

March 2019

# Aristotle's Quarrel with Socrates: Friendship in Political Thought

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ARISTOTLE'S QUARREL WITH SOCRATES: FRIENDSHIP IN  
POLITICAL THOUGHT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by

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May 2019

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*Dedicated to my wife,*

*Jennifer Driscoll Boersma*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great many thanks to many people. My dissertation has its origins in the first political theory seminar course I took at Louisiana State University, taught by my committee chair, Professor James R. Stoner. Professor Stoner's approach to teaching not only introduced me to the complexity and intricacy of ancient political thought but instilled in me a desire to make sense of that complexity. The guidance and wisdom I've received from my committee members—James Stoner, Cecil Eubanks, Alexander Orwin, Mary Sirridge, and Christopher Sullivan—has been invaluable. In addition, I would like to thank my professors from St. John's University, William Byrne, Mark Movsesian and Marc DeGirolami, each of whom encouraged me to pursue my graduate studies.

In addition, I would like to thank my parents. Aristotle writes that one can never repay the debt one owes to ones' parents. This is undoubtedly true in my case. In addition to giving me the gift of life and raising me according to the principles of the Christian faith, my parents have been a constant source of support and encouragement. My father patiently read and edited each chapter, providing helpful feedback and criticism.

Last, words cannot express the gratitude I have toward my wife and children for their love, support, and patience. Jennifer is my dearest friend, and her support of my graduate studies, after having already endured three years as the wife of a law student, is a testament to her deep and abiding friendship. Her love for me and our children, Kathryn, Gerald, Theodore, and our two boys on the way, has, in no small way, made my graduate studies and this dissertation possible.

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## ABSTRACT

Friendship played an outsized role in ancient political thought in comparison to medieval and modern political philosophies. Most modern scholarship has paid relatively little attention to the role of friendship in ancient political philosophy. Recently, however, scholars are increasingly beginning to investigate classical conceptions of friendship. My dissertation joins this growing interest by examining the importance of friendship in the political thought of Socrates and Aristotle. Specifically, I analyze the divergent approaches that Socrates and Aristotle take to politics and trace these distinct approaches to their differing conceptions of friendship. Through an examination of two Platonic dialogues—the *Lysis* and the *Gorgias*—I make the case that Socrates has a largely negative conception of friendship, according to which all friendships are based upon a metaphysical lack or need. This negative understanding of friendship causes him to adopt a negative, abstentious approach to politics. In contrast, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents a conception of friendship that is based not upon deficiency and need, but instead upon the mutual recognition of each other’s complementary virtues. Aristotle’s positive account of friendship ensures that he does not take a negative, abstentious approach to politics, but instead seeks to use his philosophic insight to impact politics and orient it toward the good.

## INTRODUCTION. POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, AND FRIENDSHIP

### Friendship and Politics

The topic of friendship has recently seen a resurgence of scholarly interest. No less than eight monographs in the past few years have been devoted to this topic, and a fair number of such recent publications make recourse to the writings on friendship that date from classical antiquity to help further their own inquiries into the concept of friendship.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, while political philosophers of antiquity, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero all discuss the concept of friendship in detail, it fell out of favor as a source of inquiry with the coming of the Christian era. Lorraine Smith Pangle argues that Christianity's call to "devote one's heart as completely as possible to God, and to regard all men as brothers" may be the cause of this eclipse.<sup>2</sup> According to Pangle, this new conception of the way social relations ought to be ordered "made the existence of private, exclusive, and passionate attachments to individual human beings seem inherently questionable," unless ordered toward marriage and family life.<sup>3</sup> Through much of the Middle Ages, friendship seems to have been less important as a topic of inquiry than it had been

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<sup>1</sup> See, P.E. Digeser, *Friendship Reconsidered: What it Means and How it Matters to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016) Ann Ward, *Contemplating Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016); Filippa Modesto, *Dante's Idea of Friendship: The Transformation of a Classical Concept* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Gregg Lambert, *Philosophy After Friendship: Deleuze's' Conceptual Personae* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Seow Hon Tan, *Justice as Friendship: A Theory of Law*, (New York: Routledge, 2015); John von Heyking, *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016); Alicia J. Batten, *Friendship and Benefaction in James* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; Cf., David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) esp. 156–167; But see, Constant J. Mews and Neville Chiavaroli, "The Latin West" in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (New York: Routledge, 2014) 73, who argue that while there was a profound shift in the understanding of friendship from the Classical period to the Medieval period, "classical traditions of friendship never completely disappeared."



during the classical period. Though it enjoyed a mild resurgence in the Renaissance era in the writings of Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon, after the Enlightenment, it again fell into desuetude.<sup>4</sup>

This history may go some way to explaining the resurgence of interest in friendship. If Christianity is responsible for channeling the love of friendship into marriage, it may be that the recent breakdown of the family goes some way to explaining the renewed interest in friendship: as the social unit in which individuals found completion begins to break down, people may begin looking to friendship elsewhere to fulfill that lacuna. Alternatively, it may be that people are responding to the inability of social contract theories to explain deep commitments. Perhaps as abstract rights and duties begin to be perceived as no longer capable of providing a solid foundation for politics, people are turning to friendship to afford this foundation.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the reason, friendship has long been perceived as holding out the possibility of providing completion to man.<sup>6</sup> To what extent can friendship provide an antidote to what seems to be a prevailing sense of *anomie* and isolation in our society? Should friendship figure more prominently in our political life? Was the eclipse of friendship as a basis of political order a salutary development or a problematic one?

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<sup>4</sup> Montaigne, "Of Friendship," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976); Francis Bacon, "Of Friendship," in *Francis Bacon: Essays and New Atlantis* (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942). Pangle writes that "the devaluation of friendship is the result of a decisive new turn in philosophy that occurred in the years immediately after the publications of Montaigne's and Bacon's essays.... For it was early in the next century that Thomas Hobbes began to develop his powerful reinterpretation of human nature as directed neither to friendship nor to virtue" *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Abbey, "Review Essay: On Friendship." *Review of Politics* 79 no. 4 (2017): 695–707.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* (*Sym.* 189a2–193d6).

The purpose of this dissertation is to enter into the discussion surrounding the above questions through an analysis of Plato's *Lysis* and *Gorgias*, as well as books VIII and IX of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both Socrates and Aristotle inquire into the character of friendship, its relation to politics, and what our stance toward it ought to be, and for the most part, both wrestle with the same questions and themes. Indeed, Aristotle's indebtedness to Socrates in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is evident, as he develops many of the themes articulated in the *Lysis*. Despite the different conclusions that Socrates and Aristotle reach, both provide invaluable insights into the extent to which friendship should inform our political life.

### **The City and the Philosopher**

Socrates' death at the hands of his political community, famously recounted in Plato's *Apology*, illustrates the inherent tension that seems to exist between the philosopher's devotion to a life of contemplation and the political community. Socrates' famous assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living" generates criticism both among the Athenian political elite, and among the poets, who point out that his life of constant inquiry calls into question the conventional practices of Athens (*Apol.* 38a6–7). The tension between philosophy and the *polis* pervades much of subsequent philosophy, with the result that many political philosophers since Socrates—

particularly in the modern era—have recognized this tension and sought to reduce it in various ways.<sup>7</sup>

This theme of the tension between philosophy and politics pervades Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as well—albeit in a nuanced form—and has recently been the focus of a renewed interest in Aristotle's *Ethics*.<sup>8</sup> However, in contrast to Socrates, Aristotle makes his peace with politics. Not only does Aristotle devote an entire treatise—the *Politics*—to the different possible regimes and the manner in which such regimes might be improved, but he also famously collected constitutions alleging that these collections of laws and regime types would be of good use to those who are capable of determining which laws would be beneficial for the various types of regimes (1181b8–10). As a result, some have persuasively argued that the *Politics* is intended to be the counterpart to the *Ethics*, and that the one is meant to lead seamlessly into the other.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Aristotle's interest in politics was not limited to strictly theoretical concerns but extended to practical engagement with politics. Aristotle's relation to the Macedonian rulers

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Georg W. F. Hegel contrasts Socrates' discovery and devotion to the principle of subjectivity with the objective Greek customary morality. *The Philosophy of History* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1956 [1837]), 269. Hegel goes on to reconcile the principle of subjectivity with objective morality through what he terms the "absolute and universal law." *Ibid.*, 255. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau despite being estranged from his native city-state of Geneva and describing himself as the "solitary walker," seeks to legitimate the civil order through the notion of adherence to the "general will." See, *The Social Contract* trans. and ed. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1762] 1997), Bk 1. This theme is reiterated throughout the history of Western philosophy. The philosopher is presented as largely alienated from the political regime and, through some sort of devotion to an abstract rule, is able to reconcile his subjective will with that of the political community.

<sup>8</sup> See, Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's 'Ethics'* trans. by Jan Edward Garrett. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Aristide Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> A. W. H. Adkins, "The Connection Between Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*," *Political Theory*, 12 (1984): 29–41.

has long been acknowledged—in particular his relationship with Alexander the Great, whom he was hired to tutor in 343 BC. While the exact extent to which Aristotle acted as a political advisor to Alexander is debated, most scholars agree that Aristotle had an influence on Alexander’s political and ethical undertakings.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the extent to which his advice had a practical impact on Alexander’s policies, scholars generally agree that Aristotle was politically active. Thus, in contrast to Socrates, who eschewed the practice of politics as an enterprise that entailed the exercise of injustice (Cf. *Apol.* 31d–32e.) and inquired into political matters only to show the inherent limits of politics, Aristotle inquired into and engaged in the practice of politics in a concrete manner.

How is it that Aristotle alleviated the tension between politics and philosophy in a way that Socrates chose not to? Can it be that Aristotle was simply more of a realist than Socrates when it comes to political life? Did Aristotle understand the harsh necessities of politics and condone them in a way that Socrates did not? Many political interpretations of Aristotle’s *Ethics* have adopted precisely this argument.<sup>11</sup> Leo Strauss and others have put forward an interpretation according to which Aristotle recognized the tension between philosophy and

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<sup>10</sup> Carnes Lord relates that while “it seems highly likely that [Aristotle] was more active politically on behalf of Macedon . . . it appears that the traditional picture of Aristotle as a close associate and admirer of Alexander and his works is, at best, very overdrawn.” “Introduction” in *Aristotle’s Politics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), viii. Paul Cartledge relates that Aristotle gave Alexander a copy of the *Iliad*, and that Alexander carried his “Aristotle-annotated text” with him on his expedition to Asia. Alexander was said to be “so attached to it that at night he allegedly slept with it—and a dagger—under his pillow.” *Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past* (New York: Overlook Press, 2004), 227. For a full overview of the relations between Aristotle and Alexander, see Victor Ehrenberg, *Alexander and the Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 62–102.

<sup>11</sup> N. D. Arora and S. S. Awasthy, *Political Theory and Political Thought* (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 2007), 77: “The two major streams along which the whole Western political thought keeps marching on are: (i) political idealism or as one may see [*sic*] political philosophy, and (ii) political realism, or as one may call it political science. Plato represents political idealism, and Aristotle represents political realism.”

politics, but sought to alleviate it in various ways, all the while maintaining the superiority of the philosophical life.<sup>12</sup> According to this interpretation, Aristotle's concern with the political community was primarily practical—he recognized that the philosopher's good is in some way dependent on the political community and, as a result, he attempted to foster a favorable disposition towards philosophy among the educated political class.<sup>13</sup> In essence, the “Straussian interpretation” of the *Ethics* holds that at best Aristotle's presentation of the moral virtues was intended to point out that they are merely a pale imitation of the philosophical life of contemplation, while at worst, his presentation may simply be an elaborate ruse, the goal of which was to ensure that the city is made safe for philosophy.

The standard “Straussian reading” of the *Ethics* has much to offer. According to this reading, Aristotle sought to present the life of moral virtue so as to emphasize its nobility, while also exposing its limitations. In this way, the well-bred Greek gentleman (καλοσκάγαθος), if he is a sufficiently attentive reader, will recognize that the true benefit of moral virtue is that it points beyond itself toward philosophical virtue, which is self-sufficient and capable of being

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<sup>12</sup> See, Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964); Harry V. Jaffa *Aristotelianism and Thomism: A Study of the Commentary by Thomas Aquinas on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Aristide Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*; Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*.

<sup>13</sup> Allan Bloom argues that the fundamental problem of politics lies in determining how the wisdom of the philosophers may come to influence the gentlemen who have power. In his commentary on the *Republic*, Bloom notes that the first very scene of the *Republic* (327a–328b), in which Polemarchus orders his slave to catch up with Socrates as he is leaving the Piraeus exemplifies the fundamental political problem: “Power is in the hands of the gentlemen, who are not philosophers. They can command the services of the many, and their strength is such that they always hold the philosophers in their grasp. Therefore, it is part of the philosophers' self-interest to come to terms with them. The question becomes: to what extent can the philosophers influence the gentlemen?” “Interpretive Essay” in *The Republic of Plato*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 312.

practiced alone.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation accords nicely with the general consensus that perceives Socrates as the idealist who doggedly pursues the good and holds Aristotle to be the realist who moderates his pursuit of the good in order to concern himself with political matters.<sup>15</sup>

While there is certainly an element of truth to the idealist/realist dichotomy that scholars have imposed on Socrates and Aristotle, I will argue that their differing evaluations of political life stem instead from their different conceptions of friendship. While the interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics* described above provides much purchase, its greatest difficulty is that it struggles to incorporate much of books VIII and IX into the overall inquiry of the book. These books, both of which deal with friendship, are largely treated by the standard Straussian approach as an exhortation preparing the reader for Aristotle's somewhat startling claim that the philosophical life is the happiest life.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, I will argue that these two books, which together comprise a fifth of the entirety of the *Ethics*, entail a direct response to Socrates' inquiry into friendship in the *Lysis*, and are meant to make clear the deficiencies of Socrates' understanding of friendship, as well as of his approach to politics as described in the *Gorgias*.

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<sup>14</sup> Aristide Tessitore writes, "Aristotle attempts to offer guidance for those who are disposed to an active life of political involvement ... [while] at the same time ... point[ing] his most gifted students to ... contemplate something of the radical and more fully satisfying character of the philosophic life." *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Leo Strauss seems to suggest as much, when he writes "The only reason why not Socrates but Aristotle became the founder of political science is that Socrates who spent his life in the unending ascent to the idea of the good and in awakening others to that ascent, lacked for this reason not only for political activity but even for founding political science." *The City and Man*, 29. Robert C. Bartlett argues that the "'best regime'" of Books VII and VIII of Aristotle's *Politics*, the classic of premodern political science, shows Aristotle to be in no sense naïve or that he knows full well the ways of the world." "The 'Realism' of Classical Political Science" *American Journal of Political Science* 38 no. 2 (1994), 382.

<sup>16</sup> This position is encapsulated nicely by the following statement from Aristide Tessitore: "Aristotle's treatment of friendship in Books VIII and IX ... prepares readers for his concluding endorsement of the rare but simply best way of life available to human beings. His subsequent demotion of the life of moral virtue in light of the superior happiness afforded by the contemplative pleasures of philosophy is perhaps less strange and less jarring because it is prefaced with a consideration of friendship." *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, 95.

As I will make clear, Socrates had a largely negative understanding of friendship, according to which friendship acts as an impediment to one's advancement toward what is good. It is this understanding that causes Socrates to treat philosophy and the pursuit of the good as occurring outside of the political realm. In contrast, Aristotle had a positive conception of friendship. This positive view, I will argue, caused Aristotle to present politics in a favorable light and enabled him to use philosophy as a measure that can order the political realm toward the good.

### **Friendship, Necessity, and the Polis**

It may perhaps, seem odd to explain the differing stances that Socrates and Aristotle take toward the *polis* as the result of their differing concepts of friendship. Friendship seems, at first glance, to be decidedly non-political. Neither Plato nor Aristotle discuss friendship at length in their most obviously political works.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, contemporary conventional understanding of friendship seems to suggest that it is more fundamental than politics. Not only are friendships able to transcend political boundaries (and, in fact, often do), but our understanding of political relations ordinarily entails concepts of rights and duties that seem to be foreign to our conception of friendship. Perhaps as a result, friendship seems to be pre-political. This raises the question: if friendship is pre-political, does it impact politics? The answer, I hope to make clear, is: yes, the pre-political has a fundamental bearing on politics.

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<sup>17</sup> Friendship is not treated at length in either Plato's *Republic* or the *Laws*, nor is it treated in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Both Socrates and Aristotle point out, that it is precisely pre-political relationships—specifically, relationships developed to fulfill a felt need, or lack—that give rise to the *polis*.<sup>18</sup> In Book II of the *Republic*, Socrates relates to Adeimantus that a city “comes into being because each of us isn’t self-sufficient but is in need of much” (*Rep.* 369b6–7). What follows is an analysis of the way in which different parts of the city come together to provide one another with various necessary goods. Aristotle’s account of the development of the *polis* appears to be similar to that of Socrates. The *polis* seems to emerge from a variety of parts that come together to counter necessity. The most basic unit of the *polis*, states Aristotle, is the individual, who joins with other individuals to form the household. This is done to provide “for the needs of daily life,” as these individuals “cannot exist without one another.” In turn, several households come together to form a village, so as to provide for the sake of “non-daily needs.” Finally, the “complete community, arising from several villages, is the city” (1252a26–30). Thus, Socrates and Aristotle both suggest that the *polis* has its origin in the pre-political relationships that are ordered toward countering necessity.

There is, however, a subtle difference between Socrates’ account of the city’s formation, and that of Aristotle. While Socrates is quite clear that the city arises from the pre-political relationships that are ordered toward countering necessity, Aristotle’s account goes beyond this. Indeed, as Aristotle presents it, both the daily and non-daily necessities are countered at the level of the household and the village respectively, and the city—the complete community—comes into being “for the sake of living well” (1252a30). However, Aristotle remains silent about what

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic* 369b6–7; Aristotle, *Politics* 1252a25–b13.



it is that *causes* the city to be ordered towards this end. As a result, it seems that for Aristotle there is some force other than a desire to relieve man's estate that orders the city towards living well.

I hope to show that the differences between Socrates and Aristotle have their roots in their disparate understandings of friendship. If the pre-political relationship of friendship has its basis in a felt need or lack, then Socrates is correct: the entirety of the political community is founded on pre-political relationships of desire and need. Political communities are, at bottom, little more than economic associations meant to provide for man's necessities. Friendship and political community are, in the end, little more than arrangements of convenience designed to facilitate mutual, utilitarian advantage; only the desire to overcome the harsh necessities of nature causes human beings to form communities. However, if individuals are liable to enter into friendships with one another wholly independent of need, then Aristotle's account may be correct. Political communities have their basis in pre-political relationships that are based not on lack but on an appreciation of another's virtues or goodness. Political communities are ordered toward an end that is more noble than mere utilitarian advantage.

It is precisely this difference in understanding of friendship that causes Socrates and Aristotle to take differing approaches to the political realm. Socrates' belief that friendship, and by extension the political realm, has its basis in necessity, causes him to take a negative, abstentious approach to politics. Placing philosophy in the service of politics would be a degrading and humiliating exercise that is beneath the dignity of the philosopher. In contrast, Aristotle's understanding of friendship and politics as based on self-sufficiency and a recognition of another's virtues, allows philosophy to play the crucial function of ennobling politics;

philosophy can have a positive guiding impact on politics. For Aristotle, friendship grants dignity to politics, a dignity that relationships based on necessity alone do not provide. Viewed in this perspective, the concept of friendship developed in the *Ethics* not only affects politics but may be precisely that which prompts Aristotle to offer the practical, political advice contained in the *Politics*.

The following four chapters proceed in a comparative manner. In Chapter 1, I detail Socrates' understanding of friendship as presented in the *Lysis*. I make the case that the *Lysis* ought to be read as Plato's subtle critique of Socrates' conception of friendship. Plato presents Socrates as using eristic arguments and sophisms, while engaging his youngest interlocutors in the entirety of the Platonic *corpus*—Menexenus and *Lysis*—in a discussion concerning the definition of friendship. At one point, Plato presents Socrates as adopting a sophistic argument that is strikingly similar to an argument used by the two sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, in the *Euthydemus*. Plato's ultimate critique, I argue, is that Socrates collapses the distinction between friendship and *eros*, such that friendship and *eros* are both characterized by a felt need or desire. According to Socrates, there is no such thing as a friendship based on self-sufficiency and an appreciation that two people may have of one another's good qualities. I show that Plato adopts this presentation of Socrates' understanding of friendship not only to intimate that Socrates is incorrect in suggesting that all friendship has its basis in need, but also to point to the dangers that attend his conception of friendship.

Chapter 2 presents the political implications of Socrates' conception of friendship by examining the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. The *Apology* shows Socrates' relation to the practice of politics to be one of negation and abstention. As he attests in his defense speech, Socrates never

puts forward a positive teaching, but instead always goes around to the citizens of Athens questioning their settled convictions and exposing their ignorance. The result, I argue, is an approach to politics that is entirely negative or dissolvent of people's opinions. Not only is Socrates' approach entirely negative, but it is abstentious as well. In his defense speech, Socrates claims that he entirely avoids the practice of politics due to its incompatibility with justice. While Socrates does not explain in his defense speech precisely why he believes the practice of politics to be incompatible with justice, this connection is made clear in the *Gorgias* and, as I make clear, hinges directly on Socrates' understanding of friendship. At a critical juncture of the dialogue, Socrates directs his interlocutor, Callicles, away from the practice of politics precisely on the basis of a definition of friendship that had been proposed—but found wanting—in the *Lysis*. I show that for Socrates the conventional practice of politics depends on a false conception of justice and friendship.

The third chapter analyzes Aristotle's discussion of friendship in Book VIII of the *Ethics* in light of his understanding of the virtue of magnanimity. I argue that Aristotle's friendship of the good is ultimately intended to describe the friendship between two magnanimous individuals. Turning first to Aristotle's presentation of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics*, in which Aristotle suggests that there may be two types of magnanimity—one that is political and another that is philosophical—I show that Aristotle views the virtue of magnanimity to be problematic. The two types of individuals who are held up as being potentially magnanimous are presented as being self-sufficient and aware of the honor and respect they deserve. Nevertheless, when they fail to attain the honors they rightly deserve, they tend to act in a socially destructive manner. I go on to argue that Aristotle's presentation of magnanimity in the *Ethics* is intended to suggest

that the cure for the socially destructive tendencies of such magnanimous individuals is friendship. If the magnanimous philosopher were to befriend the magnanimous politician, they would not only temper one another's socially destructive tendencies, but their alliance—the alliance of power and wisdom—would be capable of bestowing great benefits on the political realm.

While Chapter 3 shows that Aristotle's friendship of the good is intended to describe friendship between two magnanimous individuals, Chapter 4 explains why it is that such individuals will choose to befriend one another. Aristotle recognizes that philosophers are not likely to become friends with individuals who hold positions of power, as those in power may well have had to engage in nefarious tactics to attain their position and therefore cannot be described as virtuous or good. Nevertheless, in Book IX Aristotle uses a protreptic address to convince the philosopher to engage with the statesman. As I make clear, Aristotle induces the philosopher to interact with and to activate the statesman's potential for virtue. In this way, Aristotle ensures that philosophy will have an indirect, guiding effect on the practice of politics.

In the conclusion, I examine the extent to which the distinct understandings of friendship developed by Socrates and Aristotle can be of use in our own practice of politics. I hope to show that Aristotle's conception of friendship can provide a solid foundation for politics that endows it with a certain level of dignity. Nevertheless, I emphasize that neither Socrates nor Aristotle believe that friendship can provide people with the completion that they may desire. While Aristotle differs from Socrates in recognizing friendship as a positive good that is not based on a metaphysical lack or need, he emphasizes that the pleasures associated with friendship can distract us from the practice of our most complete, or most divine, activity—the activity of

contemplation. Last, I examine some of the practical consequences of Aristotle's understanding of friendship and magnanimity. What role ought the virtue of magnanimity play in the practice of modern politics? Are magnanimity and the friendship associated with it antithetical to modern liberal democracy's commitment to egalitarianism and the rule of law? I argue that Aristotle's analysis of magnanimity and friendship remains not only relevant, but crucial, to the practice of politics today.

## CHAPTER ONE. SOCRATIC FRIENDSHIP AND MAN'S

### DESIRE FOR THE GOOD: *LYSIS*

In his *Second Letter*, Plato informs us that his writings present a Socrates “become young and beautiful” (*Letters* 2.314c). If this is the case, Plato’s writings present at least some difficulty in distinguishing the true “historical” Socrates from the Socrates made young and beautiful. This difficulty is only heightened by Socrates’ well-known self-deprecation and irony. Thus, not only do we receive a portrait of Socrates that is potentially highly idealized, but we are further hampered in our efforts to attain a portrait of the “real” Socrates due to his dissembling dialectics. However, Plato chooses to write four dialogues in narrative form (*The Republic*, *Lysis*, *The Lovers*, and *Charmides*), in which Socrates himself conveys not only the conversations in which he engages, but his activities and reflections as well. As a result, although these dialogues may not obviate the problem of distinguishing the “historical” Socrates from the Socrates made young and beautiful, they may enable us to distinguish more clearly Socrates’ dialectical arguments from his true intentions.<sup>1</sup> Thus, these dialogues provide us with a window

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between Socrates’ outward statements (dialectical or otherwise) and his intentions is made most clear toward the end of the *Lysis*. After recounting the various arguments raised throughout the dialogue, Socrates comments, “If nothing among these is a friend, I no longer know what to say” (222e9). However, immediately after this, he suggests to the reader, “But as I said these things, I already had in mind to set in motion someone else among the older fellows” (223a1). While Socrates expresses dismay, it seems that he is not as much at a loss, as he lets on to his interlocutors. On the importance of the narrated dialogues see, Catherine Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19; Leo Strauss, *On Plato’s “Symposium,”* ed. and with a foreword by Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001), 186.

into Socrates' character in a way that most other dialogues do not, granting us a particularly clear picture of *who* Plato believed Socrates to be.

Despite the fact that the *Lysis* has been called *the* Platonic dialogue on friendship, what it teaches about friendship has been highly contested. Some scholars have argued that it is simply aporetic and contains no positive teaching. Pointing to Socrates' last line of the dialogue, in which he concludes, "What he who is a friend is we have not yet been able to discover" (*Lys.* 223b9–10),<sup>2</sup> these scholars maintain that the *Lysis* is one of Plato's earlier dialogues and presents a failed attempt at defining friendship.<sup>3</sup> Others maintain that amidst the false starts and inconclusive arguments, the *Lysis* does present a coherent account of friendship or, at the very least, points toward what a friend is.<sup>4</sup> Still others, such as David Bolotin, have pointed toward the inconclusive ending of the dialogue in order to show that it contains a teaching pertaining to man's metaphysical neediness. According to this argument, Plato holds that all friendship and desire have their roots in man's need for completion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All citations to the *Lysis* are taken from David Bolotin's interpretation unless otherwise noted. *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis with a New Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> W. R. M. Lamb in the introduction to his translation of the *Lysis* notes that "Socrates is content to lead his young friend into a maze of analogical reasoning, from which neither of them can find any certain egress." *Plato III*, Loeb Classics (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1975), 3. Similarly, George Grote, notes: "To multiply defective explanations, and to indicate why each is defective, is the whole business of the dialogue." *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. II (London: John Murray, 1867), 186.

<sup>4</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle comments: "Plato may provide the reader with the outlines of compelling arguments that, though facilely rejected, are not refuted" *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 21. James M. Rhodes points to the subtitle of the dialogue, "On *Philia*: Obstetric," and concludes that "Socrates is practicing the midwife's art. Socrates will not give us a propositional 'theory of *philia*.' Rather, the 'pregnant' characters in the play and we ourselves need to be delivered of the virtue of friendly love" ("Platonic *Philia* and Political Order" in *Friendship and Politics*, ed. by John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko [University of Notre Dame Press, 2008], 25–26).

<sup>5</sup> Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*. In my analysis of the dialogue, I am deeply indebted to Bolotin's superb interpretation of the dialogue. However, I seek to further Bolotin's analysis by pointing to some of the deficiencies in Socrates' arguments, which suggest that Plato may have been subtly critiquing Socrates.

What is it about this dialogue that lends itself to such different, even contradictory, interpretations? Part of the reason is that at least some of the arguments raised and eventually refuted by Socrates, are neither fully fleshed out nor conclusively refuted. In fact, one of the possible definitions of friendship that Socrates raises is hardly even explored. As a result of the dialogue's elementary and, at times, even specious arguments, some scholars in the nineteenth century went so far as to label it spurious, contending that Plato could not have written something containing so many eristic arguments.<sup>6</sup> Today, the authenticity of the *Lysis* is no longer disputed but is by and large agreed to be a genuine work.<sup>7</sup> However, the difficulty posed by the sophistic arguments remains: Why would Plato present Socrates as failing to properly refute arguments and engaging in sophistic arguments, all while speaking to what are likely the youngest interlocutors in the entire Platonic corpus?

Diogenes Laertius relates that “on hearing Plato read the *Lysis*, Socrates exclaimed, ‘By Heracles, what a number of lies this young man is telling about me!’”<sup>8</sup> To assume that Diogenes' recounting of Socrates' reaction to the dialogue is accurate would not prove Plato's depiction of Socrates to be erroneous. However, assuming its truth *would* point to a difference of opinion between Plato and Socrates on the topic of friendship. It is my contention that Plato intends for the dialogue to elucidate the disagreement between himself and Socrates on the topic of friendship. To this end, Plato writes the dialogue in such a way that it both points toward a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Friedrich Ast, *Platon's Leben und Schriften* (Leipzig: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1816) 428–34; Joseph Socher, *Über Platons Schriften* (Munich: Ignaz Joseph Lentner, 1820), 137–44.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert G. Hoerber, “Plato's *Lysis*,” *Phronesis* 4 no. 1 (1959): 15.

<sup>8</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. by James Miller and trans. by Pamela Mensch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) Bk. III, 35.



more complete understanding of friendship, while also revealing a deficiency in Socrates' understanding of friendship. Specifically, Plato shows that in his haste to direct the young toward a life of contemplation, Socrates fails to give the concept of friendship the proper regard it deserves; a failure that has extremely negative political consequences. As a result, I contend that Plato presents Socrates as raising serious arguments, but as rejecting them in a facile, sophistic manner.

In what follows, I will first turn to the prologue of the *Lysis* to show the way in which it provides the key to uncovering Plato's intentions. Next, I will catalogue Socrates' use of eristic and sophistic arguments throughout the dialogue, suggesting that Plato intends to point to deficiencies in Socrates' understanding of friendship. Specifically, I will argue that Plato suggests Socrates is too quick to conclude that all friendship has its basis in need in the same way as erotic love. In addition, I will show that through this process, Plato leaves enough of a trail from which one can develop a fully coherent understanding of friendship.<sup>9</sup> I will close with some remarks concerning the implications that this dialogue has for Socrates' approach to politics in general.

### **The Introduction: Panops, Hermes, and a Sleight of Hand**

The *Lysis* begins by introducing the reader to characters and details that seem superfluous to what appears to be the dialogue's main inquiry: what is friendship? Socrates relates, "I was on my way from the Academy straight to the Lyceum, along the road outside the wall" (203a1–2).

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<sup>9</sup> It is precisely this trail that Aristotle picks up on in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Both the Academy and the Lyceum are located outside of the walls of the city; the Academy to the north, and the Lyceum to the south-east. Socrates is therefore taking the circuitous route outside and around the city rather than choosing to go directly through the city itself. While we are not told *why* Socrates makes this choice, we are told that the road he was walking along was “outside the wall and close under the wall itself,” and it is here that he chances upon Hippothales, Ctesippus, and some other youths outside the *palaestra* near the spring of Panops (203a 2–7).<sup>10</sup> Panops, whose full name is Argus Panoptes, was the name of a local deity, whose name means all-seeing. According to Greek mythology, Panops was famous for his watchful gaze. Thus, the dialogue takes place near the edge of the city under watchful eyes.

Hippothales tries to induce Socrates to come inside the *palaestra* and talk with them. Plato seems purposefully to direct our attention to the location in which the conversation about friendship will take place, describing it as “a kind of enclosure set against the wall” and informing us that it was “built recently” (203b7–204a3). A *palaestra* is a place of instruction in both wrestling and other matters. Thus, the setting of the dialogue on friendship is a place of instruction—together the disputants will wrestle with one another, in an attempt to come to a conclusion as to who or what a friend is.<sup>11</sup> The fact that Socrates needs to enter the *palaestra* to engage in the discussion concerning friendship may suggest that he himself is in need of instruction. This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that Hippothales informs Socrates that the

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<sup>10</sup> The entirety of this dialogue, in which Socrates fails to find a definition of friendship, occurs at the very edge of the city. This fact may be suggestive of Socrates’ relation to the city and to politics in general. In contrast, the *Phaedrus*—a dialogue concerning *eros*—occurs well-outside the city.

<sup>11</sup> On the connection between wrestling and philosophy, see Clinton DeBevoise Corcoran, “Wrestling and the Fair Fight in Plato,” in *Topography and Deep Structure in Plato: The Construction of Place in the Dialogues* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 119–151.

teacher at the *palaestra* is Socrates' "companion" "and praiser—Miccus" (204a7). Socrates responds with an oath and relates that "the man is not an inferior one, but a capable sophist" (204a8–9). That the dialogue on friendship occurs in a place of instruction under the guidance of an instructor suggests that Socrates is not in an unambiguous position of superiority in this dialogue. Of course, Miccus does not instruct the participants of the conversation, but the fact that he is mentioned in the prologue and is recognized by Socrates as "a capable sophist" may suggest that Socrates' understanding is in some way deficient.<sup>12</sup>

Hippothales suggests that Socrates pass time with the group. He proposes that the group might share their speeches with him and that, together, they could observe the "good-looking" boys. Hippothales thus sets up the invitation as one in which all will share in the good things equally. Hippothales' invitation tells us that he has a relatively sanguine view of friendship. Indeed, the idea that they might share their speeches with Socrates brings to mind the adage that will come to impact the conversation later: "Friends have all things in common" (cf. 207c9–11). In contrast, Socrates' response indicates the opposite. While interested, he replies that he would prefer first to hear "what terms [he is] to enter on and who the good-looking one is" (204b1–2). Socrates' wariness of friendship is on display already at the beginning of the dialogue. He will not accept Hippothales' friendly invitation without knowing "the terms" he is to enter on; Socrates suspects that friendships involve a *quid pro quo* and are not something simply gratuitous or given solely for the sake of the other.

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<sup>12</sup> Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, commenting on the passage in question, note that while the term 'sophist' is ordinarily used in a derogatory sense, here "the term seems to be used in a purely descriptive way; and that ... is the point: Miccus professes, and teaches, wisdom, and wisdom or knowledge will be one of the chief themes of the main part of the dialogue" (*Plato's Lysis* [Cambridge University Press, 2005], 4n2).

While Socrates' skepticism may be disconcerting, Plato points out that it is not—at least in this case—completely unwarranted, as it soon becomes clear that Hippothales likely does have an ulterior motive in inviting Socrates to join the group. Hippothales is quickly revealed to be “in love” (ἔρωτος) with one of the good-looking ones. Indeed, when Socrates pushes him to reveal who *he* believes the good-looking one to be, Hippothales blushes, apparently out of modesty or bashfulness. Socrates then tells Hippothales that he can see that Hippothales is not only in love, but that he is “far along the way in love already” (204b8–9). Thus, the dialogue on friendship begins with a young man who is *in love*. In fact, the term “love” (ἔρωτος) enters into the discussion prior to the term “friend” (φίλος). Thus, the structure of the dialogue seems implicitly to attest that for Socrates love takes primacy over friendship. Socrates continues, making note of his knowledge of erotic matters: “I am inferior and useless in other things, but this has somehow been given to me from a god—to be able quickly to recognize both a lover and a beloved” (204b9–c2). Socrates refers to his divine gift and suggests that his knowledge of erotic matters is his *only* area of expertise. Later on, Socrates will tell us that he has no knowledge of what a friend is. Given Socrates' distinction between friendship and erotic love, we may wonder whether Socrates is useless when it comes to friendship, or whether perhaps his sole fixation on erotic love causes him to run roughshod over the concept of friendship.

Socrates points out that his capacity to recognize lover and beloved is a useful one. In response, Hippothales blushes “still much more” (204c3). This time however, it is not clear that he blushes from bashfulness alone; perhaps Hippothales blushes from the shame of having his friendly invitation to Socrates uncovered as having an ulterior motive; enlisting his help in discerning whether his beloved is endeared toward him.

In any case, Ctessipus breaks in, noting that all this false modesty is a little much coming from a man who is so in love with the young boy, Lysis, that he constantly sings his praises, much to the annoyance of his friends. Ctessipus goes on to detail how Hippothales sings songs of praise about Lysis that include songs regarding Lysis' family's past exploits, and his family's mythical connection to the gods. When Socrates hears this, he rebukes Hippothales strongly declaring his actions to be "ridiculous." He notes, "Whoever is wise in love-matters ... does not praise his beloved before he catches him" (206a2–3), for in doing so, the lover simply fills the beloved with "proud thoughts and bragging," making the beloved "harder to capture" (206a4–5). After this, Hippothales finally fesses up to his ulterior motives in conversing with Socrates, noting, "It's because of these things, Socrates, that I'm consulting with you. And if you have anything else, give your advice as to what to say in conversation or what to do so that someone might become endeared to his favorite" (206c1–4). Socrates agrees to make a "display" of what it is Hippothales needs to say to Lysis to ensure his love is requited, and the group begins to design a scheme whereby they may induce Lysis into conversation.

It is at this point that we are informed that the dialogue on friendship is taking place during the Hermaea, a festival in honor of the god Hermes. Hermes was not only the patron of the *palaestra*, but he was also known as the god of tricks who would commit thefts and other shameful acts, the god who transgressed boundaries, and the god who would outwit other gods in order to help human beings.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is precisely this penchant for crossing boundaries that allows Socrates and the other older youths to associate with Lysis. As part of their scheming,

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 156–58.

Hippothales notes that “since they’re observing the Hermaea, the youths and the boys are mingled in the same place” (207d1–3). The rules, or boundaries, surrounding appropriate relations are relaxed during the Hermaea, allowing the older youth to associate with the younger boys.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the setting for the dialogue has been carefully constructed: the very dialogue in which Plato is scrutinizing Socrates’ understanding of friendship occurs during a festival in honor of a deity who deceives other deities in order to help humans transgress their limits.

That the dialogue occurs during the Hermaea is significant not only because of Hermes’ status as the god who helps human beings transgress their limits, but also due to Hermes’ relation with Panops. As will be recalled, at the very beginning of the dialogue, Socrates relates that he was stopped near the “spring of Panops.” The references to Panops and Hermes—the only references to deities (aside from oaths) in the entire dialogue—is not accidental. As it turns out, the two deities both figure prominently in the Greek myth of Io. To appreciate the full significance of these mythical allusions to the dialogue, it will be useful briefly to recap the myth of Io. According to Greek mythology, Zeus had attempted to seduce Io, the beautiful daughter of the river god. When she resisted his charms, Zeus covered the earth with a dark cloud, grabbed Io, and raped her. Seeing the cloud and suspecting that her husband was being unfaithful, Hera hurried to earth to investigate. Upon her approach, Zeus transformed Io into a white heifer to cover up his infidelity. However, Hera sensed that Zeus was being unfaithful and asked to be given the cow as a gift. Hera then gave Argus Panoptes (Panops)—a deity whose one hundred eyes never all slept at the same time—the task of guarding Io, to ensure that she did not

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Zuckert notes that Socrates’ entry into the *palaestra* is itself a transgression of boundaries, as only the older youth were allowed to mingle with the boys, not adults such as Socrates. *Plato’s Philosophers*, 513.

transform from a cow back into a deity. After some time, Zeus took pity on Io and sent Hermes to rescue her. To do so, Hermes tricked Argus Panoptes by telling him incredibly long tales until he fell asleep, at which point he cut off Panoptes' head, setting Io free.<sup>15</sup>

Why would Plato allude to this story—a story recounting the primordial crime of the first murder among the gods—in the dialogue concerning friendship? As the remainder of the dialogue indicates, Socrates effects a similar transformation. Through the use of sophistic arguments, Socrates manages to transform friendship into love under the watchful eyes of Plato.

### **A False Start**

When the group enters the *palaestra*, Socrates relates that the boys are all dressed up, playing knucklebones, a game of chance. The fact that these boys are all dressed up and seem to take their game of chance quite seriously may indicate that friendship in general, or at least non-intentional friendship, is taken much too seriously. The scene also reinforces the fact that the boys in the *palaestra* are quite young. The boys' young age makes Socrates' subsequent conversation with them all the more scandalous. Indeed, in what follows, he engages in a conversation with the boys that can be broken up into three parts: First, he speaks with both Lysis and his friend Menexenus as to the nature and purpose of their friendship. Next, he speaks

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<sup>15</sup> According to the myth, once Io has been set free she is not yet free to transform back into a deity, but is pursued by the shade of Argus, as well as by a gadfly that stings her incessantly. It is only once Io the cow reaches Egypt that she is finally free to transform back to a deity. If Plato intends for this myth to act as an allegory of Socrates' treatment of friendship, the fact that Io is pursued by a gadfly brings to mind Plato's depiction of Socrates as a gadfly in the *Apology*. Socrates is said continually to alight on the city as a means of waking it from its slumber. It would seem that the change from friendship to *eros* is a cause of consternation for the city.

with Lysis alone, questioning the love Lysis' parents have for him. Last, he again speaks with both Lysis and Menexenus as to who or what a friend is. In the course of the latter two portions of the conversation, however, Socrates makes use of a variety of questionable claims and eristic arguments. These claims and arguments are being used to question not only the young boys' relationship with one another, but also their other relationships, such as those they have with their parents and with the city itself. Socrates seems to be using sophisms and eristic arguments to undermine the children's existing attachments. Based on the depiction of Socrates in this dialogue, one gets the sense that the charge of corruption of the youth in the *Apology* may not have been unwarranted.

The conversation begins with a false start. Once Lysis and Menexenus have come over to join the conversation—a mini-drama itself, which requires the more forthright Menexenus to join the group first before his more bashful friend Lysis summons the courage to join them—Socrates begins by asking them which one of them is older. Thus, rather than beginning the inquiry into friendship with a “what is” question, as Socrates is prone to do in other dialogues, he begins by exposing a quality of friendship.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the question posed is seemingly designed to uncover a source of conflict between the two young boys, who are of roughly the same age. Menexenus confirms this, stating, “We dispute about that” (207b13). Socrates' question suggests that he seems already to have some idea of what friendship is. Socrates continues to ask questions that

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<sup>16</sup> David B. Robinson notes that the *Lysis* “is one of five short Platonic dialogues which address themselves entirely to a question of definition. Besides the *Lysis* these dialogues are the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Hippias Major*, and *Euthyphro*; all of these ask a question of the type ‘What is x?’ and make this question their sole concern” (“Plato's *Lysis*: The Structural Problem,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 no. 1/2 [1986]: 63). While I agree with Robinson that the dialogue does seek a definition of friendship, I am of the opinion that the dramatic activity surrounding the question suggests that the purpose of the dialogue is not *simply* to define what friendship is.



bring out the competitive nature of their friendship, including who is more noble (γενναιότερος) and who more beautiful (καλλίων). Last, he asks them about their wealth. Citing the well-known adage, he states, “Well the things of friends are said to be in common, so you [two] won’t differ in ... respect [to wealth], if indeed you [two] are speaking the truth about your friendship” (207c9–11). Both Lysis and Menexenus agree. Doubt has already been raised implicitly earlier on in the dialogue as to whether friends have all things in common, and it seems that Socrates is pursuing this line of inquiry. As friends who are similar to one another in age and nobility, Lysis and Menexenus naturally compete with one another, and while it is certainly possible for them also to compete about who is more wealthy, the boys seem to be sufficiently well-born to recognize that competition in such matters is unseemly. Thus, Socrates’ probing questions have uncovered that at the heart of their friendship lies a desire in each of them to strive after what is good for themselves. Socrates is about to pursue further the inquiry into whether all things are held in common by asking them “which one was juster and wiser,” but is interrupted when Menexenus is called away (207d1–4).

The question of which of the two boys is juster and wiser, which Socrates was about to ask, is a potentially fruitful avenue of inquiry for *who* or *what* a friend is. Indeed, are justice and wisdom, like age and nobility, things about which friends compete? Socrates sought to frame the question in a compound manner—“I was attempting to question them as to which one was juster and wiser” (207d1–4)—thereby giving the boys the option to agree that while the one is more just, the other is wiser. In this way, justice and wisdom would *not* be like the other things about which friends compete. Indeed, the two would not simply strive against one another in a bid to outdo each other, as they do when they argue about who is older, or more noble, but would

instead recognize each other's strengths. Perhaps, their differing strengths could even be recognized as complementary.<sup>17</sup> The complementarity of Lysis and Menexenus is intimated at various points of the dialogue. Recall, for example, that the bashful Lysis would not join the group until the more forthright Menexenus had joined (207a3–b5). Similarly, later in the conversation, after Lysis volunteers to take over for Menexenus after Socrates perplexes him, Socrates notes, “Since I wished to give Menexenus a rest and was also pleased by [Lysis’] love of wisdom [φιλοσοφία], I turned to Lysis and began to make my arguments to him” (213d8–e1). Plato draws our attention to the fact that the brash Menexenus and the bashful but wise Lysis have complementary strengths. However, Socrates is frustrated in his attempt to ask which one is “juster and wiser,” as Menexenus is called away “to supervise the sacred rites” as part of the Hermaea (207d–4). Hermes, the god of tricks and transgression of boundaries, requires a sacrificial victim before the inquiry into what friendship is can continue.

### **Socratic Sophisms and a Sacrificial Victim**

At this point, the conversation takes a sharp turn. From the conversation that follows, it seems that the sacrificial victim that Hermes requires if he is to help man transgress his boundaries and have a share of the divine lot, is Lysis' friendships. Indeed, rather than an inquiry designed to discover the complementarity of Lysis and Menexenus, Socrates' line of questioning makes Lysis begin to question all of his existing friendships. In stark contrast to Hippothales' love

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<sup>17</sup> This is precisely the definition of friendship that is alluded to but not fully explored in the final sections of the dialogue. See 222b4: “If what is akin differs in some respect from the like, we might be saying something, in my opinion, concerning what a friend is.”

songs, which speak of the exploits of Lysis' family, Socrates immediately sets Lysis against his family. First, by means of a faulty argument, Socrates intimates that Lysis' parents do not love him. He begins by asking Lysis whether his parents love him, and whether they want him to be happy. Lysis predictably answers that of course his parents love him and want him to be happy. Next, Socrates asks him, whether it would be possible to be happy if one were a slave, "and if it were not possible for him to do anything he desired" (207e1–3). When Lysis answers no, Socrates, asks whether his parents, therefore, allow him to do whatever he desires, since he avers that they want him to be happy. Of course, Lysis relates that they do prevent him from doing a great number of things. Socrates drives the point home by purposefully asking Lysis about various activities that he knows his parents will not allow him to do, such as riding his father's chariots in a competition, driving the mules, or even ruling over himself. Socrates further elicits from Lysis that his parents trust hirelings or slaves with these tasks, while they prevent Lysis himself from undertaking them. It seems that Socrates' point in pursuing this line of questions is to suggest to Lysis that his parents do not love him and seek to prevent him from doing what he desires. Socrates seems purposefully to be driving Lysis to resent his parents on the grounds that they don't love him.

However, this line of questioning, as well as the implied conclusion are obviously false. It is not true that if Lysis' parents desire him to be happy, they would allow him to do whatever he wants. Following one's desires, whatever they happen to be, does not lead to happiness. This is made eminently clear in the *Republic*, where Socrates depicts the tyrannical soul as a destructively desirous soul that acts against its own wishes by following its every desire (*Rep.* 579a–c). Lysis likely does not recognize what is at stake philosophically in Socrates' line of

argumentation, and instead asserts in conformity with what is conventionally appropriate, that his parents prevent him from engaging in various activities because he is not yet old enough for these tasks. Socrates, however, skillfully directs Lysis away from the topic of age and leads him to recognize that it is because of his lack of understanding that his parents prevent him from racing chariots and driving the mule team. Whereas they grant him autonomy in such things as reading, writing, playing the lyre, and other activities of which he has an understanding, they deny him autonomy in other activities, in which he lacks understanding.

Socrates continues, using Lysis' recognition that his parents prevent him from engaging in various activities to suggest that as soon as his father recognizes that Lysis is not only capable, but superior to his father in the things he is currently prevented from doing, then his father will trust Lysis to manage both his father and his father's estate. At this point, Socrates begins to straightforwardly appeal to Lysis' ambition and desires. Not only will his father entrust his estate to him, but his neighbor will do so as well, once he believes Lysis' household management skills to be better than his own. In fact, once Lysis has the requisite skill and knowledge, the Athenians will hand over the keys of the city to him—the only thing preventing Lysis from ruling in the city is that he does not yet have the knowledge. Socrates concludes:

With regard to the things in which we become prudent, everyone—Greeks as well as barbarians, and both men and women—will entrust them to us... But with regard to those things in which we don't acquire good sense, no one will entrust [them to us] ... but everyone will obstruct us as much as is in his power—not merely aliens, but even our father and mother and whatever may be more closely or akin to us than they are. (210a9- c3).

Good sense, Socrates argues, is all that is required for one to rule over all. Of course, Socrates' argumentation fails to acknowledge the possibility that others may not recognize Lysis' good sense. Good sense alone is not enough to obtain power. However, what is most striking is Socrates' statement that to the extent we do not have good sense, "everyone will obstruct us as much as is in his power." One *could* charitably interpret Socrates' overall intention in this part of the dialogue to be an attempt to make Lysis recognize his own deficiency and thereby spur him toward self-improvement and the acquisition of "good sense." However, this particular line of the argument seems to cast doubt on this interpretation, as it introduces an antagonistic element to all of Lysis' relationships that would seem to be unnecessary if Socrates' sole intention was to cause Lysis to recognize his deficiency. The implication is that no one loves another for his own sake, but only in so far as he has good sense and will be beneficial.

Thus far, Socrates has appealed to Lysis' competitive and ambitious nature to cause him radically to question his existing relationships and to view them all in terms of utility and need. However, after having fed Lysis' vanity and ambition, Socrates cuts him down to size. He relates, "Now, therefore, not even your father loves you, nor does anyone else love anyone else insofar as he is useless" (210c8–9). Friendship, Socrates argues, depends upon wisdom. If Lysis becomes wise, he will be useful and good, but if he fails to do so "no one else will be your friend, and neither will your father, nor your mother, nor your own kinsmen" (210d2–4). It is important to note that according to Socrates, not only will his father and his mother not love him, but his entire political community will disown him. While the main point is to humble Lysis, we can see here that Socrates' understanding of friendship is somewhat problematic, as political friendships are equated with the love parents have for their children, with no distinction.

At this point in the conversation, Lysis has been shown to have knowledge in some areas (reading, writing, and playing the lyre), and lacking knowledge in others (chariot racing and mule driving). However, Socrates drives home Lysis' lack of wisdom by means of another fallacious argument, which ends with the conclusion that Lysis does not have *any* knowledge. He asks Lysis, "Is it possible ... for someone to think big, in regard to those matters in which he's not yet thinking?" (210d4 – 5). Lysis responds that it would be impossible. Socrates follows up by stating (not asking), "And if you require a teacher, you're not yet thoughtful" (210d6–7). When Lysis concurs, Socrates concludes that "your thoughts are not [too] big, if indeed you're still thoughtless" (210d7–8).

In making this argument, Socrates is engaging in a deliberate sophism, in the same way and regarding the same topic as the sophists did in the *Euthydemus*. It will be helpful to relate the scene from the *Euthydemus* to emphasize the similarity between the way Socrates proceeds and the way the sophists do. In the *Euthydemus*, two sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, heckle a young boy named Cleinias with eristic arguments, designed to tangle him up in knots, by equivocating on the term "to learn." Euthydemus asks Cleinias whether those who learn are the wise or the ignorant. No matter which way Cleinias answers, the two sophists are able to refute him. When Cleinias first answers that the wise learn, the sophists point to the fact that those students who learn from their teachers are "unlearned" at the time of their learning. However, when Cleinias agrees that the ignorant are the ones who learn, the sophists immediately point out that when the teacher dictates things, it is the wise boys, rather than the unlearned boys, who learn the dictation. Thus, no matter what Cleinias answers, the sophists are able to refute him. After this display of sophistry, Socrates consoles Cleinias:

Our two visitors are pointing out this very thing, that you did not realize that people use the word “learn” not only in the situation in which a person who has no knowledge of a thing in the beginning acquires it later, but also when he who has this knowledge already uses it to inspect the same thing.... Now this, as they are pointing out, had escaped your notice—that the same word is applied to opposite sorts of men, to both the man who knows and the man who does not.... These things are the frivolous part of study ... and I call these things “frivolity” because even if a man were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser as to how matters stand (277e4–278b5).

By equivocating on the term “to learn,” the sophists have refuted Cleinias. It is precisely this same tactic that Socrates uses against Lysis. The statement, “if you require a teacher, you’re not yet thoughtful,” can be both true and false depending on what the term “thoughtful” (φρονεῖν) means. The ambiguity of the term renders Socrates’ question sophistic, as it can mean both “to understand” and “to think.” Indeed, if thoughtful means “to understand,” then it would be correct to state that the fact that Lysis needs a teacher means he does not yet “understand.” However, if thoughtful simply means “to think,” then the syllogism would be incorrect. It is not true that simply because Lysis needs a teacher, he does not yet “think.” As Benjamin Rider points out, “A student spends a lot of time *thinking* about his subject; he just thinks deficiently and needs a teacher to help him *understand* it.”<sup>18</sup> Socrates equivocates on the term φρονεῖν in a manner that is strikingly similar to the way the sophists equivocate on the term “to learn.”

After this sophism, the demonstration is finished. Socrates has made Lysis recognize that he is not wise. In addition, he has caused him to question his existing relationships—primarily, but not exclusively, his relationship with his parents. At this point, Socrates looks over at

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Rider, “A Socratic Seduction: Philosophical Protreptic in Plato’s *Lysis*,” *Apeiron* 44 no. 1 (2011): 56.

Hippothales and nearly blurts out, “This, Hippothales, is how one needs to converse with his favorite, by humbling him and drawing in his sails instead of puffing him up and spoiling him, as you do” (210e3–6). Hippothales’ gratification of Lysis through constant songs of praise only has the effect of spoiling him and leads to vanity. To “catch” one’s beloved, Socrates shows, it is necessary to shake him from his complacency and show him that he is *not*, in fact, self-sufficient.

Why does Plato present Socrates as using sophistic arguments to make his point?

According to James Rhodes, Socrates is not being serious either when he questions whether the boy’s parents love him or when he suggests that all friendships stem from the utility they obtain. Rhodes argues that, instead, these arguments are simply a dialectic ploy meant to “bamboozle” Lysis and are part of a larger attempt to correct a moral failing on the part of Lysis. He writes, “when we mean to take the wind out of a person’s sails, we need not resolve that every word we utter be true. It suffices to contrive that our speech, true or false, will deflate our victim.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, according to Rhodes, Socrates uses sophistic arguments simply to cut Lysis down to size and cause him to recognize that utility cannot be the basis of friendship.<sup>20</sup> While this is possible, it seems to me to be only a partial answer, as it fails to account for why *sophistic* arguments are necessary for this purpose. Presumably, Socrates would be capable of constructing non-sophistic arguments that have the effect of belittling Lysis. Furthermore, it fails to account for the striking similarity between Socrates’ approach and the approach adopted by the sophists in the *Euthydemus*; Plato goes out of his way to draw a parallel between these two dialogues.

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<sup>19</sup> James Rhodes “Platonic *Philia* and Political Order,” 27.

<sup>20</sup> According to Rhodes, far from seeking to develop a utilitarian conception of friendship, Socrates goal is to *curb* Lysis’ utilitarian impulses. *Ibid.*, 31.



To avoid this problem, Benjamin Rider argues that Socrates makes use of sophistic arguments in an effort to draw Lysis into the philosophic life. Focusing on Lysis' competitive character, Rider argues that Socrates uses Lysis' penchant for eristic games by raising "interesting and worthy problems," so as to encourage him to apply his "skills in competitive argument to doing real philosophy."<sup>21</sup> While this may seem to be a plausible interpretation, one of the difficulties with it—one with which Rider does not contend—is that it is not clear that Lysis is ever led to pursue "real philosophy" or the life of contemplation.<sup>22</sup> If Lysis has not been led to pursue the life of contemplation, but has instead simply been led to question his existing relationships, Socrates may be acting in a reckless fashion; a recklessness that the end of the dialogue intimates.<sup>23</sup>

The recklessness of Socrates' activity is revealed more immediately when Menexenus rejoins the conversation. Upon his return, Lysis turns to Socrates and whispers to him, asking him to repeat the conversation to Menexenus. Presumably Lysis desires Menexenus to go through the same humiliating experience he has just undergone. Socrates counsels Lysis to tell Menexenus himself, instructing him to remember everything clearly: "Try, then ... to remember it as well as possible, so you can tell him everything clearly. And if you forget any of it, ask me again, when you first happen to come across me" (211a10–3). Curiously, this type of

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<sup>21</sup> Rider, "A Socratic Seduction," 65.

<sup>22</sup> See below at n. 46 and accompanying text.

<sup>23</sup> Right near the end of the dialogue (223a2–a7), Socrates narrates that the boys' attendants came "like some daemons" and "bade them to leave for home." Socrates relates that he and the boys had an altercation with the attendants and "tried to drive them away." Socrates' conversation has led the boys to chafe under the authority set over them by their parents.

regurgitative teaching is not in keeping with Socrates' ordinary style, which is to consider the character and soul-type of his interlocutor.<sup>24</sup> Might Plato be suggesting that Socrates is too quick to disabuse the young of their existing conceptions of friendship? In any case, the fact that Socrates' conversation with Lysis has had an effect on him becomes clear when Lysis reveals that his overriding concern is for Socrates to "chasten" Menexenus. As Bolotin notes, "In order to overcome his own humiliation, he arranges by stealth to have the returning Menexenus chastened, and not just ridiculed, in his presence. This is no mere continuation of their friendly rivalry. Lysis' action, while playful and harmless enough, contains the seeds of betrayal."<sup>25</sup> It seems that Socrates' earlier conversation has, in fact, caused Lysis to turn on his friend.<sup>26</sup>

### **What Is Friendship?**

Socrates agrees to Lysis' demand that he converse with Menexenus and initiates the conversation by delivering a long speech about his desire to have a friend. He congratulates the boys on their friendship, noting, "I am so far from the possession that I don't even know the manner in which one becomes a friend of another" (212a3-4). Socrates' disclamation of any knowledge regarding friendship sits in stark contrast with his claim to have a divine dispensation concerning erotic matters. At this point, friendship and erotic love seem still to be clearly distinguished, although

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus* 275d5-e5.

<sup>25</sup> Bolotin, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Bolotin defends Socrates from this charge, noting that Lysis' desire to chasten Menexenus reveals that their "juvenile friendship was not innocent. We may assume that the shortcomings of their friendship would have come to light eventually with or without the intervention of Socrates" (Bolotin, 106-7). It's not clear to me that this provides an adequate defense for Socrates' behavior, as it underplays the extent to which Socrates' earlier conversation with Lysis prompted Lysis' desire to chasten Menexenus. Furthermore, Socrates encourages, or stokes, Lysis' desire for punishment by pointing to Menexenus' "contentious" character (211c3-5).

Socrates' disquisition concerning his *desire* to have a friend may perhaps foreshadow Socrates' conflation of the two terms, given the association of erotic love with desire.

Calling on Menexenus' "expertise" in friendship, Socrates asks him the following question: "When someone loves (φιλή) someone, which one becomes a friend (φίλος) of the other, the loving (φιλῶν) of the loved (φιλουμένου), or the loved (φιλούμενος) of the loving (φιλοῦτος)? Or is there no difference?" (212a10 – b2). What seems to be straightforward question is in fact a minefield of ambiguity. As A. W. Price points out, Socrates' initial interaction with Menexenus contains three senses, or usages, of the term φίλος:

(i) Reciprocal and equivalent to our 'friend'; usually conveyed by a pair of correlative pronouns (212a6, c8), once by a conjunction of the active and passive moods of the verb *philein* (213a6 – 7), and once simply by the plural 'the *philoï*' (213a7). (ii) Neuter and passive, meaning 'dear'; often followed by a personal dative (most explicitly at 212e6, and introduced by a list of *philo*-compounds (for instance, 'horse-lover', 'dog-lover', 212d5 – 7). (iii) Masculine and active, meaning 'fond'; often followed by a genitive (most explicitly at 213b5–6).<sup>27</sup>

This dizzying array of different usages of the term φίλος allows Socrates to switch between the various meanings of the term throughout his first colloquy with Menexenus, leading to their failure to adequately define what a friend is.

Menexenus answers that in his opinion it makes no difference which of the two loves the other, so long as one of the two individuals loves the other, the two will both become friends. Socrates notes that this cannot be. Using the verb φιλεῖν, Socrates notes that it is possible for one to love and not be loved in return. To explicate this, he provides the example of a lover

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<sup>27</sup> A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–4.

(ἐραστής) who, even though he loves (φιλοῦντες) as much as possible, supposes that he is not loved in return (οὐκ ἀντιφιλεῖσθαι). While Socrates' example seems to be simply a particularly acute case of non-reciprocal friendship, Socrates' use of the term ἐραστής is significant, as it connotes a more passionate love bound up with desire than the term φίλος ordinarily implies. As will be made clear, Socrates' use of this term is not simply to provide an acute example of non-reciprocal love, but it again foreshadows the way in which the ordinary sense of the term friendship or φιλία will ultimately be transformed into ἔρως by the end of the dialogue. In any case, because it would be ridiculous to say that there is friendship between the ἐραστής and his indifferent beloved, Socrates and Menexenus temporarily conclude that love must be reciprocal.

Shortly afterwards, Socrates notes that it would then be improper to call those who love inanimate objects lovers. Using the masculine noun φίλοι, Socrates asks whether the poet Solon was lying when he said, "Prosperous is he who has children as friends (φίλοι), together with single-hoofed horses, Dogs for the hunt, and a guest-friend in a foreign land?" (212e3–4). Using the masculine noun, Socrates is able to show that in everyday discourse, people speak—in a colloquial way—of being friends with inanimate objects: lovers of dogs, lovers of wine, or lovers of wisdom. Assuming that Solon did not speak incorrectly, they tentatively conclude, now using the neuter noun, that "that which is loved ... is a friend (φίλον) to the lover ... whether it loves or even if it hates" (212e6–8). According to this account, "it's not the one who loves who is a friend but the loved one" (213a5–6). However, this definition proves to be obviously problematic as well, as it leads to the conclusion that "many ... are loved by their enemies and hated by their friends" (213a8–b2). Socrates and Menexenus agree that this conclusion is absurd, but given the way Socrates has framed the question, no path forward is evident.

Socrates suggests that they turn away from the semantic difficulties associated with the concept of friendship and seek help from the poets instead. Doing so clears the way to get at the *ground* of friendship. Indeed, the poets assert that “always a god leads [the one who is] like to [the one who is] like” (214a8). Thus, for the poets, the gods are the cause of friendship, and they lead those who are alike to become friends. Ostensibly, Socrates turns to the poets because they are, “as it were, our fathers in wisdom and our guides” (214a1–2). However, a short while later, Socrates will invoke a second poet, Hesiod, in support of a completely contradictory principle: those who are most alike to one another, are “most filled with envy, love of victory, and hatred toward each other,” while those most unlike one another are filled with friendship (215d1–4). According to Socrates’ interpretation of Hesiod’s poetry, those who are opposite will be friends. If fathers are, indeed, like the poets as Socrates suggests, they would also say contradictory things (cf. *NE* 1180a19–29). Socrates’ point in invoking the poets as “our fathers in wisdom” seems to be a further attempt to undermine Lysis’ trust in his parents; neither a parent’s love nor the veracity of his claims ought to be taken as a matter of trust. Instead, recourse to philosophy is necessary.

Perhaps, as a result of the unreliability of the poets, Socrates invokes the authority of certain philosophers “who converse and write about nature and the whole” in support of the contention that “like is always necessarily a friend to its like” (214b2–6).<sup>28</sup> However, in bringing up these philosophers, Socrates engages in a somewhat curious dance regarding how they should react to the statement that like is a friend to like. He notes, first, that perhaps the philosophers

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<sup>28</sup> The two philosophers who inquire into the whole and are of the view that like is necessarily always a friend to like are Empedocles and Democritus. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle invokes Empedocles in support of the principle “that like *aims* at like” (*NE*, 1155b5–7; emphasis added).

only speak well in half of what they say, because it would be impossible for those who are wicked to be friends with one another, as they would do injustice to one another. Next, he alternatively suggests that perhaps the philosophers speak well in all of what they say, “only we don’t understand them” (214b8–10). Why would Plato present Socrates as uncertain of the soundness of the philosophers’ statement? Could it be that Plato is suggesting that Socrates does not understand these philosophers? In the *Phaedo*, when he recounts Socrates’ famous turn from investigations concerning nature and the whole to what is distinctively human, Plato tells us that Socrates had “no natural aptitude” for natural philosophy (*Phaedo* 96c1–2). Similarly, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle informs us that Socrates ignored the study of nature (*Meta.* 987b1–4).<sup>29</sup> It may be that by presenting Socrates as unsure of the philosophers’ statement, Plato is pointing to a flaw in Socrates’ intellectual capacity, which influences his understanding of friendship.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, accepting that the wicked cannot be friends with one another—as they are at variance with even themselves—Socrates and the boys posit that the philosophers must mean that it is the good who are friends to one another. However, Socrates complicates this possibility as well, asking, “Is he who is like, insofar as he is like, a friend to his like, and is such a one useful to such a one?” (214e 6–7). This difficulty cuts to the heart of the dialogue. By juxtaposing “the good” with “the useful,” Socrates is able to uncover the fundamental question concerning friendship. Is it possible to have a friendship that is based solely on self-sufficiency, where both parties to the friendship admire and love one another for their own sake? Or, are all

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<sup>29</sup> Specifically, Aristotle writes, “Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions” (*Meta.* 987b1–4).

<sup>30</sup> See below at n. 32.

friendships rooted in deficiency and need? The difficulty is that in so far as a person is good, he would be self-sufficient and would not be in need of any other individual. As Socrates notes, “Would anything whatsoever which is like anything whatsoever have the power to hold out any benefit to it, or to do it any harm, which that couldn’t also do itself to itself?” (214e8–10). A completely self-sufficient individual, Socrates suggests, would have no need of anyone else and, hence, would have no reason to treasure another individual. Because it would be absurd to claim that friendship exists among those who do not treasure one another, Socrates and Menexenus conclude that the basis of friendship cannot be the extent to which the parties are the same.

At this point, Socrates tries to take another tack and suggests that two individuals who are good might be friends with one another, insofar as they are good and *not* insofar as they are alike. The idea seems to be that two people who are good, but nevertheless differ in some other respect, may be friends. However, Socrates quickly points out that the difficulty with this proposition is, again, that as self-sufficient individuals who are “in want of nothing,” these good individuals would have no reason to treasure one another, and as such would not love one another (215a7–9). As a result, because such individuals have no use for one another, they would not be friends. In his earlier conversation with Lysis alone, Socrates had suggested that all of Lysis’ friends—including his parents and fellow citizens—are friends with him only to the extent to which he is useful. Now, Socrates again asserts that it is need that causes one to befriend another. Before he turns to the next possibility of who may be friends, Socrates asks Lysis, “Consider then, where we have gone astray. Are we somehow being deceived in the whole?” (214c3–4). Plato again seems to draw our attention to the fact that Socrates may not have a full grasp of “the whole,” or that his knowledge is only partial. Perhaps there is

something in the saying of the “wisest ones” who study “nature and the whole” that Socrates does not fully understand.<sup>31</sup>

Socrates now brings up another possibility for the basis of friendship, noting that he once heard someone say, “that what is like was most hostile to its like, and that those who are good [were most hostile] to the good” (215c4–7). According to this understanding of friendship, it is precisely those who are most unlike who will be friends with each other; the poor and the wealthy will be friends, as will the weak and the strong. In fact, according to Socrates’ source, the principle that all opposites desire one another extends to all of nature, such that “what is dry desires [something] wet, [and] what is cold [something] hot” (215e3–5). In contrast, those who are alike can derive no use or advantage from one another and are not friends.

Socrates asks Menexenus whether this “oppositional” account of friendship seems to be a correct understanding of friendship. When Menexenus agrees, Socrates immediately points to the obvious difficulty with this conception of friendship: if opposites are friends, then it would be the case that an enemy—the opposite of a friend—would be “a friend to the friend” (216b3–4). It would, of course, be absurd to claim that an enemy is a friend. However, the proposition that all opposites desire one another, would seem to entail this conclusion. As a result of this absurd, but

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<sup>31</sup> In Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Empedocles is mentioned as the proponent of the view that “like aims at like.” The only other time in the totality of the *Ethics* where Empedocles is mentioned is in Book VII, where Aristotle specifically critiques the Socratic thesis that “no one acts contrary to what is best while supposing that he is so acting” (1145b26–27). In this discussion, Aristotle notes that a person may know the words of something but be ignorant of what they mean. Such an individual, Aristotle comments “merely speaks, as a drunk man states the sayings of Empedocles” (1147b12–13). It may be that Aristotle is suggesting that Socrates fails to understand the sayings of Empedocles.



logically necessary consequence, Socrates concludes that the “oppositional” account of friendship is incorrect: friendship does not exist between opposite entities.

However, in his depiction of this exchange, Plato seems to present Socrates as being much too quick to dismiss the “oppositional” conception of friendship. Indeed, in bringing up the refutation of the “oppositional” conception of friendship, Socrates asks, won’t the “all-wise men, the ones skilled in contradicting, be pleased to leap upon us straightway and ask whether hatred isn’t most opposite to friendship?” (216a8–b1). Plato seems to go out of his way to emphasize that only eristic debaters and the “all-wise” who are “skilled in contradicting” would try to exploit this linguistic difficulty rather than get to the root of what the “oppositional” conception of friendship entails.<sup>32</sup> Plato suggests that by accepting the linguistic objection, Socrates is, in fact, acting like one of these eristic all-wise men who are skilled in contradicting.

Given the failure of the two previous definitions, Socrates now proposes his own definition, suggesting that “whatever is neither good nor bad may thus at some times become a friend of the good” (216c2–4). He continues noting:

I am really dizzy myself from the perplexity of the argument, and I’m afraid—as the old saying goes—that what is beautiful is a friend. It seems, at any rate, like something soft, smooth, and sleek. And that is why, perhaps, it easily slides past us and gives us the slip, inasmuch as it is such. (216c5–d2).

A number of indicators suggest that this is not simply another definition, but is, in fact, a turning point in the dialogue. First, Socrates’ definition drops the requirement that the friendship be

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<sup>32</sup> On what lies at the root of the oppositional conception of friendship, see below at pp. 164–170.

reciprocal. He only states that “whatever is neither good nor bad” becomes a friend of the good; he does not state that the good becomes a friend in return. Furthermore, Socrates recognizes that friendship has been giving them the slip and admits that the perplexity of the argument has left him dizzy. In fact, he’s so dizzy that he is afraid “that what is beautiful (τό καλόν) is a friend.” Why would Socrates be “afraid” of this possibility? The answer, I believe, is that by suggesting that the beautiful is a friend, Socrates is admitting defeat as to the question of what “friendship” is. At this point in the dialogue, Socrates is beginning to lay the groundwork for transforming friendship into erotic love. Indeed, in the *Symposium* Socrates recounts how Diotima sought to initiate him into erotic matters by explaining to him how the beautiful acts as a spur to philosophical contemplation of the form of the good and the beautiful (*Sym.* 210a4–b6). Diotima develops a “ladder of love,” whereby one’s initial encounter with the beautiful in the form of a particular person gives way to increasingly abstract encounters with the class of beautiful things, until at last one contemplates the form of the beautiful. As we will see, Socrates’ suggested definition of friendship is very much akin to this “ladder of love.”

Socrates finally elaborates on his definition of friendship. Noting that he is speaking “as a diviner”—we are not told whether his divination comes from a friendly source or not<sup>33</sup>—he states that “whatever is neither good nor bad is a friend of the beautiful and good” (216d3–8). By finding a middle category—a neutral state between good and bad—Socrates avoids the difficulties that beset the previous definitions of friendship. Of course, it is precisely the

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<sup>33</sup> Ordinarily, when Socrates attributes his actions to a divine cause, we are told that the source is his “divine sign.” Furthermore, Socrates notes that the “divine sign” only ever tells “me to turn away from what I’m about to do, but never prescribes anything” (*Theages* 128d3–4). This suggests that in this particular instance, Socrates is not speaking under the influence of his divine sign.

existence of this neutral, middle state that Diotima discloses to Socrates in the *Symposium*.

Diotima tells Socrates that Eros (the δαίμων of desire) is something between the good and the bad, or between the beautiful and the ugly (*Symposium* 202b1–5). This parallel seems further to indicate that the transformation from friendship to erotic love is underway.

At this point, none of the logical problems that hindered the previous definitions of friendship threaten to undermine Socrates' proposed definition. However, it is not yet clear *why* the neutral would seek out the good. This difficulty is brought out when Socrates analogizes human desire for friendship or love to the human body's desire for the medical art. A healthy body has no need of the medical art due to its "sufficient" condition (217a6). It is only insofar as the body is diseased that it seeks out the medical art. Socrates emphasizes, however, that when the disease is in its initial stages the body itself remains neutral—it has not yet become bad. As a result, the body (neutral) seeks the medical art (good) because of the presence of a disease (bad). Similarly, an individual only has need of the good when some evil is present, causing it to desire the good. However, if the evil has been allowed to fester and caused the individual to become bad, it "deprives [him] of the *desire*, at the same time as the *friendship*, of the good," because what is good cannot be a friend of what is bad (217b7–c1; emphasis added). At this point, we can see Socrates effecting the transformation of friendship into erotic love, as he strings together desire (characteristic of ἔρωϛ) and friendship, indicating that Socrates believes them to be in some way related.

Next, Socrates extends this formulation to an individual's relation to wisdom. Neither those who are already wise nor those who are so ignorant as to be bad would love wisdom. Instead, it is only those "who while having this evil, ignorance, are not yet senseless or stupid as

a result of it, but still regard themselves as not knowing whatever they don't know. And so therefore, the ones who are not yet either good nor bad love wisdom" (218a7–b2). Why would Socrates extend his formula of "the neutral being a friend to the good" to cover the one who is partially ignorant as being a friend to wisdom? The obvious answer is that he is holding up the philosophic life and the pursuit of wisdom as that which can most fulfill one's desire for the good. However, in making this argument, he is also walking back an argument he had earlier made to Lysis. During the earlier part of his conversation with Lysis, Socrates made the sophistic argument that one either has knowledge, or one does not. Socrates belittled Lysis in front of Hippothales by suggesting that Lysis did not have knowledge. By walking back this argument, Socrates is showing how it was necessary for him to belittle Lysis, in order to make him aware of his ignorance. It is only once Lysis becomes cognizant of his ignorance that he may be impelled to the pursuit of wisdom.

In any case, Socrates concludes that they have "discovered that which is the friend.... For we assert ... that whatever is neither bad nor good is itself, because of the presence of an evil a friend of the good" (218b8–c3), and he rejoices as a result. However, Socrates' happiness at having discovered "that which is the friend" is short-lived, as "some most strange suspicion came over me—from where, I don't know—that things we had agreed to were not true" (218c7–9). Socrates explains that the difficulty with this definition of friendship is that all friendships are entered into "for the sake of something" (218d8–9). Just as the body (which is neutral) becomes friends with the medical art (which is good) for the sake of health (which is also good), so a friend becomes a friend for the sake of a further friend. Socrates establishes a "ladder of friendship" that is strikingly similar to the "ladder of love" that Diotima develops in the

*Symposium*. Of course, the implication is that no one becomes a friend to another for the sake of the other individual, but only insofar as that person can spur him on to higher friendships.

Socrates notes that it is necessary “for us to renounce going on like this or else to arrive at some beginning principle,” so that they might “come to that which is a friend in the first place” (219c).<sup>34</sup> Just as all the beautiful objects one encounters on the ascent up the “ladder of love” are pursued only for the sake of contemplating the “beautiful itself” (*Sym.* 211d1), so the ordinary friendships that one has are for the sake of the “first friend.”

In contrast to the *Symposium*, however, Socrates concludes not only that the lower objects on the “ladder” are for the sake of the “first friend,” but that they are, in fact, phantoms of the “first friend.” Ordinary friends cannot even be considered friends as they are, in fact, “deceiving us,” as they are qualitatively different from the first friend (219d1–5). Socrates’ denunciation of ordinary friendship seems especially harsh. However, immediately after this, Socrates employs an analogy that pulls back on this harsh appraisal of friendship. He notes that upon discovering that his son has drunk hemlock, a father who “values his son more highly than all his other possessions” would treasure not only wine, which acts as an antidote to hemlock, but also the jar that carries the wine (219d5–220a1). These things are treasured, not for any intrinsic value they have, but only insofar as they are useful for the final good of healing the son. A father who recognizes the instrumental value of the wine and the jar, values them correctly. In the same way, an individual who recognizes the instrumental value of his ordinary friendships will value them correctly.

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<sup>34</sup> Socrates does not relate *why* it would be necessary to renounce going on like this. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1094a17–23; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11 (47).

Why would Socrates first suggest that ordinary friendships involve only deceptive phantom friends, and then indicate that these friendships have the potential to be useful? Through this juxtaposition, Socrates seems to be suggesting that while friendships have the *potential* to spur one on to higher friendships, and ultimately to the contemplative life, they are also potentially debilitating. If a friendship leads to a sense of complacency, or a false sense of self-sufficiency, the friendship will act as an impediment to the philosophic life. Thus, to the extent that any friendship is not directed toward the “first friend,” that is toward the good, it is a phantom image of friendship. Socrates’ implicit lesson here seems to be that friendship ought to impel one toward the good, and that friendships are *never* for their own sake.

While Socrates’ introduction of the “first friend” theory calls into question many existing friendships, there is a logical difficulty with his introduction of the first friend theory as well. Indeed, this theory violates one of the principles established earlier; like cannot be a friend to its like. By formulating the “ladder of friendship” in such a way that the body (neutral) becomes a friend with the medical art (good), and that the medical art accepts the friendship for the sake of health (good), Socrates intimates that the medical art (good) desires health (good). Of course, because health and the medical art are both “good,” this would be a case of like becoming a friend to its like, which they had previously asserted to be impossible. While Socrates recognizes this problem, he states “this I allow to go by” (219b7–9).<sup>35</sup> Why would Socrates allow this to go by? Whereas previously he invoked the violation of this principle as a reason to discard a definition of friendship (214e6–215a5), now this violation is allowed to go by. It

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<sup>35</sup> In the *Gorgias*, Socrates professes that in his opinion friendship does consist of those who are alike (cf. *Gor.* 510b4–6).

seems that Plato is, again, suggesting that Socrates is less interested in getting to the root of what friendship is than in driving forward a definition of friendship—a definition that encompasses friendship within the ambit of erotic love.

By establishing that the “first friend” is the only *true* friend, Socrates has made clear that all friendship aims at the good, and that it does so because of the presence of something bad; all friendship has its roots in some deficiency or need. To explore whether this is, in fact, the only basis of friendship, Socrates engages in a thought experiment. First, he asks whether “that which is good is a friend” (220b7–8). When Menexenus agrees, Socrates follows up with the following hypothetical question: Supposing that what is bad did not afflict us, would the good still be useful to us? If it is, in fact, the case that the “first friend” is a friend solely on account of the evils present in us, it would seem to be “of no use itself for its own sake” (220d7–8). When Menexenus responds that based on what has been said, it doesn’t appear that the first friend would remain a friend to us in the absence of evil, Socrates responds with an oath. He asks whether in such a situation all desires would cease as well. Indeed, if that which is bad ceases to exist, would there still be hunger, thirst, or other desires?

The question, of course, cannot be answered, and Socrates—in recognition of this fact—asks, “Is the question ludicrous—what will be or will not be then? For who knows?” (221a1–6). What we do know, he suggests, is that even now it is possible for those with desires to desire in a manner that is beneficial for them (good desires), or in a manner that is detrimental to them (bad desires). For example, someone might have a desire for healthy foods or for unhealthy foods.

As a result, if all bad things ceased to exist, only good desires would remain.<sup>36</sup> Having come to the conclusion that there may still be desires in the absence of evil, Socrates asks whether “it is possible for one who desires and who loves passionately (ἐρῶντα) not to love (φιλεῖν) [as a friend] that which he desires and loves passionately?” When Menexenus answers that this would not be possible, Socrates concludes that “there will be, then, as it seems, some [things that are] friends, even if evils cease to be” (221b3–10). At this point, it seems that Socrates has found a basis for friendship that is *not* dependent on some evil, although it does have its basis in desire, and is therefore not distinguishable from erotic love.

Socrates picks up this thread of the argument, asking, “Is desire ... really a cause of friendship?” (221d3–6). Securing Menexenus’ agreement, Socrates asks whether it is the case that “that which desires desires whatever it is in want of?” and, if so, whether “what is in want, [is,] therefore, a friend of that which it is in want of?” (221d8–e3). Menexenus agrees to both questions. At this point, Socrates has secured the boys’ agreement that all friendships have their basis in some perceived want or lack. Recall that the background assumption of Socrates’ investigation at this point is that there is a basis for friendship independent of any evil. Thus, the want or lack that desire is responding to cannot be considered to be bad. In any case, Socrates continues, addressing Menexenus and Lysis by name, and tells them that it appears “passionate love, friendship and desire happen to be for what is akin” (221e4–6). Now, this is a curious statement. Why would one have a desire for what is akin [οἰκεῖον]? The difficulty resolves itself when we understand that the term “οἰκεῖον” can also be translated as “one’s own.” Thus,

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<sup>36</sup> Specifically, Socrates states, “There will be, then, whatever desires are neither good nor bad, even if the things which are bad cease to be” (221b5–7).



one desires what is “one’s own.” As David Bolotin notes, the desire discussed here is not “like any desire or need, to acquire what belongs naturally to a single human being; instead, the desire or longing of each being is to belong to a larger whole of which he is merely a part.”<sup>37</sup> Socrates notes that if Menexenus and Lysis are friends, they are “by nature in some way akin to each other” (221e7–8). If they are friends, Menexenus and Lysis *belong* to one another in some way; together they make up a composite whole.<sup>38</sup> Both Menexenus and Lysis agree to this statement. It is perhaps not surprising that they do, as it seems to confirm that their friendship has its basis in nature.

Socrates concludes, “If someone desires another, boys, or loves him passionately, he would never desire, nor love passionately, nor love [as a friend] unless he happened to be akin in some way to his passionately beloved” (222a1–3). This time only Menexenus agrees, whereas Lysis falls silent. Socrates’ statement—which broadens those who are “akin” to include not only those who are friends but also those who love passionately—seems to have prompted Lysis to ponder Hippothales’ passionate love for him. Whether or not Lysis takes Socrates statement this way, it seems that Hippothales certainly does, for when he hears Socrates state that because it is “necessary for us to love what is akin by nature” it is necessary “for the passionate lover, who is genuine, and not pretended, to be loved by his favorite(s),” he “radiate[s] all sorts of colors as a result of his pleasure” (222a6–b3). At this point, it seems clear that Socrates has completed the transformation of friendship into passionate love. He has made clear that just as it is necessary

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<sup>37</sup> Bolotin, 183.

<sup>38</sup> For the compatibility of Menexenus and Lysis see above at n. 18 and accompanying text.

for one to return the friendship (φιλία) of one who is akin by nature, it is equally necessary for one to return the love (ἔρωζ) of one who is akin by nature.

At this point, Socrates narrates to the reader that he “wish[ed] to examine the argument [for himself]” (222b4–5). Two things are important about this narration. First, Socrates expressly states that he now wishes to examine the argument for himself. This suggests that previously, he was pursuing the argument, not for his own sake, but for the sake of his interlocutors. Perhaps Socrates has been conducting the argument in a particular way to lead the boys to this understanding of friendship. Second, Plato draws our attention to the fact that Socrates is in some way curious about the argument that friends might be “akin” to one another, or that he does not yet fully understand the argument, and therefore wishes to examine it further. Socrates turns to Lysis and Menexenus and states:

If what is akin differs in some respect from the like, we might be saying something, in my opinion, concerning what a friend is. But if it happens that like and akin are the same, it isn't easy to reject the previous argument, which says that what is like is useless to its like insofar as there is likeness. (222b4–9).

Conceding that they are “drunk” from the argument, Socrates suggests that they simply grant and declare that “what is akin is something other than the like” (222c1–4). Thus, they do not even investigate whether this is, in fact, the case, but simply assume it. Again, Plato seems to be hinting at sloppy reasoning by Socrates. Socrates continues, “Shall we also, then, posit that what is good is akin to everyone, and that what is bad is alien? Or else [shall we posit] that what is bad is akin to the bad; that what is good is akin to the good; and that whatever is neither good nor bad is akin to whatever is neither good nor bad?” (222c4–8). The boys opt for the latter, and

Socrates notes that this leads them back to the difficulties that plagued their earlier definitions of friendship; the bad and unjust will be friends with each other, no less than the good.

Socrates continues, suggesting that they avoid this difficulty by restricting what is akin to what is good—thereby excluding those who are bad. However, he quickly notes that this avenue also would not work, as “on this point, too, we supposed that we had refuted ourselves” (222d8). However, as Bolotin points out, the refutation that the good cannot be friends to the good was refuted only on the supposition that the good were self-sufficient, and therefore would be of no use to each other. As it is, the present argument rests on the presupposition that those who are akin are also good, and yet are *not* in every respect alike (222c1–3). Thus, it is not clear that the previous refutation holds as applied to the present argument. Could it not be that two individuals who are akin (or who belong to each other), are both good—and yet are good each in his own way, or according to his own *nature*?

Socrates initially began the conversation with Menexenus and Lysis by asking which of them was “juster and wiser.” It was earlier posited that this was a potentially fruitful line of inquiry, as it allowed the boys the option of suggesting that one of them was more just, while the other was wiser. Furthermore, it was noted that throughout the dialogue Menexenus is presented as the more spirited or forthright of the two, while Lysis is presented as the more thoughtful. If the virtues of justice and wisdom are both within the class of what is good, each boy would be self-sufficient in his respective field, and yet they would not be identical to one another. As a

result, despite the fact that the two boys are both good and self-sufficient, they would nevertheless still be useful to one another.<sup>39</sup>

## Friendship and Desire

Socrates' assumption that the earlier refutation suffices to dispose of the proposed definition of friendship without re-examining it ensures that they do not discover a friendship between two self-sufficient individuals that is independent of need. Thus, the inquiry seems to conclude in a state of *aporia*. However, it is not the case that the dialogue is wholly without any development whatsoever. Indeed, one fundamental change that occurs throughout the course of the dialogue is the character development of Lysis. Socrates' interrogation on the nature of friendship has had an effect on Lysis, such that he begins not only to question his existing friendships, but also to recognize the benefit of erotic relationships. While no proposed definition of friendship is ever successfully maintained, throughout the course of the dialogue Socrates has transformed friendship into erotic love. Lysis has come to recognize that he suffers from some sort of metaphysical lack or need, which only the good, or the "first friend" can fulfill. Socrates suggests that to the extent that Lysis' ordinary friendships—his friendship with Menexenus, his friendship with his parents, or even the more extended friendship he has with the other members of his *polis*—leave him feeling sufficient and complacent, they are "phantom friends" that impede his access to the good. By forcing Lysis to confront and recognize that at their root all

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<sup>39</sup> Bolotin notes that the notion that the spirited element of the soul is akin to the rational part of the soul is discussed in the *Republic* at 440e. This is also picked up by Aristotle, who states that the non-rational part of the soul shares in reason to the extent it is capable of listening to the rational part of the soul.

his friendships are, in some way, based in desire, Socrates turns him toward “erotic love” and, therefore, toward the good.

That it seems to have been Socrates’ goal to turn Lysis toward “erotic love” and the good from start of their conversation is borne out by the end of the dialogue. He concludes the inquiry into friendship by recounting the proposed definitions of friendship they have put forward—a method he rejects elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> He lists nearly every definition of friendship that they have proposed, noting that “I, at least, don’t remember any more because of their multitude—if nothing among these is a friend, I no longer know what to say” (222e7–9). Thus, Socrates seems to suggest that he is at a loss. However, Plato has Socrates narrate to the reader the following: “But as I said these things, I already had in mind to set in motion someone else among the older fellows” (223a1–2). Socrates is not nearly as much at a loss as he lets on, but is, in fact, very much in control of the argument. What precisely is it that Socrates has in mind to set in motion among the older fellows? While we are never explicitly informed as to what Socrates has in mind, the preceding action of the dialogue leaves little room for doubt. Socrates has prepared Lysis for passionate love by causing him to question his existing friendships and inculcating in him a desire for the good. Given that Socrates views ἔρως as an impetus to philosophic contemplation, it seems that what Socrates has in mind is to bring Lysis and one of the older fellows together. In this way, the *Lysis* can be seen as a prelude to the *Symposium*, with its focus on ἔρως.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Phaedrus*, 267d6–268a6.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that Socrates does not narrate that Hippothales is the older fellow whom he has in mind to set in motion. This is important as it may absolve Socrates from the charge that he is acting, as Seth Benardete

Throughout the dialogue, not only has Plato shown Socrates to be somewhat hasty and too quick to dismiss possible definitions of friendship, he has also shown him to have engaged in a rather reckless manner. Socrates is seen to have used a variety of sophistic arguments to undermine the friendships of perhaps the youngest interlocutors in the entire Platonic corpus.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, first, Socrates indicated to Lysis that a person is only happy if he follows his desires, regardless of what those desires may be (207e1–3). Next, he intimated that Lysis’ parents only love him to the extent he is useful (210d2–4). Finally, in an effort to belittle Lysis, Socrates employed a specious argument that equivocated on the term “to understand,” showing him that he knows nothing (210d4–8).<sup>43</sup> Socrates seems to have been depicted as a rather irresponsible individual.

One might want to absolve Socrates of his recklessness, given that his intention appears to have been to awaken in Lysis a desire for the good and to spur him to the contemplative life. However, Plato draws our attention to the fact that the dialogue does not have such a happy ending. Before Socrates can “set in motion someone else among the older fellows” as he had intended, the attendants and brothers of Menexenus and Lysis come forward “like some daemons,” to bring the boys home (223a1–4). Socrates relates that “we and those standing around tried to drive them away” (223a6–7). The scene is striking, in that it is the only time in all the Platonic dialogues that Socrates is depicted as engaging in something more than a verbal

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bluntly, states “a pimp.” “On Plato’s *Lysis*,” in *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 198–202.

<sup>42</sup> Gary Allan Scott, *Plato’s Socrates as Educator*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 52.

<sup>43</sup> Through the course of the dialogue, all three of these sophistic arguments are walked back (cf. 214c6–d4; 212e6–213a4; 218a7–b1).

dispute. As Bolotin notes, “Socrates directed or at least assisted Lysis and Menexenus in a rebellion against the guardians appointed by their fathers.”<sup>44</sup> This little rebellion makes clear the effect that Socrates’ discussion has had on the boys. While Socrates has sought to initiate the boys into the philosophic life, in the process of doing so, he has instilled in them a spirit of rebellion. By finding that friendship has no basis apart from desire, Socrates has devalued existing attachments and friendships, including the friendships that exist between a parent and a child, and thereby the friendships that provide the foundation for traditional authority. The rebellion with which the *Lysis* ends points toward the difficulty that Socrates’ approach poses to traditional authority and, by extension, to political cohesion. Ultimately, the rebellion is unsuccessful; the attendants, we are told, were impervious to reason, as they “had been drinking quite a bit at the Hermaea” (223a8–b2). Hermes, the god of tricks, appears once again to have frustrated Socrates’ intentions.

Given Socrates’ inability to match Lysis with one of the older fellows, we are left wondering about Lysis’ fate. On the one hand, Lysis has been led to awareness of his own insufficiency, an awareness that leaves him desirous of completion—a completion that perhaps only philosophic contemplation and the pursuit of the truth can attain. On the other hand, Socrates has also instilled within Lysis a rebellious streak that causes him to be dismissive of existing friendships. These two outcomes suggest that Plato is aware of the dangers of Socrates’ approach. The Socratic approach, he suggests, may lead an individual to pursue the contemplative life. However, it may equally induce a hubris that is destructive of the friendships

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<sup>44</sup> Bolotin, 197.

that are at the basis of political life.<sup>45</sup> The name of the dialogue itself suggests as much. “Lysis” (Λυσις) can be translated both as “to loosen” and “to destroy.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, while Socrates seeks to loosen Lysis from the strictures and standards of the city, he is at the same time destroying his pre-existing friendships in a way that may be harmful to the health of the *polis*.

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<sup>45</sup> Hannah Arendt explains how Socratic questioning of traditional virtues led some of his students to turn against Athenian customs: “In the circle around Socrates, there were men like Alcibiades and Critias—God knows, by no means the worst among his so-called pupils—who had turned out to be a real threat to the *polis*, and this ... because they had been aroused by the gadfly. What they had been aroused to was license and cynicism. Not content with being taught how to think without being taught a doctrine, they changed the non-results of the Socratic thinking examination into negative results: If we cannot define what piety is, let us be impious” Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1977,) 175.

<sup>46</sup> H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1066–67.



## CHAPTER TWO. SOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

In his *Seventh Letter*, Plato relates that he gave up on the reformation of politics because he found political reformation to be impossible without friends (*Sev. Let.* 325d). For Plato, friendship seems to be a sine qua non for political action. This is noteworthy, in that it suggests that Plato's depiction of the Socratic approach to friendship has implications for politics. What does Socrates' treatment of friendship tell us about his relationship to politics? We have seen that in the *Lysis*, Plato presents Socrates as running roughshod over the phenomenon of friendship: he transforms it into erotic desire. Socrates takes his interlocutors' friendships—which were thought (perhaps erroneously) to be full and self-sufficient—and substitutes for them something that has its basis in desire, lack, or incompleteness. In the *Lysis*, Socrates does not ever discover a definition of friendship that entails an appreciation between two people solely for the other's good qualities. Nevertheless, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates indicates that he considers himself to be the boys' friend. Through the process of refuting the boys, Socrates has, in some way, become their friend. In addition, we have seen that Plato seems to be skeptical of Socrates' approach to friendship. Not only does he seem to point to an oversight or misunderstanding in Socrates' understanding of friendship, but he also indicates that dangerous political effects attend the Socratic approach to friendship. The rebellion that Socrates inspires at the end of the dialogue is indicative of this, and it hints at the deleterious effect that Socrates' understanding of friendship can have on politics.

Having uncovered Socrates' understanding of friendship by way of a close analysis of the *Lysis*, it is now necessary to explicate the way that this understanding impacts his approach to

politics. In contrast to his presentation of Socrates' conception of friendship, which covers only a single dialogue, Plato's depiction of the Socratic approach to politics is covered in a variety of dialogues, each of which reveals only an aspect of this approach.<sup>1</sup> The two dialogues that are most apposite for uncovering Socrates' relationship to the political community are the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*.<sup>2</sup> In the course of his trial, recounted in the *Apology*, Socrates documents his relationship with the *polis*. As will be made clear, the *Apology* shows that Socrates' interaction with the political community is essentially one of negation and abstention. However, the trial takes place in a very public manner, in front of an audience consisting of five hundred jurors, who are largely hostile to Socrates' way of life. As a result, the reasons adduced by Socrates in defense of his peculiar stance toward the political community do not convey the totality of the reasons for his seemingly antagonistic relation to the political community. Thus, while the *Apology* provides a succinct overview detailing the *facts* of Socrates' relationship to the political realm, it does not adequately get to the heart of *why* the facts are the way they are.

In order to get to the heart of why Socrates' stance toward political life is one of negation and abstention, it is necessary to turn to the *Gorgias*. Not only does the *Gorgias* allude to and

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss comments, "The individual dialogue is not a chapter from an encyclopaedia of the philosophic sciences or from a system of philosophy, and still less a relic of a stage of Plato's development. Each dialogue deals with one part; it reveals the truth about that part. But the truth about a part is a partial truth, a half truth. Each dialogue, we venture to say, abstracts from something that is most important to the subject matter of the dialogue." *The City and Man*, 62.

<sup>2</sup> The Platonic work that most obviously deals with Socrates' relation to politics is, of course, the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, Socrates and his interlocutors famously construct a "city in speech" in an effort to discover what justice is. Nevertheless, I have chosen to focus on the *Gorgias* because, like the *Apology*, it focuses on Socrates' way of life. Both the *Apology* and the *Gorgias* concern Socrates' way of life—that is the philosophic life—and examine its relation to the *polis*. In contrast, the primary investigation of the *Republic* is not Socrates' orientation toward political life, but the city taken as a whole and the way in which it ought to be ordered. In this way, the *Gorgias* is primarily a practical dialogue rather than a theoretical dialogue. The *Gorgias* concerns the practical question of how an individual ought to live, while the *Republic* is a theoretical investigation into the form of justice and the manner in which it might come into being in the city as a whole.

foreshadow Socrates' trial and death numerous times, but it also deals with the same theme as the *Apology*. Socrates' way of life is explicitly put at issue and is contrasted with the active life of politics.<sup>3</sup> However, in contrast to the highly public character of the *Apology* in which the political community makes Socrates' way of life the focus of debate, the *Gorgias* is a private discussion among learned individuals, including one of the leading rhetoricians of the time, in which Socrates himself puts his way of life under discussion. It is in this private setting amongst learned individuals that Socrates feels free to uncover what "he professes and teaches," or "who he is" (*Gor.* 447–d).<sup>4</sup> As Socrates makes clear, it is his opinion on the nature of friendship that causes his approach to the conventional practice of politics to be one of avoidance and negativity.

### **The Apology: A Life of Principled Abstention**

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates tells Chaerephon to begin the conversation with the great sophist Gorgias by asking him "who he is" (447d). By means of this question, Socrates aims to determine Gorgias' relation to the *polis*. Socrates points out that based on the craft in which an individual engages, one can easily determine what he ought to be called and what his function is in the *polis*. By asking this question, Socrates indicates (as does the remainder of the dialogue) that the rhetoricians' relation to the *polis* is questionable. However, we may equally ask the

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<sup>3</sup> Further connection between the *Apology* and the *Gorgias* is made clear by Douglas D. Feaver and John E. Hare. They argue that every section of the Socrates' main speech in the *Apology* is an "inverted parody" of Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*. "The *Apology* as an Inverted Parody of Rhetoric," *Arethusa* 14 no. 2 (1981), 205–16.

<sup>4</sup> All citations to the *Gorgias* are taken from the interpretation provided by James H. Nichols Jr. unless otherwise noted. *Plato Gorgias* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

same question of Socrates himself: “Who is he?” What is Socrates’ relation to the *polis*? Does the philosopher have a defined role in the city, similar to that of any other craftsman? An examination of the *Apology* does not definitively answer these questions. However, it does reveal two essential characteristics about Socrates’ way of life that point toward an answer: Socrates’ way of life is both private and negative. Socrates abstains from a public role in the city, and when a public role is forced upon him, his public activity is essentially negative in character.

In the course of his trial, Socrates explains his way of life as a kind of divine mission designed to reveal the paucity of human wisdom. He recounts his perplexity at the fact that, in response to a question posed by Chaerephon, the oracle at Delphi stated there was none wiser than Socrates (21a).<sup>5</sup> Why, Socrates wonders, would the oracle make this statement, given that he was, in fact, very conscious of his lack of wisdom? Socrates states that as a result of his perplexity he set out to test the oracle’s statement by speaking to the politicians, poets, and craftsmen of the city, to test their wisdom. Socrates relates that those most reputed to be wise among these three classes turned out to be ignorant of the “greatest things” (22d).<sup>6</sup> In fact, after

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<sup>5</sup> All citations to the *Apology* will be taken from Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West’s translation in *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato and Aristophanes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, Socrates relates that the politician he questioned “seemed to be wise, both to man other human beings and most of all to himself, but that he was not” (21c). In turn, of the poets, Socrates relates that “they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired.... For they too say many noble things, but they know nothing of what they speak” (22b). Last, of the manual artisans, or craftsman, Socrates states, “They did have knowledge of things which I did not have knowledge of, and in this way they were wiser than I. But ... the good craftsmen also seemed to go wrong in the same way as the poets: because he performed his art nobly, each one deemed himself wisest also in the other things, the greatest things—and this discordant note of theirs seemed to hide that wisdom” (22d).

speaking to one of the politicians, Socrates tells the jurors that he reasoned with himself as follows:

I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I *am* likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know. (21d).

Socrates has no knowledge of the “greatest things” and is eminently aware of his ignorance. As a result, he concludes that, paradoxically, he is the wisest.

In recounting his activities, Socrates reveals that the entire approach he adopts is negative. This emphasis on negativity is consistent with what are held to be Plato’s early dialogues, in which Socrates employs dialectical argumentation to dissolve his interlocutors’ opinions about the various virtues. In none of these early dialogues does Socrates ever arrive at a definition of the virtues. As Dana Villa notes, Socrates does not claim to have any knowledge of the virtues. Instead, all his energies “are devoted to dissolving the crust of convention and the hubristic claim to moral expertise.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Socratic method seems to be entirely negative.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Apology*, after emphasizing that he possesses no knowledge of the “greatest things,” Socrates argues that his negativity and his practice of dissolving his fellow citizens’

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<sup>7</sup> Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>8</sup> For an extended account of Socrates’ negativity see Søren Kierkegaard, *On the Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling’s Berlin Lectures*, ed. and trans. Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hatlestad Hong. (Princeton University Press, 1992). For a contrary perspective, which emphasizes the positive nature of Socrates’ philosophic practice, see Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Terence Irwin, “Socrates’ Method,” in *Plato’s Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17–30.

opinions nevertheless benefits his fellow citizens. He states that as a result of his divine mission, “I always do your business, going to each of you privately, as a father or an older brother might do, persuading you to care for virtue” (31b). By forcing them to examine their opinions concerning the “greatest things,” Socrates exposes his fellow citizens’ ignorance, purges them of their opinions, and opens them up to the possibility of true knowledge by perplexing them, or leading them to a state of confusion.<sup>9</sup> What is revealing about Socrates’ statement is that it shows not only the negative character of his teaching, but also the private form it takes. Socrates dissolves his fellow citizens’ opinions, and he does so by going around to each of them *privately*, and by “being a busybody in private” (31c).<sup>10</sup>

The negative, private approach that Socrates adopts ensures that he does not involve himself in the democratic institutions of Athens. Instead, he purposefully seeks to avoid political activity (31c–d). By Athenian standards, Socrates’ choice is, at best, peculiar. Indeed, in choosing to eschew public life, Socrates is acting in a way that is not only contrary to what was customary for Athenians, but in a way that was decried as unpatriotic. For example, in his famous *Funeral Oration*, Pericles describes the public life of the Athenian citizens as follows: “Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well.... We do not say that man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own

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<sup>9</sup> This is, of course, a truncated description of the activity Socrates undertakes in the *Lysis*, as described in the previous chapter. Cf. *Sophist* 231e; *Meno* 84a–b.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 443b–444a.

business; we say that he has no business here at all.”<sup>11</sup> Socrates’ private, abstentious approach seems to be directly contrary to the Athenian ideals posited by Pericles.

Why would Socrates choose to proceed in a purely private manner that is contrary to the ideals and practices of his *polis*? Much of the extant literature emphasizing Socrates’ negative and abstentious relation to the *polis* in the *Apology* suggests that his stance towards politics stems from his unique moral integrity and a commitment to avoiding injustice. In fact, this reading of the *Apology* has become so ubiquitous that its characterization of Socrates’ stance toward the *polis* has been labeled “Socratic Citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> This commentarial tradition suggests that Socrates resolves the tension between his commitment to justice and the seemingly unavoidable injustice required by politics by abjuring the practice of politics. Scholars point to Socrates’ own argument for political abstention:

Know well, men of Athens, if I had long ago attempted to be politically active, I would long ago have perished, and I would have benefitted neither you nor myself.... For there is no human being who will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes either you or any other multitude and prevents many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. Rather, if someone who really fights for the just is going to preserve himself even for a short time, it is necessary for him to lead a private rather than a public life. (31d–32a).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), 147.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g., George Kateb, “Socratic Integrity,” in *Nomos XL: Integrity and Conscience*, 40, (1998): 77–112; Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g., Kateb, “Socratic Integrity,” 82; Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, 25–26.

Socrates seems to ground his abstention from politics in the belief that one cannot be politically involved while being committed to justice, without endangering his own life. Socrates' moral integrity would seem to require political abstention.

Political abstention, however, is not always possible. As a result, those who emphasize Socrates' moral integrity and commitment to justice posit that when political action is unavoidable, Socrates maintains that it is best to act in an almost entirely negative fashion, so as to avoid being complicit in injustice. Pointing to the two instances Socrates mentions where he was forced to involve himself in politics, these scholars maintain that Socrates chooses the negative stances of dissent and noncompliance in order to avoid being a party to acts of injustice. The first example Socrates provides is when he was elected by lot to serve on the Council, the administrative body overseeing the domestic political affairs of the city during Athens' democratic period. Socrates was elected during the Peloponnesian war and, as part of his duties, was called upon to judge the conduct of ten generals who had been accused of neglecting their duties during the war.<sup>14</sup> Socrates relates that although the Council wished to judge the ten generals "as a group," which was contrary to Athenian law, he alone opposed the Council and voted against their action (32b). Thus, George Kateb concludes that "Socrates risks life and

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West relate the events that comprise the background to Socrates' political activity: "Two years before the end of the [Peloponnesian] war, in 406, the Athenians won a major victory in a naval battle fought near the Aegean island of Arginusae. However, on account of the confusion following the battle and a storm that arose afterwards, the disabled ships and the Athenians still at the scene of the battle, both alive and dead, could not be rescued as the ten generals had intended. When the generals returned to Athens, eight of them were accused by Theramenes, an unscrupulous and ambitious politician, of neglecting their duty.... Theramenes cleverly manipulated the Assembly of the people, and it was led to condemn the eight to death as a group, although it was evident that many or perhaps all of them were innocent of wrongdoing. Socrates ... maintained that such a procedure was against the law on the ground that the generals should have been tried separately. His protest was ineffectual, for his fellow prytanes easily yielded to the loud threats of the politicians and the Assembly." *Four Texts*, 84 n. 58.



freedom in situations in which no one else does. He stands alone, as one person, as his naked moral self. He has only himself to fall back on. His courage is for the sake of refusing to be an instrument of injustice.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Socrates’ negative morality mandates that he oppose the unjust political action of the Council by choosing to dissent boldly from their action. Although Socrates’ dissent may be ineffectual, Kateb concludes that he would rather maintain his moral integrity than lend support to their injustice.

The second example where Socrates acts in a negative manner is the arrest of Leon the Salaminian, which occurred during the oligarchic reign of the Thirty Tyrants. He relates that the Thirty ordered him and four others to arrest Leon, a man reputed to be perfectly just, and bring him from Salamis to die.<sup>16</sup> Socrates relates, “That government, as strong as it was, did not shock me into doing anything unjust.... The other four went to Salamis and arrested Leon, but I departed and went home. And perhaps I would have died because of this, if that government had not been quickly overthrown” (*Apol.* 32d). Here, rather than engage in what he considers to be an unjust act, Socrates refuses to comply with the order. Dana Villa writes that Socrates’ noncompliance bespeaks “the seriousness with which he takes the imperative of avoiding injustice, while reflecting the awareness of how the life of active citizenship ... constantly generates injustice.”<sup>17</sup> Avoidance of injustice may seem to be the primary driver of Socrates’ negative and abstentious relation to politics.

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<sup>15</sup> George Kateb, “Socratic Integrity” 84.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West note that “the arrest and execution without trial of Leon, who was reputed to be a perfectly just man, was one of the harshest of the many injustices committed by the oligarchy.” *Four Texts*, 84 n. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, 26.

Based on Socrates' stance toward politics, advocates of the "Socratic Citizenship" interpretation suggest that Socrates evinces a type of citizenship that is "moderately alienated" from the *polis*. For the most part, these readings emphasize that it is Socrates' commitment to avoiding injustice that leads him toward a politics of abstention and negation. For example, Hannah Arendt argues that Socrates' approach to politics paralyzes political action. For Arendt, Socrates' negative, dissolvent approach to politics "slows people down in their potentially unjust pursuits."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, George Kateb argues that when Socrates "engages in worldly action in acts of citizenship, his whole concern is to avoid injustice."<sup>19</sup> And Dana Villa suggests that "the avoidance of injustice, where the sense of injustice is plain and reflects widely held standards, is the heart of Socratic virtue."<sup>20</sup> According to these commentators, Socrates' strong commitment to avoiding injustice leads to a "moderately alienated citizenship" that is inherently skeptical of existing claims to justice. While not each of these scholars agrees that Socratic Citizenship is possible, or desirable,<sup>21</sup> all see in the figure of Socrates the archetype of a politics of negation and abstention that is based on the avoidance of injustice.

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<sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1971): 423.

<sup>19</sup> Kateb, "Socratic Integrity," 80.

<sup>20</sup> Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Dana Villa emphasizes his disagreement with Hannah Arendt. He writes that for Arendt, "Socrates cannot serve as a model of citizenship, philosophical or otherwise, precisely because his care for his soul undermines the citizens' care for the (public) world. Socratic conscience is, at bottom, *self-interest*." Villa counters this by posting that Socratic citizenship is a salutary orientation toward the world of politics whereby "one best pursues one's responsibility to the world, to the claims of citizenship, by cultivating a certain distance between the self and the passions and energies of the *demos*." *Socratic Citizenship*, 52–53. Thus, for Villa, Socrates' private actions have a public benefit. However, Socrates never states that he intends to benefit the city as a whole. To be sure, he likens himself to a gadfly who has been "set upon the city by the god, as though upon a great and well-born horse" (*Apol.* 30e). However, he follows this up by reverting to a non-collectivist description of his mission, stating, "I awaken and persuade and reproach *each one of you*" (*ibid.*, 30e–31a). The remainder of this chapter will argue that

The notion that Socrates' stance to politics stems from a desire to avoid injustice is, as far as it goes, correct. However, it fails to present the full picture of why Socrates employs the stance toward politics that he does. It is noteworthy that in the *Apology*, no definition of either justice or injustice is ever advanced. Furthermore, in this same dialogue, Socrates never claims that his abstention from political activity *results* from a clash between his commitment to avoiding injustice and the inevitable injustice that the practice of politics involves. Instead, he notes that his abstention is a product of the daimonic voice:

The cause of this [abstention from politics] is what you have heard me speak of many times and in many places, that something divine and daimonic comes to me, a voice.... This is something which began for me in childhood: a sort of voice comes, and whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward. This is what opposes my political activity. (31c3–d6).

It is the daimonic voice that is specifically credited as opposing Socrates' political activity. Socrates' avoidance of injustice seems to be simply an *effect* of the daimonion's counsel to abstain from politics.

If the daimonion is Socrates' individuated conscience as numerous scholars have suggested, then it is possible that Socrates' desire to avoidance injustice is simply the product of his daimonion, or conscience.<sup>22</sup> However, a number of factors indicate that the relation between

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Socrates' negative and private approach stems from a concern that the city interferes with the health of the soul, or that there is a disharmony between the city and the soul.

<sup>22</sup> The central role that Socrates' daimonion plays in the *Apology*, along with the relatively scant information we receive about it in the entirety of the Platonic *corpus*, has led to much academic speculation over what precisely Socrates' daimonion is. Today, most scholars assume, in accordance with Hegel, that the daimonion represents Socrates' individuated conscience. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, vol. 1, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 421–25. For a contrary perspective, which emphasizes the religious character of the Socratic daimonion, see Vlastos, *Socrates*, 158. References to Socrates' daimonion in the

Socrates' daimonion and his desire to avoid injustice are somewhat more complex. First, while the daimonion is cited as being the *cause* of Socrates' abstention from political activity, Socrates' contention that one cannot both act justly and preserve one's own life while engaging in political activity is only cited as evidence that the daimonion's opposition is "altogether noble" (31d, emphasis added).<sup>23</sup> He does not cite this fact as the *cause* of his abstention for political activity. In fact, in introducing the two examples from his own life that show that one cannot be both committed to opposing injustice and be politically active without endangering one's life, Socrates states, "I for my part will offer great proofs of these things for you—not speeches, but what *you* honor, deeds" (32a; emphasis in original). He goes on to say, "I will tell you vulgar things, typical of the law courts, but true" (32a–b). While the examples that Socrates provides of his commitment to moral integrity are honorable according to Athenian standards, they are in his estimation vulgar and paltry.<sup>24</sup>

Socrates' depiction of the Athenian conception of justice as vulgar, combined with the fact that the *Apology* contains no definition of justice raises the questions: what is Socrates' real reason for abstaining from politics? Why does the daimonion oppose his involvement in politics? And, what is Socrates' conception of justice? The platonic *corpus* as a whole provides little information about Socrates' daimonion. However, the *Gorgias* does offer a suggestion as

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works of Plato include *Apology* 31c–d; 40a–c, *Euthyphro* 3b, *Republic* 496c, *Thaetetus* 151a, *Phaedrus* 224b–c, *Euthydemus* 272e, and *Theages* 128d–131a.

<sup>23</sup> The noble (γενναῖος) is an important term and in the *Hippias Major* its definition proves elusive.

<sup>24</sup> Later in his defense speech, Socrates again subtly implies that he values speech over deeds: "If I say that this even happens to be a very great good for a human being—to make speeches every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be persuaded by me still less when I say these things" (*Apol.* 38a). As I will make clear, the distinction between speech and deed becomes an important theme in the *Gorgias*.

to why Socrates' daimonion may oppose his involvement in politics. As noted above, the *Gorgias*, like the *Apology*, deals with Socrates' relation to the *polis*, but it does so in a more private setting, among learned intellectuals. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims, in what appears to be a stark contrast with the *Apology*, that he is the only person in all of Athens who practices politics (*Gorg.* 521d). While on the face of it, Socrates' claim appears to contradict the negative and abstentious stance he takes towards politics in the *Apology*, the claim makes sense in light of the *Gorgias*' teaching concerning friendship and justice. Specifically, the *Gorgias* shows that the Socratic understanding of friendship affects Socrates' approach to politics, rendering it an exclusively negative and private matter.

### **The Gorgias Part I: Phantom Friends and Phantom Politics**

The *Gorgias* is ordinarily considered to be Plato's dialogue concerning rhetoric. However, a closer look reveals that the dialogue is nearly equally concerned with friendship and justice, or the way one ought to treat a friend.<sup>25</sup> The *Gorgias* is divided into two parts. In the first part, Socrates engages with the well-known sophist Gorgias and his pupil Polus, who are visiting Athens; in the second part, he converses with Callicles, the Athenian at whose house Gorgias and Polus are staying. While their conversations cover similar topics, Socrates treats his

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<sup>25</sup> Roger Duncan notes, "As far as I can determine insufficient attention has been paid, in the interpretation of the *Gorgias*, to the role of φιλία, particularly as it features in that third and longest section of the dialogue where Socrates and Callicles confront each other." "Philia in the *Gorgias*," *Apeiron* 8 no. 1 (1974): 23–25. The prominence of the theme of friendship in the *Gorgias* would be unsurprising if the narrative setting places it as occurring immediately after the *Lysis*, as Catherine Zuckert argues. *Plato's Philosophers*, 8–9. If Zuckert is correct, we can surmise that in the *Gorgias* Plato works out how Socrates' understanding of friendship articulated in the *Lysis* impacts his relation to the political realm.

interlocutors very differently. At the end of the first part of the dialogue, he seems to send Polus back into the city, armed with a rhetoric designed to challenge the city's conventions. In contrast, toward the end of the second half of the dialogue, Callicles is counseled to avoid the conventional practice of politics altogether. The disparate treatment Socrates affords his interlocutors has long been the source of scholarly debate. I will argue that the difference in approach Socrates takes with his interlocutors stems from his understanding of friendship. Furthermore, I will show that Socrates' understanding of friendship also makes sense of Socrates' negative approach to politics and his abstention from the conventional practice of politics. An analysis of Socrates' discussion with Polus reveals that Socrates' understanding of friendship necessitates a negative approach to politics, in which rhetoric is used to purge the city of injustice. However, Socrates also invokes friendship as grounds for Callicles to avoid the conventional practice of politics altogether. Thus, the *Gorgias* explains that friendship lies behind both Socrates' negative and his abstentious approach toward politics.<sup>26</sup>

The connection between the themes of rhetoric and friendship comes to the fore near the beginning of the dialogue. Socrates and Chaerephon arrive late at Callicles' house, and Callicles states, "In war and battle, they say, one must take part in this manner" (447a). We soon learn that Gorgias, a sophist visiting from Leontini, has been regaling the crowd inside with rhetoric, and that Socrates and Chaerephon have come too late to hear the display of the speeches.

Callicles' remark suggests that rhetoric is war—that is, rhetoric necessarily contains a conflict in

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<sup>26</sup> It might reasonably be questioned how Socrates' understanding of friendship causes him both to counsel Polus to return to the city and use rhetoric to purge it of injustice and to counsel Callicles to avoid politics altogether. As I hope to make clear, Socrates' ability to argue in this way hinges upon the different character of each of his interlocutors. While neither Polus nor Callicles is impervious to shame, Callicles proves to be much less sensitive to shame than does Polus.

which one side emerges victorious. Socrates responds with his own proverb, “Oh, so have we then come, as the saying goes, after the feast and too late?” (447a). In contrast to Callicles’ statement, the proverb quoted by Socrates implies that rhetoric is not like war but is more like a feast of which all friends can partake. The opening colloquy sets up the fundamental question of the dialogue: Is rhetoric akin to war with its clash of opposing interests, or is it more like a feast shared among friends that leaves everyone satisfied?

Socrates informs Callicles that he would prefer to skip the feast and learn instead from Gorgias “what the power of the man’s art is, and what it is that he professes and teaches” (447c). What is the power of Gorgianic rhetoric? Socrates wishes to know to what extent rhetoric can truly reconcile opposing interests and satisfy all parties.<sup>27</sup> To begin the inquiry, Socrates instructs Chaerephon to ask Gorgias “who he is” (447d). Perhaps in a bid to put on his own display, Polus interjects with an oath, “By Zeus, Chaerephon, test me, if you wish!” (448a). Chaerephon obliges and asks Polus what it is that Gorgias ought to be called; just as one who knows the art of medicine is called a doctor, and one experienced in the art of painting is called a painter, so Chaerephon wishes to know, on the basis of Gorgias’ art, what he should be called. As noted above, the question of who Gorgias is has to do with his relation to the city—what is Gorgias’ contribution to the city? Or, how does he fit into the whole?<sup>28</sup> In providing the example

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<sup>27</sup> Seth Benardete notes, “The issue in the background of the *Gorgias* is very simple. If Gorgianic rhetoric has the power Gorgias claims for it, it would necessarily follow that the best city in speech of the *Republic* could be realized anywhere on earth and at any time.” *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Gorgias was a famous rhetorician who traveled from city to city selling his knowledge. Teresa Morgan, “Rhetoric and Education,” in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010), 304. The question of Gorgias’ relation to the city is, therefore, apposite, as the manner in which Gorgias practices his craft transcends political boundaries and loyalties. Later on, Gorgias will claim that rhetoric ought to be used justly and for the benefit of friends (456a–457c).

of a doctor and a painter, Chaerephon—perhaps unwittingly—anticipates Socrates’ discussion with Gorgias and gets to the heart of the dialogue. Is rhetoric akin to the *knowledge* of a doctor or is it merely an *experience* or skill that imitates reality?

Polus responds with comic prolixity, saying nearly nothing.<sup>29</sup> He simply praises Gorgias’ art as “the best,” without saying what it consists of. However, Polus does choose between the two options provided by Chaerephon, “knowledge” and “experience,” noting that art is simply experience, and that art (as experience) conquers chance (448c).<sup>30</sup> Polus suggests that in the absence of the skills obtained through experience, our lives would proceed according to the vagaries of fortune. According to Polus, rhetoric is one of the skills that can conquer chance. At this point, Socrates interjects, noting that Polus has engaged in rhetoric—that is, he has simply praised Gorgias’ art, without answering *what* it is. Socrates knows enough about rhetoric to know that it consists in assigning blame and praise, and that it commonly does so without knowledge of its object. Because of Polus’ failure, Socrates begins to engage Gorgias directly. After quickly establishing that the art he practices is rhetoric and that, as such, Gorgias can rightly be called a rhetor, Socrates asks him, “what of the things that are (τὰ ὄντα), does rhetoric happen to be about?” “About what ... is it a science?” (449d). By characterizing Gorgias’ practice in this way, Socrates skillfully shifts the category under which rhetoric falls from art to science, and from experience to knowledge.<sup>31</sup> By shifting rhetoric’s categorization in this way,

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<sup>29</sup> “Chaerephon, many arts have been discovered among men experimentally through experiences. For experience causes our life to proceed by art, whereas inexperience causes it to proceed by chance. Of each of these arts, various men variously partake of various ones, and the best men partake of the best; among these is Gorgias here, and he has a share in the finest of the arts” (448c).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* 981a1–5.



Socrates suggests that he wants to probe the extent to which Gorgias' practice is directed towards truth or towards "the things that are."

Gorgias responds that rhetoric concerns speeches and, when pressed to follow up with more specificity, Gorgias states in a manner reminiscent of Polus' vacuous response, that the rhetoric of speeches is concerned with "the greatest of human affairs ... and the best" (451d). Socrates points out that opinions vary on what is "the greatest of human affairs," and to illustrate he quotes a quatrain from a popular drinking song, which enumerates the various goods people claim are best: "'Being healthy is best, and second is to have become beautiful and third' as the poet who wrote the song says, 'is being wealthy without fraud'" (451e). However, Socrates omits portions from the song. The full quotation concerning the second good is "to have become beautiful *in one's nature*." In addition, Socrates completely omits the song's fourth good, namely, "to be in the prime of youth with friends."<sup>32</sup> Both of these omissions are significant because, as I will make clear, they go to the heart of the issue of the *Gorgias*: to what extent is rhetoric akin to a war, and to what extent is it akin to a feast shared by friends?

Gorgias responds that rhetoric has the power to obtain *all* the goods mentioned by Socrates in the drinking song. Rhetoric is "able to persuade by speeches" in any political setting,

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<sup>31</sup> This shift is purposeful, and it betrays Socrates' efforts to discover whether rhetoric is capable of aiming towards what *is*, or towards truth. Based on the manner in which Socrates appears to try and redirect rhetoric towards the things "that are," some scholars have suggested that Socrates' purpose is to reform rhetoric. See Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's 'Gorgias': Rhetoric, Justice and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> E. R. Dodds provides the full quatrain. He remarks that "the fourth item is omitted by Plato, since it does not depend on any τέχνη." *Plato Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 200. However, Dodds does not comment on Socrates' incomplete quotation of the second good. My own view is that Socrates' omission of the fourth good is meant to raise the question of what role friendship ought to play in political life. On Socrates' incomplete quotation of the second good, see n. 59 and accompanying text below.

enabling one to obtain power over the artisans who produce health, beauty, and wealth (452e). Gorgias thus sets up rhetoric as architectonic; it is able to command all other arts and sciences and is able to satisfy all bodily desires. However, rhetoric's relation to friendship—the fourth good of the drinking song that was left unstated by Socrates—remains open. Is friendship a good like health, beauty, and wealth, which can be obtained through rhetoric? Or is friendship something altogether different? Rhetoric's relation to friendship will soon be raised directly by Gorgias himself.

Perhaps as a result of Gorgias' response, Socrates shifts the category again, adopting the language of art: “You're saying that rhetoric is a *craftsman* of persuasion” (453a; emphasis added). It seems that while Socrates is willing to grant Gorgias the benefit of the doubt in describing it as a science, Gorgias' response causes Socrates to relegate it again to the status of art. By switching the status of rhetoric from art, to science, and back again, Socrates signals his ambivalence about the status of rhetoric; it may theoretically be possible for rhetoric to be a science, but as described by Gorgias, rhetoric is at most an art.

The notion that rhetoric is concerned with persuasion is not precise enough for Socrates. He notes that while he has a *suspicion* as to what Gorgias means with this notion, he would like to ask Gorgias to clarify it for him by responding to his questions. The reason he chooses to proceed in this manner rather than stating his suspicion outright is, according Socrates, “not on account of you, [Gorgias], but on account of the argument, in order that it may go forward so as to make what is being talked about as manifest as possible to us” (453c). Socrates declares, perhaps somewhat rudely, that his concern is not for Gorgias, but rather for the truth of the argument. Socrates' *primary* interest in speaking with Gorgias, is not to improve Gorgias in

some way, but is instead self-interest.<sup>33</sup> Socrates' own good—that is, his inquiry into the power of rhetoric—rather than a concern for Gorgias' good, is the primary driver of the conversation.<sup>34</sup> A short while later, Socrates will state forthrightly that he would rather be refuted if he were to say something false than refute another's false statement, for “it is a greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil than to release another” (458a).

Upon prompting, Gorgias makes clear that rhetoric is about “persuasion in law courts and in other mobs ... and about those things that are just and unjust” (454b). Socrates indicates that this is precisely the suspicion he had, but that he had asked for clarity, “not on account of you” (i.e., not for Gorgias' interest), but instead so that the argument can “be brought to a conclusion in a consequential manner” (454c). Again, Socrates makes clear that he is pursuing the argument for his own sake, or to attain truth. This time, however, after noting that he is pursuing the argument for the sake of truth, and not for Gorgias' sake, Socrates adds, “so that we may not become accustomed to guessing and hastily snatching up each other's words” (454c). Socrates makes clear that while his *primary* concern is with the truth, he would like to remain on friendly terms with Gorgias. Socrates is exploring the main theme of the dialogue: What is the power of Gorgianic rhetoric? Can Gorgianic rhetoric be directed toward the truth (Socrates' interest) and at the same time maintain friendships?

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<sup>33</sup> Some have argued that the self-interest displayed by Socrates is related to his trial. According to this line of argument Socrates is seeking to reform rhetoric so as to make his trial proceed favorably. See, Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of the Gorgias*.

<sup>34</sup> This primary concern for one's own good is echoed in the *Charmides*, “I am examining the argument mainly for my own sake, but also, perhaps, for that of my other intimates” (166c7–d4).

Having made clear to Gorgias that he would like their conversation to proceed in a friendly manner *and* wants to aim at the truth, Socrates continues his questioning, extricating from Gorgias the concession that rhetoric, in contrast to didactic persuasion, “provides belief without knowing” (454e). Socrates concludes by diplomatically stating the conclusion to their colloquy: “The rhetor, therefore, is not didactic with law courts and the other mobs about just and unjust things, but persuasive only; for he would not be able, I suppose, to teach so large a mob such great matters in a short time” (455a).<sup>35</sup> Upon Gorgias’ acceptance of this summary, Socrates once again presses Gorgias to define precisely what it is that rhetoric is able to obtain. Surely, it is engineers and architects (those with knowledge), not rhetors, who are responsible for the walls and harbors of the city. Therefore, concerning what—aside from the just and unjust—does rhetoric give counsel? (455d). Gorgias counters by noting that it *is* the rhetors, rather than the craftsmen, who are responsible for the “coming into being” of walls, harbors, and the like. Socrates does not dispute Gorgias’ claim, but encourages him, noting that rhetoric “appears to me as a power demonic in greatness” (456a).

Gorgias responds to this flattery by giving in to his propensity for loquacity and delivers a disquisition on the benefits and purpose of rhetoric, a disquisition that will make clear his confused understanding of rhetoric. Socrates subtly points out that gratification or flattery leads another into error. By encouraging or gratifying him, Socrates goads Gorgias into delivering a long disquisition on the powers of rhetoric. As it turns out, it is precisely this disquisition that brings to light Gorgias’ confused and contradictory understanding of rhetoric.

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<sup>35</sup> James Nichols writes of Socrates’ remark, “Could one imagine a more tactful way of bringing up the rhetor’s lack of concern for conveying knowledge about issues of justice?” *Plato Gorgias*, 37 n. 28.

In order to prove the power of rhetoric, Gorgias points to his ability to persuade those unwilling to do what is best. He notes that he has gone with doctors to visit the sick and, while the doctors are at times unable to persuade unwilling patients to take their medicine, Gorgias, using the power of rhetoric, is able to persuade these patients to take their medicine, for their own benefit. Rhetoric is, therefore, all-powerful, and can be used to ensure that people undertake what is good for them, even if they don't recognize it as good (456b). Yet, despite this power, Gorgias quickly cautions that it should be used only against one's enemies, not against one's friends and family. Just as one who has become skilled in boxing ought not use those skills to "beat ... his father and mother or some other relative or friend" but ought instead to use those skills against "enemies and doers of injustice," so rhetoric ought to be used in the same manner (456d–456e). In this statement, Gorgias exposes his understanding of justice—an understanding that calls to mind Polemarchus' definition of justice in the *Republic*: one ought to do good to friends and harm enemies.

Three fundamental and connected themes emerge from Gorgias' disquisition: the good, justice, and friendship. Gorgias' statement that rhetoric can persuade those who are unwilling to take their medicine reveals a recognition that rhetoric can and should be aimed toward the good. However, Gorgias also displays a devotion to friendship, or the principle that one ought to be loyal to one's own. Tellingly, however, Gorgias allies justice only to friendship, and not to the good. Indeed, he asserts it would be unjust to use rhetoric against one's friends.<sup>36</sup> The rhetor is placed in somewhat of a quandary. According to Gorgias' description, the rhetorician has two

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<sup>36</sup> We can be skeptical of the extent to which Gorgias, as a traveling rhetorician who sells his wares to the highest bidder, truly believes in the existence of justice and friendship. See above at n. 28 and accompanying text.

incompatible goals. On the one hand, the rhetor is capable of administering treatment to his patients, ensuring that those who are unwilling to do what is best for them, will nonetheless do so. On the other hand, Gorgias believes that justice dictates that the rhetor ought not to use his skill against his friends. Of course, if a friend were to fall ill and be in need of medicine, the rhetor's goals would come into conflict. Friendship may well impede the rhetor's ability to administer medicine in a manner that is conducive to the patient's health.

Socrates very likely realizes that Gorgias' conception of justice and friendship is in tension, if not outright opposition, with his belief that rhetoric ought to aim for the good. However, rather than set the good and the just against each other directly, Socrates instead shows that the rhetorician could never do an injustice. After coaxing Gorgias to admit that the rhetorician must necessarily know what justice is, Socrates is able to show (not altogether convincingly) that as a knower of justice, the rhetorician must therefore be just, do just things, and never wish to do injustice (460b–c). When Gorgias agrees, Socrates concludes that Gorgias must have been mistaken in asserting that the rhetor would ever use his art in unjust manner.

What is noteworthy about this exchange is that neither Gorgias nor Socrates offers any definition of justice. As Polus will later assert, Gorgias likely does not know *what* justice is, but is shamed into asserting that he is concerned with justice. As a rhetorician who travels from place to place, Gorgias has likely seen that different cities have different conceptions of justice. Further, as a rhetorician who sells his services, Gorgias likely adapts his speeches (and thereby his conception of justice) to the city he happens to be visiting. Socrates appeals to Gorgias' sense of shame, inducing him to concede (perhaps falsely) that he is concerned with justice. As

a result, Socrates' refutation of Gorgias contains no direct conflict between justice, or a commitment to one's friends, and the good.

Through an appeal to Gorgias' shame, Socrates manages to save the phenomenon of justice. However, the relationship of justice to friendship and the good has not yet been resolved. Is justice allied with friendship (as Gorgias indicates) and therefore opposed to the good? Or is justice allied with the good, and therefore something that undermines friendship? The question of where justice stands in relation to the good and friendship comes to the fore in the next section of the dialogue, which takes place between Socrates and Polus. Upon witnessing Socrates refute Gorgias, Polus interjects with force, arguing that Gorgias is simply ashamed to admit that the rhetorician does not also know the "just, noble, and good things" (461b), and that it is his sensitivity to shame that has led to his refutation.<sup>37</sup> Socrates responds, telling Polus that it would be just for Polus to correct him and Gorgias if they have been "tripped up in the speeches on some point" (461d).<sup>38</sup> Polus agrees and begins to question Socrates on what rhetoric is. Through a series of exchanges in which Socrates tells Polus what questions to pose to him, Socrates reveals that he believes rhetoric to be a sort of flattery that is, in fact, a "phantom of a part of politics" (463d).

When Gorgias intervenes, expressing confusion, Socrates elaborates, noting that the art that is directed to the soul is called politics, and that it is comprised of two parts—the legislative art and justice (464b–d). Justice, therefore, is directed toward the improvement of the soul.

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<sup>37</sup> Polus is likely correct to describe Gorgias' shame as the cause of his refutation, as Gorgias does exhibit a sense of shame at various points of the dialogue (cf. 458d7–458e2).

<sup>38</sup> Socrates' response adumbrates what will later be his definition of justice. Justice is refuting others (cf. 505b–c).

Socrates continues, stating that flattery (the phantom art of politics), is itself divided into two parts; sophistry and rhetoric, which are meant to mimic the legislative art and justice. He states, flattery “slipped in under each of the parts” of the art of politics (the legislative art and justice) and pretends to be that which it has slipped under. Thus, sophistry pretends to be the legislative art, while rhetoric pretends to be justice. The problem, Socrates notes somewhat perfunctorily, is that neither of these parts of flattery give heed to “the best,” but instead “hunt ... after folly with what is ever most pleasant” (464d).

The distinction, therefore, between rhetoric and justice is that while justice aims at what is best, rhetoric aims at what is most pleasant. While Socrates does not yet declare what “the best” is, we can surmise that between the two contenders, friendship and the good, Socrates means that justice aims at the good. This supposition is borne out when Socrates invokes the analogy to the medical art that Gorgias had raised earlier, and notes that justice is akin to the art of the doctor in that it aims at what is best: the health of the patient. By invoking this analogy, Socrates finally dissociates justice from friendship and allies it instead with the good. It seems at this point that rhetoric, which aims only at what is pleasant or that which gratifies, is allied with friendship. However, while Socrates suggests that justice aims at what is best and, therefore, at the good, we still do not know of what it is that justice consists. In fact, Socrates remains almost cryptic about what justice is.<sup>39</sup>

Polus, not knowing quite what to make of Socrates’ depiction of rhetoric, seeks to burnish the reputation of rhetoric by focusing on the supposedly powerful *deeds* that the person

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Apology*, 32a.



skilled in rhetoric is capable of accomplishing. He asks: Don't rhetors, like tyrants, have the capacity to "kill whomever they wish, and confiscate possessions and expel from the cities whomever it seems good to them" (466b–c)? Rather than explain precisely what justice is, Socrates explains that Polus has, in fact, asked two questions: "Do rhetors do whatever they wish?" and "Do rhetors do what seems good to them?" (466c–d). Through a series of dialectical moves, Socrates shows that the rhetor who engages in these deeds does them only to pursue what he perceives to be good for him. Therefore, if the rhetor engages in one of these acts under the mistaken belief that he is doing something good for himself, he does nothing of what he wishes, although he certainly does what seems to him to be best (466e). Given that Polus had earlier agreed that having power is good for the person who wields it, Socrates is able to refute Polus' conception of power, concluding, "Do you then think it is good, if someone who does not have intelligence does those things that seem to him to be best? And do you call this having great power?" (466e).

In response, Polus reveals his commitment to what is pleasant as opposed to what is best. He protests indignantly that Socrates himself would "welcome the possibility of doing what seemed good" to him, whether it was just or unjust (468e). In recognition that Polus has not been convinced by his refutation—that is, by what is *best*<sup>40</sup>—Socrates attempts to gratify him by

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<sup>40</sup> Socrates has implied, earlier in the dialogue that being refuted is best. Cf. *Gor.* 458a ("And of what men am I one? Those who are refuted with pleasure if I say something not true, and who refute with pleasure if someone should say something not true—and indeed not with less pleasure to be refuted than to refute. For I consider it a greater good, to the extent that it is a greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil than to release another. For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinion about the things that our argument now happens to be about"). That Socrates believes that being refuted is the greatest good (greater even than refuting another) explains why Socrates earlier insisted that his primary purpose in pursuing the argument was for his own sake, and not for the sake of his interlocutors. Socrates does not primarily pursue the argument to refute Gorgias, but to test his own opinions. See above at n. 34 above and accompanying text.

appealing to his desire for punishment. First, he tells Polus that one ought not admire those who do injustice but instead ought to pity them, for they are wretched. When Polus asks how the rhetor who commits great acts of injustice is wretched, Socrates compares the rhetor to a common criminal who kills citizens in the market place. In response, Polus protests that this is not the type of power he has in mind, because “it is necessary for someone who acts in this manner to pay a penalty” (470a).<sup>41</sup> This reply reveals that Polus’ earlier shameless disregard for justice was feigned; Polus is not so shameless as to praise a petty criminal. While Polus admires rhetors and tyrants who are able to engage in injustice on a grand scale, he has no admiration for the common criminal.

Having exposed Polus’ shame or sense of decency by appealing to his desire for punishment, Socrates seeks to refute Polus on two points. The first is Polus’ notion that it is better to do injustice than it is to suffer injustice (469b), and the second is Polus’ belief that the individual who escapes punishment is better off than the individual who pays the penalty for his injustice (472e). In order to prove the first claim, that doing injustice is a greater evil than suffering injustice, Socrates begins by establishing that all fine or noble things are called such on the basis of either use or pleasure, while the shameful are defined by the opposite, namely, pain and badness. Because Polus agrees that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering injustice, the former must surpass the latter either in pain or in badness, or in both. Furthermore, because

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<sup>41</sup> In comparing the rhetor to a common criminal who, according to Polus, deserves punishment, Socrates appeals to Polus’ moralistic desire for punishment, which will eventually prove necessary to persuade him that the rhetor is unjust. However, Polus is unwilling to equate the rhetor with the common criminal and, in support of the contention that unjust rhetors are happy, he points to the many unjust deeds that Archelaus the ruler of Macedonia committed in order to attain his station. Socrates never states his agreement with Polus that Archelaus is unjust, or even that he has committed injustices. (*Gorg.* 468e–71d).

doing injustice cannot possibly exceed the suffering of injustice in the realm of pain, it must surpass it in badness (474e–475b). As a result, doing injustice must be worse than suffering injustice (475d).<sup>42</sup>

Next, Socrates seeks to prove that it is a greater evil to avoid paying the penalty for injustice than to be punished for an injustice. First, he obtains Polus' agreement that "all just things are fine" or noble insofar as they are just (476b). After this, he asserts that in any action that is undertaken, the entity undergoing the action undergoes it in whatever way the action is inflicted. Thus, if someone beats violently, the object that has been beaten will have been beaten in a violent manner (476c). Having secured Polus' affirmation, Socrates extends this to suffering a penalty. If someone suffers a penalty from one who justly inflicts the penalty, the penalty must also be suffered justly. And, if the penalty is suffered justly, it must also be noble or fine to suffer such penalties (476e). Socrates concludes that it is beneficial to suffer punishments, as it releases one from "badness of soul" (477a).

By appealing to Polus' desire for punishment, Socrates partially reintegrates Polus into the city. Polus' attack on justice has been uncovered as insincere, and Socrates seems to re-establish the ties of justice between Polus and the city. However, he does so in a manner that ensures that Polus does not simply uncritically accept the city's conventions. Indeed, if it is better to suffer punishment than to escape punishment, it is necessary that one seek to administer justice—and therefore punishment—both on oneself and one's friends. The relationship of

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<sup>42</sup> There is reason to believe that Socrates does not, himself, agree with this argument, as it relies on the claim that the fine or noble is equivalent to the good, a distinction which is challenged in the *Hippias Major*. James Nichols notes that "in the *Hippias Major*, Socrates investigates just what the fine (noble, beautiful) is; it proves very difficult to state." *Plato Gorgias*, 61, n. 54.

justice to friendship is finally revealed. While Socrates had earlier revealed that justice is allied with the good, we now see that it is allied with the good *against* friendship. One ought to act like a doctor that administers medicine. To act justly means removing injustice from one's own the soul and from the souls of one's fellow citizens. As a result, Socrates states the following concerning rhetoric:

For speaking in defense of one's own injustice, therefore, or that of parents or comrades or children or fatherland when it does injustice, rhetoric will be of no use to us, Polus; except if someone takes it to be of use for the opposite purpose, supposing that he must most of all accuse himself, and then whoever else of his relatives and friends happens at any time to do injustice, and not hide the unjust deed but bring it into the open so as to pay the just penalty and become healthy, and compel both himself and others not to play the coward but to grit his teeth and submit well and courageously as if to a doctor for cutting and burning. (480b–c).

Socrates appeals to Polus' desire to punish, noting that if rhetoric is to have any use at all, it would be to accuse oneself, one's friends, and one's own city.

Because Socrates suggests that one ought to accuse oneself, one's friends, and one's own city, some scholars have suggested that Socrates is sending Polus back into the city to administer justice and purge it of its unjust practices.<sup>43</sup> However, a close look at Socrates' statements concerning justice reveals that this is only partially correct. Socrates does not seem to be particularly concerned with what are conventionally or vulgarly considered to be the unjust practices of politics.<sup>44</sup> For example, when Socrates demurs from Polemarchus' assertion that Archelaus, the ruler of the Macedonians, is unjust, Polus responds incredulously, "But how on

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<sup>43</sup> Nichols, "The Rhetoric of Justice in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Plato Gorgias*, 139.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Apology* 32a–b.

earth could he not be unjust?” (471a). Polus then conveys a litany of conventionally unjust practices that Archelaus has committed, including the illicit attainment of the throne of Macedonia and the killing of both his master and his master’s bloodline (471a–c). Socrates responds, “I certainly do not agree with you on any one of these things that you are asserting” (471e).<sup>45</sup> Socratic justice, seems to be different from, or beyond, a conventional, vulgar, understanding of justice that eschews the practices engaged in by Archelaus. Thus, it cannot be that Socrates simply sends Polus back into the city to reform its unjust practices.

If Socratic justice differs from the vulgar, common conception of justice with which Polus is concerned, what does it consist of? While Socrates does not provide a definition of justice anywhere in his discussion with Polus, he intimates throughout that it is connected to speech. For example, when questioning Gorgias what *precisely* concerns rhetoric or in what areas it persuades, Socrates asks, “Since, therefore, not [rhetoric] alone but also other [arts] achieve this work [i.e., persuasion] ... we might after this *justly* ask the speaker further, ‘Of what sort persuasion, and of persuasion about what, is rhetoric the art?’ Or doesn’t it seem to you *just* to ask further?” (454a; emphasis added). Similarly, when Polus angrily interrupts Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias, Socrates tells him it is *just* for him to correct himself and Gorgias if they have been “tripped up in the speeches on some point” (461d). Justice is connected to speech; speaking truthfully is just, while falsity (and flattery) are unjust.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Socrates similarly demurs from the statement that “the great king” (i.e., the King of Persia) is unjust, commenting, “I do not know how he stands in regard to education and justice” (*Gorg.* 470e).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 448b: “I’m asking now. If Gorgias happened to be a knower of his brother Herodicus’s art, what would we *justly* name him” (emphasis added). Cf. also 465e–466a: “So then, when you are answering, if I too do not know what use to make of it, you too extend your speech; but if I do, let me make use of it; for that is just.”

This conception of justice also helps to make sense of Socrates' argument that it is better for one to pay the penalty for injustice than to escape punishment. According to Socrates' understanding of justice, escaping punishment simply ensures that one maintains a false conception of what *is*, whereas undergoing punishment ensures that one's false convictions are refuted. This interpretation of Socrates' understanding of justice is borne out in the dialogue, when Polus tells Socrates that even a child could refute him. Socrates responds, "I shall feel much gratitude to the child then, and equal gratitude to you too, if you refute me and release me from drivel. So don't tire of doing good *to a man who's a friend*, but refute" (470c; emphasis added). Similarly, immediately before refuting Gorgias, Socrates states, "And of what men am I one? Those who are refuted with pleasure if I say something not true, and who refute with pleasure if someone should say something not true.... For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinion about the things that our argument now happens to be about" (458a–b). Last, sometime after Socrates has refuted Polus, Socrates states, "Don't shrink from answering, Polus; for you will suffer no harm. But submit yourself in a nobly born manner to the argument as to a doctor, and answer" (475d). Socrates does not believe that justice primarily consists either in performing actions that are vulgarly considered to be just deeds or in avoiding unjust deeds. Rather, justice consists in refuting others' opinions about what *is*, for it is by refuting another—and thereby leading him to a state of perplexity—that a person, is *released* from falsity.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This is finally asserted explicitly toward the end of the dialogue during Socrates' conversation with Callicles. Cf. 522d–e.

Socrates' conception of justice and his approach to Polus mirror the approach undertaken in the *Lysis*. It will be recalled that in the *Lysis* Socrates refutes Lysis in a manner that causes him to question all his pre-existing friendships. Socrates leads Lysis to understand that his friendships have not been sufficient and that, to the extent that Lysis believed them to be sufficient, they were simply "phantom friendships." Therefore, through refuting him, Socrates releases Lysis from a state of complacency and opens him up to an awareness of need and, perhaps, to the good life of contemplation. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates undertakes a similar approach with Polus. He refutes Polus and releases him from his erroneous conception of justice and rhetoric. For Socrates, justice is allied not with friendship, but with the good. As a result, justice—and rhetoric, if it is to be just—ought to question friendships and the conceptions of justice that uphold them. According to Socrates, a true friend (as opposed to a "phantom friend") is one who questions and exposes the false or "phantom" conceptions of justice, friendship, or whatever else that *is*. In contrast, a "phantom" friend is one who engages in flattery, preserving a false conception of what *is*. In both dialogues, Socrates can be seen acting as a true friend (under the Socratic conception of friendship), who releases his interlocutors from a mistaken conception of what *is*. While refutation is a painful process—much like the taking of medicine or punishment—it leaves one better off, as it leaves one perplexed and therefore desirous of true wisdom.

Socrates's negative approach to politics, therefore, is explained by his conception of friendship and justice. His belief that justice consists in refuting a friend in order to free him from an erroneous conception of what *is*, means that Socrates' approach to politics and the practice of justice takes a negative form. In the name of friendship and justice, Socrates

dissolves his fellow citizens' pre-existing conceptions of who a friend is, and what is just or noble. In this way, Socrates' claim to be the only person to practice politics is understandable, despite his complete avoidance of conventional politics. This negative approach is not primarily due to Socrates' commitment to avoiding acts that the many consider to be unjust (i.e., vulgar justice), nor is it due to a desire to preserve his own life. Rather, when Socrates relates in the *Apology* that he has never "conceded anything contrary to the just" (33a), what he means is that he has never engaged in flattery but has instead always acted justly by dissolving his fellow citizens' erroneous conceptions of what *is*.

Through his refutation of Polus, Socrates is able to show both Gorgias and Polus why their practice of rhetoric is unjust. Flattery, as the phantom part of justice, preserves phantom friendships. Together, flattery and phantom friendships lead to complacency. Just as the phantom friendships described in the *Lysis* lead one to a false sense of self-sufficiency and impede one's access to the good, so flattery, the phantom part of justice, maintains a false conception of what *is* and maintains those who have been lied to in a state of ignorance and complacency (cf. *Rep.* 382b–c). In contrast, Socratic justice involves dissolving false conceptions of what *is*. Of course, by doing so, one also dissolves that which undergirds phantom friendships. In Socrates' view it is by dissolving another's false conceptions of justice, and by dissolving their phantom friendships that one truly acts as a friend. Thus, it is his understanding of friendship and justice that prompts Socrates to act as a gadfly who wakens his fellow citizens from their slumber by dissolving their pre-existing conceptions of what is (*Apol.* 30e). It is only by dissolving another's false conceptions of what *is*, thereby leading him to a state of perplexity, that one can open him up to a life of contemplation. Socrates' approach to



politics is negative because politics, as it is practiced in Athens—and likely as it is practiced in all places at all times—relies on flattery (cf. *Rep.* 414b–c).

## **The Gorgias Part II: Socratic Eros and the Private Life**

While Socrates' conception of friendship and justice explains his negative approach to politics, it does not yet explain why Socrates chooses to do this privately, but not in the public manner befitting an Athenian citizen (cf. *Apol.* 31c). That is, why does Socrates not choose to engage himself in the world of politics and publicly dissolve his fellow citizens' conceptions of what *is*? Some have maintained that it is simply because of the incompatibility of philosophy and politics.<sup>48</sup> However, Socrates' discussion with Polus has made clear that rhetoric can potentially be used to dissolve people's false conceptions of justice and of what *is* (480b–c). To understand why Socrates abstains from publicly engaging in his negative approach to politics, it is necessary to turn to his discussion with Callicles, which comprises the second half of the *Gorgias*. As we shall see, the basis of Socrates' abstention is found in his conception of friendship.

Having heard Socrates explain to Polus that if rhetoric is to have any use in the city at all, it ought to be used to punish oneself, one's friends, and one's fatherland, Callicles cannot contain himself. He bursts in, asking Chaerephon whether Socrates is serious.<sup>49</sup> Somewhat curiously, Socrates responds to Callicles by first pointing to something he and Callicles share:

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<sup>48</sup> E.g., Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*, 37: "Public address ... effectively forbids any fundamental questioning. Oratory is flattery because persuasion, not genuine criticism, is its goal."

Callicles, if human beings did not have some feeling that was the same—some having one and others another—but if some one of us suffered some private feeling different from what the others feel, it would not be too easy to point out one’s own affection to the other. I say this bearing in mind that you and I now happen to have suffered something that is the same: we are two lovers. (481c–d).

Socrates points out that he and Callicles are similar in that they are both erotic individuals. Given the distinction between “phantom friends” and erotic desire formulated in the *Lysis*, Socrates seems to be indicating that Callicles, like he himself, is aware that he is in some way incomplete and in need. Neither Socrates nor Callicles suffer from the complacency brought on by the illusions of self-sufficiency associated with phantom friendships. Like Socrates, Callicles is a desirous individual. Thus, we can already surmise that Socrates’ interaction with Callicles will not consist of a simple refutation in order to perplex him and lead him to a state of desire.

After this initial statement pointing out their similarities, Socrates quickly goes on also to explicate the differences between them by pointing to the objects of their love. While Socrates loves Alcibiades and philosophy, Callicles is in love with the Athenian people and with Demos the son of Pyrilampes.<sup>50</sup> It seems that in their desirous nature, Socrates and Callicles are similar, but not identical to one another. Of course, this was the final definition of friendship tentatively put forward, yet not fully explored, at the end of *Lysis*. As I will make clear, by having Socrates

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<sup>49</sup> Nichols relates that Chaerephon’s response, “there’s nothing like asking the man himself,” mirrors Callicles’ response to Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue suggesting “that the dialogue is to begin anew here.” *Gorgias*, n. 61.

<sup>50</sup> The son of Pyrilampes was called *Demos*, which is of course the same word for the Athenian people (*demos*). *Demos* the son of Pyrilampes “was famous for his beauty and also for lack of intelligence.” Nichols, *Plato Gorgias*, 70 n. 65.

emphasize both their similarities and their differences, Plato alludes to the possibility of a *rapprochement*, or friendship, between these two individuals.

However, Socrates does not seek a *rapprochement* between himself and Callicles. Instead, he confronts him in a very personal way by suggesting that his own philosophic way of life is superior to the active life practiced by Callicles, due to the stability of philosophy. While the fickleness of the Athenian people causes Callicles constantly to say different and discordant things, Socrates' own love, philosophy, always says the same thing. Socrates challenges Callicles to refute the philosophic principle that has come to light in his discussion with Polus, "by showing that doing injustice and not paying the just penalty when one does injustice are not the utmost of all evils" (482b). He concludes that if Callicles fails to refute this principle, he will continue to say discordant things and "will be dissonant in his whole life" (482b). It is only by either proving the superiority of his life or redirecting his desires from a love of the people to a love of philosophy that Callicles' soul will be made harmonious (Cf. *Rep.*, 443c–e).

Taking up the challenge, Callicles responds by appealing to a sense of natural justice. He asserts that the only reason Socrates has been able to refute both Polus and Gorgias, was that he shifted the grounds of the debate from what is natural to what is conventional, thereby appealing to his interlocutors' sense of shame. It was their shame that caused Gorgias and Polus to shrink from saying what they truly believe and compelling them to say contradictory things.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For a convincing analysis of the role of shame in Plato's *Gorgias*, see Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 34–48. McKim argues that Socrates uses the concept of shame as a weapon of psychological warfare in order to maneuver his interlocutors into acknowledging that, deep down, they do hold Socrates' way of life to be superior.

To avoid the fate of Gorgias and Polus, Callicles seeks to blunt the power of convention by attacking it at its roots. He asserts in what seems to be a proto-Nietzschean fashion that the conventional or the lawful is simply a creation of the “weak human beings and the many” (483b). The lawful, according to Callicles, is simply a tool by which the weak frighten away the strong so that the many may have an equal share. In contrast to what is conventionally lawful, Callicles holds that the law of nature reveals that it is just “for the better to have more than the worse and the more powerful than the less powerful” (483d). A truly great individual, asserts Callicles, is one who transcends the conventional morality of the weak and rises up “to be revealed as our master” (484b). Thus, by engaging in the greatest of illegalities, an individual is only acting in accordance with what is *naturally* just.<sup>52</sup>

Callicles continues, arguing that it is only once Socrates gives up the philosophic life in favor of the political life that he will come to recognize the truth of natural justice. He warns of the dangers of devoting oneself exclusively to philosophy, noting that a person who does this will lack experience in political affairs and, as a result, will necessarily appear ridiculous when he attempts to engage in them, just as a man who devotes himself exclusively to political practices will appear ridiculous when he seeks to engage in philosophy. The individual who avoids public life, he intimates, is unable to help himself or his friends. He concludes, in a manner that is likely meant to foreshadow Socrates’ trial and death, that Socrates’ way of life is

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<sup>52</sup> There is a wide range of scholarship that interprets Callicles to be a simple immoralist. See Werner Jaeger, *Paedeia*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press 1943), 125–41; Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 3 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 24–45; George Klosko, “The Refutation of Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*” *Greece and Rome* 31, no. 2 (1984): 126–139. In contrast, Devin Stauffer argues that Callicles’ appearance as a cynical immoralist “hides his deepest convictions” and that deep down Callicles does have some standard of virtue. “Socrates and Callicles: A Reading of Plato’s *Gorgias*,” in *The Review of Politics* 64 no. 4 (2002): 627–57.

shameful. If anyone ever seized Socrates, claiming that he was doing an injustice, he would be left “dizzy and gaping, without anything to say” (486a–b). Thus, Callicles urges him to “stop refuting” and to “‘practice the good music’ of affairs” (486c).

In the middle of his harangue, Callicles quotes a line from Euripides’ play, *Antiope*. Noting that those who exclusively pursue philosophy appear ridiculous when they enter into political action, and similarly that political men appear ridiculous when they enter into philosophic pastimes, Callicles states:

For Euripides’ saying comes to pass: each one is brilliant in this, and presses on to this, “allotting the greatest part of the day to this, where he happens to be at his best.” And he flees from wherever he is undistinguished and reviles this, but praises the other thing out of goodwill toward himself. (484e–485a).

The quotation cited by Callicles is the first of many references in the *Gorgias* that comes from Euripides’ lost play *Antiope*.<sup>53</sup> Why would Plato draw our attention to this play? The significance of these references is revealed by the play’s dramatic plot, which centers on the tension between the active life and the contemplative life. According to the existing fragments, two brothers, Zethus and Amphion, sons of Antiope, the rightful Queen of Thebes, must rescue their mother from their murderous uncle. However, before they are capable of doing so, they must put aside their disagreements as to which of their two ways of life is superior. While Zethus maintains that the practical life devoted to political affairs is superior, Amphion holds that the life of philosophy and music is superior. Zethus’ powerful arguments win, and Amphion accedes that the active life is better. Together they arrange their mother’s rescue, and Amphion,

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<sup>53</sup> See 484e, 485e–486a, 486b, 486c.

having been won over to the active life, is just about to put their uncle to death when the god Hermes intervenes as a *deus ex machina*. Hermes re-establishes order by restraining the brothers and establishing them as rightful joint-rulers of Thebes.<sup>54</sup>

The dramatic struggle between Zethus and Amphion depicted in *Antiope* mirrors the struggle between Callicles and Socrates. Not only does Callicles explicitly invoke Zethus as representative of his type of life, but the two value many of the same things, including hard work, manly strength, and the ability to help oneself and one's family.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Socrates, who leads a life of political abstention and pursues the pleasurable practice of philosophy, is akin to Amphion. According to one of the extant fragments, Amphion states that "anyone who engages in many activities that he need not engage in is foolish, when he can live free from business in a pleasant fashion."<sup>56</sup> Nightingale suggests that both Amphion and Socrates believed that despite their political abstention, they were capable of providing the greatest benefit for the city through their philosophy.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Socrates later forthrightly identifies himself with

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<sup>54</sup> This brief synopsis of the work comes from E. R. Dodds' commentary on the *Gorgias*, 275–76. For a full account of the plot, Dodds directs the reader to N. Wecklein, "Die Antiope des Euripides," in *Philologus*, 79 (1923) 51–69; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge in J. U. Powell, ed., *New Chapters in Greek Literature*, 3d series (Oxford, 1933), 105–113.

<sup>55</sup> Callicles' commitment to manliness and the ability to help oneself and one's family and friends is explicitly stated at 485c and 486a respectively. His commitment to hard work is intimated by his denigration of childish play at 485b. John Gibert notes that "Zethus advocates hard work, manly strength, care of property, and the ability to help oneself and one's family and friends both privately and publicly" ("Euripides' *Antiope* and the Quiet Life," in *The Play of Texts and Fragments: Essays in Honor of Martin Cropp*, ed. J. R. C. Cousland and James R. Hume [Leiden: Brill, 2009]). The extent to which Zethus is an exact representative of Callicles is debated. Andrea Nightingale points to some apparent differences between Zethus and Callicles by noting that Callicles "does not suggest, as Zethus did, that the life he advocates is for the good of the city, for he would be hard pressed to prove that a self-seeking tyrant is good for a state." "Plato's 'Gorgias' and Euripides' 'Antiope': A Study in Generic Transformation," *Classical Antiquity* 11 no. 1 (1992): 127. However, Devin Stauffer argues convincingly that Callicles is not *simply* a self-seeking tyrant. See n. 51 above.

<sup>56</sup> Nightingale, "Plato's 'Gorgias' and Euripides' 'Antiope,'" 127.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Amphion when he informs Callicles that he would have liked to give “him back the speech of Amphion for the speech of Zethus” (506b). Thus, it seems that Plato refers to Euripides’ play to suggest that Zethus and Amphion are representative of Callicles and Socrates, respectively.

However, the resemblance between Euripides’ *Antiope* and Socrates’ encounter with Callicles is limited to this similarity between the characters. The conclusion of Euripides’ play differs significantly from the conclusion of the debate between Socrates and Callicles. The conclusion of *Antiope* suggests that it is best for active and for contemplative individuals each to perform that to which they are by nature predisposed. The establishment of Zethus and Amphion as joint rulers at the end of the play points toward the necessity of both Zethus and Amphion. As John Gibert notes, Zethus and Amphion “express complementary ideals, neither of which, in the partial and undeveloped form in which it is presented and exemplified by the inexperienced young men, is conspicuously beneficial to the polis.”<sup>58</sup> The play, therefore, points toward the coincidence of power and wisdom in the figures of Zethus and Amphion. Both are in some way good and necessary for the city. As noted above, this notion also characterizes the definition of friendship that was raised, but not fully explored, in the *Lysis*. As will be recalled, near the end of the *Lysis*, Socrates suggests that friendship may exist between those who are akin to one another.<sup>59</sup> The implication (an implication that Socrates ignored) is that friendship may consist in the relation of two individuals who are akin (or who belong to each other) and who are both good *in their own way*, or according to his own *nature*.<sup>60</sup> By alluding to *Antiope*, Plato may be

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<sup>58</sup> Gibert, “Euripides’ *Antiope*,” 34.

<sup>59</sup> Specifically, Socrates states “what is akin is something other than the like” (*Lys.* 222c3–4).

drawing our attention to a potential reconciliation between Callicles and Socrates that may serve as a foundation for political life.

As we shall see, however, no reconciliation between power and wisdom is forthcoming in Socrates' encounter with Callicles, as neither Callicles nor Socrates agrees with Euripides' assessment. For his part, Callicles argues that it is precisely the predilection to favor one's strengths and ignore one's weaknesses that leads to ridicule. To avoid the ridicule, Callicles argues that it is best for a serious man to gain experience in political affairs. While it is fitting and noble for a free man to partake of philosophy when he is young, beyond this he ought to focus on becoming highly distinguished in political affairs. For Callicles, if someone fails to practice philosophy when young, he "will never deem himself worthy of any fine and noble affair" (485d). That Callicles believes one ought to practice philosophy when young shows that he is not completely oblivious to its merit and its use. However, by recognizing its *use* in preparing men for "fine and noble affair[s]" (485d), Callicles relegates philosophy to an inferior status. For Callicles, philosophy ought to be ministerial to the practice of politics.

In response to Callicles' disquisition, Socrates exclaims his good fortune in having fallen in with Callicles. He goes so far as to proclaim Callicles to be a touchstone on which Socrates will be able to test his soul. Callicles, he asserts, has the three characteristics of "knowledge, goodwill, and outspokenness," by which Socrates will be able to "make a sufficient test of a soul's living correctly" (487a). While Gorgias and Polus were wise and friendly toward Socrates, they were "too sensitive to shame" (487b). In contrast, Socrates notes that Callicles is

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<sup>60</sup> The notion that people may be good "in their own nature" is the good that Socrates misquotes in his quotation of the drinking song listing the various things that are said to be good. See above at n. 32 and accompanying text.



sufficiently educated, has goodwill toward him, and is outspoken, or not entirely restricted by a sense of shame. The extent to which Socrates is being ironic in praising Callicles has been a source of much debate, because Plato makes Callicles' character the lynch-pin on which hinges the question of whether Socrates is correct in exclusively practicing the philosophic life.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, Socrates relates that because Callicles has all three of these qualities, his agreement with Socrates on the things Socrates has *opinions* about (not knowledge) would signal that Socrates' way of life is correct. In contrast, his disagreement would signal that Socrates' way of life is incorrect. Of course, at the end of the dialogue Socrates has not persuaded Callicles of the things he has opinions about.<sup>62</sup> Thus, if Callicles possesses these three qualities, it would suggest that as presented by Plato, Socrates' way of life is incorrect.

The first quality, Callicles' knowledge, seems to be immediately called into question by Socrates. Indeed, after calling Callicles knowledgeable, Socrates follows this up by telling him that he has "been sufficiently educated, as many of the Athenians would say" (487b).

Furthermore, Socrates relates that he once overheard Callicles urging his friends not to become "wise... beyond what is needful" (487d). Many scholars agree that Socrates' appeal to what "the

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<sup>61</sup> McKim argues that Callicles does not have any of the three characteristics Socrates ascribes to him. "Shame and Truth," 40; Benardete argues that "Callicles has neither wisdom nor frankness, but he does seem to have goodwill." *Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 68. Stauffer suggests that "while it may be reasonable to take Callicles' speech as evidence of his outspokenness," Callicles manifestly lacks wisdom, and likely goodwill as well. He concludes that Socrates may mean to indicate by his "proof" that Callicles does not possess what is necessary to pursue the truth to its attainment, and thus that the truth will not come fully to light in their conversation." *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias*, 93–94; finally, E. R. Dodds holds that that while Socrates is being ironic in calling Callicles wise, he genuinely believes that Callicles has goodwill toward him and is outspoken, but that this belief is mistaken.

<sup>62</sup> Toward the end of the dialogue Callicles states, "In some way, I don't know what, what you say seems good to me, Socrates; but I suffer the experience of the many—I am not altogether persuaded by you" (513c). Plato's ambiguity in regard to Callicles' character, as well as the way in which Callicles is depicted as not being altogether impervious to Socrates' arguments, may point to Plato's hesitancy, or skepticism regarding Socrates' way of life or his relation to politics.

many” would say, as well as his admonition not to become too wise, suggests that he is being ironic in calling Callicles knowledgeable. However, while it is true that Callicles may not be wise, this does not preclude him from having a certain type of knowledge, or intelligence, in the form of prudence. Indeed, while Callicles may lack wisdom, he does not lack prudence, or a concern for the *human* things, as is evidenced by his concern for Socrates’ safety.<sup>63</sup> In this way, Callicles can be seen to have knowledge, the first characteristic necessary to test Socrates’ way of life.

Socrates further relates that Callicles does have goodwill toward him and is outspoken. As evidence of Callicles’ goodwill, Socrates points to the fact that he has heard Callicles give his friends the same counsel that he had just conveyed to him, namely, to stop philosophizing beyond what is necessary, and to take greater care for his own safety. Some scholars point to the fact that later in the dialogue, Callicles will act in a way that causes Socrates to revoke whatever friendship he believed they had (499b–c). However, goodwill and friendship are distinct.<sup>64</sup> Thus, while Callicles likely is not Socrates’ friend, this does not preclude his goodwill toward him. In addition, Socrates suggests that Callicles’ outspokenness, or immunity to shame, has been established by his speech praising natural justice. Thus, Callicles *does* possess the characteristics necessary to test Socrates’ way of life.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *NE* 1140a24–1140b30.

<sup>64</sup> Cf., Aristotle, *NE* 1158a1–1158a12, where Aristotle argues that goodwill is the necessary precursor to friendship, it is not a sufficient condition for the existence of friendship, as friendship requires spending time together. Seth Benardete suggests that the goodwill displayed by Callicles is akin to tolerance: “If push comes to shove, [Callicles] would not help Socrates; but his tolerance insofar as it represents the atmosphere of Athens, suffices to guarantee the survival of Socrates.” *Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 69.

In any case, Socrates begins by taking on Callicles' assertion that according to what is naturally just the stronger and the superior ought to rule and have more than the inferior. The obvious difficulty with this position is that according to nature the many, when joined together, are stronger than the one. As a result, the laws they institute, including the laws that "doing injustice is more shameful than suffering injustice," are not only just by convention, but are just by nature as well (489a–b). In response, Callicles asserts that by superior he does not exclusively mean stronger but refers to those who are more intelligent (φρόνιμος). Thus, asserts Callicles, the more intelligent individual ought to rule and ought to have more than the ruled. Socrates seizes on Callicles' contention that the intelligent ought to have more and asks whether a doctor, having intelligence concerning a person's diet, ought to have more food than others or whether, through his ruling, he ought to distribute the food to everyone, according to his intelligence. Earlier in the dialogue Socrates had compared justice to the art of medicine—while the art of medicine concerns the body, justice is directed toward the health of the soul. Socrates' example is intended to expound on this corollary, while also pointing out that Callicles is too preoccupied with external goods such as food, rather than with what is good for the soul.

Displaying his lack of philosophic acumen, Callicles retorts, "You are talking of food and drink and doctors and drivel; but this is not what I mean" (490c–d). At this point, likely in recognition of Callicles' ignorance, Socrates becomes ironic with Callicles. He asks him whether those who are most intelligent and superior in weaving or cobbling ought to have the biggest cloak or the biggest shoes. In frustration, Callicles asserts that by those who are more intelligent and stronger he means "neither cobblers nor cooks, but those who are intelligent in regard to the affairs of the city and in what way they may be well governed" (491a–b). Callicles,

does not leave it at this, however, adding that the intelligent and strong are “not only intelligent but also courageous, being sufficient to accomplish what they intend” (491a–b). It is precisely these individuals—those who are intelligent in regard to the affairs of the city and courageous—who ought to rule. Callicles concludes, “The just is this, that these, the rulers, have more than the others, the ruled” (491d).

Devin Stauffer notes that by asserting that it is just for the superior to rule and for the rulers to have more than the ruled, Callicles provides a natural segue for the conversation to turn to the question of justice.<sup>65</sup> However, rather than do so, Socrates instead turns to the question of moderation, asking whether the ruler also ought to rule his own desires (491d). Why does Socrates turn to the topic of moderation? As will be made clear, part of the reason is Callicles’ excessive concern with external goods, or the goods of the body. By turning to the issue of moderation, Socrates seeks to show Callicles not only that there is a greater good than these external goods, but also that the acquisition of these external goods necessarily requires some involvement with evil. Socrates seeks to redirect Callicles’ desires from external goods to an unalloyed good that is not dependent upon evil.

In response to Socrates’ suggestion that rulers ought to be moderate, Callicles asserts vehemently that one who controls his desires and appetites is a slave. Instead, he argues that one ought to allow one’s desires to be as great as possible and that the ability to satisfy these desires leads to happiness. Socrates, in turn, praises him for his outspokenness before asking whether Callicles believes that in order to satisfy these desires one ought to “prepare satisfaction for them

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<sup>65</sup> Stauffer, “Socrates and Callicles” 640–41. For this next portion of the chapter concerning Callicles’ desire for a good that is independent of evil, I am indebted to Stauffer’s insights.

from any place whatsoever” (492d–e). When Callicles agrees, Socrates in turn asks whether those who are in need of nothing are, therefore, not happy. Callicles responds, “No, for in this way stones and corpses would be happiest (492e).<sup>66</sup> Surprisingly, Socrates does not deny the charge, but instead points out the equal wretchedness of those who continuously need to satiate their desires without end. He compares the life of the intemperate man to a man with perforated and decayed jars. In a quest to fill his jars, the intemperate man continuously works to fill them and is in pain when they are not filled. In contrast, the life of the orderly and moderate man is like a man with healthy jars who, upon having filled his jars, gives them no more thought and is at rest (493a–d). Callicles remains unpersuaded, noting again that the life of the moderate man is like that of a stone, for “when one has been filled up,” he no longer rejoices nor feels pain (494b). Unable to convince Callicles, Socrates seeks to shame him, comparing the life described by Callicles first to a stone curlew, a bird who excretes as he eats, and next to a life of constant scratching (494b–c). In the face of both examples, Callicles remains outspoken and unashamed, asserting that “he who scratches, too, would live pleasantly” (494d). However, when Socrates finally turns to the “culmination of such things as these, the life of catamites,” Callicles exclaims, “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to lead the arguments into such things?” (494e). While some have maintained that this betrays Callicles’ sense of shame, it is equally plausible that Callicles is attempting to shame Socrates. If so, Callicles can be seen to be turning Socrates’ own tactics against him. Just as Socrates had appealed to conventional justice and shame to refute Gorgias

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<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, at the end of book VII of the *Ethics*, seems to agree with Callicles: “Hence the god always enjoys a pleasure that is one and simple, for there is an activity not only of motion but also of motionlessness, and pleasure resides more in rest than in motion. But “change in all things is sweet,” as the poet has it, on account of a certain defective condition. For just as the defective person is a human being who readily undergoes change, so also the nature in need of change is defective, for it is neither simple nor decent” (1154b26–32).

and Polus, Callicles now seeks to use shame to refute Socrates. Again, Plato seems to be pointing to the similarity between Socrates and Callicles.

Socrates, of course, is impervious to Callicles' attempt to shame him. Instead, he simply notes that Callicles is the one who has led the argument to this point by refusing to distinguish between good and bad pleasures. Socrates now turns to the question of whether the good and the pleasant are the same or different. If the good and the pleasant are the same, the shameful examples provided by Socrates could, perhaps, be classified as good, whereas if the good and the pleasant are different, the examples would be classified as pleasurable, but not as good. In a bid to remain consistent, Callicles asserts that he will hold to the position that the good and the pleasant are the same. While Callicles' answer suggests that Socrates' examples have convinced him that the pleasant and the good are *not* the same, he asserts that he will maintain his former argument. Callicles is not willing to be shamed into abandoning his position. Rather, he will follow the argument to its conclusion. Callicles' desire leads the way; he is not held back by shame.

What follows is a somewhat odd colloquy, in which Socrates tells Callicles that if he is speaking contrary to his own opinion, he would be "corrupting the first speeches" and "would no longer be sufficiently examining with me the things that *are*" (495a; emphasis added). When Callicles replies, "And you too," Socrates coyly responds, "Well then, I too am not doing what's correct, if indeed I do this, nor are you" (495b). Through a series of dialectical moves, Socrates will go on to elicit from Callicles that the good and the pleasant are different. Of course, earlier in his conversation with Polus, Socrates led Polus to the conclusion that the good and the

pleasant are the same.<sup>67</sup> It seems that Socrates and Callicles agree that neither of them is going to be examining what *is*. Callicles will assert contrary to his true belief that the pleasurable and the good are the same, while Socrates, perhaps in contrast to his true beliefs, will attempt to lead Callicles to the belief that the pleasurable and the good are different.

As part of his refutation, Socrates distinguishes between the good and the bad on the one hand, and the pleasant and the painful on the other hand. According to Socrates, the good and the bad are completely distinct—that is, they are obtained and lost separately. As evidence, he points to health and sickness; when one becomes healthy, he is released from sickness. It is impossible to suffer what is good (health) and bad (sickness) at the same time. In contrast, the pleasant and the painful are necessarily mixed. When one obtains pleasure from eating or drinking, for example, this implies the need and desire of hunger or thirst, which is painful.

Socrates' ostensible purpose is to critique Callicles' thorough-going hedonism by pointing out that pleasure cannot be identical to the good because pleasure is necessarily mixed with pain, while the good is wholly free of need, or lack. However, Socrates' critique suffers from a number of flaws. As Dustin Stauffer points out, it is not true that health and sickness cannot coexist, as one can suffer varying degrees of sickness and health throughout life.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Socrates never proves that an unalloyed good, free of any bad, can exist. In fact, as was shown above, in the *Lysis* Socrates calls into question whether such a good can exist at all in the present life.<sup>69</sup> However, Callicles does not raise these problems. Instead, when Socrates asks

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<sup>67</sup> See above at n. 40 and accompanying text.

<sup>68</sup> Stauffer, "Socrates and Callicles," 644.

him whether he agrees that there is a good, independent of bad, Callicles asserts emphatically, “I do agree, extraordinarily so” (496c). Callicles’ assertion is significant, as it reveals his desire for a good that is free of evil.<sup>70</sup>

By way of the distinction between the pleasant and the good, Socrates is able to refute Callicles. Through a series of moves, Socrates shows that if the pleasant and the good are indeed the same, then the intelligent and the courageous (those revered by Callicles as good and deserving to rule) are no different from the foolish and the cowardly, as both experience the same amount of pleasure. Callicles is shown to have no basis on which to ground his admiration for intelligence and courage. At the end of this exchange and in response to the refutation, Callicles asserts that he has not been forthright with Socrates in asserting that all pleasures are the same, but that he has, instead, been joking. In response, Socrates cries out:

Oh! Oh! Callicles, how all-cunning you are and how you treat me like a child—at one time claiming that things are this way, and at another time that the same things are otherwise, deceiving me! And yet I did not think at the beginning that I was to be deceived by you voluntarily, since you were my friend. But now I have been played false, and it looks like it’s necessary for me—according to the old saying—to make do with what is present and to accept from you this that is given. (499b–c).

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<sup>69</sup> See above at pp. 45–49.

<sup>70</sup> Stauffer argues that Callicles’ desire for a such an unalloyed good indicates that Callicles is not a simple hedonist but has a commitment to virtue. “Socrates and Callicles,” 645. As indicated in Chapter 1, in the *Lysis* Plato subtly raises the possibility that friendship between two individuals who are good, each in his own way, may be a good that is free of evil.



Socrates points out that Callicles has deceived him and, therefore, can no longer be considered a friend. Of course, as noted above, Callicles was never said to have friendship with Socrates, he was only credited with having goodwill toward him.<sup>71</sup>

In any case, while Socrates claims to have exposed Callicles' friendship as fraudulent, it is significant that almost immediately prior to this, Socrates uncovers Callicles' desire for an unalloyed good. We have already seen that near the beginning of their discussion, Callicles shows himself to be a desirous individual. However, his desire was directed solely to the extrinsic goods that rhetoric and the conventional practice of politics are able to provide. At this point in the dialogue, Callicles' desire for the good is revealed to be so great that he believes in the existence of a good independent of any evil. In the next portion of the conversation, Socrates will lead Callicles to the conclusion that the attainment of such a good is, in fact, impossible.

Based on Callicles' distinction between good and bad pleasures, as well as his belief in the existence of an unalloyed good, Socrates steers Callicles to accept the proposition that pleasures and pains are good only to the extent that they are directed toward the good. Next, Socrates asserts that it requires an *artful* man to distinguish pleasant things that are good from pleasant things that are bad. Tying the conversation back to the theme of rhetoric, he reminds Callicles that he had earlier designated rhetoric as an experience rather than an art, on the basis that rhetoric concerns itself only with flattery, or pleasure, irrespective of whether the pleasure aims at the good. He concludes by asking Callicles whether the "rhetoric directed toward the Athenian people and the other peoples of free men in the cities" is anything other than simple

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<sup>71</sup> See above, n. 63 and accompanying text.

flattery aimed at gratifying the people (502e). In response, Callicles asserts that it depends on the rhetor; some care for the citizens, while others are precisely as Socrates describes.

Perhaps surprisingly, Socrates does not deny the existence of the art of rhetoric Callicles describes, instead noting that if such an art were to exist, its goal would be to make the “citizens’ souls to be as good as possible” (503a). However, Socrates quickly follows up on this comment by noting that this rhetoric has never yet come to pass. He continues his description of this “noble” rhetoric by noting that the rhetorician who “speaks with a view to the best” would seek to arrange and order the citizens’ souls in a healthy way, namely, by instilling justice and moderation into them, and by removing injustice and intemperance (504d–e). Socrates notes, however, that moderation is not chosen simply for its own sake. Rather, just as doctors “allow a healthy man to satisfy his desires” and deny the same to a sick man, so the rhetor will allow healthy souls to pursue their desires, while keeping base souls away from their desires. By keeping the base soul away from these desires, the rhetor will improve it. When he agrees, Socrates concludes by asking Callicles to agree also to the proposition that keeping the base soul “away from the things it desires” is punishment and that being punished is “better for the soul than intemperance” (505b). Of course, by leading Callicles to this conclusion, Socrates has bested him. Socrates has shown Callicles to be unable to meet the challenge posed at the beginning of their conversation: to show that doing injustice and not paying the just penalty when one does injustice are not the utmost of all evils.

Callicles, however, refuses to be refuted, claiming that he does not know what Socrates is saying. In response to this feigned ignorance, Socrates states, “This man here does not abide being benefitted and suffering for himself this thing that the argument is about, being punished”

(505c). Despite the logic of Socrates' argument, Callicles remains unpersuaded and refuses to take his medicine. Socrates now indicates that his argument is only half over because Callicles' intransigence is frustrating its development. At this point the dialogue takes a turn. Socrates asserts it is "not righteous to abandon even myths in the middle" and proposes to take over the argument by posing questions and answering them in turn (505c–d). In what follows Socrates shift from a dialogic style of argumentation to a disquisitional, or rhetorical one, to finish the argument. However, Socrates, explains that what he is about to say is *not* said with knowledge. Furthermore, he indicates that he would have preferred to continue speaking with Callicles until he had "given him back the speech of Amphion for the speech of Zethus" (506b). In this way, Plato suggests that the disquisition that Socrates is about to deliver cannot be characterized as Socrates' true belief—or that he is unsure of its truth.

Socrates begins by fairly accurately recounting the conversation he has just finished with Callicles. He distinguishes the pleasant from the good and states that the pleasant must be done for the sake of the good. Furthermore, he notes that things are made good by the presence of some virtue and that the virtue of the soul is moderation. At this point, however, Socrates deviates from the conversation he has had with Callicles. Whereas up to this point, Socrates has held that moderation is directed *toward* the good, he now holds that the moderate soul *is* good (507a). Given Socrates' insistence that philosophy always says the same thing, we may conclude that Socrates does not truly believes the rhetorical display he is delivering and that what he is

about to say is simply a noble myth (505d).<sup>72</sup> As we shall see, this rhetorical display is designed to appeal to Callicles' desire for an unalloyed good.

Socrates continues by noting that the ordered, moderate soul is the basis for the ordered whole of nature, as moderation leads to happiness between men and the gods. The moderate man, Socrates states, would do “fitting things concerning both gods and human beings,” and he would, in fact, be “the completely good man” (507a–b). Therefore, if one wishes to be happy and good, he must “pursue and practice moderation, and each of us must flee intemperance as fast his feet will carry him” (507d). At the center of this noble myth are the virtues of justice and moderation. Wisdom and its concomitant desire are not even mentioned.<sup>73</sup>

Socrates then ties the noble myth back to the philosophic principle that he has maintained throughout the dialogue; one ought to avoid the practice of injustice, and one must punish the evil doer, even if the evil doer is oneself or “some other of one's own” (507d). Invoking the wise (σοφοί), Socrates states that “heaven, earth, gods and human beings are held together by community, friendship, orderliness, moderation, and justness; and on account of these things, comrade, [the wise] call this whole an order, not disorder and intemperance” (507e–508a). As a result, the immoderate evildoer, who is incapable of friendship and community, ought to be punished if this happy state of order is to be maintained: “If oneself or some other of one's own—whether private man or city—needs it, one must apply the just penalty and punish, if he is to be happy” (507d). According to the myth put forward by Socrates, a natural harmony obtains

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 382c–d. Commenting on this section of the dialogue, Seth Benardete notes, “Philosophy always says the same; Socrates does not.” *Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 504d, where Socrates indicates that “there is something yet greater than justice.”

between the whole and the human soul; the soul is a microcosm of the whole. Although Socrates' account is simply a myth, the philosophic principle he has maintained throughout the dialogue remains the same: injustice ought to be avoided, and the evildoer must be punished. Thus, Socrates constructs a myth that is as close to the truth as possible.<sup>74</sup>

Socrates's myth, which holds out the possibility of a wholly-ordered and wholly-good universe, is designed to appeal to Callicles' desire for an unalloyed good. Socrates himself, however, does not actually believe in the existence of such a universe. As we shall see, for Socrates there is no natural compatibility between the individual soul and the whole; the soul is not, in fact, a microcosm of the whole. As a result, Socrates, in contrast to Callicles, does not believe in the existence of an unalloyed good.

As noted, Socrates' myth is based on an understanding of nature and the whole articulated by "the wise" (σοφοί). This reference to "the wise" is significant because, as indicated above, these same wise (σοφοί), who "converse and write about nature and the whole," are invoked in the *Lysis* in support of the proposition that "like is always necessarily a friend to its like" (*Lys.* 214b2–6). As argued above, Plato suggests in the *Lysis* that Socrates does not quite fully understand these "wisest ones." As will be recalled, I have argued that Plato's purpose in the *Lysis* is subtly to imply that Socrates' inattention to nature and the whole causes his inquiry into the definition of friendship to flounder. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that almost immediately after providing this appealing account of an ordered whole of nature Socrates implicitly denies its possibility by appealing to the concept of friendship.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 382d.

Socrates begins his denial of the myth by recounting Callicles' charge against him. Let us examine, he says, on the basis of the myth, "whether what is said is fine or not: that I am unable ... to help either myself or anyone of my friends or relatives, or to save them from the greatest dangers, but am at the mercy of whoever wishes" (508c). As the myth has indicated, and as Socrates has continuously maintained, doing injustice and failing to pay the just penalty is the greatest evil or harm that can befall a person. Furthermore, he contends that the greatest help one can provide for oneself and for one's friends is to turn away the greatest harm; in turn, the second greatest benefit "would be help against the second evil, third against the third, and so on" (509b–c). The nobility of the benefit corresponds to the greatness of the evil turned away. When Callicles assents, Socrates notes that it is, therefore, necessary to prepare a power so as neither to do injustice nor to suffer injustice.

He begins by analyzing the power necessary to avoid suffering injustice. The power consists in either taking up rule in the city (perhaps even as a tyrant) or being a friend of the existing regime (510a). Not surprisingly, Callicles agrees emphatically. Next, Socrates asks whether Callicles also agrees that "each man is the friend of another to the greatest possible degree, who the ancient and wise said was the friend: like to like" (510b). As will become evident, the introduction of friendship and, in particular, the introduction of this definition of friendship, is crucial. As noted, in the *Lysis*, Socrates' understanding of this concept is depicted as, at best, incomplete. Not only does Socrates deny there the possibility of two individuals having a self-sufficient friendship that entails an appreciation for each other simply on account of one another's goodness, but he also guides the conversation in such a manner that at its end friendship is subsumed within the ambit of erotic desire (ἔρως).

When Callicles agrees to the definition of friendship provided by the wise—like is friend to like—Socrates continues, stating that neither a good nor a lowly man would be able to become the tyrant’s friend “with his whole mind” (510b–c). The tyrant would either fear the good man or despise the lowly. The only individual who could be a friend with the tyrant, suggests Socrates, is the man “who, being of the same character and praising and blaming the same things, is willing to be ruled and to be submissive to the ruler. This man will have great power in that city” (510c–d). As a result, the only way an individual is able to obtain power in a city ruled by a tyrant—and thus be able to prepare a power to avoid injustice—is by becoming as much like the tyrant as possible. The obvious result of preparing such a power, concludes Socrates, is that great injustices will also have been committed and, therefore, the greatest evil will have befallen the individual who has obtained power in the regime. Such an individual will have harmed “his soul through imitation of the master and through power” (511a).

In effect, Socrates’ understanding of friendship denies the possibility of the unalloyed good he had earlier proffered in the form of the noble myth. At the end of the *Lysis*, Plato points toward the unsettling political ramifications that the Socratic understanding of friendship entails. In the present dialogue, Plato makes clear how the Socratic understanding of friendship unsettles the cohesion of the regime. The myth of an ordered and complete whole depends on the phenomenon of friendship: “The wise say ... that heaven, earth, gods, and human beings are held together by community, *friendship*, orderliness, moderation, and justness” (507e–508a; emphasis added). If political community and the order of the cosmos depend on friendship, Socrates’ understanding of friendship implies that the myth does not adequately describe reality. Indeed, Socrates’ understanding of friendship suggests that there is, in fact, no harmony between the

individual soul and the political community. As a result, he counsels Callicles to avoid the life of politics and instead to pursue the Socratic way of life; the private life of contemplation. While the life of politics (including befriending the *demos*) may protect one from the lesser evil of suffering injustice, it does so only “at the cost of the things dearest to us” (513a). The Socratic life is unable to ensure that one does not *suffer* injustice; it does ensure that one avoids committing injustice, which is the greatest harm that can befall a person.

Upon the conclusion of Socrates’ speech, Callicles seems to be only partially persuaded. He states, “In some way, I don’t know what, what you say seems good to me, Socrates; but I suffer the experience of the many—I am not altogether persuaded by you” (513c). In reply, Socrates states “if we investigate these same things often, and better, perhaps you will be persuaded” (513c–d). Perhaps a better rhetorician would be capable of persuading Callicles. In any case, as we saw above, Socrates began the conversation with Callicles by noting that due to his goodwill, outspokenness, and knowledge, Callicles could serve as the touchstone for Socrates’ way of life. Socrates had declared that if he could convince Callicles to agree with him on the thing about which he holds opinions, it would vindicate his way of life. Now, near the end of the dialogue, Callicles remains unpersuaded, suggesting that Socrates’ way of life has *not* been vindicated. By drawing our attention both to Callicles’ character and to the fact that Callicles remains unpersuaded, Plato seems to be suggesting that Socrates’ approach to the debate between politics and philosophy—or the debate between Zethus and Amphion—is, in fact, not the correct approach. Given Plato’s critique of the Socratic understanding of friendship leveled in the *Lysis*, as well as the role that Socrates’ understanding of friendship plays in the



*Gorgias*, it is fair to conclude that Plato believes the Socratic understanding of friendship is not only incomplete, but that it negatively impacts his relation to the *polis*.

The manner in which Socrates introduces the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* bolsters this interpretation. The myth itself concerns the judgement of human beings in the afterlife, and it relates how it came to be that men are judged on the basis of their soul alone, rather than on account of their wealth, beauty, or political connections.<sup>75</sup> The myth is meant to underscore the message Socrates has conveyed throughout the dialogue: the care for one's soul ought to come before a concern for the external goods provided by politics, and, to the extent that the external goods are obtained at the expense of an upright soul, they ought to be considered worthless. Socrates introduces the myth by alluding to a passage in the *Iliad* concerning the division of rule among the gods. He states, "For just as Homer says, Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto divided the rule among themselves, after they took it over from their father" (523a). As James Nichols notes, this is a reference to Book XV of the *Iliad*, in which Poseidon complains of being unjustly stripped by Zeus of his right to jointly rule the land. According to the account in the *Iliad*, Zeus orders Poseidon to leave the fighting at Troy. In response, Poseidon angrily states that he is of equal honor to Zeus. Poseidon recounts that he, along with Zeus and Pluto (Hades) had divided up the rule they had taken over from their father Cronos, such that while Pluto would have control of

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<sup>75</sup> According to the myth, during the early portion of Zeus' rule, the fate of individual men was decided while they were still living, and it was decided by other living men. The result was that "the judgments were decided badly." Pluto, the god of the underworld and those in charge of "the islands of the blessed" informed Zeus that the judges were deciding the fates wrongly and that "unworthy human beings were frequenting them in both places." To rectify this, Zeus ordered that going forward, the men being judged should be dead and naked. For under the previous practice, many "who have base souls are clothed in fine bodies, ancestry, and wealth." Furthermore, the judges were also previously clothed "with eyes and ears and the whole body, like a screen, covering their soul." The problem with the previous practice is that all these coverings—both those of the judges and those of the men being judged—stand in the way and result in poor judgements. Thus, by judging the soul alone, without any of the sensible accoutrements concealing its true state that, the judgements will be made correctly. (Cf. 523a–524a).

the underworld, Zeus would have control of the heavens, and Poseidon would have control of the seas. Meanwhile, they would all have equal access to the land and to Mount Olympus. As a result, Poseidon suggests that Zeus is committing a grave injustice by ordering him to stop interfering in the land battle between the Achaeans and the Trojans, as they have an equal title to jointly rule the land. Despite this fact, Poseidon leaves the battle on account of Zeus' superior force.

Why does Plato allude to this story? Of course, it introduces the myth in a way that sets up Zeus' ability unilaterally to alter the method of judging human beings without interference from Poseidon, so that they are judged on the basis of their soul alone. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates has attempted to convince his interlocutors that the soul alone is important, suggesting that the Zeus depicted in the myth is representative of Socrates. Like Zeus, Socrates changes the standards of judgment such that the soul alone is of importance, while external or necessary goods are counted as worth nothing. Socrates believes that only his way of life is good.

Plato's allusion to Zeus' banishment of Poseidon and the myth told by Socrates at the end of the dialogue seem to offer a substitute ending to that of *Antiope*, the Euripidean play alluded to at earlier points in the dialogue. It will be recalled that in *Antiope*, Zethus, the political man of action (who is meant to represent Callicles), and Amphion, the philosophic man of contemplation (who is meant to represent Socrates), argue about whose life is superior. At the end of the play, Hermes enters and restores order by granting them the power to rule jointly. As we have seen, this is decidedly *not* how the dialogue between Callicles and Socrates ends. While Socrates does not persuade Callicles of the superiority of his way of life, he is unambiguously the victor of the conversation. Socrates ensures that the standards by which his way of life is

judged, are recognized as the *only* standards. The fact that Plato introduces the final myth told by Socrates by alluding to Zeus' unlawful act of depriving Poseidon of his share in their joint-rule suggests that he believes that Socrates also commits an injustice in denying any merit to Callicles' concern for the external (or necessary) goods. Could it be that Plato believed that some sort of joint-rule is necessary between politics and philosophy? Or that the coincidence of power and wisdom is necessary?

### **Conclusion: Friendship and the Coincidence of Power and Wisdom**

The *Gorgias* details the way in which the Socratic understanding of friendship developed in the *Lysis* directly impacts Socrates' approach to politics. At the end of the *Lysis*, Socrates' ambivalence about friendship is made clear. On the one hand, he tells Lysis and Menexenus that he counts himself as one of them, suggesting that they have become friends. On the other hand, he immediately follows this up by stating that they have not yet discovered what a friend is. It was earlier noted that the conclusion of the *Lysis* suggests that at the end of the dialogue Socrates considers himself to be a friend of the boys only because he has "refuted them" and has inculcated in them an awareness of their deficiency and of their metaphysical incompleteness—he has stoked in them a desire for the good.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates' understanding of friendship is seen to impact his approach to politics. In the first half of the dialogue, Socrates' understanding of friendship, as well as his declaration of friendship to Polus and Gorgias, leads him to refute them. By refuting them he seeks to remove their false conceptions of what *is*. First, he refutes Gorgias by exposing his

deficient and contradictory understanding of the nature and purpose of rhetoric. Next, he refutes Polus, showing him that it is better to suffer injustice than it is to do injustice, and that it is better to pay the just penalty for injustices committed than it is to escape punishment. In the same way that Socrates refuted Lysis, he refutes Polus and Gorgias. Furthermore, just as in the *Lysis*, in which Socrates' refutation of the boys caused them to rebel against the established authorities, so in the *Gorgias*, Socrates sends Polus back into the city armed with a rhetoric designed to refute the city rather than flatter it. For Socrates, it is just to refute both oneself and one's friends; friendship consists in refuting or removing the lie that exists in one's soul. This ensures that any approach to politics is necessarily negative and destructive of the bonds of the city. Socrates' interaction with Gorgias and Polus shows how his conception of friendship has the effect of destroying the city and how his conception of friendship causes his interaction with it to be negative.

In the second half of the dialogue, Socrates counsels Callicles to avoid politics on the basis of his understanding of friendship. How is it that Socrates' understanding of friendship can cause him both to send Polus back into the city armed with a rhetoric meant to refute it *and* to counsel Callicles to avoid politics altogether? The answer is related to the difference in character between Polus and Gorgias, on the one hand, and Callicles, on the other. Callicles is, in some ways, very similar to Socrates. While Polus and Gorgias both suffer from a strong sense of shame, Callicles and Socrates are both more outspoken. As a result, while Polus and Gorgias are *not capable* of overcoming the conventional understanding of justice due to their shame, Callicles and Socrates—perhaps to differing extents—are able to overcome these conventions. Indeed, both are shown to be highly erotic individuals, and it is their erotic desire for what is

good that enables them to “shake... off and break... through all” the conventional taboos that stand in their way (484a). In fact, Callicles’ desire for the good is so great that he believes in the existence of an unalloyed good independent of any evil. As a result, under the Socratic conception of friendship, which holds that like is a friend to its like, Socrates asserts that Callicles ought to avoid politics altogether, for it is only by becoming like the regime that Callicles will come to have power in the city. Gorgias and Polus are both wedded to conventional conceptions of justice. Therefore, Socrates is not depriving them of the good by undertaking a life that requires them to challenge and refute the existing conventional understanding of justice. In contrast, Callicles’ erotic desire and his devotion to natural justice suggests that he ought to avoid politics altogether.

Neither Socrates’ negative approach to politics nor his attempt to avoid politics altogether is due primarily to a desire to avoid the conventional, vulgar conception of injustice. Rather, the Socratic approach to politics stems from his conception of friendship. While the destructive effect of his understanding of friendship is hinted at near the end of the *Lysis*, it is made explicit in the *Gorgias*. There is no self-sufficient basis for friendship that is grounded in a simple conception of another’s goodness. Rather, to the extent that friendship exists, it consists in refuting the lie in another’s soul and awakening in him a desire for completeness—a completeness that lies outside the realm of friendship and politics altogether.

Plato’s treatment, however, suggests that the Socratic conception of friendship may be mistaken. In the *Lysis*, Plato alludes to the fact that there may be a basis for friendship between two people who both are good but who are good *each in his own way*. The friendship between Lysis and Menexenus is portrayed as potentially being one of such friendships. The soft-spoken,

thoughtful Lysis is contrasted with the more brash Menexenus. This allusion to a self-sufficient friendship independent of need is continued in the *Gorgias*. Socrates and Callicles are depicted as being in some way similar to one another. Both are erotic, relatively shameless individuals who have a strong desire for the good. However, each is devoted to a different mode of life, Callicles to the active the life of politics, and Socrates to the quiet life of contemplation. By presenting Socrates and Callicles in this way—as similar, yet in some way different—Plato seems to be suggesting that their lives may be complementary. Could it be that Socrates and Callicles are good, each in his own way?

Given both Plato's depiction of the Socratic understanding of friendship in the *Lysis* and the way that friendship works to destroy the myth in the *Gorgias*, it seems that for Plato the seeds for a reconciliation between power and wisdom lie in a correct understanding of friendship. In both the *Lysis* and the *Gorgias*, Plato points to the danger that Socrates' understanding of friendship carries for politics. The manner in which Socrates subsumes friendship into the ambit of erotic desire for the good ensures that there is no friendship independent of need, a friendship that appreciates another solely for the other's own good qualities. Furthermore, as a result, the pursuit of the good through philosophic contemplation becomes a personal endeavor, and a concern for the good of another interferes with that endeavor. Socratic philosophy, in its attempt to discover the right way of life through dialogue with others, ends up being parasitic on politics, as it questions the conventions and practices that hold a city together. At the same time, Plato's purpose in these dialogues is not *simply* to point to the danger of philosophy—a teaching certainly worth bearing in mind—but he simultaneously

points toward a reconciliation between politics and philosophy through the medium of friendship, a reconciliation that he leaves for Aristotle fully to develop.

## CHAPTER THREE. ARISTOTLE'S FRIENDSHIP OF THE GOOD

### **Politics and Philosophy: An Unresolved Tension**

In Book I of the *Politics*, Aristotle traces the emergence of the *polis*, or how the *polis* comes to be established. In the overview provided, Aristotle stresses the role that necessity plays in the process. He notes that the most basic unit of the *polis*, the individual, unites with other individuals in order to counter necessity. As evidence of this, he points both to the natural coupling of male and female, who come together “from a natural striving to leave behind” offspring, and to the conjoining of master and slave, both of whom use their distinct functions to preserve themselves as well as the other. From these relationships arises the household, which exists in order to satisfy “the needs of daily life” (*Pol.* 1152b13). Thus, the household exists to counter day-to-day necessities. However, Aristotle continues by noting that a household is not on its own self-sufficient but is still subject to necessity of “non-daily needs” and, as a result, various households join together to constitute the village. In turn, several villages come together to comprise “the complete community”—the *polis*. The *polis*, Aristotle states, is completely self-sufficient and exists “by nature.” From this brief sketch it seems that for Aristotle the *polis* arises naturally in order to counter necessity. Man is by nature a political being, because man is by nature not self-sufficient on his own.

If, however, necessity is the only basis for the development of the *polis*, it is not entirely clear *why* several villages would come together to form a *polis*. Indeed, as Aristotle makes clear, the household and the village together already provide for both man’s daily and non-daily needs.



Thus, it is already at the level of the village that necessity has been overcome. To what end do villages join together to form a *polis*? In his brief depiction of the development of the *polis* Aristotle hints that the *polis* has an end beyond simply countering necessity; while the *polis* comes “into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well” (1252b25–30). The city, therefore, has an end beyond merely securing the existence of its members and countering necessity. Aristotle initially suggests that the end of the city is justice. Pointing to man’s capacity for speech, he notes that man, in contrast to other “herd” animals, has the ability to distinguish between good and bad, justice and injustice, and furthermore has the capacity to institute its judgements concerning the just into custom and law. Justice seems to be the natural end of the city.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the city’s complete and full self-sufficiency, Aristotle argues that it is “prior by nature to the household and to each of us” (1253a20). The whole is prior to the part. As a result, man’s full existence depends on his relation to, and participation in, the *polis* in the same way that a foot or a hand depends on the existence of whole body. Aristotle seems to suggest that it is in the city that man finds completion or perfection as a human being. Specifically, it is by being an active participant in the shaping and promulgation of the city’s laws concerning what is just and unjust, and furthermore by obeying these laws, that man fulfills his purpose. In contrast to Socrates, Aristotle presents the individual as having the same end as the city. In Book I of the

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as Susan Collins points out, “Aristotle’s ‘natural beginning’ is a bit of a red herring: The city presents its justice as the natural completion of a human being, yet the city is not simply natural in one respect: It must be constituted.” *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19. The fact that justice is not strictly speaking a natural end of the city is hinted at already in Book I of the *Politics*. After suggesting that man’s capacity for speech or reason is what sets him apart from other “herd animals,” Aristotle states that this capacity “is what makes a household and a city” (1253a19). This, of course, suggests that the city is not *distinguished* from the household on account of justice and political virtue. At this point, the distinct end of the *polis* has not yet been revealed.

*Politics*, Aristotle seems to imply that there is a natural harmony between the individual and the city.

The remainder of the *Politics*, however, complicates this picture. In Book VII, Aristotle specifically raises the question of what the best life is for the individual and whether it is the same for the individual as for the city. We are again told that the city has an end beyond itself; it aims at living well, not mere existence. Both the city and the individuals that comprise it ought to aim at living well.

What it means to live well, however, is not entirely clear. While Aristotle makes clear that to live well means to live a life of virtue,<sup>2</sup> he notes that there is debate over *which* virtue. It is at this point that Aristotle deals head-on with the question that had been debated by Callicles and Socrates in the *Gorgias*:

There is dispute among those who agree that the most choiceworthy way of life is that accompanied by virtue as to whether the political and active way of life is choiceworthy, or rather that which is divorced from all external things—that involving some sort of study, for example—which some assert is the only philosophic way of life. (1324a26–29).

The political and the philosophic life are here juxtaposed, and, after spending some time distinguishing the various modes of active life, Aristotle involves himself in the debate between the proponents of these two types of life.<sup>3</sup> Aristotle lays out the various opinions before

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<sup>2</sup> In a passage that mirrors the division of goods in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle divides good things into three: property, the goods of the body, and the goods of the soul. Through a series of arguments, Aristotle concludes that the goods of the soul (i.e., virtue) are superior to other goods. Cf. *Pol.* 1323a24–1323b21.

<sup>3</sup> Before turning to the merits and demerits of each life, Aristotle first distinguishes between two *types* of active, or political life. On the one hand, there is a life dedicated to ruling as a master over one's neighbors in a despotic fashion. On the other hand, there is rule in a "political fashion," which seems to be rule in accordance with law.

investigating them. He first puts forward a position that is nearly identical to the Socratic position as presented in the *Gorgias* before contrasting it with the position held by Callicles. He notes that some eschew the active life on the grounds that “the way of life of the free person [is] different from that of the political ruler and the most choiceworthy of all,” and that the political life is an impediment to one’s own well-being (1325a17–22). In contrast, others consider the active life to be best, due to the fact that “it is impossible for one who acts in nothing to act well, and that acting well and happiness are the same thing” (1325a22–24).<sup>4</sup>

In the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle conspicuously concludes that the philosophic life is superior to the political life. This same conclusion is expressed in Book VII of the *Politics* as well. Thus, while Aristotle’s statement that “happiness is a sort of action” may seem to settle the debate between the two lives in favor of the active life of politics, Aristotle famously re-defines the life of philosophy to be a life of action. The active life, he states, is “not necessarily in relation to others” (1325b17). Aristotle suggests that the active life can also be practiced in a *private* manner, rather than simply in a public or political manner. The philosophic life is active as well because thought itself is an activity. In fact, Aristotle goes so far as to say that those thoughts “that are complete in themselves, and the sorts of studies and

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Aristotle lays out three sets of opinions regarding the merits of these two types of active life. Some, Aristotle notes, believe neither type of rule is good; they maintain that while the tyrannical rule over one’s neighbors is accompanied by great injustice, rule “in the political fashion” is simply “an impediment to one’s own well-being” (1324a36–39). This first opinion encapsulates Socrates’ position in the *Gorgias*. Others, Aristotle notes, hold that the “political life” is the only life for a man (1324a40–41). This opinion seems to encapsulate Callicles’ assertion that the man who fails to engage in politics will never amount to much. Last, Aristotle notes, are those who assert that “the mode of regime involving mastery and tyranny is the only happy one” (1324b3–4). Aristotle concludes that while the opinion that rule always involves mastery and tyranny is the most common and even accords with nature to some extent, this is not the city’s highest aim. Aristotle will later explain that the city’s ultimate aim is, instead, “the actualization and complete practice of virtue” through the institution of laws and education (1332a9–10).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Gor.* 485d–e.

thoughts that are for their own sake” are “much more” active than those thoughts that are pursued for some other activity (1325b18–21). This statement mirrors Aristotle’s argument Book X of the *Ethics* that the philosophic life is the happiest due to its greater self-sufficiency and the fact that it is sought as an end in itself. The *Politics* ends with the same conclusion as the *Ethics*: the philosophic life is the *most* active life.

While Aristotle is explicit in his assertion that the philosophic life is superior to the political life, he nevertheless emphasizes in the *Politics* that cities can *also* partake in the action of thought. Positing the existence of an “isolated city” that intentionally chooses to live alone, he writes that this type of city is also active, “for activity can come about relative to a city’s parts: there are many sorts of shared activities undertaken by the parts of the city in relation to one another” (1325a3–4). While this passage is somewhat cryptic, what Aristotle seems to have in mind is education. As Susan Collins notes, Aristotle “suggests that the political community may be organized so that its highest aim is action understood in [the] sense” of study and thinking.<sup>5</sup> The life of political rule—understood as the improvement of souls—shares in the active life of the philosopher by aiming at the life of study and thought. It is for this reason that the last book of the *Politics* covers the education that ought to be instituted in the best regime. Aristotle concludes that in this way, the aim of the best regime and the aim of the individual are the same; both partake of the activity of thought.

A number of indicators suggest, however, that harmony between the individual and the city is not so easily achieved. First, the education described by Aristotle is not *simply*

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<sup>5</sup> Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, 116.

philosophic. In fact, Aristotle's views on philosophic education mirror those of Callicles. It will be recalled that Callicles believed that while some education in philosophy was necessary and suitable for the young, one ought not pursue education beyond what is necessary. Aristotle relates similarly that one ought not to "persevere overly much in the [liberal sciences] with a view to proficiency" (1337b17). Commenting on the education in Aristotle's best regime, Susan Collins writes that the education Aristotle lays out aims at "a life of leisure in which the arts and music figure most prominently. This life is neither wholly political nor wholly philosophic—neither wholly devoted to the city nor separated from it."<sup>6</sup> Of course, this seems to be in stark contrast to Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the life of theoretical contemplation is unambiguously held to be the best life, for sake of which all other actions are undertaken. Robert Bartlett concludes that "the discussion of 'leisure' in [Book] VII is arguably the peak of the *Politics*, not because it outlines the genuinely satisfactory end of life but because it points to the true peak, the truly satisfying and altogether private activity of philosophic contemplation."<sup>7</sup> If Bartlett is correct, it would seem that the aim of the individual and the aim of the city are *not* the same, as the aim of the city is not strictly philosophic in the way it is for the individual.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, to the extent that education in the best regime *is* philosophic, we have to wonder what causes the city to be concerned with philosophy. That is, while the necessity that characterizes the pre-political state is the impetus that animates the city's concern for justice, it

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Robert Bartlett, "The 'Realism' of Classical Political Science," 394.

<sup>8</sup> If this conclusion is correct, it may well call into question Aristotle's description of man as a political animal. Indeed, if the end of man is different from the end of the city, it would seem that man is not by nature directed toward participation in the city.

remains an open question what it is that animates and orients the city toward philosophy. Last, Aristotle fails to make clear why the philosopher should be concerned with the well-being of the city. It will be recalled that in his discussion concerning the relative worth of the political and philosophic life, Aristotle had raised the Socratic objection to the political life that political rule is simply an impediment to one's own well-being (1324a38–39). However, he does not (in the *Politics*) directly respond to this criticism. Given that Aristotle spends the last book of the *Politics* giving political advice on how to institute an educational system that is concerned with the improvement of the souls of *other* people, it would seem fair to question whether Aristotle's pursuit of the good is undermined or tainted in some way by political concerns.<sup>9</sup> We may conclude, therefore, that, in the context of the *Politics*, Aristotle's attempt to resolve the tension between the philosopher and the city appears to be at most a superficial solution. Analogizing the leisure of the city to the theoretical speculation of the philosopher does not fully reconcile the city and the philosopher.

The *Politics* does, nonetheless, hint at a resolution to the problem regarding the philosopher's estrangement from the city. In introducing the educational system of the best regime, Aristotle raises the question of why one would do, or learn, something if it does not directly benefit oneself. He writes, "It makes a difference, too, for the sake of what one does or learns something. What is for one's own sake or for the sake of friends or on account of virtue is not unfree, while the person who does the same thing on account of others would often be held to do something characteristic of the laborer or the slave" (1337b18–22). It seems that the

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<sup>9</sup> Strauss, *The City and Man*, 29.

philosopher needs to obtain some benefit from instituting the educational system if he is not to be doing something “characteristic of the laborer or the slave.” As the quotation indicates, it is the concept of friendship that is able to answer the questions of why the city is concerned with philosophy and why the philosopher is concerned with the education of his fellow citizens. As will later be made clear, friendship is concerned both with one’s own good and the good of another. Like the city itself, friendship is ordered toward two ends.

### **Friendship and The Structure of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics***

Fully to understand the way in which friendship mediates the tension between the political and philosophic life, it is necessary to turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle unpacks his conception of friendship in detail. It is a discussion that has traditionally received little attention. This lack of attention is curious, given that the two books on friendship, Books VIII and IX, together constitute a full fifth of the *Ethics*. To see how Aristotle’s discussion of friendship figures into the debate between proponents of the life of politics and proponents of the private life of contemplation, it will be helpful to look to the structure of the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole. The first book of the *Ethics* states Aristotle’s intention “in outline.” In this book, Aristotle notes that his goal is to find “the human good” (*NE*, 1094b7).<sup>10</sup> Based on an argument that assumes the teleological character of the entirety of nature, Aristotle holds, somewhat ambiguously, that the human good is “an activity of soul in accord with virtue, and if there are

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<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise indicated all citations to the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be based on the translation provided by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins in *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

several virtues, then in accord with the best and most complete one” (1098a17–18). Of course, as the *Ethics* continues it quickly becomes clear that there is more than one virtue; Aristotle distinguishes the moral virtues, discussed in Books III through V, and the intellectual virtues discussed in Book VI.

The ambiguity surrounding the human good—and whether it consists in the practice of moral virtue or the practice of intellectual virtue—does not appear to be resolved until Book X, the last book of the *Ethics*, in which Aristotle straightforwardly states that the philosophic life of contemplation is the highest life, while the life of moral virtue is happy “only in a secondary way” (1178a8–9). Given Aristotle’s somewhat abrupt conclusion and the apparent ambiguity surrounding the way in which his discussion of the moral virtues fits together with his account of the philosophic life described at the end of the *Ethics*, some scholars have despaired of finding any unity at all in the *Ethics*.<sup>11</sup>

Many political interpretations of the *Ethics* have sought to resolve these difficulties by reading the *Ethics* in light of the debate that is raised in the *Politics*; the relation between the active life devoted to politics and the private contemplative life of philosophy.<sup>12</sup> One standard political interpretation of Aristotle’s *Ethics* holds that Aristotle recognizes the tension between philosophy and politics but seeks to alleviate it in various ways, all the while maintaining the

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<sup>11</sup> J. L. Ackrill, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” in *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Otfried Hoffe, trans. Fernbach (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 33–52; John Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 156–77; Thomas Nagel, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” *Phronesis* 17 no. 3, (1972): 252–59; Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, [1886], 1902), 70.

<sup>12</sup> See Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s ‘Ethics’*; Burger, *Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates*; Jaffa, *Aristotelianism and Thomism*; Strauss, *The City and Man*; Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics*.



superiority of philosophy.<sup>13</sup> According to this interpretation, the *Ethics* can be seen as containing two complementary parts. While the first half deals with the political life characterized by moral virtue, the second half is concerned with the philosophic life. This interpretation has much to offer in that it is able to make sense of the way the moral virtues relate to the life of philosophic contemplation. Specifically, this reading holds that Aristotle presents the life of moral virtue in a way that emphasizes its nobility, while also exposing its limitations. This ensures that the well-bred Greek gentleman (καλοσκάγαθος), if he is a sufficiently attentive reader, will recognize that the true benefit of moral virtue is that it points beyond itself toward philosophic virtue, which is self-sufficient and capable of being practiced alone.<sup>14</sup>

While this interpretation provides much purchase, it suffers from two drawbacks. First, it struggles to make sense of Aristotle's stated intention in Book I to define the human good. In describing his intention at the outset, Aristotle argues that the end of human action—the human good—falls under the architectonic art of politics, and that the good of a nation or city is “nobler and more divine” than the good of any single individual (1094b10–11). How can the good of the city be “nobler and more divine” than the good of a single individual if the *Ethics* ends with the conclusion that the solitary life of contemplation is the human good? Second, it runs into a difficulty similar to that noted above concerning the conclusion of the *Politics*—namely, if the

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<sup>13</sup> See, Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*; Jaffa, *Aristotelianism and Thomism*; Strauss, *The City and Man*; Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Strauss writes, “When the philosopher Aristotle addresses his political science to more or less perfect gentlemen, he shows them as far as possible that the way of life of the perfect gentleman points toward the philosophic way of life; he removes a screen.” *The City and Man*, 28. Similarly, Tessitore argues that “Aristotle attempts to offer guidance for those who are disposed to an active life of political involvement ... [while] at the same time ... point[ing] his most gifted students to ... contemplate something of the radical and more fully satisfying character of the philosophic life.” *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, 20.

human good is the solitary life of contemplation, why does Aristotle concern himself with directing the Greek gentleman toward the life of contemplation? Last, and perhaps most problematically, this political interpretation gives short shrift to Aristotle's two books concerning friendship. The standard political approach typically treats these two books as an exhortation meant to prepare the reader for Aristotle's somewhat startling claim that the philosophic life is the happiest life.<sup>15</sup>

It is my contention that, in light of Aristotle's discussion of friendship, the *Ethics* does *not* end with the conclusion that the solitary life of contemplation constitutes the human good. Rather, I will show that Aristotle views the political life of moral virtue and the philosophic life of contemplation as complementary. Focusing on Aristotle's account of friendship not only allows us to see the *Ethics* as a single, unified, work, but it also is able to account for why Aristotle asserts that the philosopher is concerned with the political realm.

### **The Ascent to Friendship via Magnanimity**

Aristotle famously holds that true friendship, or friendship in the primary sense, is the friendship of good human beings (1157a30–32). If so, it would seem that the highest friendship would be a friendship between those who are characterized by magnanimity or those who are 'great-souled' (μεγαλοψυχία), as Aristotle considers these individuals to be completely virtuous

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Tessitore suggests that Aristotle's reflections on friendship have, "in the measure possible, prepared readers for his concluding endorsement of the rare but simply best way of life available to human beings. His subsequent demotion of the life of moral virtue in light of the superior happiness afforded by the contemplative pleasures of philosophy is perhaps less strange and less jarring because it is prefaced with a consideration of friendship." *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, 95.

(1123b36–1124a2). Therefore, when we turn to Aristotle’s discussion of magnanimity, we are perhaps unsurprised to see that friendship makes an appearance. At the same time, however, its appearance in the discussion of magnanimity is striking given Aristotle’s depiction of the great-souled man. He is described as haughty and somewhat aloof (1124a20). One commentator has gone as far as to say that Aristotle’s magnanimous man is “self-absorbed.”<sup>16</sup> And yet, Aristotle writes that the magnanimous man “is incapable of living with a view to another—except a friend—since doing so is slavish” (1124b28–1125a1). Why does the topic of friendship appear at this juncture of the *Ethics*? Even more curiously, why does it appear as part of the description of an individual who seems to be most self-sufficient and is “incapable of living with a view to another”? The question is related to Socrates’ inquiry in the *Lysis*: what need could a self-sufficient, good individual have of another?

The answer, I hope to make clear, will become apparent once we understand who Aristotle’s magnanimous man is. However, the identity of the magnanimous man is itself a vexing question, as Aristotle never provides a definition of the virtue of magnanimity; nor does he give an unambiguous indication in the *Ethics* of who the magnanimous man is. To understand the identity of Aristotle’s magnanimous man requires that we look outside the confines of *NE* 4.3 and examine first the virtue of courage, as well as Aristotle’s depiction of the magnanimous man in the *Posterior Analytics*. As will be made clear, Aristotle’s account of courage reveals the need that a city may occasionally have for an individual who is capable of transcending its standards. While the great-souled man would seem to fit the mold of an

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<sup>16</sup> David Ross, *Aristotle*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 208.

individual who is not beholden to the city's standards, Aristotle's depiction of the great-souled man in the *Posterior Analytics* shows the dangers such a man poses to the city.<sup>17</sup> I contend that when Aristotle's account of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3 is read in the light of these other passages, it becomes clear not only *who* the magnanimous man is, but also why friendship is introduced at this point of the *Ethics*, and what role friendship plays in Aristotle's political philosophy in general.

Courage is the first moral virtue that Aristotle covers in the *Ethics* and, contrary to what some have insisted, his of treatment of courage is far from a conventional re-telling of the Greek conception of courage.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, as we shall see, Aristotle's account of courage in Book III is meant subtly to bring into focus the limits of the conventional Greek understanding of courage. Aristotle seeks to expose these limits in order to make clear to the reader the need for the virtue of magnanimity, which is introduced in Book IV.

Aristotle initially indicates that courage "is a mean with respect to fear and confidence" (1115a7–8). However, what this mean entails is never fully resolved in Aristotle's discussion of courage. This lack of resolution is due, in part, to the interrelation between two aspects of courage: (1) the courageous man's desire for honor; and (2) his lack of concern with ill-fortune. The courageous man's desire for honor is initially portrayed as laudable—indeed, one *ought* to

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<sup>17</sup> Given Aristotle's famous dictum that the individual "who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god" (*Pol.* 1253a28–29), it would seem that any attempt to invoke the assistance of a magnanimous man who is unbounded by the conventions of the city is, at the very least, fraught with danger.

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent rejoinder to the view that Aristotle's listing of the moral virtues in Books III and IV is simply an account of the qualities admired by the Greeks during Aristotle's time, see Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, 47–52.

be fearful of disrepute (1115a10–15). The courageous man’s lack of concern with ill-fortune is similarly suggested to be laudable (1115a15–17). Aristotle suggests that perhaps one should not be fearful of things such as poverty or sickness, as these are outside of one’s control. It seems, then, that courage is primarily concerned with pursuing that which is noble and honorable and remaining impassive in the face of the vicissitudes of fortune.

As Aristotle’s account of courage develops, however, he indicates that the relationship between honor and ill-fortune is somewhat troublesome and that the common conception of courage is problematic. Toward the end of the first chapter on courage, Aristotle defines courage “in the authoritative sense,” by noting that “a courageous man could be said to be someone who is fearless when it comes to a noble death and to *any* situation that brings death suddenly to hand,” such as illness or death at sea (1115a33–35). This seems simply to bolster the observations made earlier—the courageous man is concerned with honor and is unmoved in the face of ill-fortune. Aristotle, however, follows this definition of courage “in the authoritative sense” by noting two things. First, when faced with the prospect of death at the hands of ill-fortune, the courageous man “despairs of his preservation” (1115b3). Of course, this pulls back on the observation that a courageous man ought to remain impassive when confronted with ill-fortune. Rather than remain unaffected by ill-fortune, the courageous man “despairs of his preservation” and ought to be “disgusted with [the] sort of death” brought on by ill-fortune (1115b2–3). Second, Aristotle notes that while “the courageous act like men (*ἀνδρίζονται*) in circumstances where prowess in battle is possible or dying is noble,” in situations of illness or sea, “neither such prowess nor nobility is possible” (1115b6–7). Aristotle subtly suggests that the virtue of courage is not exhausted by the manly acts of valor that are considered noble—true

courage seems to extend beyond that which the many consider noble. For Aristotle, neither excessive concern with honor nor insufficient concern with one's fate is indicative of true courage.

This interpretation receives added credence from Aristotle's depiction of the five types of specious courage that merely resemble courage in the authoritative sense. The first of these types of specious courage is the "courage found in the citizen" who "endures dangers" for the sake of honor (1116a17–20). Aristotle uses Hector and Diomedes from Homer's *Iliad* as examples of this type of courage. According to the lines Aristotle selects to portray Hector and Diomedes as exemplars of civic courage, both warriors indicate that they will maintain their stations in battle so as to avoid reproach or scorn. These are, of course, somewhat odd examples of *specious* courage, as both Hector and Diomedes are warriors undertaking great acts of valor on the battlefield—precisely the situation described by Aristotle as that in which the courageous man is capable of displaying his virtue. Why are these examples provided to illustrate the courage that only *seems* like virtue in the authoritative sense, when they seem to fit all the criteria for a courageous act?<sup>19</sup>

The answer becomes evident when one examines the wider context in which these lines are spoken. The first line is part of a dialogue Hector has with himself as he is preparing to face Achilles on the battlefield: "Polydamas will be the first to lay a reproach upon me" (1116a24). The ending of the line—which Aristotle does not quote—is as follows: "...for that he bade me

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle notes that of the five types of courage that merely resemble true courage, "this most closely resembles the courage [in the authoritative sense], because it arises through virtue, that is through a sense of shame and longing for what is noble (since it is for honor) and through avoiding reproach, since it is shameful" (1116a26–29).

lead the Trojans to the city during this fatal night, when goodly Achilles arose. Howbeit I hearkened not—verily it had been better far!”<sup>20</sup> Hector is portrayed as a hero with a tragic flaw. His devotion to reputation and honor is so great that he cannot heed the advice of others and, as a result, puts the welfare of his entire city at risk. Hector’s good (as he perceives it) conflicts with that of his city. This tragic flaw prevents him from acting for the welfare of his city, as he places his own sense of honor above that of the common good.

The second example Aristotle provides is that of Diomedes, who states, “For Hector will one day declare among the Trojans, speaking in the assembly, ‘The son of Tydeus, by me...’” (1116a25). Diomedes makes this statement as he is attempting to pursue Hector on the battlefield. Each time he attempts to do so, however, Zeus thwarts his advance with a “white lightning-bolt.”<sup>21</sup> When Nestor recognizes that the gods are against them and advises Diomedes to turn and flee, Diomedes initially refuses because of a concern about what Hector will say of him. Like Hector, Diomedes is incapable of heeding advice because his reputation and honor are at stake. Aristotle uses the example of Diomedes as an instance in which pride and concern for honor can result in a failure to acknowledge one’s limitations. Diomedes’ pride and his excessive concern for honor cause him initially to spurn Nestor’s advice in favor of the belief that he can oppose the will of the gods, or challenge fortune. Diomedes’ failure to heed Nestor’s advice evinces equanimity in the face of ill-fortune of a kind that is destructive of his own self-preservation and serves as a detriment to his fellow Greeks.

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<sup>20</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, trans. A. T. Murray, vol. 2, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924) 22:100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 8:130.

These two examples, coupled with what follows, indicate why civic courage is not the same as courage in the authoritative sense. Aristotle immediately follows up these examples of civic courage by comparing them to examples of men whom it is necessary to *compel* to fight. He writes, “Someone might put in the same category also those who are compelled by their rulers [to fight]” (116a30–31). The only difference between those operating under the auspices of civic courage and those who must be compelled to fight is that while the former fight out of a sense of shame, the latter fight on account of fear of the penalties involved. The city, it seems, has two ways to induce men to fight for its interests: by holding out honor or by the threat of penalties.

While Aristotle flatly states that having to be compelled to fight by the threat of penalties is not noble (1116b4), he indicates that the former method is also problematic. Indeed, the very concern for honor that the city seeks to inculcate in its citizens so as to induce them to fight for its security and continued existence, can undermine that same goal as well. The corollary of honor is shame and, as the examples of Hector and Diomedes make clear, an excessive concern with honor and shame (the standards of the city) can cause men to act in ways that are contrary to the good of the city. While Hector and Diomedes may obtain honor and glory by facing their foes on the battlefield (and avoid the shame that attends leaving the battlefield), their conduct is destructive of both themselves and the city. Through these examples, Aristotle makes clear that the very sense of honor and shame that the city inculcates in its citizens can lead to its ruin as well. To secure its existence, it seems that the city may at times require an individual who is capable of transcending the city and its standards. Aristotle’s depiction of civic courage as



deficient points to the need for a more developed account of the proper relation to honor and fortune, one that is *not* tied to the standards of the city.

Aristotle's account of civic courage directs the reader's attention to the need for an individual who is capable of transcending the standards of the city. It is precisely this individual whom Aristotle describes in his portrait of the great-souled man in Book IV of the *Ethics*. However, while Aristotle's account makes clear that the magnanimous man transcends the city and is capable of bestowing great benefits on the city, the questions of who this magnanimous man is and what type of benefits he provides have long been the subject of debate. Some have argued that the great-souled man represents the height of moral achievement that is capable of being attained by an individual devoted to the life of politics, such as a statesman or general.<sup>22</sup> Others have suggested that Aristotle is referring to the philosopher who is devoted to the life of contemplation.<sup>23</sup>

Strong arguments have been raised in favor of both positions. For example, those insisting that Aristotle's great-souled man is intended to depict a man of great moral or political achievement point to Aristotle's placement of this virtue among the so-called moral or political virtues and to the fact that the magnanimous man is concerned with great actions. In addition,

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<sup>22</sup> W. F. R Hardie, "'Magnanimity' in Aristotle's *Ethics*," *Phronesis* 23 no. 1, (1978): 63–79; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), II-II. Q. 129, Art. 1–3), and *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), vol. 1, lectures 8–11; Carson Holloway, "Aristotle's Magnanimous Man," in *Magnanimity and Statesmanship* ed. Carson Holloway (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 13–28; Jaffa, *Aristotelianism and Thomism*.

<sup>23</sup> René Antoine Gauthier, *Magnanimité: L'Idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne*, (Paris: Vrin, 1951), 104–17; J. A. Stewart, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 1:334–46.

the magnanimous man is said to be eager to help others and willing to face great dangers.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, others have suggested that the great-souled man is the philosopher par excellence, with some going so far as to maintain that he is intended to represent Socrates. Pointing to Aristotle's statement that magnanimity is a "kind of ornament" that only attends those who have complete virtue (1123b36–1124a2) and to his statement that the life of theoretical contemplation is the happiest life (and hence the most virtuous), these scholars conclude that the magnanimous man is meant to represent the philosopher.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some have noted that the magnanimous man's idleness and proclivity to irony also favor the view that magnanimity is at root a philosophic virtue.<sup>26</sup>

Further debate has surfaced as to whether Aristotle views the magnanimous man as unambiguously good or whether he presents him as suffering from a tragic flaw.<sup>27</sup> For example, Harry Jaffa suggests that the fault of the magnanimous man is his "overweening" concern with "his own greatness."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Holloway argues that this "overweening concern" is "compatible with and may arise from his moral seriousness and not from a merely personal preoccupation with his own status."<sup>29</sup> Others, such as Hardie, have suggested that the tragic fault

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<sup>24</sup> Hardie, "Magnanimity," 70.

<sup>25</sup> Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> For a succinct overview of the debate about whether Aristotle's magnanimous man is a statesman/general or a philosopher, and about whether Aristotle finds fault with the magnanimous man, see Jacob Howland, "Aristotle's Great-Souled Man," *Review of Politics* 64 no. 1 (2002): 29.

<sup>28</sup> Jaffa, *Aristotelianism and Thomism*, 140–41.

<sup>29</sup> Holloway, "Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and Aristotle's Great-Souled Man." *Review of Politics* 69 no. 3 (2007): 355.

of the magnanimous man lies not in his intolerance of insults but in his refusal to recognize “the contribution of luck and nature to his achievement.”<sup>30</sup> According to this view, the tragedy of the magnanimous man is his inability to recognize his indebtedness to the role of fortune.

It is my contention that in his account of the virtue of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3 Aristotle proposes to describe *both* the philosopher and the statesman. Building on Aristotle’s discussion of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics*, in which Aristotle suggests the possibility that there may be two types of magnanimity, I will argue that his depiction of the great-souled man in *NE* 4.3 is intended as a response to the difficulties posed by the virtue of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, I will argue that the *Posterior Analytics* suggests that magnanimity can be ascribed to the apex of the moral life exemplified by the politically active man as well as to the philosopher. As depicted by Aristotle in the *Analytics*, both the individual at the apex of the moral life and the individual at the height of the contemplative life have a correct estimation of the great benefits they are capable of providing to the city; yet both suffer from a tragic flaw that causes them to act in a socially destructive manner. Last, I will argue that in *NE* 4.3 Aristotle provides a solution to this tragic flaw in the form of friendship. It is through friendship and the recognition of each other’s virtues that Aristotle is able to reorient the magnanimous man’s lack of concern with the standards of the city for the common good.

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<sup>30</sup> Hardie, *Magnanimity*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Howland’s article “Aristotle’s Great-Souled Man” for the following discussion concerning Aristotle’s reference to magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics*. My own account of Aristotle’s discussion of magnanimity takes a similar starting point as that of Howland—Aristotle views the magnanimous man as tragically flawed and he holds out friendship as the antidote to this flaw. However, my interpretation differs from Howland in my conclusion regarding Aristotle’s appraisal of Socrates. See below at n. 45 and accompanying text.

Aristotle's discussion of the virtue of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics* occurs in a passage that is ostensibly meant to provide a simple overview of how to attain the definition of a genus that covers more than one species. The virtue of magnanimity is provided as an example (*Post. An.* 97b7–28).<sup>32</sup> Aristotle maintains that to obtain a definition of magnanimity it would be necessary to compare two groups of individuals who are held to be magnanimous on account of different traits, to see what they have in common. If we take our bearing from Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax, we are led to the conclusion that magnanimity consists in an intolerance of dishonor, as it was intolerance that caused Alcibiades to go to war, roused Achilles' wrath, and drove Ajax to commit suicide (97b20–21). In contrast, if Lysander and Socrates are held to be magnanimous, it seems that magnanimity consists of being indifferent (ἀδιάφοροι) to good and ill fortune.<sup>33</sup> Aristotle concludes his brief discussion of magnanimity by stating that to obtain a definition common to these two groups, it would be necessary to “inquire what common element have equanimity (ἀπάθεια) amid the vicissitudes of life and impatience of dishonor” (97b23–26). If they have nothing in common, Aristotle concludes that there would be two genera of magnanimity.

If Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3 is intended as an attempt to discover a common trait that applies to both groups of men mentioned in the *Posterior Analytics*, it would initially seem to be failure. Indeed, as Howland notes, “If one reads the passage from the *Posterior Analytics* at face value, such an attempt [to find a common trait] must fail: anyone who

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<sup>32</sup> All citations are taken from G. R. G. Mure's translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

<sup>33</sup> While Aristotle provides evidence of the fact that Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax are intolerant of insults, he provides no similar evidence regarding the indifference to fortune displayed by Lysander and Socrates.

is intolerant of insults after the manner of Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax is not truly indifferent to fortune.”<sup>34</sup> However, before making a judgement as to whether *NE* 4.3 does, in fact, apply to both groups of magnanimous men, it is necessary to inquire into the two groups themselves to discover *all* the commonalities that the members of each respective group share. Aristotle provides the following advice for attaining a common, universal, definition:

It is also easier by this method to define the single species than the universal, and that is why our procedure should be from the several species to the universal genera—this for the further reason too that equivocation is less readily detected in genera than in *infimae species*. Indeed, perspicuity is essential in definitions ... and we shall attain perspicuity if we can collect separately the definition of each species through the group of singulars which we have established ... and so proceed to the common universal with a careful avoidance of equivocation. (97b28–38).

Thus, Aristotle states that we must first inquire into *all* the aspects that the members of each respective group share in common with one another, maintaining an especial vigilance for equivocation, before examining what it is that the members of both groups have in common.

When we turn to the individuals who comprise the first type of magnanimity—those intolerant of insults—their commonality seems straightforwardly political. As Tessitore notes, Alcibiades, Achilles and Ajax were all great Greek warriors who “embody a conception of greatness that expresses itself in action and battle. Each is characterized by a desire for glory that exhibits itself in conquest and implacable resistance to dishonor.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is clear that the first type of magnanimity is, at root, political. All the individuals that comprise this group are capable of providing great benefits in war and battle for their respective political communities.

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<sup>34</sup> Howland, “Aristotle’s Great-Souled Man,” 35.

<sup>35</sup> Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics*, 32.

However, as Aristotle intimates, while their concern for honor can lead them to confer great benefits on their community, it can also lead them to inflict great harm on their community due to a tragic flaw (ἁμαρτία): stubbornness, and an inability to listen to advice.

A brief analysis of each of the three politically magnanimous men shows that knowledge of their own greatness and of the honors that they are due, combined with an inability to heed advice, causes them to inflict great damage on their community. Ajax is famous for attempting to kill the Greek generals Menelaus and Agamemnon after they fail to grant him the honor he feels he is due. According to Sophocles' rendering of the story, as Ajax prepares to leave his tent in order to avenge his dishonor, his concubine, Tecmessa, attempts to dissuade him. Ajax replies, "Woman, silence is the grace of woman."<sup>36</sup> Later, when the plan goes awry due to the intervention of the gods, Ajax plans to kill himself. Again, Tecmessa seeks to dissuade him, asking, "Wilt thou not heed?"<sup>37</sup> Again Ajax spurns her advice, telling her, "Too much hast thou spoken already."<sup>38</sup> Ajax shortly does, indeed, commit suicide.

Similarly, when Agamemnon deprives Achilles of the war prize he believes he has rightly merited during battle, Achilles refuses to continue fighting with the Greeks against the Trojans, thereby depriving them of their greatest warrior.<sup>39</sup> When Odysseus and Phoenix seek to persuade him, Achilles refuses to be reconciled with Agamemnon, recounting instead the

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<sup>36</sup> Sophocles, "Ajax," in *The Complete Greek Drama*, trans. R. C. Trevelyan, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1938), 1:325.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vol. 1, 1:160–245.

dishonor that Agamemnon had done him.<sup>40</sup> This failure to heed their advice results not only in the death of a great many Greeks, but also of his dear friend, Patroclus.<sup>41</sup> Last, Alcibiades' failure to listen to Socrates' moderating advice leads to his notorious political enterprises.<sup>42</sup> In his pursuit of political glory, Alcibiades betrayed the Athenians by aiding the Spartan forces in their war efforts against the Athenians during the Peloponnesian war.<sup>43</sup> All three of these great warriors were very much attuned to the honors they were due, and this self-knowledge, combined with an incapacity to heed moderating advice, caused them to inflict great harm on their community.

While it is relatively straightforward to determine what connects the individuals comprising the first type of magnanimity, it is more difficult to discern what holds Lysander and Socrates together. Socrates the philosopher and Lysander the Spartan general initially appear to have little in common, aside from an ability to bear the ill-fortune of poverty with equanimity.<sup>44</sup> As a result, some have maintained that Lysander's love of honor and supposed intolerance of dishonor suggest that he actually belongs with Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax, while Socrates

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 9:165–665.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 16:20 – 45; 780–865.

<sup>42</sup> On Alcibiades' failure to listen to Socrates' advice, see Andre Archie, "Listening to Plutarch's Alcibiades in Plato's *Alcibiades Major*," in *Politics in Socrates' Alcibiades: A Philosophical Account of Plato's Dialogue Alcibiades Major* (New York: Springer, 2015), 101–21. Michael Gargin traces Alcibiades' political failures to Socrates' hubris. See "Socrates' 'Hybris' and Alcibiades' Failure," *Phoenix* 31 no. 1 (1977): 22–37.

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, "Alcibiades," in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, rev. by Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Random House, 1864), 248–50.

<sup>44</sup> Plutarch, "Lysander," in *Lives*, 525–26; Plato, *Apol.* 31b–c, 36d; and Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.6. Jacob Howland argues against viewing their easy acceptance of poverty as the basis for Lysander's and Socrates' magnanimity because this trait "is hardly the basis on which one would pick out both Lysander and Socrates as great-souled men." "Aristotle's Great-Souled Man," 36.

comprises a class all on his own.<sup>45</sup> Others have suggested that Lysander is merely included as “a more accessible but less perfect introduction” to the philosophic magnanimity of Socrates.<sup>46</sup>

The inclusion of Socrates as representative of the second type of magnanimity suggests that Aristotle does intend to draw our attention to the fact that this type of magnanimity can take a philosophic form. However, while Aristotle may seek to draw our attention to the philosophic form that this type of magnanimity can take, it is still necessary to account for the reason Aristotle chooses to include Lysander the Spartan general (who was not known in any way for his philosophic acumen) as opposed to some other philosopher. If we follow Aristotle’s advice and proceed “from the several species to the universal genera” while maintaining an eye for “equivocation,” we will see that Lysander and Socrates have more in common than simply an ability to bear poverty with equanimity. Following Aristotle’s method allows us to avoid the premature conclusion that Aristotle has either misplaced Lysander or has included him as simply a “more accessible” introduction to philosophic magnanimity.

In addition to having an ability to bear the ill-fortune of poverty with equanimity, Lysander and Socrates share in common that they are both excluded from rule on account of

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<sup>45</sup> Howland, “Aristotle’s Great Souled Man,” 36 (“A more adequate division would separate Socrates from Alcibiades, Achilles, Ajax, and Lysander. These four are all marked by the love of honor and the intolerance of dishonor, but Socrates shares neither trait; he is indifferent to good and bad fortune, and therefore also to the cards that fortune deals him with respect to honor and dishonor”). Lysander’s inclusion with Socrates is confusing, given the fact that he does seem to have more in common with Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax. However, as I hope to make clear, if we follow Aristotle’s instructions on how to come to a common definition, it is possible to find a commonality between Lysander and Socrates: an ability to persevere in the face of the ill-fortune of an ignoble birth.

<sup>46</sup> Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics*, 32. Tessitore explains that while Plato never refers to magnanimity, “he does have Socrates speak of philosophic magnificence. As part of his account of philosophic virtue, Socrates explains that nothing human seems great, and that even death itself is not terrible for one who contemplates all being and all time (*Rep.* 486a–b).” *Cf. NE* 1124b7–9 (“The great-souled man is not one to hazard trifling dangers and he is not a lover of danger either, since he honors few things. But he will hazard great dangers, and when he does so, he throws away his life, on the grounds that living is not at all worthwhile.”).



their status in society.<sup>47</sup> However, in contrast to their easy acceptance of poverty, both Socrates and Lysander did *not* easily accept the ill-fortune of their low-born status. Instead, they both believed themselves to be superior to others and deserving of honor and rule. We have already seen in our analysis of the *Gorgias* and the *Apology* that Socrates views his manner of life to be superior to the political life due to his commitment to avoiding injustice, and that he thinks he is worthy of honor for the benefits he is capable of bestowing on the city.<sup>48</sup> Callicles tells Socrates that his philosophizing causes him “to become unmanly (ἀνάνδρῳ)” as he flees “the central area of the city and the agoras” (*Gorg.* 485d 5–7). He presciently declares that Socrates’ preoccupation with philosophy at the expense of practicing the more manly art of rhetoric and politics ensures that if he is ever accused of doing an injustice, he would stand in the lawcourt “dizzy and gaping, without anything to say” (486b1–2). Of course, in the *Apology*, Socrates does attempt to use rhetoric to make the case that his way of life is superior to the active life. As part of his defense speech, he seeks to justify his way of life by telling the jurors that he constantly philosophizes because the oracle at Delphi had ordered him to do so, but he fails to persuade the requisite number of jurors of his innocence.<sup>49</sup> Given the depiction of Socrates in

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<sup>47</sup> For an account of Socrates’ poverty and low-birth see Eduard Zeller, *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, trans. Oswald J. Reichel (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877), 54, n. 1; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11–12. For an account of the way Lysander’s birth excluded him from rule in Sparta, see Plutarch, “Lysander,” in *Lives*, 541.

<sup>48</sup> For Socrates’ belief in the superiority of the philosophic life over the political life, see above at pp. 112–113. In the *Apology*, Socrates relates that he is someone who has committed “no injustice,” and that as a result of his manner of life he is worthy to be honored with free meals in the Prytaneum, an honor reserved for Olympic heroes (cf. *Apol.* 36d–37a).

<sup>49</sup> In the *Apology* Socrates expresses surprise at the closeness of the verdict. After the jury finds him guilty, Socrates states, “Many things contribute to my not being indignant, men of Athens, at what has happened—that you voted to convict me—and one of them is that what has happened was not unexpected by me. But I wonder much more at the number of the votes on each side. For I at least did not suppose it would be by so little, but by much” (*Apol.* 35e–36a). Plato may be indicating that Socrates has underestimated the power of rhetoric.

the *Gorgias*, as well as Socrates' inability to persuade the jurors in his trial, we can conclude that Socrates' failure was largely the result of his inability to take seriously the necessity of courage and rhetoric in political affairs.

Lysander's low-born status similarly prevented him from obtaining the honor and privilege that he deserved. To rectify this perceived injustice, Plutarch relates that Lysander "formed a design to remove the government from [those who ruled Sparta], and to give it in common to all ... Spartans," so that he might have a share in ruling.<sup>50</sup> The plan, as recounted by Plutarch, is strikingly similar to the story that Socrates relates at his trial concerning the oracle at Delphi. According to Plutarch, Lysander sought to trick his fellow citizens into believing that it was the will of the gods that political rule ought to be decided on the basis of merit rather than nobility. To this end, he conjured up oracles from Apollo to "alarm and overpower the minds of his fellow-citizens by religious and superstitious terrors, before bringing them to the considerations of his arguments."<sup>51</sup> However, as Plutarch relates, Lysander's plan fell through due to the lack of courage of one of its participants.<sup>52</sup> Thus, both Lysander and Socrates audaciously sought to use the religious customs of the people to implement great change in the

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<sup>50</sup> In a passage detailing Lysander's plan to change the constitution, Plutarch relates that Lysander "first attempted and prepared to persuade the citizens privately.... Afterwards perceiving so unexpected and great an innovation required bolder means of support, he proceeded, as it might be on the stage, to avail himself of machinery, and to try the effects of divine agency upon his countrymen. He collected and arranged for his purpose answers and oracles from Apollo [so as to] first alarm and overpower the minds of his fellow-citizens by religious and superstitious terrors, before bringing them to the considerations of his arguments" (Plutarch, "Lysander" in *Lives*, 541). The parallel to Socrates' use of the Delphic oracle as recounted by Plato is striking. Socrates also first sought to persuade the citizens of Athens privately to care only for virtue, and eventually used the oracle at Delphi to persuade to his fellow citizens. Cf., *Apol.* 36c.

<sup>51</sup> Plutarch, "Lysander," 541.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

order of the city, and both failed due to a lack of courage on the part of the participants involved in the plan.

The commonality between Lysander and Socrates is all the more striking in light of the fact that the term “ἀδιάφοροι” is equivocal and can mean different things in different circumstances. When paired with “poverty,” “ἀδιάφοροι” describes one who is “indifferent” to poverty.<sup>53</sup> However, when paired with “adversity,” it means to be “steadfast” or unwearied.<sup>54</sup> In light of Aristotle’s advice that one ought to avoid equivocations when making the requisite comparisons necessary to arrive at a common definition, it seems that we have to choose from among the two meanings of the word “indifferent.” Aristotle means to draw our attention either to the capacity of Lysander and Socrates to be indifferent to poverty or to their ability to be steadfast and persevere in the face of their low-born status.

It is likely that Aristotle intends to highlight the ability of Lysander and Socrates to persevere in the face of their low-born status, as this seems to be a more fitting basis for magnanimity than their ability to suffer poverty with equanimity.<sup>55</sup> In addition, viewing Socrates

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<sup>53</sup> Liddell and Scott, *Greek English Lexicon*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Further indication that Aristotle intends the basis for the second type of magnanimity to be an ability to persevere in the face of misfortune is found in his description of the method one ought to employ when seeking to arrive at a “common universal” definition. After noting that it is important to avoid equivocation, Aristotle writes, “We may add that if dialectical disputation must not employ metaphors, clearly metaphors and metaphorical expressions are precluded in definition” (*Post. An.* 38–40). When describing Lysander and Socrates, Aristotle initially notes that they are both indifferent or steady (ἀδιάφοροι) in the face of good and bad fortune. Shortly after, he notes the same thing, but this time he uses the word ἀπάθεια instead of ἀδιάφοροι to describe their relation to fortune. To be “indifferent (ἀπάθεια) to poverty” is, according to Aristotle, a metaphorical expression. In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle writes, “Again, the man that endures no pain, not even if it is good for him, is luxurious; one that can endure all pain alike is strictly speaking nameless, but by metaphor he is called hard, patient or enduring (κακοπαθητικός)” (*EE.* 2:1221a). The root of κακοπαθητικός is the same as that of ἀπάθεια. Thus, where Aristotle indicates that Lysander and Socrates are “indifferent to fortune,” he cannot mean that they are “enduring” poverty,

and Lysander from this perspective not only elucidates what they have in common, but it also makes clear what unites the first type of magnanimity with the second, allowing us to obtain a common, universal definition of magnanimity. Indeed, the members of both groups believe themselves to be great and, therefore, to be worthy of great things.<sup>56</sup> Achilles, Ajax, and Alcibiades were all outstanding in battle, and because of an awareness of their own great worth, they spurned their political community when it deprived them the honor that they were due. Socrates and Lysander were similarly aware of the outstanding benefits they were capable of bestowing on their political community.<sup>57</sup> To ensure that they, or their way of life, would be accorded the honor it was due, each attacked the foundations of their respective regimes.<sup>58</sup> If the second group of magnanimity is intended to be, at root, philosophic, Aristotle seems to indicate that while those who are philosophically magnanimous may have the capacity to undertake great deeds for their community, their awareness of this fact, coupled with adverse fortune, can lead them to attempt to conquer fortune in a way that is inimical to the well-being of the city.

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as this is a metaphorical expression and metaphorical expressions are “precluded in definition.” We are left with the conclusion that when Aristotle states that Lysander and Socrates are indifferent (*ἀδιάφοροι*) to fortune, he means that they are capable of persevering in the face of adversity.

<sup>56</sup> This is the very first characteristic Aristotle uses to describe the magnanimous man in *NE* 4.3. Aristotle writes, “He, then, who deems himself worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them is held to be great souled” (*NE*, 1123b3–4).

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch relates that when Lysander “had risen into great renown for his exploits, and had gained great friends and power, was vexed to see the city, which had increased to what it was by him, ruled by others not at all better descended than himself” “Lysander,” 541. In the *Apology*, Socrates relates that he is capable of performing “the greatest benefaction” (*Apol.* 36c).

<sup>58</sup> Socrates hints that he is well aware of the destructive tendency his way of life has. After the jury has sentenced him, he states, “For you have now done this deed supposing that you will be released from giving an account of your life, but it will turn out much the opposite for you, as *I* affirm. There will be more who will refute you, whom I have now been holding back; you did not perceive them. And they will be harsher inasmuch as they are younger, and you will be more indignant” (*Apol.* 39c–d).

The men who are provided as examples of the two types of magnanimity (political and philosophic) in the *Posterior Analytics* have a correct estimation of their worth. However, while they rightly recognize that their virtue is worthy of great honor, they mistake their own virtue for the whole of virtue. Those who are politically magnanimous mistake their courage and the benefits it provides for the city as the whole of virtue. Therefore, when they are not afforded the honors they are due, they fail to take advice from those who have knowledge and end up acting in a socially destructive manner. Similarly, those who are philosophically magnanimous fail to recognize the necessity of political courage, and, therefore, they seek to usurp the existing order of the city. As great-souled individuals, all five of the magnanimous men listed in the *Posterior Analytics* stand above the standards or conventions of the city; yet each has a tragic flaw causing him to be destructive of the health of the city.

### **Curing the Magnanimous Man**

Based on the portraits that he provides of civic courage in the *Ethics* and of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle seems to be in a bit of a quandary. On the one hand, his portrait of civic courage points to the need for a type of courage that transcends the conventions and standards of the city. Indeed, it is the excessive concern with the honor and shame that the city fosters in its citizens that causes Hector and Diomedes (both of whom embody civic courage) to spurn advice and act in a way that is inimical to the well-being of their respective cities. On the other hand, the magnanimous men described in the *Posterior Analytics* do

transcend the standards of the city. While they are not motivated by shame (as are Hector and Diomedes)—instead, they have an accurate knowledge of their own worth—they also end up acting in socially destructive ways when they fail to receive what is their due. Perhaps it is the destructive tendency of these magnanimous men that causes Aristotle to conclude his discussion of magnanimity in the *Posterior Analytics* by suggesting that if there is one definition of magnanimity, the medical treatment for each will be the same. He states, “Besides, every definition is always universal and commensurate: the physician does not prescribe what is healthy for a single eye, but for all eyes or for a determinate species of eye” (96b26 – 28). As we shall see, in the *Ethics*, Aristotle hints that the prescription for the socially destructive propensity of magnanimous men is friendship.

An initial reading of Aristotle’s account of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3 reveals a number of contradictions, particularly in regard to the magnanimous man’s orientation toward honor and fortune. Aristotle does not begin his discussion by disabusing the magnanimous man of the notion that he is worthy of great honor. Instead, he starts out by reaffirming his worth. The magnanimous man “deems himself worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them” (1123b3–4). However, as Aristotle continues, his focus shifts from the honors that attend greatness to the underlying basis of that honor, namely, virtue. As Ryan Hanley notes, “As the account of the magnanimous man’s attitude to honour develops it becomes clear that greatness of soul consists not in equal parts claiming and deserving honour; true magnanimity has instead everything to do with the latter and little to do with the former.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, near the end of his discussion of honor,

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<sup>59</sup> Ryan Patrick Hanley, “Aristotle on the Greatness of Greatness of Soul,” *History of Political Thought* 23 no. 1 (2002): 5.

Aristotle forthrightly states that the magnanimous man's virtue is so great that no honor could be worthy of it (1124a8). It seems that Aristotle transitions from a concern for honor to a concern for virtue.

Based on this shift, some have suggested that Aristotle's purpose is to cast the virtue of magnanimity initially in such a light as to appeal to ambitious honor-loving individuals. Once this appeal is made, Aristotle subtly shifts the emphasis from honor to the underlying virtues that accompany honor. According to this interpretation, Aristotle is simply preparing the reader for the claim that is to come later in the *Ethics*: that the life of theoretical virtue is the best life.<sup>60</sup> One of the difficulties posed by this interpretation, however, is that the shift from honor to virtue is not sharply drawn. Indeed, while the magnanimous man is said to have "complete contempt" for honors that come from people at random, or for small honors, the magnanimous man has a moderate disposition toward the honor that comes from "serious human beings," taking pleasure from such people in a measured way (1124a5–12). Thus, it is not the case that Aristotle unambiguously and absolutely shifts the magnanimous man's concern from honor to virtue alone. Aristotle remains purposefully ambiguous.

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<sup>60</sup> Ryan Hanley, Carson Holloway, and Harry Jaffa all make this argument, albeit in different ways. Hanley notes, "It is not the magnanimous man but some other in whose direction the magnanimous man merely nods who is independent of fortune altogether.... One has to wait until Book X of the *Ethics* to meet the fully self-sufficient man." "Aristotle on the Greatness of Greatness of Soul," 14–15. Holloway writes that the magnanimous man has a "deficiency" that stems from his "unfamiliarity with philosophy." "Aristotle's Magnanimous Man," 27. Jaffa states, "The traits which Aristotle ascribes to the magnanimous man are those which he evidently believes on the basis of observation actually do characterize the highest human type, as viewed within the dimension of morality. To measure this type by a higher standard is to transcend this dimension. But if we transcend this dimension we no longer see things as they appear within the dimension. The magnanimous man's world is in one respect at least like the world of the child." *Thomism and Aristotelianism*, 140.

Similar ambiguity surrounds Aristotle's depiction of the magnanimous man's orientation to fortune. First, we are told that the magnanimous man takes a measured approach to good and bad fortune as well as to wealth and political power, neither being overjoyed by good fortune nor despairing of ill-fortune (1124a12–17). Next, he connects the gifts of fortune to honor, stating that the magnanimous man "is not disposed even toward honor as though it were a very great thing, and political power and wealth are choiceworthy on account of the honor they bring" (1124a17–18). On the basis of this statement the magnanimous man seems to be concerned with fortune because of the honors that attend good fortune. However, Aristotle soon shifts, noting that "in truth only the good human being is honorable" (1124a25–26). This would seem to suggest that one ought not to direct any attention to the gifts of fortune or the honors they bring, as it is only the underlying character trait or virtue that is of real worth. Rather than ending with this conclusion, however, Aristotle instead follows up by noting that "he who has both goodness and good fortune is deemed even worthier of honor" (1124a26–27). That Aristotle calls attention to the fact that some people *believe* those with good fortune are more worthy of honor than those with ill-fortune, suggests that the beliefs of these people matter. Thus, in the same way that the magnanimous man ought to accept honor from those who are "serious," he also needs to dispose himself to fortune in a proper manner, since fortune is productive of honor.

Why would Aristotle maintain such an ambiguous stance on the magnanimous man's relation to honor and fortune? If it is truly only the magnanimous man's underlying virtue that is good, rather than the honors that attend this virtue, why does Aristotle go out of his way to maintain that the magnanimous man is concerned with honor from those who are serious and to suggest that good fortune can affect other people's perceptions of one's magnanimity? The



answer has to do with the phenomenon of friendship. As noted above, friendship makes a curious appearance in Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity. Indeed, Aristotle states that the magnanimous man is "incapable of living with another—except for a friend—for to do so is slavish" (1124b31–1125a1). As will shortly be made clear, Aristotle believes that the two types of magnanimous men listed in the *Posterior Analytics* are well-suited for friendship.

As I noted above in Chapter One, in the *Lysis*, Socrates fails to arrive at a definition of friendship. Nevertheless, in that dialogue, Plato intimates that friendship may come to exist between two individuals who are similar, yet different in some way from one another. It is precisely this type of friendship that Aristotle suggests as the cure for the socially destructive tendencies of the two types of magnanimous men listed in the *Posterior Analytics*. The two groups of magnanimous men listed in the *Posterior Analytics* are similar in that they are all magnanimous and capable of bestowing great benefits on their community, though the benefits they are capable of bestowing differ in kind. As we have seen, however, the individuals that comprise the two groups of magnanimous men all suffer from a tragic flaw. Their awareness of the honors they are due causes Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax to spurn prudent advice, leading them to act in socially destructive ways. Similarly, while Socrates and Lysander have the knowledge and wile to reform the social order, their plans result in failure due to lack of courage. It seems, therefore, that each type of magnanimous man is well-suited to befriend the other, as each makes up what is lacking in the other.

Bearing in mind the suitability of friendship between these two types of magnanimous men helps to make sense of the apparent contradictions in Aristotle's account of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3. Aristotle's account of honor and fortune both indulges and tempers the magnanimous

man's excessive concern with honor and his perseverance in the face of adversity. Aristotle indulges the magnanimous man by insisting that he is great and is deserving of great things. In this way, the magnanimous man avoids the strictures and standards of the city; he is not beholden to the city's standards concerning honor and shame in the way that Hector and Diomedes are. At the same time, the magnanimous man is not a law unto himself. Aristotle tempers the destructive tendency of the magnanimous man by ensuring that he be concerned with the honor of a few serious people. In the case of those magnanimous men that are "intolerant of insults," Aristotle's method ensures that they will maintain a concern for the opinion and, indeed, the *advice* of serious people, while thinking nothing of the honors or dishonors that come "from people at random" (1124a10). To the extent that he is concerned with the opinion of other serious or magnanimous individuals, Aristotle's magnanimous man is open to persuasion and advice.

Similarly, Aristotle's ambiguous treatment of the magnanimous man's relation to fortune is meant to both indulge and temper those magnanimous men who have the ability to persevere in the face of ill fortune. Aristotle's statement that "in truth, only the good human being is honorable" indulges the magnanimous man's belief that he is worthy of honor (and perhaps rule) independent of any ill-fortune regarding birth, status, or wealth. At the same time, Aristotle draws attention to the fact that some people esteem those with good fortune. To the extent that the magnanimous man cares for the honor of "serious people," Aristotle's remark has the effect of tempering the magnanimous man's desire to upend the social order in his pursuit of that which is his due. Aristotle's account of magnanimity in *NE* 4.3 can be seen as an attempt to lead these magnanimous men to recognize the social conventions that honor those who are well-born,

powerful, and courageous. The magnanimous man must, to some extent, *accept* the existing social order. According to Aristotle, fortune is something that ought to be worked with rather than conquered. Of course, being able to recognize the good attributes of another is the definition of a friendship based on the good.

When read in light of the topic of friendship, Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity can be seen as part of his "cure" for the magnanimous men listed in the *Posterior Analytics*. By being complete or self-sufficient *in their own nature*, each type of magnanimous man described in the *Analytics* is good. Yet, to the extent that these magnanimous men mistake their own virtue for the whole of virtue, they are tragic figures that cause grief for their communities. It is only by recognizing the virtues and claims of other magnanimous men who are similar to themselves, yet differ in some point of virtue, that the magnanimous man is able to avoid tragedy.<sup>61</sup> By indulging his concern for honor, Aristotle ensures that the magnanimous man stands above the conventions of the city. At the same time, Aristotle tempers the magnanimous man's concern for honor such that he is concerned only with the honor of "serious people." In this way, Aristotle sets the ground for friendship, which alone can act as the cure for the socially destructive tendencies of the magnanimous man; a cure that is more fully developed in Books VIII and IX.

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<sup>61</sup> Howland points out that "At *Iliad* 7.302, Ajax and Hector, having dueled, part "in friendship." Hector gives Ajax his sword and receives a belt in exchange. In Sophocles' *Ajax*, Ajax kills himself by falling on Hector's sword. This gesture points toward the death he should have died—death at the hands of his only equal, who is paradoxically both friend and enemy." "Aristotle's Great-Souled Man," 51 n. 40. I would add that this points toward the fact that true friendship can exist only between those who are similar to one another yet differ in point of virtue. Indeed, friendship between those who are identical is unlikely to develop, as neither is able to provide anything the other is lacking. See below n. 76 and accompanying text.

## Friendship: Book VIII – A Self-sufficient Friendship

Already in the first chapter of Book VIII, it becomes apparent that Aristotle's discussion of friendship seeks to engage in the same inquiry as that undertaken by Socrates in the *Lysis*: is there a friendship that is *not* rooted in each friend's deficiencies, but instead is based on an appreciation of one another solely for their own sake? Yet, in contrast to Socrates, who was unable to discover a definition of friendship and, therefore, placed it within the ambit of erotic relationships characterized by desire and need, Aristotle does provide a definition of friendship. Building on the framework of Plato's *Lysis*, Aristotle develops an understanding of friendship that is based not on a lack or need, but instead on a reciprocal appreciation of another's goodness.

In stark contrast to Socrates' decision to preface his inquiry into friendship by setting two friends against one another, Aristotle begins by emphasizing the utility of friendship. Friendship "is most necessary with a view to life," and "without friends, no one would choose to live" (1155a5–6). Aristotle indicates that friendship is useful not only for the young and the old but also for those who are in their prime to perform noble actions (1155a13–15). In support of this contention he cites the *Iliad*: "For 'two going together' are better able both to think and to act" (1155a15–16). This citation from the *Iliad* is spoken by Diomedes as he is about to go on an excursion at night to seek information regarding the movement of the Trojan troops.<sup>62</sup> Diomedes chooses Odysseus to come with him, whom he describes as having a "heart and proud spirit ...

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<sup>62</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vol. I, 10:220–30. The entire line is as follows: "When two go together, one discerneth before the other how profit may be had; whereas if one alone perceive aught, yet is his wit the shorter, and but slender his device."

beyond all others eager in all manner of toils” and being “wise above all ... in understanding.”<sup>63</sup> On their excursion, Diomedes and Odysseus not only learn of the Trojan troop movements but are also able to sneak into the Trojan camp and abscond with some fine horses.<sup>64</sup> Together, the wily Odysseus and the courageous Diomedes are able to provide great benefits for the city, which redound to their own honor.

While Aristotle’s preface differs from Socrates’ initial foray into the subject by emphasizing the utility of friendship, he quickly runs into the same dilemma as Socrates: what *is* friendship? Aristotle initially puts forward two potential options. He notes that while some argue that friends are “those who are alike,” others stress the complementarity of opposites (1155a33–1155b7). Of course, both options were explored and found wanting in the *Lysis*. In the *Lysis*, Socrates found that neither provides the means for elevating the basis of friendship beyond mere utility or need. However, Aristotle provides a further definition of friendship—a definition that was raised but not fully explored by Socrates in the *Lysis*: Aristotle notes that aside from those who cite the previous two definitions of friendship, there “are still others, including Empedocles, who claim that like aims at like” (1155b7–9). Of course, in the *Lysis*, this quotation—“like aims at like”—was used as the launching pad for much of the inquiry into friendship. However, while in the *Lysis* the expression is interpreted as suggesting that those who are identical to each other are friends, in the *Ethics* the quotation appears to describe a middle approach between the friendships of those who are identical to one another and the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 10:240–50. As described by Diomedes, Odysseus is not only wise, but also capable of persevering in ill-fortune.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 10:465–540.

friendships of those who are opposites. This middle approach suggests that those who are similar but not identical to one another would be friends.<sup>65</sup> That Aristotle introduces a third possible definition of friendship, one not fully explored by Socrates, suggests that he intends to add to Socrates' inquiry into friendship, or that he considers Socrates' inquiry deficient in some way.<sup>66</sup>

After raising these three possible definitions of friendship, Aristotle informs us that he intends to turn aside from these “perplexing questions bound up with matters of nature” to focus instead on those questions that are “bound up with what is distinctively human” (1155b9–10).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This is made clear in both the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia*, in which Aristotle provides a brief commentary on the statement by Empedocles that “like aims at like.” Aristotle writes in the *Eudemian Ethics*: “The natural philosophers also arrange the whole of nature taking as a principle the movement of like to like; that is why Empedocles said that the bitch sat on the tile, because it had the greatest similarity” (*EE*, 1235a10–12, as quoted in Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, trans. Brad Inwood (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 159. Similarly, he writes in the *Magna Moralia*: “They say that there was once a bitch who always slept on the same piece of tile, and when Empedocles was asked *why* the bitch slept on the same piece of tile he said that the bitch was in some way similar to the tile, as though the similarity caused the bitch to go to the tile” (*MM*, 1208b11–15, as quoted in Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, 159. Finally, near the middle of Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, at a portion of the argument where Aristotle again lapses into a discussion of nature, Aristotle states, “Yet perhaps one opposite does not aim at the other opposite in itself, except incidentally. Rather, the longing involved is for the middle term, since this is good” (*NE* 1159b19–21).

<sup>66</sup> Further bolstering the possibility that Aristotle views Socrates' inquiry in the *Lysis* to be deficient is the fact that in the entirety of the *Ethics*, the only other time Empedocles is mentioned is in the context of Book VII. Here Aristotle explicitly critiques the Socratic thesis that “no one acts contrary to what is best while supposing that he is so acting” (1145b26–27). In this discussion, Aristotle notes that a person who knows the words of something, but is ignorant of what they mean, “merely speaks, as a drunk man states the sayings of Empedocles” (1147b12–13). It may be that Aristotle is suggesting that while Socrates knows the sayings of Empedocles, he fails to understand them. Of course, as we've seen, in the *Lysis* Socrates himself raises the possibility that he does not fully understand the saying “like aims at like.” Of the possibility that friendship exists between those who are alike, he states, “Then do you also happen to have come across the writings of the wisest ones ... namely that what is like is always necessarily a friend to its like? And they, I suppose, are the ones who converse and write about nature and the whole.” Socrates goes on to say that these “wisest ones” may “speak well ... only we don't understand them” (*Lys.* 214bff). It was noted above, that Plato suggests that Socrates' understanding of friendship is deficient due to his failure to understand the writings of “the wise” (οἱ σοφοί), who inquire into nature and the whole. As Aristotle's discussion of friendship will show, it is precisely this third definition espoused by Empedocles that is capable of elevating friendship from a relationship based on mere necessity to one in which two friends love one another on account of each other's goodness.

<sup>67</sup> Aristotle may also be subtly critiquing Socrates' inquiry into friendship by characterizing these possible definitions of friendship as “perplexing questions bound up with matters of nature.” As noted above, Aristotle was

As we shall see, however, the “distinctively human” approach that Aristotle adopts is very much bound up with nature. In fact, throughout his discussion of friendship Aristotle will on several occasions lapse into a discussion of nature almost as if to remind his audience of friendship’s connection to nature. In this way, Aristotle can be seen to be building on the framework established in the *Lysis*.

To see how Aristotle responds to the problems raised in the *Lysis*, it will be useful briefly to recap the difficulties Socrates encounters in his attempt to define friendship. It will be recalled that Socrates first raises the problem of reciprocity. While it seems natural that if friendship is to exist between two people, they need to love one another, Socrates notes that it is common to speak of lovers of wine, lovers of gymnastics, or lovers of wisdom, objects that are all incapable of reciprocating love. However, accepting that friendship need not be reciprocal would result in the absurd conclusion that those who do not reciprocate love, or even hate their lover, are nevertheless friends of their lover. Taking a different tack, Socrates suggests that perhaps the wise—those who inquire into nature and the whole—are correct in holding that “like is always necessarily a friend to its like” (*Lys.* 214b5). The difficulty posed by this definition is twofold. First, Socrates argues that it is impossible for the base to be friends. Second, even if it is assumed that the wise are talking only about the good, Socrates notes that these would not be useful to one another. To the extent that the good are sufficient in themselves, they will not be in want of anything and, therefore, will not have any desire for their friend. Finding this definition inadequate, Socrates takes another approach and suggests that perhaps those who are opposite

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aware that Socrates “neglect[ed] the world of nature as a whole but [sought] the universal in ... ethical matters” (*Meta.*, 987b1–3).

and wholly unlike are friends with each other. This suggestion immediately runs into the difficulty that hatred is the opposite of friendship. Finally, Socrates raises the possibility that the neutral (those who are neither good nor bad) are friends with the good. As the dialogue continues, it becomes clear that this definition would destroy the phenomenon of friendship, because it would mean that, in comparison with *the* good (which Socrates terms the “first friend”), all one’s friends would simply be phantom friends.

Aristotle begins by critiquing the notion that there would be a single *form* of friendship. According to Aristotle, there are three forms of friendship, which correspond to the three things that are loveable: the good, the pleasant, and the useful.<sup>68</sup> Almost immediately, Aristotle points to a difficulty: in their love of what is good, “is it the good, then, that people love or is it the good for themselves?” (1155b22–23). This question recalls Aristotle’s discussion of Plato’s theory of the forms in Book I, in which he investigates whether the good is one and universal, or whether the good differs for different entities. In Book I, Aristotle does not fully resolve this question, but he does note that the way in which various things are said to be good are in some way *similar* to one another. In the present discussion of friendship, Aristotle again suggests that both are possible (i.e., that the good is both universal and differs for various objects or people). He writes, “It seems that each person loves what is good for himself and that, while in an unqualified sense the good is what is lovable, what is lovable to each is what is good for each” (1155b23–25).<sup>69</sup> Aristotle suggests that different people are by nature directed toward different

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<sup>68</sup> Note that in Book II the noble is something that is an object of choice.

<sup>69</sup> In contrast to my interpretation, Lorraine Pangle argues that Aristotle is “not making any claim that the simply good is good in some absolute way, wholly apart from its being good or pleasant *for* something, if only for itself.” As evidence, she points to the fact that Aristotle includes the pleasant in this discussion, and notes that “it would be



things; while the good may be unqualified and universal, the way in which people pursue the good may be different or unique.

After raising the distinction between the universal good and that which is good for each individual—a distinction that will inform nearly the entirety of the rest of his discussion on friendship in Book VIII—Aristotle goes on to address the difficulties associated with friendship that Socrates raises in the *Lysis*. First, Aristotle emphasizes the reciprocal nature of friendship. He notes that friendship must involve reciprocated goodwill—that is, one must wish for good things for one’s friend, for his own sake. Explicitly alluding to Socrates’ objection that one can be a friend to inanimate objects, Aristotle states, “It is perhaps laughable to wish for good things for the wine, but, if anything, one wishes that it be preserved so that one may have it” (1155b29–30).<sup>70</sup> Friendship, Aristotle suggests, must be between people. However, goodwill alone is not enough;<sup>71</sup> rather, each friend must also be aware of the other’s existence.<sup>72</sup> People might well feel goodwill for another they have not met but suppose is decent. It would be absurd, Aristotle

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absurd to speak of something as being intrinsically pleasant if it were not pleasant for anyone.” *Aristotle on Friendship*, 38. However, Aristotle discusses the intrinsically pleasant in Book VII of the *Ethics*. In Book VII, Aristotle notes that the existence of the gods is intrinsically pleasant. Specifically, he writes, “Yet the same thing is not always pleasant on account of our nature’s not being simple. Rather, something else is present in us as well (hence we are subject to destruction) such that when the one part acts, this is contrary to nature with respect to the other nature; and when both are equally balanced, the action performed seems to be neither painful nor pleasant. For if someone’s nature were simple, the same actions would always be most pleasant. Hence the god always enjoys a pleasure that is one and simple, for there is an activity not only of motion but also of motionlessness, and pleasure resides more in rest than in motion” (1154b21–28). I suggest that in the same way that the intrinsically pleasant is available only to the gods, so the intrinsically good is also available only to the gods.

<sup>70</sup> Laughter is, of course, not a convincing form of refutation (cf. *Gor.* 473e1–3). This suggests that Aristotle’s full explanation regarding the role that reciprocity plays in friendship has yet to be revealed.

<sup>71</sup> See above at chapter 2 n. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Becoming aware of another’s existence will prove to be major theme in Book IX, in which Aristotle reveals how one becomes a friend to another. See below at pp. 214–217.

argues, to suggest such people are friends without knowing of each other's existence. Again, Aristotle emphasizes the phenomenological and, thus, human aspect of friendship. Based on these characteristics, Aristotle provides the following description of friendship: "Friends must, therefore, have goodwill toward each other and not go unnoticed in their wishing for the good things for the other, on account of some one of the [lovable] things mentioned" (1156a3–5).

Based on this definition, Aristotle turns in chapter three to distinguish the three forms of friendship from one another. The first two types of friendship—friendships of utility and pleasure—exist only on the basis of some advantage or pleasure that each individual comes to have from the friendship. The parties to these two types of friendship "do not love each other in themselves but only insofar as they come to have something good from the other" (1156a10–13). As a result, once the purpose for which the friendship was entered into ends, these types of friendship are prone to dissolve. In contrast, friendships between "those who are good and alike in point of virtue" love each other on account of *who* they are (1156b7–8). Aristotle writes that these friendships are "stable," since the underlying basis for the friendship, virtue, is a stable thing (1156b12–13). Thus, in contrast to Socrates, who held that all friendships are based on a lack, Aristotle holds that there is a self-sufficient friendship based on an appreciation of the good characteristics of each party to the friendship. The good, or those who are virtuous, love one another solely for the other's sake, insofar as he is good.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Aristotle is quick to add that "friendships of this sort are likely to be rare, since people of this sort are few. Further, there is also need of the passage of time and the habits formed by living together" (1156b25–26). He concludes this chapter with what may be taken as a subtle critique of Socrates' and Callicles' declaration of friendship in the *Gorgias* (cf. *Gor.* 485e3; 485c1; 499c2–5): "Those who swiftly make proofs of friendship to each other wish to be friends but are not such unless they are also loveable and know this about each other. For a wish for friendship arises swiftly, but friendship itself does not" (*NE* 1156b30–33).

Of course, while Aristotle arrives at the precise opposite conclusion of Socrates, he does not yet explain how he resolves the fundamental obstacle to his definition of friendship. Specifically, why would two good individuals be friends to each other if they are both “good and alike in point of virtue”? What benefit could they provide one another? Or, as Socrates asserts, “How ... will those who are good be at all friends to the good, since neither do they long for each other when absent—for even apart they are sufficient for themselves—nor do they have any use for each other when present?” (*Lys.*, 215b). Why would these two virtuous individuals desire each other’s company? Indeed, Aristotle simply asserts that good people are both beneficial and pleasant to one another, without explaining the basis for this assertion.

It has already been noted in the discussion on magnanimity above that Aristotle believes those who are magnanimous in the mold of Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax to be well-suited for friendship with those who are magnanimous in the manner of Lysander and Socrates. The members of the two groups are different from each another, yet they are all self-sufficient and good with respect to their own character or virtue. Moreover, if the second type of magnanimity is at root philosophic, then the wisdom it evinces would be well-suited to complement the courage that is emblematic of the first type of magnanimity. If these two types of magnanimous men were capable of amicably ruling together, wisdom and power would coalesce in a way that benefits the entire political community. However, as Aristotle subtly indicates in the *Posterior Analytics*, these magnanimous men are not likely to recognize each other’s virtues. As noted above, these magnanimous men suffer from the tragic flaw of mistaking their own virtue for the whole of virtue. Furthermore, we have seen that these two types of magnanimous men stand *above* the standards of the city and, as a result, a utilitarian appeal to the city’s well-being is

unlikely to have the persuasive effect necessary to lead them to recognize each other's virtue or claim to rule. Thus, while the two types of magnanimous men may be well-suited to become friends with one another, it seems that they have little inclination to do so.

In chapters four through six of Book VIII, Aristotle presents a somewhat cryptic argument to explain why it is nonetheless in their *own* interest for these magnanimous individuals to recognize each other's virtue and claim to rule. In chapter four, Aristotle sets up the basis that will undergird his explanation as to what benefit friendship holds out for magnanimous, self-sufficient men. He begins by reasserting that friendships that are complete are both pleasant and useful as well. However, as he continues, Aristotle begins consistently to elevate friendships of pleasure, such that the good and the pleasant turn out to be nearly indistinguishable from one another. Aristotle begins by noting that "among those who seek pleasure or utility, friendships endure especially whenever each attains the same thing from the other—for example, pleasure—and not only this but whenever it comes from the same type, as in, for example, those who are witty" (1157a4–6). By way of this example, Aristotle points to the overlap between the good (virtue) and the pleasant, as wit was identified as one of the social virtues articulated in Book IV. He immediately contrasts this example with the relationship of lover and beloved, who do not receive pleasure from the same thing: the lover is "pleased by seeing the beloved, the beloved [is pleased] by being attended to by his lover" (1157a6–8). While Aristotle initially seems to disparage this type of relationship by stating that it sometimes fades "when the bloom of youth fades" (1157a8), he continues by noting that these types of friendships can become stable if, through the time spent living together, they begin to develop

affection for one another's character (1157a10–12). Thus, the time spent together can cause two lovers to delight in one another's character.

Turning to complete friendships, Aristotle underscores the way that erotic friendships can evolve into friendships of virtue by pointing to the way in which the time spent together stabilizes friendship. He writes, "Only the friendship of the good is secure against slander, for it is not easy to trust anyone when it comes to slander about someone who has been tested by oneself over a long time" (1157a21–22). He then concludes that only friendships based on the good are complete friendships, and that the other two friendships are friendships "only by way of a resemblance" (1157a32). However, Aristotle follows this up by noting that "what is pleasant is a good for the lovers of pleasure" (1157a33). Here Aristotle seems almost unequivocally to suggest that pleasure and the good are, for some, the same.

Why does Aristotle elevate friendships of pleasure, such that they become nearly identical with friendships of the good? The answer becomes apparent in chapter five, where Aristotle subtly reveals his solution to the difficulty that Socrates encounters in the *Lysis*: what would cause those who are good and self-sufficient to desire another? Aristotle begins chapter five by noting that "just as in the virtues, so too in friendship: some people are spoken of as good in reference to the characteristic they possess, others as good in reference to the activity they engage in" (1157b5–7).<sup>74</sup> Aristotle informs us that virtue or goodness expresses itself in

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<sup>74</sup> This language mirrors Aristotle's discussion of what it is that happiness consists of in Book I. In Book I Aristotle writes, "The argument, then, is in harmony with those who say that [happiness] is virtue or a certain virtue, for the activity in accord with virtue belongs to virtue. But perhaps it makes no small difference whether one supposes the best thing to reside in possession or use, that is, in a characteristic or an activity" (*NE* 1098b30–33). This, of course, sets up the fundamental distinction between the moral virtues and the intellectual virtues that undergirds much of the rest of the treatise.

different ways. Some are good in reference to their virtuous characters (i.e., their possession of moral virtues), while others are good in reference to their activity (i.e., their practice of philosophy). As we shall see, this differentiation in goodness provides the basis for friendship in a way that avoids the difficulty encountered by Socrates in the *Lysis*.

After these initial steps towards a solution to Socrates' dilemma, Aristotle makes a small detour, reiterating what he had stated previously, namely, that living together is important to friendship. Those who live together, he states, "delight in and provide good things to one another" (1157b8). Again, pleasure comes to the fore as an important aspect of friendship. He continues, noting that if friends remain separated for an extended period of time, the friendship itself can be destroyed. Thus, Aristotle suggests that even among those who are good, friendship cannot exist and be maintained on the basis of the good alone. Friendship, Aristotle suggests, needs the leavening effect of pleasure. Turning to the elderly's indisposition to form friendships, this point is made even more starkly. The elderly and the sour, he states, are unlikely to form friendships, "for there is little that is pleasant in them" (1157b14–15). He concludes, "Nature appears to avoid most of all what is painful and to aim at what is pleasant" (1157b17). With this short statement, Aristotle both reminds the reader of friendship's connection to nature (or that friendship is natural), and that the basis for friendship cannot be the good alone, but that pleasure is a necessary component of friendship—perhaps even more so than the good.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> At this point, Aristotle is responding also to Socrates' ambiguity in the *Gorgias* regarding the relationship between the good and the pleasant. (Cf. pp 94–98.) While Aristotle does not come to a definitive conclusion here, his discussion anticipates his fuller discussion of the difficulty in Book X.

After having again emphasized the importance of pleasure, Aristotle directly touches upon the Socratic dilemma. He restates the dilemma as follows:

The friendship of those who are good, then, is friendship most of all, just as has been said many times. For what is good *or pleasant* in an unqualified sense seems to be lovable and choiceworthy, whereas what is good *or pleasant* to each individual seems to be such only to that person. But a good person is lovable and choiceworthy to a good person on both accounts. (1157b25–29; emphasis added).

Aristotle here restates Socrates' question of how it can be that someone who is good or pleasant in an unqualified sense can also be good or pleasant only for a certain individual. Would it not instead be the case that the good in the unqualified sense be good for all good individuals?

Aristotle's solution to the dilemma is best understood against the backdrop of the introductory statement of Chapter five: "Some people are spoken of as good in reference to the characteristic they possess, others as good in reference to the activity they engage in" (1157b5–7). Aristotle seems to suggest here that in a friendship of the good, each individual is unqualifiedly good—and, we may add in light of the subsequent discussion, such individuals are also pleasant—and is therefore loveable and choiceworthy. While it is true that in a friendship based on the good, both parties to the friendship are unqualifiedly good and pleasant, each party is also different from the other in some way—some being good in character, others in philosophic activity. Each party can therefore be good and pleasant specifically for the other party to the friendship. In this way, Aristotle is able to resolve the Socratic dilemma of why those who are good and self-sufficient would ever treasure or love another.

The sort of individuals that Aristotle has in mind as being both good unqualifiedly and good for the other party to the relationship seems to be those who best exemplify the moral virtues and those who practice the intellectual virtues. This interpretation is bolstered by the following paragraph, where Aristotle delineates the role played by each party in a friendship based on the good. He writes, “Friendly affection is also like a passion, whereas friendship is like a characteristic: friendly affection exists no less toward inanimate things, whereas people *reciprocate* love as a matter of choice, and choice stems from one’s characteristic” (1157b28–32). In this statement, Aristotle indicates that each party will have a different role. The fact that friendly affection is akin to a passion that one may have towards an inanimate object is meant to recall the philosopher’s passionate love of wisdom.<sup>76</sup> In this way, Aristotle suggests that one party to the friendship acts as the passionate philosopher.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, the party who reciprocates love does so as a matter of choice, which stems from a characteristic.<sup>78</sup> Aristotle’s terminology here is meant to bring to mind the moral virtues, which are characteristics marked by choice. Aristotle indicates that a friendship based on the good involves an exchange of pleasure or delight between the practitioner of the intellectual virtues and the practitioner of the moral virtues.

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. *NE* 1155b25–30; *Lys.* 212d6–10.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle notes, however, that “people also wish for good things for those who are loved, for the sake of the loved ones themselves, not in reference to a passion but in accord with a characteristic” (1157b32–34). This suggests that even the “active” partner loves not solely in an egotistical way ordered solely towards pleasure, but also for the sake of the other, in so far as the other is good.

<sup>78</sup> At this point Aristotle finally answers the Socratic inquiry regarding the reciprocity of friendship. See above at pp. 36–37.



It seems therefore, that in a friendship based on the good, one party to the friendship will have a *passionate* love for his friend similar to that which a philosopher has for wisdom, while the other party will reciprocate love based on his characteristic. In this succinct statement on friendship, Aristotle points toward a resolution to the Socratic dilemma concerning friendship. Each party to the friendship brings a specific good or pleasure to the relationship that is both good in and of itself and is also good or pleasant in some *specific* way for the other party. He concludes, “Each [party], then, both loves what is good for himself and repays in equal measure what they wish for the other and what is pleasant. For it is said, ‘friendship is equality.’”<sup>79</sup>

In the following chapter (Chapter 6), Aristotle discusses the political implications of this type of friendship. Regarding the friendships of “people in positions of authority,” he states the following:

It has been said that the serious person is at once pleasant and useful; yet such a person does not become a friend to someone who exceeds him [in power], unless [the person in power] is also exceeded [by the serious person] in virtue. But if this does not occur, [the serious person] is not rendered equal [to the person of greater power], since he is exceeded in the relevant proportion. (1158a33–37).

Aristotle indicates that the powerful, owing to their superiority in power, are unlikely to be friends with those who are “serious.” In fact, it is only when the serious person exceeds the

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<sup>79</sup> This conclusion points to a further difficulty: the relative inequality of the virtues. The virtue of wisdom (i.e., philosophic virtue) is superior to that of prudence and the moral virtues (i.e., political virtue) (cf. 1143b18–1145a11; for further discussion regarding the superiority of wisdom over prudence, see Richard Bodéüs, “The Gods as Objects of Imitation,” in *Aristotle and the Theology of Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Garrett (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 168–79. If “friendship is equality,” as Aristotle states, how could the wise philosopher and the prudent statesman befriend one another? The answer is hinted at in the following chapter. Aristotle will state that superiority in a point of power can render its practitioner equal to a serious person who exceeds him in virtue (1158a35).

person in power in point of virtue that a friendship may develop, as the differential in virtue is able to compensate for the power differential between the two parties. Again, Aristotle points toward a solution to the fundamental political problem: how power and wisdom might coincide to realize the best regime possible. Those who are politically powerful ought to befriend those who are “serious.” The magnanimity of an Alcibiades requires the complementary magnanimity of a Socrates. Of course, Aristotle knows that Alcibiades spurned Socrates’ advice and that the powerful are unlikely to befriend the wise. As a result, Aristotle concludes this brief reveal of the political implications of his discussion of friendship with the observation that “[those in positions of authority] are not much accustomed to becoming these sorts [of friends to the virtuous]” (1158b38–39).

In his discussion of friendship, Aristotle has made clear that magnanimous men who are politically powerful, well-born, and courageous are well-suited for friendship with philosophically magnanimous men who, despite their low-born status, have great benefits to offer the city. Aristotle suggests that the fundamental political problem identified by Socrates and Plato—how to ensure the coincidence of power and wisdom—can potentially be resolved by the phenomenon of friendship. Through an appreciation of one another’s virtue, two individuals who are self-sufficient and good in their own nature can together ensure the existence of the best possible regime. However, not a few difficulties remain. First, while Aristotle has hinted that pleasure is that which causes the one individual of such a friendship to appreciate the good qualities of the other, he has not yet indicated how or why this mutual exchange of pleasure will take place. In fact, the most he has indicated is that those in positions of authority are *not* much accustomed to becoming friends of the virtuous. It is not until Book IX, in which Aristotle

finally tackles the fundamental political problem regarding the coincidence of wisdom and power, that he explicates *how* this mutual exchange of pleasure will occur.

## CHAPTER FOUR. THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

In the previous chapter I noted that Aristotle hints that the fundamental problem of politics—attaining the coincidence of power and wisdom—may be capable of resolution through the medium of friendship. Specifically, by way of friendship, the philosopher can impact the policies of those in power. However, I noted that while Aristotle hints that friendship is a solution to the difficulty of attaining the coincidence of power and wisdom, he states quite frankly that those in power are not disposed to become friends with serious or worthy people. The goal of Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to show how such individuals may become friends with serious people. I will argue that it is through a discussion of the giving and receiving of benefits, that Aristotle explains how this friendship may come about.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle's intention in taking up the discussion of how those in power may become friends with the philosopher is indicated in the first sentence of Book IX, which states that its subject matter is heterogeneous friendships, in which the goal of each party is different.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In discussing the giving and receiving of benefits, Aristotle is, of course, picking up on a theme that he had earlier touched upon in his depiction of the magnanimous man. In Book IV, Aristotle had noted the following about the magnanimous man's disposition towards the giving and receiving of benefits: "He is also the sort to benefit others but is ashamed to receive a benefaction; for the former is a mark of one who is superior, the latter of one who is inferior. He is disposed to return a benefaction with a greater one, since in this way the person who took the initiative [with the original benefaction] will owe him in addition and will have also fared well thereby" (1124b9–13). The magnanimous man's attitude toward the giving and receiving of benefits is rooted in a concern with his own superiority. This attitude initially appears to be at odds with Aristotle's understanding of friendship, which entails an appreciation of the other for his own sake. Book IX of the *Ethics* should be read as Aristotle's attempt to reconcile the magnanimous man's concern with his own superiority with the description of friendship in Book VIII.

<sup>2</sup> This distinction is made clear both by the concluding sentence of book VIII and by the introductory phrase of Book IX. Book VIII concludes: "Let what concerns these matters, then, be spoken of to this extent" (1163b28). "These matters" refers to "homogeneous friendships," or friendships in which both parties to the friendship seek the same goal—for example, usefulness or pleasure. The opening line of Book IX reiterates the intention to leave homogeneous relationships behind: "In all heterogeneous friendships, what is proportional equalizes and preserves

Aristotle begins by providing an example of a political or market friendship between different craftsmen.<sup>3</sup> This type of friendship is easily equalized through the medium of commerce, as each party exchanges his wares according to their value, and Aristotle has discussed this type of friendship at length in Book V in connection with justice.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the following example that Aristotle provides is a decidedly non-political friendship, which is more difficult to equalize and, as a result, is susceptible to dissolution: the erotic friendship consisting of a lover and beloved who enter into the relationship for different purposes. Aristotle notes that such relationships will dissolve “when the lover loves the beloved for the pleasure involved, [while] the beloved his lover for his usefulness to him, and when both parties do not have what each wants” (1164a6–10). Because neither party to the relationship receives what it desires, the relationship ends.

By introducing the example of a political or market friendship that is easily equalized alongside a decidedly non-political relationship that is difficult to equalize, Aristotle silently

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the friendship” (1163b33–34). Thus, broadly construed, the subject matter of Book IX is that of heterogeneous friendships, or friendships in which each party seeks a different goal.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Pakaluk notes that this friendship is, strictly speaking, a homogeneous friendship, as both parties seek what is useful. He asserts that Aristotle likely introduces this example by way of contrast with the types of friendship that are to follow. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 149.

<sup>4</sup> In Book V Aristotle notes that the exchange of wares occurs due to the prompting of necessity. Necessity, he argues, prompts people to come together in order to undertake exchange. As a result, an object’s worth is measured by necessity, and money acts as the medium of exchange that is capable of equalizing disparate things that have different value (1133a25–b18). Nevertheless, Aristotle states—almost in passing—that some things have their basis in something other than necessity and are incapable of being equalized in this way: “Now in truth, it is impossible for things that differ greatly from one another to become commensurable, but it is possible, to a sufficient degree, in relation to need” (1133b19–2). This may suggest that necessity does not hold *all* things together; some relationships have their basis in something other than necessity and, as such, are beyond being made commensurable via the virtue of justice. In this way, Book V’s discussion of justice points toward Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in Books VIII and IX.

raises the question of whether relationships may exist that are both political *and* difficult to equalize. Are some political relationships beyond the realm of proportional justice? The answer, it turns out, is yes. The relationship between those who are in power and those who are wise—that is, the relationship between those with political ambitions and those who are philosophically inclined—is a relationship that is political in nature and is beyond proportional justice.

That Aristotle has this relationship in mind is borne out by his subsequent discussion concerning the giving and receiving of benefits. He uses an erotic relationship, in which neither party receives what it wishes, as a springboard to launch into the question of who is to decide the worth of what is given in a friendship. Ought the person who “takes the initiative in giving” assess the gift’s worth, or should it be “the one who is first in receiving” the gift? (1164a23–24). Aristotle answers that “he who takes the initiative in giving appears to entrust this assessment to the receiver, which is in fact what they assert Protagoras used to do” (1164a24–25). Aristotle’s example of Protagoras is revealing and introduces the subject matter that will silently come to dominate the rest of Book IX. Protagoras, of course, was the philosopher who claimed to have the unique ability to teach men “the political art” and how to “make men good citizens” (*Prot.* 319a4). By using Protagoras as an example, Aristotle draws attention to the classic theme of the relationship between politics and philosophy, a relationship that is both political and difficult to equalize.

Protagoras, asserts Aristotle, would “bid the learner to estimate how much he held [his teachings] to be worth knowing, and that is the amount he used to take” (1164a25–27). In describing Protagoras’s conduct, Aristotle distinguishes him from the Sophists, “who take money in advance and then do nothing of what they claimed, because their promises were excessive”

(1164a27–31). While the Sophists are rightly accused by those with whom they contract for failing to deliver what they promised, those who take the initiative in giving advice for the benefit of their partner “do not give cause for accusation” and may instead be practicing the highest type of friendship (1164b34–35).<sup>5</sup> Thus, Aristotle implies that the philosopher who advises with the intention of benefitting the one who receives the advice—perhaps by teaching him “the political art” or by making him a “good citizen”—may, in fact, be practicing the highest form of friendship (1164a35-36).

While the introduction to Book IX strongly suggests that Aristotle intends this section of the *Ethics* to cover the friendship between the magnanimous philosopher and the magnanimous statesman, a number of obstacles prevent the easy attainment of this type of friendship. First, as noted above, Aristotle indicates that those in power are not likely to become friends with those who are serious. In fact, those who are in power may have had to engage in decidedly nefarious tactics to attain their position and, as a result, cannot be described as virtuous or good. Thus, it can fairly be asked: what would dispose the philosopher to dispense advice to such a person? As will be made clear, Aristotle will first seek to appeal to the philosopher by way of a protreptic address to prepare him for the potentially difficult character of the politician. Second, if the friendship between these two magnanimous individuals is a friendship based on the good, Aristotle will have to make clear *how* the philosopher will turn the politician toward virtue, such that they may appreciate and take pleasure in each other’s good qualities. Third, even if Aristotle’s protreptic address is capable of preparing the philosopher for the politician’s prickly

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<sup>5</sup> While Aristotle’s evaluation of Protagoras’s art is beyond the scope of this project, his distinction between Protagoras and those whom he terms the “Sophists” is striking.

personality, it remains to be seen what benefit these magnanimous individuals receive from their friendship with one another. If the magnanimous man is “incapable of living with a view to another” (1124b31 – 1125a1), as Aristotle states in Book IV, why would the magnanimous statesman and the magnanimous philosopher enter into friendship with one another? As I hope to make clear, Aristotle addresses each of these issues in turn, explaining how and why the friendship of the philosopher and the politician can be attained, thereby securing the coincidence of wisdom and power in the establishment or direction of the regime.

### **Taming the Philosopher**

Aristotle’s first task in bringing about a friendship between the philosopher and those who are or aspire to be politically powerful is to inculcate a friendly disposition in the philosopher toward those who are or who have the ambition to be statesmen. Through a discussion concerning the giving and receiving of benefits, Aristotle seeks to tame the philosopher’s hubristic demeanor and show him the advantages of friendship. After having introduced the theme of the philosopher’s relation to the political realm by way of the example of Protagoras, Aristotle suggests that the philosopher who provides political advice with the intention of conferring a benefit may deserve some sort of repayment from the one who receives the advice. Of course, as noted in the previous chapter, in friendships based on the good, the repayment is what one would “wish for the other and what is pleasant,” and this repayment ought to aim to equal the benefit that was bestowed (1157b35–1158a1). The issue of repayment is a difficult one, as it is not evident what could possibly count as adequate repayment for the benefit of learning “the political



art” and becoming a “good citizen.” It would perhaps not be surprising that the philosopher, in recognition of the value of his benefit, might feel slighted either if the benefit he bestows remains unrecognized, or if the repayment does not appear to be adequate.

The issue of repayment is complex, and Aristotle remains—perhaps purposefully—vague in discussing the issue. Initially, he notes that the gift of philosophy is invaluable, and as such the repayment cannot be satisfied by either money or honor, but instead “whatever it is possible to repay would be sufficient” (1164b3–5). However, Aristotle continues, noting that “if the giver receives as much as the recipient is benefited (or however much in return the recipient would have given in choosing the pleasure involved), the giver will have received what was merited from the recipient” (1164b10–13). The meaning of this somewhat abstruse explanation of repayment will later be revealed,<sup>6</sup> but at present it suffices to note that Aristotle suggests that repayment depends, in part, on the efficacy of the philosophical advice rendered.

Before Aristotle expounds on what may count as adequate repayment, he seeks to prepare the philosopher for the possibility that those in power may not be receptive or appreciative of his advice. In order to forestall the sullen and bitterly ironic reaction of a philosopher who, in response to having his advice rejected, retreats to his own private realm to criticize the political community, Aristotle seeks to ground the philosopher in his community, or tame his hubristic demeanor.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, he uses a number of tools to accomplish this task. First, he

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<sup>6</sup> See below at note 49 and accompanying text.

<sup>7</sup> In this way, Aristotle, like Aristophanes, is critical of philosophers who have their heads in the clouds, unaware that they have obligations to their political community. For an analysis of Aristophanes’ criticism of Socrates in this regard, see Mary Nichols, *Socrates and the Political Community: An Ancient Debate* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1–28.

indicates that the value the philosopher places on his advice may be mistaken; that is, the philosopher may not have an accurate understanding of his worth, or the worth of his advice.<sup>8</sup> Second, he reminds the philosopher that those in power and the political community more generally have certain claims that ought to be taken seriously. Last, he appeals to the philosopher's superiority, entreating him to be patient with those who, due to their limited capabilities, are unable to recognize either the benefits of the advice or the good character of the one who bestows the advice.

Aristotle begins his protreptic approach at the end of chapter one by unequivocally stating that in the absence of an express agreement of the gift's worth, the one who receives the gift—or advice—ought to assess its worth in determining repayment. The rationale, according to Aristotle, is that “many things are not valued equally by those who possess them and by those who wish to receive them, since *what is one's own* and what one gives *appears* to everyone to be worth a great deal” (1164b17–19; emphasis added). The reference to “one's own” is the second of two references in the totality of the *Ethics* in which “one's own” is contrasted with philosophy or the truth. The first reference occurs in Book I, where Aristotle begins his famous critique of Plato's theory of the forms. Prefacing his critique, Aristotle notes that it will be a difficult undertaking “because the men who introduced the forms are [friends]” (1096a13–14). He continues, however, stating that for philosophers in particular, it may be necessary to “do away with even one's own things,” in order to preserve the truth (1096a14–16). Thus, while gaining a truthful account of things may be difficult, Aristotle leaves us with the impression that such an

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<sup>8</sup> According to Aristotle's depiction of magnanimity in Book IV of the *Ethics*, to the extent that a philosopher overvalues his self-worth he would fail to be magnanimous. Rather than aiming at and achieving the mean with regard to self-worth, such a philosopher would be guilty of the vice of vanity (cf. 1123b8–9).

account of things is possible. The second reference to “one’s own,” which occurs here in Book IX, seems to pull back the on the idea that one will ever be able to achieve a full truthful account of things. Indeed, the fact that the philosopher ought to entrust the assessment of the worth of his advice to the recipient indicates that even the philosopher is incapable of attaining complete objectivity and may have a preference for what is “one’s own,” or for his own teaching.<sup>9</sup> Ever so subtly, Aristotle suggests that the philosopher may not be impartial as to the worth of his teaching, and that the love of “one’s own” may cloud his assessment of the worth of his teaching.

In chapter two, Aristotle continues his protreptic approach by reminding the philosopher of what he owes the political realm. He does so by raising the question of what obligation one has to one’s father. Ought one “render everything to one’s father and obey him in everything?” (1164b22). The claims of the ancestral are raised in light of the preceding discussion regarding the advice rendered by the philosopher—that is, the philosopher and his penchant for innovation are weighed against the claims of established customs. Similar political questions are raised in conjunction with the claim of the ancestral: must one “serve a friend more than a serious man?” and “must one repay a favor to a benefactor rather than give away something to a comrade?”

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<sup>9</sup> The difference in approach may be due to the audience Aristotle is addressing. In the first portion of the *Ethics* Aristotle is directing his writing primarily to the politically inclined gentlemen (καλοικάγαθοι), who may initially be suspicious of philosophy. Thus, in order to convince the καλοσκάγαθος to give up what is “his own,” Aristotle needs to hold out the possibility of an “objective account” of things. In contrast, in the second half of the *Ethics*, Aristotle undertakes a “another beginning” (1145a15) and seems to be directing his writing to the philosopher. The philosopher, of course, does not need to be reminded of the possibility of obtaining an “objective view” of things, but instead needs to be reminded that he may not have such an objective view of things. For a discussion concerning Aristotle’s intended audience, see Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics*, as well as Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics*. While Bodéüs contends that Aristotle’s primary audience is the lawgiver, whom he hopes to serve by “providing him knowledge of the best political or constitutional rules” (p. 39), Tessitore remarks that Aristotle has a dual audience, comprising of both “non-philosophers and potential philosophers” (p. 20). My own account builds on insights from both Bodéüs and Tessitore but differs in that I view Aristotle’s primary audience to consist of both statesmen/legislators and philosophers.

(1164b26–28). Each of these questions raises the issue of how one ought to be disposed towards the claims of “one’s own” and towards the claims of philosophic truth.

In dealing with these questions, Aristotle initially provides an answer that would not shock his more philosophically inclined readers:

That someone ought not to give back everything to the same person is not unclear; nor is it unclear that, for the most part, he must repay good deeds more than gratify his comrades, just as a person must pay back a loan to someone he owes, more than he must give away something to a comrade. (1164b30–34).

This answer provides the philosophically inclined reader with precisely what he would expect: not everything is owed to the ancestral; the good ought to take priority over one’s comrades; and the repayment of a loan (i.e., repayment for the philosophical advice one has received) ought to come before one undertakes to give any gift to one’s comrades. No matter how axiomatic this answer may seem to the philosopher, Aristotle immediately calls it into question. Perhaps, suggests Aristotle, “not even this is always so” (1164b34). What follows is a somewhat cryptic example regarding ransoms. Ought a person who has been ransomed from pirates pay in return the ransom to his ransomer? Aristotle indicates that while the general rule holds that an obligation is incurred, the obligation is relieved under certain circumstances. For example, if a person owes his ransomer money while at the same time his father is being held ransom, he ought to ransom his father first (1164b3b–1165a3). Through this example, Aristotle elevates the claim of the ancestral and suggests that the philosopher’s axiomatic preference for the good over the ancestral may not always be warranted.

In addition, Aristotle seeks to remind the philosopher of his superior position relative to those to whom he gives advice. He writes, “Sometimes the repaying of a previous service is not even equal [or fair]—when someone benefits a person he *knows* to be serious, but the repayment is to one whom the serious person *supposes* to be corrupt” (1165a4–7; square brackets original; emphasis added). In this scenario, the service is rendered by a knower (i.e., a philosopher), who has a correct assessment of the recipient’s character, while the recipient (i.e., a statesman)—although, serious—only has an opinion of the philosopher’s character. Through an appeal to the philosopher’s superior knowledge, Aristotle seeks to exhort him to be patient with those to whom he gives advice, as they may be incapable of recognizing either the soundness of the advice, or the philosopher’s character, and may be under the false impression that the philosopher is corrupt.

Only after having called into question the philosopher’s axiomatic preference for the good over the ancestral and after having exhorted the philosopher to be patient with those who lack knowledge, does Aristotle make clear the implications of his teaching. He writes that different relations ought to be accorded different honors. Again, Aristotle places the philosophic and the ancestral in explicit contrast to one another: “Honor too we owe to parents, just as to the gods—though not every honor. For we do not owe the same honor to a father as to a mother; nor, in turn, do we owe them the honor proper to a wise man or general” (1165a24–26). This suggests that the honor due to a wise man (as well as a general, for that matter) is *different* than that which is due to a father. Aristotle raises here the notion that honor may be due to a wise man—i.e., someone who gives advice—but it is only after he has elevated the claims of the ancestral, that the possibility of such honor is mentioned. The chapter concludes by noting that

while a relative assessment of what honor belongs to each relation is easy amongst those “of the same family” or class,<sup>10</sup> such an assessment is difficult when it involves people of different characters (1165a33–34). Nevertheless, Aristotle concludes that “one must not, on this account, give up the attempt but rather make the relevant distinctions, to the extent possible” (1165a34–36). Thus, Aristotle concludes this chapter by remaining coy about what honor is, in fact, owed to the philosopher.<sup>11</sup>

In chapter three, Aristotle continues the theme of the obligations that exist among relations. Having cautiously presented his belief, in the previous chapter, that members of the political community have an obligation to the ancestral, Aristotle now introduces the far more radical contention that the philosopher himself may have certain obligations toward the political community. Perhaps in recognition of the fact that the philosopher will likely have an instinctual aversion to the idea that he has obligations to the political community, Aristotle introduces the topic tentatively. He begins by simply reiterating the relatively uncontroversial assertion that friendships based on what is useful or pleasant tend to dissolve when they no longer serve the purpose for which they were entered. However, the focus soon shifts to the more difficult—and for the philosopher, perhaps, more controversial—question of whether a friendship based on the good can be dissolved if the character of one of the parties undergoes a change: “If someone accepts another person as good, and that other becomes corrupt or seems so, must he still love

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<sup>10</sup> Liddell and Scott note that the word τὰ ὁμογενῆς can mean “of the same race or family.” However, they further note that Aristotle’s usage of the word suggests a broader meaning: “of the same genus” or “of the same kind or general character.” *Greek English Lexicon*, 1223.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle has thus far hinted several times that the philosopher is owed some sort of honor without specifying what that honor is. See 1164b 4–6; 1164b10–14; and 1165a24–26. Aristotle’s coyness on this front stands in marked contrast to Plato’s presentation in the *Apology* of Socrates’ (perhaps facetious) demand that the philosopher be awarded meals in the Prytaneum at public expense. See above at chapter 3 n. 48.

him? Or is it not possible, if indeed not everything is loveable but only the good?” (1165b12–15).

Aristotle has, of course, already prepared his reader for the answer to this question in the previous two chapters by suggesting that the ancestral is loveable. If the good and the ancestral are distinct—as they usually (perhaps always) are—this would imply that the ancestral is loveable *despite* the fact that it is distinct from the good. In this way, Aristotle has tacitly signaled his answer: while the good may be pre-eminently loveable, the philosopher owes something to the ancestral as well. This comes to light most clearly in the hypothetical friendship presented by Aristotle in which one individual stays the same, while the other “greatly surpasses him in virtue” (1165b23). Ought the more virtuous individual treat the one who has remained the same as a friend? Or, alternatively, if an individual comes to a greater awareness of the good and thereby recognizes the flaws and failings of the city in which he was raised, how ought he respond to the city that raised him? Aristotle argues that while friendship may no longer exist in such situations, the philosopher still owes something to his former friend. Rather than altogether dismissing his former friend, “one ought ... to remember the life lived together with him,” and on this basis “render something to those who were once friends” (1165b33–36). Thus, even in the event that the distance becomes so great as to dissolve the friendship, Aristotle nevertheless finds that something is still owed.

Having introduced the possibility of an individual who so surpasses his friend in virtue that the two can no longer remain friends, Aristotle turns, in chapter four, to the question of whether it is possible for such an individual to be a friend to himself. While the question is no doubt provocative, it seems to be a logical development from the previous chapter. If one’s

superiority to those around him is so great that he can no longer remain friends with them, then perhaps such a person can fulfill his desire for friendship by being friend to himself.<sup>12</sup> This topic is introduced by noting that four attributes appear to be most characteristic of friendship: (1) wishing and doing things that are good (or at least appear good) for the sake of the other; (2) wishing that the friend exist and live, for the friend's own sake; (3) going through life together and choosing the same things as the friend; and (4) sharing in life's sufferings and joys (1166a1–10).

Aristotle goes on to state somewhat tersely that these four characteristics can all pertain to oneself. However, his description of the manner in which the second of the four characteristics of friendship applies to oneself—wishing that a friend exist and live—contains a compact discussion of what it means to exist:

He also wishes that he himself live and be preserved, and especially that [part of himself] with which he is prudent. For existence is a good to the serious person, and each wishes for the good things for himself. Yet no one chooses to possess every good by becoming another—as it is, the god possesses the good—but rather by being whatever sort he is; and it would seem that it is the thinking part that each person is or is most of all. (1166a18–23; square brackets original)

A serious person, argues Aristotle, finds his existence to be both desirable and good and, as a result, he will seek to *preserve* his existence. By invoking the notion of preservation, which hinges on the virtue of prudence (φρόνησις), Aristotle is able to focus on man's existence as a

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<sup>12</sup> In Book IV of the *Republic* Socrates contends that the perfectly just man can be a friend to himself: the just man “arranges himself, becomes his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts [of his soul], exactly like three notes in a harmonic scale.... And if there are some other parts in between, he binds them together and becomes entirely one from many.” *Rep.* 443c–e.



mortal entity—that is *as a human being*. No one, he tells us, would choose to possess every good by becoming another. By focusing on prudence, Aristotle argues that we seek that which is good for us *as human beings*, and that only the god is completely self-sufficient and in possession of the universal good. Thus, Aristotle reminds us that even the individual who is pre-eminent in virtue is merely human and, as such, needs to preserve his existence. In the very argument in which the friend is famously declared to be “another self,” Aristotle seeks to tame the philosopher by reminding him of his humanity, and that his virtue, while it may be self-sufficient, is not the *whole* of virtue. In this way, Aristotle reveals to the philosopher that he may in some sense be in need of a friend and, given Aristotle’s discussion in Book VIII concerning the importance of complementarity in friendship, we can surmise that the philosopher’s friend will be an individual whose characteristics complement those of the philosopher. Together, the philosopher and his friend *could*, perhaps, possess the entirety of virtue.

### **Forming a Friend**

Together, chapters three and four point toward a difficulty. On the one hand, chapter three raises the possibility that the philosopher may be so vastly superior to others that he is incapable of friendship with them. On the other hand, chapter four reiterates the philosopher’s limited nature as a human being and strongly suggests that he is nonetheless in some sense in need of a friend. What ought the magnanimous philosopher to do in such a situation? It seems that the only path

forward would be to seek out a *potential* friend, whom one can form, or educate, with a view to virtue, such that he may *become* good and pleasant.<sup>13</sup>

Chapters five and six are devoted to identifying *who* the philosopher ought to become friends with. Aristotle begins chapter five by distinguishing goodwill from friendship proper. While goodwill is similar to friendship, it differs in that it “arises suddenly” and is “without intensity or longing” (1166b34–1167a3). Nevertheless, Aristotle emphasizes that goodwill is a necessary precursor to friendship, and that goodwill, if “prolonged over time and carries over into the habit of living together ... becomes friendship” of the highest kind (1167a13–14). As noted above, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles are described as having goodwill for one another, and yet later in the dialogue, it becomes evident that the initial goodwill they feel toward one another is an insufficient ground for friendship.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Aristotle makes explicit what Plato had implied in the *Gorgias*: goodwill may become the grounds on which a friendship can be started, but friendship itself requires time and trust.

Aristotle concludes chapter five by indicating to whom the philosopher might look in his search for a potential friend. He writes, “On the whole, goodwill arises on account of virtue and a certain decency, whenever someone appears to another as *noble or courageous* or some such thing, just as we said in the case of competitors as well” (1167a18–21; emphasis added). Thus, Aristotle suggests that the philosopher ought to seek out those who appear to be noble or

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<sup>13</sup> The transition from chapter four to chapter five indicates that this may be Aristotle’s intention. At the end of chapter four, after having warned that the base person only seeks to spend time with others so as to escape their own misery, Aristotle tells the reader he must “flee corruption with the utmost effort and attempt to be decent, since in this way he would both be disposed toward himself in a friendly way and become a friend to another” (1166b27–29). In turn, chapter five focuses on good will, which Aristotle defines as “the beginning of friendship” (1167a3).

<sup>14</sup> See above at p. 105.

courageous when looking for a potential friend. The introduction to chapter six further underscores the importance of complementarity in friendship. Aristotle notes that “like-mindedness ... appears to be a mark of friendship” (1167a22). However, he quickly clarifies that this like-mindedness does not pertain to just anything. Indeed, “those who are of like mind concerning the things in the heavens” are not friends (1167a26). Of course, those who concern themselves with “the things in the heavens” are the philosophers. Aristotle indicates that it is not on account of their philosophical agreement that two individuals become friends.<sup>15</sup> Instead, he notes that like-mindedness pertains to matters of common advantage and action. He provides an example, citing how the citizens of Mytilene were like-minded when they resolved to have Pittacus rule. In contrast, “when each person wishes that he himself rule ... there is civil faction” (1167a 30–35). This example is meant to distinguish the like-mindedness that contributes to the common good (each having in mind that the good should rule) from the like-mindedness of multiple self-interested individuals that results in discord. Aristotle is unambiguous in pointing out that the former is a mark of friendship, while the latter is not.<sup>16</sup>

By stressing the complementarity of the partners in a friendship, Aristotle subtly indicates to the reader why Socrates’ search for a definition of friendship in the *Lysis* results in failure. It

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<sup>15</sup> That philosophical agreement is not an essential ingredient for friendship is hinted at already in Book I, in which Aristotle criticizes Plato’s theory of the forms. Aristotle writes that an examination of the universal goods “is arduous, because the men who introduced the forms are dear. But perhaps it might be held to be better, and in fact to be obligatory, at least for the sake of preserving the truth, to do away with one’s own things, especially for those who are philosophers. For although both are dear, it is a pious thing to honor the truth first” (1096a13–16). Aristotle indicates that philosophical agreement does not constitute the grounds of his friendship with Plato.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle’s example also points to a difficulty that will have to be overcome if those who are philosophically magnanimous and are to become friends with the politically magnanimous: how will these two individuals, both of whom believe themselves deserving of the greatest honors, decide who ought to rule? This difficulty is addressed, and a solution provided, in chapter 8 of Book IX. See below at n. 39 and accompanying text.

will be recalled that Socrates had initially interpreted the phrase “like to like,” as requiring identity. In contrast, Aristotle suggests that friendship is not marked by identity, but instead by a like-mindedness that concerns “what is advantageous,” aims at “what has been resolved in common,” and pertains to “matters of action” (1167a26–30). By looking for identity, Socrates’ inquiry was bound to fail.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, interaction between those who seek the exact same benefits or honors is more likely to result in factious disputes than harmony.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle indicates that the final definition of friendship that Socrates puts forward (but fails adequately to pursue) in the *Lysis* is, in fact, the one that is most characteristic of friendship between the good. The highest form of friendship, for Aristotle, is that which exists between those who are similar to one another, yet differ in a point of virtue.

Aristotle’s distinction between goodwill and friendship is important. The notion that goodwill is only *potential* friendship, or friendship that lies idle, suggests that the individual described in chapter five as one who *appears* noble or courageous to the philosopher, has the potential to become friends with the philosopher. Much of the *Ethics* can be read as an attempt by Aristotle to actualize the potentiality of his readers as such noble individuals. No less than four times in the *Ethics* does Aristotle remind his readers that his intention is to make his reader “good” (1094b11; 1095a4–6; 1103b26–30; 1179b1–4). Furthermore, in the introduction to Book II of the *Ethics*, Aristotle states that “none of the moral virtues are present in us by nature, since

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<sup>17</sup> In Book I of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle provides a further subtle critique of Socrates’ interpretation of the phrase “like to like.” He writes that “if we were to follow out the view of Empedocles and interpret it according to its meaning and not to its lispig expression, we should find that friendship is the cause of good things, and strife of bad” (*Meta.* 985a3–6). Aristotle may be implying that Socrates’ interpretation of Empedocles’ view is insufficient.

<sup>18</sup> This raises the question of whether two philosophers could ever be friends. While Aristotle indicates that he and Plato are friends, he seems to be clear that their friendship is not based on their philosophical agreement. See above at n. 15.

nothing that exists by nature is habituated to be other than it is.... [The moral virtues] are instead present in us who are of such a nature as to receive them, and who are completed through habit” (1103a19–26).<sup>19</sup> Thus, Aristotle’s task in the portions of the *Ethics* discussing the moral virtues can, in large measure, be interpreted as that of “forming a friend.”

To comprehend well the manner in which Aristotle’s *Ethics* is an attempt to “form a friend” by actualizing his potential for virtue, it is necessary to turn to Aristotle’s inquiry into the nature of “being” in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle discusses the forces of potentiality (δύναμις) and actuality (ἐνέργεια) in detail. In the first book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle recounts the history of philosophy, or the history of the investigation into the “first causes and the principles of things” (*Meta.* 981b29). He notes that most of the pre-Socratic philosophers believed that “the principles which were of the nature of matter were the only principles of all things” (983b7–8). Aristotle describes this belief as inadequate, as it does not account for the existence of artificial or conventional things. He states, “It is not likely either that fire or earth or any such [material] element should be the reason why things manifest goodness and beauty both in their being and in their coming to be” (984b11–13). Aristotle argues that there needs to be something beyond the simple material elements that accounts for change and causes things to exhibit goodness and beauty.

This question concerning the origin of the artificial and conventional, as well as of the origin of goodness and beauty, is similar to the question that Aristotle implicitly raises in the *Politics* concerning the origins of the *polis*. It may be recalled that while Aristotle argues that the

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle’s view seems to be similar to that of Protagoras as depicted by Plato in the *Protagoras* (cf. *Protagoras* 323a4–328c3).

household comes into existence to deal with day-to-day necessities, and the village comes into being to provide for the non-daily needs, he never indicates what it is that causes the *polis* to come into existence. Indeed, it seems that with respect to material necessity alone, the village is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, Aristotle maintains that the *polis* is natural and serves the purpose of “living well,” without providing much in the way of explanation as to why this is so.<sup>20</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, in his recounting of pre-Socratic philosophy, Aristotle provides the early pre-Socratic answers to the question of why things manifest goodness or beauty, or what causes things to progress and develop beyond the bare necessity dictated by nature. He notes that according to Empedocles, friendship is the cause of order, beauty, and goodness, and strife is the cause of what is bad, disordered, and ugly (cf. 984b8–985a9). Thus, for Empedocles, friendship and strife are the sources of movement or change and account for what is conventional or artificial. However, Aristotle states that while Empedocles correctly identifies the sources of movement or change as friendship and strife, he does so in a vague and unscientific manner (985a22–985b3).

It is not until Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, when Aristotle describes the forces of potentiality (*δύναμις*) and actuality (*ἐνέργεια*), that he describes in a scientific manner the way in which friendship and strife act as the sources of movement or change. At the beginning of Book IX, Aristotle explains that potentiality and actuality are the originative sources of motion. However, he is quick to note that these terms do not refer *simply* to motion but are also used in another sense (1045b28–1046a4). Thus, while potency and actuality are, indeed, the cause of

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<sup>20</sup> See above at pp. 121–123.

motion, they are also the cause of something else. As I hope to make clear, these forces are, in fact, that which cause things to exhibit either goodness, beauty, and order, or disharmony and ugliness.

To understand how the forces of potentiality and actuality cause things to exhibit either goodness and beauty or disharmony and ugliness, it will be useful first to look to Aristotle's criticism of the Megaric school's understanding of potency and actuality. In the third chapter of Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that "there are some who say, as the Megaric school does, that a thing 'can' act only when it is acting, and when it is not acting it 'cannot' act" (1046b28–30). Aristotle provides the example of a builder to elucidate this position. According to the Megaric school, "he who is not building cannot build, but only he who is building, when he is building" (1046b30–31). Potency and act are, for the Megaric school, unified and indistinct. The obvious difficulty with this view, states Aristotle, is that "a man will not be a builder unless he is building ... and so with the other arts" and, indeed, all other capacities (1046b33–35). This leads to the absurd conclusion that an individual gains and loses the ability to conduct an art as many times as he commences and ceases acting, with no account of how he comes to possess the art (1046b 35–1047a4). According to the Megaric position, any time a capacity is not exercised, the capacity is lacking altogether. The consequence of the Megaric position, according to Aristotle, is that it does away with both "movement and becoming" (1047a14–15). As Edward Halper writes, the Megarians "appear to have pressed the results of logic despite the disagreement of these results with physics."<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, in contrast, maintains

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<sup>21</sup> Edward C. Halper, *The One and the Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books* (Ohio, IN: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 206. Interestingly, the Megaric position is also described—but not mentioned by name—in the second and third chapters of Book VII of the *Ethics*. Here the position is described in the context of a discussion

that because movement and becoming are processes that clearly do occur in the world, potency and actuality are distinct forces that account for these processes.

Aristotle introduces in chapter four the notion of *pairs* of potentialities, which are dependent on one another. In a passage that is dense with formal logic, Aristotle makes the case that “if B’s existence necessarily follows from A’s, and if A is possible, B must be possible.”<sup>22</sup> While it is initially unclear what role this discussion concerning pairs of potentialities plays in Aristotle’s metaphysics, chapter five makes his intentions manifest. Aristotle begins by noting that all potentialities or capacities come from (1) nature; (2) habit; or (3) instruction (1047b31–34).<sup>23</sup> Potentialities from nature are non-rational and, as a result, always act in a particular way when they are brought into contact with that which has the potential to be affected. Aristotle makes clear that pairs of potentialities within nature have a certain regularity or necessity. For example, when fire comes to bear on a pot of water, it will eventually boil and becomes steam.

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concerning self-restraint. Aristotle asks how it could be the case that “a person, though he forms a correct conviction, lacks self-restraint” (1145b22–23). He goes on to note that on account of this puzzle, Socrates denied that a person “who has scientific knowledge [could] lack self-restraint” (1145b23). The Socratic position holds instead that “nobody acts contrary to what is best while supposing that he is so acting; he acts instead through ignorance” (1145b26–27). This position is identical to the Megaric position; both suppose that when a person has a capacity (in this case, knowledge), he must exercise it; both deny the existence of potentiality. Aristotle rejects this position in chapter three of Book VII: “Since we say ‘to know’ in two senses—both the person who has the science but is not using and he who uses it are said to know—it will make a difference whether someone who does what he ought not do has the relevant knowledge but is not actively contemplating it, or whether he is actively contemplating it” (1147b31–34). Thus, Aristotle’s position differs from Socrates in that he maintains that one can have knowledge but fail actively to exercise it.

<sup>22</sup> Halper, *The One and the Many*, 206; Cf. *Meta.* 1047b14–30.

<sup>23</sup> This discussion mirrors Aristotle’s account in Book II of the *Ethics* of the manner in which the intellectual and moral virtues come into being. Aristotle writes, “Both the coming-into-being and increase of intellectual virtue result mostly from teaching—hence it requires experience and time—whereas moral virtue is the result of habit . . . . Neither by nature, therefore, nor contrary to nature are the virtues present; they are instead present in us who are of such a nature as to receive them, and who are completed through habit. Further, in the case of those things present in us by nature, we are first provided with the capacities (*δυνάμεις*) associated with them, then later on display the activities (*ἐνεργείας*)” (1103a14–8). Aristotle is clear that while the intellectual and moral virtues come into being through habit and teaching, we have the capacity (*δύναμις*) for them by nature.



The water's potential to become steam is actualized when it comes into contact with the potentiality of fire to cause the water to turn to steam. When these two potentialities come into contact, they are *both* necessarily actualized.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to the non-rational potencies, which act in a pre-determined and necessary way, rational potencies—those from habit and instruction—can act in different ways or produce contrary effects. Aristotle uses carving as an example: “We say that potentially ... a statute of Hermes is in the block of wood ... because it might be separated out” (1048a32–34). However, the block of wood can also potentially be something else, perhaps a table. The final form that the block of wood exhibits depends on the “desire or will” of the carver (cf. 1048a5–15). The rational potency of the carver comes to bear on the non-rational potency of the piece of wood to determine what artificial or conventional thing it might be. Indeed, we may say that the carver has the ability to bring order or beauty to nature. However, Aristotle makes clear that it is impossible for these potentialities to produce contrary effects at the same time. The carver can form the block of wood into a statue of Hermes, or he can form it into a table, but he cannot make both at the same time. Aristotle indicates that “desire or will” is determinative of what the rational potency will do when it is brought into contact with that which has the potential to be affected. Thus, potencies—including rational potencies—come in *pairs*, and it is through the interaction of these potencies that the artificial or conventional comes into existence.

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle uses temperature and health as an example of this process at a variety of different places. See, e.g., *Meta.* 1046b18–20, “The wholesome makes health alone, the heat-making potency heat, and the cold-making potency cold” as quoted in Halper, *The One and the Many*, 204; *Phys.* 201a19–24, “The same thing, if it is of a certain kind, can be both potential and fully real, not indeed at the same time or not in the same respect, but e.g. potentially hot and actually cold. Hence at once such things will act and be acted on by one another in many ways: each of them will be capable at the same time of causing alteration and of being altered.”

Of course, human beings have both types of potencies—the non-rational potencies from nature, which are innate and “imply passivity,” as well as rational potencies that come to be from either habit or learning (1047b31–34). The fact that human beings have both kinds of potencies is amply demonstrated in the *Ethics*. In Book II, Aristotle notes that the moral virtues come into existence via a process whereby practice comes to bear on the innate passive potencies. He states: “Neither by nature, therefore, nor contrary to nature are the virtues present; they are instead present in us who are of such a nature as to receive them, and who are completed through habit” (1103a22–26). Thus, the innate potencies are realized, or come to be, through practice or habit, and they in turn give rise to another potency, or capacity: the capacity to act virtuously. However, as the *Ethics* demonstrates, if repeated practice is to result in the acquisition of a stable virtue, it needs to be informed by reason. Thus, to act virtuously, one needs to be informed (or formed) by one who has knowledge—that is, by the philosopher. The philosopher’s rational potency has the ability to form another individual in the same way that a carver’s rational potency can form a statue of Hermes out of a piece of wood. When the philosopher’s rational potency comes into contact with his friend’s rational potency for habitual action, the result may well be the actualization of virtue. It is the contact between the philosopher’s rational potency and his friend’s potency for habitual action that is the cause of that which is good, beautiful, and orderly.

Aristotle’s understanding of potency and actuality as explicated in the *Metaphysics* helps to clarify much of his discussion of friendship in the *Ethics*. Part of Aristotle’s purpose in the *Ethics* is to “form a friend,” by actualizing the potentiality of another individual. In chapter seven of Book IX, Aristotle investigates the counter-intuitive observation that those “who

perform a benefit seem to love those who receive this benefit more than those who are the recipients of the benefit love those who perform it” (1167b16–19). While it may seem contrary to reason for the benefactor to love the recipient more than the recipient to love his benefactor, Aristotle explains why this is so by analogizing the situation to the relationship between an artisan and his work (perhaps a carver and his statue). An artisan, states Aristotle, “is fond of his own work more than he would be loved by that work, should it come to have a soul.... The case of those who perform a benefit is like this too, for what has received the benefit is their own work” (1167b34–1168a4). This curious comparison suggests that by dispensing advice, the philosopher is, in some sense, acting like an artisan: the philosopher leaves his imprint on the one he has benefitted.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in words that mirror the division between the active and passive parts of friendship in book VIII, Aristotle reiterates that “friendly affection ... resembles an active ‘making,’” while “being loved resembles a passive ‘undergoing’” (1168a19–20). Thus, it is through the dispensing of advice that the philosopher is able to form the character of another individual, such that the latter is able to act as an enlightened statesman.<sup>26</sup>

The format of Aristotle’s presentation of the virtues in the first portion of the *Ethics* makes clear that his purpose is, in fact, to dispose a potential friend to be receptive of the advice of the philosopher. As noted in the previous chapter, Aristotle begins with the virtue of courage,

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle ends book IX with the same observation in the context of a warning regarding the friendship of base people: “Now the friendship of base people is corrupt: they share in base things and, being unsteady, they come to be corrupt by becoming like one another. But the friendship of decent people is decent and is increased by their associating with one another. They also seem to become better by engaging in activity together and by correcting one another, for they take an imprint from one another of the qualities they find pleasing. Hence the saying, “noble things from noble people” (1172a9–14).

<sup>26</sup> Leo Strauss observes that “Aristotle’s political science is an attempt to actualize [the gentleman’s] potentiality. The gentleman affected by philosophy is in the highest case the enlightened statesman, like Pericles who was affected by Anaxagoras.” *The City and Man*, 28.

subtly making clear its limitations and pointing toward the need for magnanimity.<sup>27</sup>

Magnanimity, in turn, points toward friendship as the cure for the magnanimous man's socially destructive tendencies.<sup>28</sup> Throughout his presentation of the social virtues, Aristotle points toward the need for an intellectual virtue or formative force that is capable of guiding these virtues. He states repeatedly that "one ought to choose the middle term—not the excess and not the deficiency—and that the middle term is what correct reason states it to be" (1138a18–21), but never once indicates what "correct reason" (ὀρθὸς λόγος) is. When he turns to the intellectual virtues in Book VI, he makes clear that what he had previously stated regarding the ethical virtues is, "though truthful, not at all clear" (1138b25). As a result, in Book VI, he argues that it will be necessary also to examine the intellectual virtues, as it is the intellectual virtues that define the boundary or outer limits of ὀρθὸς λόγος. It is in his explanation of the intellectual virtues that Aristotle finally forthrightly reveals that the statesman ought to be receptive to the formative advice of the philosopher. However, as I will make clear, Aristotle maintains an approach that is sensitive to the statesman's sense of self-worth, framing the philosopher's role in a manner that is as non-threatening as possible.

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<sup>27</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle questions why Aristotle begins with courage: "Does [Aristotle] begin with courage because it is traditionally the core meaning of virtue or *arete*? ... Or is it, to the contrary, because courage is the noblest and most splendid of all ...? In beginning with courage, Aristotle begins where the traditional gentleman does without imposing more clarity on his priorities than he finds there, but with a gentle persistence in querying those priorities." "The Anatomy of Courage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Review of Politics* 80 no. (2018): 571. The fact that Aristotle begins with courage may be explained by his depiction of the development of friendship. In his account of friendship, Aristotle states that goodwill—the beginning and prerequisite condition of friendship—arises "on account of virtue and a certain decency, whenever someone appears to another as noble or courageous or some such thing." Cf. 1167a18-20.

<sup>28</sup> While a full investigation of justice is beyond this project, the virtue of justice is also incomplete and points toward friendship. See above at n. 4.

The intellectual virtues, Aristotle tells us, are five-fold: art (τέχνη), science (ἐπιστήμη), prudence (φρόνησις), wisdom (σοφία), and intellect (νοῦς) (1139b 15–18). Of these five, νοῦς receives the least attention. Notably, however, it is νοῦς that pre-eminently defines ὀρθὸς λόγος. Indeed, νοῦς is the most divine of the intellectual virtues and is specifically concerned with the outer limits or boundaries of correct reason.<sup>29</sup> In chapter six of Book VI, in which Aristotle briefly describes the intellectual virtue of νοῦς, he distinguishes it from ἐπιστήμη, σοφία, and φρόνησις. While ἐπιστήμη “is a conviction concerning universals and the things that exist of necessity” (1140b31–32), νοῦς concerns the “principle of what is known scientifically” (1140b34). Νοῦς is, therefore, a grasp or comprehension of the principles of science itself, or a grasp of that which lies *beyond* science. Aristotle explains that while that which is “known scientifically is demonstrable,” the principles upon which ἐπιστήμη rests are not demonstrable but are beyond λόγος altogether; they *defy* rational explanation.

Precisely because these principles with which νοῦς is concerned lie beyond λόγος, they are beyond the capacity of man. Man is principally defined—and distinguished from the gods—by his capacity for speech. As Aristotle makes clear in the *Metaphysics*, the activity of pure intellect or νοῦς is characteristic of the god (*Meta.* 1072a1–29). Nevertheless, while this sort of existence is not a possibility for man, Aristotle indicates that through the exercise of certain intellectual capacities, man is capable of certain “νοῦς-like” activities.<sup>30</sup> Heidegger explains the νοῦς characteristic of man in the following way: “This νοῦς in the human soul is not a νοεῖν, a

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<sup>29</sup> In its most real or highest form, νοῦς is pure actuality, or divine thought thinking itself (Cf. *Meta.* 1072a1–29).

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger notes, “Aristotle calls this νοῦς: ὁ καλούμενος τῆς ψυχῆς νοῦς, the “so-called” νοῦς, which means the non-genuine νοῦς.” *Plato’s Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 41.

straightforward seeing, but a διανοεῖν because the human soul is determined by λογός.”<sup>31</sup> Man’s capacity for νοός is therefore never pure but is bound up with λογός. As a result, to the extent that man is able to take part in noetic activities, it will take a form that is characteristically human.

In Book VI Aristotle makes clear that the form that man’s dianoetic activity takes is that of wisdom (σοφία) and prudence (φρόνησις). Through the exercise of these intellectual virtues man has the capacity to engage in activity that approximates that of the divine νοός. What is it about σοφία and φρόνησις that sets them apart as man’s “νοός-like” capacities? Σοφία, Aristotle explains, is “a science and an intellectual grasp [νοός] of the things most honorable by nature” (1141b3–5). While science (ἐπιστήμη) concerns the demonstrable teaching that proceeds from certain eternal principles, σοφία goes beyond mere ἐπιστήμη in that it seeks “not only to know what proceeds *from* the principles but also to attain the truth *about* the principles” (1141a18–19). Wisdom, therefore, concerns the outermost principles that are capable of being discerned by the wise (σοφός) human being. Aristotle specifically distinguishes σοφία from φρόνησις, which concerns itself with human affairs. While prudence deals with that which is immediately given in our everyday existence, or that which concerns our human needs, σοφία has the ability intellectually to grasp (νοεῖν) the principles that are beyond merely human concerns and is able to demonstrate, or teach, that which proceeds *from* those principles. Thus, it is σοφία’s concern with the outermost limits of ὀρθός λόγος that sets it apart as man’s highest virtue.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Although Aristotle sets up σοφία as distinct and separate from φρόνησις on account of the former's concern with the principles that underlie science, φρόνησις too imitates—although to a lesser degree—the activity of the divine νοῦς. Φρόνησις, as noted, concerns itself with human affairs and, in contrast to science, concerns those things that can be otherwise. Aristotle defines it as “a true characteristic that is bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being” (1140b5–7). Because of this somewhat expansive definition, φρόνησις comes in a variety of forms, including (1) the political art (πολιτική); (2) household management (οικονομία); and (3) φρόνησις in the specific sense, concerning the interests of the individual (cf. 1141b24–31). While these roles are all distinct, they are nevertheless similar to one another in that they all involve action in response to engagement with particular circumstances. Aristotle states the following:

Prudence concerns the ultimate particular thing, as was said, for the action performed is of this kind. Indeed, prudence corresponds to intellect (νοῦς), for intellect (νοῦς) is concerned with the defining boundaries, of which there is no rational account; and prudence is concerned with the ultimate particular thing, of which there is not a science but rather a perception. (1142a24–27).

Φρόνησις, like σοφία, corresponds to νοῦς, because it is concerned with the “defining boundaries, of which there is no rational account.” However, in contrast to σοφία, which is concerned with the most abstract principles, prudence is bound up with the most particular thing. Thus, both σοφία and φρονήσις involve an intellectual grasp of things that are at the opposite ends of the very limits of human comprehension.

Aristotle continues by noting that the perception of the “ultimate particular thing” involved in φρόνησις is a perception “not of things peculiar to one of the senses, but a perception of the sort by which we perceive that the ultimate particular thing, in mathematics, is a triangle” (1142a28–29). Commenting on this passage, Heidegger suggests that Aristotle is referring to the perception of “states of affairs as a whole” as they are “commonly given in everyday existence.”<sup>32</sup> When we are faced with a particular, given situation, we may be able, without the need for further deliberation, intuitively to grasp the course of action that must be taken. In the same way that we can sense by simple perception that in mathematics the triangle is the most elementary shape that cannot be broken down any further,<sup>33</sup> so the prudent man (φρόνιμος) is able intuitively to perceive how he ought to act in a particular situation.<sup>34</sup>

As Heidegger points out, Aristotle holds that this same intuitive grasping occurs in the arts and sciences. For Aristotle, those engaged in the arts and sciences do not deliberate about the ends that ought to be pursued but only about the method that ought to be employed to pursue the end: “A doctor does not deliberate about whether he is going to heal; on the contrary, that belongs to the meaning of his existence itself, because as a doctor he has already resolved in

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger writes, “In Greek geometry the triangle is the ultimate, most elementary plane figure, which emerges out of the polygon by means of a διαγράφειν, “writing through.” Διαγράφειν analyzes the polygons until they are taken apart in simple triangles, in such a way that the triangles are the ἔσχατα where the διαρθεῖν stops. In αἴσθησις, as it occurs in geometry, I see the triangle at one stroke as the most original element, which cannot itself be resolved again into more elementary figures.” *Plato's Sophist*, 110–11.

<sup>34</sup> Notably, Aristotle distinguishes perception itself from prudence. He writes, “Prudence is concerned with the ultimate particular thing, of which there is not a science but rather a perception, and a perception not of things peculiar to one of the senses, but a perception of the sort by which we perceive that the ultimate particular thing, in mathematics, is a triangle. For here too there will be a stop. But this is perception rather more than prudence, though perception of a form different from that [of one of the senses]” (1142a27–32). Thus, it seems that for Aristotle, perception is a sort of pure onlooking, divorced from action, while φρόνησις involves both the onlooking and the action that follows it.



favor of healing.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, the doctor looks around at the given situation as it presents itself, and when he perceives “the first αἴτιον [cause] whence [he] can intervene,” he then acts to bring about the end which is already posited.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, a politician or statesman does not deliberate about the *end* he ought to pursue (i.e., the good of the community), but instead looks at the political situation and simply perceives the best possible way that this end might be pursued. Thus, Aristotle frames φρόνησις—intuitive grasping of the situation at hand—as something that *precedes* action.

Aristotle indicates that it is through the intellectual activity of σοφία and φρόνησις that man is capable of acting in a manner akin to the divine νοῦς. While of these two capacities, σοφία has priority, Aristotle does not straightforwardly assert this priority. Instead, he clarifies the relationship between these two intellectual virtues through an extended discussion of deliberation. This discussion reveals that good deliberation is a capacity of those who are held to be prudent and is dependent on σοφία. Good deliberation, Aristotle writes, is a sort of “correctness of deliberation,” in which the end of the action being deliberated upon is correct (1142b16). Aristotle explains that while “the base person” may set before himself some ignoble goal and, with the use of calculation, attain that goal, he will not thereby have engaged in good deliberation. While he may have gotten ahold of what he sought, he cannot be said to have exhibited “good deliberation,” because good deliberation “is apt to hit on what is good” (cf. 1142b17–27). For deliberation to be considered “good,” the end at which it aims must be good.

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<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 111.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, good deliberation—the characteristic of the prudent man—takes its bearing from σοφία, which establishes the end toward which the prudent man will be directed.<sup>37</sup>

On its face, this relationship between σοφία and φρόνησις appears to be problematic. Indeed, the magnanimous statesman is the jealous type not prone to listening. However, as pointed out, Aristotle has taken care throughout the first five books of the *Ethics* to point out the limits of the social virtues, as well as their need to be guided by some higher virtue. In this way, Aristotle has disposed his audience to be solicitous of any advice that may help guide these social virtues. At this critical juncture in Book VI, where he finally forthrightly makes clear that φρόνησις takes its direction from σοφία, Aristotle frames his depiction of the relationship in terms that will be palatable to the magnanimous statesman. The virtue of φρόνησις is described as being for the sake of some further political action. In addition, the hero chosen as the archetype of this virtue is the great Athenian statesman Pericles (1140b9). The courageous individuals at whom Aristotle aims this description of φρόνησις will appreciate the life of action that Aristotle presents here. In contrast, his description of those who are wise is presented in a non-threatening manner: Aristotle holds up the philosophers Anaxagoras and Thales who, while they “know things that are extraordinary, wonderous, difficult, and daimonic,” are thought to be useless “because they do not investigate the human goods” (1141b3–8). Notably, Aristotle does

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<sup>37</sup> Another distinction between φρόνησις and σοφία is that φρονήσις is ordered toward action—that is, it is ordered towards an end beyond itself. In contrast, σοφία contains the end *within* its own activity; contemplation is good for its own sake. As Aristotle will argue explicitly in Book X, the very practice, or activity, of contemplation makes one happy, or εὐδαίμων. In contrast, φρόνησις, or the intellectual grasping of any given situation that is ordered towards action, is oriented toward bringing this happiness into existence. In this way, φρόνησις is ordered towards an end beyond itself, while σοφία is not. Σοφία is, therefore, architectonic, in that it posits the end for which φρόνησις acts.

not here dispute this assertion,<sup>38</sup> but instead follows up by contrasting their wisdom with the utility of prudence: “But prudence is concerned with the human things” (1141b9). By calling attention to what appears to be the uselessness of wisdom and immediately comparing it with the eminent practicality of prudence, Aristotle presents the two virtues in such a way that that the statesman will not feel threatened by the philosopher but will instead solicit his advice.

Aristotle makes clear that the philosopher is able to form the character of the statesman through the dispensation of advice. Although the greatest of his politically inclined readers are hubristic and by nature contemptuous of advice, Aristotle shows that it is nevertheless possible for the philosopher to gain an audience with these politically inclined readers by appealing to their desire for action and by presenting the philosopher in a non-threatening manner. Nevertheless, several issues remain: first, by framing φρόνησις as being oriented and directed toward action, Aristotle has placed one of man’s highest, νοῦς-like capacities in the service of political action. Furthermore, σοφία has been relegated to acting as a formative or guiding force for the statesman and the city. Nevertheless, through his presentation of the intellectual virtues, Aristotle again seems to show that great things may be accomplished for the sake of the city if the two types of magnanimous men were to become friends.

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<sup>38</sup> In the *Politics* Aristotle indicates his disagreement with the conclusion that philosophy is useless by recounting the story told about Thales, who was able to use his knowledge of astronomy to predict a good harvest of olives. Using this knowledge, Thales cornered the olive market by buying up all the olive presses while the olives were out of season. In turn, on the advent of the olive season, he was able to hire out the olive presses for whatever rates he wished. Thales, Aristotle concludes, showed “how easy it is for philosophers to become wealthy if they so wish, but it is not this they are serious about” (*Pol.* 1259a18–19). This example further supports the interpretation outlined above; in Book VI of the *Ethics* Aristotle exaggerates the conventional image that people have of philosophers in order to present them in a non-threatening, almost buffoonish, manner.

## **Actualization, Pleasure, and Self-Love**

That the philosopher is able to form the character of another individual through the dispensation of advice raises a number of related issues: First, the fact that σοφία has priority over φρόνησις, suggests that the relationship between the philosopher and the statesmen will not be one of equality. Aristotle seems to suggest at a number of points that friendship is characterized by equality. Is it possible for true friendship to exist between two unequal individuals? Second, what does the philosopher gain from actualizing the potency of the gentleman? Why would the magnanimous philosopher, who has been described by Aristotle as being somewhat asocial and “incapable of living with a view to another” (1124b31), put his talents in the service of his friend and of the city? Would this not involve a certain degradation on the part of the magnanimous philosopher? Aristotle devotes chapters eight and nine to answering these issues.

He opens chapter eight by exploring the perplexing question “as to whether one ought to love oneself most or someone else” (1168a29). On the one hand, people commonly stigmatize those who are “fondest of themselves” as “self-lovers” (αὐτοφιλία) on the understanding that the base person does “everything for his own sake” (1168a32). On the other hand, Aristotle notes that all the qualities of friendship are “present especially in the person in relation to himself,” such that “he is most a friend to himself, and so [he] ought to love [him]self most” (1168b4–7). Thus, Aristotle proposes to investigate these common opinions to see the extent to which they are true.

In the ensuing discussion, Aristotle clarifies both why self-love can be a good thing and how it can be made compatible with friendship. He begins by stating that those who are

constantly grasping for a “greater share of money, honors and bodily pleasures” are seeking to gratify the nonrational part of their soul. Aristotle concludes that these individuals “bring self-love into reproach” (1168b15–21). In contrast, while those who pursue what is just, moderate, and noble may not commonly be characterized as self-lovers, Aristotle states that this type of person is, in fact, *more* of a self-lover. Indeed, Aristotle notes that those who pursue what is just, moderate, and noble are self-lovers, as they are seeking to gratify the most authoritative part of themselves (1168b36). Aristotle’s argument mirrors Plato’s comparison of the tyrannical man and the just man in the *Republic*. While the tyrannical man is grasping and has insatiable desires, the just man is self-restrained, and ensures that his desiring part is “neither in want nor surfeited—in order that it will rest and not disturb the best part by its joy or its pain, but rather leave that best part alone pure and by itself” (*Rep.* 571e2–572a2).

A number of indications suggest that Aristotle’s praise of self-restraint is not absolute, or that it does not comprise his ultimate thoughts concerning self-love. He observes that by being a self-lover, the good man will both “profit himself and benefit others by doing noble things” (1169a12–13). However, it seems that these “noble things” may be different for different people. Aristotle writes, “Every intellect chooses what is best for itself, and the decent person obeys the rule of his intellect” (1169a17–18). The serious person, he states, “does many things for the sake of both his friends and his fatherland, and even dies for them if need be: he will give up money, honors and, in general, the goods that are fought over, thereby securing for himself what is noble” (1169a19–22). This gentleman, as Aristotle describes him, can be said to “grasp” at what is noble. Of course, by this point in the *Ethics*, Aristotle can trust that his reader believes the noble to be, not whatever the community honors, but what “serious individuals” deem noble

or honorable. Thus, Aristotle suggests that the self-lover seeks out opportunities to undertake great deeds of noble self-sacrifice, not to attain honor from any “random person,” but inasmuch as these deeds are considered noble by “serious individuals.”

However, while noble self-sacrifice that has the effect of saving the fatherland may be best for some, it is not best for all serious persons. Aristotle notes that it is equally possible that the serious person would “forgo, in favor of his friend, the performance of certain [noble] actions, and that it is nobler for him thus to become the cause of his friend’s actions than to perform those actions himself” (1169a33–34; square brackets original). Given his discussion of potentiality and actuality, it seems that Aristotle distinguishes two roles: while it may be best for those who are politically magnanimous to pursue the noble action of self-sacrifice, it is better for those who are philosophically magnanimous to be the cause of their friend’s actions, or to actualize their friend’s innate potentiality. Aristotle suggests that it is greater for the philosophically magnanimous man to give up honors and political offices to a friend, thereby becoming “the cause of his friend’s actions,” than to “perform those actions himself” (1169a29–34). In this way, Aristotle solves the unstated issue regarding the roles of the politically magnanimous man and the philosophically magnanimous man that had been left lurking in the background, namely, which of the two ought to rule.<sup>39</sup> The philosopher’s role is to enable the statesman to rule.

Although Aristotle resolves the unstated issue as to whether the philosopher or the statesman should rule, the question remains, what does the philosopher obtain in return for

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<sup>39</sup> See above at n. 16 and accompanying text.

actualizing the ruling potential of his friend? If it is equality that characterizes friendship most of all, should the philosopher not obtain something in return for providing this great benefit to his friend? It would seem uncharacteristic of friendship, if it were the case that the friendship between the philosopher and the statesman resulted in the statesman's ability to gratify his most authoritative part by doing noble deeds, while the philosopher was left without any means to gratify *his* most authoritative part. Aristotle's statement that it may be "nobler" for the philosopher to "become the cause of his friend's actions than to perform those actions himself" seems to be an underwhelming reason for the magnanimous philosopher to commit himself to actualizing the potentiality of his friend for the benefit of the city. What benefit does the philosopher obtain from actualizing the potential of his friend? Furthermore, what if there are no opportunities for the politically magnanimous man to gratify himself? If the city is at peace—a condition that Aristotle will later endorse as being preferable to war (cf. 1177b7–12)—how will the politically magnanimous man have opportunity to gratify himself?

Aristotle provides answers to these questions in chapter nine of Book IX of the *Ethics*. Here, Aristotle explains that the philosopher's friend, having been formed by the philosopher, is in turn able to actualize the potential of the philosopher. The way in which Aristotle explains this process of actualization is somewhat cryptic. To grasp Aristotle's answer properly, it is necessary to turn again to the metaphysical principles that undergird his explanation. Specifically, we must turn first to Aristotle's account of actuality, or complete reality, in the *Metaphysics*, as well as to his treatment of pleasure in Book VII of the *Ethics*.

As noted above, the *Metaphysics* makes clear that actuality is the opposite of potentiality, and that a person or thing's actuality is realized when two potentialities come into

contact. As we noted, just as the potentiality of the carver can come to bear on the innate potentiality of a block of wood, actualizing its potential to become a statue, so the philosopher's potentiality can come to bear on, and actualize, the innate potentiality of the statesman, such that the statesman may become an enlightened statesman. In chapter six of Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle notes that there are different types of actions or actualities. On the one hand, some actions have a limit or a definite end. As an example, Aristotle states that an exercise that makes the body thin is not a complete action, as the movement itself (i.e., exercise) is not the purpose of the action. The purpose, or end, for which the action is engaged (thinning out the body) is outside the activity itself (*Meta.* 1048b18–23). Such actions are limited, or incomplete, as the end does not inhere in the action itself. On the other hand, actions in which the end *is* present in the action itself are complete actions. Aristotle provides the following examples: “At the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood, are thinking and have thought” (1048b23–24). Activities such as seeing, understanding, and thinking, Aristotle indicates are whole and complete immediately upon being exercised. Aristotle thus concludes by classifying the former actions (actions that have a definite end) as movements, and the latter actions (actions which contain the end in the activity itself) as actualities or “complete reality” (1048b28–34).

Aristotle's extended account of pleasure in Book VII of the *Ethics* makes clear that pleasure is one of those types of actualities that are complete, or which contain their end in their action. Indeed, pleasure is similar to sight, understanding, and thought. Aristotle prefaces his investigation of the nature of pleasure with a brief description of the reasons that people posit for deprecating pleasure as being less than, and distinct from, the good. The central reason that



people deprecate pleasure is that they view “every pleasure [as] a perceptible process of coming into its nature, [and] no coming-into-being belongs to the same class as the ends we pursue” (1152b13–14). According to this teleological argument, all actions or activities are pursued for the sake of some end or purpose. As a result, because pleasure is an activity, or a “coming-into-being,” it cannot be the good or the purpose for which we act. According to the common opinion that Aristotle describes, pleasure exists for the sake of some other end.

Aristotle quickly notes his disagreement with this opinion. He states, “It does *not* turn out that, on account of these things, pleasure is not good, or even not the best thing” (1152b25). Aristotle begins by distinguishing different types of pleasures: incidental pleasures and unqualified pleasures. Incidental pleasures, Aristotle informs us, are restorative in nature. These pleasures are not “unqualifiedly pleasant,” as they are pleasant *only* to the extent there is something lacking on the part of the individual enjoying the pleasure (1152b33–35). For example, eating and drinking are pleasant only because they are restorative in nature. However, once our nature has been restored (our hunger sated or our thirst slaked), continued eating and drinking are no longer pleasant. Thus, restorative pleasures are not unqualifiedly pleasant but are pleasant only by virtue of a deficient condition.

In contrast, “unqualified pleasures” are those that are pleasant in and of themselves. In support of this contention, Aristotle explains that contrary to common opinion, pleasure is *not* a process of coming-into-being but is an “activity and an end” (1153a10). Some pleasures, Aristotle contends, do not have something else as an end, but the end inheres in the activity itself. Aristotle indicates that pleasure is like one of the “complete activities” listed in Book IX of the *Metaphysics*; seeing, understanding, and thinking. As a result, he defines pleasure as an

unimpeded “activity of the characteristic that accords with nature” (1153a14), and he provides “the activity bound up with contemplation” as an example (1152b37). When one’s nature is not deficient, the activity of contemplation is accompanied by neither pain nor desire but is pleasurable in and of itself. Thus, because the activity of pleasure that is “bound up with contemplation” is not impeded in any way when one’s nature is not deficient, contemplation is unqualifiedly pleasant.

In the following chapter, Aristotle goes on to argue that pleasure is good and may in fact be “the best thing.” He explains that if the unimpeded activity of each characteristic (i.e., pleasure) is most choiceworthy, it follows that “a certain pleasure would be the best thing” (1153b12). Of course, the term “best thing” implies that it is better than all others, or that it is the highest good. What is striking about this claim is that Aristotle explicitly seems to be pulling back on a claim he had made in Book I. There he had critiqued Plato’s theory of the forms on the basis that the good appears to be manifold; things such as pleasure, honor, and prudence, all of which are said to be good in themselves, are “distinct and differ in the very respect in which they are goods” (1096b24–25). In fact, Aristotle went on to note that even if there is some one thing that is separate all by itself, which we might term “the good” or the idea of the good, such a thing “would not be subject to action or capable of being possessed by a human being” (1096b33–34). Why would Aristotle now discuss this “best thing” after having claimed in Book I that it is beyond the capacity of a human being to attain?

A possible answer is given immediately after Aristotle’s criticism of the Platonic theory of the forms in Book I. He notes that even though no human being can possess such a thing as “the good,” it may be helpful to have the idea of the good “as a sort of model,” or pattern, so that

“we will to a greater degree know also the things that are good for us; and if we know them, we will hit on them” (1097a2–4).<sup>40</sup> Thus, while Aristotle seems to be ambivalent about the actual existence of this sort of good, he appears to think that it may nevertheless be useful for human beings to strive for, so that they may attain what is good for them.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that in Book VII Aristotle states that pleasure may be “the best thing” may indicate that he views pleasure as the model, or pattern, on which human beings can base their life. In making the argument that the pleasures of contemplation may be “the best thing,” Aristotle states that “*if* in fact there are unimpeded activities of each characteristic ... a certain pleasure *would* be the best thing” (1153b7–13; emphasis added). The significance of the conditional nature of this argument is made clear near the end of Aristotle’s account of pleasure, where he underscores the human limitations in achieving such pleasure. Because human nature, in contrast to that of the god, is not simple, “the same thing is not always pleasant” for human beings.<sup>42</sup> The pleasure that the god enjoys is, in the words of Book I, “not subject to action or capable of being possessed by a human being” (1096b33–34). While the god can “always

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<sup>40</sup> Cf., *Rep.* 592a7–592b7.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle further notes that the argument “seems to be inconsistent with the sciences” because the various sciences are not concerned with the “knowledge of the good itself.” Nevertheless, he concludes, “It is not reasonable for *all* craftsmen to be ignorant of so great an aid and not even to seek it out” (1097a3–7). Aristotle seems to suggest that this pattern of the good may be useful for select few—perhaps one or two—types of craftsmen.

<sup>42</sup> In Book XII of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle describes the pure activity of the divine  $\nu\omicron\varsigma$ : “[The First Mover has] a life such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be) since its actuality is also pleasure. (And for this reason are waking, perception, and thinking most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so on account of these.)” (1072b14–17). For Aristotle, the god, in contrast to human beings, *is* able to undertake action that is both continuous and pleasurable. Furthermore, the complete activities for which human beings have the capacity—waking, perception, and thinking—are related to the complete activity of the First Mover due to the pleasure involved in these activities. It seems that by engaging in activities such as waking, perception, and thinking (activities that have no end apart from itself), we are—to an extent—able to share in the unqualified pleasure enjoyed by the First Mover or divine  $\nu\omicron\varsigma$ .

enjoy... a pleasure that is one and simple” (1154b26), such a pleasure is beyond the capacity of a human being to attain due to a certain “defective condition” (1154b29).<sup>43</sup>

Why, if Aristotle has already in Book VII arrived at the conclusion that the best life for a human being is the life of contemplation, does the *Ethics* continue for another three books? The answer has to do with our limited capacity for continuous pleasure. While human beings *are* capable of experiencing the sublime pleasures associated with contemplation that the god experiences, we are incapable of experiencing this pleasure *continuously*, due to our embodied and limited existence. As a result, Aristotle’s concluding paragraph of Book VII reminds the reader of his humanity: “‘Change in all things is sweet,’ as the poet has it, on account of a certain defective condition.”<sup>44</sup>

That Aristotle discusses the limitations of human nature immediately before launching into his two books on friendship may seem to suggest that it is precisely our limitations that cause us to engage in friendship. Much of Book IX of the *Ethics* seems, at least at first glance, to bear out such a reading. As noted above, Aristotle indicates the manner in which the philosopher may seek out a courageous or noble individual in order to *form* a friend precisely because his status as a mortal human being requires him to have a friend. And in chapter nine of Book IX,

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins note that the term defective (*πovέpια*) is “usually translated as “wickedness”; [Aristotle] may here be playing on the fact that the term has both a moral and a nonmoral use.” *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, 162 n. 62.

<sup>44</sup> The quotation is taken from Euripides’ *Orestes*. In the play, Orestes is suffering from madness brought on by the furies, who are exacting punishment on him for murdering his mother. The line, “change in all things is sweet” is spoken by his sister Electra, who is tending to him and encouraging him to rise from his bed. Orestes responds, “That will I; for that has a semblance of health; and that seeming, though it be far from the reality, is preferable to this” (Euripides, *Orestes*, 235). Aristotle may be suggesting that in response to the painful awareness of the fact that the life of the god is beyond our reach, it is best to embrace the world of appearances, which, though far from reality, can ease our sufferings.

Aristotle explicitly links his insights concerning our limited nature in Book VII to the philosopher's need for a friend who can actualize his potentiality. If this interpretation were to hold, Aristotle's attempt to find a basis for friendship that is rooted in self-sufficiency would be a failure. As I will make clear, however, towards the end of the *Ethics*, Aristotle actually does find a basis for friendship between two magnanimous individuals that is not rooted in deficiency but is instead based on a self-sufficiency, while enabling each party to the friendship to recognize and appreciate the good of the other.

Aristotle begins his analysis by raising the issue of whether the happy person needs friends. He mentions the Socratic opinion concerning self-sufficiency and friendship that was stated in the *Lysis*: "Those who are blessed and self-sufficient have no need of friends, since the good things are theirs already; and ... since the happy are self-sufficient, they have no need of anyone in addition" (1169b4–7). The quotation that Aristotle invokes to summarize this position may give us an inkling of his valuation of the Socratic stance. Indeed, he cites the following line from Euripides' *Orestes*: "When a *daimon* gives well, what need of friends?" (1169b8). In the play, the line is stated caustically by Orestes, as he is at the time being pursued mercilessly by the daimonic furies after he has killed his own mother. This suggests that Aristotle is not entirely convinced of the Socratic stance, or that the Socratic stance may not convey the totality of the phenomenon of friendship.

Why, then, will the magnanimous, self-sufficient individual need friends? Furthermore, if he does need friends, does this not imply a deficiency on the part of the magnanimous man? Aristotle's response to the Socratic dilemma unfolds in three stages by way of a kind of crescendo, with each argument building upon and complementing the previous argument.

Aristotle's first argument in favor of the philosopher's need for friendship is based on a number of conditions: if the actions of a serious person are good and pleasant, and if we can contemplate the actions of those near us better than our own, it follows that "the actions of serious men who are friends" will be "pleasant to those who are good" (1169b30–1170a1). Lorraine Smith Pangle points out that this argument is incomplete, as "a friend's activity [is] always ultimately his and not ours."<sup>45</sup> According to Pangle, any pleasure we receive from witnessing the good or noble acts of another "will always be a somewhat passive and vicarious pleasure."<sup>46</sup> However, as pointed out above, Aristotle views friendship as consisting of an "active making." Thus, to the extent that the philosopher is the *cause* of his friend's good and noble actions, the pleasure received will not be simply passive and vicarious. Instead, the philosopher will have undertaken an active role in creating those good and noble acts.

The second argument draws our attention away from viewing the activity of a friend to the difficulty attending continuous activity. Aristotle tells us that life is hard for the solitary person, "since it is not easy to be active continuously by oneself" (1170a5–6). This recalls Aristotle's argument in Book VII concerning the limits of human life. In contrast to the god, who is capable of constant contemplation, human beings are limited and are therefore incapable of constant contemplation. This conclusion is stated explicitly in Book X of the *Ethics*, where Aristotle states that while the wise person is "the most self-sufficient," the life of constant contemplation "would exceed what is human" (1177a30; 1177b27). Read in this context,

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<sup>45</sup> Lorraine Smith Pangle, "Friendship and Self-Love in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 198.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Aristotle's second argument for the need for friends seems to be that because the life of *constant* activity is impossible, the magnanimous man will, to this extent, need friends.

Finally, Aristotle's third argument is based on an understanding of the workings of nature. He notes that for a serious person, a friend is choiceworthy and good by nature, and that the things that are good by nature are "good and pleasant" in themselves (1170a13–16). In this way, Aristotle signals to the reader that his third argument will show friendship to be good not on account of some lack that it is able to fill, but inasmuch as it is good in itself, or on its own terms. Aristotle begins by pointing out that for human beings, living is defined as "a capacity for perception or thought" (1170a16–18). This definition is striking in that it seems to go out of its way to include perception. At the beginning of the *Ethics*, Aristotle had insisted that what is distinctive about human beings is our capacity for thought, as it is our capacity for thought that distinguishes us from the animals. At this point, however, shortly after having pointed out that man is not a god, Aristotle includes man's particularly corporeal capacity of perception in his definition of man, thereby drawing our attention to man's distinct status as neither beast nor god. He continues, noting that "a capacity is traced back to its activity, and what is authoritative resides in the activity" (1170a18). As applied to perception and thought, this means that the authoritative status of a person or thing lies not in its potentiality, but in its activity. We have already seen that the philosopher actualizes the potentiality of the statesman by the dispensation of advice, causing him to act in accord with the moral virtues. At this point, as we will see, Aristotle intends to make the argument that while the philosopher actualizes the statesman, the statesman in turn also actualizes the potentiality of the philosopher.

To make the case that the statesman also actualizes the philosopher's potential, Aristotle states the following:

If living itself is good and pleasant ... and if he who sees perceives that he sees ... then there is something that perceives that we are active. The result is that if we are perceiving something, we also perceive that we are perceiving.... And to perceive that we are perceiving ... is to perceive that we exist. (1170a27–34).

This abstruse passage is meant to elucidate a fundamental aspect of Aristotle's understanding of friendship. His argument is that it is through the senses, and in particular the sense of sight, that we come to perceive (*αἰσθάνομαι*) or understand that we have sight. Since sight is a type of activity, it is through the medium of sight that we are capable of perceiving or apprehending that we are active. As a result, when we look at something, or apprehend something, we also come to realize that we are apprehending. Finally, to realize that we are apprehending something, is to understand that we exist. This passage could appropriately be called the existential moment in Aristotle's *Ethics*. For Aristotle, it is through our sense perception, and specifically through our perception of a friend, that we become aware of our own existence.<sup>47</sup> Because the philosopher is the *cause* of his friend's noble actions, he is able to perceive the good present in himself by witnessing his friend's noble actions.

In this third and final argument as to why the philosopher needs a friend, Aristotle explains how the exchange between two friends takes place. It will be recalled that in the very

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<sup>47</sup> Aristotle's understanding of existence can profitably be contrasted with René Descartes' famous "Cogito, ergo sum." While Descartes' interaction with the sensual world stems from an attitude of skepticism, in which our existence is revealed to us through the use of our mind alone, Aristotle affirms that it is through sense perception that we come to be aware of our existence. Cf. René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 14–15.



first chapter of Book IX, Aristotle had indicated that the philosopher is owed some kind of return for the philosophical advice he gives his friend. Nevertheless, Aristotle indicated that it is up to the recipient of the advice to determine its worth. Aristotle cryptically stated: “For if the giver receives as much as the recipient is benefited ... the giver will have received what was merited from the recipient in question” (1164b11–13). In this third argument as to why the philosopher needs friends, Aristotle finally unpacks this statement regarding what the philosopher is owed: the philosopher receives *pleasure* in return for his philosophical advice.<sup>48</sup> By rendering efficacious philosophical advice, the philosopher actualizes the potential of his friend and is able to witness his friend’s noble acts. Furthermore, because he is the proximate *cause* of his friends’ noble actions, the philosopher is, in a sense, witnessing his *own* actions and is thereby taking pleasure in his own existence. The relationship between the statesman and the philosopher is made equal by the exchange of pleasure that occurs.<sup>49</sup>

However, Aristotle does not stop at pointing out the benefits that the philosopher will obtain from actualizing the potential of the statesman. As noted earlier, Aristotle describes the statesman’s prudence—specifically his ability to survey a given situation and intervene—as directed and oriented toward political action. We saw that this is problematic both because it

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<sup>48</sup> In Book VIII, Aristotle had indicated that it is through the exchange of what is good and pleasant that partners in friendship are made equal: “Each one, then, both loves what is good for himself and repays in equal measure what they wish for the other and what is pleasant. For it is said, ‘friendship is equality.’” (1157b35–37).

<sup>49</sup> The equality that characterizes the relationship between the philosopher and the statesman is an equality of returns and not an equality of status. Aristotle intimates that the return one obtains can have the effect of equalizing a relationship that is inherently unequal in status in his discussion of the friendships that exist in the household. He explains that while no amount of affection by a child could make up for the “greatest benefits” that a parent bestows on the child, parents nevertheless “love children as they love themselves,” and that this friendship affords “both what is pleasant and what is useful” (1161b27–34). Thus, it seems that the delight derived from watching an inferior whom one has benefitted in some way is what sustains the relationship. Aristotle also makes clear that pleasure is something whole and complete. See below at n. 57 and accompanying text.

subordinates a “*voúç*-like” function as if it were a mere instrument to achieving some political good, and because the opportunities to exercise this function are likely to be limited. Aristotle had already hinted at the lack of opportunity to exercise this “*voúç*-like” function in the service of political ends in his description of magnanimity in Book IV.

In Book IV, Aristotle noted that the magnanimous man’s awareness of his own worth and greatness causes him to view most things as beneath him. As a result, he is slow to act; in fact, Aristotle goes so far as to characterize him as “idle” (1124b24). Not any small occasion will cause the magnanimous man to act, as these are inappropriate to his greatness. Instead, it is only when an opportunity arises that is equal to his greatness that the magnanimous man will take a great risk, and, in doing so, he will be unsparing of his life “on the grounds that living is not at all worthwhile” (1124b8–10). However, as long as no opportunity presents itself for the statesman to intervene, his overweening concern with his own worth culminates in a sort of sloth.<sup>50</sup> Susan Collins concludes that because the magnanimous man views only great enterprises as worthy of his action, “the ‘activity’ of magnanimity ... could be described most simply as the magnanimous man’s self-contemplation of his own great virtue.”<sup>51</sup>

Chapter 9 presents the solution to the twofold difficulty of the statesman’s “*voúç*-like” capability being directed toward political action and of the lack of opportunity that the magnanimous statesman may have to contemplate his own great virtue. Aristotle not only indicates that the philosopher will obtain pleasure from witnessing the noble acts of his friend,

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle’s Dialectical Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 118–19.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, 63.

but he makes clear that by actualizing the potential of his friend, the friend *also* becomes aware of his *own* existence. Aristotle writes, “Existing is . . . a choiceworthy thing because of a person’s perception that he is good, and this sort of perception is pleasant on its own account. Accordingly, one ought to share in the friend’s perception that he exists” (1170b8–12). The philosopher, Aristotle explains, becomes aware of his *own* existence by sharing in the friend’s perception (συναισθάνομαι) that he exists. By actualizing his friend’s potential, both the philosopher and the statesman become aware of their own goodness together.

How does this joint-perception of existence occur? It is in his explanation of this process that Aristotle finally makes clear that the friendship between the philosopher and the statesman will have political consequences. Aristotle explains, “This [joint-perception of existence] would come to pass by living together and sharing in a community of speeches and thought—for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of human beings, and not as with cattle, merely feeding in the same place” (1170b12–14; square brackets added). Aristotle indicates that it is through the establishment of a “community of speeches and thought”—i.e., through the establishment of a *polis*—that the philosopher can share in his friend’s perception that he exists. Thus, in the same way that the philosopher’s potential is actualized by witnessing the noble acts of his friend—acts of which he is the proximate cause—so the statesman’s potential is actualized by perceiving the regime that he has founded. With the help of the philosopher, the statesman will be able to form “a community of speeches and thought” and will become aware of his own virtue by looking at and deriving enjoyment from the regime he has helped to establish.

By linking the magnanimous statesman’s ability to perceive his own virtue with the establishment of a regime, Aristotle resolves the difficulties that had initially appeared to

complicate his depiction of the magnanimous statesman's prudence. The perception involved in φρόνησις is no longer oriented simply toward political activity, such as noble acts of valor, but is instead engaged in for its own sake. The magnanimous man perceives the regime he has formed, and, through this perception, he becomes aware of his own existence and his own virtue. The statesman's ultimate activity—the activity that is done for its own sake—consists in a pure onlooking. In addition, Aristotle obviates the difficulty posed by opportunity. The magnanimous statesman was initially beset by awareness of his own greatness, which caused him to refrain from acting. Unless a worthy opportunity presents itself, the magnanimous man will not act. As a result, in the depiction of the magnanimous man in Book IV of the *Ethics*, the life of the magnanimous man appears to be a joyless quest for opportunities worthy of his effort. By pointing to the magnanimous man's ability to perceive the regime that he creates, Aristotle shows that the magnanimous statesman's ability to contemplate his own virtues need not be limited to those rare opportunities in which he can exercise his virile virtues.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle provides little justification as to why the *polis* emerges. It will be recalled that while the household and the village are sufficient to deal with the necessities of life, Aristotle nonetheless traces the emergence of the *polis* from several villages and argues that it is ordered towards the good.<sup>52</sup> In Book IX of the *Ethics*, Aristotle indicates that friendship is the cause of the city's coming-into-being. Specifically, it is the friendship between the philosopher and the statesman that leads to the formation of the city. While it is not incorrect to say that Aristotle's intention in the *Ethics* is to direct the statesman toward a higher form of life,

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<sup>52</sup> See above at pp 121–123.

the form that this life takes is not the life of philosophic contemplation, as many scholars have indicated.<sup>53</sup> Instead, it is the life of perception, which seems to be somewhat *analogous* to the life of philosophic contemplation.<sup>54</sup> Aristotle directs the gentleman to take an active role in the creation of a just and noble state such that he may then perceive his creation, and through that perception might become aware of his own goodness and take delight in his own existence. Together, the philosopher and the enlightened statesman are co-creators of the *polis* and are able to order it toward the good. It is their friendship—a friendship in which wisdom and power come together—that is the formal cause of the *polis*.

### **Self-Sufficiency and Actualization**

Aristotle's arguments concerning the need for friendship make clear that friendship between those who are good is a mutually beneficial arrangement for the magnanimous philosopher and the magnanimous statesman, and that it will have beneficial political effects. Indeed, the philosopher and the statesman actualize each other's potentiality, such that both become aware of their own good and take pleasure in that awareness. However, if their innate capacity to become aware of their own existence lies dormant until it become actualized through the other's actions, would this not imply a certain deficiency? Indeed, as Sarah Broadie notes, the motion from a

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<sup>53</sup> See e.g., Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*; Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*; Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics*.

<sup>54</sup> Toward the end of the *Ethics*, Aristotle writes that the political and warlike actions are “without leisure and aim at some end ... whereas the activity of the intellect [νοῦς], because it is contemplative [θεωρητικῆ], seems to be superior in seriousness” (1177b17–21). On this basis, some have concluded that the life of philosophic contemplation is the only life that is happy in the primary sense. However, “θεωρητικῆ” can also mean “able to perceive.” Liddell and Scott, *Greek English Lexicon*, 797. Thus, Aristotle seems to be suggesting that *both* the life of the enlightened statesman and that of the philosopher are characterized by leisure.

state of potentiality to actuality “essentially arises from its subject’s lack. The subject moves or is moved into a new condition because the latter is better than its previous states.”<sup>55</sup> If it is true that the statesman and the philosopher play an actualizing role for each other—each actualizing the other’s potential for pleasure—then Socrates’ view of friendship would seem to be vindicated: all friendship would have its basis in deficiency, lack, or need. However, as I hope to make clear, Aristotle is eminently aware of this difficulty, and he confronts it directly in his final account of pleasure in Book X.

Aristotle’s final account of pleasure in Book X begins in chapter four and is similar to his earlier treatment of pleasure in Book VII.<sup>56</sup> In both accounts, Aristotle argues against the common opinion that pleasure is a process, or a coming-into-being. However, his method in

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<sup>55</sup> Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 339.

<sup>56</sup> Despite many similarities, significant differences remain between the two accounts of pleasure. Perhaps the most significant discrepancy is that Aristotle seems to provide different definitions of pleasure in the two accounts. In Book VII, he concludes that pleasure is an “unimpeded activity” of “the characteristic that accords with nature” (1153a13–14). In contrast, in Book X, we are told that pleasure “completes the activity, not as a characteristic that is already inherent in it, but as a certain end that supervenes on it” (1174b33–34). These seem to be contradictory understandings of what pleasure is. As a result, some scholars have concluded that these two accounts are incompatible. According to this interpretation, Aristotle’s description of pleasure in Book X is simply hortatory, while his account of pleasure in Book VII contains his more complete treatment of pleasure. See, Smith, *Revaluing Ethics*, 233–45; Aristide Tessitore, “A Political Reading of Aristotle’s Treatment of Pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *Political Theory* 17 (1989), 247–65.

However, it is not the case that these accounts of pleasure are necessarily contradictory. If we view Book X not as providing a definition of the *nature* of pleasure, but instead as a *description* of the way in which we experience pleasure, the two accounts are perfectly compatible. Indeed, in Book VII, the definition that pleasure is an “unimpeded” activity suggests that the nature of pleasure—that is, pleasure in its most pure, active form—is the pleasure of contemplation practiced by the god. Given our status as embodied creatures, Aristotle had indicated that our capacity to enjoy such pleasures is limited. As I made clear earlier, this pure, active form of pleasure is presented by Aristotle as a sort of pattern, or model on which we may model our own lives. In Book X, we are told *how* one may pursue that pattern or model. By suggesting that pleasure “completes the activity, not in the manner of a characteristic that is already inherent in it, but as a certain end that supervenes on it,” Aristotle indicates that it is by pursuing whatever activity accords with our nature that we will experience pleasure. In this way, Aristotle’s description of the manner in which we experience pleasure is carefully stated. Thus, while Aristotle’s account of pleasure in Book X is hortatory in the sense that it compels people to pursue what is good, it is not therefore false or incompatible with his account of pleasure in Book VII.

each account is slightly different. In Book VII, as part of his rebuttal of the contention that pleasure is simply a process, Aristotle emphasizes pleasure's status as an activity. In contrast, in Book X Aristotle instead focuses on the wholeness and completeness of pleasure. In support of this contention, Aristotle contrasts pleasure with motion; while motion is never complete, as the entity in motion changes position over time, the form of pleasure "is complete at any moment" (1174b4–8). Furthermore, in contrast to motion, which we can experience only over time, we can experience pleasure in an instant. At any distinct moment in which we undergo the experience of pleasure, that experience is whole and complete. Why does Aristotle emphasize the completeness of pleasure and its status as being independent of time? The reason is that he is attempting to point out that our inability to experience pleasure continuously is *not* a deficiency. Because pleasure is something that is whole and complete and "resides in the 'right now'" (1174b9), our human incapacity to experience this pleasure continuously in the manner of the god or First Mover does not imply a deficiency on our part.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, in both accounts of pleasure—the accounts in Book VII and Book X—Aristotle makes mention of the fact that there are distinct pleasures and activities that are appropriate to different individuals. Thus, he intimates that while the activity of contemplation and its accompanying pleasures may be best for some, it is not necessarily best for all. In fact, in Book VII, Aristotle notes that "some of the base motions and processes seem to be base unqualifiedly, whereas for a particular person, they are not such but are even choice worthy for him, while some are not choice worthy for him but are such only on a given occasion and for a

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<sup>57</sup> In Book I, Aristotle writes that "the good will not be good to a greater degree by being eternal either, if in fact whiteness that lasts a long time will not be whiter than that which lasts only a day" (1096b3–4).

short time, though not unqualifiedly” (1152b29–32). Aristotle thus subtly indicates that the activities bound up with courage, or perhaps even violence—which in the absence of some sort of necessity would be base—may appear good to some people. According to Aristotle, different individuals choose different activities and pleasures that correspond to what is most authoritative in them. At various points of the *Ethics*, Aristotle points out that we *are* the part that is most excellent and authoritative in us. Thus, by perceiving the ultimate particular thing—the moment that he can engage and bring a task to completion—and then acting upon that perception by undertaking noble deeds of valor, the statesman engages and gratifies his most authoritative part. Similarly, by contemplating the outermost bounds of abstract thought, the philosopher engages and gratifies his most authoritative part. The pleasure that the statesman and the philosopher receive from engaging in their respective activities is whole and complete, even though they are incapable of being practiced continuously.

Aristotle’s description of pleasure in Book X as something whole and complete is meant to show that our human incapacity to experience pleasure continuously does not imply a deficiency on our part. While it is true that we cannot experience pleasure in the manner of the god—i.e., continuously—this is not indicative of any deficiency on our part, because pleasure is something whole and complete. However, Aristotle does not end his analysis of pleasure with this insight. Instead, he turns to address the specifically *human* element of our existence, namely, our capacity for sensation. He writes, “Every sense perception is active in relation to the thing perceived, and it is active in a complete way when it is in a good condition with a view to the noblest of the things subject to sense perception” (1174b14–16). Thus, after having explained that there is nothing deficient about our inability to experience divine pleasure



continuously, Aristotle explains that a proper consideration of our existence as embodied human beings must take into account our material surroundings as well.

Aristotle continues by noting that the specifically human aspect of our existence is also capable of experiencing pleasure: “When both the thing perceived and that which perceives are of this most excellent sort, there will always be pleasure” (1174b30–32). While Aristotle is somewhat cryptic in his description of the pleasure that accompanies perception, in light of his comments concerning friendship, it appears that what he has in mind is the pleasure that accompanies a friendship based on the good, specifically, the delight that one derives from perceiving the order and beauty that one has created. Thus, friendship is necessary as it completes, or activates, our existence as human beings.

Again, the fact that friendship is necessary to complete our existence as human beings may seem to vindicate the Socratic contention that all friendship is based on a metaphysical lack or need. However, because Aristotle has consistently maintained that we are defined by what is authoritative in us, he forestalls this conclusion. The fact that friendship completes or activates our existence *as human beings* does not imply any deficiency on the part of the magnanimous statesman or philosopher. Indeed, neither the magnanimous statesman’s capacity to perceive the ultimate particular thing and engage in noble courageous acts nor the magnanimous philosopher’s godlike capacity for contemplation requires actualization from another. As a result, Aristotle is able to maintain that while friendship completes our existence as human beings, we do *not* need a friend to complete the most authoritative part of us. Aristotle resolves the Socratic paradox concerning the good man’s need for friendship by recognizing our

limitations as human beings but refusing to acknowledge that we are *defined* by those limitations.

Aristotle makes clear that the limitations posed on us as human beings do not define us when he depicts the life of contemplation. After describing the superiority of the contemplative life to the life of political action, Aristotle points out that this contemplative type of life exceeds what is human. He writes, “It is not insofar as he is a human being that a person will live in this way, but insofar as there is something divine present in him” (1177b27–28). Nevertheless, Aristotle concludes:

One ought not—as some recommend—to think only about human things because one is a human being, nor only about mortal things because one is mortal, but rather to make oneself immortal, insofar as that is possible, and to do all that bears on living in accord with what is the most excellent of the things in oneself. (1177b32–1178a1).

Thus, Aristotle recognizes that while the material, corporeal aspects of our existence ought to be of concern if we are to attain our full potential as human beings, one ought not to attend to these human concerns at the expense of our most divine capacities. While the perception of his friend and the political regime he founds may be pleasurable and necessary for the magnanimous philosopher’s completion as a human being, he ought not devote himself to these pleasures at the expense of his more divine capacity of philosophic contemplation. Similarly, while the magnanimous statesman may derive pleasure from undertaking noble (and necessary) actions pertaining to politics and war, these pursuits should not be all encompassing, or be pursued at the expense of his more divine capacity for perception.

This exhortation is echoed in the form of a warning at the conclusion of Aristotle's discussion of pleasure. He points out that the pleasures that complete the activities bound up with thinking differ from pleasures related to sense perception, and similarly the pleasures that accompany the various sense perceptions differ from another. He continues by stating that while the pleasures that properly correspond to the activity act as an aide in the completion of the activity, pleasures foreign to the activity have the effect of impeding the activity. Thus, he writes, "Those who love the aulos are incapable of paying attention to speeches if they overhear someone playing the aulos, because they take greater delight in the art of aulos playing than they do in the activity before them" (1175b2–6). The delight that one derives from music can interfere with other more rational activities. This example is intended to show that lower-order pleasures, or pleasures associated with lower-order activities, can impede our ability to utilize our higher capacities. Thus, just as the pleasures of music can interfere with our capacity to engage in rational activity, so the lower-order sensory pleasures can interfere with our theoretical (θεωρητικῆ) capacities. When this occurs, Aristotle seems to say, our lives become all too human.

### **Aristotle as Advisor**

Having established the importance of friendship, while also warning his readers of its dangers, Aristotle devotes the last chapter of Book X to explaining precisely how the statesman and the philosopher can order the regime toward the good, or how they may transcend mere nature. Aristotle notes that while all the relevant topics have been discussed—virtue, friendship, and

pleasure—the inquiry is not yet complete, as the end in matters of action consists not simply in contemplating and understanding things, but in *doing* them. To this end, Aristotle proposes to investigate the manner in which one may “possess the virtues and make use of them” (1179a3). As I hope to make clear, Aristotle believes that possessing and making use of the virtues is dependent upon good laws, as it is through the habituation engendered by the law that a person may come to be capable of reasoned debate and persuasion. However, Aristotle also deals with the difficulty that attends the lack of public care for the laws, explaining how one can become good in the absence of good laws. Aristotle posits private education and friendship as the method of reforming the law in such a situation. In this way, he reveals that the *Ethics* is a handbook both to establish and maintain public order. Viewing the *Ethics* in this way, establishes its relationship with the *Politics* and explains Aristotle’s reserve in the *Politics*.

Speeches and rhetoric alone are insufficient, argues Aristotle, to make the majority of people decent.<sup>58</sup> The use of reasoned persuasion is, in most cases, inadequate without a certain level of pre-rational education. In order for the majority of people to be capable of listening to reasoned advice, the “soul of the student must be prepared beforehand by means of habits” (1179b25–26). Here, Aristotle agrees with Plato’s method of education: habituation must precede rational education. A correct upbringing in which one is taught what he ought to love and what he ought to dislike is necessary if he is later going to be open to reasoned persuasion. However, Aristotle notes that correct habits are difficult to obtain without proper laws. While people may have the potential to develop habit and thereby acquire a second nature, they are not

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Apology* 38a2–4.

disposed to to act in a moderate manner before this potential is actualized. Left in their untutored state, most people are prone to act immoderately and in an uncontrolled manner. Because most people “obey the governance of necessity more than of speech, and of punishments more than of what is noble” (1180a4–6), Aristotle concludes that life as a whole is in need of law.

Despite the necessity of law in the formation and habituation of the citizens of the *polis*, Aristotle observes that most cities utterly neglect the law. What occurs in most cities is not the rational imposition of law, but instead the “command characteristic of a father” (1180a19). According to Aristotle, the problem inherent in this “command method” of order is that it leads to resentment; people begrudge those who impede them in their pursuit of their untutored desires. In contrast, the impersonal character of the law avoids this resentment and is not viewed as invidious. The rational, orderly, application of the law, Aristotle indicates, is superior to the personal, perhaps tribal approach to justice that characterizes the pre-political realm.

Unfortunately, argues Aristotle, what holds sway in most cities is not the reason of the law. Quoting a line from Homer’s *Odyssey*, Aristotle indicates that what happens instead is that each father “‘lay[s] down the sacred law for children and wife’ in the manner of the Cyclops” (1180a28–30). Aristotle’s invocation of the Cyclops—a race of bloodthirsty cannibals—is notable for two related reasons. First, Aristotle, suggests that untutored nature is nasty, brutish, and short. Without the imposition of the impersonal framework of the legal system most individuals will fail to acquire the virtue necessary to ensure that life is pleasant, orderly, and good, and will instead act in the brutal manner of the Cyclops. In addition, the Cyclops spurned technical innovation, trusting instead in the forces of nature, or providence. In the *Odyssey*, in the line prior to the one invoked by Aristotle, we are told that “the Cyclopes neither plant nor

plough, but trust in providence.”<sup>59</sup> By trusting in providence or fortune alone, the Cyclops live a savage and bloodthirsty life. Nature, Aristotle intimates, is nasty and brutish.

How, then, can one rise above the severity of nature? Somewhat paradoxically, Aristotle indicates that the cure lies within nature itself. Indeed, he states, “when cities utterly neglect the public care, it would seem appropriate for each individual to contribute to the virtues of *his own offspring and friends*” (1180a30–33; emphasis added). In the following paragraph, Aristotle paints a glowing portrait of the way in which a father’s actions can come to influence his children:

For just as it is the laws and customs that hold sway in cities, so also it is the speeches and habits of the father that do so in households—and these latter to a greater degree, on account of the kinship and benefactions involved, for from the outset household members feel affection for one another and are readily obedient by nature. (1180b4–8).

It may seem odd that Aristotle would point to private education and the care for one’s own offspring and friends as the means of transcending the severity of nature after having just compared that approach to the life of the Cyclops. How can the love of one’s own be characterized both as the cause of a harsh cycloptic existence *and* as the method by which man transcends that existence? Aristotle’s Janus-faced depiction of paternal authority and friendship suggests that fortune or chance will never be completely conquered. In contrast to Socrates and Lysander, both of whom sought to conquer fortune altogether by subverting the established order, Aristotle suggests that one still needs to work with the material that nature provides, such that it may be molded in the manner best conducive to human flourishing. As the examples of

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<sup>59</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Samuel Butler, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn, NY: Walter Black, 1944), 9.105-110.

Socrates and Lysander show, attempts to confront fortune directly, without respect for prevailing conditions, will result in failure.

So, how does one accommodate oneself to nature, or that which is given, so that the cycloptic existence of pure nature might be transcended? Throughout the *Ethics*, Aristotle has subtly indicated that the answer lies in the phenomenon of friendship—that is, the natural forces of potency and actuality. As noted above, the actuality of a rational agent can come to bear on the potentiality of another rational agent, thereby cultivating and actualizing the other’s innate potentiality. In this last chapter of the *Ethics*, Aristotle indicates that friendship—and by extension the forces of potentiality and actuality—are natural, pre-political forces that exist both in family life and in friendships. These natural forces, Aristotle contends, both can and should be cultivated when public care and education have broken down. When the established order is in a state of dissolution, fathers and friends ought to act as *informal* lawgivers and educate those in their care privately.<sup>60</sup>

The primary difficulty in establishing private education, however, is that if it is to be effective, the educator himself must already be properly formed. If the lawgiver is to institute (informal) laws that are conducive to the cultivation of virtue, he must be cognizant of the end at

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Bodéüs argues that Aristotle’s primary purpose in this passage is to align the private education with the public education of the regime. He writes, “Aristotle’s injunction upon the heads of household should be understood primarily as providing a way to align children’s education, via paternal authority, with the principles of the laws which determine the development of the political community to which the children belong. Thus is removed the possible discontinuity between the household regime and the political regime.” *Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics*, 56. Bodéüs continues in a footnote, arguing that Aristotle’s point is “not to enact rules of conduct allegedly better than the norms implicitly recommended by the laws, in contradiction with the ends of the constitutional regime in force.” *Ibid.*, 166 n. 26. Bodéüs’s interpretation does not adequately take into account the context in which this injunction concerning private education is given. Aristotle makes clear that private education ought to be undertaken “when cities utterly neglect the public care” (1180a30–31). This suggests that Aristotle’s injunction is not primarily a way of aligning paternal authority with the public education of the regime but is instead a way of reforming a regime that has fallen into a state of disrepair.

which these laws are aimed, and he must himself be oriented toward that end; in sum, the educator or lawgiver must—to a certain degree—already be virtuous. Aristotle had indicated earlier in the chapter that in the absence of the requisite laws, it is difficult for someone to obtain a correct upbringing leading to virtue. As a result, he seems to be in the position of a catch-22. On the one hand, when the city neglects the public care, it requires individuals to undertake private education so as to reform the public order. On the other hand, private education itself requires the pre-existence of an individual that has been properly educated, which in turn depends on good laws.

Nevertheless, Aristotle notes, even in the absence of a formal system of public care, it is not impossible for select individuals to be self-taught on the basis of experience alone:

Nothing prevents someone—even someone without scientific knowledge—from exercising a noble care for an individual, provided that he has, through experience, contemplated in a precise way the results for each, just as even some people seem to be their own best doctors but are unable to aid another at all. (1180b16–19).

Aristotle concedes that certain individuals are capable of being self-taught via experience. However, he immediately follows this concession by noting that this experience is, on its own, insufficient for educating others; self-taught individuals are “unable to aid another at all” (1180b19). He notes that if such a self-taught individual had the desire to educate others, he would have to concern himself with science, and “proceed to the universal and become also acquainted with this to the extent possible” (1180b21–22). Thus, if one wishes to become an educator, experience alone is insufficient; rather, one needs at least some level of acquaintance with universal, scientific, principles.



Aristotle next turns to the question concerning the source from which the legislator may attain the requisite scientific knowledge that is necessary for one to become an educator or skilled legislator. The legislative skill, he argues, is different from that of the other sciences or capacities that people may develop. The other arts and sciences operate on a sort of apprenticeship system, where an individual who practices the art also transmits that capacity to others. However, in politics—of which the legislative art is a part—this does not seem to occur. Echoing Socrates’ observation in the *Gorgias*, Aristotle notes that skilled politicians do not make “their own sons or any of their friends into skilled politicians” even though this would be a reasonable thing to do (11801a5–7). Aristotle observes that instead it is the Sophists who profess to teach “the political art” and how to “make men good citizens” (*Prot.* 319a4; *NE* 1180b35–1181a2). And, like Socrates, Aristotle seems to be dismissive of their claims. In general, he notes “they do not even know what sort of a thing [the political art] is or with what sorts of things it is concerned: otherwise they would not have posited it as being the same thing as rhetoric—or even inferior to it” (1181a13–16).

In elaborating upon the Sophists’ failure properly to teach the political art, Aristotle does not dismiss their claims of knowledge completely. Instead, he insinuates that their art is incomplete. He writes that the Sophists’ view of legislating is that it consists simply of “putting together a collection of the well-regarded laws” (1181a17). However, on its own, this collection is insufficient because the selection of *which* laws to implement is not an easy task but requires a particular skill. The Sophists, he concludes, fail to recognize that “selection [is] a part of the comprehension involved, and [act] as if the correct judging of them were not the greatest thing, just as it is in music” (1181a17–19). Aristotle’s critique of the Sophists seems to be aimed not at

their lack of scientific knowledge, but at their belief that this scientific knowledge is sufficient by itself and that the act of implementing that knowledge is an easy task.

Founding a regime and establishing good laws, Aristotle suggests, is not simply an endeavor that entails scientific knowledge or an intellectual grasp of the truth about eternal principles. Instead, these tasks require the full range of man's dianoetic capacities. In addition to an intellectual grasp of the outermost bounds in the direction of the most general universality, founding a regime requires an intellectual grasp of the ultimate particular thing as well. The former capacity belongs, of course, to the philosopher. The philosopher has the capacity to create treatises and "collections of well-regarded laws" based on an intellectual grasp of eternal principles. The latter capacity—a capacity to grasp the ultimate particular thing—belongs to those politicians or statesmen who have the relevant experience: "Those with the relevant experience in each thing," he writes, "judge the works involved correctly, and they comprehend through what or how the works are brought to completion" (1181a20–23). It is not the philosopher, but statesmen with political experience who have the capacity to observe a given political situation and discern the first instance or opportunity where they may intervene to bring a particular action to completion. Of course, in establishing the rule of law the philosopher and the statesmen are not creating *ex nihilo*, but are instead building on, and bringing to completion, what is already inchoately present in nature.<sup>61</sup>

Aristotle makes clear in the last chapter of the *Ethics* that forming or reforming a regime requires not *only* the scientific capacity of the philosopher, but also the practical reason of the

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<sup>61</sup> *Pol.* 1253a30-31: "Accordingly, there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of community. And yet he who first founded one is responsible for the greatest of goods."

statesman. The last chapter sheds much light on the purpose of the *Ethics* as a whole. The capacity of the magnanimous philosopher *and* of the magnanimous statesman are necessary for the formation of a *polis* that is ordered toward the good. While both types of magnanimous individuals are capable of bestowing great benefits on the community, their awareness of this fact also causes them to be a danger to their community. Aristotle shows that friendship of the good—that is, friendship between two magnanimous individuals who are self-sufficient and aware of their own greatness—can cultivate the public benefits that magnanimity can provide while avoiding its attendant dangers. In this way, Aristotle solves the classic dilemma posed by political philosopher: friendship can attain the coincidence of power wisdom and power that ensures that the regime and the public order are directed toward the good.

## CONCLUSION. FRIENDSHIP AND THE PRACTICE OF POLITICS

Reading the Socratic dialogues on friendship in conjunction with books VIII and IX of Aristotle's *Ethics* reveals a significant and sustained difference in understanding between Socrates and Aristotle. As I have sought to show throughout this dissertation, Socrates views all friendship as based on a metaphysical lack, or need, in which a friend is seen as a sort of "phantom friend" who fills this void. According to Socrates, people naturally desire the good, and friendship simply acts as an impediment to man's ability to access the good. The political implication of the Socratic understanding of friendship is that all political relationships—to the extent that they are based on friendship (or "phantom friendship")—are obstacles to man's desire for the good or for metaphysical completion. Indeed, Socrates' own way of life is devoted to questioning and undermining the standards of justice that are the basis for political friendship. He takes a negative and abstentious approach to the political realm because the friendships it fosters are, according to him, obstacles to man's ability to access the good and are therefore unjust.

In contrast, Aristotle articulates an understanding of friendship that is based on an awareness and appreciation of another's goodness. True friendship, or a friendship of the good, is not based on any kind of metaphysical lack but instead on self-sufficiency and a recognition of another's goodness. Aristotle deftly responds to the *aporia* that Socrates confronts, namely, why someone who is self-sufficient and good would have any need for a friend. According to Aristotle, each individual is good and self-sufficient in his own nature. By finding a positive

basis for friendship, Aristotle also finds a positive basis for politics. Aristotle is keen to reconcile philosophy with politics, and it is through the friendship between two magnanimous individuals who are similar, yet different in some key regard, that he accomplishes this goal. By affirming the self-sufficiency of both the magnanimous statesman and the magnanimous philosopher, while at the same time leading each of them to recognize the virtues of the other, Aristotle attains the coincidence of power and wisdom that is necessary if philosophy is to have a guiding impact on the political realm.

My argument has largely held up Aristotle's understanding of friendship as a positive and sound basis for our own orientation toward politics in contrast to Socrates' conception of friendship. Aristotle's writings on friendship pave the way for an appreciation of the practice of politics and man's political nature that avoids viewing politics as merely a realm of injustice or as something that we enter into solely on account of our individual deficiencies. Aristotle's conception of friendship provides a level of dignity to politics. Despite the broad disagreement between the Socratic and Aristotelian conceptions of friendship and politics, Socrates and Aristotle agree that friendship is unable to provide completion for man. Neither would endorse the notion that a friend is one's "other half." Such an understanding of friendship, described in Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, views man as, on his own, incomplete and in search his "other half." According to Aristophanes, those who discover their other half, "are wondrously struck with friendship, attachment, and love, and are just about unwilling to be apart from one another even for a short time" (*Symp.* 192b9–c2). If they were capable of fusing into one, Aristophanes argues, they would choose to do so, and thereby be made whole. The Aristophanic

conception of ἔπος views friendship as a source of completion that can satisfy the desire that people have for completion, or wholeness.

Socrates is emphatic in the *Lysis* that friendship is incapable of providing completion in the manner described by Aristophanes. While Aristotle explicitly disagrees with and critiques the Socratic conception of friendship in Books VIII and IX of the *Ethics*, he nevertheless agrees that friendship is incapable of providing completion in the Aristophanic sense. Rather, the highest and most divine activity of which man is capable is the activity of contemplation. In fact, Aristotle warns that the pleasures associated with friendship may interfere with the activity of contemplation. While the philosopher's perception of his friend and of the political regime he finds may be pleasurable and necessary, he ought not devote himself to these pleasures at the expense of his more divine capacity for philosophic contemplation.

That Socrates and Aristotle both deny that friendship can provide metaphysical completion for man suggests that we need to remain wary of any political movement that seeks to ground man's metaphysical completion either in friendship or the *polis* itself. It is certainly true that Aristotle's conception of magnanimity and friendship provides a level of dignity to the political life—a dignity that Socrates denies. Furthermore, friendship may go some way to providing an antidote to the sense of *anomie* and isolation that many scholars claim is pervasive in modern political societies. Nevertheless, Aristotle denies that friendship itself is able to provide for man's metaphysical completion. For Aristotle, man's highest activity and, therefore, his most complete end, consists in philosophical contemplation.

While Aristotle’s project lends dignity to politics and is able to go some way toward combatting some of the social ills facing modern political society, we may well ask what the practical political implications of his project might be. Aristotle’s understanding of friendship and magnanimity may seem somewhat far removed from our understanding and practice of politics. We may justly ask, What concrete, practical implications does Aristotle’s treatment of magnanimity and friendship have for us? At first glance, it may seem that his account of magnanimity and friendship has little relevance for us: The very notion of magnanimity as a virtue seems out of vogue today.<sup>1</sup> While the lack of recognition we afford to the magnanimous philosophers who have worked behind the political scene and away from the public eye may be entirely as Aristotle would wish, it would seem that today the meritorious claims of the great statesmen of the western tradition, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Winston Churchill often go unrecognized as well. Indeed, Paul Carrese notes that “political science and democratic theory in America for over a century have eschewed issues of character and virtue in favor of new conceptions of democratic leadership,” premised largely on democratic and progressive values.<sup>2</sup>

It may be argued that this irrelevance of magnanimity gives evidence of the health of the current state of politics. The notion of an enlightened statesman, together with the aid and advice

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Carrese notes that this is increasingly true of modern academics and historians. He argues that academic portrayals of statesmen who have historically been depicted as principled leaders with noble and austere characters have been subject to a “subtle demotion-via-contextualization.” He goes on to posit that while the purpose of this genre is to demythologize these individuals and to portray them as “merely historical character[s],” the actual result is a “democratic historian tell[ing] a democratic age just what it wants to hear: that we have nothing much to look up to, no real greatness to ponder in [past statesmen], and no real failing in our more democratic culture.” “George Washington’s Greatness and Aristotelian Virtue,” in *Magnanimity and Statesmanship*, ed. Carson Holloway (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 147–48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

of a magnanimous philosopher, taking the *polis* in hand and formulating policy at will seems threatening to modern liberal democracy's devotion to egalitarianism and the rule of law.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps our failure to recognize the magnanimity of bygone statesmen is, in some sense, a testament to the success of these statesmen. For example, upon exiting the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin is famously reported to have said in response to the question of what sort of government had been created, "A republic, if you can keep it."<sup>4</sup> It is not unfair to surmise that the greatest danger to the newly-formed republic would be some overly ambitious character such as a Napoleon or a Cromwell. The hunger for rule that sometimes accompanies great statesmen, coupled with the desire of the populace for a hero, was a potential threat to the fledgling American republic's success. It is to George Washington's great credit that he rejected overtures from the people to seize power and retain the office of the presidency as a life-time appointment, not once, but twice.<sup>5</sup> Thus, viewed from a particular perspective, the absence of recognition of the virtue of magnanimity can seem almost salutary. Republicanism—or at least democracy—seems to be alive and well.

Nevertheless, before we congratulate ourselves and celebrate the demise of magnanimity, we would do well to reflect on Aristotle's account of magnanimity as well as on the related phenomenon of friendship to examine whether the loss of these concepts truly signals an advance. In what follows, I will make three claims concerning the continued relevance of

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<sup>3</sup> Carson Holloway writes, "The democratic societies of the modern world are largely predicated on a belief in the fundamental equality of all human beings. In contrast, the very idea of magnanimity seems to be inseparable from an aristocratic affirmation of inequality: the magnanimous man is better than his fellow citizens." "Introduction" in *Magnanimity and Statesmanship*, ed. Carson Holloway (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin: Life of a Founding Father*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 230.

<sup>5</sup> Carrese, "George Washington's Greatness," 147.



magnanimity and friendship in modern democratic politics. The first claim will center on Aristotle's insistence on complementarity in friendship, and the way that this may come to bear on politics, even in relatively prosaic periods in the life of democratic societies. Second, I will briefly analyze Aristotle's discussion concerning the benefits, as well as the limits, of the rule of law. Aristotle's discussion serves, I think, as a useful reminder that law is not the embodiment of either reason or the purpose of politics but always remains simply an imitation of these things. To the extent that law remains only an imitation of reason and the purpose of politics, Aristotle's discussion concerning the limits of law reminds us that we may at times require the political skill of statesmanship to reform the law. The last point I will make is that Aristotle's writings concerning magnanimity, friendship, and law contain a warning against the false but dangerously alluring belief that laws and institutions have a permanent character.

As I have framed it, Aristotle's account of friendship—in particular his friendship of the good—is one of complementarity. True friendship can exist only between individuals who are both good and differ from one another in some fundamental respect. I have argued that Aristotle has in mind the friendship between the statesman and the philosopher: the wisdom of the philosopher, coupled with the courage and conventional nobility of the statesman, ensure that wisdom is able to have a constructive impact on the political realm. Does Aristotle's view of the matter deny the possibility of friendship between statesmen, or friendship between philosophers? Would this interpretation not put Aristotle's theory of friendship at odds with what we see in our everyday life? Is it not plainly the case that it is precisely philosophers who join together in the pursuit of truth, or statesmen who together struggle to achieve political objectives? John von Heyking points out that some of the most profound and consequential friendships are those that

exist between great statesmen.<sup>6</sup> He points to the friendship between Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt as being not only a deep friendship, but also one that had profound consequences in turning the tide of the Second World War. Similarly, the political friendship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was instrumental in the establishment of the American Republic. If Aristotle's approach takes such friendships off the table, is his understanding of friendship at odds with the phenomena?

It is important to remember that Aristotle's theory of friendship is not exhausted by the type of friendship I have been describing in the previous chapters. Friendships of utility and pleasure, while not friendship "in the authoritative sense," are nonetheless still friendships, albeit of a lower degree. In fact, Aristotle indicates that these friendships are much more common than are friendships of the good, insofar as people who are good (or magnanimous) are rare. Thus, Aristotle does not deny that friendships between two statesmen or between two philosophers may occur. Instead, he simply claims that the basis of such a friendship will not be on account of the similarity of the two individuals; instead, it will be based on either pleasure or utility.

Furthermore, to point out that the basis of such friendships is utility or pleasure is not to trivialize these friendships. As Aristotle makes clear in his discussion concerning justice, necessity can provide a strong basis for unity. In fact, it is necessity more than anything else that "holds people together as if they were some single entity" (*NE* 133b7–8). It is not beyond the realm of possibility to surmise that absent the dire threat posed by the Third Reich, the friendship between Churchill and Roosevelt would not have been nearly as strong as it was. While not

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<sup>6</sup> John von Heyking, *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 6.

comprising the most developed and highest form of friendship, friendships based in utility or need can provide a strong—albeit, perhaps temporary—basis for friendship.

Furthermore, while I have noted above that Aristotle’s account of friendship ought to be understood primarily as a sort of guide for situations in which public order has broken down, its use is not limited to such situations. Aristotle’s account of friendship contains insights that are applicable also to periods characterized by relative stability and ordinary day-to-day politics. For example, Aristotle stresses the complementarity that characterizes friendship. He does so in large part because such friendships can lead to the establishment or profound reorganization of a political regime. Nevertheless, such complementarity can be beneficial (and perhaps necessary) also in ordinary day-to-day operations of the political regime. A friendship between those of different and complementary strengths may be beneficial to the polity in small but important ways. For example, the technical skills of a policy analyst, combined with the rhetorical skills of a politician, can serve to enhance the political and financial well-being of a regime. Thus, while Aristotle’s description of friendship is, at its height and in its greatest splendor, the friendship between two individuals with the ability to confer “the greatest benefits” on the regime, his understanding of friendship has implications for ordinary, everyday politics as well.

In fact, not only does Aristotle’s insistence on complementarity in friendship remain relevant, but it also contains an important reminder for the practice of politics today. Aristotle labored to establish the credibility and importance of philosophy among the powerful and established political gentlemen (καλοικάγαθοι) of his day, who viewed philosophy with suspicion. While Aristotle’s primary rhetorical concern in the *Ethics* is to convince these noble gentlemen of the insights and benefits that philosophy and science can bring to the political

realm, his secondary aim, is to convince the philosopher of the necessity and dignity of the practice of politics. In contrast to the political conditions facing Aristotle, today we witness great optimism concerning the benefits of science (επιστήμη) to solve our present political problems. This trend, beginning with the political philosophy of Hobbes, sought to place politics on what seemed to be the sound foundation of science and institutions,<sup>7</sup> rather than in man's fickle passions.<sup>8</sup> The dangers posed by those who fail to recognize the necessity and claims of science seem to be mild in comparison to the hostility displayed toward science in Aristotle's day. Instead, the greater danger facing today's political climate is a misplaced optimism concerning the power of science, combined with what amounts to a depreciation of the political insights possessed by virtuous statesman. Indeed, today the practice of politics has fallen into a sort of disrepute, such that the very term "politics" is viewed with a certain level of disdain.

Given the current deprecation of politics and the optimism concerning the benefits and capacity of science, Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and politics contains important insights for our expectations of philosophical speculation. His description of man's νοῦς-like capacity as two-fold, comprising not only the capacity of the philosopher to comprehend and grasp the most abstract, scientific truths, but also the capacity of the statesman to perceive and recognize the ultimate particular, seems to be a particularly relevant insight in today's context. Aristotle's political philosophy contains a useful reminder that we must

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<sup>7</sup> Leo Strauss writes that "Hobbes' break with tradition was doubtless the result of his turning to mathematics and natural science." *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), 136. Strauss later revised his thesis and argued that Machiavelli, not Hobbes, was the founder of modern politics

<sup>8</sup> Hobbes lists magnanimity as a passion, rather than a virtue. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41 (ch. 6).

recognize the claims of what is overtly political. As Aristotle presents it, the political sphere is the sphere of the particular, and it is ultimately the statesman who has the capacity to perceive the specifics of a particular situation, and to decide what laws are suitable for the character of the people and the material conditions of the *polis*. The statesman thus has a hand in forming the values or purpose of the *polis*, or what the *polis* will esteem.

Aristotle's recognition of the dignity and claims of politics, brings me to my second point concerning the importance of his understanding of magnanimity and friendship; the limits of the rule of law. While Aristotle emphasizes that the complementary friendship between the philosopher and the statesman can confer great benefits on the city, particularly when such friendship ensures that "well-regarded laws" are implemented in the correct manner (*NE* 1181a13–24), he also points out that the rule of law has certain limitations. Indeed, as Aristotle presents it, law is an artifice or convention that is meant to embody—to the extent possible—the *voûς*-like capacities of the statesman and the philosopher. However, at a number of different points in the *Politics*, Aristotle makes clear that the law is only an imitation of the correct reason or intellect of the statesman and the philosopher, and that the law can never fully capture either the intellect of the statesman or the purpose of the regime.

Aristotle's recognition of the limits of the rule of law are first hinted at in the second book of the *Politics*. In a passage in which he is commenting on and critiquing previous contributions that have been made to the study of political science, Aristotle raises the question as to "whether it is harmful or advantageous for cities to change traditional laws, if some other one should be better" (*Pol.* 1268b27–29). His principal advice is to remain cautious about changing the law, due to the fact that the law obtains its power from habituation and established

usage. Because people obey the law out of a sense of habit that is created over a period of time, “the easy alteration of existing laws in favor of new and different ones weakens the power of law itself” (1269a20 – 22) and ought to be avoided. As a result, Aristotle’s overall advice is to avoid changing the laws unnecessarily, due to the instability this would engender.

Nevertheless, immediately prior to his conclusion that one should avoid the unnecessary alteration of law, Aristotle emphasizes that progress in the law is attainable. As evidence, he points to the “simple and barbaric” nature of the laws that existed in ancient times (1268b39–40). In fact, Aristotle even goes so far as to ridicule the “ancient ordinances [that] still remain” as being “altogether silly” (1269a1). He follows this up with the observation that “in general, all seek not the traditional but the good” (1269a4–5). Thus, Aristotle’s conclusion seems to be that while laws serve to maintain a certain stability, they are not an end in and of themselves. While the law seeks to reify reason and the values or purposes of the regime, it never fully succeeds in doing so but remains an imperfect imitation of reason, purpose, and value.

This point is underscored in Book III of the *Politics* in a passage devoted to the topic of kingship. Aristotle explicitly raises the question of whether it is better to be “ruled by the best man or by the best laws” (1286a9–10). On the one hand, he notes that rule by the best man would seem to be more advantageous than the rule of law, as laws are limited by the very fact that they are framed with a view to universality. In contrast to the rule of an enlightened statesman, laws are unable to take into account the particular, or situations that lie outside the norm. In some circumstances, the application of a general law of justice may be unwise, and

perhaps even be unjust or conflicting with the purpose of the regime.<sup>9</sup> In such situations the prudent statesman or the political man on the spot who is familiar with the particulars is capable of rendering justice that reflects the standards and values of the city in a way that the generality of law is unable to do.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Aristotle notes that there are benefits to the rule of law as well. The rule of law, in contrast to human rule, is dispassionate. There is no fear that law, carried away by passion, will rule with partiality, or with its own interests in mind. Thus, this section seems to reiterate Aristotle's qualified respect for the law. While the rule of law is marked by sobriety, there are some things that it simply is unable to judge well.

Aristotle's observations concerning the rule of law point not only to the limits of the rule of law, but also to its impermanent character. This becomes clear when we set Aristotle's thoughts concerning the limits of the rule of law in relief against his famous statement made towards the end of Book III of the *Politics* concerning the individual of superlative virtue. Aristotle indicates that when an individual arises who is so outstanding in virtue that he is preeminent over all others in the city, the only natural course that remains "is for everyone to obey such a person gladly, so that persons of this sort will be permanent kings in their cities" (1284b32–34).<sup>11</sup> Here, Aristotle suggests that in such a situation the best and most just regime

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Republic* 331c1–d1.

<sup>10</sup> See also, *NE* 1137b13 – 20: "The equitable is ... a correction of the legally just. The cause of this is that all law is general, but concerning some matters it is not possible to speak correctly in a general way. In those cases then, in which it is necessary to speak generally, but it is not possible to do so correctly, the law takes what is for the most part the case, but without being ignorant of the error involved in so doing."

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle repeats this claim again at the very end of Book III of the *Politics* in a discussion concerning ostracism (Cf. *Pol.* 1288a25–28).

would be the absolute rule by the individual of superlative virtue. Is Aristotle's final claim that the rule of law is ultimately second to the absolute rule of an enlightened statesman?

Scholars have struggled to make sense of Aristotle's remarkable—albeit, brief—praise of absolute rule, particularly because it seems so at odds with the republican character of much of the rest of the *Politics*. Waller Newall posits that while Aristotle recognizes the enlightened statesman's claim to rule as rational and correct, he mutes this claim because it would undermine the claim of “the self-governing political community that is at the forefront of his political philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> According to Newall, Aristotle views both monarchy and the self-governing political community characterized by the rule of law as being sanctioned by nature. Newall avoids the obvious contradiction involved in this assertion by pointing to Aristotle's *Physics*, where natural phenomena are “understood both in terms of spontaneous self-movement and as being analogous to the rational precision by which an artist produces things.”<sup>13</sup> Newall explains that if we extend “this understanding of nature to political life, the natural realm of politics is accordingly a mixture of the self-government of political communities and the skills of monarchical statecraft through which prudent rulers ‘make people better.’”<sup>14</sup> As Aristotle writes in Book I of the *Politics*, “there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward [the city]. And yet he who first founded one is responsible for the greatest of goods.” (*Pol.* 1253a30–31). The idea seems to be that although the city naturally comes into being on the basis of a certain necessity, it

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<sup>12</sup> Waller R. Newall, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.



is through enlightened statesmanship that the city obtains a form or purpose beyond the simple countering of necessity.

Newall's explanation of Aristotle's puzzling assertion in favor of absolute rule is congruent with my own interpretation of the *Ethics*. The matter of the regime—i.e., the people—has the natural capacity to become virtuous, but it is up to the enlightened statesman to activate that capacity. However, the question that remains is under what conditions ought the city embrace self-government and the rule of law, and under what conditions ought it entrust all power and authority to the skills of monarchical statecraft? Aristotle remains silent about this. The most he states is that the city ought to entrust absolute rule to the monarch when such an individual's superlative virtue becomes evident.

The question of when the city ought to entrust governance to an absolute monarch is dependent upon when the superlative virtue of an outstanding individual becomes manifest. Such pre-eminence will likely become evident in the rare situation in which the values and purpose of the regime have been forgotten. When the regime and the people in it have forgotten their very purpose and the public care is utterly neglected, a statesman, with the advice of a philosopher, might distinguish himself and renew the city's sense of purpose. (*NE* 1180a30–b28). Of course, as shown above, these magnanimous individuals who are capable of bestowing the greatest benefits on the city by giving it a sense of purpose are potentially dangerous.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it may be that Aristotle chooses to devote the majority of his writings in the *Politics* to extolling the virtues of the self-governing community, while muting the claim to rule on the part of

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<sup>15</sup> See above at pp. 140–49.

individuals of superlative virtue because the situations in which absolute rule is necessary are rare, and the dangers that are associated with absolute rule are great. Nevertheless, the fact that Aristotle merely mutes the claim of such individuals of superlative virtue rather than extinguishing them completely, suggests that the institutions and procedures that allow for self-government and the rule of law are not permanent but are subject to decay.

Viewed from this perspective, Aristotle's political philosophy is an endorsement of the rule of law with the important qualifier that law itself is neither the embodiment of reason nor the embodiment of the fundamental character of the regime. At a time when there is strong belief in the power of the scientific administration of politics and a belief that all political problems can be solved by better laws, superior institutions, and more sophisticated procedures, it is useful to remember that law is only an approximation of the fundamental character or purpose of the regime. Part of what it means to be human, according to Aristotle, is to be a *political* being. Thus, when the institutions that are meant to reflect the fundamentally political concepts of human existence such as purpose, value, and reason fail to do so, a significant aspect of human existence—we may even say the *human* aspect of existence—is removed as a possibility for man. The attempt to resolve all problems through the use of abstract sciences and institutions that no longer reflect their original purpose or value is, in the end, a dehumanizing of man's existence.

The above statements are not intended to suggest that modern liberal democracy has reached the point at which it is necessary to abandon self-government and the rule of law in favor of absolute rule. However, Aristotle's warnings concerning the limits and impermanence of the rule of law suggest that it is important to maintain a recognition of the virtue of

magnanimity and an awareness of what can be accomplished by the friendship of magnanimous individuals. Indeed, if modern political societies lose a sense of what magnanimity is, they may be incapable of recognizing the magnanimous man when he is most needed. Or, perhaps worse yet, the failure to recognize magnanimity may instead culminate in the public acclamation of a demagogue who merely appears magnanimous. There is the very real danger—a danger that is particularly acute in democracies—that a demagogue, upon seizing power, is capable of transitioning into a dictator. Maintaining an appreciation for the virtue of magnanimity, the friendship of magnanimous men, and for the magnanimous statesmen of the past avoids not only an excessive trust in the power and permanence of laws and institutions, but it also enables us to distinguish true magnanimity from its dangerous simulacrum.

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## VITA

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