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The lure of political friendship: aspects of Aristotle's *philia* *politike* in the search for a civic *vinculum*

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This article explores the idea of political friendship and, in particular, Aristotle's notion of *philia politike*. The former is usually frowned upon in the public domain and the latter is often misunderstood in scholarly circles. The article is confined to an explication of *philia politike* and its viability for the liberal state, given the paradox that such a state cannot retain its liberal character neither with nor without an account of the good life and moral virtue. The article attempts to ascertain whether political philosophy can conceive of a civic *vinculum* or citizen bond without recourse to bonds such as family, ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion, or a shared origin of humanity.

Die aanloklikheid van politieke vriendskap: aspekte van Aristoteles se *philia politike* in die soeke na 'n burgerlike *vinculum*

Hierdie artikel verkend die idee van politieke vriendskap, en in die besonder Aristoteles se opvatting oor *philia politike*. In die openbare domein word eersgenoemde meestal bevraagteken terwyl laasgenoemde dikwels in akademiese groepe misverstaan word. Die artikel is beperk tot die lewensvatbaarheid van *philia politike* vir die liberale staat, gegewe die paradoks dat so 'n staat nie met of sonder opvatting oor die goeie lewe en morele deug sy tipiese liberale karakter kan behou nie. Die artikel poog om vas te stel of politieke filosofie 'n antwoord kan verskaf op die soeke na 'n band wat staatsburgers kan bind sonder dat sodanige verhoudings op familie, etnisiteit, ras, die nasie, die volk, godsdiens of die gedeelde herkoms van mense geskoei is.

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So the dilemma seems to be that a free society can survive neither with nor without an account of the good and moral virtue (Jacobitti 1991: 282)

This article aims to explore and assess the idea of political friendship and, in particular, Aristotle's (384-322 BCE) notion of *philia politike* as propounded mainly in his *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. The notion of political friendship is not widely known in the public domain and it is often erroneously associated with a highly partial "friendship politics", implying practices such as corruption and nepotism. In scholarly circles Aristotle's *philia politike* is often also misunderstood as a "thick brotherhood", implying that "all is held in common on the model of Plato's *Republic*" (cf Schwarzenbach 1996: 110). His ideas on political friendship, however, represent a cornerstone of the many treatises on friendship that form part of the epic narrative on this topic. His understanding that individual virtue of character can provide a sufficient *vinculum* or civic bond that will hold states together, and that this is more important than justice itself, has attracted the attention of great thinkers throughout the centuries and recently those of neo-Aristotelians seeking remedies for the loss of cohesion in modern liberal states.

Liberal theorists have in a number of ways opposed the renewed interest of neo-Aristotelians in *philia politike* as a normative model for virtuous citizenship in the liberal state. The best known example of opposition against *philia politike* is probably the communitarian movement that has found organisational expression in the USA. This movement seeks moral virtue and good citizenship at the level of community and not at the level of the clinical inhospitability of the large and plural liberal state which entertains no substantive moral commitment. It is committed to establishing an ethical public order that emphasises the community, aspects of a shared culture, the common good, reciprocity, trust and solidarity among citizens rather than individual interests stemming from the idea that there is no shared view of the good life in the liberal state. Similar movements are found in many liberal states, for example

the Afrikaner settlement Orania in the Northern Cape in South Africa is a rough approximation of communitarians in the USA. The ideas of writers such as Taylor (1989), Sandel (1998), Bellah (1996), Walzer (1983) and MacIntyre (1981) are usually regarded as being supportive of the communitarian movement and critical towards liberal thinkers who emphasise individualistic politics (*cf* also Irrera 2004: 2). However, within liberal theory and liberalism, the concept of political friendship for heterogeneous states is not an obsolete one. There are a number of non-Aristotelian and non-communitarian views on friendship and citizenship which, for example, argue that pursuing attributes such as empathy, compassion and benevolence could indeed serve as a normative model for good citizenship at the level of the liberal state (*cf* Reeder 1998).

The analysis and assessment of the ancient notion of *philia politike* in this article is confined to an explication of Aristotle's ideas and their viability in the modern liberal state in view of the paradox that such a state cannot retain its liberal character with or without an account of the good and moral virtue. To this end the views of a prominent neo-Aristotelian Sibyl Schwarzenbach, and those of the well-known philosopher Hannah Arendt, are incorporated in the analysis and the assessment. The inclusion of these scholars' thoughts specifically focus on the search for a public *vinculum* that should bring "people into a common mode of living without any recourse to more-or-less *naturalistic* bonds such as family, ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion, or a shared origin of humanity" (Chiba 1995: 508). The interest that Aristotle's *philia politike* has inspired in these scholars and their respective responses to its suitability and viability for the liberal state are a means of bridging a link between the ancient Aristotelian texts on friendship and the moral complexities of the modern liberal state.

1. Friendship, politics and political friendship

Love, friends and politics seemingly have little to do with one another and for many these concepts have different and

unrelated meanings. Yet, they seem to be related if expressed in the formats of love, personal friendship and political friendship. Love and friendship indeed share some attributes. Similarly, political friendship, although lesser known, is a form of friendship. Intimate love is commonly understood to find expression in the private realm of human existence; personal friendship finds expression in both the private and public realms, while political friendship is understood to find expression in the public realm only. Political friendship may be generally understood as a form of love, a type of civic affection or affinity that informs interpersonal relations in public matters. In its different formats political friendship is nearly always devoted to virtue that should guide the mutually advantageous utilities which ensue and accrue from interpersonal relations of a public nature.

Genuine personal friendship differs from political friendship. The former is usually based on a form of love, reciprocal trust, an intimate concern for the well-being and the happiness of the other, as well as a willingness to often make unconditional sacrifices to this end. By contrast, the impersonal nature of political friendship requires at minimum that thousands, even millions of citizens who do not know each other uphold and honour some sort of civic bond, a *vinculum* that ties them to each other, and in doing so, serve the collective good of the community. A devotion to such a bond does not primarily inform personal friendship. Human beings, however, do not have genuine personal friendships only; the complexity and variety of friendship relations may include an almost impersonal character, but this does not necessarily render such relations to assume the character of political friendship.

In his *De Amicitia*, Cicero (106-43 BCE) wrote that Scipio used to complain that

there was nothing on which men bestowed so little pains: that every one could tell exactly how many goats or sheep he had, but not how many friends; and while they took pains in procuring the former, they were utterly careless in selecting friends, and possessed no particular marks, so to speak, or tokens by which they might judge of their suitability for friendship (Cicero 2011).

Little seems to have changed. In a daily newspaper (*Beeld* 2010) a regular columnist recently wrote a probing piece on the nature of personal friendship in contemporary times. He points to research that suggests that human beings can only manage approximately 150 friends at any particular juncture. He goes on to contrast this research with the thousands of “friends” who people have on the Internet nowadays (for example, via social networks such as Facebook), and decries the ephemeral durability and the nature of such friendships. He cites the comedian Groucho Marx’s quip “Hello! I must be going” as typical of such relations and laments the fact that personal friendships are often based on mutual utilitarian advantage only.

To the extent that personal friendships are not political by nature, and that many old and modern democratic states increasingly seem to harbour powerful divisive forces among their constituent groups, it may be rightly asked whether entertaining the more demanding notion of political friendship should be seriously considered as one counteracting remedy for the erosion of cohesion in liberal states. In all likelihood such a proposition is bound to elicit many sceptical and cynical responses. These responses may vary from surprise and disbelief to irritation and bemusement that such an idea could be propounded at all. For many the notion of political friendship denotes only negative practices in public life, such as nepotism, corruption and unfairness. However, those who entertain the notion of political friendship more positively mostly relegate it to the realm of political idealism in view of the competitive nature that characterises the diversity of values and interests that prevail in modern states and a globalising world. How then can the notion of political friendship be seriously entertained at all? Was it not Thomas Hobbes who already defended “fear and enlightened self-interest” as the political glue of society; John Locke who viewed it to be “security, property, and a shared interest in freedom”, and David Hume who proclaimed “the new peaceful bond between men to be commerce”?¹ Similarly, Georg Hegel acknowledged the role that friendship played in the

1 Cf Schwarzenbach 1996: 98, Hobbes 1977: part 2 chapter 17, Locke 1980: chapters 7-9, Hume 1987: 89-97, 112-38, 259-74.

ancient polis, although he believed that the complexity of the state left no room for feeling, in it “we are conscious of unity as law; there the content must be rational and known to us“. For him the “shared interest in law, reason, and (positive) freedom” was “the sufficient, political mortar binding citizens together” (Schwarzenbach 1996: 98, cf also Hegel 1967: par 158A). Moreover, for many the legacy of liberalism in some postmodern societies with its emphasis on individualism and relativism seem as inhospitable to the development of political friendship as is the reliance on so-called procedural democracy in newly democratising states to alleviate tensions between nationalistic, ethnic, racial and religiously based social movements that have emerged after the end of the Cold War. It comes as no surprise then that the idea and practice of political friendship occupies a peripheral status on the fringes of the conventional world of politics; its existence is not widespread.

Despite factors that militate against any serious consideration and the active pursuance of the notion of civic political friendship, there are indeed considerations to the contrary. These are of both a political and philosophical nature, suggesting that the contemporary erosion of social and political cohesion in many liberal states is in dire need of cauterising remedies, of which political friendship is an important one. Examples that underline the loss of the glue or mortar in the public domain of liberal states are plentiful, both abroad and locally. Schwarzenbach (1996: 99) writes that in the USA

... our society is witnessing growing disparities in economic wealth, mounting violence, religious and racial tensions, the disintegration of traditional (Bourgeois) familial relations, and staggering rates of systemic homelessness, drug dependency, illiteracy, and so forth. Such phenomena are also on the rise in Europe, not to mention a burgeoning xenophobia, chauvinistic nationalism, as well as the myriad of difficulties involved in the aim of a unified Europe.

South Africa experienced similar tendencies over the past two decades. The country became a liberal constitutional democracy, events and developments that promised friendlier civic relations between the constituent groups of society were at times severely disillusioned by acts that raised racial and other tensions to the point of imminent and large-scale violence. Promises include

the spirit of a new civic and national consciousness signalled by President Mandela's wearing of the Springbok rugby jersey during the Rugby World Cup Final in 1995; clauses of the Final Constitution of 1996 which stipulates that South African identity may not be defined or restricted by categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or historical origins; Archbishop Desmond Tutu's phrase of a "Rainbow Nation", and Deputy President Mbeki's "I am an African" address to the National Assembly in 1995 in which he referred to South Africa as a "land of many cultures living peacefully side by side, but, significantly, as a single, hybrid, and dynamic culture" (Pucherova 2009: 929). Disillusionments to this end include the assassination of Chris Hanu in 1993 by Januzs Walus, an anti-Communist Polish refugee who had close links with the white nationalist AWB movement; the outbreak of xenophobic violence in 2008 that displaced more than 100.000 foreigners, and the murder of Eugene Terre'Blanche, leader of the AWB movement, in April 2010 that sparked off bitter and racially tainted exchanges between whites and blacks.

With regard to political friendship these examples from recent South African history point to both promise and disillusionment; the possibility of realising political friendship, and the impossibility of attaining it. It tells the story, albeit suggestively, of how expectations of what can become is disillusioned by what still exists. When Mandela puts on the Springbok jersey the hermeneutic symbolism is "enemies, there is no enemy"; he reaches out to the "other self" in Aristotelian terms. However, the events of April 2010 seem to suggest the Aristotelian epitaph of "friends, there are no friends". These phrases capture what often seems to be the paradoxical nature of friendship, namely the yearning for virtue that could become by associating with the "other" and the egocentric nature of the "self" when it exchanges the former for own interests. The promise that the future will transcend the differences of the past and the present is thus exchanged for a future that emanates from the differences of the past and the present. Potential enemies do not become friends; potential friends become the enemy. It is worth noting that this friend-enemy dichotomy was a central theme of the famous theorist

Carl Schmitt's work *The concept of the political*, first published in 1927. Schmitt regarded the "other", the "alien", as something existentially different from the "self", and even if no real conflict between groups or states exists, the possibility of it always remains real. This ever-present possibility of conflict with the enemy implies that Hobbes' primordial state may become real with bloodshed and killing as its worst outcome (*cf* Schmitt 1996). Goodrich (2003: 49) suggests that like friendship, political friendship is political work; it is labour of both an intellectual and an emotive nature. Like all forms of human relationship it is characterised by conflict and moments of violence, but also by "ecstasy or shared insights derived from 'grappling together'". One cannot move to the promise of the future without realising that one cannot be the "other", it is something one cannot own. Like critique, it "begins with listening to the interiority of difference, to the corporeal and sensible expressions of the friend. Friendship lies in an attentive and critical appreciation of difference. That at least is its beginning". The generality of political friendship lies thus not with an ignoring of the particular but in an affirmation thereof.

The paradoxical nature of the so-called open society, the modern liberal state, seems to be that ascribing to it a moral purpose would destroy its very openness and freedom. However, without any moral purpose or a conception of the common good whatsoever, its freedom, its equality, its openness and the formally guaranteed rights of its citizens would equally be put at risk. Jacobitti (1991: 282) neatly outlines these two counterbalancing constraints of the liberal state when she writes that

... the dilemma seems to be that a free society can survive neither with nor without an account of the good and moral virtue. [...] Most modern liberal theory has rested upon a claim of neutrality in these matters, a claim based either upon moral scepticism (i.e. that it is impossible to defend accounts of the good) or upon the principle that individuals have the right to determine on their own what the good is and to pursue it in their own way, free from any political interference except what is necessary to defend the equal ability of all to pursue that right. Against this, it has been argued that the liberal state cannot be satisfactorily justified without a theory of the good; that it is impossible in practice for the liberal state to be neutral among various versions of the good life; and

(perhaps most compelling) that a liberal state cannot survive if its citizens lack moral virtue, that is, if they are not constrained by some moral limits on the pursuit of individual desires, rights-claims, and visions of the good.

To the extent that political friendship aims at establishing a civic *vinculum* with moral virtue it thus faces the same dilemma as the modern liberal state in that its pursuance must find its place somewhere between the counterbalancing demands outlined earlier. Its pursuance may endanger the nature of the liberal state, and its absence may similarly endanger the civic-mindedness, freedom, equality, righteousness and political cohesion in such a society. It can therefore be concluded that the question whether the modern liberal state should indeed pursue the notion of political friendship bearing in mind its moral pitfalls, and whether it can be realised, is no doubt a matter of cardinal importance. In this respect the most daunting challenge seems to be the search for a civic *vinculum* that avoids basing its virtue and morality on potentially contentious and divisive categories such as ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion, or a shared origin of humanity. For this purpose neo-Aristotelians and philosophers have turned to Aristotle's senescent meditations on political friendship. The interest that Aristotle's notion of *philia politike* has inspired with the neo-Aristotelian Sybil Schwarzenbach and the philosopher Hannah Arendt is subsequently examined and appraised as responses that gauged the suitability and the viability of *philia politike* for the modern liberal state.

2. Political friendship

The philosophical meditations on friendship in public matters represent an epic narrative in many respects. The theme is found in the thought and religious texts of all great cultures and civilisations throughout history.² The great books in the Western tradition in fields such as theology and ethics as well as legal,

2 For *ubuntu*, cf Enslin & Horsthemke 2004, Schoeman 2005; for Confucian thinking on friendship, cf Hall & Ames 1994; for views on friendship in Indian philosophy, cf Parekh 1994 and for friendship contained in Islamic thought, cf Goodman 1996.

moral and political philosophy teach one about many forms of love and friendship. These different and often overlapping ideas include notions such as *eros*, *philia politike*, *amicitia*, *homonoia*, *storge*, *caritas*, *agape*, *cupiditas*, *compassio*, *fraternitas* and *amor mundi*. This theme and, in particular, *philia politike*, has occupied the minds of thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Bacon, Michel de Montaigne and, more recently, Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida.

2.1 Aristotle's *philia politike*

Aristotle's thoughts on *philia politike* are embedded in, and must be understood against the larger framework of philosophical and ethical questions which he addresses in his various works. With regard to philosophy, Aristotle does not take matters for what they are but for what they will become, and such a functionally directed teleology permeates most of his thoughts including his views on friendship. This is similarly the case with regard to ethical matters which represent the backdrop for understanding friendship as part of his larger concern with moral issues such as right and wrong, good and bad, virtue, justice, and the happiness of the good life (*eudemonia*) in the city. It may be argued that Aristotle's meditations on friendship and ethics represent one of the indispensable elements in the epic discourse on these matters that dates back to the genesis of the Western philosophical tradition – the time of Plato's Academy and his own Lyceum in the fourth century BCE (cf Mhire 2002: 2). His views on friendship and ethical matters are generally ascribed to three works, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Magna Moralia*. The first of these works written in approximately 350 BCE is the most comprehensive account of his views on friendship and is widely regarded as the quintessential and most authoritative of his friendship texts. It consists of ten books of which three (V-VIII) are shared with the *Eudemian*, and controversy exists whether the latter preceded or superseded the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Some scholars nevertheless regard the *Eudemian* as being "concise and coherent, and a masterful pedagogical dialogue that takes the form of a

treatise” in its own right (Mhire 2002: 34). The *Magna Moralia* devoted primarily to ethics is now generally regarded as not being written by Aristotle but possibly by one of his students.

In his works Aristotle famously argues that the normative model for good citizenship is political friendship. His work is also the source for the popular maxim that good lawgivers would pay more attention to amity than to justice because without the former the latter could not exist. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) he states that friendship

... seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality (*NE* VIII.1).

From this citation it appears that amity (Aristotle’s notion of *philia politike*, political friendship) is prior to any code of laws. It is indeed a stronger bond of community than law itself and more likely to ensure harmonious coexistence than government and law are able to achieve (*cf* also Goodrich 2003: 27).

The ancient *polis* differs from the modern nation state in innumerable ways, although it is worth noting that Aristotle’s ideas on *philia politike* and its applicability have been accepted by many neo-Aristotelians (for example, Schwarzenbach 1996 & 2009) as a normative model for virtuous citizenship in the modern liberal state. These thinkers attempt

... to shed the Aristotelian conception of some of its infamous masculinist, elitist, and xenophobic connotations, arguing that citizens of modern societies can maintain a close approximation of Aristotelian civic friendship based on a relatively thin consensus regarding toleration, mutual recognition of rights, and a universal value of care (Scorza 2004: 105).

These ideas as well as some disagreement about the meaning and applicability of Aristotle’s ideas will be discussed in the next section of this article, but it should first be pointed out that the matter of meaning and applicability was already an

issue in Aristotle's own time. Aristotle and his famous pupil Alexander (the Great) were at odds with each other about the nature and applicability of political friendship. Aristotle argued that *philia politike* (political friendship) be restricted to the *polis*, while Alexander believed that *homonoia* (the unity of mankind, like-mindedness, concord, a term related to *philia* and also used by Aristotle) should not be restricted to city-states only (*cf* de Mauriac 1949: 106):

To Alexander's notion that all men should be brothers, should intermingle, should be under the same law, thus that there should not be boundaries separating one polity from another but all should be in the same rule or empire, Aristotle replied that we should all be within much smaller city-states, wherein the possibility of the exercise of real virtue and friendship would be more likely to take place. It is noteworthy that Leo Strauss in our own time took up much the same position that Aristotle did. The only question really is whether modern nation states are themselves more like Alexander's empire or like Aristotle's city-states?³ (Schall 1996: 128, *cf* also Strauss 1964).

Before analysing and assessing some of the renewed interest in the utility of Aristotle's ideas on political friendship, it must first be pointed out that the contemporary contextualisation of these ancient notions hinges on how Aristotle is understood by modern

- 3 The etymology of the concept *homonoia* is traced back to a mythological Greek goddess with the same name. She "was the 'spirit' (*daimona*) of concord, unanimity, and oneness of mind. Her opposite number was Eris (Strife). She was often numbered among the goddesses Praxidikai (Exacters of Justice) who were said to be daughters of an early Theban King named Ogygos. As such Homonoia was probably closely identified with the Theban Goddess-Queen Harmonia (Harmony)" (*cf* Atsma 2000-2008). De Mauriac (1949: 106) sheds further light on its meaning when he writes: "The idea of the unity of mankind is sprung from the Greek concept of *Homonoia*. *Homonoia*, a difficult word to translate, means unity and concord, 'a being of one mind together.' The Greeks recognized the desirability of *Homonoia*, but they interpreted it in a negative manner: the absence of faction fights. 'There was hardly a trace as yet of the more positive sense which Homonoia was later to acquire, a mental attitude which would make war or faction impossible because the parties were at one'." It would appear that as concepts *philia politike* and *homonoia* to a large extent share denotative or extensional content, but that *philia politike* contains much more specificity with regard to connotative or intentional content.

scholars. While the interpretation of Aristotle's friendship treatise is highly contested, it will suffice in this instance to state that at least two dominant readings of the ancient texts can be distinguished.

2.1.1 *Philia politike* – possibility as actuality

The first and more popular conventional view of Aristotle's friendship is one that "requires a grasp of how friendship emerges from its possibility into actuality, and what stands revealed in actuality" (cf Bryan 2009: 765). This view also most readily imputes Aristotle's notion of friendship to the politics of our own time in a prescriptive sense. The view holds that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* explains to us three types of friendship, namely utility, pleasure, and virtue. The first is a type of companionship that is mutually advantageous in that it is based on a mutually related activity whose purpose is advanced through such an association. The second type is an acquaintance characterised by the mutuality of pleasure derived from it, such as enjoying someone else's presence in a conversation. Aristotle regards the third type, virtue friendship, as proper friendship. In *The Nicomachean Ethics* he states that

For those who are friends on the ground of virtue are anxious to do well by each other (since that is a mark of virtue and of friendship), and between men who are emulating each other in this there cannot be complaints or quarrels; no one is offended by a man who loves him and does well by him – if he is a person of nice feeling he takes his revenge by doing well by the other. And the man who excels the other in the services he renders will not complain of his friend, since he gets what he aims at; for each man desires what is good (*NE VIII.12*).

Such friendship entails *arête* (the property of excellence), an individual attribute, but simultaneously also an attribute that responds to a call for excellence or by that which brings out the excellence in other individuals. It is indeed the *polis* that makes virtue friendship possible and especially so if the constitution is of a friendly quality seeking justice and the good for all of the community. Although not all citizens possess the quality of virtue (the element of *arête* that calls one to excellence), just laws

would provide the necessary political bonds of reciprocity and equality among all the members of a community, both virtuous and less virtuous, replacing in this way the love and the trust typical of virtuous friends where it is not present. For this view of *philia politike* the threefold taxonomy of friendship also suggests a progression from the first instance of convenience and advantage that utility friendship offers through the pleasures of friendship to the fullness of happiness when *arête* actualises itself:

‘Virtue’ friendship is, for Aristotle, ‘proper’ or ‘true’ friendship because it is what orients us to what is required of us by those we love and who love us. Proper friendship, where the *telos* of friendship has been reached (insofar as this is possible at all), is commonly interpreted as both involving *arête* and being one (Bryan 2009: 758, cf also Irrera 2004: 1-14).

In the conventional view, the true friend is perceived as the “other self”, a view that acknowledges the separateness of individuals, but simultaneously the distinctive ways in which all concerned realise the good life. The relationship between the “self” and the “other self” is generally regarded as the element in Aristotle’s *philia politike* that constitutes a *vinculum* or civic bond of friendship that ties citizens together. As a result of the mutual awareness of liking and possibly emulating one another, much controversy underlies the understanding of this aspect of his thought, especially with regard to the elements of narcissism, egotism, altruism and excessive benevolence that may be inferred from it (cf, for example, Annas 1977, Derrida 1988, Stern-Gillet 1995, Van der Valk 2004-2005).⁴ The

4 The controversy pertaining to the interpretation of the “other self” in Aristotle’s friendship has many facets. Among others, it raises questions such as whether *philia politike* is indeed also an advantage friendship such as that between individuals, or whether the utility that seeks the common good makes it virtue friendship. While some neo-Aristotelians subscribe to the latter interpretation, others such as Van der Valk (2004-2005) regard complete virtue friendship as something which develops beyond *philia politike*. In this sense proper virtue friendship, “where the *telos* of friendship has been reached (insofar as this is possible at all), is commonly interpreted as both involving *arête* and being one” (Bryan 2009: 758, cf also Irrera 2004: 1-14). Thus, how the relation between the “self” and the “other” is interpreted is crucial in that it raises the question whether *philia politike* is indeed virtuous from the outset or

happiness of the good life (*eudemonia*) is not possible if others do not enjoy it as well and shared happiness thus “entails the rational capacity for jointly promoting common ends as well as the capacity to identify with and coordinate separate ends” (Sherman 1987: 589). In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes:

For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all; for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? (*NE VIII.1*).

The good life implies self-sufficiency, meaning that it lacks in nothing, and the addition of no other good will contribute to making it more desirable. However, since friends and friendship, among other goods, make self-sufficiency, the happiness of the good life, itself possible, such a life is by definition an interwoven life of well-being (*kath'heteron*). It is not a life in isolation; the good life is a relational one, only a god can be self-sufficient in his own well-being (Sherman 1987: 595-6). The Aristotelian adult friend, the “other self”, is equally an “another self” and a “separate self”, each will possess specific but also shared ways of being virtuous. The virtuous character of the self and the other must, however, pre-exist to realise any friendship based on virtue:

This entails that such friends promote each other’s good in a privileged way (as only another self can), but in a way that is nonetheless mindful of the mature rational agency of each. So, given the similarity of character friends and the exclusivity of the relation, each is in a position to know how best to help the other, and how to help in a way that most reassures and pleases. In those cases where decisions are not joint, intimate knowledge of each other’s abiding interests puts each in a position to offer counsel and support for the sort of choices that give real shape to each other’s lives. Yet within this extended and interwoven life, the individuals nonetheless retain their separateness (Sherman 1987: 607).

whether and at what stage it may become virtuous when the *telos* of such friendship is reached. For some scholars, such as Bryan and Arendt, this seems to be understood as a possibility rather than something which can be actualised.

This, in brief, is Aristotle's notion of *philia politike*, at least as understood conventionally. Although not all citizens of the ancient polis, who are fewer than the number of citizens needed to fill a modern sport stadium, could ever know one another, *philia politike* in its limited manifestation will nonetheless provide for a sufficient civic-mindedness that will guarantee cohesion and righteousness of a friendly nature for the entire *polis*. The limited, but also the multiplying collective effect of virtue friendships formed by those who possess the attribute of *arête* would bring forth and ensure a *vinculum* that would eliminate faction and ensure a measure of unanimity that would uphold a justice that law in itself could never attain without it.

2.1.2 *Philia politike* – actuality as possibility

The second interpretation of Aristotle's notion of friendship, amplified by, in particular, the work of Derrida (1988 & 1997) and Bryan (2009), is more abstract, complex, even radical, and is one that can only be understood in terms of a teleology that permeates most of Aristotle's thought, on the one hand, and the philosophic-historical context of his treatise, on the other. On this view, friendship's "actuality is itself possibility", Aristotle's understanding of *philia politike* is inextricably linked to the philosophical principle of teleology, as well as to moral virtue and ethical matters. This interwoven set of themes suggest that his notion of friendship is a subsidiary but indispensable part of a larger schema of philosophical pursuits in his thoughts. His views on teleology require serious consideration. It permeates most of his works that range from metaphysics, physics and biology to politics and ethics. His friendship texts form part of the latter and his *Politics* (*POL*), the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) and the *Eudemian* (*EUD*) contain specific passages that underscore the importance of understanding their themes in teleological terms⁵.

The inclusion of these passages on teleology should not be viewed as a coincidence. Aristotle's teleology finds its roots in the natural necessity of biological life forms as well as metaphysics, and is a

5 Cf *POL* I.II, *NE* I.VII, *EUD* II.I and Miller 2011.

philosophical principle that posits that actuality contains the true essence of being that continually evolves towards its true end function (*cf* Bradie & Miller 1984, Logan 1987). In its extreme form it may be described as a finalist form of causal determinism. It exalts some future teleological category to exclude all other features of reality and thus explain the inexorable unfolding of everything, past, present and the future unfolding of the future in terms of the *telos*, whatever it may have as its source (*cf* Burkill 1941: 191, Faure 2009: 85). In general, however, scholars question the extent to which the influence of the *telos* is an all-encompassing omnipotence in Aristotle's understanding of teleology such as that postulated by the extreme form of finalist causal determinism. His *Posterior Analytics* (*PA*) specifically provides for cause and effect as a fundamental aspect of reality, including being, and his notion of a *telos* does not preclude the possibility and potential of free will as a condition for moral purpose (*cf* *PA* II.111). For Aristotle this is also founded on his understanding of being. In this regard actuality precedes potentiality. This means that every potentiality and incomplete potentiality or motion must be understood in relation to its parallel incomplete actuality. Aspects of reality, matter, things (including friendship) reveal themselves in form and this contains activity, motion, and energy that, over time, changes the form itself (*cf* Mirus 2004: 724).

The implications of interpreting Aristotle's friendship, along with moral issues such as right and wrong, good and bad, virtue, justice, and the happiness of the good life (*eudemonia*) in the city in teleological terms are far-reaching. In Aristotle's thought the forms of human activities, in contrast to those found in biology for example, are seldom if ever deemed to have reached their true end function, and this often elicits a particular type of response that taints teleologically informed appraisals in a nostalgic or expectant manner. Mhire's (2002: 133) concluding appraisal in his study of the *Eudemian* captures a sense of such an understanding when he writes that

[t]he ending of the *Eudemian Ethics* brings a kind of bittersweet resolution to our examination. The highest way of life for man, that which fully maximizes the potential of his nature, is more than likely a theoretical construct, one never to be realized in the realm

of political reality. At first, this realization dampens the mood of the treatise, as the pursuit of true happiness seems to be something of a Sisyphean labor. After a moment's reflection, though, this realization appears necessary, for the activity of living well must always be a pursuit of something, and what that something is can only be known in light of the best.

A perspective similar to the above can be inferred indirectly in the thought of philosophers who preceded and succeeded Aristotle. This is found not in the text or the textual context of his own works, but in the broader historical context of his thought. Several authors address this issue, but in this instance Bryan (2009) presents it in a recent article entitled *Approaching others: Aristotle on friendship's possibility*. Bryan skilfully invokes the memory and the stature of a moral and virtuous Socrates (469-399 BCE) as a precious and idealised "friendship in memory", and Diogenes Laertius' (third century AD) account of Aristotle's thought, respectively decades before and centuries after Aristotle's life, as historical signposts to ascribe meaning to *philia politike*. For Bryan Aristotle's nostalgic longing for a virtuous past "friendship" personified by Socrates, and the nostalgia contained in Aristotle's often repeated anecdote "My friends, there are no friends" as reported by Diogenes in his *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers* is the key with which the teleological meaning of *philia politike* can be unlocked (cf Bryan 2009: 772: 54-5, Diogenes 1853).⁶ This is an intriguing contextual way of inferring the meaning that *philia politike* essentially represents a yearning for or a vision of the possibility of a righteous, virtuous and friendly body politic in the unseen future as inspired by a nostalgic longing for what once was. Several other authors (cf Derrida 1988 & 1997) also attach importance to Diogenes' anecdote in this sense and taken with the depiction of Socrates by Aristotle in his own work as one of the most virtuous men, as well as Aristotle's leaving of Plato's Academy and Athens may all be considered as contextual issues that are potentially important in understanding Aristotle's thought.

6 In this source the anecdote is translated as follows: "The man who has friends has no friend." Derrida (1988: 632) understands Diogenes' phrase to be "Oh my friends, there is no friend".

It is against this background of nostalgia and teleology that Bryan must be understood when he writes that at any given moment a being, a friend, is

... no longer what it once was and is also about to perish and become something else. Aristotle expressed this transience by way of the distinction between *dunamis* (potency, potentiality, possibility) and *energeia* (the being-at-work of a being, actuality). A being's *potential* is always working itself toward its *actuality* or the moment of its *activity* – or, [...] its existence in the *ergon*, or work, that has become. The *ousia* or 'essence' of a being is therefore not found in its being actual or 'at work' in front of us, but in the potential it holds for transforming itself: beings are in continual movement 'toward' who or what they really are (Bryan 2009:766).

The view simultaneously suggests that we have not fully realised and explored the way in which nostalgia has animated Aristotle's thinking, as well as how it could inform our own thinking about political friendship. As analysed by Derrida (1988 & 1997) and Bryan (2009), the cornerstone of this understanding starts with the anecdote "friends, there are no friends" attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius and the nostalgia that the phrase contains is the guiding precept for understanding this view (*cf* Derrida 1988: 632, Bryan 2009: 754-5, *cf* also Diogenes 1853).

The implications of understanding Aristotle in this manner are far-reaching and complex, but a sense of it may be gained when Bryan (2009: 773) depicts the sense of nostalgia and of loss that Plato experienced with the death of Socrates. Something – friendship – was no longer possible since a

... different form of activity and being with others came in its place; that is, the Academy. So in the anecdote of Aristotle, we might recognize that something was perhaps lurking not in its diminished possibility but in the sense that friendship as possibility does not require that there actually be a friend or friends.

He reminds us that we may have all experienced the loneliness contained in the phrase "My friends, there are no friends" and poses the following question:

Might we wonder at the very possibility of friendship's possibility? This doubled sense of possibility may be sorrowful legacy of Aristotelian political thought, but I would argue only if we turn

to political theory without recognition of our own nostalgia in doing so. We do not 'use' political theory, or turn to it to solve our problems, but to think through who we have become and are becoming, to think through what we are doing when we speak thusly. And thus perhaps the only thing we stand to learn is our own nostalgia, or own placelessness, and that, when we learn it, it is something very important to have learned. In learning what we no longer have, we also learn what will count for us as some kind of possibility of and for politics in our time.

The next two sections successively examine the thoughts of two theorists, Sibyl Schwarzenbach and Hannah Arendt. These authors' ideas could in very general terms be perceived as representing the two interpretations of *philia politike* discussed earlier. Both these theorists subscribe to the moral individualism in character or virtue friendship found in *philia politike*, a feature which for many liberal theorists renders the notion of political friendship untenable.

2.2 Schwarzenbach on realising what is possible: possibility as actuality

The work of Sibyl Schwarzenbach (1996 & 2009) is probably one of the best examples of neo-Aristotelian theory's attempts at utilising the notion of *philia politike* as a necessary condition for addressing the problem of social cohesion in modern liberal states. In view of her specific understanding of *philia politike*, her analysis is systematic and her arguments are well-reasoned. Her understanding of Aristotle must be accounted for in terms of the conventional approach outlined earlier, namely how *philia politike* as possibility may actualise itself. Since she generally subscribes to this interpretation of Aristotle, it need not be accounted for again and therefore this section rather focuses on the considerations and arguments why it can indeed apply to contemporary liberal states of our own time. Schwarzenbach (1996: 110) maintains that Aristotle's notion of *philia politike* has been grossly misunderstood by contemporary theorists as referring to and conflating "'personal friendship' with that of a highly partial 'friendship politics,' or it is presumed to be a 'thick brotherhood' where all is held in common on the model of Plato's Republic". Despite this

gross misunderstanding she acknowledges that there are indeed major structural differences between liberal states in modern times and the ancient *polis* and its historical context, as well as subsequent momentous developments. At first glance, these structural differences tempt one to reject the relevance of *philia politike* as being of any contemporary relevance. These are the size of the modern nation state, the influence of the Reformation, the doctrine of individual rights, and the impact of modern market economies (cf Schwarzenbach 1996: 109-12). In order to avoid the “anachronistic pitfalls” of transposing *philia politike* from its original setting and time to modern conditions without qualification, Schwarzenbach critically assesses the matter of size difference and the effects of the developments that took place in liberal states in modern times in order to ascertain whether these, in principle, rule out the contemporary utilisation of the notion of *philia politike*. Her conviction is that none of these justify the jettisoning of Aristotle’s notion of *philia politike*, and it is warranted that we attend to these considerations as they are intended to dispel both colloquial and scholarly misconceptions about its meaning, value and utility in modern times.

Schwarzenbach points out that the mere size and complexity of the modern state (with, for instance, 250 million inhabitants compared to approximately 40,000 of the *polis*) is an almost self-evident consideration for rejecting the possibility of any type of friendship that can bind citizens together in a civic bond. She argues that such a rejection by liberal theorists has little to do with Aristotle’s political friendship and stems from the large-scale confusion of personal friendship with that of *philia politike*, virtue or political friendship. Aristotle did not claim that all citizens personally knew one another or that they were emotionally close to each other. In his opinion

... political friendship is evidenced, rather, by a general concern and attitude in the everyday lives of its citizens and works via the constitution; it is recognized in legal and social norms regarding the treatment of persons in that society, as well as in the willingness of fellow citizens to uphold them (Schwarzenbach 1996: 109).

Willingness in this context is of cardinal importance. To mete out fair justice by way of force is inferior to a righteous arrangement which parties willingly acknowledge and accept, and it is for this reason “that Aristotle considers the cultivation by the legislator of unanimity and friendship in a population to be more important than cultivating even justice itself, for “when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be of a friendly quality” (Schwarzenbach 1996: 106, *cf* also *NE* VIII.I). According to Schwarzenbach (1996: 109), the legal and social norms pertaining to the treatment of persons, the “public norms of concern for each citizen (the normal way citizens experience each other’s goodwill) can equally well apply to any modern state as to the ancient polis”.

Liberty of conscience and religious toleration is the legacy of the Reformation, and in political terms this implies that happiness and the good life can no longer be dictated to the individual from above or without. Similarly, the state cannot prescribe to individuals who their friends should be or what character friendship should take; individuals are free to pursue this in private associations (Schwarzenbach 1996: 110). To this she responds that the Reformation’s legacy does not make a non-paternalistic political friendship impossible or undesirable, and that tolerance does not rule out friendship. For civic friendship Aristotle only requires that friends should share a court system and some sense of justice, as well as possess goodwill and concern for the moral virtue of fellow citizens (Schwarzenbach 1996: 113-4). The pursuance of mutually antagonistic individual goals and the institution of private spheres with concomitant mutual indifference to others that followed the Reformation do not rule out, for Schwarzenbach, a concern for the moral character of citizens in the public realm rather than the private sphere. The Reformation’s effect should not be understood as a transformation from goodwill to neutrality and indifference; it is a transformation from a stringent concern with moral virtue to a more enlightened tolerant concern with political character of citizens in the public sphere (Schwarzenbach 1996: 113):

It is true that, in Aristotle's time, citizens *de facto* shared certain religious beliefs and racial or cultural commonalities which can no longer be taken for granted today. But this does not imply that citizens of a modern pluralist nation-state hold no fundamental values in common. On the contrary, one might argue that what shared values citizens do possess today have merely altered, grown more abstract and 'second-order' (Schwarzenbach 1996: 114).

The legalising of individual rights and autonomy is a consequence of the gradual loss of monarchical power to the people and the subjugation of the former to the rule of law. The modern doctrine of individual human rights has found expression in bills of rights and liberal constitutions, as well as attempts at universalising the doctrine and applying it to all persons, at least in principle. This development supplemented the moral autonomy brought about by the Reformation in legalising spheres of individualism and, like the former, it also superficially seems "to fly in the face of ancient or feudal concerns with loyalty, trust, and the local commonalities of friendship" (Schwarzenbach 1996: 111). She counters this misunderstanding by reminding us that, although the institution of these doctrines may have been antagonistic in its origins, it is certainly not their aim, intention and consequences. She regards the progressive extension of individual human rights, as well as the substantive extension of the content of these rights "as a necessary aspect of any adequate modern conception of civic friendship" since impartial principles of public concern for the individual prevents friendship between citizens from degenerating into "friendship politics" (Schwarzenbach 1996: 115). She thus distances herself from conventional liberal theory's critique of individualism as inhibiting political friendship, such as the communitarians for example, and views this doctrine as one of the most important expressions of political friendship in modern times (Schwarzenbach 1996: 114). Her position on the necessity of individualism and individual rights is well captured when she writes that

... by guaranteeing to each individual – simply on the basis of his or her humanity – a basic set of rights (including due process of law, etc.), and, further, in the repeated effort to uphold these rights and to see them realized in practice, citizens acknowledge and express their general concern and goodwill toward the interests of each

particular individual in the concrete. A doctrine of individual rights, far from revealing mere conflict or indifference between citizens, may be seen to embody a fundamental regard – if not love – for the special interests of every human being (Schwarzenbach 1996: 114).

The development of free-market economies led to the exponential expansion of market relations. The instrumental activities that underlie these relations are not only a celebration of free labour, but are almost exclusively dedicated to productivity. According to Schwarzenbach (1996: 111), this production model changed traditional notions on the value of citizens in the sense that the physical production of goods became more important than productive praxis or what could be called reproductive activity. The latter, which includes occupations such as those of churchmen, physicians, men of letters and menial servants, were denigrated by thinkers such as Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant and John Locke as the lowest form of productive labour. Aristotle, by contrast, glorified such reproductive activity or praxis as ends that lead to the reproduction of flourishing relations among citizens. These activities promote political friendship and their receding into the background against the rise of the modern productive state and its market-driven economies that explains to Schwarzenbach why, among others, *philia politike* has nearly completely disappeared from view (Schwarzenbach 1996: 111-2).

However, Schwarzenbach (1995: 116) also notes that it is often overlooked that the instrumentalist activity of the free market does not take into account that the parallel development of liberal views which include those of thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith and John Rawls not only emphasised liberty and productivity, but also contained elements which provided for ways in which citizens could express and demonstrate materially their new-found respect for each other. Measures such as the provision of public services and free-market distributive mechanisms, which found expression in the practice of market economies themselves, albeit with varying degrees of success, not only promoted the freedom of the individual, but made some provision for the well-being of individuals to pursue liberty itself. The classical liberal doctrine and the practice of free-market economies are therefore not opposed to citizens extending respect

to one another, even though its primary emphasis is on production and productivity. The excessive preoccupation, both theoretical and practical, with production, and not reproductive praxis, thus explains why *philia politike* has faded into the background, but it does not in any way prohibit its use through a renewed appraisal of the value of reproductive praxis itself (cf Schwarzenbach 1996: 116).

Schwarzenbach's drawing attention to and rectifying misunderstanding about *philia politike* is as important as her assessment that its pursuance is not, in principle, ruled out by size, as well as moral, legal and economic conditions that have shaped and that characterise the modern liberal state. However, to realise this she requires the revitalisation of ethical reproductive *praxis* and simultaneously an understanding that the state is not only "the organized use of legitimate force for the purposes of maintaining law and order (with penalties of death) and a military prepared for war, and with the central goal of policing citizens' productive competition", it "includes something more; the state proper includes the customs, manners, and moral consciousness of a people historically united together in a tradition" (Schwarzenbach 1996: 118). To this end she develops a comprehensive feminist theory (cf also Schwarzenbach 2009) aimed at realising the Aristotelian notion of *philia politike* in which she argues for a more important role of women in imparting practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in line with the second understanding of the state outlined earlier. Although her feminist theory and measures to implement it at the practical level cannot be pursued in greater detail in this article, it may suffice to state that it challenges the masculinist and patriarchal fraternity that inform the first understanding of the production-centred state referred to earlier. Quite paradoxically a political role for women was denied in ancient Greece due to prejudices of that time, yet Aristotle praised the significance of reproductive *praxis* – a mirror-image of modern times in which women in liberal states are emancipated, but where the significance of unpaid reproductive *praxis* is, according to Schwarzenbach, wholly undervalued. Her feminist theory argues that the historical role of mothers and women in imparting values of love, care virtue and good character to children and others should supplement the utilitarian

thinking and moral deductivism that dominate in liberal states. Like Aristotle, Schwarzenbach (1996: 125) regards the ethical and moral nature of reproductive *praxis* or *phronesis* for which women are uniquely equipped as a result of their historical roles in love, mothering and care as practical reason about human actions and particularly the human good (*cf* also *NE VI*). Unlike the calculation and deduction of *episteme* and the skill of *techne* (the modes of thinking that inform the male-production centred state) practical reason requires from its practitioner the attribute of moral virtue (*arête*); it is not a science, but cognitive experience gained through the “habituation of the emotions (*pathos*)” which can directly affect our notions about fellow citizens. This Aristotelian mode of moral reasoning does not equate moral judgments with rational decisions, and it does not regard emotions, and especially sympathy as devoid of content unaffected by sensuous or emotional content (Schwarzenbach 1996: 125, *cf* also *NE VI& II*).

The large-scale expansion of education in reproductive *praxis* from traditional private and household spheres, and instituting it in the social and political spheres of the public domain is a necessary condition for creating the civic *vinculum* which, according to Schwarzenbach, will transform *philia politike* from possibility into actuality. Although this article covers only the cognitive grounds of her project, it may be mentioned that one of the important practical measures that she envisages to this end is the introduction of mandatory universal civic service for young adults as a countermeasure for the exclusive patriarchy of masculinist military training in the modern state (Schwarzenbach 2009: chapter 7). On her friendship project she writes:

If I am correct, beginning to take the model of reproductive *praxis* seriously points to an ancient capacity or disposition we can now demand of the modern citizen as well: the political capacity – at first abstract – for friendship with fellow humans. Aristotle explicitly describes such a capacity as the prerequisite for the proper functioning of *phronesis* (knowing the human good) as well as for the well-ordered society itself. Such is an emotional capacity which must be nurtured and cultivated from its earliest days, educated to function in the concrete circumstances of everyday life. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, Aristotle directs his legislators to attend

more to friendship between citizens than even to justice itself. Let us not forget, however, that my attempt is here to revive Aristotle's view within the context of the modern period. I am thus referring to a capacity for political friendship (or goodwill) which must now be educated to operate in the midst of multicultural differences between citizens, and of one which has incorporated the modern principle of universal respect deep within it (Schwarzenbach 1996: 125).

3.3 Arendt on the realisation of possibility-actuality as possibility

Although the idea of rejuvenating an ancient form of moral reasoning was introduced in the preceding section, this interpretation of Aristotle requires an understanding of and thinking about public morality, or its absence, in view of the dilemma that a free society can survive neither with nor without a commitment to the good and moral virtue as outlined earlier. The moral differences that distance modern times from ancient conceptions of political friendship in the polis also require an understanding of the latter in terms of the former, rather than uncritically or unwittingly imputing thinking about the polis to political thinking and the circumstances of modern times. Such an understanding, albeit controversial in many respects, that accounts for the nature of contemporary political morality and how it relates to political friendship can be found in the thought of Hannah Arendt. Although she never squarely and systematically addresses the issue of political morality or political friendship in a book or treatise, many passages of her thoughts on these matters can be found in her publications and lecture notes. It is worth noting that at one stage she seriously considered giving her *magnum opus*, *The human condition* (1958), the title of *Amor mundi* (love for the world, her notion of political friendship), and that in this book she positively views Aristotle's notion of *philia politike* (political friendship) as an important political concept (cf Chiba 1995: 507). Chiba (1995: 521) suggests that the difference between Arendt's *amor mundi* and Aristotle's *philia politike* is more a matter of scope than substance in writing that

“Arendt’s notion of *philia* should be understood not as a denial of the Aristotelian *philia* but rather as broadening and elevating it to a more genuinely political form, so that it may cope with differences, diversities, and heterogeneities among friends”.

For her ideas on political morality Arendt was severely criticised (cf Kateb 1983, Elshtain 1981, Pitkin 1981) for portraying modern political morality as devoid of content or purpose without any internal imitations on moral standards (Jacobitti 1991: 281, 290). In recent years, however, some of her interpreters (for example, Jacobitti 1991 and Chiba 1995) have drawn her thoughts on political morality and how it relates to political friendship together more systematically. Arendt’s ideas on political morality, written in the second half of the previous century, attest to a remarkable historical insight that surpassed the understanding of her own times. Arendt’s vision of a politics of freedom finds expression in her ideas on *amor mundi* (love for the world), one of numerous themes in her work which may in this instance be described as “the power of promise which establishes a body politic in the unseen future” (Chiba 1995: 506), a theme that in most respects corresponds to the second interpretation of *philia politike*. To understand why she views the actuality of political friendship as possibility it is imperative to first trace her disillusionment with political morality in modern times and the reasoning which brings her to an individualistic morality that implies the possibility of political friendship, not its actuality.

We start with Jacobitti’s (1991: 281) very skilled account of Arendt’s thought on political morality when she writes that

... Arendt took very seriously the possibility that moral philosophy may be impossible in the modern world. She began with the challenge posed by cultural relativism and by the Nietzschean claim that, with the ‘death of God,’ all traditional morality dies as well. Arendt accepted Nietzsche’s view that the entire Western moral tradition from Plato on is dead beyond recovery.

According to Arendt, the transcendental truths of Platonic and Christian philosophy acquired “either because of a vision beheld by the ‘eye of the mind’ or a voice heard by ‘ear’ of conscience” were, in the Western moral and political tradition, imposed by the

enlightened few on the many who did not have such experiences by way of “belief in eternal rewards and punishments” (Jacobitti 1991: 282-3, *cf* also Chiba 1995: 535, Arendt 1965: 024631). These truths, which Arendt regarded as nothing more than a myth, were adopted by the Christian Church at the end of the Roman period, transformed into the trinity of religion, an authority of rewards and punishments that buttressed the Church throughout the Middle Ages as the only seat of moral and political authority. This authority started to erode in the early modern period with Luther, the scientific ideas of the Enlightenment and Cartesian doubt. In Arendt’s opinion, Nietzsche only registered the logical outcome of a long dying process when he announced the death of God and the end of all morality in Europe. For her the notion of a Judeo-Christian transcendental morality with standards against which human conduct could be gauged came to an end during the twentieth century when the majority of populations in Western countries lost their belief in the idea of an afterlife. According to Arendt, this introduced the possibility of understanding morality only in an etymological sense as *mores* “the customs, manners, and habits which mold behavior in every society and which, of course, are relative to time and place” (Jacobitti 1991: 283). With this substitution of values that were not “backed by transcendent principles or divine sanction” for moral standards which were “understood to be simply ‘values’ [...] good because people valued them” Arendt had little patience; “they were as easily interchanged as money” (Jacobitti 1991: 283) and powerless in the face of totalitarian movements such as Nazism. For Arendt:

This to her was the basic moral experience of the twentieth century. That respectable bourgeois Germans had been able to switch to Nazi moral standards in the 1930s and back again after the war was understandable only in terms of the basic exchangeability of moral principles once they become reduced to mere ‘values’ (Jacobitti 1991: 283, *cf* also Arendt 1965: 024583f & 1978 I: 177).

Jacobitti (1991: 283-4) explains that in the absence of transcendent absolutes and the interest-driven interchangeability of traditional mores, Arendt directed her search to finding moral experience of a secular non-transcendent ground for moral action

in human conduct as well as in literary and philosophical writings. She found such moral experience in both human behaviour and meditations. There were undeniably persons who, for example, opposed the excesses of Nazism and Stalinism under the pressure of social *mores* and who acted against evil without recourse to transcendent principles. In such a refusal to acquiesce with evil, Arendt sought an inner moral standard common to all people since examples of such behaviour were not related to class, education levels, occupations or other sociological groupings. Arendt associated this capacity to tell right from wrong, of not being able to live with one's own past, and doing so without appealing to *mores* or transcendent values with thinking in a special way:

These basic moral propositions, she argued, have two noteworthy features. First they seem to be dictates of reason, but they cannot be proven. If one asks, why should I take the moral point of view, why should I love my neighbor as myself or suffer rather than do evil, reason has no satisfactory answer. Second, each of these propositions appeals back to the self, to what is good for the self—which seems paradoxical in light of the common view that the essence of morality is unselfishness and that self-love is sinful (Jacobitti 1991: 284, cf also Arendt 1965: 024564, 024566, 024586).

In Arendt's view, it is Socrates who best exemplifies an understanding of basic moral propositions. His claims in the *Gorgias* that "it is better to suffer than to do evil"; that "it is better for an evildoer that he be punished than to go unpunished" and that "the tyrant who does what he pleases with impunity is unhappy" vividly illustrates the real reason for not doing wrong, namely "that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, that it is impossible to live with a criminal, especially if he happens to be you" (Jacobitti 1991: 284-5). These moral propositions appeal to self-interest, a wish not to be in disharmony with oneself, because without internal harmony one cannot engage in dialogue with oneself. This "is only possible if one is friends with oneself" (Jacobitti 1991: 285, cf also Arendt 1965: 024612f & 1978 I: 180-2, 187-8). The decision to be in harmony with oneself is thus a hypothetical imperative for thinking, it is self-ish being in one's own interest, but it is entirely up to the individual whether such a choice is made. Thinking under such conditions is

selfish, but not necessarily devoid of moral content. Not thinking implies that the reasons and justifications for human action are not questioned, while thinking enables one to decide with which things one cannot live. This, however, does not take one very far, and Arendt was aware of this. It leaves that which one can live with to individual judgment, and only for those who care to think; it remains selfish with no responsibility to others or to take public action to correct wrongs (Jacobitti 1991: 285-6, *cf* also Arendt 1965: 024594). Thus, Jacobitti explains Arendt's verdict on Socrates. Although Socrates best understood thinking about basic moral propositions, such thinking itself fell short of a responsibility to others and a responsibility to act in terms of such thinking. It introduces the possibility of doing wrong to fight wrong:

This was the basis of Arendt's claim that Socrates' case was irrelevant to the issue of civil disobedience. The civil disobedient, she claimed, acts for a public purpose, not for the sake of her or his own conscience. From the perspective of the world, there may be more to be said for Callicles' viewpoint in the *Gorgias* – that since in this world one must do wrong or suffer it, the sensible person had better do it – than for Socrates' response that for the sake of one's own internal harmony, one had better suffer wrong (Jacobitti 1991: 286, *cf* also Arendt 1969: 58-64 & 1978 I: 182):

Arendt's claim that Machiavelli was the only moral thinker in the secular tradition who took seriously the possibility that if one does not fight evil with evil, to resist evil is an amplification of Callicles' viewpoint explained earlier. According to Jacobitti, this has unfortunately caused much misunderstanding of Arendt's view on the relation between thinking and action, and how their interrelation mediates via virtue and friendship within the private and the public domains, respectively. She claims that an "unwritten political morality" can be inferred from the various works of Arendt that more clearly reflects "the relation between public and private than she ever worked out explicitly". This consists, "first, of an account of moral constraints on politics and, second, of an account of friendship as the virtue or relationship which mediates between the public and private spheres" (Jacobitti 1991: 286-7, *cf* also Arendt 1982: 50). Two constraints in the form of moral principles emerge from the very

activity of politics itself, namely the keeping of promises and the forgiving of transgressions. The keeping of promises (the notion of *pacta sunt servanda*) is essential for the stabilisation of political institutions and indeed all human behaviour, while the forgiving of transgressions is indispensable if an endless historical cycle of revenge and hatred is to be broken (cf Chiba 1995: 536). Thinking in the private realm that translates into action in the public realm requires courage to emerge from safety and anonymity to assume responsibility and be part of political processes with unpredictable outcomes, but such courage must be tempered by moderation. For Arendt moderation is the virtue *par excellence* in politics. This virtue qualifies and limits the courage of action and especially *hubris*, the temptation *par excellence* of political actors. Moderation implies that one's action be kept within limits, that political action never be based on moral absolutes or a pretence to do good for others since one knows what is good for , turning them into mere objects (Jacobitti 1991: 287, cf also Arendt 1958: 236-47, 35-6, 191 & 1963: 79, 104):

Political action involves and must involve respect for the other with whom one acts and a willingness to consider and talk about the other's point of view. This is to acknowledge what Arendt called the plurality of the human condition, which is, for her, probably the most fundamental moral limitation on politics. Arendt linked this idea of respect for others with the Aristotelian virtue of friendship. 'Respect,' Arendt said, 'not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politike*, is a kind of "friendship" without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us' (Jacobitti 1991: 287-8, cf also Arendt 1958: 175-6, 243).

From the preceding overview it should be clear that Arendt takes friendship from its moral and religio-ethical context and transforms it into a secular principle for constituting the plurality of the public world. The inherent political constraints of courage, moderation and respect open up the vision of *amor mundi* (an extension of *philia politike*), a mode of linking together, but simultaneously opening up public spaces between both friends in the private sphere and citizens in the public sphere. The plurality of the human condition requires that both friends and citizens be united and separated, not unlike people who are united and separated when sitting around

a table (cf Chiba 1995: 509, Jacobitti 1991: 288). According to Arendt, the notions of “fraternity (*fraternitas*) and compassion (*compassio*) do not qualify as political, since they do not do justice to the plurality and diversity of the public world” (Chiba 1995: 512). Public pressures such as poverty and the fear of persecution may, for example, drive people into the anonymity, safety and intimacy of the private. However, Arendt does not view the solidarity and brotherhood which often results from these circumstances among the affected as friendship or citizenship at all. Sentiment and emotion which bond people together in such circumstances fall short of being a “proto-public sphere” where friends are bound together not only by commonalities, but also by the plurality of differences. Refugees represent a tragic example of people who do not experience public spaces between them in either the private or the public spheres (cf Jacobitti 1991: 289, Chiba 1995: 513). In Arendt’s thought the acceptance of “thou” springs not from the love for God. Neither is it the “self-love” that characterises the citizens in Augustine’s *Civitas Terrena* that makes it possible; it is the “love” of the world which for Arendt means

... ‘the spring of action’ which restrains the fluctuation, contingencies, and arbitrariness of the will by giving ‘weight’ and ‘permanence’ to the soul, so that a sustained commitment to the world may become possible. One’s readiness to live together with those who are different, diversified, and heterogeneous, is the essential ingredient of *amor mundi*. If judgment, as we have seen, actualizes the spirit of disinterested *amor mundi* of citizens as ‘spectators’ within a concrete historical reality, the act of willing can be said in turn to embody the dedicated spirit of *amor mundi* based on the existential initiatives of the same citizens as ‘actors’ (Chiba 1995: 534).

For Arendt, as indeed it was for the ancient Greeks, the essence of friendship lies in discourse, a “unique discursive reality”. Constant talk is what united citizens in the *polis*. By contrast to intimate talk about oneself among friends, the converse that unites citizens is talk about the common world which remains inhuman unless citizens constantly talk about it. In such discussions the world is humanised by what is human in our inner self and, in the process, citizens learn to be human (Chiba 1995: 522).

3.4 The civic *vinculum* in Schwarzenbach and Arendt

The interest that Aristotle's notion of *philia politike* has inspired with Sybil Schwarzenbach and Hannah Arendt differ in many respects, but share an underlying commonality, the search for a civic *vinculum*. The differences in their respective responses can be attributed to a number of considerations. The differences begin with the fact that they do not subscribe to the same meaning of Aristotle's *philia politike*.

As pointed out earlier, the meanings that have been inferred from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Eudemean* are contested. In the case of Schwarzenbach and Arendt the different meanings ascribed to are clearly evident in the former scholar who understands *philia politike* as a possibility that can be actualised in the near future whereas Arendt's preference for a stronger teleological understanding of *philia politike* is a possibility that can unfold somewhere in the unseen future. Schwarzenbach views the actualisation of *philia politike* as a means to moderate and counteract, among others, religious and racial tensions as well as rising levels of xenophobia and chauvinistic nationalisms found in many contemporary liberal states. In *philia politike* she finds an individualistic moral virtue that does not reflect the moral justifications associated with the centripetal and divisive tendencies that she wants to counteract. For Schwarzenbach the individualistic prerequisites for the introduction of *philia politike* are, in principle, already present in liberal states. These include aspects such as religious toleration, private spheres of morality and the legalised sets of human rights contained in the constitutions of liberal states. These, in fact, form the basis for an impartial concern with morality in the public sphere similar to that found in Aristotle's *philia politike*. For her a civic *vinculum* based on individual virtue, the excellence of individual character (*arête*) can take root under these conditions, though it will require a concerted effort. As outlined earlier, such an effort will require a greater acknowledgement and role of what reproductive *praxis* can contribute to the shaping of individual character. Arendt's search for a civic *vinculum* is similarly concerned with moral considerations. In her various works she goes to great lengths to uncover the dangers of religious morality that is used for political purposes, as well as

collective *mores* and conventions that are powerless in the face of political pressures. She is probably the philosopher who has best exposed the potential evil that can be practised under the moral banner of *Volk*, ethnicity, nationalism and religion. Her disdain for non-individualistic and collective forms of morality is evident in her search for individual morality that emanates from thinking, and how courage as conditioned by moderation can place it in the public sphere as a form of non-intimate friendship without closeness and with a regard for the “other” which the space of the world puts between citizens. In essence, Arendt conceives of an individualistic civic *vinculum* consisting of a set of secular principles that opens up space and respect for the “other”, but which simultaneously binds them together as citizens by virtue of respect for differences and a shared love of the heterogeneity of the world. Unlike Schwarzenbach, however, she views such a civic *vinculum* as a future possibility and not as a possibility that can be actualised in the near future.

Viewed in terms of the moral paradox that a free society can survive neither with nor without an account of the good and moral virtue, an individualistic virtuous bond of reciprocity such as Aristotle’s *philia politike* holds an important implication. This implication is that the notions of an Aristotelian civic *vinculum*, as articulated by Schwarzenbach and Arendt, appear to be an account of virtue that to a large extent avoids and bypasses the moral pitfalls associated with moral justifications of a collective nature based on family, ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion, or a shared origin of humanity. This is due to the fact that moral virtue for the purposes of a civic *vinculum* is assigned to the basic constituents of political life, the character of the individual. Exploring a civic bond of such nature warrants serious consideration in liberal states. While the development of public bonds of friendship based on the aforementioned categories in plural liberal states seem to be an unavoidable fact in modern liberal states, the virtues of *philia politike* are not in principle incompatible with these and may prove to be an indispensable element in restraining the divisive tendencies of the former.

4. Conclusion

The appeal of Aristotle's notion of *philia politike* has captivated the attention of prominent thinkers throughout history and the lure of attaining virtuous friendship of a political nature has endured for over two millennia. The virtues contained in it are not incompatible with contemporary liberal theory and the modern liberal state and its paradoxical moral dilemma of not being able, at the expense of its liberal nature, to subscribe to a morality based on ethnicity, race, nation, the *Volk*, religion or other sociological constituents of its plural nature. Although notions of friendship based on virtues and morals of the constituent categories of plural liberal states may indeed find successful expression at a sub-national level, the very nature of liberal states as being legally or factually individualistic suggests that citizenship of a friendly nature should be pursued on the basis of the latter. Moreover, the active pursuance and amplification of different moralities and factional bonds of friendship within the liberal state contain strong divisive forces that could potentially endanger cohesion and promote further fragmentation. Of course, these conditions of plurality differ vastly from state to state. Yet, attaining virtuous political friendship at the national level, as distinct from the solidarity of fraternity or bonds of political friendship among groups at levels lower than that of the state, may be extremely difficult, if not impossible to realise in the full sense of the word. However, this does not imply that Aristotle's *philia politike* as contained in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and its contemporary theoretical corollaries must be discarded. We may never know the exact extent to which Aristotle's notion of virtuous friendship is an analytical treatise, a historical account of the matter, or even whether the anecdote attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius in *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers* that "there are no friends" is indeed true, and whether Aristotle's alleged nostalgia of a virtuous past is to be understood as a vision of a righteous and friendly body politic in the unseen future. Schwarzenbach's understanding of *philia politike* as realising what is possible, and Arendt's understanding of how its possibility

could unfold are two of the many insightful responses to the rich legacy of political thought contained in the *Nicomachean* ethics. We concur with Bryan (2009: 773) in restating that we

... do not 'use' political theory, or turn to it to solve our problems, but to think through who we have become and are becoming, to think through what we are doing when we speak thusly. And thus perhaps the only thing we stand to learn is our own nostalgia, or own placelessness, and that, when we learn it, it is something very important to have learned. In learning what we no longer have, we also learn what will count for us as some kind of possibility of and for politics in our time.

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