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ARISTOTLE'S IDEA OF POLITICAL FRATERNITY

ANTHONY KRONMAN

According to Aristotle, for a polis or political association to endure, there must be a friendship as well as justice among its members. Political fraternity, the kind of friendship that exists among citizens, is the product of a complex and overlapping system of social relations based upon "marriage-connections, kin-groups, religious gatherings and social pastimes." The associations in which these relations are anchored occupy an intermediate position between the family or oikos on the one hand, and the polis on the other, and simultaneously exhibit the distinct kinds of unity that characterize these other forms of association. Because of their hybrid nature, the institutions of political fraternity provide a connecting link between the spheres of private and public life, transmitting the feelings of intimacy and solidarity characteristic of one realm into the wider and more impersonal domain of the other.

OF THE DIFFERENT SortS OF human association, Aristotle believed one—the polis or political association—to be pre- eminent. In the opening lines of the Politics, he describes the polis as the most complete and self-sufficient kind of association, an association that "includes" all the others and which constitutes their end and consummation. But while the polis is the best and most inclusive kind of association, it is not the only kind. In particular, Aristotle warns, it is important to remember that there is a qualitative difference between the form of human association represented by a polis, and the form exemplified by a household community or oikos. If we overlook this important distinction, we are apt to conclude, mistakenly, that a city and a household are associations which differ only in size and not in kind.

It is a mistake to believe that the statesman is the same as the monarch of a kingdom, or the manager of a household, or the master of a number of slaves. Those who hold this view consider that each of these persons differs from the others not with a difference of kind, but according to the number or the paucity, of the persons with whom he deals. On this view a man who is concerned with few persons is a master: one who is concerned with still more is a statesman or monarch. This view abolishes any real difference between a large household and a small polis. . .

* I would like to thank Gerhard Casper, Richard Posner, Kenneth Seeskin and James White for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
1. Pol. 1252a 5; Nic. Eth. 1094b 5-10; 1160a 10-30.
According to Aristotle, the qualitative difference between a household and a city is to be explained in terms of the different sorts of unity they display. Every association of human beings, on Aristotle’s view, must be unified in some fashion: only its unity distinguishes a true association from an accidental collection of individuals, and makes it possible to determine the association’s limits (whom it includes and whom it does not). But a household and a city are associations that exhibit two distinct sorts of unity, and it is this difference in the types of unity they display which sets them apart.

This essay is divided into three parts. In the first part, I shall describe Aristotle’s conception of the unity of a household and in the second, his conception of the quite different unity which characterizes a polis or political association. The third and most important part of the essay is devoted to Aristotle’s idea of political fraternity—the special sort of friendship which he claims the citizens of a polis must have for one another if their city is to endure. I shall argue that Aristotle conceived the institutions of political fraternity as a mediating link between the spheres of household and civic life, and that he regarded friendship among citizens as a hybrid form of association which simultaneously exhibits the distinct types of unity that characterize an oikos and a polis respectively.

I. THE UNITY OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Book One of the Politics—Aristotle’s theory of the household—is largely devoted to an analysis of the three relations that constitute the elementary factors of household life: the relations of master and slave, parent and child, husband and wife. All three relations, according to Aristotle, are based upon a principle of subordination. In each relation, one of the two parties (master, parent, husband) is the ruler and the other (slave, child, wife) the ruled. Aristotle believed each of these three relations of subordination to be a natural relation, a relation existing by nature.

At several points in Book One, Aristotle analogizes this basic relation of subordination to the relation that exists between an individual's

4. Even if we grant that an accidental grouping of human beings has a unity of some sort, the unity it has is not the same as that of a true association. “While in a sense we call anything one if it is a quantity and continuous, in a sense we do not unless it is a whole, i.e., unless it has unity of form; e.g., if we saw the parts of a shoe put together anyhow [in 'any old way'] we should not call them one all the same (unless because of their continuity); we do this only if they are put together so as to be a shoe and to have already a certain single form.” Met. 1016b 12-17. (Ross).
5. Pol. 1253b 5-10.
body and his soul (the latter being the naturally superior, and the
former the naturally inferior element). What is most troubling about
this analogy is not its implication that certain types of human beings
are by nature superior to others (although our modern democratic
sentiments make this difficult enough to accept), but rather its as­
similation of relations among members of the household to the rela­
tion that exists between the parts of a single individual's composite
being. Whether or not we believe that some members of the house­
hold are superior and others inferior by nature, we tend to think of
all of them as separate individuals, each with an independent life
(and body) of his or her own. Because we regard its members as
independent human beings, it is difficult for us to accept Aristotle's
comparison of the relations among them with the relation between the
body and soul of a single individual.

There are two things that seem to make this comparison a mislead­
ing one. In the first place, the parts of an individual—his body and
soul—have no actual existence independent of one another. They
can be separated only in thought. By contrast, as anyone can see,
the members of a household are distinct in reality—distinct in the
most obvious sense of having separate physical bodies. Second, the
relation of body and soul is a silent one; their union does not require
the deliberate kind of communication for which speech is necessary.
Indeed, there can be no speech between them because the body is
essentially inarticulate. Relations between the members of a house­
hold, on the other hand, are speaking relations. Husband and wife,
parent and child, master and slave all talk to one another, the organi­
zation of their joint family life—the unity of their household—requires

7. Pol. 1252a 30-1252b 2; 1254a 25-1255a 2; 1255b 8-12; 1260a 1-20.
8. Even the slave, who is the most deficient member of the household asso­
ciation, is able to "apprehend" the existence of a "rational principle" in another.
Pol. 1254b 20-25. Although he lacks reason himself, the slave can perceive it in
his master; the slave must be sufficiently rational to follow his master's com­
mands. This would seem to require that he possess a capacity for speech (a
capacity to understand the meaning of the communications addressed to him).
The natural slave is not an animal. What makes him a human being is the
"gift of speech." Pol. 1253a 10. This fact raises a fundamental problem for
Aristotle. How can the natural slave be a human being, endowed with the power
of speech, and yet be as different from his master as the body is from the soul?
Pol. 1254b 15-20. Aristotle notes that the latter sort of difference exists between
a man and a tame animal, and then concludes that the "use made of slaves and
of tame animals is not very different," Pol. 1254b 25. The natural slave, it would
seem, is at once a domesticated animal and a human being. But this is impos­
sible since human beings speak, and animals do not. There is a deep incon­
sistency in Aristotle's account of natural slavery at this point. I hope to explore
the inconsistency, and discuss some of its consequences for Aristotle's political
theory, in a subsequent paper.
that they do so. The unity of an oikos exhibits, therefore, a reflectiveness and reciprocity which is lacking in the unity of body and soul. One might conclude from this that the bond between any two human beings must be very different from the bond which unites the parts of a single person.

Aristotle's comparison of the unity of a household with that of a single human being does seem appropriate, however, in the case of one of the three basic relations that comprise the household association. Even if we dismiss his contention that some men are slaves by nature, and reject his view that the male partner is superior by nature to its female mate, I think most of us would admit that Aristotle's description of the relation between parent and child is accurate in its essentials. Putting aside the difficult question of how we determine when childhood ends and adulthood begins, few would disagree with Aristotle's assertion\(^9\) that it is proper for the parent to rule the child — to guide, direct and inform him. Most of us would also agree that this relation of subordination is one that exists by nature\(^10\) in the specific sense that it is not the product of a consensual act but rather a consequence of the simple fact that the parent is older and more experienced than the child, and is (as Aristotle put it)\(^11\) the "author" of the child's being.

Of course, a child only remains under the direct tutelage of his parents for the period of his childhood. After the child has become an adult, his life is no longer fully under their control and supervision. If we ask why it is proper that the child should be under their control even as a child, a good answer would be the following one. A child lacks the capacity to organize his own affairs in a rational manner. If we think of this capacity as a faculty, we might say that he lacks reason, or has it only in an incomplete and potential sort of way. The parent, by contrast, has what the child lacks. In the parent, the capacity of reason is fully developed and mature. The parent must therefore supply the child with what he does not himself possess, by providing the child with rules and directions for ordering his life.

We may express this aspect of the relation between parent and child by saying that the parent "informs" the child, in the double sense of "educates" and "gives shape to." The parent shapes the child's existence. In this way, the child gradually comes to share, with his parents, a conception of how one ought to live, and to feel a similar commitment to the particular values which distinguish that

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conception from others. The child thus becomes a spiritual extension of his parents, just as he is already their physical extension. In both senses, the child belongs to his parents and owes his being to them. The completeness with which the child belongs to his parents, the completeness of his dependency upon them, makes him, in Aristotle's words, a "separate and living part" of their own being.

As we have seen, this metaphor implies that the bond between parent and child resembles the bond that exists between the different parts of a single individual person. If the metaphor seems inappropriate, it is because the child, after all, is a human being in his own right, separate and distinct from his parents. But although the child is separate, he is not self-sufficient. He depends upon his parents in many different ways, and apart from them would soon perish or lose direction. In the biological sphere, an extreme example of this kind of dependency may be seen in the relation between an organ (heart, kidney, liver) and the larger organism of which it forms a part. If the organ is removed from the organism, it ceases to function. The organ can survive only as a working part of some larger and self-sufficient whole, to which it must remain entirely subordinate. As an embryo, freshly implanted in the wall of its mother's womb, the child more closely resembles a dependent organ than a self-sufficient human being. We may think of these two states (complete organ-dependency and independent self-sufficiency) as representing, respectively, the beginning point and terminus of childhood. To the extent that the child continues to depend upon his parents even after birth, first for the material requisites of existence and then later for guidance in his relations with others, he resembles a subordinate (but detached) organ without a life of his own. Of course, the resemblance becomes more attenuated as the child matures. This is what distinguishes the child from the true organ—from the liver, for example—which never achieves emancipation. But one of the essential facts about childhood, and about the child's relation to his parents, would be obscured if we were to deny the resemblance altogether.

According to Aristotle, both the wife of the master of a household and his (natural) slaves depend upon the master for guidance and direction, in much the same sense that a child depends upon its parents (although the forms of dependence differ in the three cases). Since Aristotle believed (or at least wrote as if he believed) that each of these three relations rests upon a natural dependency as strikingly obvious as the dependency that, even to our way of thinking today,
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characterizes the relation between parent and child, it is not at all surprising that he should have compared the unity of the entire household association to that of a single individual.

This comparison has great metaphysical significance for Aristotle. In order to understand why, it may help to begin by repeating a point I have already made in describing the relation between parent and child. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the child, to shape the child's life by providing a framework of rules and beliefs within which the child can develop his capacities in an orderly and progressive fashion. According to Aristotle, this process of "information" must be understood quite literally. In the absence of parental guidance, the child's life will lack form in the sense that it will not possess a coherent organization or direction of its own. If the child's life has any discernible form at all, it has it only in an incomplete and indefinite sort of way—only potentially, as Aristotle would put it. According to Aristotle, precisely the same thing is true (in different ways and to a different extent) of both the wife and the natural slave. Wife, slave, and child share in common an incapacity to guide their own affairs. To the extent they are unable to do so, their lives exhibit a characteristic formlessness, the kind of aimless, "absent-minded" wandering that marks the behavior of someone who doesn't know what he wants to do or isn't sure where he would like to go. This basic fact explains their common dependence upon the master of the household. It is he who provides each of them with an appropriate end or goal at which to aim, and who brings order and direction into their lives by endowing them with both purpose and limits. In this way, their otherwise formless existences assume a definite and meaningful shape.

It is one of the main principles of Aristotle's metaphysics that the being of a thing and its form are, if not identical, at least very intimately connected. Put somewhat differently, Aristotle thought that it is the form of a thing which makes it what it is: any particular thing is what it is, has the kind of being that it does, in virtue of the form or shape which it possesses. According to Aristotle, both the end or goal of a particular thing (what it aims at) and its definition (the properties which make it the kind of thing that it is) are determined by its form. Indeed, even "determined by" is not quite strong enough: it would more accurately represent Aristotle's view to say simply that the form of a thing both defines it and specifies the particular good toward which it strives. Since in the Aristotelian scheme,

14. Met. 1029b 12-1032a 10; 1039b 20-1040a 7; 104, 6 5-10, 25-32; Phys. 193b 7-12.
the being of a thing may best be expressed in terms of its definition and end, his assimilation of these latter two concepts to the more fundamental notion of a thing's form underscores Aristotle's own equation of the ideas of form and being.

It follows that those members of the household association who must be informed by another possess a being which is not really their own. To the extent that their lives lack form, wife, slave, and child lack being as well. Only insofar as their lives assume a discernible shape do they have any reality at all. Because the form which shapes their lives must be supplied by another—by the self-sufficient master of the household—the being they possess is of a derivative sort. Wife, slave, and child are informed by the master; in this way, their lives acquire reality by partaking of the reality which his already possesses. The very being which the dependent members of the household have, to the extent they have it at all, is an extension or part of the being of their master, the only member of the association who is ontologically self-sufficient. Aristotle's equation of form and being leads irresistibly to the conclusion that the being of the subordinate members of the household is identical with (or submerged in) the being of their master. Viewed in this way, the idea that a household and an individual exhibit the same kind of unity is not only plausible but inescapable. Only the Christian identification of being with will rather than form could break the spell of this argument, by endowing Aristotle's natural subordinates with an ontological dignity and self-sufficiency of their own.

II. THE UNITY OF THE CITY

According to Aristotle, for an association of human beings to have the kind of unity characteristic of a polis, for it to be a political association, more is required than that its members simply live in the same place. The geographical contiguity of its members is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the existence of a city. An association of men (or, more accurately, of families) is a polis only if relations among its members are regulated by a constitution. It is the constitution of a city which informs or shapes it, and which defines it as a polis or political association.

Aristotle describes the constitution of a city (of any city) as a "scheme of composition." The principal function of this scheme is

15. Pol. 1280b 12-32.
17. Pol. 1276b 7. (Barker).
to specify how the common goods brought into being by the association (such as wealth, honor and offices) are to be distributed among its members. The constitution of a polis is therefore at bottom a distributional scheme; the arrangement that it defines is one of political justice. Put in this rather abstract way, it might also seem appropriate to describe the organization of the household as a kind of constitution and to characterize the distribution of tasks for which it provides as a familial sort of justice. How, according to Aristotle, does the constitution of a polis differ from that of an oikos?

Aristotle believed that the constitution of a household is based upon the inequality of its members. By contrast, he regarded the polis as an association of equals. At first blush, this might seem to be a rather strange view. While some regimes are egalitarian, others are not. In fact, most political associations divide their common goods in an unequal fashion, more going to some and less to others. Surely, one might object, a polis of the latter sort is still a polis despite the unequal way in which its members are treated under its constitution.

This objection misunderstands the meaning of Aristotle's assertion that the polis is essentially an association of equals. Aristotle's point is this: every constitution (whether democratic, oligarchic, aristocratic, or royal) rests upon the fundamental principle that equal cases should be treated equally. It is true that constitutions differ in how they define equal cases. Some make one factor (such as goodness) and others another factor (such as birth or wealth) the criterion for determining who is equal to whom. But all political constitutions rest on the principle that equal cases (however defined) must be treated in the same manner.

There is, however, a different and deeper sense in which the polis is for Aristotle an association of equals. In order to explicate this deeper sense, it is necessary that I say a word or two about Aristotle's theory of moral choice. According to Aristotle, moral choice is the product or end-point of a complicated activity which he calls deliberation. Deliberation involves two things: recognition of what is the right thing to do in a particular situation, and the formulation of a

18. Pol. 1278b 10-15; 1289a 15-20. By common goods, I mean those whose existence is conditioned upon the association's. Examples of public goods include the prestige and authority enjoyed by the occupants of public office, and the increase in material wealth which results from the division of labor in large-scale cooperative economic ventures.


20. Pol. 1255b 20; 1261a 30—1261b 5; 1282b 15-20.


plan of action for doing or accomplishing the right thing. In order to deliberate successfully, one must therefore possess two distinct capacities—the capacity to distinguish what is good from what is bad (a kind of attunement to moral values), and the capacity to reason from an abstract premise about what is good to a concrete conclusion concerning the practical measures that must be taken to realize the good (the capacity to construct what is traditionally called a "practical syllogism"). Only those human beings who have both capacities are equipped to deal with the problems of moral life.

Aristotle considered the ability to deliberate to be a prerequisite for participation in the political affairs of a city.23 Because he did not sharply distinguish politics and morality, it is natural that Aristotle should have included a capacity for moral choice among the necessary qualifications for political action. It follows that on Aristotle's view, even in a political regime of great inequality (such as kingship), the unequals (the king and his subjects) will be equal in one important respect—in their possession of a capacity for deliberation. All of the citizens of even the most inegalitarian polis must be moral beings. In this sense every political association is necessarily an association of equals.

This might seem like a trivial point, but according to Aristotle not all individuals possess a capacity for deliberation. In particular, slaves, women, and children lack the capacity to different degrees. As we have already seen, the dependent members of the household association (wife, child, and slave) are unable to order their own affairs; each depends upon the master of the household for guidance and control. In a very interesting passage in Book One of the Politics,24 Aristotle attributes this deficiency to their lack of a capacity for deliberation. The slave lacks this capacity entirely; the wife has it only in an inconclusive, and the child only in an immature form. Among the members of the household association, it is the master alone who possesses a fully developed capacity for deliberation—or, as Aristotle puts it, who possesses "moral goodness in its full and perfect form."25 It is precisely his capacity for deliberation that equips the master for the difficult task of managing the household; it is through deliberation that he is able to discern the good of the other members of the association, and to construct an appropriate life-plan for each.26

25. Pol. 1260a 17. (Barker).
Wife, child and slave each depend upon another—the master of the household—because they themselves lack a capacity for deliberation, or have it only in an incomplete and tentative way. The master himself does not depend upon anyone else for guidance of this sort; he is self-sufficient in the sense that he is able to direct his own life. It follows from this, of course, that only the master is eligible for membership in the political association. The *polis* is an association of self-sufficient human beings, each of whom possesses a capacity for deliberation and is a mature moral actor. The dependent members of the household association are excluded from political life because they lack this capacity. To the extent they participate in the affairs of the city at all, they do so only as subordinate and inarticulate parts of their master’s own being.

Aristotle’s identification of the unity of the household with the unity of a single individual follows from his metaphysical equation of form and being, and his assumption that the dependent members of the *oikos* are informed by (and therefore derive their being from) the only truly self-sufficient member of the household. Of course, one individual will need to be informed by another only if he is unable to inform himself, that is, only if he lacks a capacity for deliberation. Consequently, if each of the members of an association is able to inform himself through deliberation, the unity of that association must, in principle, be different from the unity of a single individual.

The *polis* is an association of this sort. Because each member of the *polis* is self-sufficient, his being is not derivative from the being of any other member of the association. No citizen is dependent upon any other citizen in this ontological sense. This distinguishes the *polis* from the *oikos*, and makes it profoundly inappropriate to describe some members of the political association as the parts of other members. While it accurately expresses Aristotle’s conception of the unity of the household, this organic metaphor misrepresents his view of the unity of the *polis*; the members of a political association are simply too self-sufficient, too independent to be characterized as the subordinate organ-parts of some larger autonomous whole.

What makes a political association one, what gives it its unity, is precisely the shared and deliberate participation of its citizen-members—who together constitute a plurality of self-sufficient individuals—in a particular scheme for the distribution of the common goods brought into being by the association itself. By contrast, the household is a nondeliberate association[^27] only one of whose members is a self-sufficient human being. The unity of the household, in sharp

[^27]: Pol. 1252a 26-31.
contrast to that of the city, may therefore be compared to the non-deliberate unity of a single individual. It is this difference in the kinds of unity they exhibit which sets the political and household associations apart.

This interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the difference between *polis* and *oikos* is confirmed by the answer he gives to the question whether relations between members of the household may be "just" in any sense of the term. According to Aristotle, the term justice is used primarily to describe the state of affairs secured by the constitutional distribution of goods and offices among the members of a political association. Relations among the members of such an association—considered purely as such—are relations of justice. In his discussion of justice in Book Five of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes that justice in the true or most complete sense can only exist between two or more individuals. Justice therefore requires a plurality of persons; according to Aristotle when we speak of someone having been just to himself we are using the term in a derivative and analogical way.

A political association contains a genuine plurality of individuals because each member of the association is self-sufficient. But no justice in the true sense (as Aristotle conceives it) is possible between the members of a household association since the household itself constitutes only a single individual, represented by and embodied in the personality of the master. Consequently, any relation between the members of an *oikos* must be like the relation of an individual to himself—or more precisely, like the relation between one part of an individual and another part. Thus, when we talk about justice between the members of a household, what we are really describing is a particular kind of harmonious relation between the various parts of an individual. In the same sense, we might say that a particular body is in a just state when its parts work together and cooperate for the well being of the whole. But according to Aristotle, this is a rather strained use of the term and of the concept. On his view, an individual can be just to himself only in an analogical sense. The analogy, of course, rests upon a comparison of the relation between different individuals with the relation between the parts of a single person. Aristotle's insistence that a relation of the latter sort cannot be just in the true sense—the dominant theme in his discussion of

30. *Nic. Eth.* 1129b 25-1130a 5; 1138a 20. This same point is made by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, at pp. 23-27.
justice within the household—rests upon the fundamental assumption that these two relations differ in kind. A city is an association whose members are related in the first and an oikos an association whose members are related in the second way. On Aristotle’s view, it is this difference in their respective modes of unity which constitutes the “real difference between a large household and a small polis.”

III. POLITICAL FRATERNITY

We have already seen that for a polis to come into being, more is required than that its members merely live in the same place. In addition, they must all participate in a constitutional scheme for the distribution of the association’s common goods, a scheme of justice. But although a scheme of justice is a necessary precondition for the establishment of a city, it is not enough, by itself, to insure the city’s continued existence. For a political association to endure, according to Aristotle, there must not only be justice between its members, but a kind of friendship or fraternal goodwill as well. While the formal unity of a city is supplied by the peculiar distributional scheme embodied in its constitution, its actual longevity can be secured only by the growth of fraternal bonds among its citizens. A polis in which there is justice but no friendship is ripe for revolution (in the Aristotelian sense of a change in constitutional form). Since on his view the being of a city, like anything else, is determined by its form, the friendless but just city must soon cease to be.

The meaning of Aristotle’s observation about the necessity of friendship among citizens may be elucidated in the following way. It often happens that an individual is unhappy about what he is required to do, or what he has been given under a particular distributional scheme. This may be so despite the fact that he has deliberately participated in the scheme in the past and enjoyed the advantages of such participation, and despite his willingness to acknowledge that his present share is precisely the one to which he is entitled under the scheme in question. An individual who finds himself in this familiar, if unpleasant, situation has two alternatives. He can accept his present burdens as the cost of participating in the scheme, and thereby reaffirm his basic commitment to the distributional principles the scheme embodies. Or he can reject the scheme and urge that another (one which is presumably more compatible with his frustrated interests) be substituted for it.

31. Pol. 1262b 7; 1280b 35-40; 1295b 20-25; Nic. Eth. 1155a 22-30; 1161a 30-1161b 10.
An individual's decision to pursue one course or the other will be determined, in part, by the importance he attaches to the expectations of his fellow participants—expectations that have been generated by their own participation in the present scheme. If he attaches little weight to these expectations, he may be undisturbed by the prospect of upsetting them, especially if he is also convinced that his new scheme is far superior, on substantive grounds, to the one under which the expectations of his fellows have been built up. Of course, an individual may know in some abstract sense that the expectations of others give them the right to insist on his own compliance; but whether this theoretical proposition has any practical force for him, whether he finds it easy or difficult to conduct himself accordingly, will depend upon the importance he attaches to their expectations.

Since we are more likely to be concerned about upsetting the expectations of friends than of strangers, the best safeguard against political revolution is a stable spirit of friendship among the members of the polis. The stronger this spirit, the less willing any member of the association will be to urge a revolutionary course of action for purely philosophical reasons (no matter how sound they may appear). This is why, for the continued existence of the polis, justice is not enough. There must also be friendship among its citizens.

How is friendship established among the members of a political association? Aristotle's answer seems to be contained in the following passage in the Politics.

It is clear, therefore, that a polis is not an association for residence on a common site, or for the sake of preventing mutual injustice and easing exchange. These are indeed conditions which must be present before a polis can exist; but the presence of all these conditions is not enough, in itself, to constitute a polis. What constitutes a polis is an association of households and clans in a good life, for the sake of attaining a perfect and self-sufficing existence. This consummation, however, will not be reached unless the members inhabit one and the self-same place and practice inter-marriage. It was for this reason that the various institutions of a common social life—marriage-connections, kin-groups, religious gatherings, and social pastimes generally—arose in cities. But these institutions are the business of friendship. It is friendship which consists in the pursuit of a common social life. The end and purpose of a polis is the good life, and the institutions of social life are means to that end.33

Political fraternity—friendship among citizens—is the product of a complex and overlapping system of social relations based upon

32. Nic. Eth. 1160a 3-5.
33. Pol. 1280b 30-1281a 1.
“marriage-connections, kin-groups, religious gatherings and social pastimes.” These diverse associations (which Aristotle groups together in a single class) are the “business” of friendship.

The most striking thing about this particular species of association is the intermediate position it occupies between the political association proper and the household. The various friendship associations that Aristotle enumerates give the appearance of hybrids which belong simultaneously to the spheres of household and civic life. Some rest, explicitly, upon kinship; all seek to promote and perpetuate the kind of intimacy or fellow-feeling which ordinarily characterizes relations among the members of a household. At the same time, these friendship associations extend the natural circle of household intimates in a more or less artificial way by establishing fraternal bonds between citizens who are not necessarily members of the same oikos (or who are only in some fictional sense).

It is through these intermediate associations, and in particular through the practice of intermarriage and religious union which many of them celebrate, that the separate households of the city are bound together. These ties, in turn, provide the foundation for that spirit of friendship which is a social precondition of political stability.

Because they artificially extend the natural intimacy of the household by establishing fraternal ties among the members of the polis, Aristotle’s friendship associations from a connecting link between the household on the one hand and the wider and more indifferent realm of political life on the other. In order to mediate in this way between the spheres of household and civic life, it is necessary that the institutions of political fraternity exhibit, simultaneously, two different sorts of unity. On the one hand, if it successfully promotes among its members a spirit of intimacy which approximates that shared by the members of a natural household, such an institution will become, for them, a kind of “second” family. According to Aristotle, the members of a household are intimate because they are, in an important sense, identical, being merely the separate, living parts of a single individual. To the extent that it constitutes a second household for its members, a friendship association must also be one in this same rather extreme sense, and exhibit the kind of unity characteristic of an oikos.

On the other hand, insofar as the friendship associations that Aristotle describes are associations of citizens, their members must be

34. For a description of how these institutions actually functioned in the classical Greek polis, see Fustel DeCoulange, The Ancient City; Henry Maine, Ancient Law; Paul Vinogradoff, Historical Jurisprudence (Vol. II-The Greek City).
self-sufficient individuals, no one of whom, properly speaking, is or can be a part of any other. Because they are self-sufficient and therefore ontologically independent, the citizen-members of such an association must be related to one another in the same way that the members of a *polis* are related. If this is so, then the institutions of political fraternity must exhibit the unity of a city, as well as that of a household.

This interpretation of the hybrid nature of political fraternity is, I believe, supported by a number of remarks which Aristotle makes in the course of his much fuller discussion of friendship in Books eight and nine of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, friendships fall into three main types: those based on usefulness, those based on pleasure, and those that rest upon a mutual affection which the friends feel for one another because they are the persons they are.  

This third form of friendship is true or perfect friendship; the other two constitute friendship only in a derivative or analogical sense.

One loves a true friend because he has the character he does, because he is the person he happens to be. Put somewhat differently, one loves a true friend for the whole of what he is, and loves him for the friend's own sake. By contrast, friendships based upon pleasure and usefulness require only that the friends have mutually pleasurable or useful traits, traits which may represent merely a small part of their total characters. One loves a useful or pleasurable friend because he is useful or pleasurable, not simply because he is the person he is, and certainly not for the friend's own sake. According to Aristotle, friendship based upon love of the friend for his own sake is the most complete and perfect form of friendship and therefore offers the best guide to understanding the nature of friendship associations in general.

To which of the three basic types of friendship does political fraternity—the friendship that exists between the members of a *polis* and that “holds cities together”—belong? At times, Aristotle talks as if the *polis* were held together by a kind of friendship based upon usefulness.  

It seems clear, however, that in these passages Aristotle is talking about economic exchange. Economic exchange is one of the benefits of political association. It may also be one of the ends for which the city is brought into being in the first place, and a necessary if not sufficient condition for the city's continued vitality. But economic exchange is not political fraternity.  

38. This is clearly implied in the passage at *Pol.* 1280b 25-35.
relations of friendship (in the very broad sense that Aristotle uses that term), political fraternity—unlike economic exchange—resembles friendship of the true or perfect kind, friendship based upon love of the friend for the friend's own sake. According to Aristotle, one loves a true friend for the whole of his moral being, for the totality of settled moral habits that together constitute his character, rather than for some particular attribute or trait. Because political fraternity is a kind of friendship based upon love of character, it may appropriately be classified as a friendship of the true or perfect variety.

By definition, the members of any political association are all subject to a single set of laws respecting the distribution of their common goods, that is, they are all subject to the same standard of justice. We may express this fact by saying that the members of a political association belong to the same legal community. However, in addition to providing a scheme of composition for the distribution of certain goods, the laws of the city (and those who make them) have a second great object: the establishment of an educational regime which will provide for the proper moral training or habituation of the members of the association. An educational system of this sort, according to Aristotle, must always rest upon a particular conception of the good for man, a conception which in the well-ordered city harmonizes with and tends to support the distributional scheme embodied in the city's constitution. The aim of such an educational regime is to shape or inform the moral being of the members of the political association in a certain way, in conformity with a particular conception of the good. The end product of this process of moral education is moral character, an ensemble of beliefs and commitments organized around a dominant conception of the good for man. Consequently, when a city's educational system is functioning as it ought to, the members of the association will share a fundamentally similar moral outlook and will exhibit the same kind of character. This fact may be expressed by saying that they are members of the same moral community.

It is the existence of this moral community which guarantees the stability of the distributional arrangement set out in the city's constitution. Where they belong to the same moral community, citizens have a similar conception of the good. This shared conception secures their continued willingness to abide by the distributional rules that

40. *Pol.* 1310a 12-18; 1333b 36-38; 1337a 10-20.
42. *Pol.* 1333b 36-38.
define what is just and what is not. If the members of a political association abide by these rules not merely because it is just to do so, but because it is good to do so as well, the threat of revolution is reduced and the stability of their association is assured.

As members of the same moral community, citizens have a feeling for one another that may be described as a kind of friendship. This is not difficult to understand. Human beings tend to feel affection for those who share their values, and who have a similar view of the ends of human life and social association.\(^43\) It is this moral friendship, in fact, which generates the spirit of political fraternity that holds cities together. As we have already seen, the stability of a political association depends upon the importance its members attach to one another's expectations. As a practical matter, an individual will attach greater importance to the expectations of another, even when they conflict quite sharply with his own interests, if both individuals share (and know they share) similar views regarding the value and purpose of human life. Where a shared attitude of this sort exists, the members of a political association will be friends and there will exist between them a spirit of fraternity capable of withstanding the strains that any scheme of justice is bound to produce.

Clearly, the friendship that citizens feel for one another as members of the same moral community is a friendship based upon character rather than pleasure or usefulness.\(^44\) Political fraternity develops not because the members of a polis happen to find one another mutually advantageous (although they certainly will and ought to) but because they possess the same moral habits. Of course, political fraternity may not be as intense as some other character-based friendships.\(^45\) Within the legal and moral framework of the city, individuals may follow a variety of different pursuits. Those who follow the same ones—who share the same interests and enjoy the same activities\(^46\)—often become very close friends, and feel a bond with one another which they do not feel with their fellow citizens. Nevertheless, political fraternity resembles these more intense friendships, where they are based on character rather than usefulness or pleasure, in that it too is animated by an affection for the whole of the friend's (moral) being, or as Aristotle might express it, for the "looks" of his soul. In order to more fully understand Aristotle's conception of political fraternity, we must therefore turn to his account of true or perfect friendship (of which political fraternity is one sort).

\(^43\) Nic. Eth. 1167a 22-1167b 5.
\(^44\) Nic. Eth. 1167b 5.
\(^45\) Nic. Eth. 1160a 1-10.
\(^46\) Nic. Eth. 1172a 1-8.
There are three main ideas which run through the whole of Aristotle's treatment of true or perfect friendship. (1) According to Aristotle, true friends desire to "live together." Above all else, true friends wish to spend their time in one another's company and to share the same life.\(^{47}\) This is a peculiar attribute of character-based friendship; we wish to be with friends who are merely pleasant or useful only when we need them, not all the time.\(^{48}\) This desire to be with one's friends continually, to share a common life with them, reflects the fact that friendships of this sort rest upon an affection for the friend's whole being or character. The character of a person only comes to light slowly, and one must spend a great deal of time with him to know his character.\(^{49}\) By contrast, the particular traits that make a person useful or pleasant are quickly discovered after even a superficial acquaintance. (2) True friendship rests upon a specific kind of equality—equality of character or more precisely of good character. Only two men of good character can be friends in the true or perfect sense.\(^{50}\) The reasons for this will become clearer later on.\(^{51}\) It is important to note, however, that this attribute of true friendship distinguishes it both from those friendships which are based on inequality\(^{52}\) (such as the nominal sort of friendship that may exist between the members of a household association) and from friendships that rest upon equality of a different sort (for example, the friendship which exists between the parties to an economic exchange—a friendship based upon equality of need).\(^{53}\) (3) Finally, true friendships are essentially reciprocal. This means, first of all, that a true friendship is fully deliberate (each chooses to be a friend of the other and to have the other as a friend). It also means that each friend desires the other's good, for the other's own sake, and is known by the other to do so.\(^{54}\) If any of these elements is absent in a relationship, it lacks complete reciprocity and therefore cannot be a true or perfect friendship.

True friendship, then is distinguished by three things: by the desire of such friends to live together, by their equality as men of good character, and by the reciprocity of their relationship. Now in some ways a friendship of this sort resembles the kind of relationship that

\(^{47}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1157b 18-20; 1170b 10-15; 1171a 1-15; 1172a 1.
\(^{48}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1156a 25-30.
\(^{49}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1156b 32; 1158a 14-17.
\(^{50}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1156b 6-10; 1157a 16-20; 1166a 10-1166b 30.
\(^{51}\) See note 64, infra.
\(^{52}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1158b 12-20.
\(^{53}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1133a 26; 1133b 7, 20.
\(^{54}\) *Nic. Eth.* 1155b 30-1156a 5; 1156b 5-12.
exists between the members of an oikos, and in some ways it clearly
does not. To the extent that true friendship is based upon an intimacy
or familiarity which can only be realized if the friends live together,
continually spending their time in one another's company and sharing
in the repetitive acitvities of everyday life, it reproduces the same
spirit of togetherness felt most fully by the members of a household
association. It is in this light that we should understand Aristotle's
reference to the old saying about friends having to take the "requisite
amount of salt" together.55

On the other hand, to the extent that true friendship is based upon
an equality of character and is fully deliberate in nature, it differs
quite sharply from the three primary household relations, each of
which rests upon the nondeliberate or natural subordination of inferior
to superior. As we have seen, the inequality of relations within the
household association is a consequence of the fact that all of its mem­
bers but one lack a capacity for deliberation. If an individual lacks
this capacity, he will be incapable of independent moral action.
Strictly speaking, such an individual can have no moral being or
character of his own. Since the equality on which true friendship
is based is an equality of moral character, a relation between true
friends must be unlike any of the relations described in Book one of the
Politics.

Furthermore, true friendship must be reciprocal. But two friends
can wish for one another's good only if the friends are distinct indi­
viduals. If true friendship were really like a relationship between the
members of an oikos, the friends would be bound to one another in
the same way that the parts of a single individual are bound together
and the good of one could therefore not be distinct from the good of
the other (the good of each consisting in the good of the whole of
which they are parts, the good of their common soul). Aristotle
himself assumes that there can be no true "friendship between a
master and a slave for the same reasons that no true justice can exist
between them.56

Because it is based on equality and reciprocity, a relationship be­
tween true friends resembles the kind of relationship that exists
between citizens. An association of true friends must therefore
exhibit the same sort of unity as a city. I have suggested that an as­
nociation of true friends also exhibits the kind of unity characteristic
of a household. But is this true in any really important sense? From

56. Nic. Eth. 1161a 30-1161b 10; Mag. Mor. 1211a 25-40; Eud. Eth. 1241b
10-25.
what has been said so far, it might appear that the only basis for believing it does is Aristotle's assertion that true friends desire to live together and become intimate with one another.

There is, however, another and more powerful reason for thinking that an association of true friends, on Aristotle's view, must exhibit the unity of an oikos. In his discussion of true friendship Aristotle repeatedly makes the remarkable claim that love of a true friend is really love of oneself. This idea, whose meaning Aristotle says is expressed in the traditional saying that true friends "share the same soul," conflicts with his assertion that true friendship can only exist between self-sufficient individuals. How can two individuals be self-sufficient and yet share a common soul? Or put somewhat differently, how can Aristotle maintain both that true friendship is distinguished by the fact that it rests upon a love of the friend for the friend's own sake, and that the love one feels for a true friend is really love of oneself?

If love of a true friend is love of oneself, then true friendship is an association which must exhibit the unity of a single soul, the kind of unity that characterizes a household. But if true friends are equals, their association must also exhibit the unity characteristic of a city. There are two divergent and conflicting strains in Aristotle's analysis of true friendship. One emphasizes the independence and self-sufficiency of true friends. The other emphasizes their intimacy and identity. Together, these two strains bear witness to Aristotle's own recognition of the hybrid nature of character-based friendship.

In what sense may an individual's relation to a true friend be said to "resemble" or "spring from" or represent "an extension of" his relation to himself? According to Aristotle, there are certain typical attitudes that characterize an individual's relation to himself. These same attitudes may be observed in an individual's relation to a true friend: indeed, it is precisely their presence which distinguishes true friendship from the other and less perfect forms of friendly association. The three characteristic attitudes which Aristotle indentifies are these. (1) An individual always wishes for his own good for his own sake (his own good is for him an end in itself). Likewise, he wishes for the good of a true friend for the true friend's sake. (2) An individual wishes for his own continued existence, and similarly for the continued existence of a true friend. Both his existence and

57. Nic. Eth. 1166a 32; 1168b 5-10; 1169b 7; 1170 5-10; 1171b 33.
59. See note 66, supra.
that of his friend are desired for their own sake. By contrast, he wishes for the continued existence of useful and pleasant friends only so long as they remain useful and pleasant: while their continued existence may be important, it is not an end in itself. (3) A good man is happy to be with himself and enjoys his own company. Similarly with true friends: the distinguishing mark of a true friendship is the fact that such friends are inseparable and wish to be together always (and not merely when they have a need for one another, as is the case in those less perfect forms of friendship based solely upon the useful or the pleasant).

The most striking thing about this argument is the question it raises in Aristotle's mind: is it possible to be friends with oneself? It is easy to see how this question arises. If we call a particular kind of relation between two individuals “true” friendship, and assert that the defining characteristics of this relation are the same as those of some other relation (namely, an individual's relation to himself) then it would seem appropriate to describe this latter relation as a form of friendship as well.

It is equally easy to see, however, why the question was bound to be a very troubling one for Aristotle. In the strict sense, according to Aristotle, an individual's relation to himself can never be anything but a relation between the different parts of his being. Consequently, if an individual can be friends with himself, this friendship must consist in a certain relation between the parts of his being. In fact, this is precisely what Aristotle says. A man is friends with himself when the parts of his soul are properly ordered and act in

61. It must be remembered that only a good man can have true friends. For an explanation of why this is so, see note 64, infra.


64. This seems to be the basis for Aristotle’s claim that true friendship can only exist between good men. Only the good man can be friends with himself, because only his soul is properly ordered. If true friendship “springs from” an individual's relation to himself, then only the good man can be a true friend. And a good man can only be the true friend of another good man because true friendship is reciprocal. Put somewhat differently, only the good man's soul is unified. Therefore only he can share a common soul with another man or be “one” with him: and since this is a distinctive mark of true friendship, only he can be the true friend of another. If a man is not “one” with himself, he cannot be “one” with another. However, the only other man with whom he can be “one” is another good man, since only another good man is “another self,” i.e., a man essentially like him in character. Consequently, only a good man can be the true friend of another, and he can only have other good men for his friends.
harmony with one another. He is unfriendly toward himself when his parts are disordered, when they are not in their proper relation. According to Aristotle, the proper relation between the parts of the soul is one of subordination: it is proper for the better part of the soul to rule, and for the worse part to obey. This is a consequence of the fact that only the better part of the soul (the part that possesses reason) is qualified to provide adequate leadership in the affairs of life. In this respect, a well-ordered soul (a soul which is in a friendly condition) quite clearly resembles a smooth-running and harmonious household. But according to Aristotle, true friendship can only exist between equals. And since the parts of an individual soul are no more equal to one another than the members of a household, it is just as impossible that true friendship exist between the former as between the latter. In both cases, one can speak of friendship only in an extended or analogical sense (for the same reasons that one can speak of justice in either case only in this extended sense). Friendship with oneself is fundamentally unlike friendship between two equals. A well-ordered soul is not held together or unified in the same way as an association of true friends. But if this is so, in what sense can an individual’s relation to a true friend be an “extension of” or “spring from” his relation to himself?

Aristotle never answers this question directly. Instead, after discussing at some length whether and in what sense true friendship is a kind of self-love, he turns his attention to an apparently quite different question: must a good man have friends in order to be happy? The answer that Aristotle gives is interesting because it makes sense only if one assumes that character-based friendships do indeed exhibit the two distinct and conflicting sorts of unity that I have described.

Aristotle’s argument that one must have friends in order to be happy goes like this. (1) To be happy, an individual must be active and know that he is active. Activity and knowledge of one’s activity are each necessary but not sufficient conditions for happiness. (2) Activity, at least in the moral domain, consists in doing good deeds. (3) A man who is doing good deeds, and who knows that he is doing good deeds, will therefore be a happy man. (4) To know that he is doing good deeds, a man must observe his own conduct and draw the correct conclusion regarding its moral worth. If his deeds are

68. Nic. Eth. 1169b 3-1170a 3; Mag. Mor. 1213a 10-27.
bad, but he incorrectly concludes they are good, he cannot be said to know, but only to believe, that his deeds are good ones. (5) It is extremely difficult and perhaps impossible for us to draw correct conclusions about the goodness or badness of our own conduct since we are interested parties. (6) It is far easier for an individual to correctly judge the moral worth of another person's character and conduct. (7) Consequently, it is easier to judge the conduct of a friend than one's own conduct. (8) However, because a friend is another self, his conduct is really one's own. Therefore, when we judge a friend we judge ourselves and in this way it is possible to come to a correct conclusion regarding the goodness or badness of our own conduct. (9) It follows that even a man of good character must have friends in order to be happy.

This argument is a very complex one which rests on both metaphysical assumptions (the equation of happiness and activity), and factual ones (the assertion that we cannot be neutral observers of our own conduct). Although each of these assumptions may be challenged, I shall not do so. Instead, I only want to clarify the unspoken premise upon which Aristotle's argument depends. In order for his argument to succeed, the relation between an individual and his friend must both be and not be like an individual's relation to himself. If his relation with his friend is not a relation with a self-sufficient and independent person, an individual's observation of his friend's conduct will be infected with the same self-interest and prejudice as observation of his own behavior. Aristotle's argument assumes that the observing individual and his friend are two distinct persons. It is only because of this difference in their being that the friend's conduct can be assessed in a neutral and independent fashion. Neutrality requires that observer and observed be different persons.

On the other hand, if the relation between an individual and his friend is not fundamentally like the individual's relation to himself, there can be no basis for the individual's regarding his friend's conduct as his own. An individual cannot learn about himself by observing the conduct of a stranger: only observation of a friend will tell him what he himself is like. The friend is a special person because he is another self. We can learn about ourselves from observing the conduct of a friend only because we share a common soul with him.

In order for an individual's observation of his friend to be neutral, his friend must be an independent person; for his observation to reveal what he himself is like, observer and friend must be the same person. Together, they must be one person and two persons simultaneously.
Only if both conditions are satisfied, will an individual require friends in order to be happy, and be made happy by his friends.

To the extent that it satisfies the first condition, an association of true friends resembles a household association and exhibits a similar sort of unity. To the extent that it satisfies the second condition, an association of true friends resembles a polis and displays the kind of unity characteristic of a political association. Neither a polis nor an oikos can satisfy both conditions simultaneously. Only a character-based association of friends can do this; the distinguishing mark of all such associations is their essentially hybrid character. The institutions of political fraternity—a species of character-based friendship—exhibit this same hybrid nature. It is precisely this which permits them to function as an intermediate and connecting link between the spheres of private and public life (or, to put it in a more metaphysical way, the spheres of identity and difference), transmitting the feelings of intimacy and solidarity characteristic of the one into the wider and more impersonal domain of the other.

This rather abstract conception of the nature of political fraternity is concretely expressed in Aristotle’s discussion of the peculiar kind of friendship that exists between brothers. The relation between brothers, which interestingly enough is not discussed in Book one of the Politics, illustrates more clearly than any other the hybrid nature of character-based friendship in general and political fraternity in particular. I shall conclude my account of Aristotle’s idea of political fraternity with a few remarks about brotherhood.

According to Aristotle, brothers are “in a sense identical” because they share the same parents. “Brothers love one another because they were born of the same parents: the identical relation they have with their parents makes them identical with one another.” The relation between brothers is a natural one; brothers do not choose to be brothers—they are born into brotherhood. In this respect, the relation between two brothers exhibits the kind of unity which in Book one of the Politics Aristotle ascribes to the household as a whole.

But if brothers are “in a sense identical” they are also self-sufficient equals or are capable of becoming so. The relation between brothers is therefore unlike the relation between parents and child, husband and wife, or master and slave. It is also unlike the relation between two sisters: although sisters may be equals, they are by nature incapable of developing the moral self-sufficiency required for participa-

69. Nic. Eth. 1161b 30-1162a 15.
70. Nic. Eth. 1161b 33.
71. Nic. Eth. 1161b 30-32.
tion in the political life of their city. Brothers, by contrast, are destined for citizenship; indeed, it is only by eventually assuming their civic responsibilities that they realize their potential as moral beings, as men of character.

But even as citizens, as self-sufficient equals, brothers feel a special sense of identity. This lasting identity is, in the first place, a function of their common parentage. But according to Aristotle, it is also a consequence of the fact that they have been "brought up together and have received a similar education." 72 Brothers therefore feel an identity not only of blood but of character as well, and they continue to feel this even after they have assumed the responsibilities of citizenship. Because they have received the same education, they share a common conception of the good. This conception, which shapes the soul of each, gives their souls a common moral form. Not only do brothers outwardly resemble one another: their souls look alike. And looking alike, they are alike—they are the same, in fact—because it is the looks or form of a thing which makes it what it is. So brothers, having been raised and educated in the same household, share a common soul; and yet, at the same time, they are self-sufficient equals. The relation of brotherhood therefore provides a peculiarly appropriate foundation upon which to build the hybrid institutions of political fraternity. Aristotle himself appears to have recognized this, for he says at one point that "friendship between brothers resembles friendship between club members," 73 between members, that is, of those associations which in the Politics he calls the "business" of friendship and whose existence he regards as the social precondition of political life. In his brief remarks on the nature of friendship between brothers, Aristotle sounds each of the themes I have attempted to develop in my account of his idea of political fraternity.

73. Nic. Eth. 1161b 35-36.