Aristotle's Courageous Passions

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How do the courageous feel upon the field of battle? Aristotle's answer concerns fear and confidence, but stating his position with precision is difficult, not only because Aristotle does not approach the topic of courage in this way, but also because those of his thoughts that do bear on an answer are limited and seem discordant. Although these latter difficulties could be dismissed as due to carelessness or inattention, a more telling explanation has to do with the intrusion of certain ethical doctrines, forcing Aristotle in different directions. But this diagnosis does not preclude the hypothesis that there is one answer to the question which Aristotle does or should favour. To give an account of this answer, and of the diagnosis, is the object of my paper.

If one is concerned about courage as it bears upon one's emotional life, is there any reason to restrict the question to the battlefield? Socrates in the Laches (191dff) seems to think that courage is found in many settings. For him the question is appropriately put with regard to people tossed on a storm swept sea, suffering illness or poverty, and, perhaps, struggling with money or intellectual matters. Aristotle, however, restricts questions of courage to the battlefield. He does so not because he thinks that situation is most likely to reveal the relevant feelings (though doubtless he thinks this also), but because, strictly speaking, only in this setting is courage found. As a philosopher struck by the homonomy and paronomy of expressions, and what Owen has called "focal meaning", Aristotle deems the extension of 'courage' to be narrower than Plato had allowed. Rather than searching for what is common to all instances of courage or all the utterances of 'courage', Aristotle turns to the paradigm of courage, to courage in its most perfect and noble form. That paradigm is to be found upon the battlefield, though even here, paradigm versus derivative cases are to be distinguished.1 To get a grip on Aristotle's view, then, the question must be set

1 The justification for thinking that upon the battlefield the paradigm will be found
and answered in terms of the paradigm. Once answered, of course, it would be interesting and appropriate to apply the considerations Aristotle raises to the more extensive terrain that Plato works (cf. *Politics* 1334a22).²

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One approach to the question would be to observe that when injured the courageous, like anyone else, are in pain; when victorious, like anyone else, they are ecstatic. But I do not mean my question in this way. Rather I mean the question to concern whether from Aristotle's thoughts anything follows about the spirits of the individual acting courageously by virtue of being courageous.

A different approach to the question would be a psychological-sociological one, involving introspection and observations concerning the acts of the courageous upon the field of battle. Such consultation of what people commonly say and do Aristotle would find valuable. Presumably, his inclusion of fear and confidence is in part explained by such an appeal to the phenomena.³ But this approach will not resolve the matter for Aristotle (nor, I suspect, for us). A philosophically naive appeal to experience could well be undermined or altered by answers to questions about the nature of courage, courageous acts, etc. – as the issue of courage's extension in-

² In *Metaphysics* gamma Aristotle argues for a science of being qua being, not because there is one sense of being, but because of the relationship of different senses to a primary sense (1005a5-11). Similarly, an Aristotelian investigation of courage should allow that the Socratic extension is something that one can discuss intelligently, though it requires the methodology suggested here, and it needs to be realized that one would be talking of derivative notions of courage.

³ In interviews with people who act courageously one usually hears more talk of fear than confidence. Aristotle also thinks courage mostly has to do with matters of fear (1117a29), and his discussions reflect this. Since Aristotle's own remarks on confidence are minimal, I too shall concentrate on fear. But see J.L. Stocks' plea on behalf of what he calls cheer in "The Test of Experience" (*Mind*, 1919), and A. Duff's position that only through the transformation of fear by confidence does the state become an excellence ("Aristotelian Courage", *Ratio*, 1987).