

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OVERLOOKED VALUE OF GREATNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Greatness is a concept ubiquitous throughout human history; amorphous, undefined, yet tauntingly and irresistibly alluring.¹ Humanity's interest in achievement is demonstrated by philosophy's many attempts at distilling the concept, with concessions ranging from Aristotle's virtue-oriented *megalopsychos* to Nietzsche's power-hungry *Übermensch*. These two dichotomously opposed figures (the *megalopsychos* and *Übermensch*) both, in the minds of the philosophers who created them, embody human greatness. Contextualized by the obsessive, overwhelming, and often anxiety-inducing human aspiration to greatness, the dissimilarities between them become somewhat disconcerting, and we must ask: what exactly is greatness? This essay aims to shed additional light on this question from the space between prevalent philosophical interpretations of greatness.

Generally, it seems that attempts to define greatness fit within one of two categories. The first of these prioritizes a link to virtue and morality, while the second understands power to be the measure of greatness. Aristotle, Plato, and Saint Thomas Aquinas understand greatness in terms of virtue, while Nietzsche and certain feminist philosophers understand it to emerge out of an exercise of power.

Essentially, the virtue-oriented thinkers purport that greatness is achieved by a life of virtuous acts conducive to happiness and honor. *Megalopsychia* is "a sort of crown of

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Nate Whelan-Jackson and Dr. E. Wray Bryant for their support and suggestions on the many versions of this work.

the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them.”² Adversely, with a conspicuous disdain for the “whole virtuous dirtiness” of the first category, Nietzsche’s Will to Power purports that the concept of greatness is intrinsically linked to personal power.³ Valuing only the conquering of obstacles and expansion of strength, status, wealth, and influence, the *Übermensch* is an eagle amongst lambs, yielding only to its own will to power.

IS GREATNESS IN 'POWER-TO' OR 'POWER-OVER'?

Nietzsche’s definition of power that prioritizes strength and force, however, is challenged by certain feminist perspectives on power. Amy Allen, for instance, notes the predominantly masculine and oppressive form of power, described by Robert Dahl, as a scenario in which “[person] A has power over [person] B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do,” has come to be known as the ‘power-over’ understanding of power.⁴ This understanding of power is similar to Nietzsche’s philosophy: it values physical strength, influence, and social status. Historically, the mistreatment of women has led to the interpretation of this notion of power as a tool of the patriarchy. The feminist perspective, in an attempt to remediate this oppressive and misogynistic concept, has instead promoted conceptions of power that empowerment of action – ‘power-to’ rather than ‘power-over.’

A ‘power-to’ perspective focuses on a more positive relationship with others, noting facets of power as the ability to empower and inspire transformation in oneself and others; put simply, it is the ability to enact change. This perspective places few, if any, restrictions who can potentially be counted among the powerful. As Johanna Oksala notes, women have impacted immeasurable change, even when consigned to the roles of mothers and caretakers, through the upbringing and nurturing of others.⁵ She further summarizes the feminist response to power, “In other words, the fact that women are often reluctant to take or exercise power over others does not indicate that women have a problem; it indicates that there is a problem with our understanding of power, as well as in our relationships with each other in patriarchal societies,” a problem the ‘power-to’ concept attempts to remediate.⁶

² Understood as ‘greatness of soul’; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.3.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Translated by H. L. Mencken. Binghamton (NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1924): 21.

⁴ Amy Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition): 1.

⁵ Johanna Oksala, “Feminism and Power,” *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, (2017): 680.

⁶ Oksala, “Feminism and Power,” 681.

GREATNESS AND ITS VALUE AS POWER: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

The feminist perspective, with a definition of power vastly different than Nietzsche's, still supports the idea that greatness is reliant upon the expression of power. An excellent example of specific feminine greatness is discussed in Alison Booth's *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf*, in which Booth discusses the influence the two authors held over their patriarchal Victorian-era society, exemplifying 'power-to' through literature. Booth suggests their greatness results from their persuasiveness; their ability to describe through their writing a society of inclusion and progress elicited reactions from readers that broke the strongly enforced gender roles of the late 19th century. Persuasion, of course, is an expression of 'power-to,' specifically power to influence others and incite change.

Woolf and Eliot displayed a visceral expression of power through their persuasive literature, an achievement magnified by the oppressive, damaging gender norms to which they were constrained. T. S. Eliot even "affirms that Woolf became 'the centre . . . of the literary life of London,' 'the symbol' of the 'Victorian upper middle-class' cultural tradition," despite her womanhood being a social disadvantage.⁷ Their ability to influence their readership with notions of "a shared, progressive life beyond individuality" is certainly reason to deem these two authors great wordsmiths, and while the ability to persuade and influence is an important component of the feminist assessment of greatness, it is not the only one.⁸ Equally as important to the concept is the predominantly feminist ethic of care.

Care and Power

This ethic of care is not exactly the naive, benevolent depiction the connotation of 'care' may evoke. Virginia Held addresses the presence of violence, particularly against women, and how the ethics of care has been designed to handle such stark possibilities. Rather than negatively attempting to suppress or harm those who may be violent, the ethic of care searches for a more positive, peaceful resolution. "Within practices of care, as we have seen, rights should be recognized, including rights to peace and security of the [violent] person. Force may sometimes be needed to assure respect for such rights. This does not mean that the background of care can be forgotten."⁹ This 'background of care' and, in fact, the general term 'care,' has been given various definitions by numerous thinkers; Joan Tronto focuses on the work of caring for someone, and Nel Noddings on the attitude with which one is willing to care.

⁷ Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Booth* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1.

⁸ Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Booth*, 6.

⁹ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139.

After sifting through the many offered definitions, Held provides and seems to prioritize the definition offered by Diemut Bubeck, who believes “Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person, where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared-for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself.”¹⁰ Bubeck’s definition simultaneously separates care from being a service for one capable to complete an act themselves, and allows care to be universally offered without a prerequisite of emotional attachment. However, there are, at risk of dramatization, fatal flaws in Bubeck’s contender that desecrate its validity in Held’s eyes. She notes that Bubeck does not pay mind to the intent of the caregiver; a nurse may utterly hate a patient, wishing them death, but still offer them services. Is this truly care? Bubeck says yes; Held is less certain. She adjusts the original definition to form her own:

Care is both a practice and a value...it shows us how to respond to needs and why we should. It builds trust and mutual concern and connectedness between persons....along with its appropriate attitudes...Practices of care should express the caring relations that bring persons together, and they should do so in ways that are progressively more morally satisfactory. Caring practices should gradually transform children and others into human beings who are increasingly morally admirable...In addition to being a practice, care is also a value. Caring persons and caring attitudes should be valued... We can ask if persons are attentive and responsive to each other’s needs or indifferent and self-absorbed. Care is...more the characterization of a social relation than the description of an individual disposition, and social relations are not reducible to individual states.¹¹

Held’s description of care rectifies the flaws found in Bubeck’s definition while maintaining the universality and distinctiveness of acts of service originally proposed.

Care plays an important role in the feminist assessment of greatness, as it is through care that empowerment and influence must be affected. While moral value seems to permeate this understanding of care and empowerment, it is important to recognize that the feminist analysis of greatness credits the power, the ability to influence positive change as the variable pertinent to greatness, rather than the morality intrinsically present in care and empowerment. The ethics of care certainly fit into the feminist perspective of ‘power-to’ as a necessary condition for empowerment, which in turn leads to the final value of greatness— per this assessment, that is the power to incite change. Interestingly, these characteristics—care, empowerment, and social progressiveness— seem to be the antithesis of the Nietzschean power characteristics of wealth, status, and strength. However, despite their differences in understanding

¹⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 139.

¹¹ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 42.

of the term, both the feminist perspective and Nietzsche contend that expression of power is the ultimate value of greatness.

POWER? OR VIRTUE?

Now that the proponents for each set have been introduced, and their arguments described, who do we believe? Is the reason humanity strives for greatness tied to morality and virtue? Or is greatness simply an expression of human power, with no tie to morality? It seems evident that the much more likely and correct answer is a third option; morality and power are both required to achieve greatness. More specifically, expressions of power that are consistent with morality and exhibit virtue are the only actions that mirror the characteristic of greatness. Analyses of the reasoning provided by both the virtue-centric and power-centric proponents will now be conducted in order to determine the validity of each—are they self-sufficient and satisfactory? Or do they support this essay's contention?

An Analysis of 'Power-Over' Greatness

Nietzsche's argument against the idea of virtue as having any role in the value of greatness, and thus his argument against this paper's contention, are quite unconvincing. He asserts that the achievement of great acts, through all the pain and suffering they bring, grows personal power in accordance with the innate will to power living beings experience; this growth of power is the ultimate good along with the expression of personal power over opposition. In this view, either power-over is a sufficient condition for greatness, meaning those with power have a correlated claim to greatness, or that power is a necessary condition for greatness, meaning that if one is great one must possess power.

Both of these logical avenues struggle in defending Nietzsche's contentions. Firstly, let's assess power-over as a sufficient condition for greatness. The existence of tyrants and oppressive power, the likes of Hitler and Stalin, discredit this avenue for (what should be) an overwhelming majority. The power and influence these two men specifically possessed was immense, yet without morality to guide them, such power lent itself to atrocities rather than greatness. Their growth in power did not ultimately lead them to happiness, rather, their thirst for power and conquest was insatiable and unsatisfying. These two tyrants exemplify the *Übermensch*, possessing power, influence, strength, and wealth. Yet they are lacking the result expected from this Nietzschean equation: greatness of character is certainly not associated with these dictators. Thus, Nietzschean power is not a sufficient condition for greatness.

The conclusion that strength, influence, and, in general, 'power-over' is not necessary for greatness rests upon the assumption mentioned in the introduction—humanity is able to intuitively identify greatness of character. Without this assumption, a

ridiculous conclusion and counter may conceivably be offered by the fiercest and most adamant subscribers of Nietzschean philosophy: that such horrific tyrants are great. In this context, the assumption that those engaging with this discussion are reasonable enough to denounce vehemently this conclusion is necessary, and benign to the analysis. However, Nietzsche's philosophy does play a supportive role in the concept of greatness and its value this discussion proposes.

Although certainly not sufficient, it seems to be the case that power is instead a necessary condition for greatness. If this is indeed the case, no examples of greatness without power exist. In this aspect, Nietzsche appears to be somewhat correct. Harriet Tubman's incredible life provides an equally inspiring and fascinating example to explore through a Nietzschean lens. Tubman embodies the opposite of the aforementioned *Übermensch* and tyrants: a woman widely (and rightly) regarded as great (again, relying on the precursory assumption), who had little, if any, social power. As an escaped slave, she possessed no influence, no wealth, and no particular physical strength. As the victim of a head injury that left her susceptible to seizures, blurred vision, and headaches, it seems quite the opposite was true.¹² Despite having no resemblance to the typically described *Übermensch*, Tubman does, in fact, demonstrate a will to power.

Tubman's will was not expressed in grandiose displays of power or influence, rather, it was expressed both in her daring escape from slavery and through the thirteen acts that earned her a place amongst the great; the thirteen selfless and daunting journeys that delivered emancipation to over seventy people. Simply, Tubman willed to free herself and others, and enacted that will through her power. Defying the racial oppression—perhaps more appropriately, the racially motivated abuse—she and countless others were subjected to, Tubman's story exemplifies the human desire to “overcome the world” against them that Nietzsche describes.¹³ Tubman's story, although certainly incredible, is just one example of power's intricate relationship with greatness. Syntactically,

Each choice demonstrates an expression of power (the power to choose one outcome or another).

Agential actions require the choice to act.

Great acts that elucidate greatness of character must be agential.¹⁴

¹² Harriet Tubman Byway, “About Harriet Tubman.” Accessed July 23, 2022, harriettubmanbyway.org/harriet-tubman/#about.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter A. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Translated by Walter A. Kaufmann. (NY: Random House, 1968), 182.

¹⁴ (c) serves as a defense against technicality. If one is theoretically forced to do a great action against their will, the action does not elucidate greatness of its actor's character, and is thus out of this discussion's intended scope.

Therefore, great actions (actions denoting greatness of character) must be a result of power.

In this notation, power is necessary for greatness. However, since power is not sufficient for greatness, as we deduced earlier, then a second characteristic in cooperation with power must also be responsible for greatness. This second characteristic reveals itself to be morality, as Tubman's life exemplifies.

Along with expressing her will to power against an oppressive society, the morality Tubman's actions displayed was perhaps equally, if not more, responsible in warranting her the recognition of greatness. The actions through which she expressed virtue were plentiful, as her thirteen journeys liberating slaves through the Underground Railroad were simply precursors to her serv[ing] as a spy and scout; provid[ing] extensive assistance to soldiers including nursing, cooking, and laundering, and even help[ing] lead a major attack on Confederate property called the Combahee River raid...yield[ing] new union enlistments and over 700 "contrabands" (freed slaves).¹⁵

These heroic and selfless expressions of will exemplified courage, ambition, selflessness, and certainly several other virtues— all of which elucidated the greatness of her character. While Nietzsche's argument of the will to power is unsatisfactory as a sufficient condition of greatness, Harriet Tubman's life demonstrates its conceivable role as a necessary condition illuminates the first evidence of this essay's contention—greatness' value lies in the crossroads of expressing power and morality.

An Analysis of 'Power-To' Greatness

To further support the argument that both power and virtue play a role in greatness and its value, we will once again use the sufficient and necessary logical avenues to analyze the validity of the 'power-to' argument offered by the feminist perspective, which states that displays of greatness—defined as acts that empower and influence change through ethics of care—are valuable in the social change they effect. Again, either 'power-to' is a sufficient condition, suggesting that no 'power-to' is expressed without greatness, or it is a necessary condition, meaning no greatness is evident without the expression of 'power-to.' The ultimate value prescribed by the feminist perspective of 'power-to,' and thus greatness, is the instigation of social change.

This expression of power as it is understood by the feminist perspective, upon logical analysis, appears to contain variables necessary for greatness but offers none sufficient for greatness. While many examples of vicious leaders lacking the distinction of

¹⁵ Lasch-Quinn, Elisabeth. "Harriet Tubman: An American Idol," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 43, (Spring 2004):124, [jstor.org/stable/4133571](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4133571).

greatness certainly possessed and demonstrated characteristics of the feminist assessment, specifically influence, the morality required for care and empowerment seems to be the filter such tyrants and dictators cannot percolate. Hitler, for example, achieved immense influence over Germany through his oration. Daniel Binchy recalls listening to him speak at a meeting that took place in 1921, at the University of Munich. “Here was a born natural orator,” he describes, “He began slowly, almost hesitatingly, stumbling over the construction of his sentences, correcting his dialect pronunciation. Then all at once he seemed to take fire. His voice rose victorious over falterings, his eyes blazed with conviction, his whole body became an instrument of rude eloquence.”¹⁶ The speech ends with a response from the audience, “a scene of hysterical enthusiasm which baffles description,” Binchy recalls.¹⁷ The captivation Hitler commanded over a listening audience demonstrates a similar degree of persuasiveness that Woolf and Eliot possessed through their literature. Unlike these two great authors, however, Hitler used this persuasion to persecute, oppress, and breed hatred, rather than empower positive social change.

He did, however, empower himself. Allen’s understanding of Held’s concept of ‘power-to’ clarifies that the “capacity to transform and empower oneself” is compliant with the sickening expression of power Hitler demonstrated.¹⁸ Through propaganda, manipulation, and fear, Hitler empowered himself and his political party, posing as a moral crusader while victimizing millions throughout his cynical rampage.¹⁹ While he was undeniably lacking care as described by Held, the evidence that such a terrible man displayed both empowerment and influence characterizes where this assessment of power is subject to dispute and provides evidence against ‘power-to’ as a sufficient condition for greatness.

It appears that without morality, the abilities of empowerment, influence, and ultimately, the means to produce societal change, do not warrant the distinction of greatness. The unique aspect of care, though, and the virtue intrinsically woven within care undoubtedly fit into our concept of power with virtue. Care certainly demonstrates characteristics representative of the expression of will; an enactment of personal power. Held notes that “An important aspect of care is how it expresses our attitudes and relationships,” meaning that the intentions of a caregiver must match their actions to be genuine care.²⁰ This acting upon one’s desire is compatible with the Nietzschean concept of Will to Power; the caregiver expresses their personal power, (i.e. ability to care) in response to their will (i.e. their desire to care). While they may not necessarily be facing the social opposition Nietzsche posits, they are certainly

¹⁶ Daniel A. Binchy, “Adolf Hitler,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 85 (March 1933): 1, [jstor.org/stable/30094970](https://www.jstor.org/stable/30094970).

¹⁷ Binchy, *Adolf Hitler*, 2.

¹⁸ Allen, *Feminist Perspectives on Power*, 4.

¹⁹ Richard Weikart, *Hitler’s Ethics: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 17.

²⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 33.

attempting to overcome an obstacle; they are attempting to alleviate whatever the cared-for may be facing, an obstacle that, through relationship, becomes personal. While the feminist perspective is unsatisfactory alone in its assessment of greatness, the understanding of care as the expression of one's will and power, partnered with the intrinsic morality present in care, appears to further support the conclusion that both power and virtue are essential in greatness and its value.

THE VIRTUE-CENTRIC CONTENTION

Plato, Aristotle, and Saint Aquinas each believe that greatness and its value are closely related and dependent upon moral standards and displays of virtue. Aristotle particularly argues that greatness of soul, *megalopsychia*, is a crown that indicates the metaphorical wearer as one who possesses and appropriately practices each virtue. Greatness, as argued by these essentially eudaemonistic philosophers, holds value as the practice of virtue required for greatness is also the path to happiness. Similarly, great acts are valuable in that they reveal greatness of character.

Contrary to the Aristotelian theory of unity, which unconvincingly describes that one cannot possess a single virtue if they do not possess all of them, –a theory that has been discredited by numerous scholars– it appears that greatness does not require the display of each virtue. Referring again to the moon landing, the undeniable act of greatness certainly lacked some of the twelve virtues Aristotle notes–humorous wit was likely not a large factor in the endeavor–but appropriate temperance, courage, ambition, and liberality undeniably were.²¹ The appropriate practice of these four virtues required to complete the mission still demonstrated the greatness of character the astronauts on board possessed, and further, seem to entail a correlation with honor.

As virtuous actions are valued by and rewarded with honor, the more virtues represented in an action, the more honor and greatness they seem to elicit. While greatness may not require every virtue, it is important to note that great acts must always be compatible with morality and all twelve virtues. For example, one may harbor ambition for an act of evil that directly opposes friendliness or justice. Ambition, one of the twelve virtues, does not make this potential act great; the lack of morality necessary for compatibility with virtue transforms ambition from a virtue into a vice. Acts of greatness, then, must show compatibility with the twelve virtues while demonstrating an appropriate practice of at least one virtue worth honoring.²² An analysis of this argument, as stated, will reveal whether virtue and morality are necessary, sufficient, or both in regard to achieving greatness.

²¹ The twelve virtues being Courage, Temperance, Liberality, Magnanimity, Ambition, Patience, Truthfulness, Wittiness, Friendliness, Modesty, and Righteous Indignation (Justice), via W. F. DeMoss.

²² W.F. DeMoss, "Spenser's Twelve Moral Virtues: According to Aristotle," *Modern Philology* 16, no. 1 (May 1918): 25, [jstor.org/stable/433028](https://www.jstor.org/stable/433028); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.

It appears that a display of virtue that is morally compatible with each virtue is necessary for acts of greatness. An action incompatible with virtue—an action incompatible with justice, friendliness, or truthfulness—simply fails to be great. For example, winning an Olympic gold medal for one’s country certainly seems like a great action. By Saint Aquinas’ definition that explains “one mak[ing] a very good use of [an item or action]” is proportional greatness, it certainly is.²³As such, any athlete capable of this feat inarguably demonstrates ambition, courage, temperance, and many other virtues both in their training and performance. Such an achievement is great unless of course, the athlete was cheating. Using banned performance enhancers, for instance, is incompatible with the virtues of justice and truthfulness—the action is both unfair to the other competitors and is untruthful of the athlete, and thus, fails to be great. The incompatibility of the twelve virtues perverts what would be an honorable and great action into a dishonorable act. It is the only aspect of this athlete’s conduct that excludes them from the designation of greatness.

This particular distinction between moral compatibility and incompatibility demonstrates quite well the necessity of morality: an action that would, by all other accounts, be great, marred by an act incompatible with virtue, fails to be great. Logically, then, virtue compatibility is necessary for great achievement. Additionally, excellent displays of virtue seem to be a requirement for greatness; an act is not great simply because they are compatible with virtue, it must display something worthy of honor. Which, as previously discussed, excellent demonstrations of virtue are worthy of honor. With a simple example, we have demonstrated the necessary roles of both virtue compatibility and displaying virtue in the achievement of great acts, through which greatness of character is represented.

POWER LED BY VIRTUE

When determining whether demonstrations of honorable virtue and virtue compatibility are sufficient for greatness, a dilemma requiring further attention appears. Our conclusion, upon logical analyses of both Nietzsche’s and the feminist perspective’s arguments, revealed the false dichotomy between the virtue and power assessments of greatness; both power and virtue seem necessary for greatness. When taken as two separate variables, virtue could not, then, be a sufficient condition, as the presence of an expression of power is required to achieve greatness. However, a different perspective reveals that they are not distinct variables, rather, expressions of power and morality are so closely intertwined that the two variables act as one—through one’s will and expression of personal power, virtues signifying greatness may be performed.

²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.129.

An important aspect of virtue ethics as Aristotle describes them is the intention behind an action. He explains that we, as humans, deliberate amongst ourselves over choices we can control, including both virtue and vice. Whether one expresses virtuous acts depends, for the most part, upon their own choice and internal deliberation. Aristotle describes this ability by explaining, “For where it is in our power to act it is also in our power not to act, and vice versa; so that, if to act, where this is noble, is in our power, not to act, which will be base, will also be in our power, and if not to act, where this is noble, is in our power, to act, which will be base, will also be in our power;” our personal will, most often decided upon by our reasoning, determine whether we express virtues or ‘base’ actions in any given scenario.²⁴

This description of internal conflict and expressions of power seems quite reminiscent of the Nietzschean description of a being’s expression of their will to power, as well as the ‘power-to’ contention; indulging one’s will in an expression of power based solely on their whims and the ability to act upon one’s choice and influence change. “How does one become stronger?” Nietzsche asks before answering, “By coming to decisions slowly; and by clinging tenaciously to what one has decided.”²⁵ The permeating undertones of intention and choice are not unique to Aristotle and Nietzsche, as evidenced by the feminist contention.

The opposite distinction of power also understands choice as a crucial element, a power even described by Sarah Lucia Hoagland as “power of ability, of choice and engagement.”²⁶ The presence of deliberation and decision followed by the expression of power required to enact that decision in Will to Power, a ‘power-to’ approach, and Nicomachean Ethics supports the conclusion that both power and virtue are required for greatness. Saint Aquinas strengthens this notion, stating “The word ‘choice’ implies something belonging to the reason or intellect, and something belonging to the will...choice is substantially not an act of the reason but of the will... of the appetitive power” within us.²⁷ One must possess the will and power required to choose and act upon their decision to display virtue, thus displays of virtue are intrinsically woven with an expression of power.²⁸ Rather than interpreting these as separate variables, it seems that, due to their inseparable nature, the more appropriate route would be to conclude that power is an essential part of the practice

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5; Base meaning ‘lowly, inefficient.’ via Rose Cherubin. “Ancient Greek Vocabulary: Aristotle.” Accessed July 4, 2022, mason.gmu.edu/~rcherubi/arovc.htm.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 486.

²⁶ Sarah Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value* (CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), 118.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.13.

²⁸ We have discovered here that choice is an integral part of greatness. As an expression of one’s will or power, it is the link between power and virtue. Without choice, a distinction of ‘greatness’ is neither important nor honorable for the one receiving it: they did not accomplish anything worthy of the distinction! Only because there is a possibility not to be virtuous or moral is such an act honorable and great. Of course, this relies upon the belief that human free will is a reality. Without such a belief, human greatness (as is human evil, or any other human characteristic) is a falsity. Discussions on this topic (free will) can be found in Aquinas, Augustine, Bonaventure, Slote 1980.

of virtues. Therefore, the expression of virtues, through acts compatible with every virtue, is sufficient for the acts of greatness required in the demonstration of greatness of character.

CONCLUSION

In our attempt to construct a clearer understanding of greatness, the concepts once held to be diametrically opposed have become amalgam, enmeshed by the shared aspect of choice. It does not appear, through our analysis, that power alone is sufficient for a claim to greatness: as stand-alone contentions, both the Nietzschean and feminist perspectives of power encounter rather problematic implications that are incompatible with the notion of human excellence.²⁹ Nietzsche's perspective, termed 'power-over,' accommodates tyranny, oppression, and systemic violence in a concept of human excellence—a conclusion we must vehemently refute. While the progressive notion of 'power-to' as offered by the feminist perspective is an alternative account that resists the historically marginalizing patriarchal tones of 'power-over,' it too falls victim to similar unacceptable implications. Recounts of Hitler's influence, persuasion, and vicious self-empowerment reflect rather eerily the pillars upon which a 'power-to' perspective lies.

The apparent 'saving grace' of these power-centric concepts of greatness seems to be the necessary infusion of virtue, whether purely Aristotelian or mediated by Held's ethic of care. This formulation immediately excludes the preposterous notion of tyrants qualifying as great and adds to greatness a value as conducive to happiness and honor (in proportion to the virtue displayed). The example of the dishonest Olympian demonstrates the necessity of virtue for greatness; actions normally worthy of honor, marred by an act incompatible with morality, simply fail to demonstrate greatness. Additionally, Harriet Tubman's incredible life exemplifies the integral role of personal power (specifically, the personal power to choose) in expressing virtue, a notion which is supported by both the virtue-centric and power-centric perspectives. Thus, it appears that what began as two seemingly dichotomous understandings of greatness have emerged from our analysis as one, with virtue acting as a link between power (choice) and human greatness.

²⁹ People seem to be capable of identifying greatness of character, albeit without necessarily articulating what characteristic is being recognized. Simply, people can discern a figure as great without understanding why that figure is great. This notion can be more familiarly described by (imperfectly but effectively) analogizing the assumption that people are able to identify pieces of art as art, without having a distinct or articulable notion of what makes such a piece art—asking someone to describe the distinct characteristics that denote both Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate and Andy Warhol's Brillo Box as art may prove this point.

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