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The Motive of Society: Aristotle on Civic Friendship, Justice, and Concord

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Abstract My aim in this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of the Aristotelian notion of civic friendship to contemporary political discussion by arguing that it can function as a social good. Contrary to some dominant interpretations of the ancient conception of friendship according to which it can only be understood as an obligatory reciprocity, I argue that friendship between fellow citizens is important because it contributes to the unity of both state and community by transmitting feelings of intimacy and solidarity. In that sense, it can be understood as an important relationship predicated on affection and generosity, virtues lacking from both contemporary politics and society that seem to be merely dominated by Post-Enlightenment ideals. For Aristotle, friendship is important for society because it generates concord, articulating thus a basis for social unity and political agreement.

Keywords Aristotle · Civic friendship · Justice · Concord · Social unity

Introduction

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of the Aristotelian notion of civic friendship to contemporary political discussion by arguing that it can function as a social good. Contrary to some dominant interpretations of the ancient conception of friendship according to which it can only be understood as an obligatory reciprocity, I argue that friendship between fellow citizens is important because it contributes to the unity of both state and community by transmitting feelings of intimacy and solidarity. In that sense, it can be understood as an important relationship predicated on affection and generosity, virtues lacking from both contemporary politics and society that seem to be merely dominated by

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Post-Enlightenment ideals. In addition, it should be noted that Aristotelian civic friendship is not incompatible with justice and the rule of law. Aristotle's notion of civic friendship is important, not only because it can help us develop a better understanding of his notion of political justice, but also because it can, if successfully applied to our notion of the modern state, contribute to its improvement.

In particular, in the sections that follow, I will, first, analyze Aristotle's notion of *politikē philia* as a form of common advantage friendship, and demonstrate its relation to state and society. Second, I will examine the relation between friendship and justice and will attempt to throw some light onto the connection between the two made by Aristotle, and argue that it is possible for the notions of friendship and justice to be compatible. At the same time, I will demonstrate the importance that Aristotle attributes to concord for the unity of the state, and its relation with friendship and justice. For Aristotle, friendship is important for society because it generates concord, thus articulating a basis for social unity and political agreement.

Defining Aristotelian Civic Friendship

Questions of Interpretation

Aristotle discusses friendship (*philia*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Rhetoric*, and the *Politics*.[1] In both versions of the *Ethics* Aristotle seems to give an important place to political or civic friendship (*politikē philia*) but strangely he says very little about this in the *Politics*. Most commentators have either thought that discussion of friendship has little or no importance for moral and political theory and have considered Aristotle's treatment of the subject as *sui generis*, or else have focused entirely on the *NE* neglecting the account of friendship offered in the *EE*. In addition, there has been little discussion of Aristotle's notion of civic friendship as presented in both the *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics* and of the bearing that this conception might have on his political theory, as presented in the *Politics*, where the notion of civic friendship is not discussed at length, although it is mentioned in some places. Most important, very little has been said on the relation between justice and friendship (something that Aristotle points to in both his accounts of friendship), and indeed this is left out of most discussions about Aristotelian justice.[2] It is not surprising, therefore, that, although there are studies of

[1] Abbreviations: *NE* (*Nicomachean Ethics*), *EE* (*Eudemian Ethics*), *Pol* (*Politics*), *Rhet* (*Rhetoric*). Translations from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* are from Ross (1980) and Stalley (1995) respectively, and the translations of Aristotle's other works are from Barnes (1984), with some alterations of my own.

[2] Discussions of Aristotelian justice (e.g. Williams 1981; Urmson 1988; Broadie 1991; Keyt 1991; Keyt 1995; Miller 1995) mainly concentrate on Aristotle's account of distributive justice as presented in *NE* V.3. Commentators rarely focus on Aristotle's discussion in *Pol*. III.9-13 of the relation of justice to constitutions where—among other things—it is pointed out that 'the pursuit of a common social life is friendship' and that the business of friendship is to safeguard the social institutions (*Pol*. 1280b38-39). A notable exemption amongst commentators has been Yack (1985, 1990, 1993).

Aristotle on friendship, little has been written specifically about his view on civic friendship.[3]

Aristotle maintained that friendship is the motive of society since '*philia* is the pursuit of a common social life' (*Pol* 1280b38-39) and argued that friendship is even more important than justice since it generates concord in the city (*NE* 1155b21-27). 'In all communities of exchange, this sort of justice holds people together' (*NE* 1132b31) and 'reciprocity preserves cities' (*Pol* 1261a32). Social beings as we are by nature we need other people and we learn from a young age to communicate and interact with them, 'for a human is a social being and his nature is to live in the company of others' (*NE* 1169b18-19). Indeed, Aristotle attributed a special kind of meaning to the idea of friendship maintaining that 'Society depends on friendship—after all, people will not even take a journey in common with their enemies' (*Pol* 1295b23-25). According to Aristotle, 'it is thought to be the special business of the political art to produce friendship, and people say that excellence is useful because of this, for those who are unjustly treated by one another cannot be friends to one another' (*EE* 1234b22-25).

The claim that friendship is necessary for justice comes out of the *NE*, when Aristotle discusses friendship at length in Books VIII and IX, and also in the *EE* Books VII and VIII. There is very little mention of 'political friendship' as such in the *Politics*, or its relation to justice. Aristotle discusses friendship in passing in some places in the *Politics*. First, in Book I.1255b13 when he talks about friendship between master and slave (a same point he has made in *NE* VIII.13.1161b5). Second, he also mentions friendly feeling when he talks about common land in *Pol* VIII.10.1330a1. Political friendship is also mentioned at *Pol* 1280b38 and 1295b23; both passages claim that friendship is essential to the state but say little about it. Friendship is also mentioned in Book II.3-4 where Aristotle criticizes Plato's *Republic*.

The fact that civic friendship is not explicitly discussed in the *Politics* is problematic, in a way, for the manner in which Aristotle's ethical works relate to his political treatise. Perhaps, one could say that Aristotle saw no need to discuss it in the *Politics*, since he had already done so at length in the *Ethics*. Another way of justifying the absence of extensive discussion of 'political friendship' in the *Politics* would be to point out the peculiarity of the Books of the *Politics* themselves which are not a consistent work but rather a number of originally independent essays, not completely worked up into a whole (Ross 1980, p. 13). So, one could say that somehow a discussion on 'political friendship' was left out from the *Politics* simply due to the general disorganisation of the treatise. But, another line of argument would be that a discussion of 'political friendship' was left out of the *Politics* because it would not seem essential when discussing a normative political theory, in the sense that, since there is no plausible way to legislate friendship, one cannot force people to become friends. If this is right, then despite the fact that *philia* in general and *politikē philia* in particular were thought by Aristotle to be essential to

[3] Several monographs have recently been written on the topic of Aristotelian friendship (e.g. Price 1989; Nichols 1991; Schollmeier 1994; Stern-Gillet 1995; Pangle Smith 2003) but these usually dedicate only a chapter to civic friendship; only individual papers have concentrated on Aristotelian civic friendship (e.g. Kronman 1979; Schwarzenbach 1996; Cooper 1999b; Schofield 1999; Mulgan 2000).

justice and to the good of the *polis* and its citizens, he may, nevertheless, have realised that there is no practical way of 'forcing people to be friends', to adapt a familiar Rousseaunean expression. Entering into friendship is something to be done voluntarily and no law could normatively regulate that we should have friendship in our private or political life. It is true that Aristotle does seem to say at *NE* 1155a23-24 that the lawgiver's aim is to try to create friendship in the state. But, nevertheless, there is nothing in either the *Nicomachean* or the *Eudemian* text to suggest that there is a way for the lawgiver to actually regulate friendship—in the form of legislation for example. Aristotle there rather seems to suggest that the lawgiver should encourage friendly feeling among the citizens; but could not, nevertheless, force them to be friends. In addition, Aristotle points out in *Pol* 1280b38-40 that, although friendship is necessary for social life—in the sense that the pursuit of a common social life is friendship—nevertheless, political associations exist not for the sake of social life but for the sake of the good life.[4]

Three Kinds of Friendship

In order though to be able to understand Aristotle's notion of political or civic friendship, one should look into his general definition of friendship and the various distinctions he makes between the different kinds of friendships, and their varieties.

Aristotle (*NE* 1155b21 and *EE* 1236a32) distinguishes three kinds of friendship: *philia*[5] that arises from (1) goodness (*agathon* or *aretēn*), (2) pleasantness (*ēdu*), and (3) usefulness (*chrēsimon*). These three kinds are better understood when we, first, come to know the object of love (*philēton*); 'for not everything seems to be loved but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant, or useful', and for people 'to be friends, then, they must be mutually recognised as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other for one of the aforesaid reasons' (*NE* 1155b17-1156a5).[6] Corresponding to the object of love, there are three kinds of friendship equal in

[4] Despite this luck of extensive discussion of political friendship in the *Politics*, there is no question that Aristotle's notion of political friendship is unequivocally linked with his notion of political community (*koinonia*): 'Friendship is community, and as we are in relation to ourselves, so we are in relation to a friend' (*NE* XI.1171b32-33). For an extensive discussion of this relation, see Kronman (1979, pp. 125–128) and Irwin (1990, pp. 84–87).

[5] As Cooper (1999a, pp. 312–313) points out, 'the field of *philia* covers not just the (more or less) intimate relationships between persons not bound together by near family ties, to which the words used in the modern languages to translate it are ordinarily restricted, but all sorts of family relationships (especially those of parents to children, children to parents, siblings to one another, and the marriage relationship itself); the word also has a natural and ordinary use to characterise what goes in English under the somewhat quaint-sounding name of "civic friendship". Certain business relationships also come in here, as does common membership in religious and social clubs and political parties'. Examples of *philia* describing family relationships such as those of parents to children, children to parents, siblings to one another, and the marriage relationship itself can be found in *NE* VIII. 1161b12; 1242a1; 1161b 12 and in *EE* VII.10.5-6; also in *Generation of Animals*, III.2. 753a13. See also Blundell (1989, pp. 39–49) where she discusses the many levels and varieties of *philia* under three main headings: family, fellow citizens and personal friends, and Mitchell (1997, pp. 1–72) for a presentation of the various Greek popular practices of *philia*.

[6] Pleasure and advantage friendships should be distinguished from exploitative relationships in which the parties aim each at their own pleasure or usefulness and not at all at the other's good.

number to the things that are loveable: 'for with respect to each there is a mutual and recognised love, and those who love each other wish well to each other in that respect in which they love one another' (*NE* 1158a6-10). The different reasons for loving someone depend on whether one loves them for their utility, their pleasantness, or their virtue: 'those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant' (*NE* 1156a10-24). Virtue friendship is the friendship of people who are good, and alike in virtue; such friends wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves (*NE* 1156b6-8). It is obvious from Aristotle's analysis that, from all three kinds of friendship, virtue friendship[7] is the one to be preferred.[8]

Nevertheless, various passages in the *NE* (1155b21-27; 1158a9; 1166a1-10; 1166b30-1167a3; 1171a5), and a passage in the *Rhetoric* (1380b36-1381a5), seem to suggest that all three kinds of friendship (including the variety of civic friendship that derives from utility or advantage friendship) entail at least two important constitutive features: affection and an altruistic concern for a friend's good.[9] According to Aristotle: x and y are friends iff

(1) x and y know each other
(2) x and y have mutual goodwill for the other's sake
(3) x and y feel affection for each other, and
(4) x and y recognise (2) and (3) (Leontsini 2007, p. 175).

Political Friendship as 'Common Advantage Friendship'

Aristotle mentions several kinds of *philia* similar to the political one, all falling under the framework of the three kinds of *philia*: friendships of fellow-citizens, fellow-tribesmen, shipmates, even thieves (*EE* VII.1242a1-2 and *NE* VIII.1161b12). As he says, these are more like friendships in a community, because they appear to be based on a sort of agreement; in this sense, the friendship of host and guest could also fall into this category.[10] Aristotle does not explicitly state exactly how political

[7] 'Virtue friendship' (*agathon* or *aretēn*) is also translated as 'perfect friendship', 'friendship of the good', 'friendship of character', or 'primary friendship'.

[8] For a more extensive analysis of the three kinds of personal friendship as described by Aristotle, see Leontsini (2007, pp. 175–185) from where this analysis derives.

[9] I am adopting Cooper's (1999a, b) interpretation according to which all three kinds of Aristotelian *philia* are indeed friendship, having in common affection and an altruistic concern for another's well-being (no matter how loosely conceived). Cooper's interpretation is also followed by Schwarzenbach (1992, 1996), and others but not Schofield (1999).

[10] Communities or associations like these, although similar to the political community, should be distinguished from it, since it is the 'constitution' (the system of courts, a common set of laws and a shared conception of justice) which distinguishes the political community from other associations either merely contractual or commercial. Aristotle rejects the commercial model for the kind of community a city constitutes in *NE* III. 9, since for Aristotle the end of the city is not mere life, nor an alliance for mutual defence but the common promotion of a good quality of life. For an informative discussion of this, see Cooper (1999b, pp. 365–368).

friendship is related to the three kinds of *philia*, but it is clear that he regards it as a special form of 'common advantage friendship' (*to koine symferon*):

> For people journey together with a view to some particular advantage, and to provide something that they need for the purposes of life; and it is for the sake of advantage that the political community too seems both to have come together originally and to endure, for this is what legislators aim at, and they call just that which is to the common advantage (*NE* 1160a11-14).

Aristotle points out that the political community is formed and survives for the sake of the common advantage that its members derive from it. In this sense, it is essential for such a community to aim at securing what is needed by its members to support their lives (*NE* 1160a11-23). All these different small communities, which exist within the larger political association, seem to be subordinate to this political community, because the political community aims not at what is immediately useful, but at what is useful for the whole life:

> All these communities, then, seem to be parts of the political community; and the particular kinds of friendship will correspond to the particular kinds of community (*NE* 1160a28-30).

In *EE* 1242a6-13 political friendship is also classified as advantage friendship:

> Political friendship on the other hand is constituted in the fullest degree on the principle of utility, for it seems to be the individual's lack of self-sufficiency that makes these unions permanent – since they would have been formed in any case merely for the sake of society. Only civic friendship and the deviation from it are not merely friendships but also partnerships on a friendly footing (*ôs philoi koinônousin*); the others are on a basis of superiority. The justice that underlies a friendship of utility is in the highest degree just, because this is the civic principle of justice.

It seems, therefore, that Aristotle's notion of political friendship falls under the kind of advantage or utility friendship, and that both accounts of political friendship as presented in *NE* and *EE* point to this. However, in this kind of civic friendship as a form of common advantage[11] that Aristotle advocates, political friends retain the aspects of mutual awareness and liking, of the reciprocal wishing the other well for that other's sake, and of doing things for the friend. Aristotelian civic friendship falls under the general definition of *philia*, and, 'like other forms of advantage friendship, is really a *friendship*' (Cooper 1999b, p. 370). As Cooper again points out, 'like all relationships deserving the name "friendship", civic friendship involves mutual good will, trust, and well-wishing, and the mutual interest that fellow-citizens have in one another's characters is part of that good will and well-wishing' (Cooper 1999b, p. 370).

Virtue friendship—being the central and basic kind of friendship—allows all sorts of interpersonal relations which involve mutual other-concern to fall under friendship. As Cooper points out, 'civic friendship, then, as the special form of friendship characteristic of this kind of community, is founded on the experience

[11] Yack (1993, p. 110) labels it as 'shared advantage friendship'.

and continued expectation, on the part of each citizen, of profit and advantage to himself, in common with the others, from membership in the civic association' (Cooper 1999a, p. 333). Political friendship then exists when the fellow-citizens, to one another's mutual knowledge, like (*philein*) one another, that is, where each citizen wishes well (and is known to wish well) to the others, and is willing to undertake to confer benefits on them, for their own sake, in consequence of recognising that he himself is regularly benefited by the actions of the others (Cooper 1999a, *ibid*).

In such a community animated by political friendship, each citizen assumes that all the others, even those hardly or not at all known to her, are willing supporters of their common institutions and willing contributors to the common social project, from which she, together with all the other citizens, benefits (Schwarzenbach 1992, p. 257). According to Cooper (*ibid*), 'if this is what political friendship is, it is not surprising that Aristotle should remark that lawgivers are more concerned to foster friendship among their citizens than they are to put their relations on a footing of justice'. As Aristotle says, '… justice can exist perfectly well among those who care nothing for one another and who would not lift a finger to help anyone else, except insofar as rules of justice may require; the sense of justice, understood as respect for fairness and legality, is compatible with a suspicious, narrow, hard, and unsympathetic character' (*NE* 1155a23-24). Indeed, as Schwarzenbach (1992, p. 258) points out, 'the stable and good society, one where the truest form of justice is not merely meted out, but recognised by all citizens involved, must of necessity be a society animated by civic friendship'.

Nevertheless, political friendship understood as a form of common advantage friendship has been claimed to be problematic for Aristotle's general notion of friendship, since, if political friendship is defined in this way, then there is a danger of it not being friendship in any real sense. Political friendship, defined thus—it could be argued—is friendship only in name; it has in fact nothing to do with the definition of friendship offered previously. Indeed, most interpretations of Aristotelian friendship, and consequently of political friendship, tend to be idealized, focusing on virtue friendship, criticizing Aristotle's notion of political friendship because in their view Cooper's interpretation does not match up to this ideal of virtue friendship. The reason is that 'most contemporary commentators find it hard to accept Aristotle's unequivocal characterization of political friendship as an instrumental friendship as his last word on the subject, for this notion threatens the overly moralistic conception of political community they impose on his writings' (Yack 1993, p. 116). Price (1989, pp. 179–205) offers an alternative interpretation, since he attaches the label of 'virtue' to civic friendship, disagreeing thus with Cooper. Stern-Gillet (1995, pp. 147–169) also agrees with Price in this; in fact, her exegesis is an exemplary account of such an idealized overly moralistic interpretation of Aristotelian civic friendship, as was also Kronman's (1979) earlier.[12]

[12] Both Miller (1995, p. 209) and Yack (1993, pp. 109–127) partially deny Cooper's interpretation on different grounds, since they attempt to argue that Aristotle advocates a form of commercial civic friendship (Cooper 1999b, pp. 365–368) that would support their libertarian appropriation of Aristotelian political philosophy. The Aristotelian text is in places ambiguous as to what kind of advantage (common or commercial) political friendship is really taken to be (see Cooper 1999b, n. 11 and n. 12 and Mulgan 2000, pp. 21–24).

It is true, of course, that in the case of political friendship, there are normally no ties of intimacy, of personal knowledge, or of individual affection in the same way that exist amongst personal friends. Indeed, the main difference between personal and political friendship is that among civic friends there is neither any intimate knowledge of the friend nor any close emotional bond. But why would we want something more than a conception of advantage friendship for civic society anyway? We cannot possibly desire to love one another as fellow citizens in the same sense that we love the people we have feelings for. Love in all its forms might be 'a desire for another's good' (Scruton 1986, p. 239), but surely we cannot be expected—nor would we desire for that matter—in any meaningful way to feel the same kind of love for our fellow-citizens. I cannot be expected to care about my fellow-citizens above the point at which I simply care about their well-being. I can only have a minimum of affection for them, and it is this kind of care and affection that civic friendship requires. In a way, these overly moralistic interpretations of Aristotelian political friendship seem to attribute to civic reciprocity more than its actual meaning.

In any case, Aristotle thinks that it is impossible to have many character and familial friendships. Although it is possible to have many friendships of varying intensities, very few of those will be intimate in the way that character (virtue) and familial friendships are. There is an additional passage in the *NE* that further expresses Aristotle's dislike—and contempt even—for people who have too many personal friends, where he also specifies the loose bond of friendship between fellow citizens that needs to be distinguished from that of personal friendships:

> Those, however, who have too many friends and treat everybody they meet as if they were close to them, seem to be friends of nobody, except in the sense that fellow-citizens are friends. These people are called obsequious. In the way fellow citizens are friends, indeed, one can be a friend to many and yet not obsequious, but a genuinely good person; but one cannot have many friends for their virtue and for their own sake. We must be content to find even a few friends like this (*NE* 1171a15-20).

Since it is impossible to have too many friends, it is only in a secondary sense that we can enjoy friendship with a large number of people, and it is in this sense that civic fellowship is perceived.[13] Aristotle argues that one cannot be friends in the literal sense of the word with all one's fellow-citizens, since there is a limited number of personal friends one could have in the first place. In fact, as far as the kind of virtue friendship (*NE* 1156b6-8) is concerned, we would be lucky if we

[13] Aristotle does not think that we could have feelings of friendship for people who are remote from us or for people we know nothing about. Aristotle does not seem to discuss, under the heading of ethically required other concern, concern for the interests of others however close or distant one's commitment to them. His attention is focused rather on friendship as other-concern restricted to those people to whom one has a certain kind of commitment which can be deep, as with friendship based on virtue, or shallow, as in advantage friendships. In all cases though, friendship involves some personal commitment, and thus cannot be demonstrated to 'all humanity' in the sense of caring for people about whom we know nothing or to whom we have no special kind of personal commitment (Annas 1993, p. 250). For people we know nothing about, we could of course have 'goodwill', but goodwill alone is not a sufficient condition for friendship.

manage to acquire one such dear virtuous friend in our lifetime (*NE* 1156b9-19) that would be 'another self' (*NE* 1166a30-31). True friendship is rare, if not impossible, and sometimes it takes a lifetime to recognise a friend. For Aristotle, it is obvious that one cannot live in the company of many people and share oneself between them, since 'it becomes hard to share personally in the joys and sorrows of many, because it is likely to turn out that one shares the pleasure of one and the distress of another at the same time' (*NE* 1171a6-8). Finite beings that we are, we can only be in a state of friendship with a limited number of people and it is for this reason that Aristotle attaches importance not only to the family but also to other forms of social organisation within the state (Stalley 1991, p. 193). Strangely enough, Aristotle's remarks on virtue friendship clarify his conception of civic friendship; the rarity of virtue friendship implies that he could not have intended this kind of friendship to be the only one that he counts as friendship, since we all have relationships we call friendships that do not match this ideal (Leontsini 2007, pp. 175–185).

The Unity of the State: Friendship, Justice, and Concord

As pointed out in the beginning of this paper, one of the most striking features of Aristotle's account is that he sees an important relation between justice and friendship. In his view, friendship is in some ways as important as justice—if not more—for the prosperity of the state. The city is a partnership for the sake of the good and—in the same sense that justice is the good in the sphere of politics—friendship is also a good and holds the state together. Lawgivers, according to this argument, seem to care more for friendship than for justice, since friendship generates concord (*homonoia*)—i.e. unanimity of the citizens—which is similar to friendship. In that way, friendship can hold the state together—in the same sense that justice does—and can also expel faction. It is in this sense that, when people are friends, they have no need of justice, while when they are just, they need friendship as well, and the highest form of justice seems to be a matter of friendship.

This view is expressed by Aristotle in both the *Nicomachean* and the *Eudemian Ethics* in two central passages respectively. First, in *NE* 1155a22-28 where he says that

> Friendship seems also to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for concord seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when people are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.

Second, in *EE* 1234b25-31 where he expresses almost the same view:

> All say that justice and injustice are specially exhibited towards friends; the same person seems both good and a friend, and friendship seems a sort of moral habit; and if one wishes to make people not wrong one another, one should make them friends, for genuine friends do not act unjustly. But neither

> will people act unjustly if they are just; therefore justice and friendship are either the same or not far different.

Friendship and justice seem to be concerned with the same things and to be found in the same people:

> For there seems to be some kind of justice in every community, and some kind of friendship as well. At any rate, people address as friends their shipmates and fellow soldiers, and similarly those who are members of other kinds of community or association with them. And the extent of their community is the extent of their friendship, since it is also the extent of their justice. The proverb, 'What friends have, they have in common', is correct, since friendship is based on community. But while brothers and comrades have everything in common, what the others whom we have mentioned have in common is more limited—more in some cases, less in others, since friendship too differs in degree (*NE* 1159b25-1160a).

Again, similar examples are also offered by Aristotle in *EE* 1242a20-27 where he says that

> Therefore to seek the proper way of associating with a friend is to seek for a particular kind of justice. In fact the whole of justice in general is in relation to a friend, for what is just is just for certain persons; and persons who are partners, and a friend is a partner, either in one's family or in one's life. For man is not only a political but also a house-holding animal, and does not, like the other animals, couple occasionally and with any chance female or male, but man is in a special way not a solitary but a gregarious animal, associating with the persons with whom he has a natural kinship; accordingly there would be partnership; and justice of a sort, even if there were no state.

Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's *Republic* in *Pol* Book II.3-4 could help us illuminate further this notion of the unity of the state and its relation to friendship.[14] Aristotle makes an important point when he points out that Plato's view would give rise to a 'watery' (*hudarē*, *Pol* 1262b16) friendship. Indeed, his argument against such a watery friendship in the *Politics* is essential for achieving an understanding of the notion of Aristotle's political friendship, and its relation to justice and the unity of the state (Stalley 1991, pp. 191–193; Mayhew 1997, pp. 79–85). According to Aristotle, 'the spirit of friendship is likely to exist to a lesser degree where women and children are in common; and the governed class ought to have little of that spirit if it is to obey and not to attempt revolution' (*Pol* 1262b1-3). Friendship, he argues, is the chief good of cities, because it is the best safeguard against the danger of factional disputes. It is similar to what Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* (191a, 192d–e) refers to when he speaks of lovers desiring out of friendship to grow together into a unity, and to be one instead of two. In the case of the lovers, it would be inevitable that both or at least one of them should cease to exist; but in the case of political association, Aristotle points out, there would be merely a watery sort of

[14] Aristotle's remarks on Plato's *Republic* should not be taken as direct criticisms of the *Republic*, but should be seen as expressions of Aristotle's own political position (Stalley 1991; Mayhew 1997).

friendship, since a father would be very little disposed to say 'mine' of a son, and a son would be as little disposed to say 'mine' of a father:

> Just as a little sweet wine, mixed with a great deal of water, produces a tasteless mixture, so family feeling is diluted and tasteless when family names have as little meaning as they have in a constitution of this sort, and when there is so little reason for a father treating his sons as sons, or a son treating his father as a father, or brothers one another as brothers (*Pol* 1262b17-21).

Aristotle points out at the end of this discussion of 'watery' friends that there are two motives which particularly move people to care for and love an object: 'the first is that the object should belong to yourself, while the second is that you should like it' (*Pol* 1262b22-23). But neither of these two motives can exist among those who live in a constitution such as the one envisaged by Plato in his *Republic*. Aristotle's argument against this kind of watery civic friendship supports further the claim made previously that it is not possible to legislate friendship.

According to Aristotle, friendship is an essential ingredient in the good life, not just because it is useful but because it is the source of some of our greatest satisfactions. In addition, there is also a political dimension to friendship, since it is both what holds the city together and a main reason for its existence. The city 'is formed for the good life which requires relations with one's fellows; it also involves parents, children, wives, and in general one's friends and fellow-citizens: thus the city is to be valued as providing the context for friendship' (Stalley 1991, p. 193).

For Aristotle, the role of friendship in the city is to generate *homonoia*, i.e. concord (unanimity; agreement; consensus),[15] and to safeguard justice. He clearly points out though that 'concord is not agreement in belief, since this can occur even among people unknown to one another'; 'nor are people described as being in concord when they agree about just anything, for example, the heavens (since concord here has nothing to do with friendship), but a city is said to be in concord when people agree about what is beneficial, rationally choose the same things, and carry out common resolutions' (*NE* 1167a22-28).

Aristotle stresses that concord in a city, if achieved, does not deprive the citizen body of its separateness and individuality, or its ability to deliberate on political decisions:

> In the case of a city, concord exists when all the citizens think that public offices ought to be elective, or that they ought to make an alliance with Sparta, or that Pittacus ought to govern, when he himself is willing. But when each person, like those in *The Phoenissae*, wants the same thing all for himself, then there is civil

[15] I am using here the English/Latin word 'concord' for the translation of Greek *homonoia*, although there is an etymological difference between the Greek concept and its English equivalent, *homonoia* involving a reference to *nous*, as explicit in *NE* 1167a28-1167b2 ('having the same thing in mind'); *homonoia* is the opposite of faction (*stasis*) and expresses the unity among the citizens that is produced by their literally being 'same-minded'. Although Aristotle does not fully expand on the notion of concord, giving the impression that he takes for granted the familiarity with the concept, it should be noted that *homonoia* was considered a key political virtue for fourth-century political writers and that there was a philosophical tradition in associating friendship, which generates concord, with justice, the unity of the state and the pursuit of happiness in the city (see. e.g. Kamtekar 2004; Leontsini 2013).

> strife. For being in concord does not consist merely in each person's having the same thing in mind for the same person (*NE* 1167a28-1167b2).

It should be, nevertheless, pointed out that the relation between justice and friendship does not make friendship a necessary condition for justice. Justice can exist, in Aristotle's account, even if we had no political friendship in the city. The state might not have concord, but then again one would not expect all constitutions to have that; if they did, they would be no imperfect ones. Concord seems to be political friendship, since it is concerned with what benefits people and what affects their lives. This kind of concord is found among good people, since they are in concord with themselves and with each other, being as it were of the same mind wishing for and aiming in common at what is just and beneficial. As he points out

> Bad people cannot be in concord, except to a small extent; for they try to get more than their share of advantages, while falling short in difficult jobs and public services. And since each wishes this for himself, he keeps a sharp eye on his neighbour and holds him back, because if people do not look out for the common interest, it is destroyed. So what happens is that they are in civil strife, pressing one another to do what is just while not wishing to do it themselves (*NE* 1167b9-16).

The civic friendship that Aristotle advocates could not be any sort of virtue friendship, since this would mean that Aristotle would have made the same mistake he accused Plato of; by attempting to make political friendship as close as character or familial friendship, the citizens would have to feel close personal friendship for one another as if the whole city was a close family. This could not be feasible, since it is not possible to be friends with so many people. Plato's solution will result in leaving affection out of the ideal city. Aristotelian political friendship does not require us to feel the same strong feelings of affection and liking that virtue friendship does. Aristotelian political friendship does, nevertheless, require us to have concern for our fellow citizens; 'concern for others' as opposed to the mere 'respect for others' that contemporary liberalism advocates. Therefore, political friendship for Aristotle is a much weaker version of virtue friendship. Political friendship can contribute to the unity of the state by creating agreement or concord. Nevertheless, the unity of the state advocated by Aristotle is one where citizens agree on what the proper conception of justice would be, enabling them thus to make arrangements concerning civic affairs (the rulers and the ruled, the election of offices etc.). The unity of the city depends on the parts of the *polis* being held together by a certain type of constitution. Nevertheless, it is the agreed conception of justice that would ultimately shape the desired constitution for the city.

The Relevance of Aristotelian Civic Friendship to Contemporary Society

As I have argued earlier, an Aristotelian account of friendship need not include an overly moralistic view of friendship—seeing the concern for the friend's good as the central element in friendship—and neglecting thus the liking of the friend, the desire

to be with him, the enjoyment of shared activities etc. Aristotle's notion of political friendship as a form of moderate advantage friendship poses no moral danger (partiality), since it presupposes impartiality and the rule of law. Finally, it should be stressed once more that Aristotelian civic friendship does not aim to originate the kind of political unity that Plato envisages for his ideal state. A common mistake made by both liberals and communitarians when appropriating the Aristotelian notion of political friendship is to equate it with Plato's conception of the unity of the state which allows no room for individuality, and to relate it, thus, to the problems that the Platonic vision of the city as a whole is associated with (Leontsini 2007, pp. 204–208).

But, is it possible today in a modern nation state, with all its largeness, multiculturalism and impersonality, for such a feeling to develop and flourish? Is Aristotle's account bound to the uniqueness and the limitations of the Greek city-state? Is his account unique to the *polis* or could it apply to other political associations as well as to modern nation states? Underlying all these problems are questions about the relationship between friendship and the conception of the good. It seems that there are two plausible views that Aristotle could hold about the role of friendship. First, one could say that friendship is a necessary part of the end of the state, since the *polis* exists for the sake of the good life. In order for human beings to flourish, there must be mutual concern. This view could even be taken to imply that friendship could be part of the goal of the state. Second, one could also argue that friendship is only contingently necessary. Since society would break down very quickly if people did not have mutual concern, a degree of friendship is in practice necessary for its survival. This view does not suit the idea that friendship is the goal of the state. Civic friendship is, nevertheless, an important social good that any reasonable political community would endorse. In support of this second view, one could say that since law is necessarily general, it leaves a lot of gaps. It cannot legislate in detail on every aspect of human life. In particular, it is impossible to legislate friendship, in the same sense that it is impossible to legislate love. There is no reasonable way that the legislator could force people to love one another, and Aristotle clearly understands this, as his criticism on Plato's notion of watery friendship indicates. Therefore, the only way is to rely on relationships of an informal kind for the city to function at all.

Aristotelian civic friendship is a variety of the friendship of utility, being a form of common advantage friendship. This kind of civic friendship, as envisaged by Aristotle, could serve as an antidote to the alienating aspects of modernity, providing some kind of a model for political community where there is both a common bond among citizens (no matter how loosely this bond is to be understood) and recognition of their separate identities. This bond of friendship creates concord in society that prevents civic strife. In this loose (Aristotelian) sense, civic friendship as a form of common advantage friendship could serve as model for contemporary society satisfying thus its ever growing need for social unity without posing a threat to either liberty or justice. In this sense, friendship is significant for both politics and political theory, and Aristotle's notion of civic friendship could provide the basis for a meaningful political form of friendship that could foster social unity in the context of pluralism.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed Aristotle's conception of friendship and tried to throw some light onto the various interpretations that have been offered so far. I argued that the notion of civic friendship that Aristotle advocates is one of 'common advantage' that retains nevertheless the characteristics common to all other kinds of friendship: mutual good will, affection, and an altruistic other-concern. Nevertheless, it is only in a secondary sense that we can enjoy friendship with a large number of people, and it is in this sense that civic friendship is perceived, since in this kind of 'common advantage civic friendship' there are no ties of intimacy, personal knowledge, or individual affection as amongst personal friends.

I have also examined the at first sight peculiar Aristotelian claim that friendship is more important for the state than justice, demonstrating that, in Aristotle's account, friendship is important for both state and society because it generates concord, thus articulating a basis for social unity that eliminates civic strife. According to Aristotle, although there is no plausible way to legislate friendship (nor is it desirable to force citizens to become friends), there must be mutual concern if human beings are to flourish inside a political community. In this sense, civic friendship is indeed a social good as important as justice, since it is only the bonds of friendship that can safeguard civic harmony, social unity, and political agreement.

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