



Imelda Chłodna-Blach

## The Aristotelian and Thomistic conception of magnanimity (*magnanimitas*) in the context of integral human development

The Aristotelian and Thomistic conception of magnanimity (*magnanimitas*) has developed on the grounds of the philosophical understanding of high culture in man. It was preceded by the appearance of such concepts as *paidéia* and *kalokagathía*.

### *Paidéia* in the times of Athenian democracy

In the 5th century BC, we were able to observe the beginnings of a cultural process called *paidéia*—in the sense of the highest human *areté* – the highest physical and spiritual perfection. Since then, this perfection has also been identified with spiritual culture.<sup>1</sup> The category of *paidéia* is crucial for understanding the sources of Greek culture, because it was organized on completely different grounds than other cultures.

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Imelda Chłodna-Blach, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland  
imeldach@kul.pl • ORCID: 0000-0003-1606-7552

<sup>1</sup> W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. G. Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), vol. I, 61.



*Paidéia* (from the word *pais*—boy, child, Latin *educatio, humanitas, cultura*) was understood as a comprehensive “cultivation,” the rational education of man in the individual and social aspect.<sup>2</sup> For the first time, this term appears precisely in the fifth century BC in Aeschylus, where it was synonymous with “feeding,” or raising children (*Hepta epi Thebas*).<sup>3</sup> In broader terms, it meant the universal, human nature-oriented basis of education or the ideal of education developed by the ancient Greeks and recognized as universal.<sup>4</sup> This term was defined as the process of the child’s education as well as its purpose and result. It was about forming a human being from an early age through education and upbringing. This process was closely related to the reading of human nature. Greeks claimed that the susceptibility to upbringing was inherent in nature, while the use of appropriate methods (the so-called cultivation of nature) is man’s work called culture. Proper education should help a person achieve the ultimate goal of his or her life, which is to activate the supreme potentialities with regard to the supreme object. This process is very long and difficult. Man, unlike the world of nature, is born as unfit to live and to achieve the right purpose of life. In order to develop what is most human in him, he must learn the life that will be his measure. Because it does not happen automatically, it needs help. He can get the help through proper education—*paidéia*, which equips man with the right disposition for proper action. Such permanent dispositions were called *aretai* or *virtues*, becoming like second nature. The task of *paidéia* is

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<sup>2</sup> See: M. A. Krąpiec, “Kultura” [Culture], in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii* [The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], ed. A. Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2005), vol. 6, 132.

<sup>3</sup> See: Aeschylus, *The Seven Against Thebes*, trans. A. Hecht and H. H. Bacon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 22.

<sup>4</sup> See: P. Jaroszyński, “Paideia,” in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii* [The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], ed. A. Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2006), vol. 7, 948.

just to fill the deficiencies of nature. This classical conception had nothing to do with inventing worlds of values. Culture was carrying in itself everything that was needed by man to overcome the broken passage from nature to the person at the level of action. The correction, the repair of these cracks enables the reason that helps the human person to recognize the appropriate means for authentic personal life. Of the various tendencies that drive man in different directions, the reason points to the superior good of the person. Thanks to upbringing and virtues, this direction takes on lasting forms, such as character.

The Greek *paideía*-culture was, therefore, the upbringing of man, the work of the human reason and the will, which aimed at the realization of an ideal, the formation of the more perfect man. The principle of Greek culture was not individualism, but humanism in the sense of raising man in his proper character, true humanity. It was only in Greek culture that education was deliberately directed towards a specific human ideal, and not just to prepare for the profession or to form one social layer within one nation.<sup>5</sup> Isocrates, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle brought significant contributions to the understanding of this notion, which drew attention to the ethical issues of the emerging ideal of education: “They focused less on the practical aims of education, valued ethics and philosophical education—as the most effective tool for the formation of the perfect man. In this way *paideía* became a central concept within the pedagogical reflection with distinct anthropological implications.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: Jaroszyński, “Paideia”, 948.

<sup>6</sup> W. Pawlak, “Z dziejów pojęcia ‘humanitas’” [From the history of the term ‘humanitas’], in: *Humanitas. Projekty antropologii humanistycznej* [Humanitas. Projects of humanistic anthropology], p. 1: *Paradygmaty – tradycje – profile historyczne* [Paradigms—traditions—historical profiles], ed. A. Nowicka-Jeżowa (Warsaw, 2009–2010), 177–178.

### ***Kalokagathía*** **as the crowning of all virtues**

The main motif of Greek culture was the improvement of man. This perfection was referred to by the Greek term *kalokagathía* (beauty-goodness, nobility, perfection).<sup>7</sup> This term is a bundle of words—“beautiful” and “good”—*kalos kai agathos*. Greeks treated them as one term. This ideal is one of the more specific features of Greek culture, starting with Homer. It is in his works for the first time that we see the combination of beauty and good.<sup>8</sup> Later, we see them in Solon,<sup>9</sup> and also in Thucydides.<sup>10</sup> However, the full theory can only be found in Plato and Aristotle. Thus, the fact of the presence of *kalokagathía* at the beginning of Greek culture is extremely important, as it attests to the extraordinary vitality of the word which subsequent philosophers have attempted to explain.<sup>11</sup> *Kalokagathía* more and more often referred to the old ideal of the *areté* covering the whole of man, and all his forces. It was a commitment and an inviting ideal.<sup>12</sup> It was derived from the world of noble notions, but gradually gained a broader meaning. Finally, it began to define the ideal of every citizen seeking to achieve a higher culture, and ultimately this term became synonymous with “civic virtue.”<sup>13</sup>

The combination of both beauty and good in one ideal was possible thanks to a specific, not unequivocal but analogous meaning of both

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<sup>7</sup> See: B. Biliński, “Antyczni krytycy” [Ancient Critics], in: *Meander* no. 9, 11 (1956): 292.

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, XXI V, 52, trans. R. Merrill (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Solon, *Elegies*, passages 39–40.

<sup>10</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, VIII, 4K, 6.

<sup>11</sup> See: P. Jaroszyński, “Kalokagathia,” in: *Człowiek w Kulturze* [Man in Culture] 2 (1994): 31–42.

<sup>12</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. I, 37.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 113.

terms. Plato's understanding of beauty was described in his *Symposium*, saying that it is something that is enjoyed not only by art but science, beautiful laws, beautiful behavior and beautiful bodies, and finally the very idea itself. It was these things that the Greeks said were beautiful. The understanding of good was explained by Aristotle in the *Nicomacheian Ethics*: "All art and all study, and likewise both action and resolution, seem to go to some good and that is why the good is the goal of all aspiration."<sup>14</sup> So the philosopher pointed out that it was not only related to morality, since it was the goal—of action and of production and of cognition, a goal that can be targeted and sought in various ways.

This issue is addressed by Aristotle in the Second Book of *Nicomachean Ethics*. A man can strive for something either because it is morally beautiful, which in the Latin tradition is referred to as the fair good—*bonum honestum*, or because it is useful—*bonum utile*, or because it is pleasant—*bonum delectabile*. The difference between them is that we want the last one because of the pleasure it gives us, the second one because it serves something else, and the first one is an end in itself, we want it for itself. Morality is not limited only to the good of good, but to each of these goods. The task of a virtuous man is the skillful choice of a particular good, taking into account the existing hierarchy. Therefore, the good of good—*bonum honestum* should be regarded as an end in itself, a pleasant good, not a real goal of morality, as it must be measured by a measure of a real relationship with the good itself, while *bonum utile* could not become a goal but it must be good in itself (the goal could not sanctify the means used to achieve it).<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle wrote that it is morally beautiful to act in accordance with the requirements of virtue.<sup>16</sup> This is how the two sides of moral beau-

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104 b, trans. R. Crisp (U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See: Jaroszyński, "Kalokagathia", 34.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099 a 22.

ty are revealed—objective and subjective. What connects them is direct or indirect attribution to *bonum honestum*. The good is the man himself. He is both the subject and the object of morality. Thus, the action we make for the sake of the end in itself is a noble good, also called beauty. Aristotle defines it in the following words in *Rhetoric*: “Beauty is what deserves recognition because it is by itself worthy of choice.”<sup>17</sup> In the ideal of *kalokagathía*, the moral qualities of the human being are directed towards the goal in itself and the good of good—*bonum honestum*. *Kalokagathía* was of great importance in public life—it should be a ruler’s characteristic, as opposed to laziness. It was characteristic of the Greeks to associate good and beauty with moral order, with human action in the broad sense of the word. We are dealing here with the primacy of moral order over the sensual and aesthetic order, and the spiritual order over the physical order.<sup>18</sup>

For the first time the word *kalokagathía* appeared in Xenophon to describe the ideal of his master Socrates.<sup>19</sup> This ideal was mostly moral. As Xenophon wrote, Socrates claimed that only good and beautiful paths lead to true happiness.<sup>20</sup> What makes a person better and better is not practical skills, but moral improvement, especially gaining the virtue of justice (*dikaiosyné*). The expression of a noble disposition was religious cult.<sup>21</sup> Socrates was a teacher of good morals and a model of moral conduct for Xenophon. Thus, Xenophon attributed to him such qualities as the ability to self-control, moderation, simplicity, inner harmony and fervent piety.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (London: Penguin Classics), 1366 a 33.

<sup>18</sup> Jaroszyński, “Kalokagathia”, 447.

<sup>19</sup> See: Xenophon, *Socrates*, 1, 3, 11. See also: Jaroszyński, “Kalokagathia”, 445.

<sup>20</sup> Xenophon, *Socrates*, 1, 6, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4, 49.

<sup>22</sup> K. Głombiowski, *Ksenofont. Żołnierz i pisarz* [Xenophon—soldier and writer] (Wrocław–Warsaw–Cracow, 1993), 25.

*Kalokagathía* was a sign of a general culture, involving the ability to relate (a good relationship) to all people and the gods. It was mainly associated with moral beauty and belonged to the virtues of a free man.<sup>23</sup> As we see, apart from the moral, personal dimension, the ideal of *kalokagathía* also had a social dimension. It was concerned with correct relationships with other people, based on a morally righteous character. A community, as opposed to a cluster (herd), like any individual, should be internally organized. Only then does it deserve the name of the community. This order is based not only on a certain type of unity but also on the hierarchy of goods. So there must be some kind of primordial good called a common good that unites a given community. That is the social dimension of moral beauty.

The wider, cultural meaning of the expression *kalokagathía* was given by Plato. In his works, this concept appears in a separate form: *kalos kai agathos*. It is associated with an educational ideal instilled from an early age and most often refers to morality. *Kalokagathía* in Plato's conception is the goal of *paidéia*. Plato defines the character of this *kalokagathía* through opposition to injustice and wickedness, and thus gives it a very ethical sense.<sup>24</sup> In a narrower sense, it signifies an innate, natural openness to the truth that one must direct in order to become a philosopher, a beautiful and good man. It also means the ability to intuitively recognize what is morally good and legal, and what is not, without the need to establish laws and to continually improve them. The Platonic philosopher in the *Republic* is called *kalos kai agathos*.<sup>25</sup> It is a philosopher who has true knowledge, because he can see what is permanent, universal, invariable—the idea. Only he can determine what is truly just and beautiful, and the views of the

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<sup>23</sup> Xenophon, *Socrates*, 2, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 470 e 9.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 489 e.

whole population revolve between the non-being and the true being.<sup>26</sup> That is why Plato claimed that satisfying the tastes of the masses made the true education of man, based on the criterion of permanent values, impossible.<sup>27</sup> For Plato, the philosopher is also a man of high culture. The features that characterize him are an excellent memory, knowledge, sharpness, a lust for knowledge and perseverance. He is not petty, does not focus on details or on external goods. He values truth, justice, valor. He can control himself. These are the qualities needed to achieve a higher intellectual culture. In shaping such a human being, the role of education and long-standing experience are immense.<sup>28</sup> The Platonic philosopher is the embodiment of the *kalokagathía*—the highest ideal of humanity, characteristic of the classical era of Greek culture. Plato transforms the epic-heroic ideal of man into a new philosophical ideal in this place.

Aristotle's *kalokagathía* is the culmination of all the virtues. It is reached when the detailed virtues are acquired. It refers to the good that is an end in itself (*bonum honestum*). Aristotle in the following words defines the man who possesses the most perfect of the virtues—the noble man: “A person is a noble person because of possessing those goods that are noble for their own sake, and because of doing noble deeds for their own sake. What things, then, are noble? The virtues and the works of virtue.”<sup>29</sup> Among such virtues he mentions justice and moderation. Nobility is therefore complete perfection.<sup>30</sup>

It is the feature of young people who have the character and the way of thinking of free people.<sup>31</sup> *Kalos* means acting in accordance with the

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<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 479 d.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 493 a 7 and c 8.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 487 a 7, 484 d.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. A. Kenny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1248 b, 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1249 a.

<sup>31</sup> See: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134 a, 1179 b.



virtues, the highest happiness, what must be done according to your own will. In *Politics*, Aristotle also notes that it guarantees a successful life in the state.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Megalopsychía (magnanimitas)* as the culmination of culture**

Having ethical excellence (*kalokagathía*) is an indispensable condition for self-worth and the justified pride which Aristotle calls magnanimity [Greek *megalopsychía*, Latin *magnanimitas*].<sup>33</sup> Magnanimity was known long before the rise of Aristotle's ethics. In Homer's poems, magnanimity in the form of aristocratic pride appears as a feature of heroes (Achilles, Odysseus, and others). Homer does not know the word "magnanimity." It is not about the "great soul" but the "great heart" (*megas thymos*) of heroes.<sup>34</sup> The purpose (duty) of these noble knights is to apply for the title of primacy. Consequently, they gain honor and fame. It is a constant pursuit of the highest valor, and thus the path to great fame is precipitated by this sense of pride. It is also a guarantor of the integrity and moral perfection of a well-born man who could not deserve the highest honor if in some sphere of life he acted wickedly or inappropriately.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1281 a.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123 a – 1125 a. See also: A. Krokiewicz, "O wielkodusznym człowieku Arystotelesa" [On the magnanimous man of Aristotle], in: *Meander* 5, no. 1 (1950): 39–48.

<sup>34</sup> The hero becomes "equal to the daimonion" (deity) thanks to the "great heart" and its typical capability of creative zeal. Cf. e.g. *The Illiad*, V 438, 459, XVI 705, XXI 227. See also: A. Krokiewicz, *Moralność Homera i etyka Hezjoda* [The morality of Homer and the ethics of Hesiod] (Warsaw: PWN, 2000), 107–124.

<sup>35</sup> See: E. Heza, "Kryzys arystokratycznego pojęcia arete. Z badań nad historią myśli greckiej" [The crisis of the aristocratic concept of arete. From studies on the history of Greek thought], in: *Etyka* [Ethics] 10 (1972).

Plato used the word *megalopsychia* to define “arrogance,” “ambition”—the Greek *Aphrosyne*.<sup>36</sup>

For Aristotle, magnanimity means a kind of greatness and strength of the soul. The righteous man is the one who considers himself worthy of great things, indeed he deserves them. Justified pride is a belief that one is able to do great things and is characteristic of a man trusting in his own power.<sup>37</sup> The prerequisite of magnanimity is to know oneself. This is the foundation of good self-esteem. To be able to develop, we must therefore stand in the truth about ourselves. Here humility, which is a condition for accepting the truth, helps. It keeps us from striving for what surpasses our capabilities. We must realize our own strengths over what these forces overwhelm.

Magnanimity refers to great things. A magnanimous man has the ability to correctly evaluate great and small goods. Some questions follow here: what are the great things that the souls do in a great manner (*magna anima*)? What is the object of magnanimity? Aristotle explains that great things are desired by those who have the best disposition, or the virtue of magnanimity.<sup>38</sup> In order to understand what these great goods are, one should recall the hierarchy of goods by Aristotle.<sup>39</sup> Among the goods he lists what is morally beautiful (*bonum honestum*), then what is useful (*bonum utile*) and then pleasant (*bonum delectabile*). In this hierarchy, the highest good is the *bonum honestum*, because it is most suited to the specific functions of man (it approaches him to the ultimate goal). This specific function of man is acting in accordance with the reason, while the specific function of a brave man

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<sup>36</sup> See: G. Downey, “The Pagan Virtue of Megalopsychia in Byzantine Syria,” in: *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 76 (1945), 279–286.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1389 a.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1232 a.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104 b 30 ff.

is the same action performed in a particularly good manner.<sup>40</sup> The object of magnanimity is therefore the *bonum honestum*, because only it can perfect the soul (bring it closer to happiness). Man desires it for the sake of itself; it is not easy, but very honorable. Such virtue is virtue because it is the perfection of a particular power, and it is accomplished (perfect) not in any action, but in action which is characterized by greatness or difficulty.<sup>41</sup>

Striving for great goods is difficult, so the virtue of magnanimity also helps in overcoming these difficulties. Although Aristotle distinguished many virtues and grouped them according to the division of powers of the spirit, which they improve, he realized, however, that moral conduct was marked by unity. All virtues are united in the fact that the essence of each is an inner measure whose maintenance is dependent on the particular virtue of prudence. This unity is also guaranteed by the attitude of virtue (man), a certain tendency to act in every situation according to this internal measure, which, according to Aristotle, is beautiful but rare and above all difficult. The greatest of all virtues is magnanimity. It stands for two meanings: first, it consists of a group of human virtues, called *kalokagathía*, and secondly, it consists of the consciousness of their value in the person possessing it, through which virtue is brought to full development. This awareness also makes the generous man want only great things and despise small ones.

Speaking of magnanimity, Aristotle talks about the desire for the highest of external goods, and that is what we give to the gods, what people who hold the highest positions seek, and what is the reward for the noblest deeds. This is honor (*timé*). That is why prudent reason remains with regard to reverence,<sup>42</sup> which is one of the most remarkable features

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<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098 a 12 ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1103 a 31–35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1123 b.

of a magnanimous man. The benevolent man honors virtue above all and knowing that he possesses it, expects this honor for his virtue and for himself from others. Reverence is the greatest external good.<sup>43</sup> It is a kind of worship that people usually give only to the gods. It is inherent in “great deeds.” It is the greatest reward for virtue. Proper reference to reverence and infamy is also a secondary object of magnanimity.

Moreover, Aristotle emphasizes that the righteous man is the most ethically divisible. The more virtues we have, the greater things we are worthy of. The man with the greatest number of virtues is worthy of the greatest things. Reverence is therefore a reward for ethical valor and is awarded only to those who are ethically brave. It is therefore not possible to be justly proud without ethical excellence (*kalokagathía*).<sup>44</sup> The righteous man enjoys the honor of noble people, but he neglects the honors of insignificant people and unimportant acts. The man who favors reasoned pride can thus be recognized after how he addresses honors, wealth, power, success and failures in general. Such a man will be characterized primarily by the virtue of moderation.

Aristotle very much emphasizes the importance of ethical valor. He points out that people who have external goods without having ethical

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle makes a distinction between external goods which are outside the human being and are not an integral part of man (e.g., wealth), and the internal goods, placed higher in the hierarchy, which are a real component of a human being (e.g., body, health, skills, virtues). The scale of external goods corresponds to the scale of internal goods. The higher internal good gives entitlement to the higher external goods while the lower ones entitle to the higher ones. Reverence is placed at the top of the first scale whereas the virtue called magnanimity is at the top of the second scale. Reverence is therefore an external counterpart but also a kind of a virtue test: if someone honors somebody, he confirms his virtue, but if one refuses to give somebody reverence, his virtue is denied. Looking from the perspective of an honored person, he has that virtue. If he does not experience reverence, he does not have such a virtue. The characters of Homer’s epics claimed that: “[...] reverence belongs to the virtue as the light belongs to the sun” (Krokiewicz, *Moralność Homera i etyka Hezjoda* [The morality of Homer and the ethics of Hesiod], 91).

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1124 a.

valor easily fall into pride and impudence and are also mistakenly convinced of their superiority.<sup>45</sup>

The man who is rightly proud face dangers as they come. He is also willing to offer favors, he is eager to help, he is open-minded, he is truthful, he is not vindictive, he is not a gossip, he does not complain or ask for small things or things that can not be changed. He tends to have things that are beautiful rather than useful or beneficial.<sup>46</sup> The pride associated with reasoned pride is ambition. As Aristotle writes, it does not have an equivalent (name) in Greek. He translates it as a moderation in the lust for worship.<sup>47</sup>

As for the consequences for the whole of moral life from such magnanimity, it must be stressed that it presupposes moral perfection (virtuous conduct in every field), because the person cannot be worthy of the highest reverence in some area if he/she does not follow the virtue (behaves badly).<sup>48</sup> This perfection is not to be understood in the current sense, as having an act of all virtues, but as an improvement to given acts (dispositions for them).<sup>49</sup> Such pursuit of greatness in conduct gives unity not only to all virtues, but also to the unity of human character.

Magnanimity is a general virtue that is a condition for the fulfillment of a moral life, by striving for the great, the second by prudence, which unites all virtues as if from within, by maintaining the proper measure of reason in every act.

The disadvantages corresponding to magnanimity are presumption (vanity, *chaunotes*)—when one considers himself worthy of great things, not being worthy of them, without real merit, and exaggerated

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<sup>45</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1124 a.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1125 a.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1125 b.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1123 b 29 ff.

<sup>49</sup> It is complemented by St. Thomas Aquinas in: *Summa Theologiae*, cura et studio P. Caramello, vol. 3 (Taurini, 1952), II–II, q. 129, a. 3, 2.

humility (pusillanimity, *mikropsychía*)—when one does not ask for reverence at all or is considered worthy of something less than what he deserves; and therefore does not consider himself worthy of something great, although he possesses the qualities by which he can rightly be considered worthy of them; he is too shy.<sup>50</sup> Pusillanimity is therefore associated with cowardice and lack of self-confidence, while vanity is associated with presumptuousness.

For Aristotle, magnanimity was a typical virtue of the group of valor, in which the striving for good connected with difficulties is significant. These sources can be sought in the tradition of Homer, where a sense of aristocratic pride forced the greatest hardships in the name of fame, and glory was a kind of immortality to the Greeks, the greatest. Magnanimity was a model of moral perfection, but not everyone could have access to it, as it was possible to acquire only by a few—nobly born individuals.<sup>51</sup> It was the consequence of Aristotle's ethical system, for which the aim (happiness) of man is to act in the most appropriate way—to act rationally. Life in accordance with the precepts of reason guarantees the realization of human potentialities, self-improvement by a proper good. Therefore, anyone who would in any way be deprived of the possibility of intellectual development would also be deprived of virtue and happiness.<sup>52</sup>

This problem could only be solved with the advent of Christianity. The proper perspective for these issues was the concept of the personal God, the *creatio ex nihilo*, which gave rise to the understanding of the human being as a person. It is in the philosophy of St. Thomas that

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<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123 b. See also: *Eudemian Ethics*, 1233 a.

<sup>51</sup> "Nobility is nobleness. The one who has not been born as a noble man will never become noble" (T. Zieliński, *Rozwój moralności w świecie starożytnym od Homera do czasów Chrystusa* [The development of morality in the world of antiquity until the time of Christ], lecture delivered at the public meeting of the Polish Academy of Skills on June 11, 1927 (Cracow, 1927), 4).

<sup>52</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1176 b–1178 a.

magnanimity is understood as a virtue available to every human being. Reverence is due to a rational nature in which all people participate equally. Magnanimity is, however, inseparable from humility. Only when taken together can these virtues direct the proper pursuit of greatness, constantly bearing in mind the constant reflection on the contingency of man. Reverence and fame, which for the ancients was the main motive for the pursuit of greatness, in Christianity gained a new dimension. The new dimension has also gained the greatness to be sought: “Be therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>53</sup>

### **The Meeting of Christianity with Greek *paidéia* and Roman *humanitas***

The Greek culture in antiquity, whose ideals are focused on the term *paidéia*, had a significant impact on the thought and culture of early Christianity, which grew on Hellenistic grounds.<sup>54</sup> Christianity took over the foundations of Greek culture as necessary for the formation of man, although the anthropocentric perspective, of course, was replaced by the theocentric perspective. Christianity was focused not so much on the perfection of man on his own but on his openness to God in the perspective of the ultimate goal of human life, salvation.

Christianity faced the Greek *paidéia* in the first centuries after Christ, especially through the Eastern Fathers of the Church raised in the Hellenic culture.<sup>55</sup> The permeation of concepts, mental categories, and the meaning of certain concepts into Christian thought was made

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<sup>53</sup> Mt 5:48.

<sup>54</sup> An author who clearly emphasized the influence of Greek culture on the Christian religion was Adolf von Harnack. See his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Bd. 1 (Freiburg–Leipzig, 1894), 121–147.

<sup>55</sup> J. Wilk, “Edukacja,” in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii* [The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], ed. A. Maryniarczyk, vol. 3 (Lublin: PTTA, 2002), 18.

possible through the Greek language. The first phase of Christian Hellenism began with the use of this language in the New Testament writings. It was the primary meaning of the word *hellenismos*.<sup>56</sup> It took place in the era of the so-called “Apostolic Fathers.” It was the earliest, archaic period of early Christian thought, which occurred immediately after the apostolic times. It began at the end of the first century and lasted until around the middle of the second century. Among the most significant Church Fathers are Clement of Alexandria, St. Clement of Rome, Justin the Martyr, Origen (Orygenes), the Fathers of Cappadocia (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa).

The fulfillment of the Christian ideal was a life-long pursuit of perfection, approaching God to the measure of the possibility of every individual. In view of this perceived purpose of human life, Christianity began to take the form of a concrete model of perfect life, based on the contemplation of God and on an increasingly perfect union with Him.<sup>57</sup>

### **The conception of magnanimity (*magnanimitas*) of St. Thomas Aquinas**

While gradually discovering the truth about who a person was, both ancient Greeks and Romans encountered problems looking for answers to another question about the ultimate goal of human life. With only some intuition, they claimed that it was an ideal that a

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<sup>56</sup> The Greek term *hellenismos* is a noun formed from the verb form—“I speak Greek” and originally denoted the correct use of the Greek language. The indicated term was, in that very sense, the first term to be used by teachers of rhetoric.

<sup>57</sup> W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 94.



human being can realize through his own power, through the development of intellectual, moral and physical powers.

However, the proper answer to this question has been brought only by Christianity, which, by taking over the most important decisions of Greek philosophy, developed them creatively, thereby completing the concept of man. What it owes to Greek culture is especially philosophy and ethics, which helped to uncover the universal dimension of truth and good. The novelty of Christianity was, above all, the anthropology proposed by it, according to which man is a personal being, transcending the world of nature and the community in which he lives and a new, unknown concept of a personal, transcendental, and omnipotent God who is the Creator of the entire universe and man. This new concept of God had important consequences not only on the level of religion, but also on the levels of culture and civilization. It extended the perspective of human life to a supernatural dimension, emphasizing that the ultimate goal of human-person life is eternal life. The contribution of Christianity to the deeper understanding of culture was significant, because such a perspective had not been provided by any religion or culture until then.

The philosopher who fully answered the question of who man is by showing him in his human action was St. Thomas Aquinas. He devoted much attention to the ethics of virtue for this purpose. We will see St. Thomas' conception of magnanimity by analyzing his reflections on virtue; he listed it among the ingredients of the virtue of valor. St. Thomas relied here on the distinction between the four components of valor made by Cicero in his work *De Inventione*. Cicero pointed to trust, majesty (Latin *magnificentia*), patience (Latin *patientia*) and perseverance (Latin *perseverantia*). St. Thomas pointed out that three more were added to these components, and this was due to Macrobius, who mentioned them in his commentary on Cicero's work entitled *The Dream of Scipio*. Macrobius replaced patience with endurance, perseverance with persistence, and added the following three elements:

magnanimity (Latin *magnanimitas*), self-assurance (Latin *fiducia*) and constancy (Latin *constantia*). Cicero placed magnanimity and self-assurance in trust. St. Thomas explained that trust refers to the element of certainty in hope, while magnanimity to the greatness of the thing expected.<sup>58</sup> As he pointed out, Macrobius added here self-confidence which excluded fear, because fear was the opposite of hope.

The virtue of magnanimity appears at the stage of spiritual preparation. For St. Thomas, it was important from an educational point of view. To be a truly valiant, “great” man, he must be able to develop many virtues, which are auxiliary and the components of bravery. Apart from some intrinsic properties which can help or hinder it, for St. Thomas the most important thing was his own work on himself.<sup>59</sup>

St. Thomas, therefore, followed Cicero in adopting the four component and auxiliary parts of valor, but instead of trusting in his own powers, he put magnanimity (*magnanimitas*). It is the virtue that makes man strive for great things, the goods he expects, for great goods, for spiritual goods—virtues. Magnanimity is thus a sign of a high culture—unparalleledness (lack of mediocrity), consisting of strong but disciplined desires-drives (impulses), great and broad minds, guided by real and high truths. It differs from valor that is about trying to achieve something difficult to achieve, whereas valor aims at withstanding evil which is difficult to endure, requiring a greater power of the spirit.<sup>60</sup> The common feature of valor and magnanimity is that both of these virtues take part in strengthening the spirit in difficult matters. St. Thomas treats magnanimity as part of valor, claiming that he joins it as a secondary virtue with the primary virtue.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 128, a. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa teologiczna* [Summa theological], vol. 21, trans. S. Bełch (London, 1962) explanatory notes, 185.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 129, a. 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 129, a. 5.

virtue of magnanimity is the improvement of the will, and its proper object—the aim is what is great and difficult (best) in every virtue. The components of magnanimity are confidence and humility. The faults of magnanimity are presumption, ambition, vainglory and pusillanimity (*mikropsychia pusillanimitas*).

It is very important to work on developing the virtue of magnanimity. It is based, among others, on the elimination of associated faults. Magnanimity plays a key role in the process of education (upbringing). In practice, it is extremely helpful to develop in man the virtue of responsibility for creating a high culture, so that he is ready to take on something difficult and assume the responsibility of completing the work undertaken. This should be accompanied by help in recognizing talents and the methods of how to use them. The scope of tasks must be adapted to the skills and developmental stages of the person. Unfortunately, we often face situations in which people, especially young people, often fail to fulfill their commitments. This may be due, on the one hand, to the fact that the tasks they have undertaken are too difficult, and on the other hand, many people do not have the virtue of perseverance that helps them complete a difficult task. In developing the virtues of magnanimity, it also helps to promote healthy competition based on fair play. Nowadays it is often distorted, leading to unhealthy competition, and in extreme cases it becomes a source of envy. Nevertheless, this is a very important educational tool that should be used in a skillful way to help to educate a mature, responsible man. Apart from the above methods of shaping magnanimity, example is of great importance. Firstly that given by the parents, then by peers and teachers. Therefore, it is extremely important that the child is provided with proper growth conditions at every stage of his development.

## The object of magnanimity

Like in every virtue, here also the object is the good, but in the case of magnanimity, it is primarily the noble good which is great and difficult at the same time. These properties of the good are recognized by the person through cognition and appropriate spiritual preparation.<sup>62</sup> To be able to achieve such a good, man needs support on the part of virtues that are perfected through education and the grace of God. Man is not self-sufficient.

Aristotle associated magnanimity with reverence, which is a reward for the noblest deeds.<sup>63</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas shares this view, but he objectified magnanimity in such a way that he conditioned it on the object of a great and difficult good. Thomas pointed out that these types of goods were spiritual goods. He emphasized that thanks to this virtue, man is able to distinguish great goods from small goods.<sup>64</sup> The first are the aim in themselves, and the second are the means to achieve higher goals, so they are good thanks to their usefulness and functionality.

Because the achievement of this type of goods is demanding, in this action two main components of magnanimity—trust and humility—help. The task of the first is to uphold in man the hope that he will be able to realize that above-average goal he aspires to, to be able to achieve a difficult good. The virtue of humility is focused on maintaining a balance between self-confidence, which removes discouragement, and presumption, originating in insufficient knowledge about ourselves. Finally, the virtue of humility has its relation to God-Creator, to the gifts that He gave to man. The man who has this virtue

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 21, II-II, q. 128, a. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1123 b.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 21, II-II, q. 132, a. 2.

is aware of what he has received from God. This is based on the sense of human dignity and self-confidence.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Considerations of magnanimity can be combined with the explanation of what is high culture in man. Looking at magnanimity from the side of its object, we can see the essence of the universally understood high culture: the man who holds this virtue and receives grace is measured with great things, takes responsible tasks, does not rest on what is small, mediocre, irrelevant. He bravely overcomes the difficulties that appear in his way. By remaining in harmony with the reason, he undertakes the effort of working on his abilities and aims high in order to develop his potential to the highest possible degree. It is not easy, but by nature man is equipped with the ability to work out the virtue of bravery, and the magnanimity that helps him make his life more noble, and thus more human.

Looking at magnanimity from the perspective of its object, the essence of universally understood high culture means that man—by the possessed virtues and received grace—faces great goods; he undertakes responsible tasks without being limited to what is small, mediocre, and irrelevant. Man bravely overcomes the difficulties that stand in the way. Following the precepts of reason, he makes the effort to work on his abilities, he aims high, bearing in mind the development of his potentialities to the highest possible degree, which Aristotle calls *optimum potentiae*. The realistic concept of a person revealed that—because of transcendence—the ultimate goal, the end of human cognition and love is perfection; namely holiness, based on the unification of man with God. The definition of holiness proposed by Thomas

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 21, II-II, q. 161, a. 3c.

Aquinas is a complete realization (actualization) of the human potential with reference to God as the absolute and the most perfect being. The maximum actualization of the spiritual activity of man, especially the cognitive and volitional one—that is, love—constitutes the greatest perfection of the human person. If this activity—cognition and love—refers to God, it is a peculiar perfection of only holiness. Such an understanding of holiness is synonymous with the highest development of the human person, hence meaning the state of man that is fully perfect. Man reaches the peak of his development potential, the highest level of culture, when he is united with God.



The Aristotelian and Thomistic  
conception of magnanimity (*magnanimitas*)  
in the context of integral human development

SUMMARY

The Aristotelian and Thomistic conception of magnanimity (*magnanimitas*) has grown on the grounds of the philosophical understanding of high culture in man. It was preceded by the appearance of such concepts as *paidéia* and *kalokagathía*. Having ethical excellence (*kalokagathía*) is an indispensable condition for self-worth and justified pride, called by Aristotle magnanimity. For Aristotle, magnanimity was a typical virtue of the group of valor, in which striving for the good connected with difficulties is significant. Greek culture in antiquity, whose ideals were focused on the term *paidéia*, had a significant impact on the thought and culture of early Christianity, which grew on Hellenistic grounds. We will see St. Thomas' conception of magnanimity by analyzing his reflections on virtue as he listed it among the ingredients of the virtue of valor. Considerations of magnanimity can be combined with the explanation of what is high culture in man. The realistic concept of a person revealed that—because of transcendence—the ultimate goal, the end of human cognition and love is perfection. Such an under-

standing of holiness is synonymous with the highest development of the human person, meaning the state of man that is fully perfect. Man reaches the peak of his development potential, the highest level of culture, when he is united with God.

**Keywords:** magnanimity, culture, *paidéia*, *kalokagathía*, Christianity, the human person, the good, virtue

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