
GANZ – SOME NOTES CONCERNING ARISTOTLE

Prepared for The Night School on Tuesday, 18 April 2017 (version 20 April 2017)

All of this has to do with only Book VIII of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which Book is only fourteen pages long – his justly famous exploration of the reality of friendship.

THE PROBLEM OF THE POLITY

Eric Voegelin, in his famous *Plato and Aristotle* volume 16 (2000, the critical edition) of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, page 58, describes the disillusionment that Plato felt about the collapse of Greek politics – “And in particular he was shocked by the policy of the Tyrants, well known in our own time, to consolidate their regime by involving citizens, among them Socrates, in criminal actions, which would make them reliable supporters, because a change of the regime would expose them to the vengeance of the victims. Socrates, ‘whom I would not hesitate to call the Justest man of the time’, resisted such involvement at the risk of unpleasant consequences, and Plato withdrew in disgust from the oligarchic regime.... As Plato considered all of this, and observed the men who were active in politics, with their laws and customs, and as he advanced in age, it appeared to him ever more difficult to manage public affairs properly. **For without friends and trusty companions, one could not do anything at all**; they could not be found among old acquaintances, because the polis was no longer managed according to the principles and customs of the

forefathers. *To acquire new friends, however, was impossible without great difficulties.*”

See a page later (p. 59), Eric Voegelin writes: “And above all, Plato had understood (what modern political reformers and revolutionaries seem to be unable to understand) that **a reform cannot be achieved by a well-intentioned leader who recruits his followers from the very people whose moral confusion is the source of disorder...** We are not concerned with a ‘Platonic philosophy’ or ‘doctrine’, but with Plato’s resistance to the disorder of the surrounding society and his effort to restore the order of Hellenic civilization through love of wisdom. His effort was a failure insofar as his dream of a Hellenic empire, in the form of a federation under a hegemonic *polis*, infused by the spirit of the Academy, could not be realized.”

THE OPENING LINES OF BOOK VIII

The opening lines of Book VIII of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*:

1 [1155^a] [1] After what we have said, a discussion of friendship would naturally follow, since it is a virtue or implies virtue, [5] and is besides most necessary with a view to living. **For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods....**

μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα περὶ φιλίας ἔποιτ’ ἂν διελθεῖν· ἔστι γὰρ ἀρετὴ τις ἢ μετ’ ἀρετῆς, ἔτι δ’ ἀναγκαιότατον εἰς τὸν βίον. ἄνευ γὰρ φίλων οὐδεὶς ἔλοιτ’ ἂν ζῆν, ἔχων τὰ λοιπὰ ἀγαθὰ πάντα.¹

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

¹ Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics \(Greek\)](#), ed. J. Bywater (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1894).

From Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle* volume III of his *Order and History*, page 325 – “Aristotle was born in 385 BCE, at Stagira, a little town on the Aegean coast east of the Chalcidice. As a youth of seventeen, in 367 BCE, he entered the Academy [of Plato] and remained a member of the school until the death of Plato in 348 BCE [Aristotle now 37-years old]. After Plato’s death, he left Athens for Asia Minor. For three years he taught at Assos, and then for another two years at Mytilene, on Lesbos. In 343 BCE, he was called to the court of Pella as tutor of the young Alexander [356-323 BCE]. When Philip [Alexander’s father and King of Macedon] died and Alexander succeeded to the kingship, Aristotle return to Athens in 335 BCE [Aristotle now 50-years old] and founded his own school, the *Lyceum*. He taught until 323 BCE [the year Alexander the Great died of Malaria; Aristotle now 62-years old], when the death of Alexander cause a revival of Athenian nationalism, making it advisable for Aristotle [because Aristotle was from Macedon, not Athens] to leave the city. He moved to Chalcis, on Euboea, and there he died after a few months, in 322 BCE [at 63-years old].

When Aristotle came to the Academy at age 17:

The Academy had been going for almost 20 years;
Socrates had been dead for 30 years;
and Plato was past 60-years old.

The meaning of Philosophy for Plato, and that which he taught in the Academy, was this, as summarized by **Eric Voegelin, page 326** – “Aristotle had made his own the Platonic conception of **philosophy as a movement of the soul**. For the young Plato, as we know, philosophy consisted of an ordering of the soul by the three forces of *Thanatos* [death], *Eros* [desire; love; searching], and *Dike* [custom; right order; the right way; what is fitting]; and, corresponding to the three forces, philosophy was the practice of dying, the erotic reaching out of the soul towards the Good, and the right ordering of the soul through participation in the Idea.... Philosophy as a mode of life.... The order of reality through *methexis*, through participation in the Idea.”

THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS IS THE SEARCH FOR THE SOUL

Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford, 1992), pages 4-5 – “In NE Aristotle prepares the ground for his own account of happiness by saying that the good we are looking for must be an end with two special properties. First, it must be a specially “endy” (*teleion*) end: it must – to use a more traditional translation – be perfect by comparison/contrast with other ends. That is to say, it must be something sought always for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else. Secondly, it must be self-sufficient – that is, it must be something which taken on its own makes life worthwhile and lacking in nothing.... Happiness, Aristotle says, has both these properties (1097a 15 to b 21).... **Happiness must be a life of reason concerned with action: the activity of the soul in accordance with reason.** So the good of man will be his good functioning: *the activity of soul in accordance with virtue.*”

TO DELIGHT IN AND ADMIRE ANOTHER’S GOODNESS

And if a man is most fully and truly lovable when he is both *good for another* and *good and healthy in himself*, may we not have here two reasons for love? Even if the first, the man's goodness for his friend, is necessary, it may not be exhaustive. **The capacity to admire and delight in another's goodness for what it is may allow for a deeper and richer love than would otherwise exist. And if both causes can be at work simultaneously, then it is possible in some way and in some degree to have **a true love of the other for his own sake, a love that is to that extent rooted not in weakness and deficiency but precisely in excellence and strength.**²**

² Lorraine Smith Pangle. *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Kindle Locations 658-662). Kindle Edition.

THREE FUNDAMENTAL KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP

What is unclear in Aristotle is whether Useful-Friends and Pleasure-Friends are actual *kinds* of friendship, or simply imperfect realizations of what is really only one kind of relationship worthy to bear the name “friendship” – Perfect or Virtue Friends.

[from Chapter 3] Now those **who love each other for their *utility*** do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other.

οἱ μὲν οὖν διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον φιλοῦντες ἀλλήλους οὐ καθ' αὐτοὺς φιλοῦσιν, ἀλλ' ἣ γίνεται τι αὐτοῖς παρ' ἀλλήλων ἀγαθόν.³

[from Chapter 3] So too with those **who love for the sake of *pleasure***; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people, but because they find them pleasant.

ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ οἱ δι' ἡδονήν· οὐ γὰρ τῷ ποιούς τινος εἶναι ἀγαπῶσι τοὺς εὐτραπέλους, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἡδεῖς αὐτοῖς.⁴

PERFECT (OR VIRTUE) FRIENDSHIP

[within 1156b] Perfect friendship is the friendship of persons who are **good**, and **alike in virtue**; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves.

³ Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics \(Greek\)](#), ed. J. Bywater (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1894).

⁴ Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics \(Greek\)](#), ed. J. Bywater (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1894).

τελεία δ' ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων· οὗτοι γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὁμοίως βούλονται ἀλλήλοις ἤ ἀγαθοί, ἀγαθοὶ δ' εἰσὶ καθ' αὐτούς.⁵

[in 1159b] Now equality and likeness are friendship, and especially the likeness of those who are like in virtue; for being steadfast in themselves [5] they hold fast to each other, and neither ask nor give base services, but (one may say) even prevent them; **for it is characteristic of good men neither to go wrong themselves nor to let their friends do so.**

THREE FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF POLITY

[from Chapter 10] There are three kinds of constitution, and an equal number of deviation-forms—perversions, as it were, of them. The constitutions are **monarchy**, **aristocracy**, and thirdly that which is based on a property qualification, which it seems appropriate to call **timocratic**, though most people are [35] wont to call it *polity*. The best of these is Monarchy, the worst Timocracy.

Aristotle's point is that each of these fundamental forms of polity – each kind at its most obvious deviant form – exist because of the nature of the political/personal friendships that are being practiced among those who lead these forms of government/political associations.

MONARCHY – TYRANNY

⁵ Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics \(Greek\)](#), ed. J. Bywater (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1894), within [1156b].

The deviation from monarchy is tyranny; [1160^b] [1] for both are forms of one-man rule, but there is the greatest difference between them; *the tyrant looks to his own advantage, the king to that of his subjects*. For a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing [5] further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects; **for a king who is not like that would be a mere titular king.**

Monarchy (rule for the sake of those ruled – the true meaning of sovereignty; a true King so talented, gifted, and secure in himself that he can spend his life in service to others ... because he does not need anything more than he has, does not need his people to like him, to give him things – praise, flattery, subservience, etc.) whose deviant form is *Tyranny* (the ruler is all about himself or herself ... *always*; what is “good” for the State is *me*, and delivering to me exactly what I demand to please myself *is what the rest of you are for.*)

ARISTOCRACY – OLIGARCHY

[in chapter 10] Aristocracy passes over into oligarchy by the badness of the rulers, who distribute [their wealth or power or influence] contrary to equity what belongs to the city—all or most of the good things to themselves, and office always to the same people, paying most regard [15] to wealth; thus the rulers are few and are bad men instead of the most worthy.

Aristocracy (a class of excellently trained and accomplished, and wealthy persons, who happen to be particularly aware that they are *aristoi*, the privileged, the excellent, the splendid, those whom everyone else wishes they could be, the group to which they long to belong, etc.).⁶ The deviant

⁶ It is something clear in both Plato and Aristotle that in order for such polities to exist and to maintain themselves in power requires that “the rest of us” give up our own self-respect and fall into our expected roles in relation to those who control the polity from the top. This analysis does not let off the hook those ruled, even as it reveals the pathology of those who rule.

form is *Oligarchy* (“rule by a very few” through extreme wealth, who keep wealth for themselves and for those few in the polity of equal wealth, who learn to control the whole polity by becoming *benefactors*, rather than opening the way to many others to become, if you will, benefactors of their own selves, families, etc., for the sake of achieving their own destiny and purpose.)

TIMOCRACY – DEMOCRACY

[in chapter 10] Timocracy passes over into democracy; for these are coterminous, since it is the ideal even of Timocracy to be *the rule of the majority*, and all who have the property qualification⁷ count as equal. Democracy [20] is the least bad of the deviations; for in its case the form of constitution is but a slight deviation. These then are the changes to which constitutions are most subject; for these are the smallest and easiest transitions.

Timocracy (rule by those starved for the praise of others, compelled by an excessive need to be admired and fawned over – the Capital sin of *vainglory* – who vie for top positions in society, in government, in business, in religion not because they are any good at what those roles require, but because their top-level role will finally secure for them a continuous flow of praise and flattery). The deviant form of this is the lowest form of polity (in both Plato and Aristotle),⁸ *democracy* (rule by the mob; rule by those who demand “a say” but who have nothing to say other than about what they want for themselves or their interest group; rule by those who demand

⁷ The fundamental meaning of “Timocracy” is as I define it below. But Aristotle came to associate Timocracy with “a property qualification”. What I think he means is that those who inherit land (from perhaps accomplished and significant parents or grandparents, etc.) have power because they own land that others need to be able to farm, to run sheep or goats, etc. Those who inherit land, and the power its grants them, need not be excellent in any personal way – which is I think Aristotle’s point.

⁸ I have sought to convey not just the idea but the affective aspect of what these form of polity meant to Aristotle and to his teacher Plato. We should recall that we are the American *republic*, not a *democracy*. That we now constantly speak of America as a democracy, not as a republic, is to me frightening and disturbing.

respect of everyone without commitment to *earning* that respect; who shout about “my rights” with no accompanying interest in finding out how those “rights” came to be through the sacrifice of people far greater than they, etc.)

ON THE LOVE OF MOTHERS

[in Chapter 8] In being loved, on the other hand, people delight for its [25] own sake; whence it would seem to be better than being honoured, and friendship to be desirable in itself. **But it seems to lie in loving rather than in being loved**, as is indicated by *the delight mothers take in loving*; for some mothers hand over their children to be brought up, and so [30] long as they know their fate they love them and do not seek to be loved in return (if they cannot have both), but seem to be satisfied if they see them prospering; and they themselves love their children even if these owing to their ignorance give them nothing of a mother’s due.⁹

⁹ I highlight this particular text because it gives us some personal insight into Aristotle himself. And when one remembers that Aristotle dedicates this greatest work of his to his dad – Nicómachus – we can recognize how Aristotle by honoring his mother with such words is also showing grace and gratitude to his dad whose wife she was.