



Virtue Ethics in Marie le Jars de Gournay (1665–1645)

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In her moral philosophy Marie Le Jars de Gournay defends an aristocratic code of virtue. Personal honor often appears to be the highest good in her hierarchy of values. She condemns slander as one of the gravest of immoral actions. In destroying a person's reputation, slander destroys the good name to which an innocent person has a right. For a person from a prominent social rank, such a destruction of one's good name can constitute a type of social annihilation. The concern for honor also governs her treatment of vengeance. While recognizing that vengeance is an apparent violation of the gospel's call to forgive one's enemies, Gournay argues that the courageous person must be ready to avenge any assault on the good name of the person or his or her family. This defense of honor constitutes the soul of chivalry. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Gournay does not condemn apparent virtue as the mask of vice, but she does contend that is difficult to assess the true moral worth of an externally virtuous action since the motivation of the agent usually remains hidden from view.

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