216 Great (*Magnum*)

According to the Philosopher, in the book 7 of the *Politics, chapter 7,[[1]](#endnote-1)* to judge concerning the magnitude of an object the quantity is not to be looked for, but more for the potentiality. For which one lacking in wealth can be great, so it can be said of Hippocrates that he was a great physician and his teaching is great. So, it is said concerning Isaac, Gen. 26[:13] that “he became exceeding great.” Wherefore Augustine, book 6, *De Trinitate*, chapter 22,[[2]](#endnote-2) bodies grow by their addition, but in spiritual matters when the lesser adheres to the greater, just as a creature to a creator. That one becomes greater than it was not by mass but by virtue. Moreover, in such matters this one is better that is empty. Wherefore Augustine, *De sermone Domini in monte*, sermon 19,[[3]](#endnote-3) great is the power of beginning from the least matter. If you propose to build a great building, think first of the foundation.

Again, matters are said to be great if they increase, that is, if they are ordained towards a higher position. Therefore, properly man is not said to be great unless he stretches toward heaven. However, the way of growing is treated in Eccli. 3[:20]: “The greater you are, the more humble yourself in all things.” Seneca, *Epistle* 76,[[4]](#endnote-4) none of those whom riches or honors raised to the heights is great … look at the naked man. Put away the benefits of fortune. Look at his soul how much it is great from himself or from another. Wherefore 4 Kings 5[:1]: “Naaman was a great man with his master, he was a valiant man and rich, but a leper.” So, some are great before their earthly lord whom they serve but are leprous before God. Seneca *Epistle* 66,[[5]](#endnote-5) a great soul can come from a deformed body. Nor from the deformity of the body is the soul besmirched, but the body is ornamented by the soul. If therefore Charles is called great (Charlemagne) because he acquired Rome itself, if Alexander is called great because he subjugated Asia and Europe, why is he not rather said to be great who acquired the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, Christ said, Matt. 5[:19]: “He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great.” Wherefore Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana,* book 7, chapter 18,[[6]](#endnote-6) it is only virtue that makes a man great of which the figure is read in Dan. 2[:34]: “A stone was cut out of a mountain without hands, and it struck the statue upon the feet thereof, and broke them in pieces,” and it separated into a great mountain.

¶ Again, some are great before the world, but not before God, as the evil princes who were allied to Nabal, 1 Kings 25[:2-10], that was a great living man and such matters are designated by the great statue, Dan. 2[:31-35]. Others are great before God not before the world, Judith 16[:19]: “They that fear you, shall be great with you.” Others are great before God and before the world, and these are few, such as the good prelates, Job 1[:3]: “This man was great among all the people of the east.” So “Abraham was the great father,” Eccli. 44[:20]. So “Moses was a great man in the land of Egypt,” Exod. 11[:3].

1. Aristotle, Politics 7.4 1326a9-16 (Barnes 2:2104): Most people imagine that the prosperous state must be a great state; but granted the truth of this, they fail to realize in what quality the greatness or smallness of a state consists: they judge a great state by the numerical magnitude of the population, but really the more proper thing to look at is not numbers but efficiency. For a state like other things has a certain function to perform, so that it is the state most capable of performing this function that is to be deemed the greatest, just as one would pronounce Hippocrates to be greater, not as a human being but as a physician, than somebody who surpassed him in bodily size. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.3 (PL 42:926): corpus adjunctione compositum. Et, Qui adhaeret Domino, inquit, unus spiritus est (Id. VI, 16, 17): non dixit, Qui adhaeret Domino, unus est, aut, unum sunt; sed addidit, spiritus. Diversi sunt enim natura, spiritus hominis et spiritus Dei; sed inhaerendo fit unus spiritus ex diversis duobus, ita ut sine humano spiritu beatus sit Dei spiritus atque perfectus, beatus autem hominis spiritus non nisi cum Deo. Nec frustra, ut existimo, cum tanta in Evangelio secundum Joannem et toties diceret Dominus de ipsa unitate, vel sua cum Patre, vel nostra invicem nobiscum; nusquam dixit, Ut nos et ipsi unum: sed, Ut unum sint, sicut et nos unum sumus (Joan. XVII). Pater ergo et Filius unum sunt, utique secundum unitatem substantiae, et unus Deus est, et unus magnus, et unus sapiens, sicut tractatum est. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *Sermo de Scripturis* 69.1.2 (PL 38:441): Magnus esse vis, a minimo incipe. Cogitas magnam fabricam construere celsitudinis, de fundamento prius cogita humilitatis. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Seneca, *Epistulae* 76.31-32 (LCL 76:164-167): Nemo istorum, quos divitiae honoresque in altiore fastigio ponunt, magnus est. ... nudum inspice; ponat patrimonium, ponat honores et alia fortunae mendacia, corpus ipsum exuat. Animum intuere, qualis quantusque sit, alieno an suo magnus.

None of those who have been raised to a loftier height by riches and honours is really great. ... But when you wish to inquire into a man’s true worth, and to know what manner of man he is, look at him when he is naked; make him lay aside his inherited estate, his titles, and the other deceptions of fortune; let him even strip off his body. Consider his soul, its quality and its stature, and thus learn whether its greatness is borrowed, or its own. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Seneca, *Epistula* 66.3-4 (LCL 76:2-5): Potest ex casa vir magnus exire, potest et ex deformi humilique corpusculo formosus animus ac magnus. … ut scire possemus non deformitate corporis foedari animum, sed pulchritudine animi corpus ornari.

A great man can spring from a hovel; so can a beautiful and great soul from an ugly and insignificant body. … that the body is beautified by the comeliness of the soul. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.23.23 (PL 34:27): Magnum autem aliquid adeptum se putat, si etiam sociis, id est aliis hominibus, dominari potuerit. Inest enim vitioso animo id magis appetere, et sibi tanquam debitum vindicare, quod uni proprie debetur Deo. Talis autem sui dilectio melius odium vocatur. Iniquum est enim, quia vult sibi servire quod infra se est, cum ipse servire superiori nolit: rectissimeque dictum est, Qui diligit iniquitatem, odit animam suam (Psal. X, 6): et ideo fit infirmus animus, et de mortali corpore cruciatur. Necesse est enim ut illud diligat, et ejus corruptione praegravetur. Immortalitas enim et incorruptio corporis de sanitate animi existit; sanitas autem animi est firmissime inhaerere potiori, hoc est incommutabili Deo. Cum vero etiam eis qui sibi naturaliter pares sunt, hoc est, hominibus, dominari affectat, intolerabilis omnino superbia est.

Cf. Augustine, *Sermones ad fratres in eremo commorantes* 6 (PL 40:1248): sola virtus est, quae dividit inter crudelem et pium, regem et tyrannum.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Super Sent., lib. 1 d. 19 q. 3 a. 1 co. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)