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Is Self-Proclaimed Excellence a Political Virtue? Modern and Contemporary British Political Culture in the Light of Aristotelian Virtue-Ethics

Self-proclaimed excellence has been an often neglected but controversial feature of political culture in the Anglosphere from at least the 18th-century onwards. Actors of politics often find it a useful tool of enhancing their careers in public discourse regarding the democratic processes of elections to overstress their own achievements and potential. In this context, virtue does not seem to originate in the perception of one's deeds, but in whether he or she can convince the public opinion of being virtuous, often without any real grounding. As long as self-proclaimed excellence can be backed by objective facts, and there is no obvious contradiction between a political actor's actions and rhetoric, this phenomenon can be viewed as a minor moral flaw of the British and American political community as noted by a 19th-century Hungarian traveller. It can be assumed that this issue has significant contemporary relevance as well, as self-proclaimed excellence has undoubtedly gained widespread acceptance in the entire Western public discourse, not just in a strictly political sense, but in culture and sciences as well, often without clearly defying the criteria of excellence, that raises questions about whether there is any objective basis of public excellence, or if simply acceptance by the community decides on what is viewed as virtuous without any solid ethical foundation.

In my talk, I will examine the relations of this phenomenon to Aristotelian virtue ethics, how self-proclaimed excellence relates to the Aristotelian concept of virtue, pointing out the difficulty of impartially measuring human excellence, especially on the field of the political. As everything can be politicised, these

questions have significant relevance related to the functioning of contemporary Western societies.