6] This history of strained responses presents itself as an important foil for considering the Arabic reception.

Yet if the present book began as an attempt to answer this simple question, its plot—and the questions that oriented it—was gradually forced to widen during its progress. On the one hand, it was soon clear that the story about the reception of this ancient virtue in the Islamic world was not quite what one would expect coming from the contexts just outlined. This, in fact, turned out to be a story in which the theme of conflict had a more complex place. It was a story that was as much about acts as it was about omissions, and as much about what was said as about what wasn't (and why). Yet even more importantly for the overall plot, this was a story in which the identity of the subject, as in many good stories, underwent transformation in the telling. Because one of its surprises was that there are no less than *two* distinct Arabic concepts that can be identified as counterparts or interlocutors—to put it as broadly as possible—of the ancient virtue of greatness that was *megalopsychia*. These were concepts whose genealogies and trajectories converged but also diverged in crucial respects, and whose content involved an equally delicate pattern of convergences and divergences that marked them off as separate yet consanguineous.

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. The focus of the second—ʿiẓam al-himma, which I translate as "greatness of

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spirit"—was on right desire or aspiration. Unlike the first concept, which ultimately appears to have failed to strike deep roots in Arabic-Islamic ethical culture, the second spread like wildfire through a number of genres of ethical writing and formed an important element of the visions of character excellence articulated in different kinds of ethical works. Recounting the fuller story about both concepts meant moving away from a simple account of the reception of Greek thought, and toward a more complex narrative about a broader family of moral concepts and larger region of moral thought. One might call this family "virtues of greatness."[7] While the biography of this family provides new insight into the Arabic reception of ancient ethics, it also has much to tell us about the sources and pattern of Islamic ethical thought more globally.

The complexity of this biographical account is reflected in the structure of the present book, which unfolds in two parts. Let me briefly sketch them out. Part 1 focuses on the first virtue of greatness, which is also the virtue that can be most straightforwardly identified as the "heir" of the ancient one. Surveying the ethical works of some of the most prominent Muslim thinkers influenced by ancient thought, notably al-Fārābī (d. 950/951), Miskawayh (d. 1030), and al-Ghazālī, we find that greatness of soul indeed makes an appearance in these works. It does so under the Arabic term *kibar al-nafs*, a calque of the Greek *megalopsychia*. In Miskawayh and al-Ghazālī's classifications of the virtues and vices, this virtue is predominantly defined in terms that approximate to Aristotle's account. The overall treatment the virtue receives among these writers appears all too cursory. This may seem surprising in view of its relative significance within the ancient tradition. It may also seem surprising in view of what we know about the chequered career of the virtue in other philosophical and theological (Christian) circles, particularly in its Aristotelian version, whose conflict with an ideal of humility has often come up for remark. Did thinkers in the Arabic tradition take a different view of this ideal—a different view of the "ethics of self-esteem" and the right attitude to the self and its merits?

I investigate this question by offering a substantive reading of Miskawayh's, and, rather more concertedly, al-Ghazālī's account of the ethics of esteem (honour) and self-esteem drawing on a more extensive range of works. There are delicate interpretive issues to be navigated in piecing together a confident account of al-Ghazālī's ethical commitments in this context. Yet my conclusion is that, just like philosophical and theological critics of Aristotelian magnanimity, al-Ghazālī privileges the virtue of humility and denigrates the status of honour as a good. The virtue of magnanimity that al-Ghazālī incorporates in his tables of the virtues thus appears to be in profound conflict with his considered ethical viewpoint— indeed, with what has a serious claim to being viewed as an ideal central to Islamic religious morality. Why, then, does al-Ghazālī (like Miskawayh) pass this conflict over in silence, leaving it to his readers to read through its lines? I end with some suggestions about where the answer to this puzzle might lie, and what it may have to tell us about these thinkers' engagement with ancient philosophy more broadly.

The first part of the book may seem to lead to a disappointing denouement. That larger-than-life virtue which had formed one of the brightest jewels in the crown for Aristotle and other ancient thinkers enters the Islamic world only to fade away; the foreign graft never takes. Yet this, as Part 2 of the book aims to show, is not the end of the story of the "virtues of greatness" in the Arabic tradition. There was another concept belonging to the same region

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[7] This term has also been used recently by Daniel C. Russell, but in a rather different connection, referring to Aristotle's virtues of magnificence and magnanimity: "Aristotle's virtues of greatness," in *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

of moral thought that led a more flourishing and full-blooded life within this tradition, namely greatness of spirit (ʿiẓam al-himma). Crucially, this virtue appears not only in philosophical treatises, but also in a number of other genres of ethical writing, including mirrors for princes and works of etiquette or literature (adab). Unlike the first concept, which thematised the right attitude to the self and its merits, this second concept thematises right desire or aspiration, and some of its chief architects parse it more specifically as a foundational virtue of aspiration to moral virtue, or indeed moral greatness.

I begin by documenting its development in works of a philosophical character, focusing on the works of the tenth-century Christian philosopher and theologian Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 974) and the eleventh-century religious and literary scholar al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. I then turn to plot its development in mirrors for princes, drawing on a number of prominent representatives of this genre. There are important continuities between the ways the virtue is articulated across these genres, though also some noteworthy discontinuities. There are likewise suggestive comparisons to be drawn with approaches to the virtue of greatness of soul familiar to us from broader philosophical history. Taken together, these observations invite a question about the intellectual origins of the virtue. This genealogical story turns out to be a marvellously complex one. While the influence of the Greek tradition cannot be wholly excluded, a stronger argument can be made for the influence of the Persian cultural tradition and, more intriguingly and more convincingly, the influence of the pre-Islamic Arab culture. "Greatness of spirit" was in fact one of the epithets applied to the Arab hero of pre-Islamic times. This heroic ideal is reconfigured in telling ways after it is transplanted into the soil of the Islamic faith and exposed to the effects of other intellectual traditions. Against this landscape, one can place on new footing the question about the relationship of the virtues of greatness to Islamic religious morality.

Questions about how the approaches taken in the Arabic tradition relate to developments in broader philosophical history form a running theme in Parts 1 and 2 of the book. In the book's concluding Postlude, this philosophical concern takes a different, and less historical, form. The virtue of greatness I identified as a more prominent and distinctive element of the ideals of character articulated in the Arabic tradition, greatness of spirit, may have much to tell us about the content of these ideals, and about the intellectual processes that shaped them. Yet does this historical lesson exhaust the interest that contemporary readers might take in this particular ideal? Is there anything in this ideal to engage the attention of contemporary philosophers of the virtues? In seeking to answer these questions, I consider two different ways of construing the identity of this virtue: one as a meta-virtue, another as a substantive virtue that has an affinity with the virtue of "emulousness" as theorised in recent philosophical work on the virtues. It is the latter construal that enables us to pick out the distinctive commitments that constitute the virtue, above all its emphasis on open-ended moral aspiration. Many philosophers of the virtues will find these commitments contentious. I outline a number of ways in which this virtue can be defended. Yet the greatest value of engaging with this ideal of character may lie in the very space for debate it opens and in persuading us that this debate is worthwhile.

In framing the project of this book, I have spoken of a "family" of concepts, and of different virtues that can be viewed as "counterparts" or "interlocutors" of the ancient virtue of greatness of soul. The question may be raised: How exactly is such talk to be understood, and how much weight is it intended to carry? Put differently: What kind of claim of kinship is being made here, and is it sufficiently robust to ensure that this is a book with a coherent subject—a book about a single subject? Unless the two "separate yet consanguineous"

virtues that form the focus of this book can be seen to be united by a robust relation, what sense does it make to treat them as part of a single story?

These are interesting questions, and they point on to larger questions about what it means to say that one concept is "like" another, or an "instance" of another, or of a larger "family" or "kind." What is particularly worth bearing in mind is that notions like "being the same concept" or "being the same *kind* of concept" are not fenced off by crystal-clear boundaries which would lend themselves to crystal-clear replies to such questions. Yet as in the literal foundation of the metaphor of "families" and "family relations," this does not prevent us from being able to intuitively recognise resemblances and pick out patterns when faced with actual cases.

Thinking about many of the standard virtues, we naturally assume that we have a sufficient grasp of their conceptual contours that there would be no insuperable difficulty in recognising them even in new contexts—at the limit, in other cultures whose moral language is unfamiliar to us and whose fabric of ethical thought we are newly confronted with. To be sure, this kind of cross-cultural identification is not entirely unproblematic, even when we think of standard virtues such as courage or compassion. "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."[8] Yet from a methodological viewpoint, the confidence that such cross-cultural identification of the virtues is possible would seem to be underpinned by a universalism that has been tightly bound up with an ethics of character, and that has in turn been wedded to the naturalistic terms in which this ethics has been commonly developed. This kind of universalism, as Martha Nussbaum suggested in an influential essay, shapes Aristotle's approach to the virtues. Taken most simply, the virtues and vices represent better and worse ways of handling universal spheres of experience which all human beings share and which necessarily confront them with the choice of acting in one way or another.[9]

Yet this point would now appear to add fresh impetus to the question raised above about "families" and "kinds." Because the virtue of magnanimity or greatness of soul has often been felt to constitute a very special case set against the other virtues that feature in Aristotle's work and that of his philosophical successors—virtues like courage, temperance, generosity, or justice. It has frequently 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."[10] It is the flagrant exception to the apparent universalism of Aristotle's ethics—the Trojan horse, for some, that betrays its contingent cultural roots, serving up the image of the Athenian gentleman in one view (Alasdair MacIntyre) and the repugnant relics of the Homeric hero in another.[11] Faced with a virtue of such thick cultural identity, what chance does the notion of a broader "kind" or "family"—a family of which this virtue would be only one member among others, and to which virtues articulated in other ethical cultures might be discovered to belong—have of getting off the ground?

From this perspective, it would seem that one could only intelligibly speak of *this* virtue as it lived and breathed in *this* particular cultural and textual tradition. This would have

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

[9] See Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-relative virtues: an Aristotelian approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* 13 (1988), 32-53.

[10] Ibid, 38; cf. 34, referencing the remarks of Bernard Williams and Stuart Hampshire.

[11] 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.

crucial implications for the way we understand our ability to identify the concept, yielding an emphasis on genetic descent in which the metaphor of "family relations" would come to its narrowest fruition. Our ability to recognise that a given concept found among particular thinkers represents the same concept as the one at work in the ancient tradition would depend on our ability to recognise these thinkers as heirs and participants of this tradition. Isn't this genetic continuity, it might be said, foundational to our ability to identify Aquinas's notion of *magnanimitas*, Descartes's *générosité*, or Hume's "greatness of mind" as instances of the very same concept? On these terms, a story about the life that the virtue of greatness of soul led in the Islamic world could only make sense as a story about the reception of the Greek textual tradition.

Yet on the one hand, it is important to observe that even within that philosophical tradition which is connected by a visible backbone of genetic descent, this virtue had a far from unified identity. It was a virtue, for one, whose conceptual traits changed over time. Aquinas' magnanimity, to take the most obvious example, is in some ways a dramatic revision of Aristotle's, making way, among other things, for the element of humility that the latter has been accused of disregarding. Even within the ancient context, different thinkers approached it in a variety of ways. If Aristotle, for example, articulated it as a virtue of self-evaluation concerned with honour, prominent Stoic thinkers articulated it as a virtue codifying the attitude of indifference to external goods that epitomised their moral approach. We should not thus overlook the plurality of ways in which this concept was articulated in the ancient context, or indeed the plurality of terms through which it was expressed (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 the *Posterior Analytics*—our sense of the conceptual and linguistic boundaries of the concept will be loosened still further.[12]

This is not to deny that many of these articulations had important conceptual ingredients in common. As Arthur Lovejoy noted in a different context, intellectual innovation is often less a matter of the emergence of entirely novel elements, than of a new patterning or re-arrangement of existing ones.[13] Many of the ancient configurations of greatness of soul can be seen as different ways of patterning or balancing a limited number of existing elements. These notably include an attitude to self-worth, and an attitude to external goods, including honour. The way such elements were patterned by particular philosophers—a high sense of self-worth as an *individual* or a *human being*? *attachment* to honour or *indifference*?—reflects larger variances in ethical outlook. Yet the differences are sufficiently real to suggest that the notion of a "family" of concepts—a family constituted by an intersecting pattern of likenesses and unlikenesses exhibited over time—may be required even in approaching an intellectual tradition sharing the same broad pathway of genealogical descent.[14] Once this is granted, the possibility of opening up this family to virtues articulated outside this cultural tradition begins to look less unimaginable.

For an example of what such cross-cultural identification might look like, one might consider the case of the Icelandic sagas. In an essay written some time ago, Kristján

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

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

[14] Christopher Gill's suggestion that the Stoic conception of magnanimity may have developed *independently* from Aristotle's adds an interesting twist to this point. See his "Stoic magnanimity," in *The Measure of Greatness*, ed. Vasalou.

Kristjánsson 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 men, 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 roots and overtones of the ancient virtue, there are also suggestive comparisons to be made with saga morality, with its heroic aspect.[15]

If this account is correct, here we have two virtue terms which are connected by sufficient similarities in conceptual content for us to be able to identify 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.[16] It is an interesting question how much cultural luck (to coin a term) is required for felicitous isomorphisms of this sort to emerge. Might this kind of virtue concept have a strong probability of emerging naturally within certain types of social structures or stages of social development? 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. We might instead undertake a comparison not at the level of the virtue term, but of what I earlier described as its core elements or stakes. In the case of our specific virtue, this might mean investigating, 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.

This is not the type of project I have pursued here. My investigation in this book has been structured around virtue terms, rather than stakes, though a focus on stakes also forms a building block of my discussion, notably in Part 1, which considers al-Ghazali's substantive attitude to the stakes of esteem and self-esteem as a context for his engagement with the specific virtue of greatness of soul. There are certainly many interesting comparative stories waiting to be told about the approaches taken by Muslim thinkers to some of the other elements thematised by this virtue, and to the broader ethical threads that entered into its

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[15] Kristján Kristjánsson, "Liberating moral traditions: saga morality and Aristotle's *megalopsychia*," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1 (1998), 397–422.

[16] 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," *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (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.

skein—to questions about the importance of external goods, about the role of luck in the good life, or about the relation between dependence and the aspiration to self-sufficiency. The results of certain comparisons seem more predictable than others. The notion of fortune or luck, for example—such a potent element in ancient philosophers' confrontations with the fragility of the human good—could hardly be approached in the same way by thinkers steeped in a theistic worldview in which God's determining influence on all events occupied a pivotal place. The attitude to such events, by the same token, could not be a proud avowal of independence but a sense of dependence embraced as a key moral value.

For my purposes, it will be enough if the above has opened up the concept of our focal virtue sufficiently to enable us to entertain the possibility of a larger family of concepts—a family of which greatness of soul, as developed in the ancient tradition, might not form the only member. That the Arabic virtue of greatness of spirit has a good claim to be included within that larger family is a more specific suggestion which can only be borne out through the more detailed story that follows, which will allow the pattern of affinities and resemblances to stand out. To this task I now turn.