

Book Review

Heather Devere

John von Heyking

The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship

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Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Gary M. Gurtler (eds)

Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship

State University of New York Press, 2014

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Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo

Friendship in Medieval Iberia: Historical, Legal and Literary Perspectives

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These three books, published over the last few years, add to the ever-growing literature on the histories of ideas of friendship, focusing on ancient and medieval concepts of friendship. **Von Heyking's** detailed analysis of the texts of Plato and Aristotle related to political friendship includes Plato's *Laws*, *Lysis*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics* and *Politics*. The edited volume by **Stern-Gillet** and **Gurtler** includes chapters on Plato, Aristotle, Zeno and Seneca, Epicurus, and Cicero from the ancient canon, and from medieval philosophy there are chapters on the writings on friendship of Gregory Nazianzen, Basil the Great, Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx and Thomas Aquinas. The book ends with two chapters on enlightenment writers – Kant compared to Aristotle, and the Platonic roots of Hölderlin's concept of friendship. **Scorpo** draws on the writings of the medieval King Alfonso of Castile, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, *Siete Partidas* and the *Estoria de España*, to consider the vocabulary and rhetoric of friendship in the Iberian context.

In each book there is an attempt to relate these historical accounts of friendship to the modern or current era for an appreciation of the role of friendship and its origins in the work of Ancient Greek, Roman and Medieval writers 'the background against which subsequent Western treatments of friendship are to be understood' (Stern-Gillet and Gurtler, p.ix). Von Heyking argues for the importance of friendship 'in shaping our political world' (p.7) and the lessons to be learnt about the place of friendship in politics from Plato and Aristotle in particular. Scorpo enquires about the extent to which medieval representations of friendship both reflect the legacy

of the classical tradition 'while paving the way to a more nuanced, formulaic and multi-layered definition of social, political, personal and perhaps emotional bond' (p.6).

The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship by John von Heyking, Professor of Political Science at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, has been described as 'a labour of love stemming from the direct teaching of undergraduate students' (James V. Schall, Georgetown University). Knowledgeable about and familiar with the details of the texts of Plato and Aristotle, von Heyking refers to the relevance these have in relation to political friendships that span history from Moses and Aaron, to Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher. His argument is that

[the] incapacity to practice friendship seems to be a key factor in political failure, for friendship plays a central role in the construction of networks and coalition. The isolated politician is the failed politician. The extreme of the isolated politician is, of course, the tyrant whom Plato and Aristotle regarded as incapable of friendship and thus of achieving life's greatest goods. Creative statesmanship, then, involves the capacity to practice genuine friendship as well as introspective solitude, as exemplified by a Lincoln or a Churchill (pp. 7-8).

Lincoln and Churchill are each the subject of forthcoming manuscripts on the politics of friendship by von Heyking, so in this book he is laying the groundwork for examining the use of friendship in the political language and actions of statesmen. Von Heyking explores how the category of 'virtue friendship' that he finds in both Aristotle and Plato, is related to the political order. He argues that virtue friendship as embedded in the concept of *sunaisithesis* or joint perception and awareness could be held up as 'the pinnacle or crown of friendship'.

This book, however, is not just an addition to the deeply intellectual scholarship on classical friendship and its relevance for high politics. We can see how von Heyking's approach also has an appeal to undergraduate students. He peppers his book with 'wondrous stories' and real life descriptions of friendships at the individual and community level. For example, in discussing the role of festivity in political friendship, he describes 'the Calgary Stampede', begun in 1912, that takes place once a year in July. He suggests that this Canadian civic festival has become a recipe for political success and friendship, as it has evolved to unite citizens, reconciling opposites, not just through sharing the spectacle, but through acts of participation, cooperation, tolerance and liberty.

Von Heyking admits that his claims for friendship in political relationships are somewhat idealistic (p.208) and also recognizes that these ideals are embedded in the particulars of the situations of his Greek philosophers. However, he presents their teachings as a moral standard for politics and as an inspiration of how to live well amongst 'those with whom we have been brought together, for reasons beyond our comprehension' and 'for whom we have the deepest responsibility, and they for us' (p.209).

Suzanne Stern-Gillet is Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Bolton and honorary research fellow in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of

Manchester. Her co-editor, Professor Gary M. Gurtler, a Jesuit priest, teaches in the Philosophy Department at Boston College. In their anthology, ***Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship***, they aim 'to direct a spotlight on the most salient points in what proved to be an enduring theme in philosophical literature' (p.ix), the concept of friendship, by tracing the different moral and political values displayed in pagan antiquity, through Christianity, to more recent philosophers.

In the first of four parts (although the preface makes reference to only three parts) both editors have a chapter on Aristotle. Like von Heyking, Stern-Gillet pays attention to virtue friendship and the political. She addresses two clusters of questions related to Aristotle's 'great-souled man' (*ho megalpsychos*) and his 'small-souled man' (*ho mikropsychos*) and the value of their engagement in civic friendship. She demonstrates that for Aristotle, the *megalopsychos* makes a huge contribution to the city and his political excellence makes him a suitable candidate for the highest office. However, the *mikropsychos*, who shies away from political involvement, inflicts harm on the community and 'undermines the capacity of the state to ensure that its citizens can lead the best possible human life' (p.75).

Gurtler's chapter also addresses the contrast between the virtuous and the vicious characters, and includes 'the many' as a third kind of character. Gurtler identifies four 'causes' of friendship: 'wishing the good' and the necessity of friendship; 'good will' as a necessary, but insufficient, condition for friendship; 'self love and the other' as another self; and 'virtue and activity', where friendship is an activity that produces happiness, enables self knowledge and the virtue of wisdom. He concludes that for Aristotle the many are capable of following the example of the virtuous in terms of forming friendships, but the vicious, even if they try, will never be able to achieve friendship (p.46).

Dimitri El Murr claims that contrary to many commentators, Plato 'considered friendship a primarily political phenomenon', similarly to Aristotle (p.4). He points out that the Platonic concept of *philia* (friendship) has been explored less thoroughly than *eros* (love), and that studies of Platonic friendship 'inevitably, and rightly so, start from the complex arguments of the *Lysis*' (p.5). In seeking to help redress this imbalance, El Murr focuses on a short passage from book eight of the *Laws* (Leg. 836e-37d) which he argues 'will open the way to a fresh understanding of Plato's conception of friendship' (p.5). He traces Plato's concept of friendship also through his other writings, and concludes that 'not unlike Aristotle, Plato has a coherent account of interpersonal friendship on which his conception of civic friendship heavily depends' (p.27).

Aristotle and Plato are also the subject of the two chapters in Part 4 which is entitled 'Enlightenment Thinkers'. Andrea Veltman focuses on self-disclosure and self-knowledge in friendship theorized by both Aristotle and Kant. For both the notion is 'that the highest form of friendship makes possible a mutual knowing of another' (p.271). Veltman concludes by looking at their different conceptions of trust in this mutual knowledge. Aristotle presupposes that trust exists in the shared activities of virtuous friendship, whereas for Kant 'trust is a good that is achieved through communion with another' (p.xv). Sandra Dučić-Collette explores the influence of Plato in her analysis of Hölderlin's concept of friendship in his epistolary novel, *Hyperion*, 'generally taken to be a hymn to love' (p.289). Dučić-Collette argues that this text can also be understood as 'a hymn to friendship and shows how Hölderlin drew from Plato's dialogues for his ideas on both *eros* and *philia*.

Part two considers Hellenistic philosophers, and writings by the Stoics and the Epicureans on friendship, with the three authors helpfully making reference to each other in their chapters. Bernard Collette-Dučić (acknowledged by his wife Sandra in her chapter) argues that the Stoics drew a distinction between love and friendship by presenting friendship as the aim of love, with

reference mainly to Zeno and Seneca, and the influence of Plato where it is 'the lover who benefits most from the love relationship (love being love of wisdom)' (p.88). He acknowledges other analyses that emphasise the 'formidable pedagogical power' of love 'that drives a sage in love to change his beloved into a friend' or into another sage, and hopes that his contribution demonstrates how distinctive is this Stoic idea of pedagogical love (p.108).

Cicero's *De Amicitia* (also called the *Laelius*) and Plato's *Symposium* are compared by Robin Weiss who examines whether Cicero's stoic friend is able to resolve the paradoxes of Platonic love. Weiss argues that Plato's dialogues enable him to present 'two mutually contradictory perspectives on love' by placing each perspective in the mouth of a different character. In Cicero's dialogue, he seems to place two contradictory assertions into the mouth of one character, Laelius (p.135). However, Weiss claims that it is because Cicero 'is trying to do justice to the contradictory nature of love itself' that can be both a search for ourselves and a search for the good (p. 135).

The relationship between *eros* and *philia* is also considered in the chapter on Epicurean philosophy by Harry Lesser who identifies the fundamental difference between *eros* and *philia* in Epicurean philosophy as being that *eros* or passionate and romantic love involves pain, whereas *philia* or friendship offers pleasure without pain. He suggests that the Epicurean conception of friendship is a rich and morally powerful ideal and should be respected. He ends by proposing three options: to follow Epicurus, devoting ourselves to *philia*, 'whenever possible keeping clear of sex and politics'; to follow Plato 'by engaging with sex and politics with the aim of turning them into *philia*'; or 'to accept that one must always operate in the messy world of human sexuality and politics, and within that pursue *philia* as much as one can' (p.130).

Part three demonstrates 'the shift from the Greco-Roman to the Christian conceptions of friendship' of the medieval era (p.xiii). John Panteleimon Manoussakis uses the case of the friendship between Cappadocians Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great to discuss 'Old World' components including *philia*, *eros* and *xenia* (guest friendship) and the notion of *agape* (that in the Christian gospels includes love of enemies) 'of which the classical world knew little or nothing' (p.174). Again, a contrast is drawn with Aristotle who speculates 'that virtuous friends would not quarrel and ... should spend time together', and Basil and Gregory's friendship that continued 'despite their disagreements and the distance from each other in which they lived their separate lives' (p.190).

Tamer Nawar shows how closely Augustine followed Cicero's accounts of friendship 'often to the extent of copying Cicero almost word for word' (p.199). However, although Augustine has some praise for friendship, he also sees it as a possible danger leading to vice rather than virtue. Any good that comes from friendship should be credited to God, not to the friends.

In contrast Aelred of Rievaulx, also influenced by Cicero, delights in human nature and sees a 'taste of sweetness' in the 'desire for friendship and love in the human heart' (p. 231). John R. Sommerfelt provides an account of Aelred who sees friendship as part of the spiritual realm, from the perfect friendship of God, to friendship as vital for physical and spiritual well-being, 'not merely a pleasant adjunct to human life' but also 'a reflection of a fundamental aspect of the ordering of the cosmos' (p.237).

By the thirteenth century, Christian friendship as defined by Thomas Aquinas was focused on *caritas* (love as charity). Fergus Kerr argues that Aquinas' approach changed dramatically after he reread Aristotle's *Ethics* (p.248) and he traces the influence from Plato and Aristotle to account

for Aquinas' description of charity as a 'kind of friendship' where 'we are friends with God' (p.265) and where friendship is possible between friends, only because God has made us his equals through his love for us.

Antonella Liuzzo Scorpo, a Senior Lecturer in the School of History and Heritage at the University of Lincoln in the UK, provides an in-depth analysis of one aspect of thirteenth century writings on friendship - the works of King Alfonso X of Castille (1252-84). In her monograph, **Friendship in Medieval Iberia: Historical Legal and Literary Perspective**, she links his work not only to Classical and Roman traditions of friendship, but also to Visigothic, Arabic and Eastern influences. Alfonso X of Castille was considered to be an enlightened ruler, known as 'the Wise' or 'the Learned' (p.3), and was one of the leaders of the Christian 'reconquest' of the Southern part of the Iberian Peninsular which was still under Muslim control (p.4). He explicitly declared 'his desire to be respected and loved as a friend by his subjects' (p.5).

The book starts with an extract from the *Siete Partidas*, a thirteenth-century law code 'designed to regulate all aspects of Castilian subjects' public and personal lives'.

Amicitia, in Latin, means friendship in Castilian, and friendship, according to Aristotle, is a virtue which is intrinsically good in itself and profitable to human life and that, properly speaking, it arises when one person who loves another is beloved by him, for under other circumstances, true friendship could not exist; and therefore he stated that there is a great difference between friendship, love, benevolence and concord (Translation by Samuel Parsons Scott, 2000).

Scorpo's examination of friendship in the medieval period, specifically in the Iberian context, includes the rules (and some of these are legal rules) that define and regulate friendship; what were the realities of friendship, according to medieval contemporary sources; and the Mediterranean and Central European traditions that influenced these relationships.

The main texts used were 'three encyclopedic collections produced in the Alfonsine scriptorium and chancery' that she describes as 'true gems of artistic and aesthetic splendour' (p.4). There were 'the sevenfold legislative code' of the *Siete Partidas* referred to above; the chronicles of the *Estoria de España* 'which narrate events of the history of Spain'; and the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, 'a collection of poems, enhanced with musical annotations, miniatures, displaying the miracles performed by the Virgin Mary, which also provides an insight into different devotional experiences' (p.4).

A study of the Iberian context includes very different ethnic and religious groups that were regulated by rules about with whom these communities should interact. There was explicit reference to Christians, Muslims, Jews and heretics. While Scorpo recognizes the cultural similarities with other contemporary European contexts, she identifies some original aspects of Iberian interpretations of friendship. The dismissal of blood ties and kinship as guaranteeing loyalty and respect is a contrast to ancient Greek and Near Eastern thinkers who praised these links. Bonds of loyalty and mutual respect were to be found in friendship that had to be earned and were characterized through networks, alliances, diplomatic treaties and agreements of peace. Importantly, Scorpo's book also demonstrates the beginning of the next historical shift – from Christian spiritual friendship to secular friendship.

Referring back to my article in the first volume of *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* that traced the contribution to the academic debate on friendship and politics, one can see the constant increasing presence of new books (both edited and sole authored) on this topic from only two in the decades from 1900 to 1960, then increasing each decade, until from 2000 to 2009 when there were twenty-nine. To have three books focusing on ancient and medieval concepts of friendship within three years (2014-2016) helps to demonstrate that the concept of friendship as a model for politics is no longer just in revival, but is a firm presence in the academy.