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Journal

History of political thought, 44(4)

ISSN

0143-781X

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Publication Date

2023-11-30

DOI

10.53765/20512988.44.4.655

Peer reviewed

ARISTOTLE ON POLITICAL FRIENDSHIP AND EQUALITY

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(This is a final draft of an article published in *History of Political Thought* 44, no. 4 (2023): 655-75. Please cite to the published version of the article rather than the following manuscript, which may contain uncorrected errors.)

Abstract: Recent scholarship has placed the concept of friendship at the center of Aristotle’s political thought. However, relatively little attention has been given to Aristotle’s claim that political friendship is ‘based on equality’. This article first explicates this claim as it appears in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where Aristotle asserts that the paradigmatic form of political friendship is based on ‘arithmetic’ rather than ‘proportional’ equality. Second, it shows that this ‘egalitarian’ conception of political friendship is fully consistent with the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* – and, in doing so, challenges a recent argument that the *Eudemian Ethics* was not genuinely written by Aristotle. And third, it argues that Aristotle’s ‘egalitarian’ conception of political friendship motivates his advocacy of various economic arrangements and practices throughout the *Politics*, including but not limited to the common use of property.

It’s better, child,
To honor Equality, who ties friends to friends,
cities to cities, allies to allies.
For equality is stable among men.
If not, the lesser hates the greater force,
and so begins the day of enmity.

- Euripides, *Phoenissae*, lines 535-40,
quoted by Aristotle in *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) VII.1²

¹ I would like to thank Daniela Cammack, Nick Gooding, Kinch Hoekstra, Sam Stevens, Gio Maria Tessarolo, and the audience at the Berkeley Political Theory Workshop for their invaluable feedback on earlier stages of this paper. I am also grateful to the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University for their support (grant no. IHS017543).

² Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, in *Euripides IV: Helen, The Phoenician Women, Orestes*, 3rd ed., ed. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago and London: 2013), p. 120. Aristotle quotes only the last two lines.

Although Aristotle rarely used the term ‘political friendship’ (*hē politikē philia*), recent scholarship has placed the concept at the center of his political thought.³ There is good reason for that. Aristotle maintains that all political communities are held together by ‘friendship’ (*philia*),⁴ that friendship is the greatest of goods for city-states,⁵ that the characteristic ‘function’ (*ergon*) of the political art is to produce friendship between citizens,⁶ and that legislators generally seem more

³ These studies have often drawn inspiration from two seminal articles by J.M. Cooper: ‘Political Animals and Civic Friendship’, in *Aristoteles’ ,Politik’: Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum, Friedrichshafen/Bodensee, 25.8-3.9.1987*, ed. G. Patzig (Göttingen, 1990), pp. 220-41; and ‘Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship’, in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 312-25. In addition to the studies discussed at length below, see P. Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (Albany, NY, 1994), esp. chap. 5; R. Mulgan, ‘The role of friendship in Aristotle’s political theory’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2 (1999), pp. 15-32; D.S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since ‘Brown v. Board of Education’* (Chicago, 2004), chap. 9; H. Ottman, *Platon, Aristoteles und die neoklassische politische Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Baden: 2005), esp. pp. 49-56; J. Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics* (Chicago, 2005), chap. 5; A. Ceron, ‘Sull’amizia politica’, *Storia del Pensiero Politico* 1 (2012): 143-57 and *Le amicizie degli Antichi e dei Moderni* (Pisa: 2020), esp. pp. 90-112; P.W. Ludwig, *Rediscovering Political Friendship: Aristotle’s Theory and Modern Identity, Community, and Equality* (Cambridge, 2020).

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* [EN] VIII.1, 1155a23-24. Unless otherwise noted, citations to the *EN* refer to T. Irwin’s translation (Indianapolis, 2019). Although I follow the established convention of rendering *philia* as ‘friendship’, the Greek term possessed a much broader semantic range, encompassing a variety of obligatory and non-obligatory social relationships characterized by reciprocal concern (see the entry by G. Herman in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed., ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, [Oxford, 2012], p. 591).

⁵ *Politics* [Pol.] II.4, 1262b7-8.

⁶ *EE* VII.1, 1234b23-24

concerned with friendship than with justice.⁷ Drawing on this material, many scholars have debated whether political friendship is an ‘advantage-friendship’ or a ‘character-friendship’ (a question which may be ill-posed, for it assumes the two are mutually exclusive).⁸ Others, following Hannah Arendt, have interpreted political friendship in terms of mutual ‘respect’;⁹ or, alternatively, have interpreted political friendship as consensus on foundational ‘*constitutional matters*’.¹⁰ Most significantly, John M. Cooper has given a compelling account of political friendship as a relationship in which citizens are motivated – in their political, economic, and social dealings – not merely by self-interest, but rather by a concern

⁷ *EN VIII.1*, 1155a24-25. See E. Garver, *Aristotle’s Politics: Living Well and Living Together* (Chicago, 2011), who argues that throughout most of the *Politics* Aristotle himself is ‘more concerned about friendship than justice’ (p. 99).

⁸ To a large extent, this debate seems to have been initiated by Cooper’s articles ‘Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship’ and ‘Political Animals and Civic Friendship’, where he endeavored to show, in contrast to later scholars, that civic friendship exhibits elements of *both* advantage-friendships and character-friendships – a view he shares with Gauthier (see R.A. Gauthier and J.Y. Jolif, *Aristote: L’Ethique à Nicomaque* [Louvain, 1958-59], pp. 696-97). On the advantage-virtue debate, see also E. Irrera, ‘Between Advantage and Virtue: Aristotle’s Theory of Political Friendship’, *History of Political Thought* 26 (2005), pp. 565-85; D.B. Nagle, *The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle’s Polis* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 178-86; S.A. Schwarzenbach, ‘On Civic Friendship’, *Ethics* 107 (1996), pp. 97-128; B. Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 111ff.

⁹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1958), p. 243; cf. R. Balot, ‘The ‘mixed regime’ in Aristotle’s *Politics*’, in *Aristotle’s ‘Politics’: A Critical Guide*, ed. T. Lockwood and T. Samaras (Cambridge, 2015), p. 112; Frank, *Democracy of Distinction*, esp. p. 161.

¹⁰ M. Pakaluk, ‘Political Friendship: Ancient and Modern’, in *The Changing Face of Friendship*, ed. L. Rounder (Notre Dame, 1994), p. 208 (his italics); cf. A. Kronman, ‘Aristotle’s Idea of Political Fraternity’, *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 24 (1979), pp. 114-38; Schwarzenbach, ‘On Civic Friendship’, p. 107.

for the good of their fellow-citizens, which they perceive to coincide with their own good.¹¹

This paper seeks to supplement Cooper's basic interpretation by examining a topic that remains relatively neglected in the secondary literature: the relationship between political friendship and equality. I argue that, for Aristotle, the paradigmatic form of political friendship is based on *arithmetic* rather than proportional equality, and that such equality requires a substantial degree of economic commonality and likeness in turn. I begin with *EE* VII, where Aristotle argues that political friendships are 'based on equality'; and that such friendships are fully present only in the most egalitarian political communities – democracies and *politeiai* (i.e. 'polities' or 'timocracies') (Section I). While this 'egalitarian' political conclusion is sometimes regarded as the result of a logical misstep, I argue that it follows naturally from Aristotle's analytic method.

I then show that the argument of *EE* VII is fully consistent with the *EN* and *Politics* (Section II). In these latter texts, Aristotle suggests that the arithmetic equality which underlies political friendship requires a substantial degree of economic commonality; moreover, he indicates that such equality is most present in timocracies (where all citizens possess a minimum amount of property) and in mixed regimes (where most citizens possess a moderate amount of wealth).

The authorship of the *EE* has been a topic of substantial disagreement since the mid-nineteenth century¹² – but in recent years, the strongest argument for

¹¹ Cooper, 'Political Animals and Civic Friendship', p. 238.

¹² See the seminal studies of F. Schleiermacher, *Über die ethischen Werke des Aristoteles*, in *Sämmtliche Werke, Abteilung 3: Zur Philosophie*, ed. L. Jonas

denying the thesis of Aristotelian authorship has been that the *EE*'s theory of political friendship is too 'egalitarian' to accord with the *EN* and *Politics*.¹³ Against that claim, I show that the normative criterion used to evaluate regime types in the *EN* and *Politics* is precisely the 'egalitarian' conception of political friendship found in the *EE*.¹⁴ This 'egalitarian' conception of political friendship also motivates Aristotle's advocacy of various economic arrangements and practices –

(Berlin, 2018 [1835]), pp. 306-333; L. Spengel, 'Über die unter den Namen des Aristoteles erhaltenen Ethischen Schriften', in *Abhandlungen der Philosophisch-Philologischen Classe der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Munich, 1841); W. Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, 2nd ed., trans. R. Robinson (Oxford, 1960); and A. Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between the 'Eudemian' and 'Nicomachean Ethics' of Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2016).

¹³ Pakaluk argues that 'egalitarianism' of the *EE* – a text which, on his reading, asserts the 'fundamental equality and likeness of human beings' and accords 'greater priority to friendship based on equality' than hierarchical friendships – renders the traditional thesis of Aristotelian authorship implausible ('The Egalitarianism of the *Eudemian Ethics*', *The Classical Quarterly* 48 [1999], pp. 411-423, esp. 423). He proceeds to suggest that the '*EE* and *EN* are in fact by different authors' (ibid., pp. 429-30). Drawing on Pakaluk, Schofield underscores the radically egalitarian consequences of the *EE*'s theory of political friendship – consequences which, he argues, conflict with the aristocratic leanings of the *EN* and *Politics*. These considerations lead Schofield, too, to suggest that 'the author of the *EE* is not Aristotle' (*Saving the City*, pp. 87-89) – though he entertains the alternative possibility that the *EN* and *EE* diverge because they were written for different audiences (ibid., pp. 95-98). The latter suggestion is essentially the view of D. J. Allan ('Quasi-mathematical method in the *Eudemian Ethics*', in *Aristote et les problèmes de méthode: Communications présentées au Symposium Aristotelicum tenu à Louvain du 24 août au 1er septembre 1960*, 2nd ed., ed. S. Mansion [Louvain and Paris: 1961], pp. 308-18).

¹⁴ Of course, Aristotle's conception of political friendship is not straightforwardly 'egalitarian' in the current sense of the word, for the arithmetic equality that characterizes political friendship is predicated on a broader structure of economic and social subordination. Like many of his contemporaries, Aristotle assumed that equality and hierarchy were 'opposite sides of the same coin' (*Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (New York, 1999), p. 112; cf. K.A. Raaflaub, 'Equalities and inequalities in Athenian democracy', in *Dēmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed. J. Ober and C. Hedrik (Princeton, 1996), pp. 139-74.

including the common use of property, the redistribution of wealth, and the funding of common meals at the public expense (Section III).

I

Political Friendship and Equality

Aristotle asserts in Book VII of the *EE* that political friendship is ‘based on equality’ [*kat’ isotēta*].¹⁵ But it is not immediately clear how we should interpret that claim. Aristotle famously distinguishes between two different kinds of equality: while ‘arithmetic’ equality obtains between parties who are ‘alike’ in all relevant respects and treat each other as equals, ‘proportional’ equality obtains between dissimilar parties, who treat each another in accordance with their respective worth.¹⁶ It has been argued that political friendships, as relationships uniting ‘a multitude of dissimilar people’, must be based on proportional rather than arithmetic equality.¹⁷ But I will argue that this interpretation is incompatible with the overall argument of *EE* VII. Throughout *EE* VII, Aristotle depicts political friendships as *arithmetically* equal relationships: using a discursive method known as ‘focal meaning analysis’, he models the concept of political friendship on the arithmetic friendship of men of equal virtue.

¹⁵ *EE* VII, 1242b23-33.

¹⁶ See *EN* 1130-32b.

¹⁷ H. Hutter, *Politics as Friendship: The origins of classical notions of politics in the theory and practice of friendship* (Waterloo, 1978), p. 113.

Focal meaning analysis supposes that for every set of things which are called *f*, there is a logically ‘primary’ *F* – the focal predicate – which unites the various forms of *f* under a common paradigm.¹⁸ For example, Aristotle argues in the *Metaphysics* that all ‘medical’ things – such as medical scalpels, medical diagnoses, or medical discussions – are ‘medical’ by means of their common reference to the ‘medical art’ [*episteme*].¹⁹ The medical art therefore the is *focal predicate* of all ‘medical’ things: while scalpels and diagnoses may legitimately be called ‘medical’, they count as such only with reference to this art.

In the *EE*, Aristotle proposes that the same method should be used to account for the various senses of the term *philia*. He argues that the relationships which are called friendships ‘are not all friendship in the same sense’, but rather that they are called friendships ‘with *reference* to one particular and *primary* kind of friendship, as with the term “*medical*”’.²⁰ If we are to account for the sense in which *philia* is present in a variety of social relationships, ranging from familial to commercial forms of association, we must therefore grasp what it would mean for two parties to be *philo*i in the ‘primary’ sense of the term.²¹ This method will demonstrate that social relationships genuinely count as friendships only by means

¹⁸ On focal meaning analysis, see J.K. Ward, ‘Focal Reference in Aristotle’s Account of φιλία: Eudemian Ethics VII 2’, *Apeiron* 28 (1995): 183-205. See also G.E.L. Owen, ‘Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle’, in *Logic, Science and Dialectic* (Ithaca, 1986), pp. 180-99; and G. Duke, *Aristotle and Law: The Politics of ‘Nomos’* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 12-13.

¹⁹ *Met.* IV.2, 1003b1-5; XI.3, 1060b36-61a5.

²⁰ *EE* VII.2, 1236a18-19, emphasis added

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 1236b3-27; 1237a10-b7

of their ‘reference to a single form’,²² and that each of the various forms of *philia* is derivative with respect to the concept of ‘the true friend [*philos*]’.²³

As Aristotle’s argument unfolds, it becomes clear that the paradigmatic *philos* has two defining characteristics: 1) he is a virtue-friend, and 2) he is an arithmetical equal.²⁴ Since Aristotle’s claim that the true friend is a virtue-friend²⁵ is well-studied, I will not reconstruct his argument for this position at length. For the scope of this paper, it is simply important to note that Aristotle locates the focal meaning of *philia* in virtue-friendship; while he acknowledges that friendships may also be based on utility and pleasure, he insists that in a strict sense of the term, ‘the virtue friend is the only friend’.²⁶

In precisely the same manner, Aristotle argues that egalitarian friendship is conceptually primary to hierarchical friendship – and that only arithmetically equal parties can be *philoī* in the strict sense of the term. In the early chapters of the *EE*, Aristotle had established a dichotomy between friendships ‘based on equality’ [*kat’ isotēta*] and friendships ‘based on superiority’ [*kat’ hyperbolēn*].²⁷ Friendships

²² *Ibid.*, 1236b37.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1236b27-28.

²⁴ I use male pronouns to describe primary friendship because Aristotle assumes the superior virtue of the male sex (*Pol.* I.5, 1254b13-14). This assumption has important implications for Aristotle’s conception of *politikē philia* – which, in the paradigmatic sense of the term, can only obtain between virtuous male citizens. On Aristotle’s debarment of women from the public sphere, see T. Samaras, ‘Aristotle on Gender in *Politics* I’, *History of Political Thought* 37.4 (2016), pp. 595-605; see also J. Coleman, *A History of Political Thought from Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 206-12.

²⁵ See *EE* VII.2, 1236b3-4, 1237a10, 1238a30-33; cf. *EN* VIII.3, 1156b6-9.

²⁶ See *EE* VII.12, 1244b17.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, VII.3 1238b16-18. The term *hyperbolēn* can carry negative connotations of extravagance, excess, and overreaching. See H.G. Liddell and R.

‘based on superiority’ include relationships between rulers and subjects, benefactors and beneficiaries, fathers and sons, or husbands and wives; in contrast, friendships ‘based on equality’ are characteristic of brothers or comrades.²⁸

Aristotle supposes that true *philoï* must interact on a basis of equality:

So, as has been said, there are three kinds of friendship (virtue friendship, utility friendship and pleasure friendship); and they are further divided into two, some based on equality [*kata to ison*] and some on superiority [*kat’ hyperochēn*]. Both relationships are forms of friendship [*philiai*], but *only those whose relationship is based on equality are friends [philoï]*.²⁹

While unequal social relationships may be called friendships (*philiai*), only socially equal parties are genuinely friends (*philoï*) in the paradigmatic sense of the term: unequal parties – those whose friendship is ‘based on superiority’ – can be *philoï* only in a secondary and derivative sense.

When Aristotle distinguishes between friendships ‘based on equality’ and friendships ‘based on superiority’, he is not simply saying that the former kind are equal whereas the latter are not, but rather that they exhibit different *kinds* of equality.³⁰ Specifically, friendships ‘based on superiority’ are characterized by ‘proportional, not arithmetic equality’.³¹ Hierarchical friendships are grounded in a kind of equality which consists not in sameness in number or size, but rather in equality of ratios or geometric proportionality.

Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Revised Supplement*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1996), *ad vocem*.

²⁸ *EE* VII.3-4, 1238b15-1239a10; cf. VII.10, 1242b4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, VII.4, 1239a5-6, emphasis added.

³⁰ Several times in *EE* VII, Aristotle suggests that all friendships are in fact grounded in equality, in a certain sense of the term (VII.3, 1238b15 ff.; VII.6, 1240b2 ff.; cf. *EN* 1157b35).

³¹ *EE* VII.3, 1238b23-25; cf. VII.10, 1242b1-20.

With that distinction in mind, it is clear that Aristotle's contrast between egalitarian and hierarchical friendships corresponds to his distinction between friendships based on *arithmetic* and *proportional* equality. Indeed, Aristotle's chief examples of friendships 'based on equality' – such as friendships between human beings of equal virtue,³² or between brothers or comrades³³ – also function as examples of arithmetically equal friendships;³⁴ in turn, his primary examples of friendships 'based on superiority' – friendships between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, benefactors and beneficiaries, or rulers and ruled³⁵ – function as examples of proportionally equal friendships.³⁶ So when Aristotle writes that only parties whose relationship is 'based on equality' are genuinely *philo*, he seems to mean that the paradigmatic form of *philia* is based on arithmetic rather than proportional equality.

Aristotle reiterates this claim twice in *EE* VII,³⁷ providing further reasons in support. He maintains that the essence of friendship – mutual loving and well-wishing – is fully present only in arithmetically equal social relationships. In friendships between superiors and inferiors, which are characterized by proportional equality, 'reciprocal loving is either not present or not present in the same way':³⁸ the superior party is owed love by the inferior party, but does not owe

³² *Ibid.*, VII.3, 1238b15-17.

³³ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1242a35-40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1242a5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, VII.3, 1238b15-1239a10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, VII.9-10, 1241b37-1242a4; cf. *EN* VIII.7, 1158b10-30.

³⁷ See *EE* VII.4, 1239a19-21; VII.5, 1240a4-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, VII.2, 1238b26-30.

him love in return.³⁹ Aristotle acknowledges that *philia* can exist in such situations,⁴⁰ but only in a derivative and attenuated sense – and only insofar as the two parties are *equalized* through the proportional exchange of material and social goods.⁴¹ While these unequal relationships can indeed qualify as ‘friendships’, Aristotle emphasizes that they are only ‘incidentally’ so:⁴² proportionally equal relationships are *philia* only by reference to the true *philos*: the arithmetically equal virtue-friend.

Aristotle proceeds to derive the concept of *politikē philia* from the primary meaning of *philia* – concluding, in turn, that the paradigmatic form of political friendship is also *kat’ isotēta*, or based on arithmetic equality.⁴³ This claim is often met with some bafflement in the secondary literature. Schofield, for example, views this conclusion as a logical misstep, based on little more than a verbal pun on the term *politikē*.⁴⁴ But a closer look at *EE* VII.9-10 will reveal that Aristotle’s ‘egalitarian’ conception of political friendship is, in fact, fully consistent with his analytic method in the preceding chapters of Book VII.

Aristotle begins his discussion of political friendship by returning to the contrast between ‘arithmetical’ and ‘proportional’ forms of friendship – a contrast which he now links to different forms of government. He argues that *politeiai* exhibit arithmetically equal friendships, akin to fraternal and comradely

³⁹ P.L.P. Simpson, *The Eudemian Ethics of Aristotle* [New Brunswick, 2013], p. 352.

⁴⁰ *EE*, VII.2, 1236b21-6; cf. 1236a15-32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1242b1-22; cf. *EN* VIII.6-7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, VII.5, 1240a4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1242b23-33.

⁴⁴ Schofield, *Saving the City*, pp. 88-89.

relationships; in turn, aristocratic and monarchical regimes exhibit proportional friendships, similar in structure to matrimonial and paternalistic relationships.⁴⁵ With that conceptual framework in place, Aristotle suggests that political friendship is most characteristic *not* of aristocracies and monarchies, but rather of polities and democracies: ‘Only political [friendship] [*politikē*] and the deviation corresponding to it [i.e. democratic friendship] are not just friendships [*philiai*], but associations which operate as *friends* [*philoī*] do: the other sorts [i.e. aristocratic and monarchic friendships] are based on superiority’.⁴⁶ Schofield suggests that this passage treats the term ‘political’ as if it were derived from *politeia*, such that *politikē philia* simply means the kind of friendship that is characteristic of *politeia*. Indeed, if we do not read *politikē philia* here as referring to the form of friendship characteristic of *politeiai*, it is difficult to account for what is meant by the subsequent phrase, ‘and the deviation corresponding to it’. Schofield, however, finds the *EE*’s line of reasoning unpersuasive: he argues that the ‘slipperiness’ of the term ‘political’ in this passage provides the basis for the unsubstantiated conclusion that political friendship is a non-hierarchical relationship, characteristic of democracies and polities.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *EE* 1241b30-1242a6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1242a9-11. I follow Schofield’s translation (*ibid.*, p. 88, emphasis added). The claim in this passage might appear to conflict with Aristotle’s parenthetical statement, in the same chapter, that aristocracy is the ‘best’ form of government (1241a37). But Schofield (*Saving the City*, pp. 98, 210n29) observes that the insertion of ‘best’ at 1241a37 does not work syntactically; he concludes that this was likely an ancient reader’s attempt to reconcile *EE* VII.9 with Aristotle’s ranking of constitutions at *EN* VII.10. J. Barnes’s Revised Oxford translation similarly excises ‘best’ (*The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* [Princeton, 1984]).

⁴⁷ Schofield, *Saving the City*, p. 88.

However, Aristotle's central claim in this passage – that *only* arithmetically equal civic relationships 'are not just friendships, but associations which operate as friends do' – directly mirrors his earlier claim about ethical friendship: while hierarchical relationships may indeed be friendships, only the arithmetical equal is a true friend.⁴⁸ As such, Aristotle's political conclusion seems to rest not simply on verbal 'slipperiness', or a mere 'pun',⁴⁹ but rather on his focal analysis of the term *politikē philia*. Aristotle assumes that there is a logically primary form of *politikē philia* – a focal predicate – which unites its various manifestations under a common paradigm. Since *politikē philia* is itself an instance of the broader category *philia*, Aristotle suggests that the paradigmatic political friend will resemble the paradigmatic ethical friend. Just as Aristotle held that primary virtue-friendship is characterized by arithmetic equality, he holds that the primary form of political friendship is found in cities where citizens interact as arithmetic equals. If that is correct, Aristotle's assertion that genuine political friendships are non-hierarchical relationships is not a logical misstep, but an outcome of his analytic method.

Aristotle's subsequent discussion of political friendship supports this reading. Aristotle returns to his distinction between friendships 'based on equality' and those 'based on superiority', indicating that in the latter kind, 'the superior is the ruler, and the inferior is the subject'.⁵⁰ He then explicitly contrasts this subject-

⁴⁸ *EE* VII.4, 1239a5-6.

⁴⁹ Schofield, *Saving the City*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ *EE* VII.10, 1242b1-10, emphasis added I follow A. Kenny's translation (Oxford, 2011).

ruler relationship – a relationship which, he says, is grounded on ‘proportional’ equality – to political friendship:

Political friendship [*politikē philia*] is the equal kind [*kat’ isa*]. Here too there is ruler and ruled, but the relationship is not by nature nor is it monarchical but occurs in rotation, and not for the purpose of benefactions, like a god, but for the equal sharing of benefits and burdens.⁵¹ And political friendship [*politikē philia*] in fact tends to be based on equality [*kat’ isotēta*].⁵²

In maintaining that political friendships are characteristically ‘based on equality’, Aristotle is asserting that political friendships are *arithmetically* rather than proportionally equal; and it follows from this premise that hierarchical relationships *cannot* exhibit political friendship in the strict sense of the term.

While Aristotle restricts the primary sense of *politikē philia* to arithmetically equal civic relationships, he also uses the term in a more generic sense to describe proportional relationships within hierarchical contexts. At *EN IX*, for example, Aristotle describes the ‘political friendship’ (*politikē philia*) of cobblers and their customers as an example of proportional friendship between ‘friends with dissimilar aims’.⁵³ Similarly, in a passage from the *EE* discussing ‘civic partnership’ (*politikē koinonia*) between unequal parties, such as kings and their harpists, Aristotle suggests that one should adjudicate legal disputes between superiors and inferiors based on a measurement of what is ‘proportionate’.⁵⁴ These passages indicate Aristotle also uses the term ‘political friendship’ to refer to a

⁵¹ I follow Kenny’s rendering of *hina ison ē tou agathou kai tēs leitourgias* as ‘for the equal sharing of benefits and burdens’.

⁵² *EE* 1242b23-33.

⁵³ *EN IX*, 1163b34-a3.

⁵⁴ *EE VII.10*, 1243b27-43.

range of proportional civic relationships, and that a derivative form of political friendship can obtain within hierarchical contexts. However, this is evidently not the *paradigmatic* form of political friendship, and neither of these passages should be taken to suggest that Aristotle regards political friendship as a relationship grounded in proportional rather than arithmetic equality.

II

Political Friendship and Class

The aim of this section is to determine, first, how far the egalitarianism of the *EE*'s account of political friendship is borne out in the *EN* and *Politics*. Once I have established, *pace* Schofield and Pakaluk, that Aristotle's *EN* and *Politics* do not substantially depart from the egalitarian argument of the *EE*, I will try to elaborate the kind of equality that Aristotle thinks underwrites political friendship. To do so, I will focus on two neglected aspects of Aristotle's account of political friendship: first, his view that political friendship is most present in 'timocracies' (i.e. *politeiai*),⁵⁵ where propertied men participate equally in ruling and being ruled; and second, his claim that political friendship is sustained by the rule of the *mesoi*, the 'middling element' or middle class. It will turn out that on each of these points, Aristotle's argument is not only attentive to issues of social hierarchy, but permeated by his belief that the paradigmatic form of political friendship is based on arithmetic equality; and it will become clear, in turn, that the arithmetic equality

⁵⁵ Aristotle identifies 'timocracy' with *politeia* at *EN* VIII.10, 1160a34-35.

which underlies political friendship requires a significant degree of economic commonality and likeness.

As noted above, influential scholars tend either to claim that the *EN* and *Politics* do not substantially engage with the theme of political friendship, or deny that Aristotle's account of political friendship in the *EN* and *Politics* is compatible with the argument of the *EE*. Julia Annas, for example, argues that the concept of political friendship has 'no explicit role in the *Politica* itself'.⁵⁶ Schofield, after commenting on the striking egalitarianism of the *EE*'s treatment of political friendship, argues that 'in the corresponding chapters of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN* VIII.9-IX.1) Aristotle's occasional references to "political friendship" do not broach issues of hierarchy or equality at all'. Schofield goes on to argue that 'in each of the two ethical treatises the two conceptions of political friendship simply deal with different ideas' – a conclusion which bolsters his suggestion that the *EE* was not written by Aristotle.⁵⁷

But is it really the case that Aristotle's discussion of political friendship in the *EN* 'do[es] not broach issues of hierarchy or equality'? This claim has some plausibility, if one focuses *only* on passages where Aristotle explicitly uses the term *politikē philia*. It is true that Aristotle's primary focus in *NE* IX.6 – where he does mention *politikē philia* – is not the relationship between *politikē philia* and equality, but rather between *politikē philia* and *homonoiā* (i.e. 'like-mindedness').⁵⁸

⁵⁶ J. Annas, 'Comments on J. Cooper', in Patzig, *Aristoteles' ,Politik'*, p. 243; cf. p. 248.

⁵⁷ Schofield, *Saving the City*, pp. 87-89.

⁵⁸ The concept of *homonoiā* is, of course, closely related to equality: *homonoiā*, as a state of like-mindedness, presupposes likeness, similarity and sameness; indeed,

Nonetheless, Aristotle *does* appear to have political friendship in mind in *EN* VIII.11, which parallels his discussion of political friendship at *EE* VII.9-10. At the beginning of *EN* VIII.11, Aristotle observes – as he had at *EE* VII.9 – that each of the three major constitutional forms involves a specific kind of friendship: monarchies exhibit quasi-paternal friendships; aristocracies exhibit quasi-matrimonial friendships; and timocracies exhibit quasi-fraternal or comradely friendships.⁵⁹ This passage alone constitutes sufficient evidence to reject Schofield’s claim that Aristotle’s account of political friendship in the *NE* ‘do[es] not broach issues of equality and hierarchy’. For Aristotle’s point in this passage is that each of the three major constitutional forms, like each of these familial relationships, is characterized by a different kind of equality.⁶⁰ While Aristotle may not use the phrase *politikē philia* in this chapter, it is not clear why this should matter, for he clearly has *political* friendship in mind.

In fact, Aristotle becomes increasingly concerned with issues of equality and hierarchy as his argument proceeds. He proposes, as he had in *EE* VII.10, that political friendship is based on equality. Here, however, Aristotle expresses the point negatively. He argues that political friendship is relatively absent within substantively unequal regimes: ‘where ruler and ruled have nothing in common, they have no friendship’.⁶¹ Elaborating on this claim, Aristotle explains that a tyrant

Aristotle argues that *homonoia*, in the primary sense of the term, can only obtain between persons of equally good character (*EN* IX.6, 1167b5ff.; *EE* VII.7, 1241a20-26).

⁵⁹ *EN* VIII.11, 1161a10-30; cf. *EE* VII.9, 1241b30-40.

⁶⁰ See Ceron, *Le amicizie degli Antichi e dei Moderni*, pp. 102-03.

⁶¹ *EN* VIII.11, 1161a30-35.

cannot befriend his subjects for the same reason that a master cannot befriend a slave.⁶² Political friendship is relatively lacking in tyrannies not simply because tyranny is a ‘vicious’ political arrangement, but rather because tyrant-subject relationships are grounded in extreme *inequality*,⁶³ whereas *philia* is based on arithmetic equality.⁶⁴ Having established that tyrannical regimes are lacking in political friendship, Aristotle now contrasts tyranny to democracy, and concludes – as he had at *EE* VII.10 – that democracies exhibit stronger bonds of political friendship: ‘Hence there are friendships and justice only to a slight degree in

⁶² As many scholars have observed, Aristotle’s views on the possibility of friendship between slaves and their masters seem inconsistent. In arguing that masters cannot befriend their slaves *qua* slaves (*EN* VIII.11, 1161b2-7), Aristotle abandons the position he took in discussing natural slavery at *Pol.* I.6, where he claimed that relationships between natural slaves and their masters exhibit ‘mutual friendship’ (1255b11-23; unless otherwise noted, citations of the *Politics* refer to the translation C.D.C. Reeve, 2nd ed. [Chicago, 2017]). The argument of the *EN* in fact requires Aristotle to abandon the *Politics*’ claim that natural slaves and their masters are characteristically friends. At *EN* VIII.11, Aristotle argues that friendship cannot obtain where there is ‘nothing in common’ between two parties – such as in relationships between different species of animals, between tyrants and their subjects, or between masters and slaves (1161a34-b5). Aristotle’s concept of natural slavery, as presented in the *Politics*, assumes precisely such a lack of commonality: ‘Those people, then, who are as different [from others] as body is from soul or beast from human... are by nature slaves’ (I.5, 1254b16-18). (See, however, T. Lockwood, ‘Is Natural Slavery beneficial?’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45.2 (2007), pp. 207-21, who disputes the claim that Aristotle’s discussion of natural slavery is consistent.)

⁶³ *EN* VIII.11, 1161a35-b10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII.8, 1159b1-5. In the *Politics*, Aristotle suggests that well-ordered monarchies exhibit relatively little political friendship for similar reasons: a king who acknowledged his subjects as arithmetic equals would undermine his own claim to superiority, thereby negating his title to rule (*Pol.* III.16, 1287b33ff.). See C. Atack’s discussion of this passage in ‘Aristotle’s *Pambasileia* and the Metaphysics of Monarchy’, *Polis, The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought* 32.2 [2015], pp. 314-15. See also B. Buekenhout, ‘Catching the Wren: Aristotle on One-Man Rule’ (PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2019), p. 57ff; and R.J. Corbett, ‘The Question of Natural Law in Aristotle’, *History of Political Thought* 30.2 (2009), p. 245.

tyrannies also, but *to a much larger degree in democracies*, for there people are *equal*, and have so much *in common*'.⁶⁵ Aristotle's discussion of political friendship in the *EN*, then, not only broaches issues of hierarchy and equality, but also suggests that there are strong reasons for preferring regimes in which citizens interact as arithmetical equals.

Aristotle's argument in *EN VIII.11* does not, of course, advance a defense of democratic government; on the contrary, he maintains that political friendship can only exist in a diminished sense in 'deviant' political forms, including both tyranny and democracy.⁶⁶ Although democracies exhibit a greater degree of political friendship than tyrannies, Aristotle argues that the extent of this friendship is hindered by the lack of justice in democratic regimes.⁶⁷ Aristotle does not elaborate on this point, but he might worry that democratic citizens regard one another as equals even when some citizens deserve superior treatment; in such cases, arithmetic equality would be lacking, and citizens would identify with each other's interests for the wrong reasons, making their political friendships unstable.⁶⁸

Aristotle seems to believe that the greatest degree of political friendship is present not in democracies, but rather in *timocracies* – where propertied citizens share equally in ruling and being ruled. Whereas democratic citizens interact as

⁶⁵ *EN VIII.11*, 1161b5-10, emphasis added; cf. *EE VII.10*, 1242a9-11.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, Aristotle does not discuss oligarchy, the third 'deviant' regime, in this passage. But oligarchies would presumably exhibit relatively little political friendship for similar reasons to tyranny: oligarchy is, by definition, a political arrangement grounded in substantive *inequality* with respect to wealth (see *Pol. IV.9*, 1294a10).

⁶⁷ *EN VIII.11*, 1161a30-31.

⁶⁸ See Irwin's discussion of a similar problem in tyrannies: 'Notes', in *EN*, p. 326.

equals regardless of their respective worth, timocratic citizens are genuinely equal with respect to their political status, ownership of property, and character. In timocracies, Aristotle writes, ‘citizens are meant to be equal and decent, and so rule in turn and on equal terms; the same is true, then, of their citizenship’.⁶⁹ Aristotle repeatedly compares timocratic political friendships to the arithmetically equal friendships of brothers and comrades.⁷⁰ As Ann Ward has argued, these comparisons suggest that timocratic political friendship resembles primary friendship;⁷¹ moreover, these comparisons provide evidence that the paradigmatic form of political friendship is akin to comradeship or fraternity.⁷²

However, Aristotle’s view that political friendship is most present in timocracies may at first seem puzzling. If political friendship is based on arithmetic equality, why should it be most present in regimes where political participation is not open to all residents, but restricted to the propertied classes? In fact, Aristotle seems to argue that timocracies exhibit strong bonds of political friendship because their *citizens* – as opposed to all *residents* – are arithmetically equal with respect to property and class. The citizens of timocracies are arithmetic equals precisely because their citizenship is predicated on their class identity: in a timocracy,

⁶⁹ *EN* 1161a29-31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.10, 1161a5-6; VIII.11, 1161a28-31; cf. *EE* VII.9, 1241b30-31.

⁷¹ Ward observes that timocratic citizens, ‘like brothers’, ‘regard each other as other selves’ and ‘relate to each other on the basis of a strict equality of sameness rather than a proportional equality of difference’ (‘Friendship and politics in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*’, *European Journal of Political Theory* 10.4 [2011], p. 455). See also A. Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy* (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 80-81.

⁷² Pace Yack, *Problems of a Political Animal*, pp. 117, 119.

Aristotle writes, ‘all those with the property qualification are equal’.⁷³ In timocracies, property qualifications establish equality of status within a hierarchical social structure, such that political friendships can emerge within an elite group of property-holders who relate to one another as arithmetic equals. Indeed, Aristotle’s discussion of timocracy indicates that the equality which underlies political friendship is compatible with a range of substantive hierarchies, especially the civic exclusion of the laboring poor.⁷⁴

Aristotle’s discussion of timocracy suggests a close connection between political friendship and class identity. This connection is even more apparent at *Pol.* IV.11, where Aristotle argues that political friendship is lacking in cities with substantial economic inequality, but flourishes under the rule of the *mesoi*. This passage is often neglected in scholarly treatments of political friendship – in part because, in the view of some scholars, Aristotle does not explicitly use the term *politikē philia* in this chapter.⁷⁵ Some readers go so far as to argue that *Pol.* IV.11

⁷³ *EN* VIII.10, 1160b18-19.

⁷⁴ This conclusion is unsurprising: Aristotle assumes that political friendship requires equality of character, and that productive labor hinders the development of character (see e.g. *Pol.* VIII.2, 1337b1-15). On Aristotle’s civic exclusion of banausics, see A. Schrieffl, ‘Die Wirtschaftsordnung und die richtige Einstellung zu Besitz und Reichtum’, in *Platon: Gesetze-Nomoi*, ed. O. Höffe (Berlin, 2013), p. 122; and C. Woods, ‘The Limits of Citizenship in Aristotle’s *Politics*’, *History of Political Thought* 35.3 (2014), pp. 414-18.

⁷⁵ That claim, however, rests on a particular reading of the relevant syntax. In the passage in question, *politikēs* could plausibly be taken with *philiās* as well as *koinōnias*. Cooper (‘Political Animals and Civic Friendship’, p. 233-34n16) argues that *politikēs* should be taken with both *philiās* and *koinōnias*; C.D.C. Reeve (*Politics: A New Translation* [Indiana, 2017], p. 98) follows suit in his new translation. Annas (‘Comments on J. Cooper’, p. 246) and Stern-Gillet (*Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship*, p. 204n7) argue that *politikēs* should be taken only with *koinōnias*, while other scholars, such as Yack (see *Problems of a Political Animal*,

does not bear on the theme of political friendship at all: Suzanne Stern-Gillet, for example, denies that ‘this chapter contain[s] any allusion to civic friendship’.⁷⁶ But that claim is untenable. When read in the context of Aristotle’s discussions of political friendship in *EE* VII.9-10 and *EN* VIII.10-11, *Pol.* IV.11 should be regarded as a coherent extension of Aristotle’s views on the relationship between political friendship, equality and class. For in this passage, Aristotle explicitly argues that the empowerment of the middle class is an important means of cultivating and maintaining political friendship between citizens.

Aristotle proposes that all cities are divided into three classes: the rich, the poor, and the *mesoi*, comprising members of the city who possess a moderate amount of property and wealth.⁷⁷ In the absence of a strong middle class, rich citizens tend to treat the poor ‘like a slave’;⁷⁸ and relationships between masters (*despotēs*) and slaves are, as we have seen, antithetical to friendship.⁷⁹ As such, Aristotle argues that excessive economic inequality allows the rich to rule despotically over the poor, engendering faction and undermining political friendship:

What comes into being, then, is a city consisting of slaves and masters, but not of free people, the one group envious, the other contemptuous—which is the furthest thing from political friendship and community [*philiai kai*

chap. 4) and Schofield (see *Saving the City*, chap. 5), neglect this passage in their discussions of political friendship.

⁷⁶ S. Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany, NY, 1995), p. 204n7.

⁷⁷ Aristotle characterizes the *mesoi* as a class possessing ‘a middling amount of the goods of luck’ (*Pol.* IV.11, 1295b4-5); elsewhere, he describes these goods of luck as ‘external’ goods (see VII.2, 1323b27-29; cf. *Magna Moralia* II.8, 1206b33-34) – a category including wealth and property (see Reeve, *Politics*, p. 314n513).

⁷⁸ *Pol.* IV.11, 1295b1-21.

⁷⁹ Cf. *EN* VIII.11, 1161a35-b10.

koinōnias politikēs]. For community is fitted to friendship [*philikos*], since enemies do not wish to share even a road in common. But a city tends at any rate to consist as much as possible [*hoti malista*] of people who are equal and similar [*isoi kai homoioi*], and this especially holds of those in the middle [*hoi mesoi*]. So it is necessary for this city—the one that is composed of those we say a city is by nature composed of—to be governed in the best way.⁸⁰

While political friendship is compatible with a range of social and political inequalities, it is plainly incompatible with a situation where a contemptuous elite possesses most of a city's resources, and rules despotically over the envious masses.⁸¹ Economic inequality produces *stasis* and enmity – the opposite of friendship. To avoid this outcome, Aristotle thinks it is necessary to establish a 'mixed' constitution, in which a strong middle class prevents the rich from dominating over the poor – thereby maintaining constitutional balance and avoiding *stasis*.⁸²

The foregoing analysis of *Pol.* IV.11 indicates that the arithmetic equality which underlies political friendship requires a substantial degree of economic commonality. Indeed, when Aristotle suggests that members of the middle class are

⁸⁰ *Pol.* IV.11, 1295b21-27.

⁸¹ Cooper, 'Political Animals', pp. 234-35n16. Aristotle's point here could be read as a political application of his claim that friendships cannot sustain large differences in wealth: 'if friends come to be separated by some wide gap in virtue, vice, wealth, or something else... they are friends no more' (*EN* VIII.7, 1158b34-36).

⁸² Aristotle presents the mixed constitution as means of avoiding class conflict (see Coleman, *A History of Political Thought*, p. 217; in this sense, he differs from later theorists, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Niccolò Machiavelli, who value the mixed constitution precisely for its internal contentiousness and the institutionalization of class struggle. See G. Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult: The 'Discourses on Livy' and the Origins of Political Conflictualism*, trans. P. Gaborik and R. Nybakken (Cambridge, 2018), chap. 6; cf. E. Arum, 'Machiavelli's *Principio*: Political Renewal and Innovation in the *Discourses on Livy*', *The Review of Politics* 82.4 (2020): 525-47.

‘equal and alike’ (*isoi kai homoioi*), he seems to mean that they are equal and alike with respect to their *economic* position; it is *that* sort of equality which makes them particularly well-suited for *koinōnia* and *politikē philia*.⁸³ While Aristotle assumes that the substantive realization of such equality may be constrained by various economic contingencies – including the necessity of slavery and other forms of unfree labor – he holds that in the best city, citizens will be equal to the greatest extent possible (*hoti malista*).

We have seen that in all three of Aristotle’s major works of practical philosophy, he characterizes political friendship as a relationship grounded in arithmetic equality – the kind of equality that obtains within egalitarian rather than hierarchical social and political relationships. Moreover, Aristotle assumes that such equality requires a substantial degree of economic similarity. In the final section of this essay, I will consider how the economic aspects of Aristotle’s conception of political friendship are borne out in his comparative analysis of laws and institutions in the *Politics* – especially with respect to the allocation of property.

III

Koina ta philōn: Political Friendship and Property

Having begun to explore the economic dimensions of Aristotle’s conception of political friendship, we are better equipped to make sense of *Pol.* II.1-5, where

⁸³ Cf. A. Lintott, ‘Aristotle and Democracy’, *The Classical Quarterly* 42.1 (1992), p. 126.

Aristotle appeals to the proverb *koina ta philōn* ('Friends hold all things in common') to argue in favor of the 'common use' of property.⁸⁴ Aristotle's appeal to friendship in these chapters exemplifies a broader tendency in his political thought: throughout the *Politics*, he uses political friendship as a normative criterion for evaluating laws and institutions – especially in his discussion of community and property.

Aristotle frames his theory of property as a critical response to Plato's arguments for communism in the *Republic*.⁸⁵ Although Aristotle acknowledges that Plato's proposal for the abolition of private property might seem 'philanthropic' (*philanthrōpos*)⁸⁶ and appear conducive to 'a wondrous friendship [*thaumastes philia*] for all',⁸⁷ Aristotle argues that common ownership would ultimately

⁸⁴ On the proverb *koina ta philōn*, see E.L. Minar, Jr., 'Pythagorean Communism', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 75 (1944): 34-46; and K. Eden, *Friends Hold all Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the 'Adages' of Erasmus* (New Haven, 2001), chap. 4.

⁸⁵ Notably, however, Aristotle lands on a position similar to that of the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws*, who also links political friendship to the sharing of property. Drawing on the Pythagorean proverb *koina ta philōn*, the Athenian Stranger argues that in the best regime imaginable, private property would be entirely abolished, engendering a condition of perfect *homonoia* between citizens (*Laws* V, 739c1-e8; cf. VII, 807b3-10). But since such an arrangement is infeasible in practice, the Athenian Stranger settles on a second-best arrangement in which property is privately owned (V, 736d8-37d9) but nevertheless distributed 'as equally as possible' (739e8-42c2, trans. T.L. Pangle [Chicago, 1980]). On political friendship in the *Laws*, see I, 628a1-b5; III, 693b2-e3, 694b6-8, 698b6-c2, 699c2-d3; V, 738d1e9 (see K. Eden, *Friends Hold all Things in Common*, pp. 81-88); cf. F.C.C. Sheffield, 'Love and the City: *Eros* and *Philia* in Plato's *Laws*', in *Emotions in Plato*, ed. L. Candiotti and O. Renaut (Leiden, 2020), pp. 330-71.

⁸⁶ The term *philanthrōpos* does not mean 'philanthropic' in the modern sense, but instead refers to that which exhibits love for human beings (Reeve, *Politics*, p. 259n161, citing *Poetics* 13, 1453a2; 18, 1456a21; *History of Animals* IX.26, 617b23-27).

⁸⁷ *Pol.* II.5, 1263b15-17.

generate *stasis*⁸⁸ and undermine political friendship.⁸⁹ Aristotle aims to strike a middle ground between Platonic communism and existing economic practices. He proposes that property should be held ‘in common’ in a certain sense, yet private in another: ‘it is better for property to be private, but for its *use* to be made communal. And to see that people become disposed in such a way is the special function [*idion ergon*] of the legislator’.⁹⁰

This passage has generated a great deal of confusion in the secondary literature. Jonathan Barnes regards Aristotle’s distinction between ‘use’ and ‘ownership’ as incoherent, concluding that Aristotle’s rejoinder to Plato is ‘too nebulous to sustain any serious critical discussion’.⁹¹ In turn, C. D. C. Reeve views Aristotle’s proposal as ‘not much more than a notional variant of [the] system of public ownership’ that Plato defends in the *Republic*.⁹² But the significance and originality of Aristotle’s theory of ‘common ownership’ will become clearer when situated within his account of political friendship. In fact, Aristotle’s notion of political friendship provides the conceptual basis for his distinction between use and ownership – and for his claim that citizens should ‘share’ in each other’s possessions.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, II.4, 1263a8-20; II.5, 1264a23-28.

⁸⁹ Aristotle directly juxtaposes political friendship to *stasis* at *NE* VIII.1, 1155a22-26. See S.C. Skultety, ‘Delimiting Aristotle’s Conception of *Stasis* in the *Politics*’, *Phronesis* 54 (2009), pp. 368-69.

⁹⁰ *Pol.* II.5, 1263a35-40, emphasis added.

⁹¹ J. Barnes, ‘Aristotle and Political Liberty’, in Patzig, *Aristoteles’ Politik*, p. 252.

⁹² C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle’s Politics*, 1st edition (Indianapolis, 1998), p. lxxviii, cited in K.M. Nielsen, ‘Economy and Private Property’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, ed. M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée (Cambridge, 2013), p. 69.

As noted above, Aristotle argues for his common use model by applying the proverb *koina ta philōn* to political life. Just as ‘friends hold all things in common’, Aristotle argues that the citizens of a well-ordered political community will share in each other’s possessions. In the *EN*, Aristotle had affirmed the truth of the proverb *koina ta philōn* explicitly: arguing that the closeness of a friendship is revealed by the extent to which parties share things in common, Aristotle suggests that the closest friendships are those ‘between brothers and comrades [*hetairoi*], who ‘have everything in common [*koina*]’.⁹³ Since we have seen that Aristotle also compares the highest form of political friendship to fraternal and comradely friendship,⁹⁴ this passage might inform our understanding of the relationship between political friendship and the sharing of material goods.

Aristotle’s initial formulation of his ‘common use’ model links his theory of property directly to the concept of friendship. Once again, Aristotle appeals to the proverb *koina ta philōn*:

The communal ownership of property, then, involves... [certain] difficulties. The way we have now, if adorned by habits [*kai epikosmêthen ethesi*] and by the order characteristic of correct laws [*kai taxeî nomôn orthôn*], would be superior, and not by a little, since it would have the good of both (I mean both of the property’s being communal and of its being private). For while property should in a way be communal, in general it should be private.... But where *use* is concerned, it is thanks to virtue that, in accord with the proverb, ‘friends share everything communally’ [*koina ta philōn*].⁹⁵

Aristotle suggests that the citizens of a well-ordered city, like brothers or comrades, will share their belongings in common. But what, exactly, does this ‘sharing’

⁹³ *EN* VIII.9, 1159b30-35.

⁹⁴ See *EN* VIII.10, 1161a2-7; VIII.11, 1161a25-27; cf. *EE* VII.9, 1241b30-31.

⁹⁵ *EN* 1263a21-29, emphasis added.

involve? Scholars have debated whether Aristotle has in mind voluntary acts of beneficence or a top-down system of compulsory contributions.⁹⁶ This puzzle is compounded by the fact that Aristotle alternates between describing the realization of his economic system in terms of ethical habituation and legislative reform. The passage above is illustrative: on the one hand, Aristotle associates the sharing of property with the reform of ‘habits’ and the inculcation of ‘virtue’; on the other, he suggests that such an economic arrangement would require ‘the order characteristic of good laws’. To modern ears, these thoughts might seem to point in rather different directions.⁹⁷ If the form of ‘sharing’ Aristotle envisions is achieved primarily through *ethical* habituation, then the legislator’s task would be to educate citizens to be generous with their property; however, the ‘sharing’ of property by *legal* means might require more radical measures, such as collectivization or compulsory philanthropy.

But Aristotle’s examples of economic practices which promote ‘common use’ suggest that his preferred economic model involves something rather more than individual acts of generosity.⁹⁸ Aristotle turns to Spartan economic practices

⁹⁶ See Nielsen, ‘Economy and private property’, pp. 85-88.

⁹⁷ As Nielsen, for example, suggests they do (*ibid.*, p. 85). However, these two thoughts might have seemed less contradictory to Aristotle himself, who provides little emphasis on the coercive function of law, and rather more on the educative and ethical roles thereof.

⁹⁸ Aristotle *does* suggest at *Pol.* II.5 that ‘the special function [*idion ergon*] of the legislator’ is ‘to see that people become disposed’ to use property in common (1263a35-40) – a statement which calls to mind his earlier comment that the *ergon* of the political art is the cultivation of political friendship (*EE* VII.1, 1234b23-24). This passage could be read as a suggestion that legislators should promote political friendship by habituating citizens to engage in acts of ‘private, face-to-face generosity’ (T.J. Saunders, *Aristotle: Politics Books I and II* [Oxford, 1995], p. 117). But this interpretation rests uneasily with Aristotle’s discussion of political

to show that his preferred economic system ‘is not impossible’, for it already ‘exists in outline [*hypogegrammenos*] in some cities’.⁹⁹ In Sparta, Aristotle observes, ‘they use each other’s slaves (one might almost say) as their own, and horses and dogs as well, and if they need supplies when on a journey, they may find them in the farms throughout the territory’.¹⁰⁰ Aristotle’s implication that virtuous citizens treat one another’s property ‘as their own’ echoes his claim that true friends relate to one another as extensions of their own selves (*allos autos*), and therefore cease to distinguish between one another’s interests.¹⁰¹ Here, we see Aristotle applying this ethical principle to political economy: he argues that slaves, cattle, and land – the principal means of production in ancient Greek city-states¹⁰² – should be privately owned, but nevertheless ‘shared’ in common.

friendship in *EE* VII, where he emphasizes that euergetic relationships between ‘benefactors’ and ‘beneficiaries’ are inherently *unequal* – and, as such, that these relationships are *not* political friendships. Aristotle argues that euergetic relationships are ‘based on superiority’ and on ‘proportional, not arithmetic equality’ (VII.3, 1238b22ff.). Since euergetic relationships are predicated on substantial inequality with respect to status and wealth, Aristotle *contrasts* euergetic relationships with political friendships – the latter of which, he writes, are ‘*not* for the purpose of benefactions’ (VII.10, 1242b30, emphasis added). These passages pose a challenge to any interpretation of political friendship which places an emphasis on individual acts of charity.

⁹⁹ *EN* 1263a30-31. Aristotle’s positive evaluation of Spartan economic practices reflects the widely-held view – shared by authors such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Plato – that Sparta is uniquely governed according to the principle of *eunomia* (see J. Lombardini, ‘*Isonomia* and the Public Sphere in Democratic Athens’, *History of Political Thought* 34.3 [2013], pp. 397, 406, 420, citing Herodotus, 1.65-66; Thucydides, 1.18.6; Plato, *Crito* 52e6 and *Hippias Major* 283e9).

¹⁰⁰ *EN* 1263a35-40.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, *EN* IX.4, 1166a; *EE* VII.12, 1245a.

¹⁰² See G.E.M. Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London, 1981), p. 78-79.

Aristotle does not leave it at this: he indicates that the ‘common use’ model should be extended *further* than the Spartan system allows. Aristotle suggests that the Spartans have implemented his preferred economic model only ‘in outline’¹⁰³ – which, as Trevor J. Saunders observes, ‘may suggest that he has in mind something stronger than the Spartan practice he describes’.¹⁰⁴ We get an indication of what Aristotle has in mind several chapters later, where he returns to the Spartan system of land distribution, and proceeds to criticize it for being insufficiently egalitarian: ‘one might next criticize the uneven distribution of property. For because some of the Spartans came to own far too much wealth and others altogether too little, the land passed down into the hands of the few. And this is badly ordered through the laws’.¹⁰⁵ The historical context of this passage is equivocal; some scholars have suggested that Aristotle has in mind a fourth-century Spartan policy which liberalized restrictions on gifts and inheritances of land.¹⁰⁶ On any account, Aristotle traces the Spartan ‘disparity in property’ back to a flaw ‘in the laws’, and he proceeds to argue that the Spartans should have corrected this disparity ‘through the leveling of property’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ *Pol.* II.5, 1263a31.

¹⁰⁴ Saunders, *Politics Books I and II*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁵ *Pol.* II.9, 1270a15-19.

¹⁰⁶ Lord, *Politics*, pp. 48-49n81, citing Plutarch, *Agis* 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Pol.* 1270a39-40, trans. Lord; cf. V.9, 1309a23-26. On Aristotle’s discussion of unequal land distribution in Sparta, see A.L. Shuster, ‘The Problem of the *Partheniae* in Aristotle’s Political Thought’, *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought* 28.2 (2011), pp. 292-93.

Aristotle proceeds to criticize the Spartan economic model for failing to cover the cost of official common meals known as ‘friends’ messes’ (*phiditia*)¹⁰⁸ with their ‘communal funds’ (*to koinōn*, literally ‘the common [thing]’).¹⁰⁹ Later, he argues that in ‘well-instituted cities’, ‘all the citizens should share in [*syndokein*]’ such common meals, and that their expense ‘should be common [*koinōnein*] to the entire city’.¹¹⁰ In passages such as these, Aristotle seems to use political friendship as a normative criterion for evaluating economic practices: he assesses Spartan institutions and laws based on the extent to which they promote or hinder friendship between citizens.

Reading *Pol.* II.5 in the light of such passages, Aristotle’s preferred economic system seems to involve not just widespread acts of individual charity, but rather legislation which promotes the equalization of property. These passages also reveal that Aristotle’s discussion of property arrangements is closely tied to his concept of political friendship. In fact, Aristotle seems to arrive at his common use theory by *modeling* civic relationships on arithmetically equal friendships. Just as arithmetically equal virtue-friends, Aristotle argues, share all things in common (*koina ta philōn*), arithmetically equal political friends share in each other’s property.

¹⁰⁸ Lord observes that this term may be etymologically linked to *philia*: ‘the etymology of this term is uncertain, but it may derive from a dialect of the word “friend” (*philos*)’ (*Politics*, p. 52n93).

¹⁰⁹ My translation; cf. *ibid.* Aristotle notes that the Spartans’ failure to provide for *phiditia* at the public expense not only deprived the poor of the necessary means of subsistence, but also excluded them from a customary rite of citizenship (II.9, 1271a25-40; cf. II.10, 1272a10-30).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.10, 1330a4-8.

Conclusion

Aristotle argues that the paradigmatic form of *politikē philia* – like the paradigmatic form of ethical *philia* – is grounded in arithmetic equality, and that such equality requires a substantial degree of economic commonality in turn. This ‘egalitarian’ conception of political friendship is not limited to the *EE*; it also permeates Aristotle’s assessment of regime types, institutions, and legislation in the *EN* and *Politics*. Aristotle appeals to this model of political friendship in emphasizing the importance of a strong middle class, in arguing for the restriction of citizenship to property-owning men, and in promoting the ‘common use’ of property. In highlighting these examples, I leave open the possibility that Aristotle’s normative conception of political friendship influences his preferences for institutions and arrangements other than the ones discussed above. The aim of this study has not been to provide a comprehensive account of Aristotle’s views on political friendship and equality, but rather to show that his discussion thereof is rigorous and internally consistent. And if this claim has been persuasive, we can put to rest one recent argument that the *EE* was not written by Aristotle – namely, that the *EE*’s account of political friendship is inconsistent with the *EN* and *Politics*.

Although Aristotle suggests that the paradigmatic form of political friendship requires economic and civic equality, he also indicates that political friendship is most pronounced in regimes characterized by various forms of hierarchy and civic exclusion. It remains unclear whether the connection Aristotle

draws between political friendship and civic exclusion is necessary or contingent. Aristotle himself inhabited a world in which the political equality of propertied elites was predicated on the civic exclusion of the propertyless masses, and in which the abolition of class difference was effectively inconceivable. But Aristotle also argues that, for the sake of political friendship, the residents of a well-ordered city ought to be made equal and alike 'as much as possible'. It is incumbent on modern readers of Aristotle, inhabiting societies characterized by historically unprecedented levels of economic productivity, to probe the boundaries of the 'possible'.