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Virtue Ethics in Christina Wasa, Queen of Sweden (1626–1689)

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Reflecting her experience as a reigning monarch, Christina Wasa, Queen of Sweden emphasizes the heroic virtues in her account of ethics. She considers them the summit of moral character. These heroic virtues often have a martial framework. The supreme moral virtue, courage is best demonstrated by the invincible warrior on the battlefield. Liberality in dealing with the vanquished is the mark of the morally great conqueror. Even the quieter virtues are typical of the conquering ruler. Tolerating ingratitude on the part of one's subjects is one such virtue. Consistent with her code of heroic ethics, she praises historic classical personages who were prominent rulers and warriors: Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar among men; Cleopatra among women. Similarly, the vices censured by Queen Christina are typical of the powerful and the affluent. Luxuriousness is one such vice. Paradoxically, however, the disordered taste of the ruling class for luxury products can promote the common good by the industries and jobs it finances. Satisfying expensive tastes becomes a source of secret alms for the needy.

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