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ARISTOTLE'S MUCH MALIGNED *MEGALOPSYCHOS*

Howard J. Curzer

Mr. Darcy: As a child, I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit . . . [My parents allowed] me to be selfish and overbearing—to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world . . . (ch. 58)

Elizabeth: [Mr. Darcy] has no improper pride. (ch. 59)

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austin

Modern moral philosophers, as well as Aristotle's modern commentators, think that *megalopsychia*¹ as defined by Aristotle, is not a virtue. They find Aristotle's *megalopsychos* rather repulsive. Their attitude is quite startling for two reasons. First, it is odd that philosophers and commentators who agree with Aristotle on so many other points are repelled by Aristotle's account of the *megalopsychos*, the man who has complete virtue to the highest degree (1123b26-30, 1124a1-4). Second, although many people who mention *megalopsychia* attach a pejorative adjective or two, there are relatively few sustained arguments in the contemporary philosophical literature against Aristotle's claim that *megalopsychia* is a desirable character trait.

I shall begin with a sketch of Aristotle's sketch of the *megalopsychos*. Then I shall show that the criticisms of *megalopsychia* which have been made are unfounded. Finally, I shall suggest several explanations for the contemporary prejudice against the *megalopsychos*.

Aristotle's *Megalopsychos*

Nicomachean Ethics IV 3, consists of a portrait of the *megalopsychos* (1123b26-1125a16) embedded in a frame (1123a34-1123b26, 1125a16-1125a35). In the frame Aristotle formally defines *megalopsychia* and tries

¹ *Megalopsychia* has been translated in various ways (greatness of soul, dignity, self-respect, pride, magnanimity, high-mindedness). Since the meaning of *megalopsychia* is controversial, I will just leave it untranslated. Similarly, I will leave *chaunotes* (vanity, arrogance) and *mikropsychia* (humility, false humility, small-souledness, low-mindedness, mean-spiritedness, pusillanimity) untranslated.

All quotations from Aristotle are taken from the *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. W.D. Ross, revised by J.O. Urmson, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* [Revised Oxford Translation], (ed.) J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) except that I use 'virtue' rather than 'excellence' to translate *arete*.

to fit it into his virtue-is-a-mean architectonic by contrasting the *megalopsychos* with the *chaunos*, the *mikropsychos*, and the temperate man who lacks *megalopsychia*.

Aristotle begins by defining *megalopsychia* and its opposites in terms of the external goods (wealth, power, beauty, honour, etc.). The *megalopsychos* 'thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them' (1123b1-2). The *megalopsychos* is worthy of great things because he is great in some way. And the *megalopsychos* knows that he is worthy of great things. Thus, the two components of *megalopsychia* are self-knowledge and greatness. The *chaunos* 'thinks himself worthy of great things, being unworthy of them' (1123a8-9), the *mikropsychos* 'thinks himself worthy of less than he is really worthy of' (1123b9-10), and the temperate man lacking *megalopsychia* 'is worthy of little and thinks himself worthy of little' (1123b5-6). These contrasts emphasise the two components of *megalopsychia*. The *megalopsychos* and the temperate man lacking *megalopsychia* share a sort of self-knowledge which the *chaunos* and the *mikropsychos* lack. But the *megalopsychos* also has greatness while the temperate man lacking *megalopsychia* does not. Thus, in the chapter's frame Aristotle locates *megalopsychia* in a mean with respect to only one of its components.

The *megalopsychos* [unlike the temperate man lacking *megalopsychia*] is an extreme in respect of the greatness of his claims, but [along with the temperate man lacking *megalopsychia*, the *megalopsychos* is] a mean in respect of the rightness of [his claims]; for he claims what is in accordance with his merits, while the others [the *chaunos* and the *mikropsychos*] go to excess or fall short. (1123b13-15)

In the portrait portion of the chapter Aristotle fleshes out the frame's somewhat abstract definition of *megalopsychia* by describing some consequences of combining self-knowledge and greatness. In particular, Aristotle discusses the relationship of the *megalopsychos* to honour and to other people.

Honour is the sphere (*peri ho*) of *megalopsychia*. The *megalopsychos*

deserves and claims great things . . . [and] honour is surely the greatest of external goods. Honours and dishonours, therefore, are the objects with respect to which the *megalopsychos* is as he should be. (1123b15-22)

But *megalopsychia* does not consist in desiring honour rightly. The mean between desiring honour too much and too little is not *megalopsychia*, but rather is appropriate ambition, the virtue discussed in IV 4. The *megalopsychos* is rightly related to honour in that he 'deserves and claims' great honour.

The *megalopsychos* deserves great honour by being more virtuous than others.

The *megalopsychos*, since he deserves most, must be good in the highest

degree; for the better man always deserves more and the best man most. Therefore the true *megalopsychos* must be good . . . Therefore it is hard to be truly *megalopsychos*; for it is impossible without nobility and goodness of character. (1123b26-1124a4)

The *megalopsychos* is more virtuous than others not only because he has the full compliment of virtues, but also because each of his virtues is greater. He is more courageous, more just, more temperate, etc.

And greatness in every virtue would seem to be characteristic of a *megalopsychos* . . . *megalopsychia*, then, seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them. (1123b29-1124a3)

For this reason Hardie suggests that the *megalopsychos* is the man of 'superhuman virtue' contrasted with the brute at the beginning of book VII.² The *megalopsychos* not only deserves, but also claims great honour because he is aware of being more virtuous than most other people. But his knowledge of his own greatness does not lead to exploitation of others or even to haughtiness.

It is a mark of the *megalopsychos* to [be] . . . unassuming towards those of the middle class; for . . . a lofty bearing . . . among humble people is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak. (1124b17-23)

Self-knowledge also leads the *megalopsychos* to aim at higher standards of passion and action than others. The *megalopsychos* considers himself to be a superior person. He strives to maintain this superiority and not slip into acting like an ordinary person. Aristotle spends the rest of the portrait listing examples of this. Aristotle says, for example, that the *megalopsychos* 'is the sort of man to confer benefits, but he is ashamed of receiving them; for the one is the mark of a superior, the other of an inferior' (1124b9-10).

In summary, Aristotle's *megalopsychos* has great virtue, knows it, does not flaunt it, and strives to maintain it.

Criticisms of the *Megalopsychos*—Part A

Critics of the *megalopsychos* typically claim on the basis of some passage or another that the *megalopsychos* is lacking in this or that virtue. Fundamentally, then, their claim is that Aristotle is inconsistent when he asserts that the *megalopsychos* is virtuous. My strategy is to offer alternative interpretations of the passages in question which are compatible with Aristotle's oft repeated assertion that the *megalopsychos* has every virtue.

² W.F.R. Hardie, "'Magnanimity' in Aristotle's Ethics", *Phronesis* 23 (1978) p. 71.

In this section I shall rebut the accusations that the *megalopsychos* is (1) conceited, (2) snobbish, and (3) ungrateful and manipulative.

I

I shall begin with some criticisms which are elliptic rather than fully worked out. Joachim says that there is an 'obvious exaggeration in the *megalopsychos*'s sense of his own importance . . .'.³ This seems to be an odd, easily rebutted criticism since, as we have just seen, it is the vain man rather than the *megalopsychos* who has an exaggerated sense of his own importance (1123b1-2, 1123a8-9). Perhaps the point of the criticism is that in spite of Aristotle's formal definition of *megalopsychia*, the portrait of the *megalopsychos* contains passages which suggest that the *megalopsychos* overestimates his worth. For example,

[A]t honours that are great and conferred by good men he will be moderately pleased, thinking that he is coming by his own or even less than his own; for there can be no honour that is worthy of perfect virtue, yet he will at any rate accept it since they have nothing greater to bestow on him. (1124a5-9)

The phrase 'moderately pleased' may be misleading here. Aristotle is not suggesting that the *megalopsychos* accepts honour grudgingly, but rather that the *megalopsychos* is neither excessively nor insufficiently pleased. Similarly, the phrase 'perfect virtue' may be misleading here. Aristotle is describing the paragon of *megalopsychia* just as he elsewhere describes the paragon of courage, temperance, etc. Most real *megalopsychoi* probably fall short of perfection, yet are still substantially more virtuous than the bestowers of honour. This passage does not contradict Aristotle's formal definition of *megalopsychia*.

Hardie cites the passage at 1124a5-9 and then remarks,

But if he ignores the contribution of luck and nature to his achievement, if he thinks of it as all his own doing, he falls into fatuity below the level of common sense, and far below the level of Aristotle's critical reflection and unanswered questions about the human situation.⁴

Like Joachim's remark above, Hardie's tentative criticism of the *megalopsychos* is odd. It certainly does not follow from the fact that the *megalopsychos* thinks himself to be worthy of 'honours that are great and conferred by good men' that the *megalopsychos* 'ignores the contribution of luck and nature to his achievement' (unless one holds the unAristotelian view that luck and nature determine all or most of a man's character and actions).

But perhaps it is a matter of emphasis. Hardie suggests that luck's main

³ H.H. Joachim, *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) p. 125.

⁴ Hardie, p. 74.

contribution to *megalopsychia* concerns external goods such as wealth and power.⁵ In IV 3 Aristotle says over and over that the *megalopsychos* is worthy of great external goods, but Aristotle does not even mention that the *megalopsychos* needs these goods to perform great deeds. This may not imply, but it does suggest, that the *megalopsychos* thinks of great external goods primarily as his desert rather than as necessary conditions of his *megalopsychia*.

We cannot assume, however, that the emphasis in Aristotle's exposition of *megalopsychia* reflects the thinking of the *megalopsychos*. The *megalopsychos* is doubtless aware of many things which Aristotle does not mention. Arguments from silence are risky when they concern Aristotle's own view, but they are even more suspect when they concern the object of a four page sketch.

Another reply to the above criticism is to deny that the *megalopsychos* needs great external goods to perform great deeds. Of course, some external goods are necessary for the practice of most virtues, and great wealth and power would enhance *megalopsychia* (1124a25-26), but many great deeds can be performed without great wealth and power. Aristotle includes Socrates on a list of paradigm *megalopsychoi* (*Anal. Post.* 97b15-25), and he also remarks that *megalopsychia* enables people to bear with nobility many great misfortunes (such as the misfortunes of Priam) that crush and maim blessedness (1100b22ff). Aristotle says that people of great wealth, power, etc. are sometimes thought to possess *megalopsychia*, but in fact it is people of great virtue, whether or not they have the external goods in abundance, who are the *megalopsychoi* (1124a20-1124b6). Finally, Aristotle says that the *megalopsychos* 'will possess beautiful and profitless things rather than profitable and useful ones; for this is more proper to a character that suffices to itself' (1125a11-12). Thus, Aristotle's *megalopsychos* is self-sufficient. He requires only a few external goods. In particular, people who lack wealth and power can possess *megalopsychia*.

II

Some people view the *megalopsychos* as a prig or snob because the *megalopsychos* knows that he is better than others. MacIntyre, for example, finds Aristotle's portrait of the *megalopsychos* 'appalling', but the only remark which might be construed as an explanation of this disparaging adjective is this.

The great-souled man's characteristic attitudes require a society of superiors and inferiors in which he can exhibit his peculiar brand of condescension. He is essentially a member of a society of unequals.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶ A. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) pp. 78-79.

Hardie, too, notes that 'He gives the impression of looking down on human affairs and on most of his fellow men.'⁷

Aristotle anticipates this criticism and takes pains to forestall it. He says that '*megalopsychoi* are thought to be disdainful' (1124a20). But the *megalopsychos* does not act in a disdainful or snobbish way towards his inferiors. He does not 'exhibit' condescension or 'give the impression' to his fellow man of looking down on them and their affairs. As we saw earlier,

It is a mark of the *megalopsychos* to [be] . . . unassuming towards those of the middle class; for . . . a lofty bearing . . . among humble people is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak. (1124b17-23)

Aristotle distinguishes the *megalopsychos* from people who do act disdainfully. The latter are people who are in a superior position because of their birth, wealth, or power, rather than their virtue. Aristotle describes these people in the following way.

Disdainful and insolent, even those who have such goods become. For without virtue it is not easy to bear gracefully the goods of fortune; and, . . . thinking themselves superior to others, they despise others and themselves do what they please. (1124a29-b2)

Unlike these well-born, wealthy, powerful people the *megalopsychoi* are not disdainful or insolent. They do not allow their low opinion of their inferiors to show except on those occasions when they claim honour and/or other external goods. And the *megalopsychoi* do not claim these goods incessantly. Just as they claim only the appropriate amount of external goods, so presumably they claim these goods only at appropriate times in accordance with justice. (The *megalopsychoi* claim honour when medals are being distributed, for example.)

Even though the *megalopsychos* does not flaunt his low opinion of his inferiors he does have a low opinion of them and their affairs. Is this bad? The *megalopsychos* has a low opinion of human affairs insofar as they are concerned with external goods (1124a16-19), and a low opinion of his fellow men insofar as they are lacking in virtue (1124b5-6). But these opinions are accurate. The *megalopsychos* should not be blamed for holding true beliefs.

Consider the following problem. The *megalopsychos* is truthful.

He must also be open in his hate and in his love (for to conceal one's feelings is a mark of timidity), and must care more for truth than for what people will think, and must speak and act openly; for he is free of speech because he is contemptuous, and he is given to telling the truth . . . (1124b26-30)

But it seems to follow from the fact that the *megalopsychos* speaks and acts freely, openly, and truthfully that he expresses his low opinion of non-*megalopsychoi*. The *megalopsychos* does exhibit condescension. We might

⁷ Hardie, p. 65.

put the problem this way. Aristotle's assertion that the *megalopsychos* has a low opinion of non-*megalopsychoi* combined with his assertion that the *megalopsychos* speaks and acts freely, openly, and truthfully contradicts Aristotle's assertion that the *megalopsychos* is unassuming towards non-*megalopsychoi*.

Irwin suggests a way to defend Aristotle's *megalopsychos* from this criticism. Aristotle qualifies his claim that the *megalopsychos* 'is given to telling the truth' by adding *plen hosa men de ironeian pros tous pollous* (1124b30-31). Ross translates this 'except when he speaks in irony to the vulgar'. But Irwin translates this 'except [when he speaks less than the truth] to the many', and comments, 'The magnanimous person avoids displaying his own greatness in a way that humiliates inferior people.'⁸ From the fact that the *megalopsychos* is truthful it does not follow that he exhibits condescension. The *megalopsychos* must tell the truth, but he need not always be telling it. Probably the *megalopsychos* speaks truthfully when asked sincerely about his view of non-*megalopsychoi*, but the *megalopsychos* does not volunteer this view and he is seldom asked for it. As for the rest of 1124b26-30, Aristotle's point is that the *megalopsychos* is not afraid of suffering harm via truth-telling. Aristotle is not saying that the *megalopsychos* does not mind inflicting harm by truth-telling.

III

One of the practices of the *megalopsychoi* which seems most disgusting is

They seem also to remember any service they have done, but not those they have received (for he who receives a service is inferior to him who has done it, but the *megalopsychos* wishes to be superior), and to hear of the former with pleasure, of the latter with displeasure. (1124b12-15)

They forget their debts and resent being reminded. Presumably, this is what Hardie is referring to when he says that the *megalopsychos* seems ungrateful.⁹ Jaffa and Sherman go further. Jaffa asks,

If the magnanimous man himself is perfect in every virtue, as Aristotle says, and hence, if he is perfect in gratitude, which is a virtue, then how is it that he is not able to prevent himself from giving the impression of ingratitude by being forgetful of benefits received?¹⁰

Similarly, Sherman says, 'these remarks still jar with Aristotle's contention in *Rhetoric* 1374a21-25 and 1374b16-17 that goodness and decency require

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985) pp. 102, 327.

⁹ Hardie, pp. 66, 73.

¹⁰ H.V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) p. 139.

showing gratitude to benefactors.¹¹ The implication of Jaffa and Sherman is that the *megalopsychos* not only seems but actually is ungrateful.

But it is not necessary to accuse Aristotle of contradicting himself here. First, note that displeasure upon hearing about the receipt of services is perfectly compatible with the feeling of gratitude. The *megalopsychos* is sad to have been in need of help, but this does not imply or even suggest that the *megalopsychos* is sad to have been helped. The pleasure at being helped may be much less than the displeasure of being in need of help so that the dominant feeling is displeasure. Second, note that the *megalopsychos* forgets the services received only after the debt is repaid. The *megalopsychos* does not act ungratefully. Indeed when someone has conferred benefits upon him,

he is apt to confer greater benefits in return; for thus the original benefactor besides being paid will incur a debt to him, and will be the gainer by the transaction . . . It is a mark of the *megalopsychos* to ask for nothing or scarcely anything, but to give help readily . . . (1124b11-19)

Thus, the *megalopsychos* neither acts nor feels ungrateful. I once heard someone criticising the *megalopsychos* for the practice of overpaying debts. The critic maintained that the *megalopsychos* overpaid his debts in order to gain an edge on the original benefactor; to get the original benefactor into debt.

But this is a misunderstanding. Aristotle's point here is that the *megalopsychos* does more than necessary to make the original benefactor better off. '[T]he original benefactor . . . will be the gainer by the transaction.' The *megalopsychos* is trying to help the original benefactor. That the original benefactor goes into debt is a foreseen, but unintended consequence.

Criticisms of the *Megalopsychos*—Part B

In this section I shall rebut the accusations that the *megalopsychos* is (4) inactive and remote, (5) oblivious and immoral, and (6) insufficiently concerned with honour. Most of these criticisms seem to arise primarily out of the following passage which several commentators have found disturbing.

It is characteristic of the *megalopsychos* . . . to hold back except where great honour or a great result is at stake, and to be a man of few deeds, but of great and notable ones. (1124b23-26)

IV

First, the passage seems to imply that the *megalopsychos* is only intermittently active. As Sherman says,

¹¹ N. Sherman, 'Common Sense and Uncommon Virtue', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988) p. 113, n. 23.

Aristotle lays down as a substantive criterion of the good life that it be a life of sustained virtuous activity . . . But certainly an agent who is inertial most of the time except for highly sporadic spurts of brilliant though selfless activity violates the spirit of that criterion.¹²

Similarly, Hardie says,

One of the most disconcerting of the traits ascribed to the great man is inactivity . . . It is a picture of remoteness where we might expect persistent devotion to the public good, the pursuit of personal happiness in promoting the happiness of fellow citizens.¹³

Does the passage in question imply that the *megalopsychos* is mostly inert, inactive, remote, etc.? Not at all. First, this criticism hinges on the claim that 'opportunities for spectacular actions are rare.'¹⁴ But they are not rare. Such opportunities thrust themselves upon us rarely, and we tend not to seek them out. But as Arthur Conan Doyle says, 'Chances are all around you. It is the mark of the kind of man I mean that he makes his own chances. You can't hold him back . . . There are heroisms all round us waiting to be done.'¹⁵

Second, even if opportunities for spectacular actions are rare, it does not follow that the *megalopsychos* is insufficiently active or inadequately devoted to the public good. For the *megalopsychos* may spend more time and energy performing a few great deeds than other folks spend performing many, more trivial deeds. It takes considerably more time and energy to found a library, for example, than to donate a few books. Thus, the *megalopsychos* may actually be more actively and persistently devoted to the public good than ordinary folks, even though he is 'a man of few deeds'.

Moreover, a certain sort of inactivity and remoteness might be defended in the following way. The *megalopsychos* is a resource for his community. There are projects which many people can accomplish, but there are also projects which require the talents of a *megalopsychos*. People are limited. If a person expends lots of time, energy, wealth on some projects, then he will not be able to complete other projects. In particular, if the *megalopsychos* spends himself on deeds which ordinary people can do, then he will be unable to do the great deeds which only a *megalopsychos* can do. It would be wasteful and foolish for a general to go to the forefront of a battle when others can fight adequately, but only he can direct the army. Similarly, it would be wasteful and foolish for the *megalopsychos* to undertake projects which drain and/or risk his resources and which others can handle, instead of saving himself for great deeds.

¹² Sherman, p. 107.

¹³ Hardie, p. 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁵ A.C. Doyle, *The Lost World* (London: John Murray, 1952) p. 6.

V

The second and third criticisms spawned by 1124b23-26 are that the *megalopsychos* neglects ordinary virtuous actions (i.e. virtuous actions where great honour is not at stake), and is unaware of the need or opportunity for these actions. For example, the *megalopsychos* might stand by, oblivious, while some unimportant person drowns just because saving that person would be little work and yield little honour.

Engberg-Pedersen says, 'ordinary, small-type specimens of virtuous activity he will not deign to engage in, and only a few exceptionally noble acts are able to catch his attention (1124b6-9, b24-26).'¹⁶ Similarly, Sherman suggests that the *megalopsychos* is an

agent who jumps into burning houses and freezing ponds to come to the rescue of others, but who is systematically unmindful of the milder calls of distress of those around him — of a child who has toppled down the stairs or a neighbour who out of loneliness needs someone to talk to every now and again . . .¹⁷

The second criticism is groundless. I can find no evidence that the *megalopsychos* is unaware of opportunities to perform ordinary virtuous actions. Certainly the passages Engberg-Pedersen cites do not support this criticism.

As for the third criticism, the simple response is this. (I shall deploy a more complex response below.) It is clear that the *megalopsychos* would not stand by while someone drowned or a child screamed or a neighbour wilted because, as we have already seen, the *megalopsychos* is virtuous. He does not decline to perform actions required by virtue. When Aristotle says that the *megalopsychos* will 'hold back except where great honour or a great result is at stake', he must be speaking elliptically. Since he has already extolled the virtue of the *megalopsychos* it goes without saying that the *megalopsychos* will perform all actions required by virtue. So Aristotle must mean that the *megalopsychos* will hold back on optional, ordinary actions in order to perform great ones.

VI

Engberg-Pedersen does not agree that the *megalopsychos* is virtuous. External goods are necessary for happiness (1101a14-16). But, along with Schmidt,¹⁸ Engberg-Pedersen claims that the *megalopsychos* places no value on external goods. Engberg-Pedersen asserts that this mistake prevents the *megalopsychos*

¹⁶ T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) p. 78.

¹⁷ Sherman, pp. 106-107.

¹⁸ E. A. Schmidt, 'Ehre und Tugend. Zur Megalopsychie der aristotelischen Ethik', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 49 (1967) p. 162.

from being a morally good person. In particular, it prevents the *megalopsychos* from noticing and performing ordinary virtuous actions.¹⁹

[T]he high-minded man of EN IV is wrong in his belief that only moral virtue matters (viz. for happiness) . . . [N]atural goods are in fact necessary for happiness . . . The morally good man, as opposed to the high-minded man, does recognize the value of natural goods.²⁰

Aristotle anticipates Engberg-Pedersen's assertion that the *megalopsychos* is not morally good. Aristotle calls this assertion 'absurd'. 'If we consider him point by point we shall see the utter absurdity of a *megalopsychos* who is not good' (1123b33-34). Indeed, Aristotle goes to great lengths to emphasise that the *megalopsychos* is virtuous (1123b26-1124a4, 1124a25-29).

Moreover, Engberg-Pedersen and Schmidt are mistaken to claim that the *megalopsychos* places no value on external goods. The *megalopsychos* does not 'care very much' (1124a16-17) about external goods, but he does place some value on them. The *megalopsychos* thinks that 'nothing is great' (1123b32, 1124a19, 1125a3), not that nothing is good. After all, the *megalopsychos* claims and accepts honour (1124a5-9) and even reluctantly accepts benefits (1124b9-13).

Engberg-Pedersen is aware of this, but he argues that

when the Aristotelian high-minded man claims honour for himself, he does so, not because he is at all interested in honour, but as an expression of his belief that what is of genuine value is *moral* virtue—and honour is an *athlon* of virtue.²¹

It seems implausible to me that anyone should express their view of the value of virtue and honour in the way Engberg-Pedersen attributes to the *megalopsychos*. Moreover, other statements which are at the core of Aristotle's description of *megalopsychia* imply that the *megalopsychos* places some value on external goods. First, the *megalopsychos* has all virtues (1123b29-30, 1124a1-4). Therefore, he has liberality and appropriate ambition which consist partially in not valuing wealth and honour too little. Second, the *megalopsychos* ranks honour above other external goods (1123b15-21, 1124a16-20). Therefore, he must think that honour has some positive value. Third, a person with virtue plus external goods is more worthy of honour than a person with virtue alone (1124a23-26). Therefore, the *megalopsychos* who thinks truly (1124b6) especially about honour must see that external goods have some value.

Engberg-Pedersen might respond in the following way. Aristotle asserts that the *megalopsychos* is virtuous, but also that the *megalopsychos* 'holds back' and 'is a man of few deeds' (1124b23-26). Thus, the *megalopsychos* neglects ordinary virtuous actions. Aristotle's account of the *megalopsychos* is inconsistent.

¹⁹ Engberg-Pedersen, pp. 78-79.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

I shall reply to Engberg-Pedersen in two different ways. First, even if Aristotle's assertion that the *megalopsychos* is a virtuous man clashes with his assertion that the *megalopsychos* is a man of few, great deeds, it is by no means obvious that we should discard the first assertion rather than the second. As we have seen, Aristotle emphatically asserts that the *megalopsychos* is a virtuous man several times and explicitly considers and rejects the possibility that the *megalopsychos* is not virtuous. But the assertion that the *megalopsychos* 'hangs back' and 'is a man of few deeds' is an isolated remark.

But secondly, I do not think these assertions are inconsistent. There is a natural way to read the text without attributing a contradiction to Aristotle. I suggest that the *megalopsychos* is constantly busy performing a few great, time-consuming deeds. The *megalopsychos* may be quite willing to give of his time, but the great deeds take up so much time that no time remains for ordinary deeds. Obviously, this suggestion allows the *megalopsychos* to be a man of few deeds without denying that he is virtuous.

Criticisms of the *Megalopsychos*—Part C

In this section I shall rebut the accusations that the *megalopsychos* is (7) self-absorbed, (8) unable to form perfect friendships, (9) unneighbourly, untrustworthy, unsympathetic, inaccessible, and insufficiently benevolent, and (10) obsessed with and motivated by honour.

VII

Ross passes the following judgment on Aristotle's picture of *megalopsychia*.

There are admirable traits among those here depicted, but as a whole the picture is an unpleasing one; it is an anticipation of the Stoic sage without his self-abasement before the ideal of duty . . . The passage simply betrays somewhat nakedly the self-absorption which is the bad side of Aristotle's ethics.²²

There is a sense in which anyone working with an ethics of virtue rather than duty is self-absorbed. To adopt an ethics of virtue is to try to make *yourself* a better person, to improve your *own* character. Of course, others will benefit, for you will perform your duties to others and be a better friend, etc., but these are consequences, almost fringe benefits, of the end which is character development. A duty ethic is more other oriented. Performing one's duties, especially one's duties to *others* is the crucial thing. Of course, character improvement will occur on the way. But virtues are means to performing duties.

The *megalopsychos* is self-absorbed in this sense, but no more so than the courageous man, the just man, or any other exemplar of Aristotelian virtue. Ross might object that this resemblance between *megalopsychia* and

²² W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1923) p. 208.

the other virtues does not exonerate *megalopsychia*, but rather condemns the other virtues. Not just the *megalopsychos*, but all of Aristotle's virtuous people are self-absorbed.

I shall not reply here to this comprehensive criticism of Aristotle's ethics. My paper is addressed to those who are sympathetic to Aristotle's general approach, but find his treatment of *megalopsychia* objectionable. My aim is not to save Aristotle from his foes, but rather to save the *megalopsychos* from Aristotle's friends.

Ross might have in mind another, more vicious, sense of the term 'self-absorbed'. A person who cares nothing for others, but cares only about himself is sometimes called 'self-absorbed'. Perhaps Ross' claim is that, although the *megalopsychos* performs virtuous deeds, he does not perform benevolent ones.

Is there any evidence at all that the *megalopsychos* is self-absorbed in this sense? Aristotle does say that the *megalopsychos* 'is unable to make his life revolve around another', but Aristotle immediately adds, 'unless it be a friend' (1124b31-1125a1). The implication is that the *megalopsychos* is not a slave or sycophant, but he has friends and his life revolves around them. He cares a great deal about his friends. Thus, the passage actually provides evidence that the *megalopsychos* is not self-absorbed in the more vicious sense.

VIII

Jaffa acknowledges that the *megalopsychos* has friendships, but asserts that they are not top quality friendships. According to Jaffa, 'the magnanimous man represents perfection in the sphere of the practical virtues',²³ but there is a higher sphere (contemplation), and hence a better person (the philosopher).

[O]nly a philosophic friendship can be a perfect friendship . . . [T]he magnanimous man, not being a philosopher, cannot be a party to a perfect friendship . . . [Therefore] he is imperfect in relation to friendship.²⁴

Since the *megalopsychos* cannot be a party to perfect friendships (sometimes called 'friendships of good persons' (1157a20) or 'friendships of character' (1164a12)), he is limited to pleasure friendships and advantage friendships.

Now I agree with Jaffa that the *megalopsychos* is not necessarily a philosopher.²⁵ But I do not agree that only philosophers can participate in perfect friendships. Cooper has shown that some perfect friendships

²³ Jaffa, p. 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁵ Gauthier claims that Aristotle's *megalopsychos* is a philosopher, a person who leads the contemplative life. Cf. R.A. Gauthier, *Magnanimite*, Bibliothèque Thomiste, vol. 28 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1951), p. 116; R.A. Gauthier, *La Morale d'Aristote* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963), p. 122. This might open the *megalopsychos* up to a host of criticisms. For example, if the *megalopsychos* ultimately aims at contemplation, won't there be occasions on which he will choose to contemplate rather than perform morally virtuous actions? And even if the *megalopsychos* chooses to perform the morally virtuous actions how will

might be based not on the recognition by each [person] of perfect virtue in the other but just on the recognition of some morally good qualities that he possesses (or is thought to possess). Thus, one might be attached to someone because of his generous and open spirit, while recognizing that he is in some ways obtuse or not very industrious or somewhat self-indulgent.²⁶

So even if the *megalopsychos* lacks philosophic wisdom, he may still participate in perfect friendships. Remember that the *megalopsychos* makes his life revolve around his friends (1124b31-1125a1). Surely a friend around whom one's life revolves cannot be merely a pleasure or advantage friend. So the *megalopsychos* must be a party to perfect friendships.

Of course, it must be conceded to Jaffa that if the *megalopsychos* lacks philosophic wisdom, then his friendships will not be perfect friendships of perfectly virtuous people. They will not be the best subclass of the paradigm type of friendship. But they will be close. Since the *megalopsychos* possesses all of the moral virtues, his perfect friendships will not lack mutual generosity, courage, etc. They will, at most, lack shared contemplation.

IX

The accusation that the *megalopsychos* is self absorbed has not yet been fully refuted. Perhaps the *megalopsychos* has a few close, perfect friendships, but cares nothing for the rest of humanity. Sherman finds the *megalopsychos* lacking certain characteristics related to benevolence. She says,

There is still something contemptuous about [the *megalopsychos*'s] character, about the not so invisible sign she seems to wear which says, 'Don't ask for help unless you really are up against a wall.' . . . [*Megalopsychia*] does not sit well with other characteristics we admire in people, like neighbourliness, a sense of trust, sympathy, a certain accessibility and willingness to give of one's time; it seems to squeeze these out.²⁷

I must disagree with Sherman. *Megalopsychia* does not squeeze out these admirable characteristics. Let us begin with trustworthiness. Aristotle asserts that the *megalopsychos* is trustworthy in several senses.

²⁵ *cont.*

he be able to perform them for their own sake? Fortunately, Gauthier's interpretation of *megalopsychia* has been decisively refuted by the combined efforts of Dirlmeier, Hardie, and Rees. Cf. F. Dirlmeier, *Nikomachische Ethik* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956) pp. 370, 379; Hardie, *op. cit.* pp. 67-69; D.A. Rees, 'Magnanimity in the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics', *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik*, ed. P. Moraux and D. Harlfinger (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1971) p. 242.

²⁶ J. Cooper, 'Aristotle on Friendship', *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (ed.) A.O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) p. 306.

²⁷ Sherman, p. 107.

He must also be open in his hate and in his love (for to conceal one's feelings is a mark of timidity), and must care more for truth than for what people will think, and must speak and act openly; for he is free of speech because he is contemptuous, and he is given to telling the truth . . . (1124b26-30)

Not only does the *megalopsychos* typically speak the truth and keep his promises, but also his words, actions, and passions reflect the 'inner man'. He is trustworthy in the sense that he is the sort of man that he appears to be. He does not hide behind masks. The *megalopsychos*, moreover, is not a gossip (1125a5) or an evil-speaker (1125a8). You can trust him with your reputation.

Clearly, the *megalopsychos* is neighbourly in one sense. As we have seen, the *megalopsychos* is 'unassuming towards those of the middle class' (1124b19-20). Thus, when the *megalopsychos* passes a neighbour on the street the *megalopsychos* will at least smile, say 'hello', and exchange a few friendly words.

Probably Sherman has different senses of trustworthiness and neighbourliness in mind. Her criticism seems to be that, in the absence of specific commitments, the *megalopsychos* cannot be relied upon for aid. Thus, he lacks sympathy.

Sherman's criticism that the *megalopsychos* adopts an aloof manner to avoid ordinary acts of benevolence is special case of the general criticism that the *megalopsychos* neglects ordinary virtuous actions. I have already observed that the general criticism (and, therefore, Sherman's criticism) is incompatible with Aristotle's assertion that the *megalopsychos* is virtuous (1123b26-1124a4, 1124a25-29). But Sherman's criticism is also incompatible with Aristotle's assertion that the *megalopsychos* 'is the sort of man to confer benefits' (1124b9) and 'to give help readily' (1124b18).

Sherman might acknowledge that some of Aristotle's remarks imply that the *megalopsychos* is benevolent. But she might claim that 1124b23-26 implies that the *megalopsychos* neglects ordinary acts of benevolence. Thus, Sherman might conclude that Aristotle's description of the *megalopsychos* is inconsistent.

My reply to Sherman parallels my reply to Engberg-Pedersen. First, if there is a contradiction, charity demands that we reject 1124b23-26 rather than attribute a lack of benevolence to the *megalopsychos*. Second, there is no contradiction if the *megalopsychos* is constantly busy performing a few great, time-consuming, benevolent deeds so that the ordinary ones get 'squeezed out'.

Sherman anticipates this reply. She says,

[I]t might be replied that we all make certain arbitrary selections in the assignment of our aid. We cannot help everyone, we cannot give to everyone, and so we make certain discriminations. But there are some grounds for discrimination which exclude for the wrong reasons. I have been suggesting that the magnanimous person's disregard for the smaller,

more everyday kindnesses, in favour of those that show off his stature, is that sort of bias.²⁸

Now the deeds which show off one's stature are clearly the great and notable ones. Sherman cannot be saying that when a person can do either, but not both, he should choose to perform the ordinary deeds rather than the great ones. For the great deeds are typically more important than the ordinary ones. So Sherman must be saying that the *megalopsychos* performs the right deeds for the wrong reasons. Thus, Sherman has switched her criticism of the *megalopsychos*. She is no longer objecting to what the *megalopsychos* does or even to his demeanour or style. Instead, Sherman is objecting to his motive. Her objection is that the *megalopsychos* is a show-off. He is motivated by the desire for honour.

There is no doubt that when the *megalopsychos* chooses among the available virtuous, benevolent deeds, he chooses the ones worthy of great honour. But does he choose these deeds because they are the ones worthy of great honour?

X

Aristotle repeats that *megalopsychia* is concerned with honour several times (e.g. 1123b21-22, 1124a4-5, 1124a12-13, 1125a34-35, 1107b21-22). From these passages one might come to agree with Sherman that the *megalopsychos* is motivated by the desire for honour. Indeed Jaffa goes further. He reaches the opposite conclusion from Schmidt and Engberg-Pedersen. (See section VI.) He strongly suggests not only that the *megalopsychos* is motivated by the desire for honour, but also that the *megalopsychos* is obsessed with honour.²⁹ Of course, Aristotle's description of *megalopsychia* contains passages which state explicitly that the *megalopsychos* is not obsessed with or motivated by honour. Aristotle says, for example, that the *megalopsychos*

will bear himself with moderation towards wealth and power and all good or evil fortune, whatever may befall him, and will be neither overjoyed by good fortune nor over-pained by evil. For not even about honour does he care very much. (1124a13-17)

Jaffa is aware of these passages, but he treats them as tensions in Aristotle's account rather than as evidence against his own interpretation of the *megalopsychos*. Jaffa says, 'There is something problematic in the magnanimous man's concern with honour . . . [for] he contemns honour at the same time that he is so concerned with it.'³⁰

Once again note that even if Aristotle's assertions that the *megalopsychos* is not obsessed with honour clash with the assertions that the *megalopsychos* is concerned with honour, it is not obvious that we should discard the first

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁹ Jaffa, pp. 123-127.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

set of assertions rather than the second set. After all, we have seen (and Jaffa grants) that at the core of Aristotle's description of *megalopsychia* is the assertion that the *megalopsychos* has all virtues. Therefore, the *megalopsychos* has appropriate ambition which consists partially in not desiring honour too much. Thus, the *megalopsychos* desires honour neither too much (as Jaffa suggests) nor too little (as Schmidt and Engberg-Pedersen suggest), but just the right amount. And the right amount is a rather small amount. Good people are not obsessed with honour and do not ultimately aim at honour (1095b23-30).

But secondly, I do not think these assertions are inconsistent. Jaffa has misinterpreted Aristotle's assertions that the *megalopsychos* is concerned with honour. These assertions are not claims that the *megalopsychos* is obsessed with honour (as Jaffa suggests) or even that the *megalopsychos* is motivated by honour (as Sherman suggests). Instead Aristotle is fitting *megalopsychia* into his architectonic of virtue. Every virtue has a subject matter; every virtue is about something. When Aristotle says, for example, that 'it is chiefly with honours and dishonours, then, that the *megalopsychos* is concerned' (1124a4-5) he means merely that honour is the subject matter (*peri ho*) of *megalopsychia*.

Speculation About the Root of These Criticisms

Many people find the *megalopsychos* repulsive, yet the criticisms discussed so far do not seem to account for this attitude. They do not seem to get to the core of the contemporary prejudice. One explanation of the distaste people feel toward the *megalopsychos* is this. In Aristotle's portrait of the *megalopsychos* some statements are more memorable than others. It so happens that the memorable statements tend to be pithy details which seem damning on first reading (although, as I have shown, on a more careful and charitable reading they turn out to be innocuous), while the statements of the *megalopsychos*'s virtue tend to be abstract and quite forgettable. Thus, one tends to come away from Aristotle's portrait with an unpleasant impression of the *megalopsychos*. This explanation does not account for the fact that careful commentators as well as casual readers are repelled by the *megalopsychos*. So I shall suggest three deeper explanations of the contemporary prejudice against the *megalopsychos*.

XI

Megalopsychia and *mikropsychia* are sometimes translated respectively as 'pride' and 'humility'. Even when other translations are used it is easy to see how a reader might consider the *megalopsychos* to be proud and the *mikropsychos* to be humble. But Christianity says that pride is a vice, and humility is a virtue. Thus, it is easy for people who adopt a Christian point of view to believe that *megalopsychia* is a vice and *mikropsychia* is a virtue. Indeed, the transvaluation of pride from Aristotelian virtue to Christian vice,

and the transvaluation of humility from Aristotelian vice to Christian virtue are sometimes cited as ways in which Christian and Aristotelian values differ.³¹

No such transvaluations have occurred, however. The character traits which Aristotle calls *megalopsychia* and *mikropsychia* are not the same as the character traits which Christians call pride and humility. Thus, 'pride' and 'humility' are particularly misleading translations of *megalopsychia* and *mikropsychia*.

The Christian virtue of humility consists in knowledge of one's true level of excellence, and the Christian vice of pride consists in an overestimation of one's level of excellence. What is one's true level of excellence? Mainstream Christians hold the following three 'background beliefs'. A hierarchy of excellence exists. Rank is determined by comparison with perfection. And every person is very imperfect. One should not say, 'I am great, for I am vastly superior to other people.' Rather one should say, 'I am lowly, for I am vastly inferior to God.' Combined with these three background beliefs, humility yields the recognition that one is far from perfection, the realization that one's level of excellence is low. Bernard of Clairvaux defines humility as 'that thorough [truthful] self-examination which makes a man contemptible in his own sight.'³² Aquinas says, 'knowledge of one's own deficiency belongs to humility.'³³ Similarly, pride yields the false belief that one is close to perfection, the belief that one's level of excellence is high.³⁴

Clearly, the Christian vice of pride is not the same as the Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsychia*, for Aristotle says that the *megalopsychos*, 'thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them' (1123b1-2). Unlike the proud man, the *megalopsychos* is not mistaken about his level of excellence. Aristotle agrees that the character trait Christians later called pride is a vice. He says, 'he who thinks himself worthy of great things, being unworthy of them, is vain' (1123b8-9).

Clearly, the Christian virtue of humility is not the same as *mikropsychia*, for Aristotle says, 'The man who thinks himself worthy of less than he is really worthy of is *mikropsychos*' (1123b9-10). Unlike the humble man, the *mikropsychos* is mistaken about his level of excellence. Aristotle agrees that the character trait Christians later called humility is a virtue. He says, 'He

³¹ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966) pp. 204-208; and more recently, A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) pp. 177, 182.

³² Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility*, trans. G.B. Burch (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1942) p. 125.

³³ T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947) II-II, Q. 161, A. 2, p. 1849.

³⁴ Within Christian thought there are many alternative accounts of pride and humility. One might say, for example, that since God ultimately provides persons with all of their positive properties, pride is the mistaken belief that some person's positive property is due to his own efforts and merits rather than God's gift. But the account I consider here is a common and influential one.

who is worthy of little and thinks himself worthy of little is temperate' (1123b4-5).³⁵

Thus, *megalopsychia* does not move from Aristotelian virtue to Christian vice, and *mikropsychia* does not move from Aristotelian vice to Christian virtue. Far from being viciously proud, the *megalopsychos* actually possesses the essential characteristic of Christian humility, the knowledge of his level of excellence. As Aquinas says,

Humility restrains the appetite from aiming at great things against right reason while magnanimity urges the mind to great things in accord with right reason. Hence it is clear that magnanimity is not opposed to humility: indeed they concur in this, that each is according to right reason.³⁶

Of course, the *megalopsychos*, like the proud man, believes that he is great, not lowly. Must the person who adopts the Christian point of view take *megalopsychia* to be a vice after all? No. What follows from the three Christian background beliefs is that there are no *megalopsychoi*.³⁷ If you think you are a *megalopsychos*, then you are wrong about your level of excellence. You are vain. But *megalopsychia* is not a vice. It is a virtue possessed by no one. Aristotle and the Christian have different views about human nature and human excellence. This leads to disagreement about the possibility of *megalopsychia*, but the Christian must agree with Aristotle that *megalopsychia* is a virtue.

XII

Self knowledge is only one component of *megalopsychia*. The other is greatness or grandeur. Aristotle says,

He who is worthy of little and thinks himself worthy of little is temperate,

³⁵ I do not mean to imply that Christian humility is the same as temperance. Although all humble people are temperate, not all temperate people are humble. Some, after all, are *megalopsychoi*.

³⁶ Aquinas, p. 1848. Aquinas thinks that magnanimity and humility are virtues and pusillanimity and pride are the corresponding vices. Some contemporary discussions follow Aquinas in distinguishing two virtues concerned with knowledge of one's own level of excellence. Isenberg, for example, says that improper pride may be opposed to humility, but 'a just pride is not opposed to humility. Humility consists in knowing one's limitations as pride consists in knowing one's merits' (A. Isenberg, 'Natural Pride and Natural Shame', *Explaining Emotions* (ed.) A.O. Rorty [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980] p. 361). Similarly, Richards says, 'To have dignity is to appreciate oneself sufficiently that one would withstand spurious pressures to lower one's self-esteem . . . [Humility] too involves having an accurate sense of oneself, sufficiently firm to resist pressures toward incorrect revisions. Only here the pressures are to think too much of oneself, rather than too little' (N. Richards, 'Is Humility a Virtue?' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 [1988] p. 254). It seems odd to define two different virtues, both consisting in an accurate sense of one's level of excellence. Taylor's account seems better, for it follows Aristotle in having only one such virtue which resists both upward and downward pressures. 'The person who has [proper] pride will value himself as he ought . . . It is then a kind of pride which is not to be contrasted with humility but which on the contrary coincides with humility (the Christian) virtue' (G. Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985] p. 51).

³⁷ Jesus is, perhaps, an exception.

but not a *megalopsychos*, for *megalopsychia* implies greatness, as beauty implies a good-sized body, and little people may be neat and well-proportioned but cannot be beautiful. (1123b4-8)

The *megalopsychos*, like a Homeric hero, undertakes large projects rather than small ones, and concerns himself with important things rather than trivial things. The *megalopsychos* performs great deeds and undertakes heroic quests; he does not merely do things or look for things (1124b23-26).

Several 19th century figures were alarmed over the gradual disappearance of greatness, and therefore *megalopsychia*, from the population. For example, I think this is what Nietzsche means when he says, 'People . . . are becoming smaller and smaller.'³⁸ And in a different philosophical tradition Mill says,

Already energetic characters on any large scale are becoming merely traditional . . . The greatness of England is now all collective; individually small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining . . . But it was men of another stamp than this that made England what it has been.³⁹

I think this trend described by Nietzsche and Mill has progressed so far that most of us do not know any *megalopsychoi*. We do not meet them at parties or at work or even at city hall. Hence, we are unfamiliar with *megalopsychia*.

I am not going to claim that we dislike the *megalopsychos* just because he seems alien to us. There is a deeper problem which Nietzsche and Mill bring out.

Not only do Nietzsche and Mill agree with Aristotle that greatness is a good disposition, they also go on to give an account of the psychological source of greatness. They say, roughly, that it comes from (or consists in) great passions appropriately channelled. But when Aristotle states that the *megalopsychos* is a man 'to whom nothing is great', he is denying that the *megalopsychos* has great passions. Thus, Aristotle rejects in advance the account given by Nietzsche and Mill of the psychological source of greatness. Yet Aristotle provides no alternative account.

My suggestion about the origin of contemporary hostility to the *megalopsychos* is this. Without some idea of the source of the *megalopsychos*'s greatness Aristotle's account of *megalopsychia* does not jell. But Aristotle does not tell us what the source of the *megalopsychos*'s greatness is, and he won't let us use the account suggested by Nietzsche and Mill. So we fall back on our own experience. Of course, our hypotheses are typically incorrect and unflattering since we do not know any *megalopsychoi*. For

³⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954) part III, ch. 5, p. 169. I shall not take a stand on the extent to which Nietzsche's 'overman' is the same as Aristotle's *megalopsychos*. Kaufmann suggests that they are similar. Cf. Nietzsche (New York: Random House, 1950) pp. 382-384. Magnus asserts that they are quite different. Cf. 'Aristotle and Nietzsche: *Megalopsychia* and *Urbemensch*', in *The Greeks and the Good Life* (ed.) D. Depew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) p. 262. Neither argues for his position.

³⁹ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978) ch. III, p. 67.

example, we might fall back on the hypothesis that the *megalopsychos* does what he does because he is obsessed with honour. This we can understand. We know people who are similarly obsessed. And, of course, such people have many of the faults which commentators have incorrectly ascribed to the *megalopsychos*. Thus, despite Aristotle's warning to distinguish the *megalopsychos* from other individuals who superficially resemble him (1124a20ff), we find ourselves criticising the *megalopsychos* for character flaws which these individuals have and the *megalopsychos* lacks.

XIII

In the many years between Aristotle's age and our own various egalitarian principles have gained wide acceptance. All persons are equal before God and the law. All persons have the same set of natural rights. All persons deserve equal concern and respect. And so on. These egalitarian principles and the egalitarian spirit behind them are deeply entrenched in modern thought.

Of course we recognize that some people are stronger, smarter, and more virtuous than others, but the claim that some people are better than others does not sit comfortably with the egalitarian strand in our thought even though there is no actual incompatibility. There is a similar tension between our egalitarianism and the claim that certain goods ought to be straightforwardly distributed according to talent and merit. So we take certain steps to repress these claims. We teach our children, for example, that 'elitist' is a dirty word. We are typically suspicious of and sometimes hostile to people who assert that some people are better than others and therefore more deserving than others. And we are doubly suspicious of and hostile to people who claim to deserve goods because they are better than others.

Now Aristotle's *megalopsychos* believes himself to be much better than others. And the *megalopsychos* claims to deserve more goods than others, because of his superior talent and merit. In light of the egalitarian strand in our thought which I have been discussing it is not surprising that the *megalopsychos* is viewed with suspicion and hostility by modern readers.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ I have profited from suggestions by D. Browning, A. Epstein, H. Granger, A. Martinich, D. Nathan, and W. Schaller.