Friendship & Politics

Essays in Political Thought

Edited by
John von Heyking and
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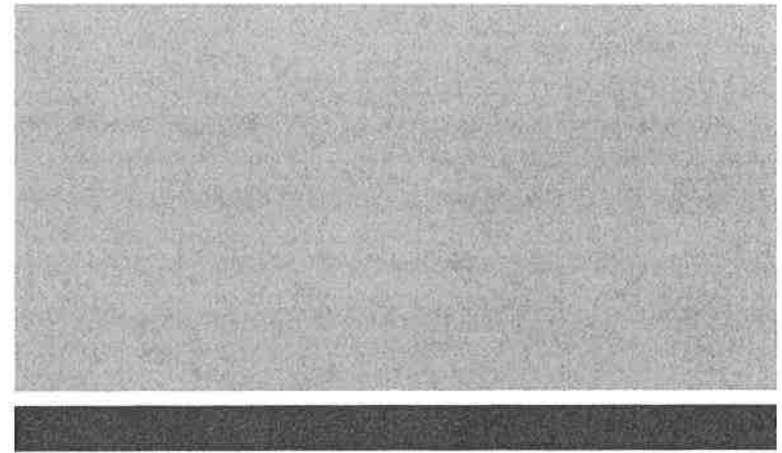

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5

A Companionship of *Caritas*

Friendship in St. Thomas Aquinas

Jeanne Heffernan Schindler

"When friendships were the noblest things in the world," Jeremy Taylor observed, "charity was little."[1] So begins Gilbert Meilaender's thoughtful examination of the theological significance of friendship. Meilaender features Taylor's observation because he thinks it captures an important shift in Western culture, specifically the shift from a classical period in which friendship commanded a high degree of respect and attention from statesmen and philosophers alike to a modern period in which friendship has a much-reduced place, meriting little attention from intellectuals. Rather than claiming a central place in political and moral philosophy, friendship has been relegated to the private sphere, becoming so much sentimental grist for the commercial mill.

How did such a state come to pass? Meilaender offers a few suggestions. The modern world, he notes, is one increasingly focused

on work. The categories of the working world dominate our self-understanding, and we, unlike the ancients, are far more apt to identify ourselves with our occupation than with our circle of friends. The modern world is also marked by an extraordinary mobility, partly demanded and reinforced by the pressures of the workplace. We go where the jobs are. Such a setting, Meilaender observes, is hardly hospitable to cultivating the kind of friendships cherished by the ancients, which only develop through time spent together. Friends, Aristotle reminds us, must eat the required pinch of salt together.[2]

Yet for Meilaender economic changes alone cannot account for the decline of interest in friendship. Philosophical changes also play a role. He notes that the preoccupation of modern ethics, so dominated by Kant, is with obligations. In such a schema, friendship, which Meilaender calls "a personal bond entered freely and without obligation,"[3] finds no place.

Most relevant for our purposes, however, is Meilaender's claim that theological factors share in the responsibility for the displacement of friendship. Citing Taylor's observation again, Meilaender appeals to a New Testament passage that lends it support. Jesus did say to the disciples, "If you love those who love you, what reward have you? . . . And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:46–47). For Meilaender this text reveals the general tendency in Christian thought for *philia* to be superseded by *agape*.

That this shift should occur is no mystery, given what Meilaender takes to be the fundamentally different character of the two. *Agape* love is non-preferential, like the love of the Father who sends the rain on the just and the unjust, whereas *philia* is precisely "a preferential bond in which we are drawn by what is attractive or choiceworthy in the friend."[4] Moreover, *philia* is a bond marked by reciprocity, while *agape* extends even to our enemies. The love of *agape* is not only broader in scope than *philia*, it is also more constant. The bond of friendship can change, but *agape* should reflect God's enduring faithfulness to the covenant.

The tension Meilaender describes is the starting point for this essay, which seeks how friendship is regarded in Thomistic theology. Mindful of Jeremy Taylor's charge ("When friendships were the noblest things in the world, charity was little"), I will focus attention on one question: Does Christian charity eclipse friendship? To consider this question in

the context of Aquinas' encounter with Aristotle seems especially promising, for on the one hand, in Aristotle we find a supremely high estimation of friendship, and on the other, in Aquinas we find a celebration of charity as the highest theological virtue.

Friendship in Aristotle

Before examining Aquinas' discussion of charity, we should recall Aristotle's extensive treatment of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. From the very start of book 8 we are impressed with the seriousness of the topic, as Aristotle calls friendship "most necessary for our life" (*Ethics*, 1155a2), noting that "no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods" (*Ethics*, 1155a5–6). Rich and poor, powerful and weak, young and old—all stand in need of friendship. Yet friendship is not only a necessary thing, but also a fine thing, having to do with love.

As Aristotle observes, we love a variety of objects, for instance, what is pleasant, useful, and good. And each of these characterizes a type of friendship. "[F]riendship," he maintains, "has three species, corresponding to the three objects of love" (*Ethics* 1156a5). What they have in common is "reciprocated goodwill" (*Ethics*, 1155b34). Each species of friendship involves conscious, "mutual loving" (*Ethics*, 1156a5) and the wishing of goods one to the other.

While they enjoy certain commonalities, the three species of friendship are not equal in quality. Those who love for utility love the other not for his own sake or in himself, but for the sake of some good he provides. Older people with a keen eye for what is useful are especially inclined to this sort of relationship. Likewise, friendships of pleasure are grounded not in the partners themselves, for themselves, but in the pleasure each takes in the other. Young people, motivated principally by their feelings, are prone to this sort of relationship.

Now while Aristotle classifies friendships of utility and pleasure as friendships, he contends that they are incomplete. Their limitation and fragility is not hard to recognize, for what is useful or pleasant to a person changes, sometimes rapidly; hence the raison d'être of the bond disappears. To call these relationships "friendships," Aristotle explains,

is to do so by way of similarity. They partake to some degree in the character of the highest form of friendship, the friendship of the virtuous, which is at once useful, pleasant, and good.

True friendship for Aristotle is a rare and precious thing. Its rarity stems from the fact that it can only be found among the virtuous—virtue itself is rare—and from the fact that it requires face-to-face companionship over time. (As Aristotle reminds us, "Though the wish for friendship comes quickly, friendship does not" [*Ethics,* 1156b32].) At the heart of complete friendship, that is, "the friendship of good people similar in virtue" (*Ethics,* 1156a7), is reciprocated goodwill "for each other's own sake" (*Ethics,* 1156b10). This provides the stability lacking in friendships of utility and pleasure: a true friend loves the other in himself, not conditionally. And he does so from a firm disposition; "loving," Aristotle is quick to point out, "would seem to be a feeling, but friendship is a state" (*Ethics,* 1158b30). But while the hallmark of this bond, unlike the others, is a common life of virtue based in decision, complete friendship is also pleasant and useful. Good people, Aristotle insists, are good and advantageous and pleasant in themselves and for the other. It is no wonder that such a form of friendship is highly praised and is desired even by "blessedly happy people [who want for nothing]" (*Ethics,* 1157b22).

Friendship in the Christian Dispensation

Now in the terms of the Gospel, Christians should be accounted the most blessed of all. But if Meilaender's initial suggestion is right, there would seem to be little room for friendship, at least as classically understood, in the life of beatitude. Charity eclipses *philia.* Meilaender's observation finds support in various Christian writers throughout the ages, from the New Testament to the modern period. As David Konstan argues in his survey of early Christian texts, the classical conception of friendship, if endorsed at all by antique Christian writers, underwent significant modification. That the elevated status of friendship found in Rome and Greece would lose its place of primacy in the early Christian period is anticipated by the fact that friendship receives relatively little attention in the New Testament—recall, by comparison, Aristotle's and Cicero's extensive treatment of the topic. Noting the rarity of the terms *philo* and *philia* in these texts, Konstan observes that "the Christian writers themselves place small emphasis on friendship among the faithful."[5] Instead of appeals to friendship to characterize the distinctive bonds between the followers of Christ, the Scriptures draw on familial and kinship metaphors; the disciples are brothers to one another, adoptive sons of the Father. Such usage abounds in both the gospels and epistles. In one of the post-resurrection narratives, for instance, John recounts Jesus' instruction to Mary Magdalen: "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). The motley crew assembled by Jesus, including such unlikely associates as tax collectors and sinners, fishermen and a Pharisee, becomes a family, united by their common adoption by the Father—they have received "the Spirit of sonship"—and their fraternal bond to Christ.[6] Thus, the early Christian community employed familial terms far more often than the language of friendship to describe relations among the followers of Jesus.

Konstan suggests several reasons for this choice, evident not only in the biblical texts but also in antique Christian writings up to the fourth century. First, he recalls that the sine qua non of classical friendship was equality—and this of several kinds. In the era of the city-states, Konstan observes, friendship was understood to obtain among men of equal social standing, participants together in the democratic life of the polis.[7] Friendship, in other words, presupposed citizenship and its activities. More importantly, however, the great distinguishing mark of friendship was equality in virtue. As is clear in Aristotle's description of the most complete friendship, friends are men who have attained that rare and estimable condition of character, *arête.* In such men one finds an internal harmony among the parts of the soul; reason is at the helm, directing the will and cultivating the proper passions. Possessed of such inner order, they engage the world oriented by a firm disposition toward goodness and a correspondingly strong will to choose it.[8] Only men of such high character, whom Aristotle describes as friends of themselves (*Ethics,* 1166a2, b28), are fit for complete friendship. In these relationships alone, unlike friendships of utility or pleasure, "reciprocal regard for the virtue of the other is what excites the amicable feelings in each of the parties."[9]

According to Konstan, for many early Christian writers this mutual regard for one another's excellence at the heart of classical friendship ran contrary to the great Christian virtue of humility. Surveying a set of texts from Paulinus of Nola, which Konstan considers typical of a main stream in Patristic thinking, he observes that Paulinus most often substituted Christian *caritas* for *amicitia* when characterizing his relationship to other believers. For Konstan, this stems from Paulinus' humility; he cannot assume the role of friend in the classical sense, for his modesty prevents his claim to equality in virtue with his peers, let alone those more advanced in the Christian life. When writing to Augustine's companion Alypius, for instance, Paulinus begins his letter with the following address: "To his lord, deserving and honored and most blessed, father Alypius, from the sinners Paulinus and Therasia."[10] Paulinus thus characterizes the relationship as that between saint and sinner and exhibits a kind of self-effacement that would be foreign to the terms of classical friendship; hence his appeal to a different kind of response from Alypius—namely, one resembling the gratuitous love of God, *agape*, not a gesture of friendship based on a positive assessment of the other's virtue. Taking Paulinus' texts as illustrative of an important current in early Christian thought, Konstan contends that Christian humility "disrupts the classical ideal of friendship based on a consciousness of virtue" and concludes that, in turn, "Christians writing in this vein present themselves to one another not as friends and equals, but as brothers united in the body of Christ, thanks to their common faith."[11]

The tension between *philia* or *amicitia* and *agape* underscored by Meilaender finds evidence in early Christian texts, but it is not limited to this period. A brief look at Søren Kierkegaard will suffice to show that this tension endures into the modern period, though different dimensions of the tension are accented. As Paul Waddell points out, the problematic feature of classical friendship for a thinker such as Kierkegaard was not its basis in equality of social standing or excellence; rather, it was the preferential character of such love that most distinguished it, indeed separated it, from Christian love. Celebrated by pagans, *philia* belongs to a world unenlightened by Gospel truth; hence it remains worldly and earth bound, in dramatic contrast to the sublimity of Christian *agape*. As Kierkegaard declares, "Christianity has thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, the love rooted in mood and inclination, preferential love, in order to establish spiritual love in its place, love to one's neighbour."[12] Everything about *philia*—its origin, nature, and end—stands in opposition to Gospel love. Rooted fundamentally in self-love, friendship rests on attraction to a particular person deemed worthy of one's attention and affection; it is by its nature preferential and exclusive and serves to benefit the self. "Consequently," Kierkegaard insists, "Christianity has misgivings about erotic love and friendship because preference in passion or passionate preference is really another form of self-love. . . . Therefore," he continues, "what paganism called love, in contrast to self-love, was preference. But if passionate preference is essentially another form of self-love, one again sees the truth in the saying of the worthy father, 'The virtues of paganism are glittering vices.'"[13] As Waddell summarizes, friendship is thus conceived as erotic, preferential, selfish, and exclusive, whereas *agape* is spiritual, obedient, other-regarding, and inclusive. With Christianity, there dawns a new kind of love that forever eclipses that most celebrated of pagan relationships.

Friendship in St. Thomas Aquinas

Evidence from the New Testament, Patristic, and modern periods indicates that Christian writers across the centuries have perceived a basic and irreconcilable tension between friendship, at least as classically understood, and Christian love. *Agape* supercedes *philia*, which the ancients prized so highly. Yet, not all Christian thinkers have held such a stark view. As David Konstan notes, while the substitution of *caritas* and *agape* for *amicitia* and *philia* was common in the early Church and Patristic eras, renowned Christian theologians, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Basil, and Augustine, favorably appeal to the terms of classical friendship, transforming them in distinctively Christian ways. This suggests that the soil of *philia* might not be inhospitable to the root of Christian love as it might first appear.

A turn to the medieval period and an examination of Aquinas on this point is illuminating and somewhat surprising, for we find in Aquinas neither a rejection nor even a diminution of friendship; rather we find friendship elevated and transformed by the order of grace. It is

elevated insofar as it takes on a supernatural character foreign to classical friendship, while it is transformed by divine power into a means of enjoying eternal beatitude.

The first clue that indicates the enduring value of friendship in the Thomistic schema is in Aquinas' treatment of the passions of the soul in the Prima Secundae Q. 26 of the *Summa.*[14] Here we see that friendship is an important category for Aquinas, for it exemplifies a particular kind of love. In contrast to concupiscent love or desire, which loves something or someone instrumentally, for the sake of something else, friendship reflects what Aquinas calls the primary "movement of love"[15] (directed only toward human beings and not to inanimate goods or to animals, which by their nature serve human uses). In this primary movement of love, we love someone, wishing good to him *for his own sake.* Indeed, it is insofar as relationships display the second movement of love, borne of concupiscence, that they defect from the love of friendship. Clearly referencing Aristotle, Aquinas deems friendships of utility and pleasure as defective in this way.

Having introduced the category of friendship, Aquinas proceeds to describe it in quite favorable, even extravagant, terms. The friendship is unitive, bringing lover and beloved together physically and emotionally; friends enjoy the presence of the other and share in affection.[16] So intimate is true friendship that it effects a "mutual indwelling" of persons, by way of the apprehensive power and the appetitive power. On account of the first, the beloved abides in the mind of the lover, who "strives to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to the beloved, so as to penetrate his very soul."[17] On account of the second, the beloved dwells in the affections of the lover, who wills the good of the beloved, takes pleasure in his presence, and longs for him in his absence. Friendship, then, entails the action of both the heart and the mind and is marked by a particular kind of intensity—Aquinas calls it "zeal"—which "causes a man to be moved against everything that opposes the friend's good."[18]

Now each of the characteristics described above might also be said of Aristotelian *philia.* Indeed, Aquinas makes explicit his debt to the Philosopher's treatment of friendship numerous times throughout his analysis, appealing to such texts as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics, Politics,* and *Rhetoric.* Thus, the preceding discussion shows only that Aquinas is attentive to the category of friendship and considers it important. I have yet to show what a distinctively Christian understanding of friendship would be, or to put it differently, how charity in Aquinas relates to friendship.

Aquinas himself makes the link for us, and quite dramatically at that. First, in II–II, q. 23 Aquinas appeals to a startling passage in the Gospel of John, which serves as a counterweight to the Matthean text Meilaender cites in which Christ seems to place the universality of Christian charity in tension with the particular bonds of friendship (*agape* over against *philia*). By contrast, the Johannine passage, which is authoritative for Aquinas on this question—"I will not now call you servants . . . but my friends" (John 15:15)—indicates that human beings can, through the theological virtue of *caritas,* enjoy a bond of friendship with God, the very source of *agape* love. Aquinas puts it most straightforwardly when he says, "charity *is* friendship."[19] Now one might suspect that he is using the term "friendship" in an equivocal sense. But as if to head the objection off at the pass, Aquinas immediately invokes Aristotle's definition of friendship as that particular kind of love marked by mutually reciprocated goodwill for the sake of the other, communication, and fellowship. Each of these conditions obtains—however imperfectly—in the friendship of man and God in charity. As Anthony Keaty observes, Aristotle's categories of benevolence and communication furnish a taxonomical scheme according to which Aquinas identifies the genus and species of charity friendship.[20] But when he identifies the substantial good shared between friends in charity, Aquinas moves beyond Aristotle's categories onto qualitatively different ground.

To gauge how significantly Aquinas' *caritas* transforms the Philosopher's *philia,* we must turn to Aristotle's treatment of friendships between unequals. After noting that friendships resting on "superiority" (1158b)—such as those between father and son, men and women, and rulers and subjects—entail a proportional equality, he observes that great disparities impede the formation or maintenance of friendship. Among such disparities is that found between gods and men. So removed from the human estate, the gods enjoy, in Suzanne Stern-Gillet's words, "complete autarky," self-sufficiency to the highest degree. Immune from fortune and appetitive desires, "the divine nature constitutes its own, uniquely suitable, cognitive object." Unlike human beings who gain self-understanding through relationship to others, the

divinities need no friends: "divine autarky is total."[21] Not surprisingly, Aristotle proceeds to question whether a friend really wishes the greatest good, namely, to be a god, to his fellows, since "[if he becomes a god], *he* will no longer have friends" (1159a8–9). Betwixt god and man is affixed an unbridgeable gulf—not even proportional equality is possible here; hence neither is divine—human friendship.[22]

Christian charity, by contrast, is precisely friendship between God and man. How is such a thing possible when Aquinas, no less than Aristotle, recognizes the radical disparity between the divine and the human? The answer lies in the action of the transcendent God himself. Having created man in his own image, capable of knowledge and love, God invites him into a *communicatio*, a sharing of "God's beatitude," what Paul Waddell describes as "the friendship love that is God, the perfect love relationship that is Trinity."[23] Human beings are by nature incapable of effecting such a relationship. As Aquinas insists:

> Charity, as we have said, is our friendship for God arising from our sharing in eternal happiness, which is not a matter of natural goods but of gifts of grace, according to St. Paul, "The free gift of God is eternal life." Consequently charity is beyond the resources of nature, and therefore cannot be something natural, nor acquired by natural powers, since no effect transcends its cause. Hence we have it neither by nature, nor as acquired, but as infused by the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son; our participation in this love . . . is creaturely charity itself.[24]

So gifted by grace, human beings are "elevated *by God's power* to a state of *actual* similitude with God, i.e., to a state of participation in the blessedness of God's own life."[25] God alone initiates charity friendship. It is "the Holy Spirit," Aquinas explains, who "constitutes us God's friends, and makes Him dwell in us, and us dwell in Him."[26] But this friendship commences only when man freely accepts the divine invitation. And it grows only as he becomes "the sort of person who embodies God's perfection," that is to say, only as he becomes more like Christ.[27]

It is in light of this primary friendship with God that Aquinas understands human friendship for one another. *Philia* has thus been given a new foundation; the source of friendship has been taken out of the bounds of the polis.[28] But while friendship finds its origins outside the polis, according to Aquinas, it returns to it in a new way, for the supernatural virtue of charity transforms every natural relationship. Recalling Jesus' articulation of the Great Commandment,[29] he explains that, "God is the principal object of charity, while our neighbor is loved out of charity for God's sake."[30] Christian friendship finds its source in God and its sustenance in grace, but it extends beyond God to our neighbor. Human friendships are not lost under the Christian dispensation. Making an explicit appeal to Aristotle's definition, Aquinas takes care to note that the Christian wishes good things for his friend, does good things for him, takes pleasure in his company, and enjoys with him a communion of sorrow and joy.[31] What adds leaven to this list, however, is the character of the goods he wishes for his friend, for the primary good he wishes for his friend—one that informs all of the others—is not to be found in the city. It is the "fellowship of everlasting happiness."[32] Above all, heaven is what we wish for our friends, and we foster this end in ways that evince the distinction between classical and Christian friendship. For instance, Aquinas notes that friends imbued with the love of charity share spiritual goods with one another through the mystical connection they enjoy. Through activities such as prayer and fasting, instruction in the faith, and heroic material sacrifices, "the good of one is communicated to the other."[33] Such acts of *caritas* bear both temporal and eternal fruit, a fitting yield for a natural relationship that, once elevated by grace, becomes "a means of salvation for those involved."[34]

We have seen how the source and end of friendship is transformed in the Christian life, but for Aquinas its scope is also changed. Herein lies the greatest challenge to the classical definition. Christians are commanded to love their enemies, but friendship presupposes reciprocal goodwill. Mindful of this tension, Aquinas explains that friendship extends to a person in two ways. First and most directly, we love our virtuous friend; second, we love those belonging to the friend, whether virtuous or no. "Indeed," Aquinas maintains, "so much do we love our friends, that for their sake we love all who belong to them, even if they hurt or hate us; so that, in this way, the friendship of charity extends even to our enemies, whom we love out of charity in relation to God, to Whom the friendship of charity is chiefly directed."[35] The circle of friendship is dramatically extended.

But is it so extended that the concept is stretched beyond recognition? Do we assume that Christians have to spend as much time in the company of their enemies as they do with their friends? Must they have the same sentiments toward them? Is *caritas* blind to virtue and vice? Aquinas sheds some light on these matters when he considers the question "Ought we to love one neighbor more than another?" The recurring claim found in the three objections he entertains is from Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*: Christians are called to love all men equally. Now some, he notes, interpret this to mean that we ought to have the same inward affections, ties of the heart, to all men equally, including our enemies, but that for obvious reasons of human finitude, we ought to confer more "outward favors" on those with whom we are most closely associated. Interestingly, Aquinas rejects this view and vindicates particular attachments not only on account of the constraints of time and space, but also, it seems, in principle. He argues that "one's obligation to love a person is proportionate to the gravity of the sin one commits in acting against that love" and adds that "it is a more grievous sin to act against the love of certain neighbors [such as father and mother], than against the love of others." And so Aquinas concludes, "[W]e ought to love some neighbors more than others."[36] The universal scope of charity is not contradicted thereby, he insists, since we love all men equally according to charity, that is, we wish them all the same good, eternal life. But as to our beneficence, we have differentiated obligations; there are "those to whom we ought to behave with greater kindness."[37]

For Aquinas this differentiation applies not only to our actions, but also to our affections, which would seem to leave more room for expansion. Aquinas accounts for this by appealing to the particular way in which the order of grace relates to the order of nature. Grace builds upon nature, for both the inclinations of grace and the natural appetite "flow from the Divine wisdom."[38] As Robert Sokolowski expresses it, friendship is "a natural substrate that can be elevated by grace into the Christian theological virtue of charity. It is the point of contact between nature and grace." Friendship is thus a "natural anticipation" of the graced love of charity.[39] And, for Aquinas, just as we are called to express our love more intensely for some than for others, so too ought "the affection of our charity" reflect the same proportion.[40]

Aquinas' treatment of friendship, then, provides some resolution of the tension to which Gilbert Meilaender has alerted us. Friendship retains a high place in the Christian life, but it has a new source, end, and scope. *Agape* and *philia* meet in the companionship of *caritas*.

Political Meaning of Thomistic Friendship

As evident above, charity complements natural human love, a fact that illustrates one of the central tenets of Thomistic theology cited earlier—namely, grace builds on, not destroys, nature. Those ends that Aquinas identifies as natural are not denigrated for being temporal; rather, earthly happiness and the virtues requisite to it are given their due as reflective of God's design of creation and providential care for man in history.[41]

In the Thomistic schema, the most auspicious context for achieving such happiness is the polis; it is here that man can develop his moral and intellectual faculties most fully. Political authority plays an indispensable role in this development, for it attends to the character of its citizens, employing law to habituate them in virtue so as to flourish as human beings. Insofar as the statesman is concerned with the good of his people, he enjoys a kind of friendship with them. As Aquinas describes in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, a king worthy of the authority vested in him acts not for his own interest "but rather for the benefit of his subjects."[42] This other-regarding orientation is precisely what distinguishes a good regime from its corruption and provides the basis for the friendship between ruler and ruled. Reflecting again on Aristotle's account of political systems, Aquinas notes that each form of government involves a type of friendship founded on justice and that in the best regime, namely, kingship, there exists "a superabundant friendship" between a king and his subjects as between a benefactor and beneficiaries. "It is proper to a king," Aquinas explains, "to confer benefits on his subjects, for if he is a good ruler he takes care that they perform good deeds, and strives to make his subjects virtuous." He continues, "Hence, inasmuch as he leads his subjects as a shepherd his flock, he is even given the title. Thus Homer called King Agamemnon shepherd of his people."[43]

Law is the most prominent staff of statesmanship for this shepherd. It is an instrument by which he communicates concern for his flock; it is, as it were, a means of expressing his friendship. Such a notion likely sounds foreign, at best, to modern ears; at worst, it strikes us as clever propaganda deployed by a ruling class. Schooled in the terms of liberalism and postmodernism and accustomed to viewing law through a suspicious hermeneutical lens, we are apt to conceive of law as Thrasymachus cynically described justice: "the advantage of the stronger."[44]

Aquinas disagrees. Though no stranger to unjust regimes and bad legislation, he nevertheless insists, "Law is nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, promulgated by him who has the care of the community."[45] Self-interested statutes imposed by an elite on a vulnerable public hardly qualify as law—in Augustine's famous formulation, "a law that is not just seems to be no law at all."[46] It is striking, in fact, to recognize the many ways in which Aquinas thinks particular laws can deviate from their proper form. As he explains at length, laws may be unjust:

> Either in respect of the end, as when an authority imposes on his subjects burdensome laws, conducive, not to the common good, but rather to his own cupidity or vainglory; or in respect of the author, as when a man makes a law that goes beyond the power committed to him; or in respect of the form, as when burdens are imposed unequally on the community, although with a view to the common good. Such are acts of violence rather than laws.[47]

Nor could such measures be considered acts of civic friendship.

By contrast, genuine law in its promulgation and reception is always a reflection of civic friendship. Guided by reason, the ruler articulates an ordinance designed to benefit the citizenry and promote the common good; lawmaking is thus beneficent. Its beneficiaries, for their part, reflect the friendly goodwill they have toward their sovereign by obeying his just commands; in so doing, they not only honor the authority of his office but also express friendship toward one another, since the law is directed toward the good of the whole.[48]

As Aquinas notes in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics,* the particular friendship citizens share—namely, "concord" or "political friendship"—entails a particular kind of agreement. It is not agreement over speculative matters, but practical ones that rise to a certain level of importance. Aquinas explains that for Aristotle, "citizens of a state are said to have concord among themselves when they agree on what is useful, so that they vote for the same measures and work together on projects they consider for their interests."[49]

Civic Friendship and Charity

But does the natural good of civic friendship relate to the supernatural virtue of charity? It does and in several ways. Recall that for Aquinas the particular grace of charity perfects temporal loves, including the bonds between citizens. As Aquinas affirms in *De Caritate,* "[C]harity embraces in itself all human loves, those alone excepted that are supported on sin. So that love for relations and fellow-citizens and companions voyaging together or for anybody, however associated, can be from charity and worthy of heaven."[50] As Michael Sherwin explains, charity has a special unifying effect among human beings, and when citizens are bound to one another not only by a common political tie, but also by charity, their civic communion is enhanced. In the first place, the individual endowed with charity enjoys an inner union of heart, mind, and will that "is an invaluable asset to the community and safeguards its good,"[51] for it enables him to promote peace in the community. In addition to fostering tranquility, charity causes the citizen "to desire and actively promote the good of every other member of the community," manifested most clearly in the alacrity with which he exhibits the cardinal political virtue of justice. Charity, for Aquinas, not only strengthens justice, but perfects it, prompting the citizen to give his fellows their due "spontaneously and joyfully," even adding "something in excess by way of liberality."[52] The interior order of its citizens' souls, animated by *caritas,* thus profoundly affects the common good of the city.

That the bonds of civic friendship are assimilated for Aquinas into the love of charity becomes more readily understandable when one considers that he views life in political community as natural, an outgrowth of man's God-given sociability. So, too, is political authority. Aquinas rejects the view found in some strains of political theology

that government was simply remedial of sin, "a necessary evil," as Reinhold Niebuhr put it, "required by the Fall of man."[53] To the contrary, Aquinas held political authority to be natural, part of the created order from the beginning. As his treatment of the state of innocence makes clear, both the welfare of individuals and the community would have required the "office of governing and directing."[54] This seems implausible to a modern audience accustomed to seeing political authority primarily as an agent of coercion and punishment. For Aquinas, though, the punitive function of government, made necessary by sin, is secondary and accidental to its main function: ensuring the conditions for the fullest moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of persons. In other words, political authority is charged with care for the common good.[55]

The directive function of this authority, for Aquinas, whether in Eden or east of it, must always reflect God's own design of creation found in the eternal law. Human law, in other words, is derived from the wisdom of God evident in the intelligible structure of the created order and mediated to human consciousness by natural and divine law; it ought to remain faithful to that order, for it is precisely the conformity of human law to the eternal law that furnishes its obligatory force. "If they be just," Aquinas insists, "[laws] have the power of binding in conscience from the eternal law whence they are derived."[56] Thus, to recall the description of civic concord described above, the reception of law by the citizens is a mark of their friendship toward their governors, but it is more than that. Given that government is providentially appointed for human perfection and that legislators share some part of the divine activity of lawmaking, obeying human law can be seen as a manifestation of charity, that is, of friendship with God.[57] This becomes more evident when we note that Aquinas recommends disobedience of any law that is "opposed to the divine good,"[58] whether because it is idolatrous or offends some portion of the divine law.

Civic friendship on the part of the citizen, then, reflects the supernatural virtue of charity insofar as it springs from his love of God and the things God has ordained, including political authority and law. Yet, as demonstrated earlier, friendship in the Christian dispensation finds its origins from above and returns to the polis on a new footing; it is precisely this foundation that provides a standard for judging the limits of civil obedience. The friendship a man enjoys with God dictates the terms of his friendship within the city. Since he "must obey God rather than men,"[59] the requirements of charity supersede the claims of political authority when it transgresses the divine law. But it is important to note that the disobedience required in this instance is itself borne of friendship, both for God and man; it is not anarchistic in inspiration. The Christian citizen who disobeys such a law publicly testifies to friendship with God and instructs his fellows in the right ordering of love.

While acts of genuine civil disobedience afford an opportunity for this kind of witness and instruction, they are occasioned by a failure of charity and civic friendship. Any law that opposes the divine good, for Aquinas, is an affront to charity; the lawgiver has failed to respect the dictates of the eternal, natural, and divine law. He has also offended against charity in promulgating an act that jeopardizes the spiritual welfare of his citizens, with whose good he has been entrusted. Now for Aquinas the immediate direction of individuals to their eternal end, their ultimate good, is vouchsafed to the Church and its ministers through the proclamation of the Word and the performance of the sacraments.[60] But while the statesman does not directly govern the spiritual life of his subjects, he should nevertheless advance it. At a minimum, he should never enact a statute that would offend against the divine law, but more is required. Prompted by charity to be concerned about their ultimate end, he habituates his citizens in the natural virtues, which enable them to live out the infused virtues with greater ease. He likewise prohibits those vices that would threaten their temporal, as well as eternal, well being.[61] Civic friendship and charity require attention to both ends.

Caritas and a Companionship of Earthly and Heavenly Cities

As the preceding discussion makes clear, friendship retains an elevated status within the political theology of Thomas Aquinas. Unlike other Christian thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Aquinas denies an irreconcilable tension between *philia* and *agape.* The two converge, in fact, in the virtue of *caritas* —the new foundation of friendship and the highest of the Christian virtues. United in the bond of charity, Christians enjoy a

tie of friendship with God that informs and infuses all of their other relationships, including their political bonds. Mindful of their primary friendship with God through which they love one another, Christian citizens enjoy a distinctive kind of concord, desire and promote one another's good, and obey the just ordinances of their rulers as deriving from God's wise ordering of the cosmos. Christian rulers, in their turn, govern in friendship with their subjects, taking care to promote not only the temporal but also the eternal good of the citizenry. In the political theology of Thomas Aquinas, then, *philia* and *agape* have met in the companionship of *caritas* that finds a home in both the earthly polis and the heavenly city alike.

Notes

1. Quoted in Gilbert Meilaender's *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 1.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 2d ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1156b28. Hereinafter cited as *Ethics.*

3. Meilaender, *Friendship,* 2.

4. Ibid., 3.

5. David Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4(1) (1996): 96–97.

6. Romans 8:15. The familial metaphors used to describe Christian solidarity are voluminous. In addition to those noted above, representative passages can be found in Matthew 5:45, 23:8; Luke 22:32; Acts 11:29; and Galatians 4:6.

7. In light of the primacy placed on equality in the classical ideal of friendship, it is not surprising to see that Aristotle carves out a special category to describe the relationship that obtains between persons who are in one respect or another unequal. Fathers and sons, men and women, and rulers and ruled fall into this category. In these relationships, ones that "rest on superiority" (*Ethics,* 1158b25), a kind of equality is effected by proportional love in which the proper acts of love are differentiated according to station. Parents and children, for instance, owe different things to each other and do not exhibit the same kind of love as that found between peers. Nevertheless, they achieve a kind of equality required of friendship: "when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved in a way, and this seems to be proper to friendship" (*Ethics,* 1158b27–29). Aristotle cautions, however, that if the friends become separated by an unbridgeable gap, the friendship cannot endure, and in this vein he notes that "far inferior people" (*Ethics,* 1159a1–2) cannot expect to enjoy the friendship of a king. Aristotle does not specify the nature of this gulf or the way in which these persons are "far inferior." But since he mentions it in the context of his discussion of unequal friendships—among which political friendships receive specific mention—it should be seen as an *exception* to the type of friendship enjoyed between ruler and ruled; it should not be seen to undermine the category per se. This exception indicates that Aristotle is working with an implicit distinction between those among "the ruled" who are fit for this kind of friendship and those (including, slaves, perhaps) who are not.

8. Aristotle vividly contrasts the integrity of soul found in the virtuous man with the divided soul of the vicious: whereas "the excellent person is of one mind with himself, and desires the same things in his whole soul" (*Ethics,* 1166a14–15), actively exerting himself for the good, the vicious man experiences conflict in his soul, being ever "at odds with [himself]," having "an appetite for one thing and a wish for another" (*Ethics,* 1166b7–8). At the most basic level, then, the vicious man lacks the dependability required for those ongoing acts of goodwill demanded by friendship.

9. Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship," 100.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 101.

12. Paul Waddell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 75.

13. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 58, quoted in Waddell, *Friendship and the Moral Life,* 76–77.

14. Several of Aquinas' reflections on friendship have been helpfully collected in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship,* ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991). I have made use of this collection here.

15. *ST,* I–II, q. 26, art. 4.

16. *ST,* I–II, q. 28, art. 1.

17. *ST,* I–II, q. 28, art. 2. In his argument concerning friendship and justice in Aquinas, Daniel Schwartz Porzecanski contends that the intensity of this desire to know the friend intimately does not yield a perfect knowledge of him; all human friendships, even those deeply rooted in charity, are subject to the constraints of human finitude and fallenness. "Aquinas's friendship," Porzecanski maintains, "coexists with conflict, disputes, and mutual uncertainties between friends (which are ineliminable features of the personal relationships we can experience in this world). For this reason, whatever the closeness present in a relationship, justice never becomes redundant." Thus, in reflecting on Aquinas' assertion that "a thing is loved more than it is known; since it can be loved perfectly, even without being perfectly known" (*ST,* I–II,

q. 27, art. 2, ad 2), Porzecanski concludes that "the effect of the union of love (as to apprehension) is a *desire* of cognition of everything related to the beloved, not that the effect is the actual and complete cognition of it" ("Friendship and Justice in Aquinas," *Review of Politics* 66(1) (2004): 35, 41).

18. *ST,* I–II, q. 28, art. 4.

19. *ST,* II–II, q. 23. (Emphasis added.)

20. Anthony Keaty, "Thomas's Authority for Identifying Charity as Friendship: Aristotle or John 15?" *Thomist* 62 (1998): 585.

21. Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 123, 129.

22. L. Gregory Jones reflects on this paradox of the divine *autarkeia* and human happiness by noting that for Aristotle "what it means to be human is to be more than human; it is to attempt to become divine, to resemble (if we can) the gods. Yet," he continues, "Aristotle's account is limited by its inability to find a way to make what is necessary for human happiness possible. Human happiness is dependent on becoming like the gods. Yet on the basis of his understanding of the gods' relation (or lack thereof) to the world, as well as the gods' being so unlike us that friendship with them is impossible, Aristotle had no means to envision how human happiness could be possible" ("Theological Transformation of Aristotelian Friendship in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas," *New Scholasticism* 61 [Autumn 1987]: 380). Jones argues that Aquinas' theological resources provide the grounds for a resolution of this problem; I offer a similar argument here.

23. Waddell, *Friendship in the Moral Life,* 122–23.

24. *ST,* II–II, q. 24, art. 2.

25. Joseph Bobik, "Aquinas on *Communicatio:* The Foundation of Friendship and Caritas," *Modern Schoolman* 64 (November 1986): 7.

26. *Summa Contra Gentiles,* IV, 22 (3).

27. Jones, "Theological Transformation," 385. Jones persuasively argues that Aquinas' account of *caritas* presupposes a Christological and sacramental context, for it is only through the merits of Christ that human beings experience redemption from sin—a prerequisite to the life of friendship with God. Moreover, it is only by the grace continually offered to the disciples in the sacrament of the Eucharist that they are transformed into friends of God who imitate the works of God.

28. This contrast with the polis is meant to underscore the supernatural origin of Christian friendship, not to suggest that the highest form of friendship for Aristotle is civic friendship. As his fuller description of eudaimonia in *Nicomachean Ethics* book 10 makes clear, the highest human activity is contemplation; thus, the practical virtues most associated with the active life of the polis are secondary to the cultivation of the contemplative capacity. The best form of friendship, then, would have a more comprehensive field than civic

friendship. In addition to the practical political concerns shared by citizens, those who enjoy complete friendship also share a commitment to the life of study. These friends recognize that exercising the "divine element" (1177b28) of the human soul, the understanding, gives rise to the fullest happiness, and so they assist one another in this activity; together they "do philosophy" (1172a5). Underscoring the importance of this companionship, Aristotle notes that while the wise person is able to study by himself, "he presumably does it better with colleagues" (1177b1).

29. "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mt. 22:37–40).

30. *ST,* II–II, q. 23, art. 5, reply obj. 1.

31. *ST,* II–II, q. 25, art. 7.

32. *ST,* II–II, q. 25, art. 3. The way in which this primary good orders all others might actually jeopardize the attainment of certain natural goods pertaining to the city in the interest of securing supernatural ones. An example from contemporary American politics comes to mind. During the 2004 election, several Catholic bishops decided to withhold communion from pro-choice politicians within their dioceses. In light of Aquinas' schema, this is properly viewed as an act of Christian friendship, for the bishops are concerned in the first place with the spiritual welfare of the politicians, who have placed their salvation in jeopardy. The tension with the immediate temporal good at stake becomes clear when one considers the probability that had the politicians in question changed their public stance on abortion and returned to full communion with the Church, they would very likely have imperiled their reelection. Insofar as political office is a natural good, it would thus be forfeited for the sake of a supernatural good. (The fact that these conflict in this case indicates, of course, that the context within which reelection would be forfeited is itself a fallen one. There should be no conflict per se between exercising political authority and enjoying full Christian communion; only the circumstances of sin pit the one against the other, that is, only in a broken world is it the case that a candidate feel pressure to contradict Church teaching in order to secure political office.) At the same time, at a deeper level the bishops' actions can be seen as contributing to the natural good of the polis, insofar as their interventions encourage its improvement in justice. By reminding their flock of the impermissibility of abortion, by potentially changing the policy stance of Catholic officials, and by alerting the broader public to the gravity of the issue, their actions might well decrease the prevalence of the injustice.

33. *In Symbolum Apostolorum,* 13 (135), quoted in Michael Sherwin, O.P., "Charity as Friendship in the Promotion of the Common Good in the Thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas" (unpublished master's thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1991), 101.

34. Ibid., 103.
35. *ST*, II–II, q. 23, art. 1, reply obj. 2.
36. *ST*, II–II, q. 26, art. 6.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Robert Sokolowski, "Phenomenology of Friendship," *Review of Metaphysics* 55 (March 2002): 470.
40. These passages in Thomas bring to mind a vignette from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* recounted by Gilbert Meilaender. In this scene Dr. Johnson is conversing with one Mrs. Knowles who suggests that friendship is a Christian virtue, to which Johnson responds, "Now Christianity recommends universal benevolence, to consider all men as our brethren; which is contrary to the virtue of friendship, as described by the ancient philosophers." Mrs. Knowles, in turn, appeals to the biblical injunction to "do good to all but *especially* to those of the household of faith." Johnson counters that "the household of faith is wide enough." And the quick-witted Mrs. Knowles reminds her interlocutor that though Jesus gathered twelve apostles "we are told that there was one whom he loved." And Boswell records that Johnson ("with eyes sparkling benignantly"), conceded, "Very well, indeed, Madam. You have said very well." Boswell: "A fine application. Pray, Sir, had you ever thought of it?" Johnson: "I had not, Sir." (Meilaender, *Friendship*, 7).
41. A passage in John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995) expresses this perspective well: "Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 John 3:1–2). At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual's earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an 'ultimate' but a 'penultimate' reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters" (3).
42. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P. (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1993). When appealing to this commentary, I am operating with the assumption that Thomas is in substantial agreement with Aristotle on the question of civic friendship. I have not found anything in the text itself or in Thomas' political writings to suggest otherwise.

43. Ibid., para. 1688–89. See also *De Regno*, trans. Gerald B. Phelen (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949), I [10]. It is important to note that Thomas sees the task of the statesman as including not only the promotion of the temporal end of natural virtue for his citizens, but also their supernatural end. He explains in *De Regno*, for instance, that "through virtuous living man is further ordained to a higher end, which consists in the enjoyment of God, as we have said above. Consequently, since society must have the same end as the individual man, it is not the ultimate end of an assembled multitude to live virtuously, but through virtuous living to attain to the possession of God" (III, 1, 14 [107]). How the statesman directs his subjects to this higher end is discussed in the following section on "Civic Friendship and Charity."
44. Plato, *Republic*, I, 344 c.
45. *ST*, I–II, q. 90, art. 4.
46. Augustine, *On Free Will*, I, 5, cited in *ST*, I–II, q. 96, art. 4.
47. *ST*, I–II, q. 96, art. 4.
48. Aquinas describes this appropriate receptivity as a virtue. "Now the virtue of any being that is a subject consists in its being well subordinated to that by which it is regulated; and thus we see that the virtue of the irascible and concupiscible powers consists in their being obedient to reason. In the same way, *the virtue of every subject consists in his being well subjected to his ruler*, as the Philosopher says" (*ST*, I–II, q. 92, art. 1).
49. *Commentary*, para. 1836, 1832.
50. *De Caritate*, 7, quoted in Sherwin, "Charity as Friendship," 61.
51. Ibid., 97.
52. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 128 (8), quoted in ibid., 99.
53. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Children of Light, Children of Darkness* (New York: Scribners, 1944), 91.
54. *ST*, I, q. 96, art. 4.
55. See also Thomas' discussion of the necessity of political authority in *De Regno*, I [2–10].
56. *ST*, I–II, q. 96, art. 4.
57. Likely following Thomas's political reflections, the late pope John Paul II underscored the dignity of the legislative office in his *Jubilee of Government Leaders, Members of Parliament, and Politicians* (November 4, 2000) (retrieved October 15, 2005 from www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20001104_jubil-parlgov_en.html). After recognizing what the pope called a "a true and genuine *vocation to politics*" (emphasis in original), he reminded his listeners of the nobility of their charge, noting that "the very delicate task of formulating and approving laws" is, in fact, a "task which brings man close to God, the Supreme Legislator" (1, 4).

58. *ST,* I–II, q. 96, art. 4.

59. Acts 5:29, quoted in ibid.

60. *De Regno,* III (I, 14 [108–13]).

61. Thomas' much-discussed treatment of the role of the state in punishing heretics is relevant here. See, e.g., Marie Nicholas, "St. Thomas and Religious Liberty," *Papers on the History of Religion* (L'Institut Catholique de Toulouse, 1972); Takashi Shogimen, "From Disobedience to Toleration: William of Ockham and the Medieval Discourse on Fraternal Correction," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001); and Michael Novak, "Aquinas and the Heretics," *First Things* 58 (December 1995). For our purposes, what deserves emphasis is the statesman's concern for the souls of his subjects; it is not simply a question of concern for public order. Those who remain obstinate in heresy, Aquinas contends, should be subject to capital punishment by the state: "For it is a much graver matter to corrupt the faith which quickens the soul, than to forge money, which supports temporal life. Wherefore if forgers of money and other evildoers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death" (*ST,* II–II, q. 11, art. 3).

Not only does heresy jeopardize the individual's eternal standing, it has the potential to corrupt others, wreaking religious and social havoc; a movement of spiritual rebellion against Church authority, heresy was thought to undermine respect for temporal authority, as well. As noted by David Abulafia in *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): "Heresy, indeed, is presented as treason. Those who deny the articles of the Catholic faith implicitly deny the claims of rulers to derive their authority from God. They are enemies not merely of God and of the souls of individuals, but of the social fabric. Their questioning of religious truth involves a questioning of the monarch's command over the law; as enemies of the law, they are its legitimate targets, and the position of primacy accorded to legislation against heretics is thus entirely proper" (quoted in Novak, "Aquinas and the Heretics," 34). Thus, for Aquinas, the statesman's severe punishment for heresy reflects his concern for both the spiritual and temporal good of his subjects.