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Jameson Critical Essay Contest Winners

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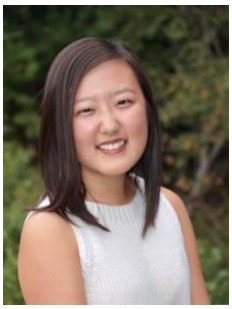

Sonic Ritual: Defending Theological Beauty in the Music of Arvo Pärt

HOPE CHUN

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I. Introduction

A MAN ONCE PRESENTED HIS SON to his town's esteemed visitor, Fyodor Dostoevsky. The young boy, only twelve years old, had quickly gained recognition throughout the town as a poet, and his father was in search of an appraisal. As Dostoevsky read through one of the boy's pieces, the town held its breath. Finally, an evaluation was pronounced: "your poetry…is meaningless." Stunned, the town inquired after the verdict, to which Dostoevsky conveyed a simple sentiment: because the boy was only twelve—because he had not experienced any suffering in life—his art lacked the capacity to have depth, meaning, and beauty.

The place of suffering in beauty is an idea which Christian theologians have given serious consideration throughout history. For Christians, the fullest demonstration of beauty occurred on Easter morning, when the body of Christ was resurrected from the dead. In considering this claim, theologians are quick to emphasize the latter portion of the clause: the resurrection is beautiful precisely because it was a resurrection *from the dead*. In order to comprehend the immensity and height of the resurrected Christ, Christians first need to be thoroughly acquainted with the depths of the preceding days. Jeremy Begbie summarizes this complex: "*In and through* this particular torture, crucifixion, and death, God's love is displayed at its most potent." Only through

Christ's sufferings can Christians begin to grasp God's beauty; we come to understand that God's beauty is that which reaches, extends toward, and redeems even the most "abysmal ugliness of sin."[1]

If fullness of theological beauty is made possible only through careful recognition of "abysmal ugliness," failure to dwell appropriately on the events of the cross, theologians conclude, results in sentimentality, not beauty. When the cross is bypassed, theologians instruct a strict forfeit of the description of "beautiful." The tendency towards sentimentality is a slippery slope and can be described as a "premature grasp for Easter morning, a refusal to follow the three days of Easter as three days in an irreversible sequence of victory over evil." In other words, sentimentality arises when victory in itself is desired, rather than recognizing the necessity of a counterpart over which to have victory. Because the fullness of beauty was made possible only in and through the suffering and death of Christ, the Christian narrative is one which demands protection against sentimentalism.

To guard against this "premature grasp," Begbie and others suggest an active attunement to Christ on the cross: "a constant remembrance of the cross will prevent the pleasure that rightly attends beauty from sliding into sentimentality, for beauty at its richest has been forged through the starkness and desolation of Good Friday: indeed, as the Revelation to Saint John reminds us, the risen Lamb on the throne bears the marks of suffering."[2] Begbie aptly acknowledges the "pleasure" and ease that seems to accompany sentimentality. To be sure, skipping directly to the resurrection has its appeal. The theological account of

[1] Jeremy Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2020), 43. Italics added.

[2] Ibid., 44.

beauty, however, claims that in doing so, one denies themself the possibility of encountering "beauty at its richest."

Scottish composer James MacMillan considers himself actively engaged in the work of counter-sentimentality. Deeply concerned about attention to the cross, MacMillan crafts narrative arcs in his music, utilizing "music of different qualities to battle and to create their own dramas as expressive of that conflict that God came to engage in Jesus Christ."[3] Through complex, dissonant, eclectic means, MacMillan paints landscapes of sonic suffering which he then transforms into "novel and utterly beguiling beauty."[4] By sequentially walking through musical conflict, the beauty MacMillan eventually arrives at is *that much* deeper, richer, and reflective of theological beauty.

The idea of transformation certainly appears to be a non-negotiable theological premise to the fullness of beauty. Notably, theologians are not the only scholars to stress this concept. From a musicological standpoint, a similar conclusion arises regarding what deems a style of music "spiritual." Robert Sholl discusses spirituality—as opposed to modernity—as "a search to understand God despite such 'rationality.' It is not a form of escapism from modernity. Rather, spirituality is a consciousness that has absorbed and even reconfigured the problems of modernity through alternative and sometimes equally rational discourses."[5] Sholl's language is highly reflective of Begbie's description of theological beauty: spirituality in music, according to Sholl, is *not* an 'escape' from the conflicts of modernity, but rather a 'reconfiguration'—a transformation—of modernity's means towards a beautiful end.

[3] Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 181.
[4] Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 182.
[5] Robert Sholl, "Arvo Pärt and spirituality," in *The Cambridge Companion To Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 141.

MacMillan's music is not the only kind to emerge as a decidedly religious style since the 20th century. The so-called "Holy Minimalist" tradition, commonly identified as the music of Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, and John Tavener, emerged towards the end of the 20th century as a spiritually-oriented take on minimalism. Broadly put, the music can be characterized by its contemplative nature created through reductionistic, static, and repetitive means. Although the tradition has garnered and sustained mass appeal—both in scholarly and popular circles—MacMillan is less than compelled:

> The New Simplicity style sets out to be iconic. It sets out to have no sense of conflict. It's a music that's in a kind of transcendent state and that's why it's beautiful. But that's also why it exists in one level, there is a deliberate avoidance of conflict…an avoidance of the dialectical principles that have been in Western music through Beethoven and before…for me spirituality is not something you hive off into some kind of aesthetically pure, sanitized environment but it's something that has come out of our nature, physical and corporeal existence.[6]

MacMillan seems to charge music of the "New Simplicity" with sentimentalist tendencies. Because much of the music of the Holy Minimalist tradition exists in an aurally pleasing, transcendent state for its entirety, working through simplicity rather than complexity, MacMillan is wary of its identification as "spiritual music." He points to the apparent avoidance of conflict, suggesting that the music reaches prematurely for victory without raw, true contact with adversity.

In a review in *Music & Letters*, David Clarke expresses similar concerns. Clarke cautions against the "bubble" constructed by some Holy Minimalist music—an idea which resonates with MacMillan's critique of the music creating an "aesthetically pure, sanitized environment." Clarke unpacks his concern: "[Pärt's] tintinnabuli style—with its rejection of atonality and other modernist complexities—thus becomes a cloister in

[6] Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 179-180.

which to immure himself against the conflict, confusion and fragmentation of both the social conditions of the outside world and the language of the symbolic artefacts created in response to them. It is almost a refusal to engage with musical developments at all: a kind of resolute silence articulated through music."[7]

The theological groundedness of criticisms from MacMillan and Clarke prompts serious questions: is the beauty experienced when engaging with music of the Holy Minimalist tradition mere sentimentality? And what of the mass appeal to this music—does this speak to a larger cultural tendency towards sentimentalist ease? Through an examination of his musical attention to time and special consideration of ritual in relation to the Orthodox faith, this paper constructs a defense of theological beauty in the music of Arvo Pärt, responding to MacMillan's critique by adjusting the criteria of what qualifies as the theologically beautiful in music.

II. Dwelling Respite

At first listen, Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978) appears to serve as prime feeding material for MacMillan's charges. Translated as "Mirror in the Mirrors," *Spiegel* is one of Pärt's most well-known works, representatively showcasing the composer's tintinnabulation technique as one of the first works composed in this style. Scored originally for solo violin and piano, the piece has since enjoyed twelve different scorings due to its mass appeal. From an analytical standpoint, MacMillan's choice of the description "simple" is apt, and it is tempting to attribute *Spiegel's* successful reception to the apparent ease with which one can listen to the piece. A brief analysis of Pärt's compositional style and its exemplification through *Spiegel* will assist

[7] David Clarke, "Review," *Music & Letters* 74, no. 5 (1994): 658.

in both dissecting and considering the validity of MacMillan's critique.

Any analysis of Pärt's music would be remiss without discussion of his tintinnabulation technique, a method of composition developed by the composer after an eight-year hiatus of compositional silence. A tintinnabulous work consists of two voices: the "melody" voice moves stepwise diatonically, and the "triad" voice plays notes contained in the tonic triad.[8] Throughout the entire work, melody and harmony are conflated, where one gives definition to the other. Paul Hillier describes the aural effect as "a blend of diatonic scales and triadic arpeggios in which harmonic stasis is underpinned by the constant presence (actual or implied) of the tonic triad."[9]

As one his first tintinnabuli works, *Spiegel* helpfully demonstrates Hillier's description.[10] Both instruments, violin and piano, remain rhythmically consistent for the entirety of the piece. The pianist's right hand provides the triad voice, opening the piece with broken F-major triads in second inversion. The harmonic underpinning Hillier mentions is immediately introduced as the left hand of the piano strikes a pedal F in octaves in the second measure, reinforcing the already-overt F-major tonality. For the most part, the piano holds faithfully to F-major triads, occasionally drifting to closely-related harmonies for a measure (e.g. m. 4, m. 8, m. 12, etc.) before returning back to the tonic. Notably, the piano part is notated on three staves; on either side of the right hand's triad voice, the left hand alternates between sustaining low pedals and striking single notes in the high register above the triad voice, reminiscent of bells. A sense of registrational balance is

[8] Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.
[9] Ibid., 90.

[10] The first page of the score can be found in Appendix A.

maintained as the left hand offsets each low pedal with a ringing note in the opposite register.

Married to the triad voice is the melody voice played by the violin. In sustained pitches, the violin moves in paired gestures, giving aural rendering to the work's title, "Mirror in the Mirrors." Following three measures of rest, the violin begins on an G, held for the duration of the measure, before moving stepwise to A, held for two and a half measures. The latter fragment of the gestural pair—separated from the first two notes by rest—"reflects" the preceding ascent, beginning on B, and then descending stepwise to A, both notes held for corresponding durational lengths, and followed by rest. The next gesture begins on F, moves to G, and rises to A, and then is reflected by a mirrored descent beginning on C, descending to B, and arriving on A. This pattern continues for the work's entirety. Each pair of gestures in the violin consists of a diatonic ascent with a corresponding descent, with the scale elongated by one note at each iteration.

Spiegel is entirely self-contained within a single tonality, and consists of only broken triads and sustained stepwise movement. It is for these reasons that MacMillan points to the "musical means" of Pärt's compositional style as simple and "monodimensional."[11] As opposed to the harmonically complex musical conflict featured in MacMillan's works, the label of "simple" undoubtedly carries negative connotations. To be sure, *Spiegel's* rhythmic pattern never changes, and the range of pitches is impressively limited for a ten-minute work. Moreover, MacMillan's observation of the "lack of transformation" seems equally valid: the music hardly departs from an F-major tonality, overtly established by broken tonic triads in the pianist's right hand. From the

[11] Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 180.

standpoint which recognizes the traditional teleological arc as the single way to express transformation into beauty, one may conclude that *Spiegel* has no place next to a passion narrative.

A closer examination of MacMillan's conclusive arrival at "simplicity" from "reduction" is critical in crafting a response. Andrew Shenton offers a different perspective on simplicity: "reduction certainly doesn't mean simplification, but it is the way…to the most intense concentration on the essence of things."[12] The consistency of rhythm and minimal harmonic material contribute to a reduced musical medium with which Pärt works. However, to Shenton, it is imperative that this not be mistaken for simplicity. Through reduced resources (limited melodic and harmonic range and static rhythm), Shenton argues that Pärt's music calls for an intensified concentration—a heightened level of engagement *necessarily demanded* by the sparseness of its means. Quite contrary to increased 'ease,' the reduction of materials actually requires greater concentration. Maeve Heaney agrees, illuminating unique corporeal capacities of "empty" music:

> There are other types of music that… stretch our awareness of ourselves, those around us and the world we inhabit, precisely because of their "emptiness." We wonder what's coming next, and wait for it; we become more aware of the other notes and their relationship to each other, precisely because there are so few, rather like being in a room with one other person as opposed to a crowd: attention is heightened.[13]

Both Shenton and Heaney point to the "emptiness" of simplified musical means as precisely the way in which greater awareness is prompted. Without competing harmonies walking the listener through a storyline, fulfilling expectations and filling

[12] Andrew Shenton, *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

[13] Maeve Louise Heaney, *"Can Music 'Mirror' God? A Theological-Hermeneutical Exploration of Music in the Light of Arvo Part's Spiegel Im Spiegel." Religions* 5, no. 2 (2014): 366.

the ear with constant movement—without clashing melodies and rhythmic busyness—the listener is forced to sit with the reduced material, forced to reckon with stillness. Indeed, as composer Igor Stravinsky repeatedly observed, there is a difficulty in crafting Apollonian unity that is far beyond that of Dionysian chaos and contrast. Rather than a simplification of music, the self-contained unity Pärt creates in *Spiegel* is an invitation into heightened concentration on the moment at hand. In this way, it is perhaps a misconception to attribute the wide receptivity of this piece to its ease on the ears of listeners. Perhaps *Spiegel*'s success speaks to a larger cultural hunger for space to dwell within a single moment.

A look at one of *Spiegel's* appearances in film scores supports this suggestion. In *Wit* (2001), *Spiegel im Spiegel* accompanies four different scenes, the content of the second lending particular insight to the idea of dwelling spaces. In this scene, Vivian, a 48-year-old professor with terminal cancer, breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience:

> *Do not forget that you are seeing the most interesting aspects of my tenure as an in-patient receiving experimental chemotherapy of advanced metastatic ovarian cancer. But as I am a scholar I feel obliged to document what it is like here most of the time between the dramatic climaxes. In truth, it is like this: "You cannot imagine how time can be so still...It hangs. It weighs. And yet there is so little of it. It goes so slowly. And yet it is so scarce. If I were writing this scene it would last a full 15 minutes. I would lie here and you would sit there…*[14]

Vivian's remark reveals how inaccurately media—whether films or classical music—portrays the temporality of real experiences. *Wit*, by its nature as a film, operates under time constraints, having no choice but to jump from crux to crux in Vivian's narrative. Vivian implores the audience to recognize, however, that this portrayal of her story is not reflective of the lived experience. Her time with cancer consisted

[14] *Wit*, directed by Mike Nichols, (HBO Films, 2001).

of much *in-between* space. In a culture dominated by action-climax-resolution trajectories, Vivian highlights the equal importance of the *in-between*—the space without "drama," where nothing "happens." She speaks to the necessity of recognizing this space: "If I were writing this scene it would last a full 15 minutes. I would lie here and you would sit there…" It is not surprising that *Wit* chose to employ *Spiegel* for this scene. The meditative, suspended temporality evoked by *Spiegel* offers an aural rendering of the "in-between" space Vivian implores the audience to remember. And further, the reduction of musical means challenges the listener to an intensified level of concentration on this intermittent space.

If Shenton's proposal suggests that an intensified concentration induced by *Spiegel* invites listeners into an opportunity to dwell on a single moment, Vivian's story further suggests that spaces which are immobile—those which are "non-dramatic," the merely "in-between"—are actually better reflections of lived experiences, and that the nature of cultural pace and storytelling denies this innate part of human experience. The propositions argued and alluded to by Shenton and Vivian respectively have deeply theological implications. Remembering that MacMillan's critique rests heavily on the seeming "lack of Good Friday" in Pärt's music, I suggest that MacMillan's need for teleological sequence fails to sit inside Holy Saturday in the manner which it would have been experienced by those living through those three days in history. Alan Lewis calls for two simultaneous readings of the passion narrative. On the one hand, readers of the narrative *should* read Good Friday in light of Resurrection Sunday; armed with the luxury of an awareness of the larger picture, modern readers can and should read with anticipation of the events of Sunday. However, at the same time, Lewis entreats

readers to a gospel reading which is "discovered only as it happens."[15] Although the narrative can be read with the expectation of the resurrection, an empathic connection to those present at the crucifixion is lost when this is the only way the story is read. Lewis reminds modern readers: "On the day after his death, Jesus is no hero, savior, or redeemer. He is dead and gone, convicted as a sinner, a rebel and a blasphemer, who has paid the price of tragic failure."[16] In order to become accurately acquainted with the depth of the crucifixion, one must remember that for those who were there, a whole day separated Good Friday from the resurrection; there was a full twenty-four hours of desolate *space* between elements of the narrative which are often too hastily joined together.

It would seem that a musical focus on trajectory, such as the one MacMillan adheres to, is akin to the first kind of biblical reading, that which reads the cross in light of the resurrection. To engage with the second kind of reading, a representation—be it musical or otherwise—must account for the full day separating the two dramatic cruxes. Just as important as the nodes of climax is the thread connecting them: the dwelling space which spins *in-between* the narrative junctures. The in-between static despair of Holy Saturday, which modern readers easily bypass—is central to the story of Good Friday. I am suggesting that the full attention to the cross, which Begbie and MacMillan identify as critical to counter-sentimentalist work, must account for dwelling space to sit within Holy Saturday, and that it is only when a two-fold reading of the passion narrative is embraced that one can truly attune themself to the conflict of Good Friday. The static suspension of time

[15] Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy*, 41.

[16] Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection, A Theology of Holy Saturday*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 45.

evoked in Pärt's music offers such a dwelling place. Rather than jumping from crux to crux, *Spiegel* draws out a single moment—the single Saturday—and suspends time. It calls attention to time itself, creating an environment that invites listeners to sit and dwell. It promotes not passivity, but *heightened concentration* on the moment of dwelling. Why does it appeal? Because inherent to human nature, inherent to the biblical narrative of the fullest demonstration of beauty, is the desperate need for space to stop and dwell. When the din of the city clamors on, deep suffering begs for stillness.

III. Ritualistic Transformation

Critics would likely point out that the Holy Minimalist invitation to dwell in the in-between spaces still fails to address the issue of transformation, which has already been established as a critical facet of expressions of theological beauty. I have worked to make the case that Pärt's music sits inside Holy Saturday, evoking a suspension of time that allows for attention to the in-between space that is necessary if one is to engage with a reading of the passion narrative which is "discovered only as it happens"—the type of reading that is indispensable if one is desiring to fully attune themself to the depths of the crucifixion. That being said, beauty still requires transformation; no amount of dwelling on the "abysmal ugliness" of sin and brokenness is of value unless it is to be transformationally redeemed. While dwelling is crucial—and, I suggest, too often dismissed by the teleology of Western culture at large—it cannot be the full picture.

MacMillan seems to imply that there is a particular method of musical representation that is most fit for expressing transformation. As already discussed, MacMillan's style utilizes a transformation

of dissonance.[17] The depth of Good Friday, painted through eclecticism and the battling of "different qualities" of music, is transformed into an "utterly beguiling beauty."[18] MacMillan's conception of beautiful transformation, then, centers on a *transformation of* the same dissonant, complex means through which he expressed turmoil. Because Pärt instead remains harmonically and rhythmically static, the accusation against him is that the music is non transformative. How can such a work convey the transformational component that is part and parcel of theological beauty? Benjamin Skipp suggests an alternative take on the concept of transformation:

> It is possible that the subject of the work *is* about transformation, but in an entirely different manner to the kind of transformation experienced within dialectical works. There is no sense of dramatic conflict followed by synthesis. The work occupies a ritualized space, presenting a fixed framework of an action repeated nine times at the same time as enabling those taking part to enter various new spiritual states. In this way it is most closely resembled by the processional character of certain rituals within the Christian liturgy.[19]

Skipp claims capacity for transformation based not on dialectical principles, but through musical semblance to ritual. To fully consider this suggestion, it is helpful to examine the musical elements in action, representatively demonstrated in Pärt's *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1996).[20]

The piece, a canon for string orchestra and one bell, begins with the single bell, striking an A4 four times with varying lengths of rest in between each note. In so doing, the bell dictates the tonal parameters for the rest of the piece: all seven minutes of *Cantus* sit within an A-minor sonority. The first violins, divided, are the first strings to enter. In perfect fifths, they begin at E6 and

[17] Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 181.
[18] Ibid., 182.
[19] Benjamin Skipp, "Out of Place in the 20th Century: Thoughts on Pärt's Tintinnabuli Style" *Tempo* 63, no. 249 (2009): 10. This particular quote is in reference to *Fratres* (1977), hence the specification of "nine" repetitions, but can be conceptually applied to other tintinnabuli works. Italics added.
[20] See Appendix B for score.

A6 and descend three notes diatonically in a half-note, quarter-note alternating rhythm.[21] After three notes, they begin again at E6 to start another descent, this time four notes long. The pattern continues. At each iteration, one note along the descent of an A-minor scale is added, thereby extending the line in an additive fashion, continually delaying the return to the top E6, and thwarting any sense of rhythmic predictability as both the agogic placement and durational value of the top E6 are unpredictable. As the number of pitches in each iteration of the descending scale increases by one note at each iteration, the top note—which a listener may attempt to latch onto as the best possible candidate for a dependable "agogic foothold"—does not maintain durational consistency. At times, it is one beat long, and at other times, it lasts for two beats. At times, it falls on the downbeat, and at others, it arrives on beat four. Thus, it cannot serve as an anchor.

Without a dependable foothold, *Cantus* denies the listener anticipatory points of arrival, thwarting any notion of an expectation-fulfillment complex. Narrative arc, which requires points of arrival and goals to build toward, is a nonentity. *Cantus* effectively uproots the possibility of latching onto narrative footholds, thus creating a static, suspended single moment. Rather than propelling forward—narrating a story as is the aim of traditional tonal harmony—*Cantus* freezes a single tick on a timeline, expanding it upwards, outwards, inwards, suspending the present moment.

A similarly disorienting effect is achieved between all five voices of the canon. After the first violins begin, the second violins, also divided and in perfect fifths (E4 and A4), enter one measure later in the same

[21] Further analysis in this paragraph considers only the top line of the first violin part, as this line contains the melody voice; the bottom line serves as the triad voice, and for the purposes of describing a pitch-related compositional structure, will be disregarded.

fashion as the first violins. The difference, however, lies in rhythmic duration: the second violins sustain each note for double the rhythmic value as the first violins. In other words, the second violins move through the same pitches at half the rate as the first violins. The three remaining voices—viola, cello, and double bass—continue the pattern, each presenting the minor descent at double the durational values (moving at half the speed) as the previous voice, creating a proportionally augmented canon. By presenting each voice in augmentation, Pärt simultaneously evokes five distinct layers of temporality.

Both of these compositional tactics—the horizontal additive elongation within a voice and vertical augmentation between voices—exemplify quasi-repetition that is frequently found in Pärt's music. Whereas American minimalism is broadly characterized by the motoric, exact repetition of short phrases, Pärt's music distinguishes itself through its *quasi*-repetitiveness; listeners of his music can sense a repetitive circularity as the music hovers within a limited range of pitches, but they never receive the exact restatement of a phrase or gesture. Pärt's lines are constantly undergoing subtle changes. Skipp's suggestion that Pärt's music is aligned with Christian ritual seems to be founded on the nature of these "almost" repetitions. Notably, the pattern itself is easily identifiable. A simple rule governs the individual lines and their interactions with each other, and the work abides faithfully for its entirety. Thus, it is clear that compositionally, Pärt's music operates out of a fixed, formulaic technique; a prescribed set of rules serves as a rigid framework.

However, the ends of these means are very much *unfixed*. Although a fixedness could also be attributed to styles such as American minimalism which presents exact restatements of repetitions, it is precisely

through Pärt's quasi-repetition which grants his music semblance to ritual in a way that would be inappropriate to associate with American minimalism. Pärt's ritualistic repetitions are fixed in that they are governed by a fixed rule (a rule of elongation or augmentation), but not fixed in that they do not exactly repeat themselves. Thus, the aural effect of his music is considerably different from that of his American counterparts. The listener of *Cantus* cannot perceive the fixedness. Because of the continual disorientation (by way of rhythmic, durational, and agogic unpredictability) the listener is not consciously aware of just how rigid the formula actually is. With the exact restatements of American minimalism, the listener is granted the benefit of full predictability. By contrast, listeners of Pärt are denied any sense of predictability; they are denied the ease of literal repetitions which allow the mind to "turn off." How does a work like *Spiegel* or *Cantus* evoke a heightened concentration on the moment at hand? It is precisely through their unpredictability—an unpredictability made possible only through a fixed, formulaic compositional structure—that the listener must concentrate more intensely than if they could harmonically or melodically anticipate the music's direction.

The theological parallels to the practice of Christian ritual are striking. In ritualistic practices, such as the recitation of a liturgy or confessional prayer, the practitioner begins with an established set of text—a prescribed "set of rules": a liturgy is recited every Sunday…the same words of a confessional prayer are lifted each morning at sunrise. There is a fixity inherent to ritualistic material and the manner in which it is engaged. However, in and through the fixed framework of repeated texts and rites, the practitioner is seeking something foundationally and necessarily

*un*predictable: engagement with the divine. This claim is illustrated well through the particular Orthodox practice of hesychasm. In hesychastic practices, Orthodox Christians quiet themselves into a state of silence, repeating a short phrase—whether it be a prayer or line of scripture—over themselves. The two fixed components of quieting the self and repeating a phrase are practiced with the intention of entering into a state of open receptivity; the aim is to quiet one's own soul in order to embody utmost receptivity to the voice of God. Hesychasm, like Pärt's quasi-repetition, utilizes fixed practices in order to sever the mind from its desire for control and rationality, instead challenging the practitioner to intensified concentration on the task of listening receptively to the free, unpredictable movement of the divine. The unfixity born out of fixity, then, unites the music of Pärt with the concept of ritual.

This semblance is critical when addressing MacMillan's criticism of a lack of transformation, for, to be sure, the goal of ritual—the hope of those engaging in ritualistic practices—*is transformation.* The fixed framework of ritual is available for the person of faith to walk through the practices of faith even when they do not feel as though they have faith at that moment. The ritualistic practitioner, always seeking transformation towards greater proximity to the divine, can turn to the rituals of tradition to cultivate a heart open to transformation.

Moreover, tintinnabulation as a whole serves as a further illustration of ritualistic transformation. Because the melody voice moves in stepwise motion against a triad voice which sits on pitches of the tonic triad, dissonances and resolutions permeate Pärt's tintinnabulous works. *Cantus*, demonstratively, consists of continual tensions and releases as sustained pitches a major second apart frequently sit against

each other before resolving to consonant intervals. Although not teleological, where a contained section of tension and conflict becomes transformed into a contained beauty, Pärt's tintinnabulations, instead, creates a sea of tensions (conflict) and resolutions that are continually at play. Pärt paints a circular, continual cycle of Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday, much like the continuous nature of ritual, where there is unceasing transform*ing*.

Although it may be considered static by the standards of traditional harmonic analysis, there is much in Pärt's music which lends itself to the language of transformation—and more specifically, to a state of *continuous* transformation. An amendment to a premise of MacMillan's charge is now made possible: far from a "sanitized" space free of conflict, Pärt's music is structurally *made up* of tensions and releases which ebb and flow fluidly throughout the work's entirety. Through evoking a continuous state of transformation, as opposed to a contained section of conflict followed by an equally self-contained section of resolution, Pärt's music embodies a live, present transformation—as if it is occuring in the moment. Where MacMillan demands teleological sequence, Pärt paints a sonic rendering of a fixed practice which leads to continuous transformation towards the unpredictable, *unfixed* freedom that comes when posturing oneself receptively towards the divine.

IV. Conclusion

Although the religiously-associated music of Arvo Pärt may not contain the musical elements that have been identified by scholars like Begbie and MacMillan as theologically accurate expressions of beauty, my aim through this paper has been to adjust the criteria for what qualifies as the theologically beautiful in music.

MacMillan's critique rested on the "lack of conflict" and, consequently, the lack of transformative capacity. He charged Holy Minimalist music as existing solely in a "transcendent state," as something "sanitized" and "hived off," thus refusing raw contact with the adversity of the crucifixion.[22]

To address these charges, this paper first examined *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), revealing the way that Pärt grants *unique* attention to the cross. Through reduced melodic and harmonic means, Pärt challenges the listener to a heightened level of concentration on the moment at hand, inviting the reader into the in-between space which narrative teleology often dismisses. Pärt's music acquaints a listener to the depths of the crucifixion precisely by evoking a suspended timescape characteristic of deep suffering. His music expresses the passion narrative as it would have been endured by those living through those three days in history; his music grants space to dwell inside Holy Saturday.

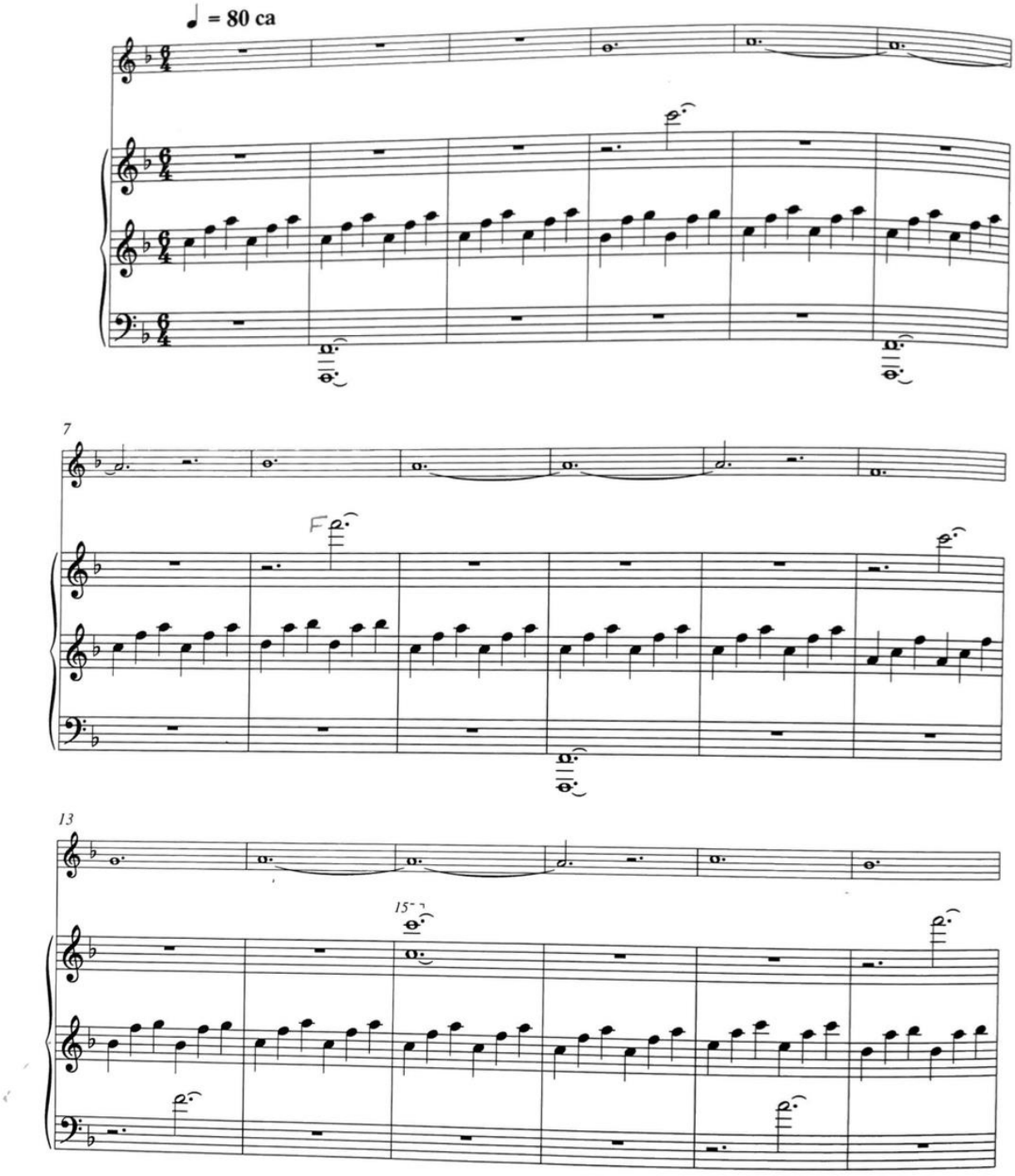
To address MacMillan's second criticism, I turned to *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1996) to examine Pärt's use of an additive formula and proportional augmentation to craft multiple layers of quasi-repetition. Precisely through these fixed means, Pärt thwarts expectations, denying the listener the ease of teleological predictability and instead inviting the listener into a receptive openness towards the unpredictable. The continuous dissonances and resolutions resulting from the mechanisms of tintinnabulation, too, contribute to the presence of transformation in Pärt's music. And, just as with Christian rituals, the end aim of fixed practices is transformation of the individual. Thus, there is transformation at work in Pärt's music. Although it does not take linear shape like

[22] Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 180.

MacMillan's music, it is an equally potent expression of transformation which cannot be dismissed.

To be sure, there is room within the conversation on theological beauty for both MacMillan's sequential, teleological expression and Pärt's continuous, suspended evocation, and, undoubtedly, others as yet to be explored. I have strived to illuminate a possible response to criticisms leveraged against the music of Arvo Pärt by broadening the criteria for musical representations of theological beauty, with the hope that future scholarship will continue to pursue consideration of beauty and its sonic renderings.

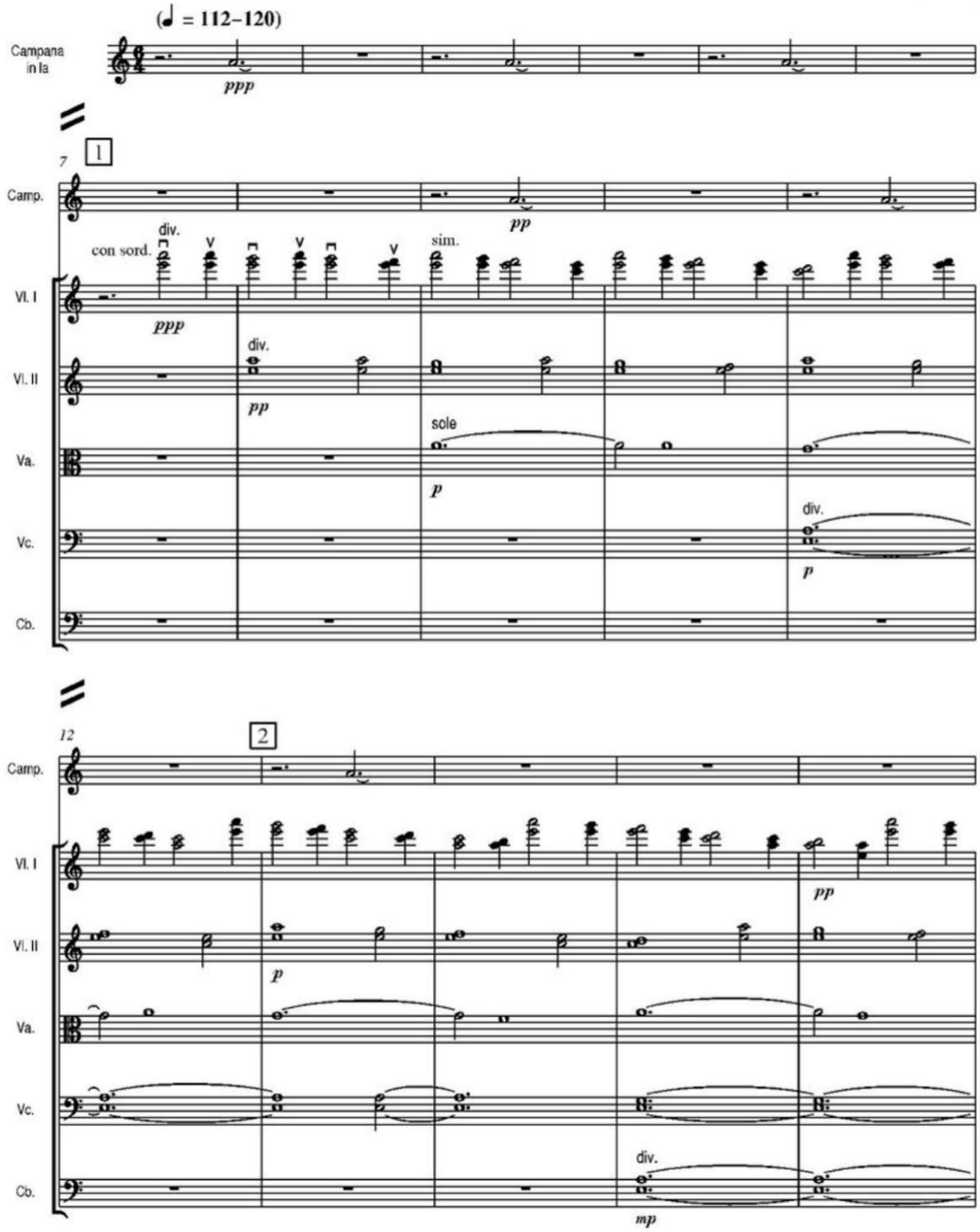
Appendix A



Arvo Pärt, *Spiegel im Spiegel*, mm. 1-18.

Appendix B

Arvo Pärt, *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, mm.1-16.



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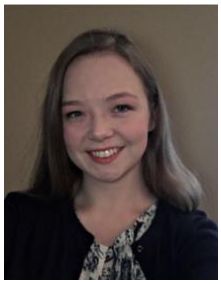

Running the Race for an Imperishable Crown: The Desire for Glory as an Essential Component of the Christian Virtue of Magnanimity

MICAILYN GEYER

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[W]hat is man, that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
Psalm 144:3

*[W]e are children of God, and if children, then heirs—**heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**, provided we suffer with him **in order that we may also be glorified with him**.*
Romans 8:16-17

*Therefore… let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, **the founder and perfecter of our faith**, who **for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, **despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God**.*
Hebrews 12:1-2

IN ONE OF HIS BEST-KNOWN ESSAYS, "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis explains that a desire for glory, which is symbolically expressed in Christian scripture "with an enormous wealth of imagery" including wearing a crown, sitting on a throne, or shining like the sun, initially struck him as not only "puzzling" and "repellent," but

even immoral and vicious. He adds that his reflexive distaste for glory-seeking is characteristic of most moderns, likely due to the influence of the Stoics and Kant (Kant representing a key figure in the modern rejection of eudaimonism in ethics) in addition to a democratic impulse that no one person is superior to another, given that the acquisition of glory seems to be a zero-sum game in which some win and some lose.[1] Materialism[2] is surely yet another strong influence: what are we, after all, other than cosmically insignificant hunks of atoms—or, as one author not-so-poetically expressed, insects on the windshield of time? A desire for glory, on a materialist account, sounds like little more than a Quixotic delusion of grandeur.[3]

Modern critiques of Aristotle's "great-souled" or magnanimous man[4] —secular and Christian alike—in almost universally citing his paramount desire for honor or glory as one of his most off-putting attributes, bear out this distaste. And yet, the desire for what Aristotle refers to as the greatest of external goods, honor or glory (*Ethics*, 1123b15-23), while seemingly among the most questionable and antiquated

[1] In her essay "Aquinas's Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness," Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung articulately expresses this concern: "the magnanimous man's excellence is… valued at least in part because it supersedes that of others whom he outdoes, despises, and condescends to… the measure of greatness remains inherently comparative, and the standard of comparison is still emphatically horizontal" (218). Interestingly—and this could be an essay all on its own—Aquinas does assert that only some people can be magnanimous and that not all virtuous men are necessarily magnanimous. Yet there is a lesser, nameless version of magnanimity that, in a sense, makes it accessible to all in the same way that not everyone can be magnificent (give great sums of money), but everyone can be liberal (give lesser amounts of money). Furthermore, Aquinas also asserts that "it is possible for one to whom the act of magnanimity is not competent to have the habit of magnanimity, whereby he is disposed to practice that act if it were competent to him according to his state" (Q129, Article 3). For these reasons, I will be treating magnanimity as a virtue accessible to all Christians, as Josef Pieper does in his work *On Hope*.

[2] Because physical entities have been discovered which are not material, the term *physicalism* is now favored instead of *materialism*, but I chose to use the latter term because it is more widely recognized.

[3] A modern short story which exemplifies this view is Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill" in which an old woman with delusions of importance discovers, in the climax of the piece, that she is utterly insignificant. Mansfield referred to the story as her "insect Magnificat."

[4] In this paper, I initially use the word "man" when describing Aristotle's account—in order to accurately represent his views—and then switch to "person" when describing a Christian reimagining of Aristotle's account.

(classical, Homeric) elements of Aristotle's portrait of a "great-souled man" is actually among the elements that a Christian recasting of Aristotelian magnanimity ought to affirm—in fact, it answers a common and dangerous misconception within the Christian faith.

In this paper, I will first provide **(1a)** a brief account of Aristotle's virtue ethics and **(1b)** a summary of his portrait of the moral virtue of magnanimity (*megalopsychia*) in particular, emphasizing how essential the desire for glory clearly is to his portrait. I will then **(2)** outline two common features of contemporary secular critiques of Aristotle's portrait of the magnanimous man: first, **(2a)** contemporary secular critiques almost universally mistakenly identify the magnanimous man's desire for glory as one of his greatest flaws. Many therefore attempt to explain that desire away, removing it from the portrait of a magnanimous man; this calls into question whether the portrait can be salvaged at all. And yet, second, many of these critiques do also **(2b)** rightly identify two irreconcilable tensions in Aristotle's account, given the magnanimous man's desire for glory. I will then argue **(3)** for what I believe is a correct Christian reimagining of the Aristotelian virtue of magnanimity which affirms the magnanimous person's desire for glory, and in doing so, actually succeeds in salvaging Aristotle's portrait. To do so, I will first argue, along with other Christian interpreters, **(3a)** that Aquinas's Christian recasting of the Aristotelian virtue of magnanimity readily resolves the two irreconcilable tensions secular commentators often identify in Aristotle's account, but will then **(3b)** outline a common contemporary Christian dismissal—the very same dismissal characterizing secular commentators' perspectives—of the magnanimous person's desire for glory, which, again, would call

into question whether the portrait can be salvaged at all **(3c)** and reply to that dismissal by citing the authority of Aquinas himself in addition to Christian apologist C.S. Lewis and Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper to affirm the goodness and rightness of a magnanimous Christian's desire for glory.

(1a) Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

Aristotle's virtue ethics is a part of the ancient and medieval tradition of *eudaimonism*, in which a human's end (*telos*) and greatest good is happiness (*eudaimonia*). As a human being's end, happiness is desirable in itself and is all a person needs to be perfectly fulfilled. On Aristotle's account, given that rationality is what sets human beings apart and must therefore characterize their function or purpose, happiness is obtained through virtuous activity over the course of one's life, which is necessarily in accordance with reason.

Human virtue, on Aristotle's account, can be divided into moral virtue (Ethics, Bk. 2) and intellectual virtue (Ethics, Bk. 6). Because magnanimity is a moral virtue, this summary will focus exclusively on the former. Interestingly, while moral virtue is influenced by reason, it is not merely rational. It is characterized by action which proceeds from emotion and desire. And yet, moral virtue is not emotion, desire, or even action; rather, it is a *state of character* formed by habits which are in turn formed by individual choices. [5] As individual choices become habits, emotions and desires follow suit: a clear sign of being virtuous is actually taking pleasure in acting virtuously and doing so reflexively, without having to think about it. The more virtuous one is, the easier it is to act virtuously.

[5] Choice consists in not just voluntary action, which animals and children are capable of, but voluntary and *deliberate* action, which is guided by the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*).

Though there are a few moral absolutes (do not steal, do not commit adultery, etc.), most right actions consist in choosing to act according to a virtue which exists as a mean between vices of excess and deficiency. For example, the virtue of courage consists in feeling *the right amount* of fear *at the right time* for *the right reason* (this is a key formulation which applies to each virtue); to be excessively fearful is to be cowardly, and to not feel enough fear is to be foolhardy. Very often, one vice of excess is far more common than another—fear, for example, is more common than foolhardiness—and it can be very difficult to hit the mean; thus, it can be practically best to aim more towards the less common vice in order to better arrive at the mean. Also worth noting is that a mean is relative to each individual: for example, gluttony for the average person is not the same as gluttony for an Olympic athlete, for whom virtue would actually require eating more food than the average person. The need for discernment—recall the subjectivity of the "the right amount…at the right time…for the right reason…" formulation above—is why the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (phronesisis) so essential to moral virtue.

(1b) Aristotle's Portrait of the Magnanimous Man

The Greek word for the virtue of magnanimity, *megalopsychia*, can also be translated as pride, high-mindedness, dignity, or self-respect. On Aristotle's account (see *Ethics*, Book IV, Ch. 3), the magnanimous or proud man is concerned with great things: he thinks himself worthy of great things and is accurate in his assessment: he is in fact worthy of them. The vices of excess which correspond to this virtue are therefore *vanity*, which consists in thinking oneself is worthy of great things when one is not, and being "small-souled" or *unduly humble*, which consists in thinking oneself unworthy of the great things one is

in fact worthy of: "being worthy of good things, [the unduly humble] robs himself of what he deserves." Such people shrink back "even from noble actions and undertakings, deeming themselves unworthy."[6] Interestingly, the vice of undue humility, in Aristotle's view, is a greater flaw than the vice of vanity, "for it is both commoner and worse." The safer extreme to aim towards is therefore not undue humility, but vanity.

Being concerned with great things, the magnanimous man desires *honor* or glory above all else—*"It is chiefly with honors and dishonors that the magnanimous man is concerned"* (1124a4-5)—as honor is "the greatest of external goods" and is what is "rendere[ed] to the gods." And yet, because no honor human beings can afford is worthy of him, he is only moderately pleased by honors conferred by the very best of human beings and thinks nothing of the honor afforded by those who are unworthy. Given that even honor, the greatest of earthly goods, is inadequate for his greatness, no earthly good, including wealth, power, and even good fortune, have the power to move him. He looks down on it all: "nothing to him is great."

The magnanimous man is necessarily "good in the highest degree" and has "greatness in every virtue"; to suggest that a man could be magnanimous and not good would be an "utter absurdity." Magnanimity is, in fact, "the crown" of all the virtues and makes all other virtues greater. The magnanimous man, therefore, would never wrong anyone else. He is no coward. He is quick to give and slow to receive. He is honest and forthright, caring more for the truth than the opinion of others. He is no flatterer. He does not bear grudges—rather, he overlooks wrongs—and is not a gossip.

[6] There is a third possibility: those who think themselves worthy of little who are in fact worthy of little. These individuals are merely *temperate*. As explained in the first footnote, this third possibility isn't relevant to the argument that will be advanced in this essay.

He is dignified towards those in high positions, but unassuming towards those in low positions, for an imposing bearing among the humble "is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak." He is a man of few deeds, but great deeds. He possesses beautiful and impractical things rather than profitable or useful things, because he is self-sufficient. He is never hurried or flustered and therefore walks with a slow step and speaks with a deep voice and level utterance. Because of the perfect virtue of the magnanimous man, Aristotle asserts that true magnanimity is difficult to achieve and therefore rare.

(2) Modern Critiques of Aristotle's Magnanimous Man

(2a) The Desire for Glory a Fundamental Flaw?

In his essay "A Great Philosopher's Not So Great Account of Great Virtue," Howard J. Curzer takes a representative critical stance in asserting that "the modern prejudice against *megalopsychia*" is likely thanks to viewing a desire for honor as essential to it. While critics object to a number of features of Aristotle's portrait—the magnanimous man looks down on others, doesn't like to receive help, neglects many ordinary acts of virtue in favor of a few great acts, prefers to own useless things rather than useful things, and so on—many of those features can be satisfactorily explained, and, regardless, it is the magnanimous man's paramount desire for honor which is the by far his most salient "problematic" feature. In order to explain away this perceived flaw, Curzer suggests that Aristotle is seeking to replace "vestigial, Homeric values of greatness and grandeur" with "the newer value of moderation and the mean,"[7] and then, in another typical move, proceeds to argue that a desire for honor is

[7] The ideal of the mean in contrast to Homeric magnificence or greatness was almost certainly influenced by Stoic and Epicurean philosophy.

not essential to Aristotle's magnanimous man, but rather that he only desires honor insofar as it is evidence of his virtue. It is being virtuous and not receiving honor that truly matters to the magnanimous man; receiving honor as a reward of his virtue is a nice but unnecessary cherry on top of the fact of being virtuous.

In support of this claim, Curzer observes that Aristotle is quick to explain that the magnanimous man actually attaches very little importance to human honor: "not even about honor does he care very much" (*Ethics*, 1124a13-17). While it is true that Aristotle is consciously critiquing a common Greek conception of magnanimity, in which a magnanimous man cared so much about the honor afforded by other people that he was characterized by an "intolerance of insults"—an allegedly magnanimous Ajax or an Achilles could therefore descend in a rage upon their own cities in response to a perceived dishonor or failure to award honor—(Fetter 3-5)[8] he is clearly not doing away with a desire for honor altogether. It is not that Aristotle's magnanimous man doesn't care for honor at all—after all, as outlined above, "it is chiefly with honors and dishonors that the magnanimous man is concerned" (*Ethics*, 1124a4-5)—but rather that no human honor is worthy of his greatness. This is why he is only "moderately pleased" by "honors that are great and conferred by good men… but honor from casual people and on trifling grounds he will utterly despise" (Ethics, 1124a6-12). He doesn't care much about honor, despite honor being the greatest of external goods, only because no honor available to him is worthy of him. To

[8] Aristotle explicitly points out this issue in his *Posterior Analytics*, an often overlooked text on the subject of his portrait of a magnanimous man: "if Alcibiades is great-souled, and Achilles and Ajax, what one thing do they all have? Intolerance of insults…" He notes than an intolerance of insults and an indifference to bad fortune, both of which are typically attributed to the magnanimous man, are contrary to one another (PA, 97b16-25 qtd. in Fetter).

remove the desire for honor from the portrait of the magnanimous man, which is so essential to it, is to call into question whether the portrait can be salvaged.

(2b) Two Irreconcilable Tensions: A Desire for Glory Can't Be Satisfied, and It's Impossible to Be Magnanimous

While Curzer's argument is flawed, what he *has* rightly put his finger on is a strange paradox in Aristotle's portrait: if honor matters most of all to the magnanimous man and he never receives the honor his greatness deserves, which even the best human beings are incapable of giving, then he is doomed never to find ultimate fulfillment or satisfaction. Mary M. Keys summarizes this problem well: "How this person at the presumed pinnacle of ethical virtue is to achieve the happiness (*eudaimonia*) that is the human *telos* remains at best an open question, an unsolved riddle. Aristotle thrice describes the *great-souled* man as 'he to whom *nothing is great*'" (41). Surely the magnanimous man, who possesses the "crown of the virtues" which makes all virtues greater "and is not found without them" (*Ethics*, 1124a 1-3) cannot fail to fulfill his purpose, obtaining happiness.

The fact that the magnanimous man possesses all the virtues points to a further irreconcilable issue in Aristotle's portrait: it is not merely, as Aristotle asserts, "hard" to be such a person (*Ethics*, 1124a 3)—someone who is "good in the highest degree" and possesses "perfect virtue" (*Ethics*, 1123b 28-29, 1124a 8), it's impossible. Further, as W.F.R. Hardie colorfully points out, even if there were a person who somehow managed to become perfectly good, for them to assume that their goodness was all their own doing, omitting the role of nature and fortune, would be to "[fall] into fatuity below the level of common sense…" (74), rendering them vain, "fools and ignorant of themselves"

(*Ethics*, 1125a 29), rather than magnanimous, for, as Aristotle explains, it is essential to the virtue of magnanimity to have an accurate estimate of one's own worth. There are, evidently, two glaring flaws in Aristotle's portrait of the magnanimous man.

(3) A Christian Recasting of Aristotelian Magnanimity

(3a) Flaws in Aristotle's Portrait Readily Addressed

A Christian recasting of Aristotelian magnanimity readily addresses these flaws. As Keys explains in reference to Aquinas's reimagining of Aristotelian magnanimity in his *Summa Theologica*, the first concern is addressed by introducing the idea of transcendence: the magnanimous person views human honor as insufficient because "man cannot sufficiently honor virtue which deserves to be honored by God" (*Summa*, II, II, Q129, Article 2). In contrast to the honor afforded by human beings, "That which we receive from God is not vain but true glory: it is this glory that is promised as a reward for good works…" (*Summa*, II, II, Q 132, Article 1). The magnanimous person can hope for and obtain the honor he or she deserves by seeking it from God. Fulfillment of his or her end—the attainment of happiness (eudaimonia)—is possible.

Speaking of desert, a Christian viewpoint also addresses the second issue: while no human being can be truly magnanimous under his or her own power, it is possible to be accounted perfectly righteous or virtuous as a gift of God's grace and therefore made worthy of all the inheritance bestowed upon Christ (we are made co-heirs with Christ): "magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God" (*Summa*, II, II, Q129, Article 3). God makes us worthy of great things and it is therefore fitting that we view ourselves as such.

(3b) An Apparent Objection: A Desire for Glory Should Not Be Affirmed

And yet, while addressing one problem, this answer—that it is only by God's grace that we are made truly magnanimous—introduces yet another problem, which calls into question the morality of a human desire for glory: surely if any good we do is entirely thanks to God, it must be wrong to hope for or desire honor or glory for ourselves, when any glory should belong entirely to God. Because "a man has not from himself the thing in which he excels… on this count honor is due principally, not to him but to God" (*Summa*, II, II, Q 131, Article 1). What does any of us have that we have not received (1 Cor. 4:7)? Moreover, isn't it wrong, mercenary, to love God for anything he can give us rather than loving him for himself? Perhaps a desire for glory and recognition from God is repellent and immoral after all.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, a Christian philosopher, appears to hold this common and understandable viewpoint. In her article "Aquinas's Virtues of Acknowledge Dependence," after identifying "our fundamental relationship of dependence on God" as "the key transformative feature of Aquinas's account of… magnanimity," and therefore a Christian account of magnanimity, she then makes the very same move as Curzer, emphasizing the magnanimous person's desire to be virtuous and downplaying his desire to see that virtue rewarded. In her view, the magnanimous person "attempts and achieves great things because they are appropriate expressions of the excellence that he has, not because he craves affirmation from others or desires glory." In other words, he "'does not regard honor as the greatest good,' but rather the virtue which makes one genuinely worthy of it" (217). Like Curzer, she subtly separates the idea of being virtuous from the idea of being rewarded—from the realization of one's own good, as if fulfillment of one's

own nature and reward were not the natural outgrowth and end of virtuous behavior.

(3c) Reply to Objection: Why a Desire for Glory Ought to be Affirmed

Initially, it is unclear whether or not Aquinas affirms a Christian's desire for the glory that is promised by God in heaven, particularly given that in his account of the virtue of magnanimity, he asserts that *honor* is not the due reward of virtue that God will give to the magnanimous—and, for that matter, all the virtuous—but rather *happiness* (*eudaimonia*). Aquinas describes honor as the paltry best that humans can offer as a reward of virtue in contrast to the eternal *happiness* God offers as a reward (*Summa*, II, II, Q 131, Article 1). This "final and perfect" happiness, as he explains much earlier in the *Summa*, is realized in the *beatific vision*, which "can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence" in which God unites himself with our intellects. The reason for this is the very same function argument made by Aristotle: perfect happiness consists in the perfection of that capacity which sets human beings apart and therefore defines their function—rationality (*Summa*, II, I, Q3, Article 8).

And yet, in the supplement to the *Summa* (Q 96, Article 1), Aquinas acknowledges that the beatific vision, a Christian's essential reward or "crown" (*aurea*), does not actually encapsulate all the rewards or "crowns" (*aureoles*) to be received by Christians in heaven. First, the glorification of the body is not directly part of the beatific vision and yet is part of the essential reward, and second, there are also "accidental" rewards distinct from the essential reward. While the end of all meritorious acts is the essential reward, different virtuous acts belong to different genera based on "the habit eliciting [the act] and from [the act's] proximate end": "accordingly it must be said that an 'aureole' denotes something added to the 'aurea,' a kind of joy… in the works one

has done… this joy is distinct from being united to God." Aquinas, as quoted above, cites honor as one such reward that God promises to Christians for their good works (*Summa*, II, II, Q 132, Article 1).

C.S. Lewis makes further sense of the apparent contradiction between the essential reward (union with God) and accidental rewards (honor, etc.) when, recognizing the metaphorical nature of all the promises made concerning heaven, he explains that the promise of future honor or glory is a one salient promise among a handful of varied promises which, "[do] not mean anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss" (35). Such promises are authoritative images provided by God for us to, so to speak, lean into them in order that we might obtain the best, most accurate image accessible to us of that future happiness (33-35).[9] In this way, to hope that God will give us glory and honor is an essential ingredient in hoping for the perfect happiness (eudaimonia) which is our ultimate end (telos).

It would be a mistake to permit the knowledge that the glory God will give us, as expressed in putting a crown on our heads, seating us on thrones, etc. is "only" a set of images to cause us to step away or detach from them as if they were unreal. One of the best ways to understand God as he wants us to understand him is, for example, to lean into the most common image he has chosen to describe himself—"father"— and think of the very best qualities of our own fathers or of fathers we know. That's the very reason God chose to call himself our "father." Lewis, leaning into the image of glory provided in scripture, elaborates on it: "glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response,

[9] Interestingly, Lewis points out that the even idea of "being with Christ," on its own, offers us an incomplete, insufficient image of our future happiness, because when we imagine "being with Christ" almost certainly picture being in physical proximity to Christ, having a conversation with him, etc. (33-5)

acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things" (41).

Downplaying a desire for God to glorify us—a desire for our own ultimate happiness—though a common and understandable move for Christians to make, given the very the real danger of pride, vainglory, and ambition,[10] is also harmful and unscriptural. Scripture of course has much to say about self-denial and humility, epitomized by the command to Christians to "take up your cross daily" in imitation of Christ. But it would be a grave error to forget that even Christ, the "founder and perfector" of the Christian faith suffered and endured the cross "*for the joy set before him*" (Heb. 12:1-2). Directly following the most well-known expression of the incredible model of humility that Christ sets in Philippians 2—his *kenosis* or self-emptying—Paul continues, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9).

This tendency to dismiss a desire for reward from God as "mercenary" is pervasive enough that both C.S. Lewis and Josef Pieper directly address it. Pieper explains the problem with such a viewpoint, even asserting that its origin is, ironically enough, *pride*:

> "The assumption that the existence of a 'concupiscent' love of God that is referred … to oneself, and hence … no more than an 'interested' and 'mercenary' love unworthy of the truly perfect Christian (as though man could possibly be 'disinterested' in the fulfillment of his own nature in God—for what else is 'heaven' all about?) belongs, it would seem, to the inevitable temptations to pride by which even the strongest souls are endangered." (32-3)

And this "desire-for-reward-as-mercenary" stance is hardly a new issue. Pieper also references a declaration made by The Council of Trent: "If anyone says that the

[10] Aquinas defines vainglory as a desire for glory for something not worthy of glory, glory given by someone unworthy, or glory not desired for a due end (God's glory or the welfare of our neighbor). He similarly defines ambition as an inordinate desire for honor—inordinate when not referred to God or to the profit of others.

faithful ought not to expect and hope for eternal happiness from God for the sake of his mercy and the merits of Christ… let him be anathema" (qtd. in Pieper 33). He explains that the imperfect love in which one hopes for good for oneself "is the not-to-be-undervalued precursor of the perfect love of friendship (caritas) by which God is affirmed for his own sake" (32). At root, the origin of the idea that is wrong to hope for one's own good and even one's own glory very likely lies in the modern rejection of the eudaimonism—a rejection which divorced acting virtuously from a desire for the fulfillment or realization of one's own good, one's ultimate happiness—which lay at the heart of both Aristotle's and Aquinas's ethics.

Conclusion

It is ironic that the modern era, the beginning of which was defined by a "turn to the subject" or the self has rendered human beings, far from the center of the universe, as might be expected, so dreadfully small and insignificant. Josef Pieper identifies *acedia* (sloth, indifference, torpor, inertia) as a hallmark of our current secular age, and explains that this is the case because it "seeks, in its despair, to shake off the obligations of that *nobility of being* that is conferred by Christianity, and so, in its despair, to *deny its true self*." (emphasis added, 59). When we fail to obey God's commands (i.e. to cultivate virtue), we fail to fulfill our nature and therefore to attain happiness. We fall into despair. Pieper goes on to explain that, accordingly, despair is "destroyed… only by that clear-sighted magnanimity that courageously expects and has confidence in the greatness of its own nature and by the grace-filled impetus of the hope of eternal life" (60). Obedience to God's commands (i.e. the cultivation of virtue), cannot and should not be divorced from the hope of the fulfillment of our own nature and the attainment of happiness. An

inextricable part of our future hope is to one day hear from God, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23).

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