Reviewed by Bob Kaster, Princeton University (kaster@princeton.edu)
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As I was preparing this review I sent an email to my Princeton colleagues asking them what they took the term 'manliness' to mean. Within twenty-four hours I received about as many thoughtful replies, from both faculty and graduate students. Most of these were straightforward attempts at definition (e.g., 'courage in the face of danger or adversity and self-mastery in relation to either pleasure or hardship', 'a capacity to impose one's will on one's environment, or to resist the determination of one's activities by that environment') and included, cumulatively, a wide-but-hardly-random range of traits (ruggedness, individuality, heterosexuality, savoir faire, sensitivity, hardness, strength, gallantry, fairness, frankness, good looks, decisiveness, sympathy and support for the weaker, defiance in the face of the stronger, rationality, competence in the face of danger or disruption, knowledge of one's duties and a desire to fulfill them, hairiness, muscularity, loudness). Some of those who offered definitions, and some who declined to do so, either dissected the term's ideological musculature or said they found it simply obsolete, not part of their active vocabulary (of these latter, one suspected I was carrying water for Harvey Mansfield). One puckish colleague sent me a picture of himself astride an all-terrain vehicle, with the caption '1000 Words'. In their variousness, skepticism, and irony alike, my colleagues demonstrated that they are a world removed from the Romans of the Middle Republic conjured up in Myles M(cDonnell)'s richly conceived, broadly informed, and, ultimately, very flawed new book: for according to M.'s account, their version of 'manliness' -- the normative term virtus, denoting the 'quality or trait entailed in being a vir' -- was but a single, deadly serious thing, the martial prowess that gained victory in battle.

M. begins (4 f.) by distinguishing his work from that of his predecessors -- esp. Donald Earl and Werner Eisenhut -- who took virtus to represent a broad concept that embraced different kinds of excellence and remained fairly stable over the course of its traceable history.1 Criticising those studies especially for failing to take appropriate account of virtus as it appears in pre-classical (i.e., pre-Ciceronian) Latin, M. sets out to tell a different story, one intended to give full force to 'the meaning of virtus that predominates in early Latin -- martial prowess or courage -- and ... to [justly gauge] the extent of Hellenic influence on virtus' (5). To tell his story, M. first provides three chapters of linguistic analysis -- 'Manliness as Courage in Early Latin' (12-71), 'Hellenization and aretê -- Semantic Borrowing' (72-104), 'aretê and Manly Virtus' (105-41) -- and two more on 'Visual Representations of Virtus' (142-58) and 'The Boundaries of Manliness' (159-80), before turning to a diachronic account in the remaining five chapters.2 The main lines of that account are as follows. Because of the structure of the Roman household, where patria potestas kept young sons and daughters on much the same footing and 'the only true man was the paterfamilias' (178), Roman males had to look beyond the household to find a place where their 'manhood was not only fashioned, but institutionalized. The institution was the res publica' (173). 'Manliness' was defined in and by public, communal service, above all military service; and during the Middle Republic -- from the second half of the fourth century BCE until the second half of the second century -- military service meant, for members of the aristocracy, service as cavalrymen, who most conspicuously displayed their 'manliness' by engaging in mounted single combat with the enemy (Chapter 6): hence the representation of virtus as a mounted figure on Republican coinage and the importance of equestrian images more generally (146 ff.). It was in this context that virtus came to be identified exclusively with martial prowess.

But by the end of the third century, and continuing on to the end of the next, several major trends affected both the nature of Roman politics and culture and the conception of virtus. As Roman power expanded throughout Italy and beyond, competition among Roman aristocrats intent on gaining surpassing fame for martial virtus began to prove problematic in ways that foreshadowed the destructive dignitatis conten-

tiones of the Late Republic (M. Claudius Marcellus is for M. a key figure here: Chapter 7). And of course Rome came into ever more intimate contact with Greek-speakers and their cultural products, with the result that many members of the elite became steeped in the language and thought of Hellenism at the same time that the notables' traditional venue for proving their virtus -- service in the cavalry -- had an ever-diminishing place in their lives. Along the way, the conception of virtus was both altered by the impact of Greek aretê and contested in the political sphere: by the second century's end we find a new man like Marius claiming for himself the mantle of traditional martial virtus to distinguish himself from a philhellene notable like Q. Catulus (Chapter 8). Two generations later another new man, Cicero, would create a completely novel character for himself -- as the imperator togatus -- and, especially over the last twenty years of his career, lastingly redefine the concept of virtus (Chapter 10).

It would be difficult to argue with M.'s account of the overall cultural and political trends in the transition from Middle to Late Republic, and anyone who has spent fifteen minutes in the Romans' company knows how important martial achievement was to their conception of 'being a man'; some of the account's elements, too -- for example, the vivid comments on the difficulty and danger of cavalry training (193 ff.) -- are of value and interest independent of the overall argument about virtus in which they are embedded. But that argument is obviously the book's core, and its strength depends to a great extent on the foundation laid by the first three chapters' linguistic analysis. How firm is that foundation?

M. starts from, and subsequently lays great and repeated stress upon, two texts, one by Ennius, the other by Caesar (6-8). In the first of these (Hectoris Lytra frag. 155-6 Jocelyn), Priam is represented as saying:

> melius est virtute ius: nam saepe virtutem mali
> nanciscuntur: ius atque aecum se a malis spernit procul.

> Justice is better than virtus: for bad men often happen upon
> virtus, while justice and fairness keep themselves well clear of the bad.

In the second passage (BC 3.59.1 ff.), Caesar tells of two brothers from the Allobroges whom he had rewarded grandly, and whom he held personally dear, because they had served with 'singular virtus' as leaders of the Gallic cavalry: when they used their positions to steal money intended for the men serving under them, they suffered great public opprobrium and exposed themselves to Caesar's punishment -- though Caesar decided to postpone punishment both because the time was not right and because he made substantial allowance for their virtus ('multa eorum virtuti concedens rem totam distulit'). These passages, M. argues, show that virtus was not the 'all-inclusive and ethical concept' (8) described by Earl and Eisenhut, and fair enough, up to a point: the passages do show that Caesar and Ennius (or the character in whose mouth Ennius put the words) did not hold, as Stoics did, that all desirable ethical qualities -- all 'virtues' -- are interentailing and ever harmonious, and they could therefore speak of virtus in ways that do not align it with, or take it to subsume, justice or fiscal honesty. But note the implication of M.'s phrase 'all-inclusive and ethical concept'; for M. does not stop at the issue of 'inclusivity'. Rather, these texts soon serve as exhibit A -- cited time after time in the course of the book -- to support M.'s contention that 'native Roman virtus' was not an ethical quality at all, that it was 'non-ethical' (110, 129, 130) or even 'unethical' (375). And it soon emerges as a corollary of this position that the influence of Greek aretê must be invoked to explain any instance in which virtus displays what M. takes to be an ethical coloring.3

But neither of these passages, nor any other that M. discusses from the corpus of pre-classical Latin texts, supports the view that 'native Roman virtus' was not an ethical quality, in the sense relevant to traditional Roman ethics: both passages presume that virtus is commonly regarded as a trait that increases one's worth as a person, and that it stands, as Sallust put it, among 'the qualities desired by good men' (BJ 64.1, quoted by M. at p. 367).4 In both passages, it is true, there is a tension, or a difference in value, between virtus and some other ethical quality, and the tension is resolved differently in the two passages, with less

value assigned to virtus in the case of Ennius, more (at least temporarily) in the case of Caesar. That one ethical quality can be at odds with another is not distinctive of virtus (think of justice and mercy), nor is virtus the only desirable ethical quality that mali can display: the fact that many very bad people have been loyal to many other bad people or causes does not keep us from regarding loyalty as an important ethical quality. But rather than ask how pre-classical virtus participated in an ethical system and its tensions, M. strips away the tensions by denying the ethical dimension.

The desire to confine the ethical dimension of virtus entirely to the Hellenic side of his rigid framework is one example of the Systemzwang that grips M.'s argument.5 For another, consider his treatment of the plural virtutes. If the singular form virtus fundamentally denotes a 'quality or trait entailed in being a vir', one might expect that the plural form fundamentally denotes 'qualities or traits entailed in being a vir'; and that is indeed what it is found to denote countless times. But there can be no such plurality of qualities or traits for M.: having decided that 'native Roman virtus' is always and determinately one specific thing, he must explain away the not inconsiderable number of places in early Latin where virtutes are mentioned, primarily by claiming that '"deeds of courage" is the regular meaning of virtutes in ... early Latin' (23). That this 'regular meaning' is not acknowledged by the Oxford Latin Dictionary is not an obstacle; neither is the fact that M.'s claim is contradicted by the very first pre-classical passage where he confronts virtutes.6 Because the plurality cannot be granted, the claim must be repeated, again and again (31, 40, 131, 132, 135). At moments such as these -- and there are very many of them -- a reader must be forgiven if the word 'procrustean' comes to mind.7

Then there is the especially grim stretch, near the end of Chapter 1, in which M., arguing against Nathan Rosenstein, insists that the 'essence of virtus' was not the courage displayed in steadfastly holding one's ground, fighting back fear and enduring pain, but was rather the courage displayed in acts of fierce aggression (64-71). One understands why M. wants to make that argument, given his belief that virtus above all expressed the quality of the aristocratic cavalryman charging ahead to face the enemy in single combat. As a reading of the evidence, however, it is about as sensible as insisting that, 'essentially', Laurel really was funnier than Hardy; it also leads M. to a conclusion that -- were it true -- would be awkward for a main line in his argument. For if the real, 'essential' meaning of virtus were just 'aggressive courage' (71) -- indeed, if virtus more generally denoted martial prowess and only that, until it was broadened under the impact of aretê -- it is not really clear why it would have experienced that broadening impact to begin with: were 'native Roman' virtus as narrow and specific a thing as M. believes it was -- were it in fact not much more than a common synonym for fortitudo -- why should it have been altered any more than fortitudo was? Why, indeed, should it ever have been chosen as the Latin stand-in for the far more flexible and various aretê?

Yet M.'s conclusion at p. 71, where he rounds off his crucial discussion of 'manliness as courage in early Latin', is problematic in another, more fundamental respect. Here are the chapter's last two sentences:

   It was precisely because the ideal of Roman manliness was belligerent and aggressive that it was thought to pose a threat to society and why a central element of Roman republican ideology and institutions was that virtus be constrained [M. here anticipates his argument in Chapter 6]. But the ways in which virtus was controlled should not be confused with the ideal itself.

An 'ideal', however, to be an ideal, must be a final good -- a thing one strives to attain as an end in itself -- and it seems obvious that any final good requiring limit or modification cannot be a final good: if virtus just was belligerent aggression of a socially threatening sort, as M. says, it cannot have been the 'ideal of Roman manliness'; if it was that ideal, it cannot have been what M. says it was.

There are many other places and many other ways in which M.'s arguments in the first third of the book struck me as wrong-headed, blinkered, or forced, but this is not the place to discuss them all.8 What then

to say by way of summation? At the very beginning of his book M. remarks that 'virtus is a notoriously difficult word to translate' (3); but I do not think that he means quite what he says. In the vast majority of the texts in which it occurs, virtus can be translated, simply yet accurately, as 'manliness';9 and though that translation might occasionally have an odd ring, it is a useful oddity, insofar it reminds us of the distance between our own conceptions and sensibilities and those of the people we study. No, the real difficulty of virtus lies in understanding how Roman 'manliness' -- a container of specific shape, yet per se as empty of specific content as its English counterpart -- was filled with different meanings in different contexts by different speakers having different aims. About some of these meanings M. has acute and useful things to say, especially the closer we come to the late Republic, and the figures of Cicero and Sallust. But for the earlier period, where he believes he is making the greatest advance over his predecessors, M.'s reductive account goes off the rails in ways that inevitably and pervasively affect the terms in which the rest of the argument is conducted.

The quality of the proofreading and the copyediting -- which tolerates sentence fragments, innumerable random commas, and at least one 'infer' for 'imply' -- would be unworthy of a book emerging from a much less distinguished press at a much lower price.

[For a response to this review by Myles McDonnell, please see BMCR 2007.03.38.]
Notes:

1.   For Earl, see esp. The Political Thought of Sallust (Cambridge, 1961) and The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome (Cornell, 1967); for Eisenhut, Virtus Romana: Ihre Stellung im römischen Wertsystem (Munich, 1973).

2.   Chapter 6 'Manliness in Republican Rome' (181-205); Chapter 7 'Divine Virtus -- M. Claudius Marcellus and Roman Politics' (206-40); Chapter 8 'Virtus Contested (241-92); Chapter 9 'Virtus Imperatoris (293-319); Chapter 10 'Manliness Redefined' (320-84), with an 'Epilogue -- Roman Manliness and the Principate' (385-90).

3.   So first p. 9 'traditionally Roman and essentially martial' vs. 'Greek-influenced and primarily ethical'; cf. thereafter, e.g., 48, 129, 289, 294, 302, 308, 319, 333 ('native martial and Hellenized ethical meanings'), 343 ('either the ethical or the courageous meaning'), 357 ('the dual meaning of virtus -- one martial and Roman, the other influenced by Greek ideas'), 375.

4.   Cf. p. 62 'In pre-Classical Latin the predominant meaning of virtus was physical courage, and it carried the highest social approval, even if it did not represent, and indeed was sometimes contrasted to, ethical conduct', a formulation which suggests that M. means not 'ethical' but 'moral' in the modern sense; cf. also the confused discussion of 'ethical' and 'social' norms on pp. 110 f.

5.   In Chapter 2 (esp. 77 ff.) M. writes as though Rome first came to have a significant Greek-speaking population, and so first felt the impact of Greek language and culture, in the course of the third century BCE. But the two cultural strands were intertwined at Rome well before that, and well before the start of the textual record in Latin: to suppose that that record can be used neatly to sever the strands is one of the book's essential implausibilities.

6.   Ter. Eun. 1090 facta et virtutes tuas, quoted on p. 17, where M. says 'virtutes surely means the soldiers' martial deeds': surely it does not, given that the deeds are already covered by facta; Pl. Rud. 321-2, where even M. cannot claim that virtutes = 'deeds', is explained away on different grounds at p. 122. Besides 'qualities or traits entailed in ...', the plural of virtus, like that of other abstract nouns, can denote 'instances / expressions of [sc. the quality/-ies ...]', which in turn can sometimes correspond to 'deeds'; but of

the eleven places where the plural virtutes occurs in Plautus, only one (Asin. 558) seems even to invite some meaning like that, though it hardly compels it.

7. For other examples see n. 8. At one point M. allows that 'the semantic range of virtus may have always included some activities other than those associated with physical prowess or courage, and it is possible that in some instances a more general meaning for virtus was extended into non-physical and non-martial contexts without the benefit of foreign influence' (128, emph. added). But M. himself seems scarcely to believe what he says here (contrast, e.g., pp. 129, 131), and in any case he certainly does not take it seriously enough to explore the implications: if the 'native' semantic range of virtus was more inclusive, what exactly did it include?

8. Among the discussions I found especially procrustean, arbitrary, or otherwise unsatisfactory: pp. 13-14, on Plin. NH 21.7; p. 27, on Pl. Pers. 268; pp. 34 f., on ILLRP 309; pp. 37 f., on ILLRP 312; pp. 38 f., on ILLRP 316; p. 54, on Cato ORF 58.12 ff.; pp. 56-8, on Cato Agr. 3.2; pp. 84 ff., on virtus vs. fortuna; p. 101, on the phrase virtute deum in Plautus; pp. 114 ff., on the supposed Greek origins of the contrast between virtus and voluptas vel sim.; pp. 132-4, on Cic. De or. 2.225-6; p. 169, on Cic. Fam. 14.3.2.

9. Thus M. himself, p. 4 n. 11: 'It is clear from usage that virtus struck the ear of an ancient Roman much as "manliness" does that of the English speaker'.