



## *Virtue Ethics in Angélique Arnauld (1591-1661)*

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The reforming abbess of Port-Royal, Angélique Arnauld developed a theory of virtue consistent with her Jansenist theology. In her neo-Augustinian perspective, the alleged natural virtues of the “good pagan” are illusory; the external virtuous actions of ancient Greek and Roman heroes were motivated by pride and self-interest. The virtue of magnanimity, for example, represents a type of insurance for the wealthy against the envy of the poor.

It is intention, and not external action or consequences, which determines the moral quality of an act. Infused by divine grace, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are necessary for authentic moral virtues, characterized by the disinterested love of God and neighbor. Mère Angélique gives the theological virtues a militant edge. Faith plunges the Christian into combat against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Supernatural hope turns the Christian against the poisonous hope of promotion and prominence that plagues the courtier. Charity, the wholehearted love of God, requires nothing less than the annihilation of oneself. Even apparently secular virtues are given a theological turn. Patience, for example, can only be pursued when one is humbly cognizant of one’s own sinful history and repeated moral failures. The Socratic virtue of self-knowledge can only emerge when introspective reflection is conducted under the illumination provided by divine grace; otherwise, one’s vices will distort the introspective process and produce an erroneous self-portrait. As the persecution of the Jansenist movement intensified, Mère Angélique increasingly stressed the martyr’s virtue of suffering for the truth.

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