

FRIENDSHIP AS MIDDLE TERM BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL

Gregory Kirk

Introduction

In Plato's *Lysis*, Socrates speaks with two young boys about friendship.¹ The dialogue begins, though, with Socrates reporting how he found himself conversing with these two boys, Lysis and Menexenus; this report includes details suggesting important structural features about how human beings live among each other. Socrates reports that he had been on his way from the Academy, and was heading straight towards the Lyceum, when he was interrupted by a young man he did not yet know, Hippothales, who asked him the following question: 'Where are you coming from and where are you going?' (203a). Socrates immediately answers him, 'From the Academy... straight to the Lyceum.' Hippothales then persuaded Socrates to come to the wrestling school of Socrates' friend, Mikkos, where the remainder of the dialogue takes place. Despite its apparent transparency, Hippothales' question, 'where are you coming from and where are you going?' can be read with existential significance. That is, read in a certain way, this question interestingly invokes the way in which the human soul develops over time. The first part — 'where are you coming from?' — implicitly demands of us that we reflect on what circumstances and actions have caused us to be in our current condition. It suggests that we ask ourselves 'what forces have contributed to shaping the person that I am?' The second part of the question — 'where are you going?' — challenges us to consider what future possibilities we wish to pursue in what remains of our lives, but also, insofar as this question follows directly on the previous one, to consider what future possibilities remain, or have become, *available* to us, given the condition in which we currently find ourselves as a result of where we are coming from. The aspirations we have — where we take ourselves to be going — reflect to some degree the people that we have become. That these two questions are made

into a single question insinuates the intimate relationship between them: Not only does where one has come from tell us to some extent who one is, it also suggests a limited range of possibilities regarding where one will go. Likewise, where one presumes oneself to be going not only tells us the kind of person that one is; it also indicates a likely range of possibilities as to where one is coming from.

This process of developing a kind of character quite profoundly has the effect of informing and limiting future possibilities. Indeed, the development of character is perhaps the central issue in one's becoming an adult and, thus, the matter of primary importance in relationship to the human being's natural progress 'from' its beginning 'to' its proper end. Furthermore, this formation of character, like friendship, occurs in the context of one's involvements with other people. The thematizing of the formation of character that is invoked by Hippothales' question and that is implicit throughout Plato's *Lysis* is explicitly taken up as the principle subject matter of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* where these themes of character, friendship and the significance of our involvement with others for answering the question 'where from and where to' are explored in their complex interweaving.

Taking this theme of our involvement with others as my central orientation, I argue in this paper that the domain of friendship constitutes a middle term between the personal and the political. To be an adult human being consists not merely in completing the process of biological growth but requires further the development of good character. This development of adult character, moreover, has a social dimension. Human adulthood involves participating in politics, which is to say, participating in spheres of life defined by norms that one does not determine freely according to one's private, idiosyncratic desires. In this paper, I will argue that what Aristotle calls true friendship plays a crucial, educational role in bringing together the individual development of character with integration into the values of political life. In section one, I begin by continuing to use a discussion from Plato's *Lysis* to present the way in which character is shaped beginning in childhood, paying particular attention to the fact that one's personal, psychological development does not automatically progress at the same pace as one's biological development. In section two, using insights from Aristotle's *Politics*, I develop an account of the political domain as one in which we must operate as learners. In section three, I turn finally to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and I present friendship as a middle-term between the personal and the political, arguing that friendship has the effect of bringing one into an intimate relation with the otherwise often

alien values that are foundational for political life. I proceed here by drawing heavily from ideas central to Aristotle's thinking concerning the nature of organisms, character, habituation, friendship and the 'organs' that are natural to the *polis*. I also draw upon the example of the interpersonal dynamics and explicit subject matter of Plato's *Lysis*. I do not, however, draw upon these resources with the primary aim of making a scholarly argument, but rather as sources of insights to be taken in new directions of thinking about the relationship between the development of the capacity for friendship and the development of political sensibility.

I. Childhood, Nature and Habituation

In the *Lysis*, after the initial exchange between Socrates and Hippothales as described above, Socrates enters the wrestling school in order to demonstrate to Hippothales how to gain the attention of Lysis, the boy to whom Hippothales is erotically attracted. As the dialogue unfolds, Socrates engages in a discussion about the nature of friendship with Lysis and his friend Menexenus. Initially, though, Socrates notices that the two friends are gently competitive with each other, and draws out light hearted disputes between them about whose family is nobler and who is better looking (207b-c). This conversation is interrupted when Menexenus is called away by his wrestling training, which leads Socrates to question Lysis about his young life in a way that invites reflection on the nature of growing up. Specifically, Socrates asks Lysis if, since his parents love him very much, this compels them to allow him to do whatever he wants (207e). Lysis reveals that he is not allowed to do many of the things that a free adult human being is able to do, and, when asked why he thinks this is so, Lysis gives as the reason that he is not yet 'of age' (*hēlikian*) to be given most of the important responsibilities in governing his own life (208a-209a). In response, Socrates suggests that perhaps it is not that Lysis' parents withhold responsibility because he is still young, but rather because they are waiting for him to become sufficiently accomplished in areas of his life before giving him control over them. This is, of course, a basic feature of youth, but Socrates' remark draws our attention to the fact that the relevant issue is not so much age but the developed state of our capacities. The skills needed to participate in the adult world are emergent, and, over the course of their emergence, there will typically be a period in which one possesses some, but not enough, of the skill or knowledge necessary to take on that responsibility effectively. Youth is, in this sense, a time in which one undergoes the process of

actualizing potentialities. Moreover, it is a time in which the process of actualizing potentialities can be facilitated or undermined. Let us further consider this structure of potentiality and actualization, with reference to Aristotle.

One of Aristotle's great insights is the observation that naturally occurring, living organisms undergo changes out of a principle of motion that comes from within them (*Physics*, II.1 192b14-16). For Aristotle, the fact that living organisms undergo growth and change from within themselves — despite the hostility of circumstances external to their bodies — demonstrates that their potentiality is more than merely a not-yet-existing part of themselves; rather, potentiality has some purchase on reality despite not yet being actual. The *reality* of nature has, therefore, the form of potentiality and actualization. In other words, living organisms occurring by nature — individual plants and animals — begin with the potential to develop into their naturally determined biological maturity, and the actions of such organisms are oriented toward that actualization, toward that accomplishment. Human nature, too, insofar as human beings are naturally occurring organisms, bears the mark of this structure: We are born with certain specific capacities that are made manifest only through actions that give shape to — that actualize — those capacities. The infant child who is not capable of speech is *more than* merely an organism incapable of speech. It is, rather, *not yet* capable of speech. Like the plant that will grow into a fern from the seedling that is “not yet” a fern, the infant is potentially a speaker.

Despite these commonalities between human beings and other living organisms, though, there are features of the human being that are distinctive, and that invert this structure. Moreover, these human features have to do with the very potentiality in the infant just described, namely, the potentiality for speech. *Unlike* the natures of plants and animals, the full accomplishment of human nature is realized only through the explicit, self-conscious efforts of the individual human being. This is a consequence of the fact that human beings are endowed by nature with *logos*, with language, and the ability to reflect on the immediacy of embodied conditions. Human beings are not simply the immediate, spatially situated biological organisms that are actively involved in the processes that mark nutrition, growth and reproduction, that is, biological maturation. In addition to being a biological organism that is constituted by an internal principle of motion and rest, leading to our inexorable transformation from childhood to biological maturity, a human being is also the *perspective* that undergoes those bodily changes. This

perspective, too, undergoes changes. This perspective, this inner experience or consciousness, is not something that will automatically mature alongside natural biological maturation. Indeed, the development of our consciousness can be of a sort that undermines our ability to live well as adults, as much as its development could facilitate that adulthood. It is, therefore, the case that being animals with *logos*, we must work at shaping this part of ourselves well. The process of psychological and emotional maturation that does not occur simply by nature but rather requires our efforts and is, to a significant extent, open to a variety of forms of corruption is called ‘moral virtue’ (*ēthikē aretē*) by Aristotle (*EN* II.1 1103a14-25).

The actualization of our natural potentialities as conscious *actors* (and not merely as biological entities) is the accomplishment of the virtues (*aretai*).² The process by which potential for moral virtue is actualized begins before we are capable of evaluating which actions to undertake for ourselves and our characters are significantly formed through the habits we develop without conscious intention in our childhood upbringing. It is, thus, our nature as human beings to have the actualization of our potentiality for virtue emerge out of circumstances that precede us and initially determine the trajectory of our lives. These contingent conditions out of which we grow and develop, along with the particular choices that we happen to make in the process of shaping our character make it the case that, though biological maturation is natural, existential maturation is not. Thus, since we *will* become adults in the biological sense, it is important that we have the existential maturity appropriate to living out of that situation. With these issues in mind, let us return to Socrates’ discussion with Lysis.

We already saw that when Socrates asks Lysis about the things over which his parents permit him to take responsibility, Lysis responds by suggesting that his parents would not allow him to take full responsibility over his life because he is too young. Socrates, by contrast, suggests that it was because he had not yet achieved competence with those things that he was prevented from taking responsibility over them. Of course, each of these explanations is correct as far as it goes. Socrates is right when he says that parents want to release their child into independent agency in the world only once they are capable of dealing with that world. However, Lysis is also right, because natural time — the time of biological maturity — at a certain point, holds sway. A human being eventually stops being *naturally* subordinated to the authority of a nurturer or an educator. Human beings have a certain amount of time to mature

and human individuals will reach an age of biological maturity, at which point they will typically be no longer willing to accept someone else governing their actions, unless it is by force. It is not because, at maturity, we have all of the skills necessary to govern our lives sufficiently; rather, we reach an age when we are simply no longer willing to subordinate our lives to our parents and educators. We typically recognize this political adulthood with the notion of an ‘age of majority’: once one is recognized as reaching biological adulthood one will have to make one’s decisions for oneself, whether one is well prepared or not. Thus, while the parents of Lysis withhold responsibility from him because they *wish* him to be ready first, at a certain point they probably must relent *regardless* of his readiness. Our natural development entails that adulthood is beckoning — right from the start — for everyone, whether they emerge prepared for it or not.

II. Adulthood and the Institution of Friendship

One of the dimensions of that question asked of Socrates by Hippothales — ‘Where are you coming from and where are you going?’ — concerns the implicit meaning of the ‘where’. The ‘where’ of this question names a place, a spatial location — such as the Academy, the Lyceum or the wrestling-school — but what that spatial location typically signifies is people, either in the form of the social and political institutions enacted and maintained by human activity, or the interpersonal relationships that make up our involvement in those institutions. To ask that question is, in some sense, to ask ‘*From whom* are you coming and *to whom* are you going?’ Thus far in my analysis, I have focused on growth and development as a personal matter. In fact, though, we typically undergo the development of our natural capacities within an interpersonal context, and our development from childhood to adulthood is, thus, a matter of dealing with others, as much as it is a personal matter. I want now to consider the interpersonal domain that is the dominant context of the typical life of the “political animal” (*politikon zōon*) (*Politics* I.1 1253a).

We are by nature “political animals”, Aristotle argues, and, inasmuch as adulthood entails the embrace of this, our political nature, adulthood thus inherently involves a distinctive form of navigating and negotiating relations with other people. Through reflecting now on the distinctive character of political life, I will argue that properly inhabiting this interpersonal domain precisely

requires the adoption of the role of “learner”. I will then consider how our characteristic experience as adults, in fact, typically puts us at odds with these demands of political life.

One of the distinctive features of political life is that it brings together people whose lives are lived separately from each other. This sharply distinguishes the *polis* from the *oikos*. In the home with the family, and in the interpersonal life that grows out of this institution, people associate with others whose opinions, attitudes and demeanours are not only known and to some extent understood, but are also *formative* of one’s own. We are raised by parents who expose us to certain kinds of behaviour, certain attitudes about the world, certain temperaments, and we typically prefer to live in an interpersonal world that broadly conforms to expectations shaped by that specific sort of childhood exposure. Political life is not structured in this way. The *polis* is able to exist as a register of human reality insofar as it integrates and organizes domains of human activity that are, by their very character, not only distinct from one another, but also productive of distinct kinds of life that need not coexist at the interpersonal register, and perhaps are unlikely to do so.³ Among the things that the *polis* depends upon are the production of food, the manufacture of crafts used in various aspects of life, the buying and selling of goods, the labour needed to maintain these activities, the defense of the *polis*, the ownership and management of property, the administering and organizing of the public arena by public servants, and the adjudication of disputes between members of the community.⁴ No doubt there are others as well. These different spheres are productive in very different ways, and, indeed, productive of very different types of people; whole communities of people are undoubtedly built around the fact that their members participate in a shared sphere of life. Not only that, but participating in a shared sphere of life in the *polis* not only has a natural unifying power; it also has a divisive power. It is safe to say that those people who participate in the labouring sphere of any society tend not to share much in common with those that participate in finance, or those that participate in governance. Some spheres of life in the *polis* depend upon a life devoted to intense study, some to bodily toil, some in dealing with various kinds of people, some dealing very narrowly with only a certain class of people. To participate in some organ necessary for the proper functioning of the *polis* is to have determined for one, and in some cases quite narrowly, one’s daily experience and consequently the habits one develops. However, it is nonetheless the case that insofar as each of these spheres of political

life is necessary, each depends on the other. They must coexist. In other words, the *polis* is the integration of differences that do not automatically coexist happily, and part of its success will be its ability to harmonize these disparate parts.

While, at the political register, harmonizing these different organs of the *polis* is essential, the operations of the *polis* occur among individual human beings, because after all these are the basic constituent parts that make up the *polis*. The execution of a political life is, of necessity, performed in a manner involving the interpersonal register. Participating in adult life depends upon individual members of different spheres of the *polis* interacting with each other, and organizing themselves in relation to others. When we enter into such situations, we cannot take for granted that the others with whom we must negotiate share attitudes and behaviours in common with us. One placed in such a position ought to know how to proceed in dealing with people with this or that distinctly different attitude or behaviour. An obvious, and problematic, attitude to take towards this sort of situation is to take oneself to be dealing, simply, with an adversary. For example, the financier might identify — indeed, might correctly identify — in the labourer someone whose interests are at least in tension with his or her own political sphere, and perhaps directly opposed to it. One might, therefore, adopt a tactical relationship to the labour sphere as a whole that is discharged in one's interpersonal encounters with individual members of labour, one involving a kind of rhetoric that appeals to the emotions and desires typical of labourers, in order to manipulate them to go along with one's own putatively distinct interests, and *against* their own putatively distinct interests.

As Aristotle's remarks at the beginning of his *Politics* suggest, to adopt the attitude that one's private interests stand fundamentally in opposition to another's is *not* to adopt a political attitude.⁵ To *be* political is to recognize a common interest between oneself, one's own people, and those of others.⁶ It is, thus, to adopt the point of view that, to participate in political life, one must participate *at a different register* than that at which one participates in familial life. One is, *qua* political animal, something different from what one is *qua* family member or *qua* individual person.⁷ Accordingly, when faced with the challenge of engaging with a person whose political sphere has cultivated opinions, attitudes and behaviours that contrast sharply with one's own, one is faced with the distinct *reality* of the *polis*. In order to participate well in that reality, especially insofar as one is newly exposed to it, one ought to adopt the attitude of the learner,

which is to be understood in the sense of adopting the attitude of one participating in something organized in such a way that it requires of one that one undergo changes. Exposure to different spheres of political life *ought to* compel us to seek to understand how they function in relation to each other, and to inquire regarding how they might function well. To adopt the other, adversarial attitude is to adopt the view that the shared domain of political life is simply a resource to be manipulated for one's own private interests.⁸ Moreover, though, it is also to treat the political sphere as simply an extension of the domain of private, self-enclosed individuals or communities, with which one must compete, from which one has nothing to learn. Let us consider further this theme of 'learning'.

In politics, one will be faced with others whose *opposing* views (on politics, religion, social values, etc.) may well be better informed and more articulate, and this possibility entails that one's initial stance of disagreement should be taken up as only the beginning, and not as the end, of political engagement. To participate effectively in the political sphere requires cultivating the ability to be open to having one's ideas about the world subjected to challenges by better informed, more confident and perhaps wiser people. Again, it requires taking on, as one's own responsibility, learning how to perform the tasks that need to be performed to carry out one's position in the political organization, and along with the learning needed to achieve *that* task, the recognition that others are neither by default nor necessarily at all concerned with one's private interests. To participate well in the distinctly political arena is to be open to exposure to a world of diverse ways of life, values and interests, to recognize that the complex world is not *de facto* interested in what one is interested in, or indeed interested in one at all. Becoming properly oriented to the *polis* thus requires that one become both oriented to learning from others, and responsible for oneself.⁹

In this sense, then, we can see that political adulthood requires learning. However, *in fact*, adulthood is typically characterized by a kind of fixity. We are typically not, in adulthood, inclined to adopt the role of learner, if by learner we mean the person whose interpersonal context is organized around allowing themselves to be shaped into something new, the way that a situation of a student in school is so organized, for example. We typically no longer seek a guide in various aspects of our lives, wanting rather to assert ourselves, wanting rather to insist that, as a result of our age, we should be granted authority over ourselves. As young adults in particular we say things like 'I can take care of myself' or 'I'm an adult!' We also have, to a

certain extent, the freedom to insist upon a certain kind of identity and way of carrying ourselves in the world that actually prevents us from continuing to be open to the kinds of transformation to which we were open when we were young. This story, though, of the fixity of adult character and adult identity that characterizes adulthood as a domain liberated from the burden of being placed in the situation of the learner, is in tension with the way in which I have characterized the adult world as being dominated by navigating the lives of others. This is to say that in adulthood, insisting that we are no longer learners is in tension with the reality of life in the political sphere. I want now to claim that becoming oriented to the world as learners — an orientation essential to our individual fulfilment as adult human beings and to the effective function of our political world — which is significantly made possible through participation in Aristotle characterizes as true friendship. To see how this is so we must account for what friendship is and what it is capable of. That is what we shall now discuss, again using as our principle resource, Aristotle's account in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

III. True Friendship and its Good

The first thing that Aristotle notes about friendship is that everyone needs it. No matter the type of character, no matter the station or class of a person, he or she regards friends as necessary for living (*EN* VIII.1 1155a3-6). Aristotle claims that friendships correspond broadly to three different ways in which we love or value things.¹⁰ We love them for what they do to us, that is, for the pleasure that they provide; for what they do *for* us, for their use; and we love things for their intrinsic goodness or beauty. He claims that there are three kinds of friendship that correspond to these. The first two kinds of friendship — those of pleasure and utility — are not really about the other person at all, but rather involve using the person as an instrument for one's own benefit.¹¹ The third kind — which Aristotle calls variously 'perfect' (*teleia*) friendship (*EN* VIII.3 1156b7) and 'friendship of the good' (*tōn agathōn philia*) (*EN* VIII.5 1157b25) — accomplishes a new register of being. True friendship is complete. It is something that exists between individuals who are alike in virtue. Such friends wish in similar fashion for the good things for *each other* insofar as they are good. People who wish for good things for their friends, *for their friends' own sake*, are friends most of all.¹² Moreover, those who participate in true friendship behave in this way, *not* because they are this way in this particular relationship, but rather

because they are already *this kind of person*. Finally, true friendship involves ‘living together’ (*sunētheia*), and therefore is a product of time, shared habitual activity, and self-conscious action.¹³

What I want now to argue is that it is participation in such true friendships that facilitates our becoming capable of operating in the *polis* at the register demanded by political life, which is to say that true friendship educates us into living life as a learner. Friendship is, thus, actually integral to the cultivation of our responsible political identity, because friendship prepares us for the responsiveness necessary for participation in political life by introducing external norms without obscuring the personal and interpersonal emotional investment. Thus, friendship is not merely necessary for one to live a happy life, as Aristotle claims (*ENIX.9. 1169b3-22*). Beyond this, it contributes to the expansion of our sense of what is worthy of care, by providing for us the experience of external norms and expectations that we do not experience as *alienating* but rather as matters of our own concern.

I want to consider friendship in its truest form, as characterized by Aristotle, in a sense roughly analogous to political institutions, but before doing this, I want to first note in what way this might strike us as odd. One of the characteristic traits of political life is that it is to a significant extent impersonal, in the sense of involving us with people, and in contexts, distinct from the interpersonal sphere we choose to live in. We typically do not experience the *person* of the human beings we are involved with in political life. For example, we do not experience the person of the administrator, or the person of the judge, or the person of the soldier. There is something appropriate about this, surely. It is not the administrator *qua* individual person who has the authority to allocate resources as she does. It is not the judge *qua* individual person who has the power to determine innocence or guilt. It is not the soldier *qua* individual person who has absolution from the prohibition to kill. They have their authority insofar as they perform a political role. We typically unthinkingly take for granted the authority of these people impersonally, which is to say, due to their roles within the given political institution. It is the institution that is administering, judging, defending, and evaluating us. It is the institution that kills for us. *Individual* relationships that we have with other people, one typically thinks, differ from social and political *institutions* due to the fact that we are only *personally* invested, and are therefore freely, individually responsive to the other person. We do not experience the friendship as exerting force upon us according to standards set independent of, and perhaps

indifferent to, ourselves as specific human beings, as we do with social and political institutions.

Though I take it to be the case that we do not typically *experience* friendship as something existing over and above the individual members that constitute it, which is to say that we do not typically experience friendship as possessing a quality analogous to political institutions, friendship does, in fact, do so. Friendship produces a structure that requires us to conform to something that exceeds, though involves, the assent of individual members. Our individual participation helps to shape, but does not fully shape, the character of that institution. Tellingly, Aristotle first introduces friendship into his discussion in a way that suggests this. He writes that friendship is ‘a certain kind of virtue, or goes along with virtue’ (*aretē tis ē met’ aretēs*) (EN VIII.1 1155a4). It takes virtue to be able to participate properly in friendship, but virtue is not sufficient for friendship, because friendship depends upon something transcending the borders of the soul. Friendship *involves* the realization of natural human potential, but only by putting it to work in interaction with others. Let us briefly consider further in what respects it is like and unlike political institutions.

A friendship is like a political institution in that it demands of us that we participate in something and that we be beholden to something that we did not independently design. Moreover, friendship, like a political institution, compels actions that are not reducible to one particular individual will. A friendship is unlike a political institution in that it is in principle — though surely not always in practice — possible to apprehend the various decisions and motivations that have given shape to the friendship. That is, it can be evident to members of a friendship how it is that it has taken shape as it has. By contrast, the massively complex decisions that make the political community take shape in the way that it does are much more obscure. This complexity presents an impersonal façade to the operations of political life, and makes it difficult to understand how a given political community got to be how it is. In both the case of a friendship and that of a political community, though, there is a product instituted by the efforts of its participants, and that instituted product, whether we are conscious of it or not, enacts change in us. In fact, it is in part because friendship involves subjection to something outside of ourselves and of our own desires that friendship changes us. While it certainly makes ‘all the difference’ how I am habituated from birth onward, as Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II Chapter 1, the self-identity I have thereby established is nonetheless

not absolutely fixed. This is especially so inasmuch as I am capable of being open to the institution of friendship, in which I am made to negotiate with, and indeed to conform to, structures beyond me, and, through this negotiation, ‘who I am’ actually changes.

Now, what I have just said about friendship and its ability to change us must be qualified, because one of the responsibilities of participating in a friendship is obviously the selection of friends, and the orientation one has towards friendship. People can, and often do, subject themselves to relationships that simply reflect their own pathological behaviour back to them. In other words, we can establish friendships that precisely ensure that who we are *does not* change.¹⁴ Such friendships, though, are, according to Aristotle, not complete and not friendships informed by virtue, but are rather merely friendships of pleasure or of utility. Aristotle describes the base person (*ho phaulos*) who is miserable in the extreme (*lian athlios*) engaging in friendship primarily as a way of fleeing from that person’s own self (*EN IX.4 1166b11-27*). Such a person inevitably either resents their friend for failing to relieve their pain, or feels a mixture of pleasure and pain, insofar as the friend’s happiness fills them with regret, envy and resentment. The behaviour of this type of person ultimately indicates that they are not capable of friendship in its complete sense. In fact, to be capable of true friendship one must find one’s own life to be intrinsically valuable (*EN IX.4*). Before exploring this theme further, though, I would like to focus on how the miserable person is obstructed by the way in which they conceive of friendship.

The miserable person is only capable of finding utility or pleasure through the use or entertainment derived from the other. Such a person cannot identify the creative, productive aspect of friendship and is, therefore, never aware of the fact that it is compelling them to behave in this or that way. They have no way to express dissatisfaction with the friendship except by dissolving it, attributing that dissolution either to the unpleasantness of the other person, or to that person’s unwillingness to provide them with what they desire. The inability of such a person to be a true friend is rooted, at least in part, in a failure to recognize that friendship is not merely a practice, not merely something done, but also something that is productive. Were the miserable person able to identify it in this way, they would have been able to discuss what was being created with their friend, to decide together what each wanted it to be. Failure to identify it in this way limits their way of engaging in interpersonal relationships, dramatically limiting those relationships. They might relate to their

friendship in the manner analogous to the way we engaged with the world in childhood, that is to say, beholden to structures that inform and govern our behaviour while we remain oblivious to their influence, and, indeed, to the true character of their existence.¹⁵ They might treat the friend in a manner not unlike an adversary — someone with whom one might happen to share common interests, but who otherwise exists completely independently.

I have so far drawn attention to the trajectory of human life as a biological process of maturation that requires a parallel, though not automatic, psychological process of maturation. I have drawn attention to the fact that this process is undergone within the terrain of interpersonal life, and have suggested that we tend, wrongly, to fail to identify that the interpersonal domain imposes itself upon us in a way that exceeds our control that is similar to the way in which social institutions impose themselves upon us. I discussed the fact that we typically fail to identify the role that our interpersonal relations play in imposing themselves upon us and shaping who we are, due to the fact that we are intimately involved in them. This contrasted, provisionally, with the way that we experience ourselves as *not* being intimately involved with identifiable human interactions in our involvement with political institutions. In interpersonal relations, we experience ourselves as engaged with *this particular* person, and not with the demands of the institution of that relationship. In fact, though, by participating in the friendship I have imposed upon my actions certain expectations of behaviour to which I am required to be responsive. That is, while it is perhaps the case that I entered into the friendship because of something pleasant about the other person, the relationship subsists — whether I am aware of it or not — as something shaping and moulding my character through the determinations it makes upon how I act.¹⁶ These expectations that I must meet come from outside. This requires that I invite that outside into the inner trajectory of my behaviour, and thus into participation in the shaping of the trajectory of my character. This structure provides me with the concrete experience that things matter, are worthy of care, that are beyond what is immediately desirable or urgent to me.

What I want to turn to now is the power that friendship has when we recognize its character as something imposing upon us the external demands within the context of our desiring and emotional life, and, when, in so recognizing this, we treat it with care. First, friendship is an ‘institution’ that we can be explicitly — which is to say, self-consciously — empowered to shape *in its role in shaping*

us. Friendship is, consequently, an essential means of taking on the task of striving to accomplish our own emotional and psychological maturity. Second, friendship is an essential means for shaping us to become better equipped to develop an improved comportment towards political life, one that can identify, in explicitly impersonal involvement in political institutions, the personal and interpersonal dynamics that go into shaping it. That is, through friendship, functioning as a middle term between our personal lives and the political domain, we can cultivate in ourselves the ability to relate to social and political institutions, as we already do with the personal and the interpersonal sphere, as domains of care.

In discussing the miserable person, I noted Aristotle's insight that one must love one's own life in order to be capable of friendship. We could think of the need to love oneself in a way illuminated by Aristotle's account of craft-making in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book IX, Chapter 7). Consider the experience of designing and crafting something that requires time, patience and expertise, like building a house or writing a book. Now, consider the way in which you, the creator, relate to your work, and contrast it with the way that an admirer might. The creator sees much more than what is present to the admirer. The creator sees in the product their own time and effort, their own skills and limitations, the choices made from certainty, and those made from uncertainty. Not only that, but the creator is given insight into their own self by seeing their work in the world among other things and for others to engage with. They see aspects of themselves they may never have seen before, expressed in material form. If the creator is satisfied with their work, perhaps it compels them to want to continue to engage creatively with the world, to continue to have themselves reflected back through their work.

Likewise, though in an importantly different sense, a teacher can see in their student their own time, skill and labour discharged in the world beyond the borders of their own character, in the form of an emergent active agent in the world. What qualifies the relationship of one person to another as different from the relationship one has to a mere product is that the child who is being educated and nurtured participates in that production. The object of care in this situation is a product of shared efforts (if to some extent and in some sense a disproportionately shared effort). Here, in Aristotle's example, we are closer to what true friendship is. Virtuous people find *themselves* discharged in the world, in their labours. Insofar as such people are gratified by what they see, they find acting on the world to be an

intrinsically choice-worthy undertaking. Their own being, or own action, is constantly choice-worthy.¹⁷ The virtuous parent or teacher has this experience, but combined with the experience that another's being is choice-worthy as well.¹⁸ Such a person is compelled to act within a context of which he or she is now only one member.

Friendship, in its truest form, and in a relationship of equality, is an activity of two people in which the expression of one's labour is reflected in several ways: First, in the actions of the other person, in which one is now implicated; second, in the institution enacted by the relationship; third, in one's presumption of the other's experience of their own actions as choice-worthy; fourth, the presumption that the other reciprocates that identification; and fifth, the recognition of one's freedom to participate in the crafting of one's own character through the work of friendship.

This last way in which true friendship is reflected back to us indicates in what way we continue to undergo processes in adult life that were undergone in childhood, but with the important addition that we can now be aware of the impact of our actions on the shaping of ourselves and others. The adult life of a person who is capable of engaging in friendship is a constant process of implicitly declaring to the world 'change me'. What differentiates adulthood from childhood is that, for those who are capable of friendship, which is to say those who identify friendship as an institution to which we respond by being open to the imposition of different ways of being, there is a *self-conscious* subjection to change, and active participation in that change. One undergoes a process of learning and experiencing new things, just as one did in childhood, but this time as an active agent. It is a repetition of the process of shaping character, but this time with the insight that this is what is happening. Perhaps the worst implication of the failure to be capable of friendship is that one is blindly subjected to changes, as one was as a child, but without the natural inclination to be open to those changes. By contrast, true friendship is characterized in roughly the reverse way: One is consciously subjecting oneself to the transformational power of interpersonal relations, while actively, and with desire, fostering the openness characteristic of one's childhood.

IV. Friendship as Middle Term

How, then, does the development of one's interpersonal life in this way contribute to an improved relationship to political institutions? Put differently, how does complete or true friendship function as

a middle term between the personal and the political? Those who participate in true friendships, which Aristotle often calls friendships of virtue, already possess the virtues.¹⁹ Those that possess virtue do not require the threat of force to compel good action, since they have already cultivated habits that incline them to act wisely, justly, courageously and moderately. Beyond this, though, the friendship itself of those that possess virtue provides a model for the laws. True friends identify their own lives as fundamentally choice-worthy, as was said above, in the sense of being sites for the realization of excellence. Moreover, they identify the lives of their friends as being of intrinsic and equal value. The true friend finds in her friend (as Aristotle puts it) a ‘second self’ (*heteros autos*) (*EN* IX.9 1170b6);²⁰ the second self is a life experienced as being equally choice-worthy to one’s own.²¹ To care about the other’s life for the other’s sake is to experience value as something emanating from elsewhere, beyond one’s own perspective. I am able to care about the accomplishments of the other, due to the fact that I can identify what it is like to experience one’s own experiences as being worthy of care, an ability which itself derives from the fact that I can identify my own life as being worthy of care. Here we can see clearly why it is that Aristotle draws a sharp distinction between friendships merely grounded in pleasure or in utility and true friendship. *Everyone* is biologically capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, and everyone experiences desires. To have ‘friends’ in this trivial sense is to have external sources of amusement or use to satisfy one’s desires. By contrast, to have complete or true friendship is to be open to the world as a site for care and value that transcends one’s own perspective. It is, moreover, to experience oneself as the *object* of care for another, which is to say to experience oneself as having value that exceeds one’s own experience.

What does this have to do with the political realm? In both the realm of true friendship and the realm of political life, we experience demands on us to subordinate our immediate inclinations to something not immediately our own. In both, we find that the basic norms of desire — that is, the norms of the personal sphere — are outstripped, and we find that we must place those desires in mediation, not just with the values of others, but also the values *shared* between us as well as values *established* as a result of the enactment of the institution (either of friendship or of the *polis*). However, while we typically experience political institutions operating on us impersonally, through bureaucracies or through rules that preceded us, in friendship, the external demands come

from a source we have emotionally and psychologically invested with value. When my friend needs me to do something I would not do on my own, I do so not because of force, and not because of over-awing authority in relation to which I recognize myself to be virtually powerless, but because I care about them, and can identify that their concerns are of intrinsic worth regardless of my own desires. This experience of emotional involvement with my friend opening me emotionally, and experientially, to external sites of value, thereby laying the groundwork for becoming open to external sites of value in which I am *not* emotionally invested.²² I have in mind here social institutions such as those enumerated above, and presented by Aristotle in his discussion of the organs of the state in Book IV of the *Politics* (as well as any others he might have missed), including agriculture, manufacturing, trade, labour, defense, property ownership, administration and law. Through the expansion of my experience of what is worthy of care in interpersonal life, I am given the insight that sites of value require me to care for them, too, even if they are not something in which I am emotionally or interpersonally invested. The domain of friendship *expands* the sphere of value for me, opening me up psychologically to the external human forces that give rise to the social and political world in which I live, and give me the experience necessary to apply abstract recognition of value to the political domain, where it is more difficult, due to the inevitable conflicts of different ways of life supported by the necessary organs of the State, for my emotions to prompt me to care. To have accomplished this abstract recognition is to have accomplished citizenship.

Conclusion

I take Aristotle's decision to situate within the *Nicomachean Ethics* the discussion of friendship (Books VIII and IX) between that of character (in particular, Books I-IV and VII) and that of the political realm (X.9) to indicate to us the importance of friendship as a kind of middle term between human virtue and the full realization of political life. On the one hand, friendship is the most immediate place in which human beings demonstrate and share who they are with one another: it is, thus, arguably the most salient locus of the expression of one's character. On the other hand, the ability to participate in true friendship provides one with circumstances in which to develop important insights into how to engage in political life, insofar as it produces the most intense experience of the value

of the lives of others; indeed, according to Aristotle, it provides a model for how the law ought to guide interpersonal conduct.

I have argued that one of the virtues of friendship is that it functions as a substantial structure that imposes on us both the inspiration and the demand to act in ways we would not simply of our own accord. Friendship, I have claimed, is a domain of transformation, both in the undermining of the fixity of habituated adulthood, and, potentially, of our relationship to political institutions. Participation in complete or true friendship has the potential to inspire a disruption of our existing patterns of behaviour, and a disruption of our detached relationship to political life. It is, in this sense, the middle term between the personal and the political.

Notes

1. Debra Nails estimates Socrates' principle interlocutors, Lysis and Menexenus, to be in their early teens. See Nails (2002: 202-03)
2. Gavin Lawrence claims that what is meant by maturity or having grown up is to be capable of having one's actions be the expression of self-consciously held values and choices. (2011: 236-37).
3. I discuss some of the important moral and political implications of this stratification of forms of life in the Greek *polis* — as presented by Aristotle in his *Politics* — in “Natural Tensions in Aristotle’s *Polis* and Their Contemporary Manifestations”, forthcoming in *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*.
4. These ‘organs’ of the *polis* are taken from *Politics* IV.4 1290b-1291b.
5. I have in mind here *Politics* I.2, where Aristotle claims that the *polis* is the product of the gathering together of several villages (*kōmai*), which is to say, typically several groups of people organized around blood relations, into “a single complete community” that fully accomplishes the social instinct in human beings.
6. See *Politics* II.2 1261a23-25. See also, Ann Ward (2001: 450).
7. For an interpretation of Aristotle’s account of political life that opposes the idea that we, *qua* citizens, become something different from what we are *qua* family members or *qua* individuals, see Lloyd P. Gerson (2007).
8. For further discussion of the self-interested orientation to the *polis*, rooted in a deficient conception of friendship as directed strictly to utility, see Ward (2011: 450-53).
9. Aristotle will call *philia* in the context of one’s involvement with the *polis* “concord” (*homonoia*). *ENVIII.1* 1155a22. See also Ward (2011: 446).
10. The intuitive plausibility of this claim in Ancient Greek stems in part from the fact that friendship and love are cognates. See *Lysis* (212a-213a), where Socrates confuses Menexenus in wordplay involving *philia*: ‘So tell me: when one person loves (*philē*) another, which of the two becomes friend (*philos*) of the other, the loving (*philōn*) of the loved (*philoumenou*) or the loved (*philoumenos*) of the loving (*philountos*)?’ (212b1-3). For more discussion of the ambiguity of the term, see David Wolfsdorf (2007:237n7), and Julia Annas (1977: 532).
11. Wolfsdorf (2007: 247), applies this distinction to the dramatic details of Plato’s

Lysis, arguing that Hippothales shows himself to be an inauthentic admirer of Lysis (though he himself fails to recognize this) insofar as he demonstrates himself only to be capable of thinking of Lysis in terms of his own hedonistic interests.

12. Annas, (1977: 534), argues, unconvincingly I think, that Aristotle's recognition of reciprocity constitutes an advance on the more egoistic account of friendship put forward in the *Lysis*. What I take to be unconvincing here is the assumption that whatever Socrates explicitly claims in his discussion with those adolescents is to be taken as representative of Plato's developed point of view. For a detailed discussion of these issues in the *Lysis*, see Lorraine Smith Pangle's (2008) chapter titled, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*.
13. For a discussion of the shared life, and particularly of friendship providing the proper context for the activity of virtue, see Nancy Sherman (1993).
14. For an analysis of this sort of interpersonal dynamic, see John Russon (2009: 79-82).
15. This issue of the standpoint of the child is a fundamental thematic feature of Chapter 2 of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.
16. Compare *Lysis* (220a-b), where Socrates contrasts the things toward which we have *philia* with that towards which *philia* is directed. I am suggesting here that that towards which *philia* is directed is an institution giving shape to the characters of the members of the friendship.
17. For further discussion of choice-worthiness, see Charles H. Kahn (1981: 30-35).
18. For an intelligent and nuanced discussion of the issues of loving one's life and caring for the other's life, see Jennifer Whiting (1991).
19. In *En X.9*, Aristotle describes those who are free (*eleutherious*) as those who are able to have good and just action explained to them; this is due to the fact that they are not governed by their desires and passions (1179b8-10).
20. For further discussion of the 'second self', see Nancy Sherman (1993: 102-107).
21. Kahn (1982: 35), making use of Aristotle's account of *nous* in *On The Soul* III.5, offers a provocative interpretation of the metaphysics of the soul, in that he regards it necessary to account for this phenomenon of feeling kinship with one's friends. Specifically, we are capable of identifying as choice-worthy the interests of the other self because (a) our own selves are fundamentally *nous*, (b) *qua nous*, all others are the same as us, and (c) we are made aware of (b) in experience with those others. What I am arguing need not conflict with this, but is rather concerned with what is concretely created in the activity, namely, a structure of habitual activities that produce developed relations that possess their own norms. Where I probably part ways with Kahn is in his claim that what is loved in loving the other self is *nous*. For it seems to me that, given that *nous* is an unchanging singular reality, what is loved is something *instituted* by the friendship; something, in other words, that did not pre-exist that friendship. For further support of the claim that the person is to be identified with *nous*, see John M. Cooper (1986: 168-180).
22. Smith Pangle interprets Aristotle as being committed to the need for an emotional attachment to one's fellow citizens, as being essential to possessing a sense of justice (2008: 79-81). I take this to be the emotional valance of concord (*homonoia*). However, it seems to me that, in light of the essential organization of disparate factions that are productive of distinctive and conflicting ways of life, emotional investment in the range of fellow citizens will be insufficient in accomplishing complete citizenship.

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