



Beyond Justice: Friendship in the City

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AN INVETERATE MAP COLLECTOR, I COLLECT MAPS OF THE CITIES I CHERISH: ST. Petersburg, the city Peter the Great envisioned as a Venice along the Baltic, despite the difference in latitude; Cambridge, complete with tow-paths and Roman roads; Tübingen, with its cobbled medieval streets climbing into a fortress overlooking the Neckar River. There are maps of less romantic cities as well, like the one of Oakland, a city condemned by Gertrude Stein to urban oblivion with a lapidary dismissal: "There is no *there* there." Whatever Stein was looking for, a map of Oakland is still useful: it contains subway grids and streetplans; it delineates neighborhoods and detours. It shows where the water begins.

Yet, maps are not peopled. The cartographer's pen masks the citizens of the city.¹ Citizens walk the city streets, work its towpaths, navigate its canals, ply its subway stations, and panhandle its corners. Citizens establish or dismantle a sense of urban community and place: the sense that a *there* is there.

I propose to create maps of a different kind, peopled maps, maps that will survey the terrain of citizenship in this end of the millennium. I would first like to examine ambient notions of citizenship in a liberal democracy such as the United States, then shift to peopled maps drawn by other citizens: one from an often-exiled citizen of Athens in the fourth century B.C. and another from a citizen without a city, a German Jew, born in the Königsberg of East Prussia in 1906 and natu-

¹Cf. Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 92-93.

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ralized as a citizen of the United States in 1951. Informed by these “imagined communities,”² I conclude with a proposal for reinventing citizenship as civic friendship.

I. CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF CITIZENSHIP

Those who have never stepped into the worlds imagined by Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* or Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* will find civic friendship unfamiliar terrain. Friendship seems antithetical to all discussions of citizenship, and when friendship enters the public square of a liberal democracy, it is outlawed as “nepotism.” Friendship is a relationship relegated to the private realm; it has little or no place in the public sphere. When pressed to address the subject of friendship, our minds turn as blank as the greeting cards in that section of card shops labeled “FRIENDSHIP.” Our own silence on the subject stands in sharp contrast to the civic passion surrounding friendship in the writings of Aristotle and Arendt.

Our silence is the legacy of liberal political philosophy, which has its roots in the seventeenth century and the rise of capitalism. Reacting against feudalism and the political philosophy of patriarchalism (John Filmer), it called for democracy, equality, and political liberty in the realm of politics. It called for a shift from land-based aristocracies to wealth-based bourgeois classes in the realm of economics. Yet, despite such uplifting ideals, liberalism had a dark side. Sheldon Wolin dubs it “a philosophy of sobriety, born in fear, nourished by disenchantment, and prone to believe that the human condition was and was likely to remain one of pain and anxiety.”³

What emerges from liberal philosophy is the abstract individual. In reaction to the power created by land and family, liberalism offers a portrait of the human person as one free from communities and driven by desire. Since all people equally possess such desire, there is competition among them, as they strive to accumulate, succeed, and fulfill themselves. The background for social and political life is competition and strife.

In liberal philosophy, then, human beings are not by nature social or political creatures. Not nature but necessity drives human community. It serves two purposes: mutual protection—and in a highly combative, competitive situation, this meant protection from one another!—and mutual satisfaction of desire for life, liberty, and pursuit of property. Association is accomplished, then, not by instinctive belongingness, but by contract. Individuals agree to affiliate and stipulate rights and their attendant duties. The contract furthers individual accumulation, keeps people from infringing on another’s right to acquire, and provides appropriate punishments and rewards in the interest of domestic tranquillity. The terms of a contract delimit human interactions, and these terms are stated in the language of

²Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991): “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6).

³Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960) 293-294.

the marketplace – not surprising, considering where and how liberal political philosophy gets its start.

Government in liberal societies emerges as the guarantor of the individual security and welfare of those who create it; no common good transcends and draws together the respective goods of individual citizens. Indeed, liberal societies do not speak the language of “goods,” “good,” or “common good”: language of rights dominates. The citizen’s primary loyalty, then, is a vertical loyalty to the institutions of government which proffer protection and security from other citizens.⁴ Like-minded citizens might form horizontal coalitions to promote mutually beneficial projects and proposals, but the interests of interest-group politics strive for mutual benefits, not common goods. Because the neighbor exists as a potential threat to my own carefully constructed cosmos of rights, the horizontal dimension of citizenship disappears.

Representative government further augments the verticality of citizenship in liberal societies. Citizens regularly alienate their responsibility to speak and act in the public realm, allowing others to speak and act on their behalf. The practice impressed an early visitor to the United States. In 1836 Alexis de Tocqueville wrote:

There is no need to drag their rights away from citizens of this type; they themselves voluntarily let them go. They find it a tiresome inconvenience to exercise political rights which distract them from industry. When required to elect representatives, to support authority by personal service, or to discuss public business together, they find they have not the time.⁵

An ideal of participatory democracy becomes the practice of representative democracy, creating a kind of passive citizenship. Michael Walzer calls these passive citizens “citizen-alien.”⁶

Any appreciation for civic friendship vanishes, a situation sharply apparent to the crowd of latter-day Tocquevilles writing in *Habits of the Heart*. Marvelling at the analytical ease with which Aristotle discusses friendships based on pleasure, utility, and virtue, the authors comment:

What we [late twentieth-century United States of Americans] least understand is the third component, shared commitment to the good, which seems to us quite extraneous to the idea of friendship. In a culture dominated by expressive and utilitarian individualism, it is easy for us to understand the components of pleasure and usefulness, but we have difficulty seeing the point of considering friendship in terms of common moral commitments.⁷

⁴Cf. Michael Walzer, *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970) esp. 203-225, where Walzer elaborates vertical and horizontal dimensions of citizenship to describe the relationship between citizen and state (vertical) and the relationship among citizens (horizontal).

⁵Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, transl. G. Lawrence, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) 2:147; cited in R. Krouse, “‘Classical’ images of democracy in America: Madison and Tocqueville,” in *Democratic Theory and Practice*, ed. G. Duncan (London: Cambridge University, 1983) 70.

⁶Walzer, *Obligations*, 210.

⁷Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985) 115.

II. ARISTOTLE ON CIVIC FRIENDSHIP

Aristotle places citizen-friends, not citizen-alien, in his peopled map of the city, the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁸ Neither an assumption of abstract individualism nor a celebration of the *vita contemplativa* focuses his political cartography. Aristotle trains his attention on the social and political nature of human life.

For the final and perfect good seems to be self-sufficient. However, we define something as self-sufficient not by reference to the "self" alone. *We do not mean a man who lives his life in isolation*, but a man who also lives with parents, children, a wife, and friends and fellow citizens generally, since man is by nature a social and political being. (1097b7-11; emphasis mine)

If self-sufficiency characterizes a good life, then it is a communal, not a solitary, self-sufficiency.⁹ Aristotle locates the good life in the bustle of city and populates the city with friends.

Civic friends come in all varieties. As noted, Aristotle delineates three kinds of friendship: those based on pleasure, those based on usefulness, and friendships among people "who are alike in excellence and virtue" (1056a10-1056b33). He regards friendships based on pleasure and usefulness as "imperfect" friendships. "Perfect" friendships form among good people; these friendships are also pleasurable and useful in addition (1156b15).

Realism pervades the discussion of perfect friendship. Women and men of virtue surface only occasionally in the city's moral landscape; perfect friendships are rare. Moreover, Aristotle restricts them in number, should the opportunity even arise. Musing on quantity, he prescribes "as many as are sufficient for living together," adding, "it would even seem to be impossible to be an intimate friend of many" (1171a10). The further stipulation that perfect friends live together reduces the number even more (1171b30). The scale and structure of this relationship make it seem an unlikely candidate for civic friendship; yet, without it civic life would wither. The city embraces all three sorts of friendships, but, as I will argue, it requires perfect friendship for its flourishing.

Various internal characteristics mark friendship: equality, respect, and justice. All three sorts of friendship share a concern for equality, but only perfect friendship adds to this respect and justice.

1. *Equality*. Friendships based on pleasure connect people who are equally pleasing to one another. Time, gravity, and the capriciousness of human nature threaten friendships that are *only* based on pleasure, making this a fragile and often temporary alliance. But because beauty and pleasure abound in the good life, these friendships have their place in the city. Friendships based on usefulness connect

⁸All of the following quotations are taken from Martin Ostwald's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).

⁹Martha Nussbaum makes this point in her book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986) 344.

people who are equally advantageous to one another. Misfortune, good luck or ill, shifting needs and desires: all these disrupt a utilitarian equilibrium, destabilizing this alliance. But because need and luck characterize the human condition, these friendships also have their place in the city. Friendships based on virtue unite moral equals, people "alike in excellence." Thus, while friends of this last sort do please one another, there is latitude for occasional displeasure. While friends of this sort aid each other, there is room for disappointment. The constancy of character in these friendships stabilizes this connection over time and gravity, over misfortune and shifting needs. Thus, all three friendships depend on equality.

2. *Respect.* Friendships based on usefulness and on pleasure have the self primarily in view. When the other no longer pleases me, when the other no longer advantages me, connections sever and friendships fray. Only perfect friendship cultivates genuine respect for the other. Perfect friends look beyond what is good for me and strive for what is good *for the other*. A whimsical example states this strongly. Aristotle is analyzing whether or not one can befriend, for instance, a cabernet! He decides against this, because he finds it odd to wish for the good of inanimate objects: "It would be ridiculous to wish for the good of wine: if one wishes it at all, it is that the wine may keep, so that we can have it ourselves" (1155b28).¹⁰ Perfect friendship recognizes the friend as other, not as an extension of the self. We might designate this recognition respect.

3. *Justice.* Perfect friends are "alike in excellence," but Aristotle states boldly the excellence they share. Perfect friends share "a view of what is just" (1159b30). This vision makes perfect friendship of critical civic relevance and brings it prominently into the public square. Not justice, but friendship binds the city together.

Friendship also seems to hold states [the Greek city-state: the *polis*] together, and lawgivers apparently devote more attention to it than to justice. For concord seems to be something similar to friendship, and concord is what they most strive to attain, while they do their best to expel faction, the enemy of justice. When people are friends, they have no need of justice, but when they are just, they need friendship in addition. (1155a22-24)

Here the city links justice and friendship, with the haunting suggestion that the remedy for injustice is not justice, but friendship.

Earlier in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines the aim of justice as effecting equality and addressing inequality. Here his concern for equality is abstract and impersonal, and he analyzes the roles of geometric proportion, arithmetic progression, and reciprocal proportion in achieving justice. One is impressed as much with the lifelessness of his thought as with its precision. Later, when Aristotle turns to friendship, his concern for equality is more personal, and he focuses

¹⁰Some ethicists would argue that inanimate objects do have a good of their own and that we humans must strive for it. In an ecological sense, humans ought to extend friendship and respect to the non-human creation. An excellent example is Eleanor Humes Haney's seminal article "What is Feminist Ethics? A Proposal for Continuing Discussion," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8/1 (1980).

on the role of friendship in effecting equality and addressing inequality.¹¹ Injustice in the city demands something beyond justice, and Aristotle calls it friendship.

In considering the social injustices of poverty, the biological injustices of age, the blind injustices of misfortune he talks not about justice, but friendship.

People would not choose to live without friends even if they had all other goods....In poverty and all other kinds of misfortune people believe that their only refuge consists in their friends. Friends help the young avoid error; to the elderly they give the care and help needed to supplement the failing powers of action which infirmity brings in its train; and to those in their prime they give the opportunity to perform noble actions....Friends enhance our ability to think and to act. (1155a5-15)

These familiar urban situations require friendships of all kinds and degrees of perfection. For imperfect friendships a civic cost-benefits analysis comes into play. Even relationships between people who are not equals can be calculated to advantage both parties; reciprocity creates a rough equality among dissimilar citizens. The elderly help the young avoid error; the young, in turn, give them care. Citizen-friends aid victims of misfortune; unlucky citizen-friends, in turn, give others an opportunity "to think and to act."

For perfect friends, however, civic responsibility goes beyond the calculus of advantages. Aristotle does not expect women and men of virtue to befriend everyone in the city: he has already said that is both undesirable and impossible. But the intimate friendships of virtuous people school them in respect for another and train them in actions that may not always be pleasant or advantageous to them. Their thoughts and actions in the public realm come with ease and serve as examples to others. The civic friendship of women and men who are good enlivens the city and inspires its members.

Civic friendship of all sorts emphasizes the interdependence of citizens in public life. It articulates a horizontal understanding of citizenship, which prizes the relationship to another citizen and places that relationship at the center of civic life. In the urban arena, civic friendship does justice, effecting equality and addressing inequality.

III. HANNAH ARENDT ON CIVIC FRIENDSHIP

Hannah Arendt turns to Aristotle in her cartography of the peopled city. As a German Jew, she was a citizen of a government that wished to exterminate her. Accordingly, Arendt fled Germany in 1933 for France; she fled France in 1941 for the United States and was naturalized in 1951. Vertical definitions of citizenship simply would not work for her. They presumed the luxury of a location or the unquestioning allegiance to a titular head. Arendt defines citizenship in terms of a horizontal allegiance to friends.

¹¹See his discussion of the possibility of friendships that cut across the inequalities of age (parents and children) or status (husbands and wives, who had unequal status in Greek society); 1161b11.

Arendt knows that she is fighting an uphill battle: friendship was consigned to the private realm; citizenship had degenerated into conformism and behaviorism that marked a mass society. She meets both challenges head-on. In accepting the Lessing Prize of the Free City of Hamburg in 1959, she reasserts the significance of civic friendship:

We are wont to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, in which the friends open their hearts to each other unmolested by the world and its demands....Thus it is hard for us to understand the political relevance of friendship. When, for example, we read in Aristotle that *philia*, friendship among citizens, is one of the fundamental requirements for the well-being of the City, we tend to think that he was speaking of no more than the absence of factions and civil war within it. But for the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*.¹²

One could argue that this interpretation of Aristotle is too talkative: he was quite adamant that friends help us "to think and to act." Speech does not figure into this civic equation. Yet, Arendt was a refugee; from 1933 until 1951 she was literally a citizen without a city. Her understanding of citizenship cannot presume a location; it must create it. Speech figures into her civic equation, because the exchange of words among friends, even a harsh exchange, creates public space.

Arendt's own life is full of such exchanges. In 1961 she covered Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, and her reports were published in the *New Yorker* during the winter of 1963. Particularly among the Jewish community, the reaction was explosive and riveted on two points. First, Arendt had portrayed Eichmann, not as a demon, but as a fool, a clown, a man who "could not think what he was doing."¹³ Not radical evil, but the banality of evil dominated her reportage. Friends who had expected the portrait of a moral monster were outraged; they felt she had trivialized a tragedy. Second, Arendt surfaced the collaboration of Jewish leaders in the deportation and named it "the darkest chapter of the whole dark story."¹⁴ Her evidence was disputed; her effect, however, was devastating. Some of her friends never spoke to her again.

During this time Arendt got many opportunities to put to test her own thinking on civic friendship. Speech, even confrontational speech, created the city and distinguished its citizens. Arendt stepped into this city, if only for a few hours, as she addressed an enormous and highly volatile crowd of Jewish students at Columbia University in July, 1963, as the author of the combusive articles on Eichmann. The exchange was not easy, but it was real: "Perhaps for a moment she had felt something of what her ancient Greek heroes had felt, when they spoke in

¹²Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968) 24.

¹³This is a paraphrase from Arendt's statement of her own project in *The Human Condition*: "What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958) 5.

¹⁴Quoted in Derwent May, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin, 1986) 107.

the *polis*.”¹⁵ For Arendt, the burden of civic friendship was a commitment to uneasy exchanges, where one had to stand by action with revelatory speech.

The Human Condition is Arendt’s attempt to think what she was doing and saying in this and similar exchanges throughout her life. Despite the risks she knew so well, she advocates insertion into the world through word and deed. Where one could rightly argue that the “world” of Aristotle’s city is closed off to women, children, and non-landholding men, Arendt’s world is predicated on difference. Human diversity creates the condition and the necessity for speech and action. For those who risk them, speech and action distinguish us one from another. Speech and action address the question posed to Arendt by an audience at Columbia: “Who are you?” When the one who acts also speaks, she identifies herself. When the one who speaks also acts, she shows that her words are not empty.¹⁶

Action and speech are both dangerous and fragile, as Arendt’s life had shown her. With this frank acknowledgment, her political realism comes to the fore. Danger lies in the unpredictability and irreversibility of the consequences of any action. Thus, humility accompanies even the most urgent civic cause. Unpredictability demands promise-making as its curb. Promises ensure that one will be the same today as she was yesterday. Without promises we “would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities.”¹⁷ Irreversibility demands forgiveness as its curb. Love inspires forgiveness in intimate relationships, but in the civic realm forgiveness is motivated by respect. In elaborating, Arendt turns again to Aristotle’s understanding of civic friendship.

Respect, 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.¹⁸

The respect in civic friendship restrains the dangers embedded in action and speech.

Words vanish, and deeds are soon forgotten: therein lies fragility. The city itself stands as “a kind of organized remembrance” against amnesia. The city ensures that “the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made ‘products,’ the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable.”¹⁹ In its work of preservation, the city literally re-members the citizen-friends who inhabited it.

¹⁵Ibid., 111.

¹⁶“Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words.” Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178-179.

¹⁷Ibid., 237.

¹⁸Ibid., 243.

¹⁹Ibid., 197.

It is important that this memory not be sanitized or sentimentalized. The memory a city preserves must include words and deeds that have been disastrous and even unforgiveable. The assassinations of Martin Luther King, of John and Robert Kennedy, the detonation of the first atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Stonewall riots, *Kristallnacht*: all these are continual reminders of the ongoing need for promises, for forgiveness, and for repentance. Only another person can hear promises and grant forgiveness: civic friendship bears a strong lateral allegiance.

IV. REINVENTING CITIZENSHIP AS CIVIC FRIENDSHIP

In the *Republic*, Plato hints that the ideal city exists only in speech. Does civic friendship also exist only in speech, a matter of mere “empty” words? Aristotle’s imposed exile from his own city, his admission that “perfect friendships” are rare, Arendt’s migration from nation to nation, her tough realism about the unpredictability and irreversibility of action: all suggest that civic friendship is merely a figure of speech and not municipally possible. Yet, I would like to argue that civic friendship is no rhetorical flourish, but a connection we need to cultivate.

Aristotle’s city demands face-to-face contact among the citizens, a chimera in all but the smallest of cities. But Arendt gives us a modest model of creating a city by “words [that] are not empty and deeds not brutal.”²⁰ These cities within cities sprout up wherever people come together to address inequalities. A group of muralists in San Francisco’s Mission District engages people to paint their hopes and frustrations on the bare sides of buildings, providing both a means of expression and a bright spot in the city’s fog-blanketed days. A public-school guidance counselor in Oakland, the city with “no there there,” works with street gangs trying to puncture their visions of despair with some hope. Many of the wealthy victims of the Oakland firestorm in 1991, temporarily homeless as their homes were being razed and rebuilt, discovered a renewed appreciation for those permanently without a place to live. They have volunteered and contributed to the city’s shelters. These expressions of citizenship stretch laterally across myriad differences to work toward projects of finite freedom.

A consideration of civic friendship might well inform us as citizens in the church. Too often churchmanship (an important word with no easy ungendered substitute) is expressed vertically as a vote of confidence in or disgust for policies and statements emanating from the *magisterium* or church headquarters. When attention is so riveted on leaders and bureaucracies, a horizontal affiliation with one’s peers is eclipsed. Horizontal responsibility to one’s peers gets lost in vertical frustration. I keep reminding disgruntled churchfolk: “Look! We are the church.” Too often pluralism and otherness terrify us in the *congregatio fidelium*: more homogeneity is expected than is humanly – or humanely! – possible. Difference of opinion amounts to heterodoxy, and I am minded of Arendt’s words to the Free

²⁰Ibid., 200.

City of Hamburg: “Nowadays, moreover, it is rare to meet people who believe they possess the truth; instead, we are constantly confronted by those who are sure that they are right.”²¹ If we could, as Arendt did, step into those harsh exchanges with equanimity and humility we might be able to accept and even embrace alterity and pluralism, we would welcome differences and demand that they are brought to a public space. If we could, like Aristotle, value the friendship that struggles with inequality, we could see the interdependence of all citizens. If we could, as Jesus suggested in the Gospel of John, live out the calling to be “friends” —not servants—of God (John 15:15), we might have a partial vision of that Good to which we are all drawn and which we see fleetingly in the faces of our friends.

²¹Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times,” 28. She cites with approbation Kafka: “It is difficult to speak the truth, for although there is only one truth, it is alive and therefore has a live and changing face.”