POLITICAL FRIENDSHIP AND THE SECOND SELF  
IN 
ARISTOTLE’S NICOMACHEAN ETHICS 

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Abstract – The difficulty that academics have faced in resolving the tensions between competing interpretations of Aristotelian political friendship can be traced to a lack of attention paid to Aristotle’s understanding of the self. The friend, Aristotle tells us, is a “second self,” but it is not clear what he means by this phrase. One group of contemporary commentators (to whom I give the name Strong Integrationists) suggests that Aristotle calls for an intimate connection between moral and political forms of friendship. Strong Integrationists, in making their arguments, tacitly assume a more-or-less Cartesian understanding of the self. I suggest that this assumption is in error. The Aristotelian self is generally unstable, fractured, and only rarely capable of the sustained virtue that characterizes the highest form of friendship. By reexamining the nature of the Aristotelian self I hope to provide a reading of political friendship that is more faithful to Aristotle’s text, and more in line with his own philosophical assumptions.

Introduction 

After centuries of relative neglect, friendship has emerged in the academy as an area of renewed interest. Moral philosophers see in friendship interesting questions regarding duty, and responsibility, while political philosophers are often interested in questions of order, obligation, and justice. A certain species of friendship, namely, its political variety, seems to bring together several of these concerns. A central question recurs in much of the literature about friendship: “To what extent can Aristotle’s ideas about friendship be pressed into useful service by modern political theorists?” Aristotle’s discussion of friendship stands as one of the most thoughtful,
penetrating, and enduring treatments we have available. It has the added bonus, for political theorists, of explicitly addressing the political dimensions of friendship. I will argue, however, that in a rush to enlist the name and authority of Aristotle, a number of contemporary theorists have made important assumptions about the nature of Aristotelian friendship that are not supported by the texts.

Much of the debate over the proper understanding of Aristotle’s view of political friendship is concerned with the relationship between politics and ethics. I suggest that structuring the debate around questions of political morality ignores a more fundamental question. Contemporary commentators often seek to appropriate the language and structure of Aristotle’s argument for their own purposes, and this is done at the expense of a full appreciation of the philosophical context of his passages on friendship. My untraditional reading of Aristotle’s concept of friendship—untraditional need not imply unfaithful—examines the psychological foundation of friendship, namely, Aristotle’s underdeveloped theory of the self. I hope to demonstrate that much of the contemporary literature on Aristotle’s theory of friendship is marred by an understanding of the self that implicitly assumes a modern understanding of the self that simply was not available to Aristotle. This is especially true of a group of scholars, to whom I give the name Strong Integrationists, that insist on an extremely intimate relationship between moral and political forms of friendships.

**Aristotle on Friendship**

For Aristotle, as for classical Greece in general, friends were necessary components of happiness, so that no one could be friendless and hope to flourish. The word that is translated into English as “friendship” (philia) is notoriously elastic.\(^5\) It can be used to refer to personal affective relationships, the parent-child bond, the connection between business partners, and myriad other such relationships. Friendship provided not only companionship, but also a social matrix within which lives and actions were given meaning.\(^6\) Speaking politically, friendship was a concern treated seriously by legislators. As Aristotle tells us,

> Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel factions as their worst enemy.\(^7\)

The seriousness accorded to friendship, however, does not mean that Aristotle speaks with absolute clarity on the issue. In fact, he recognizes that “[n]ot a few things about friendship are matters of debate.”\(^8\) As a result, Aristotle adopts with regard to friendship the same attitude he has towards the rest of the subject matter of the *Ethics*: “[w]e must be content…in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly

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6 And as Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us, for the Greeks “what are required are actions. A man in heroic society is what he does.” *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 122.


8 Ibid., 1155a32.
and in outline” since that is the degree of exactness appropriate to the subject matter.9 Despite the difficulty in gaining exactitude, a more-or-less clear picture does emerge.

Aristotle differentiates between three species of friendship, arguing that “not everything seems to be loved but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant, or useful.”10 This leads Aristotle to conclude that love of the good, pleasant, and useful, lead to different sorts of friendships: virtue (or, complete) friendship, pleasure friendship, and advantage friendship. Each form of friendship, although related in a number of ways, is distinct in that its enabling medium (goodness, pleasure, utility) is distinct.

Following the pattern he establishes earlier in the Ethics Aristotle treats one species of friendship as superior to the others; complete friendship, with its concern for the good of the friend rather than the advantages gained through the friendship is presented as the paradigmatic case. Complete “friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves.”11 Complete friendship, however, is exceedingly rare. “[I]t is natural that such friendships should be infrequent,” Aristotle tells us, “for such men are rare.”12 Because Aristotle characteristically spends much time discussing the best case of friendship commentators sometimes gloss over the fact that it is an unusual relationship, not found in large numbers, and definitely not to be expected of an entire population.

Aristotle’s discussion of the political form of friendship is particularly interesting because it provides a natural bridge between the Ethics and the Politics.13 Aristotle taught that friendship could be, and most often is, found where individuals are united in a communal pursuit of a shared goal, “for friendship depends on community.”14 The paradigmatic example of this form of friendship is a community of sailors who have undertaken a lengthy journey together, and who must cooperate if any of them are to be successful.15 However, friendship can be found in a number of communities ranging from small cadres of good men “alike in virtue” to dinner clubs (hetaireiai), commercial partnerships, and religious societies. Each of these communities, of course, “are like parts of the political community,”16 since it is the political that overarches, authorizes, and orders all other forms of community.

Despite the centrality of the political in Aristotle’s view of human affairs, his understanding of political friendship keeps it at a distance from the more esteemed virtue friendship. Political friendship, counter-intuitively perhaps, is clearly treated as a form of

9 Ibid., 1094b12-29.
10 Ibid., 1155b17-18.
11 Ibid., 11568-9.
12 Ibid., 1156b24.
14 NE 1159a33.
15 The fact that Aristotle refers to sea travelers in this regard, and seems loath to use as an example travelers by land is instructive. The length and relative isolation characteristic of a sea voyage necessitates prolonged cooperation, something that demands a minimal standard of decency, and is therefore beyond the reach of base and corrupt men. Ground travel offers ample opportunity to remove oneself from the community, thereby circumventing the communion need for a minimum level of decency.
16NE 1160a9.
advantage friendship. The city (polis) is merely another form of association, and citizens, in this context, are not unlike sailors on a voyage.\(^{17}\) As Aristotle explains,

all forms of community are like parts of the political community; for men journey together with a view to some particular advantage, and to provide something that they need for the purposes of life; and it is for the sake of advantage that the political community too seems both to have come together originally and to endure, for this is what legislators aim at, and they call just that which is to the common advantage.\(^{18}\)

Legislators create law in order to serve the advantage of the city, and justice itself seems to be little more than advantage that is widespread amongst citizens. Aristotle maintains that, “justice is a political matter; for justice is the organization of a political community, and justice decides what is just.”\(^{19}\) A political community is not created in light of a universal sense of justice, rather justice is the product of the organization of a political community. Aristotle’s insistence that the polis is the natural venue in which man can achieve eudaimonia (happiness) need not imply that the particular, contingent laws of individual political units apply with the force of natural laws. As Bernard Yack explains,

Nature thus tells Aristotle who can participate in deliberation about political justice but not what they should choose. There are natural standards governing the framework of political justice and membership in the political community, but no natural standards against which to measure the justice of members’ decisions and actions.\(^{20}\)

Political units do have ultimate authority over citizens, but that authority is self-generated, and the friendship and justice that obtain in such a situation is analogous to that which exists among any persons brought together by gain. It may be surprising to those who are familiar with Aristotle’s political theory to read in his \textit{Ethics} that political friendship is a species of advantage friendship, which takes as the object of love what is useful rather than what is good. However, Aristotle clearly describes political friendship in these terms.\(^{21}\) A political community, like other communities, is brought together to seek advantage. For Strong Integrationists, however, the picture is slightly more complicated.

\section*{The Strong Integrationist View}

\(^{17}\) There is one important difference between the political unit and other commonly found associations; success for the city means that the association must endure. The dissolution of the political association denotes failure. For commercial enterprises, sea-voyages, and even religious societies this standard does not apply. Indeed, for many forms of association dissolution is a sign of success, as the goal towards which the association had been striving is reached, and the friendships involved fade away and are replaced as new pleasures and/or advantages are sought. The demand for permanence that is functionally inherent in political friendship resembles the essential permanence of the good in virtue friendship, but this resemblance is too often mistaken for something akin to identity.

\(^{18}\) NE 1160a11-14.


The characteristically human ability to use reason in order to discuss and decide matters of justice allows us to generate conclusions about values, but, as Price points out, although “[u]nderstanding values needs a language; implementing them needs a city. Without linguistic and political structures man cannot achieve a distinctively human life.”\(^{22}\) The role of political structures in facilitating and cultivating the virtues necessary for achieving eudaimonia is of central importance, and, as Aristotle tells us, the role of friendship in maintaining political structures is crucial. This intimate proximity of politics, ethics, and friendship is sometimes taken as evidence of a direct connection, even identity, between political friendship and a disinterested pursuit of virtue, both in one’s self and in others. Thus, a common interpretation of Aristotle’s political friendship is that it “inevitably slides into ethical friendship; indeed, it aspires to be ethical friendship in its primary sense, the kind of friendship that encourages virtuous action among citizens.”\(^{23}\) I have given the name Strong Integrationists to scholars who hold this basic view, drawing attention to their seeming desire to weave together political and virtue friendships. Although I suggest that this interpretation entails a misreading of Aristotle, it deserves some explication.

In a series of influential essays on the role of friendship in Aristotle’s thought, John Cooper has argued that the distance between virtue friendship and political friendship— Cooper prefers the term “civic friendship”— is not as great as would first appear. Cooper suggests that “Aristotle holds not only that active friendships of a close and intimate kind are a necessary constituent of the flourishing human life, but also that ‘civic friendship’ itself is an essential human good.”\(^{24}\) In the best case of friendship, friendship between two good people alike in virtue, we recognize the good in another person, and only on this basis are we attracted to them. Cooper concludes from this basic fact that,

a character-friend wishes his friend to prosper, because he recognizes his good character and thinks it fitting for those who are morally good to prosper. Understanding the ‘because’ in this causal way makes it at least as much retrospective as prospective; the well-wishing and well-doing are responses to what the person is and has done rather than merely the expression of a hope as to what he will be and may do in the future.\(^{25}\)

Cooper suggests that other forms of friendship share this retrospective adjudication on the basis of the propensity of individuals to display, to some minimal degree, and with some regularity, the values and virtues of the community. Thus, political friendship will come about when fellow-citizens recognize the gifts and benefits that they receive from one another and from their association, and, as a result, political “friendship makes fellow-citizens’ well-being matter to one another, simply as such.”\(^{26}\) Citizens will feel thankful towards one another for such virtues as are displayed by their fellow-citizens.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{24}\) Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” 622.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 633.


\(^{27}\) Michael Pakaluk has pointed out, correctly, that what Cooper describes in more akin to gratitude than friendship or goodwill. See his translation of, and commentary on, the Nicomachean Ethics: Books VIII and IX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
For Cooper, however, the connection between virtue and political friendship does not end
with the goodwill generated through recognizing the mutual benefits of political association.
Emphasizing what he sees as a close connection between character-friendship and advantage-
friendship, Cooper reminds us that “civic friendship, like other forms of advantage-friendship, is
really a friendship.”28 As such, Cooper focuses on what he sees as general characteristics of
friendship, including a sense of goodwill, concern for the other’s success, and a sharing of life
sufficient enough to reasonably allow for an adjudication of another’s worth. It can be argued
that all of these elements have a direct textual connection to Aristotle, but Cooper’s case depends
on making the further claim that character friendship and political friendship will share more
than incidental similarities. In order to make this case, Cooper makes an important assumption:

Now, although Aristotle does not say so here, those who are friends are disposed
also to act courageously, generously, good-temperedly, and so on for all the moral
virtues, towards one another. To have friendly feelings towards someone is thus to
have the disposition to treat that person virtuously in all respects, because one loves
and values him as a person.29

By suggesting that all friends are disposed to act towards one another with a display of “all
the moral virtues”, Cooper aims to convince us that political friendship is itself a moral good, and
that within the political community, friendship has a distinct moral purpose, since “on Aristotle’s
view, civic, and not just personal friendship is an essential component in the flourishing human
life. In order to flourish a person needs the more fully realized forms of the moral virtues that
only civic friendship brings.”30 Political friendship, then, is necessary because it has a direct,
pervasive, and indispensable role in nourishing individuals and cultivating, refining, and
enlarging virtue.

Cooper supports his claim that political friendship refines and enlarges virtue by arguing
that “[c]ivic friendship is just an extension to a whole city of the kinds of psychological bonds
that tie together a family and make possible this immediate participation by each family-member
in the goods of the others. Civic friendship makes the citizens in some important respects like a
large extended family.”31 What is good for an individual family-member will be good for the
family unit as a whole, although other members of that (idealized) family will be happy for their
kin for their kin’s own sake, and not purely from self-interest. This same dynamic, Cooper
would have us believe, characterizes political friendship, which he sees as tying together our
individual concerns with those who have proven themselves most like, and beneficial to, us.
These shared concerns both come out of, and further generate, goodwill, prompting us to seek to
act on that goodwill. It is, then, because of this sense of goodwill that “civic friendship is a
necessary supplement to the virtues themselves, since only through it does a person come to have
the warmth and the sympathetic attachment to other persons which one rightly demands of a
perfectly and fully moral person.”32 We can now see why Cooper thinks so highly of political
friendship; it is, for him, the primary means by which virtue is inculcated in the lives of

28 Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 319.
29 Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” 647.
30 Ibid., p. 648. It is interesting to note that Cooper rarely mentions this role for political friendship in his
“Friendship and the Good in Aristotle,” The Philosophical Review, 86:3 (1977), 290-315. In this article, which, to
be fair, is more concerned with the psychological requirements of human flourishing, character-friendship plays the
starring role, while political friendship is relegated to the wings.
31 Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 320.
individual citizens, and through which an association that came together for the “sake of mere living” is transformed into an association that seeks, for each of its members, the chance to live well.

The longing for a political friendship that is grounded in, and directly cultivates, morality is shared by a number of other commentators as well. A.W. Price, for example, describes his interpretation of Aristotle’s political friendship as “overlapping” with Cooper’s approach. Both men share the belief that it is “an aspect of man’s being naturally civic that he cannot count fully as achieving eudaimoniā unless his fellow-citizens do so as well.” Like Cooper, Price gives feelings of goodwill a central role in bridging the gap between virtue friendship and political friendship by arguing that citizens “should value the general well-being for its own sake, in short that they should have goodwill towards one another; and goodwill presupposes a belief that the other has (or can develop) the virtues required for eudaimoniā.” Once this presupposition is made, Price argues, it follows that “the foundation of a flourishing city must be a kind of friendship on account of virtue,” and that “civic friendship is indeed an extended variety of the friendship of the good.”

The idea that political friendship should be patterned on virtue friendship represents the dominant interpretation of Aristotelian political friendship. For example, Hutter has argued that complete “friendship combining the virtuous, the pleasant, and the useful became the relationship prototypical for all of society and politics.” In claiming that Aristotle “thought of friendship as a model for political communities,” Scott Yenor fails to distinguish between the species of friendship that Aristotle so thoughtfully enumerated. Tessitore contends that “[p]olitical friendship inevitably slides into ethical friendship; indeed, it aspires to be ethical friendship in its primary sense, the kind of friendship that encourages virtuous action among citizens.” Contemporary neo-Aristotelians have also used the concept of friendship to argue for an increasingly moral dimension in political life. Despite inevitable disagreement about the details, there are a number of people who share the general view that the raison d’être of political friendship is, after all is said and done, to push people into whatever degree of virtue friendship their particular political, economic, or social situation will allow. The authority to use political means and motivations to enforce a wide ranging and all encompassing virtue comes from a particular understanding of the relationship between self and other. I describe this relationship in the following section.

The (Second) Second Self

One of the key arguments that Strong Integrationists point to in their attempt to eliminate the distinction between the advantage seeking political relationship and a complete friendship

33 Price, Love and Friendship, 205, n.36.
34 Ibid., 196. Compare: “Individual citizens’ lives are affected just insofar as, in one way or another, the good living of the communities to which they individually belong carries with it the individual citizens’ living well too.” Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 323.
35 Price, Love and Friendship, 197.
36 Ibid., 204.
39 Tessitore, Reading Aristotle’s Ethics, 88.
40 See, for example, MacIntyre, After Virtue, 135, 155-156, 158; Robert N. Bellah and others, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 115.
based on pursuit of the good is that Aristotle refers to the friend as a second self. This
designation of the friend as a second self is sometimes taken as proof that Aristotle saw a stable,
moral dimension in friendships (like political friendship) that otherwise appear to be utilitarian.
Paul Schollmeier, for example, writes that

Aristotle might even have argued that political friendship has an object and motive
very similar to the object and motive of personal friendship. We saw that the
object of personal friendship is another self and that another self is an individual
who is different than ourself in one sense but the same as ourself in another sense.  

According to this interpretation there is an incomplete identity between friends, who are, at
least in part, in shared possession of a “self”.  This may be, but Schollmeier’s next point takes
the argument too far. He continues by stating that,

[other selves are morally the same as we are, for they engage in the same actions
that we do and have the same habits. But fellow citizens appear to be other selves
to one another, too. Obviously fellow citizens are numerically different than one
another. For they are different individuals. But fellow citizens are also morally the
same as one another. Because they share a principle of happiness, they engage in
the same actions and acquire the same virtues.]

The problem that is presented by Aristotle’s reference to a second self is that is invites
commentators to conflate personal and political friendships in ways that are unsupported, on
even contradicted, by the text.

In bringing together the possible moral and political dimensions of friendship Strong
Integrationists assume that friendship is a totalizing relationship, one that entails a complete
engagement of one’s self in relation to another. To act in a friendly manner to a peer, a co-
worker, or a customer, then, is treated as tantamount to caring for the whole of that person. Put
another way, Strong Integrationists treat concern for one aspect of a person – their purchasing
power, perhaps, if one is an owner of a business that the person in question frequents – as
entailing a concern for that person, that second self, in other situations as well, (e.g., as a citizen).
This is the essence of the argument that Cooper and other Strong Integrationists make.
Friendship, they imply, is a case of one complete, stable, and fully integrated self caring, as a
friend, for another complete, stable, and fully integrated self. Unfortunately, in the case of
political friendship, the impulse to claim such a strong integration between species of friendship
(moral and political), and between the selves that might become friends, is misguided.

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41 Paul Schollmeier, Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship (Albany: State University of New
42 This tendency to speak as though two individuals shared a “self” as a result of friendship may have been even
more pronounced “[i]n pre-Classical times” where “rhetorical claims about friendship occasionally included
allusions to psychic symbiosis, and a number of writers appear to have assumed that philia could transcend
the limitations later associated with bodily separateness and individual self-awareness.” Stern-Gillet, Aristotle’s
Philosophy of Friendship, 17. Although I do not think that Aristotle’s sense of “bodily separateness and individual
self-awareness” matches our own, Stern-Gillet’s point is worth noting.
43 Schollmeier, Other Selves, p. 84. This conclusion ignores the fact that Aristotle clearly thinks that we acquire
different virtues. Even the friendship of “good men, alike in virtue” need not suggest that they share the same
virtues, but only that they are, on balance, roughly equal in virtue. Hence, one of the benefits of consortig with a
“second self” is exactly that they possess different virtues, allowing us to learn from their example. If this is true for
a friendships based on virtue, it seems likely to remain equally true for friendships, like those between citizens,
based on advantage.
Schollmeier, for example, claims too much for political friendship when he states that “fellow citizens are morally the same as one another.” The defining characteristic of political friendship is not moral identity among citizens (although good legislators will try to achieve this, usually in vain), but unanimity (homonoia, or “sameness of mind”), not about questions of morality, or even principles of happiness, but rather about practical and general questions regarding the common interest. Specific examples provided by Aristotle include the method of election that will be used, and what offices should thereby be filled. Aristotle tells us that “[u]nanimity seems, then, to be political friendship, as indeed it is commonly said to be; for it is concerned with things that are to our interest and have an influence on our life.” The agreement that constitutes political friendship does not include, as a matter of course, morally identical opinions.

Aristotle does suggest that “such unanimity is found among good men,” but he is forced to admit that even bad men are capable of partaking in a minimal agreement pertaining to common interests (NE 1167b 9-11). A state made up of both good and bad men may be unstable and prone to faction, and it may be characterized by a weak political bond, but it will, nonetheless, have citizens. It is an unreasonable stretch, however, to argue that, in such a mixed city made up of good and bad men, all citizens are morally identical. If political friends are indeed second selves, as Aristotle suggests, it must be in a way that differs from Schollmeier’s description. And, if Schollmeier and others are mistaken about the nature of the second self, it may be because they did not pursue another, more basic, question: what is the nature of the self (itself)?

Stern-Gillet makes a convincing argument that for Aristotle the “notion of the ‘self’ appears to be an achievement word” that signalled “the exercise of a regulating and predominating influence [by nous] over the other elements in the human soul.” The soul is divided against itself, and only by overcoming this division by means of some principle or agent of organization (something rarely completely achieved) can one truly be said to be a self. The achievement of meaningful selfhood—what Simpson calls an “existential self” rather than a merely “biological or ontological self”—is described as a slow process of integration which is broadly coextensive with the acquisition of moral virtue. Practical reason, in his outlook, constitutes the hub around which the self is formed, since it alone can effect the integration of the various psychic elements into a whole. Whenever it fails to do so, either through akrasia or vice, the individual remains unfree, a mere bunch of unstable elements and discordant parts.

The instability of the Aristotelian self, and the moral and logical isolation of its constituent elements, has led to it being described as having more in common “with the bundle theory of Hume” than the Cartesian res cogitans tacitly assumed by scholars who see substantial

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44 NE 1167a27-34.
45 Ibid., 1167b2-4.
46 Ibid., 1167b5.
47 Ibid., 1167b9-11.
48 Stern-Gillet, Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship, 39, 27.
50 Stern-Gillet, Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship, 26-27.
overlap between various species of friendship. These discordant parts of the not-yet-self are not only unstable, but are also related to one another as adversaries rather than coordinated aspects capable of unwavering goodwill (eunoia) towards another, perhaps equally discordant, not-yet-self.

But isn’t this taking it too far? Doesn’t Aristotle reject a meaningful separation between aspects of the self? Well, yes. And, no. Aristotle does reject, most famously in the first Book of De Anima, the mind-body dualism that characterized the philosophy of the majority of his predecessors, as well as later Cartesianism. But the unity referred to in these passages is between body and soul (psyche), whereas the disunity characteristic of the not-yet-self is associated with the most distinctively human part, mind (nous). In discussing the desirability of self-love, Aristotle points out that man “is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in” him, and this seems to be the “rational principle.” And, as Wiser puts it, for Aristotle “man’s very humanity [is] established by the presence of that unique faculty (nous).”

We cannot understand the meaning of Aristotle’s political friendship if we ignore the fact that, for Aristotle, the appellation “self” already signals a particular set of moral assumptions.

Commentators such as Price and Schollmeier, who see an intimate and necessary connection between political and moral friendship, are fond of the argument that we recognize in other individuals, especially those with whom we share certain baseline values, a second self. This second self is thought to be morally and psychologically stable in its resemblance to us, and therefore worthy of our altruistic attentions. Furthermore, the implication is that our second self is attractive to us because there is an ethical identity between us, as we are both thought to be embodiments of like virtues. I have suggested that this understanding of the second self is incomplete, and I would like to expand on that claim in what follows.

Although treatments of the idea of a second self vary in regard to the degree of virtue necessary to recognize, or be recognized as, a second self, there is one clear point of agreement between these differing approaches: claims that an individual might also be a second self are adjudicated on the basis of virtue, and the true second self will be one who partakes in the admirable and rare complete friendship. Second self-hood is taken to entail a moral identity, and is thus the result of a qualitative evaluation. A standard of virtue is imagined and the individual who wishes to be taken to be a friend is measured against this standard. It is in this way that different species of friendship are united through virtue, a process that facilitates the conflation of advantage friendships (including political friendship) and virtue friendships, properly so-called. Strong Integrationists take Aristotle’s suggestion that a friend is a second self, and

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51 Simpson, “Aristotle’s Idea of the Self,” p. 315. Whereas, for Hume, the inability to discover an underlying unity in the “bundles of perception” that we experience led to a rousing game of backgammon, for Aristotle the case is different. Aristotle finds, or, rather, awards, unity based the demonstrated capacity for moral action.


53 NE 1168b28-35.


55 Aristotle, at times, seems to be caught straddling two different moral worldviews, described by Hegel as sittlichkeit and moralitat. In his History of Philosophy, Hegel argued that Socrates represented a transformational figure who inherited a system of ethical behavior (sittlichkeit) and left behind an approach based on moral reasoning and individual evaluation of the same (moralitat). Aristotle’s thought plainly contains elements of sittlichkeit, but modern commentators seem unable to shake their own habitually moral patterns of interpretation. It is as though the Hegelian distinction between very dissimilar ways of thinking is ignored by those who treat Aristotelian virtue friendship as though it could actually be subject to a neo-Kantian (moral) analysis.
combine it with his implicit assumption that any true self will necessarily have achieved a threshold of virtue, and conclude that, contrary to what Aristotle explicitly states, political friendship necessarily concerns itself directly and primarily with moral excellences.

As I have argued, the Strong Integrationist approach takes for granted a modern understanding of the self in reaching the conclusion described above. If we factor out this unwarranted assumption a new and, in my mind clearer, understanding of the second self theme emerges, and with it a new vision of complete friendship. Complete friendship should not be thought of as one that is measured against a pre-existing moral standard. Instead, we should approach the idea of complete friendship as I believe Aristotle does, as a slow and deliberate process of accumulating virtues in the context of a series of activities, each of which connects us to other selves in a series of overlapping, yet distinct, relationships. A second self, in this interpretation, is not a moral twin (pace Schollermeier) or somebody who necessarily recognizes our moral worth based on a pure love of goodness (Cooper), but merely a separate individual who shares with me the specific virtue necessary to succeed in our particular common project.

Aristotle makes clear, as I have pointed out, that friendship is experienced through the medium of that which friends have in common. Friends may share an interest in music, a commercial endeavour, or a commitment to a set of rules and procedures for selecting a government. No individual can reasonably be identified with any one interest that they may have; it is the unique combination of varied interests that comprise an individual, and it is the combination of varied individuals that make a city. Aristotle himself makes a very similar point in his criticism of Plato. We must speak of the self, then, in two ways— as Aristotle does without explicitly acknowledging that he does so. As Stern-Gillet argues, Aristotle means to refer to the self as signalling the achievement of internal stability and harmony, and this implies the possession of a collection of virtues. But Aristotle also seems to refer to the self in a more casual way, merely as a description of a person who displays virtue in some limited manner. It is this limited, or incomplete, self that is important for our immediate purposes.

As an individual successfully makes her way through the types of activities and corresponding friendships described above, she can be thought of as a distinct self in contradistinction to other selves who happen to be involved in the same activity. As she partakes in a music festival or participates in the political process she becomes, in the eyes in others similarly involved, a second self musically or politically, but not wholly. We do love our useful friends, including fellow-citizens, for their respective selves. However, to love them for themselves, we now see, ends up meaning that we love them for those aspects of themselves they share with us, rather than loving them in themselves, for who they are apart from what we share. Cooper argues “that in a city animated by civic friendship each citizen has a certain measure of interest in and concern for the well-being of each other citizen just because the other is a fellow-citizen.” What he fails to mention is that this “measure of interest and concern” exists only insofar as the “other is a fellow-citizen”. I might agree with commentators who argue that political friendship makes people more virtuous, but would hasten to add that it can only increase their civic virtue; their other virtues remain dissociated from the civic except insofar as the civic allows for their development.

I do not mean to suggest that we go through life with our psyche fractured into a number of distinct selves that are held in the psychological equivalents of watertight compartments. The various aspects of an individual personality do interact and influence each other; Aristotle’s implicit theory of the self makes exactly this assumption. For Aristotle, complete selfhood is

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56 Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 319.
achieved when the various internal aspects of personality achieve harmony. The claim I am pursuing is that this potential dialogue between various aspects of an individual self is not representative of the type of relationship that obtains between distinct individuals. In the latter case it is only through the medium of that which is lovable that contact between two partial selves can occur.

These two distinct and partial selves remain so in the vast majority of cases— for it is only rarely that individuals achieve the highest level of virtue. Consequently, the declaration that the friend is a second self, except in rare cases of wholly virtuous individuals, must be taken to mean simply that the friend is one who shares the attributes of virtue necessary to maintain a working relationship that leads to the particular end they are united in pursuing. There is no evidence that second selves must be thought of as moral twins. Indeed, the textual evidence suggests just the opposite.

Ronna Burger points out that the English phrase “second self” is actually used to translate two separate Greek phrases: *allos autos* (“suggesting the replication of myself in another”) and *heteros autos* (in which a friend forms “a pair with me precisely because of the difference that makes him genuinely other.”) The appearance of *allos autos* might be taken to signify a kind of moral identity (although it is just as easily taken to describe circumscribed types of friendship), but *heteros autos* obviously denotes a sense of separation between different individuals for whom distinct spheres of selfhood happen to overlap in a partial sense. To argue, as Tessitore does that “[p]olitical friendship inevitably slides into ethical friendship” is to ignore Aristotle’s point, namely that, in speaking of the second self, difference is as important as identity.

Given Aristotle’s admission that few people will achieve the high standards required of complete friendship, most instances of friendship, including political friendship, will include partly, but less than fully, virtuous parties. Knowing this, Aristotle’s discussion of the form friendship takes in good and bad men supports my interpretation of his concept of selfhood:

> In the wicked man there is dissonance, and it is for this reason that it seems possible for a self [*autos*] to be an enemy of itself [*hautoi*]. But qua one and undivided a self [*autos*] is desirable to itself [*hautoi*], and such the good man is…since the depraved man is not one but many and within the same day is a different self [*heteros*].

The unchanging, unified self assumed by Strong Integrationists turns out to be a rare commodity in Aristotle’s experience. What one is more likely to find is an individual with a degree of incontinence, and who, to a corresponding measure, is “not a self, but many selves”. This is not to say that the unified, stable self that the Strong Integrationists admire will never be found— Aristotle clearly thinks such selves can exist— but only that such a self cannot be taken to be the starting point in Aristotelian friendship. This is especially true of political friendship.

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57 It has received little commentary in the secondary literature, but there is fairly obvious parallel between Aristotle’s approach to friendship and his approach to the self. The complete self is one where harmony is achieved among the various components; in the same way complete friendship seems to describe a case where the various psychological and ethical components of the individuals involved achieve a harmony. Lesser friendships, and lesser versions of the self, lack this very harmony.


60 Ibid.
For most of us, the collection of friends that we have throughout our lives will be a collection of individuals to whom we are related as heteros autos. In addition, individuals will tend to be partial friends, or, put another way, whole-hearted friends, but in a less-than-complete manner. Complete friendship is arrived at when, after spending considerable time together, the various partially constituted friendships begin to overlap, and eventually achieve near-perfect coincidence. As a soldier my fellow soldiers are second selves in the partial sense described above; the same holds for different activities such as politics, sailing, or religious worship. But if I add together my partial selves (sailor, citizen, soldier, etc.) with the partial aspects of another, similarly constituted and experienced individual, our friendship moves from its natural beginning point of incompleteness, and towards the rare state of completeness that is taken as the highest achievement of friendship. Complete friendship, then, can be understood quantitatively as the result of a lifetime of shared pursuits, of partial friendships, and independent virtues. It may be the job of political friendship to cultivate and encourage such completeness where possible, but this very fact points to the incomplete and divided nature of the selves involved at the start of the process. Strong Integrationists look at what is achieved at the end of the day (i.e. a meaningful self) and treat that achievement as the starting point for friendship. To fully understand Aristotle’s political friendship, however, I suggest that we begin at the beginning.

Bibliography


