

Civic Friendship and Democracy: Past and Present Perspectives

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
Political Science in the Graduate School  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

My dissertation seeks to clarify the stakes of recent calls to increase civic friendship in our communities by initiating a conversation between contemporary and historical theoretical work about the requirements and consequences of using friendship as a model for social and political relationships between citizens. Friends' lives are bound together by shared activity and by mutual concern and support; in what ways do relations between citizens, who often begin as strangers, take up these attitudes and behaviors? What kinds of civic friendship are possible in our contemporary democratic communities? How are they cultivated? And what are their political advantages and disadvantages? These questions guide the project as a whole.

I begin by canvassing some recent and popular work by Robert Bellah et al., Robert Putnam, and Danielle Allen in order to clarify the claims they make about different forms of civic friendship. The chapters that follow focus on the work of Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Adam Smith respectively in order to respond to various gaps I find in the contemporary accounts. I assess what each thinker, contemporary and canonical, can offer us today as we continue to think about the most sustainable and fair ways in which citizens can relate to one another in vast and diverse contemporary democracies. Along the way I address several important over-arching issues: the relationship between self-interest and care for others; the relationship between different sorts of equality and civic friendship; and the different roles that reason, emotions,

habits, and institutions play in the cultivation of various kinds of civic friendship. I conclude that equality and justice ought to be both prerequisites and consequences of civic friendship, that self-interest is not a sufficient source for robust civic friendship and that instead some kind of imaginative and emotional motivation is needed, and that civic friendship must be understood as both a moral and a political phenomenon.

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# 1. Introduction

The term “civic friendship” is not often invoked outside of academic discourse, although the constellation of phenomena to which it refers is often at the heart of everyday debates at all levels of society, and not only in the academe. Sometimes “solidarity,” “fraternity,” or a “sense of community” are invoked in such debates. I choose to ground my work using the overarching term “civic friendship” rather than any of these others because of what the pair of words connotes when they are considered together in the ordinary and everyday senses in which we invoke them. “Civic” brings to mind the state of citizenship, and specifically for my project, the fact that we share a community with all others who are part of ours. There are many in contemporary democracies with whom this is the only sort of relationship we share, that of being fellow citizens, even when we are also strangers to one another.<sup>1</sup> “Friendship” calls to mind things like spending time together, having some understanding of another’s life, and acting out of care and concern for their well-being. So by “civic friendship” I wish to invoke several different but related concepts, with a kind of family resemblance, including association, cooperation, trust, good will, and mutual concern and aid between citizens of a political community. The texts with which I work

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use the term ‘citizen’ broadly; at this stage, I simply wish to invoke people living together and affecting one others’ lives in variously complex ways whether at the national, state, city, and neighborhood levels.

throughout the dissertation invoke variously several of the above terms, or those that are sufficiently similar. In general, anomie – the loss of social norms and values – along with excessive individualism and isolation stand opposed to what I mean by civic friendship. The cultivation of friendships in general is an important part of human life, but is often taken to be opposed to the practice of politics. If friendship is private, partial, particular, and emotional in our common sense of the word, then politics practiced fairly upholds universal rights through the exercise of public, impartial, and rational judgment. In recent years, though, and across disciplines, much work has been done to bring attention to the normative importance as well as the empirical state of social and political phenomena connected with civic friendship; various accounts of the links between association, trust, and mutual concern and aid – and between these and a just, diverse, and sustainable democracy – have brought us back again to canonical accounts of social and political phenomena related to civic friendship, but with new questions and commitments against which to measure them.

The contemporary work on which I focus heralds phenomena as diverse as civic engagement, charity, voluntary service, community organizing, and social justice as instances and evidence of civic friendship; while my historical sources attempt to delineate just how exactly civic friendship works or how it ought to work, where it comes from, and how it can be cultivated. In what follows, I make use of these accounts of civic friendship, both old and new, in order to attend in particular to the relationship

of the attitudes and actions that go along with civic friendship to the workings and nature of contemporary democracy. The question at the heart of my dissertation is: When, where, and to what extent can we share, actually or imaginatively, in one another's fates in diverse democratic communities such as the United States? Friends' lives are bound together by shared activity and by mutual concern and support; in what ways do relations between citizens, who often begin as strangers, take up these attitudes and behaviors, and in what ways are they limited in doing so? I see my project as challenging and supplementing existing normative calls for civic friendship, and my work is grounded in the assumption that an analytically incisive and empirically supported account of different kinds of civic friendship can help us determine its possibilities and limits for us today. I also take it for granted that recent accounts of the importance of civic friendship to human beings as social beings, as well as to the stability and efficiency of their communities, are correct – but I argue that in order to arrive at a position in which we can work to sustain and improve conditions of civic friendship, we must have a clear sense of what we mean when we invoke the term and also of what causes it to flourish or to deteriorate. The primary end of this project is to contextualize contemporary calls for civic friendship by returning to several works in the history of political thought that account for some of the most significant sources and forms of association, solidarity, and care in political communities and to weigh their consequences for democracy in particular. The contemporary accounts, taken together,

paint a picture of robust civic friendship in which citizens take seriously the concerns, well-being, and dignity of their fellows and act accordingly; however, I find that they lack a satisfying account of how these attitudes and behaviors come about. So I turn to the canonical accounts in order to see if they can fill in these gaps or not.

In the second chapter I begin by canvassing recent work on community and civic friendship in the contemporary United States, in order to generate framing questions and concerns that structure the chapters that follow. I focus on works by Robert Bellah et. al., Robert Putnam, and Danielle Allen – *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, and *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. Board of Education*, respectively – because they have been extremely influential and widely read, and I take them to be exemplary in the contemporary conversation about civic friendship, broadly construed as I explained above, both in and outside of academia. I am especially interested in these thinkers because of their emphasis on friendship in contemporary democracies that are built upon the ideals of social and political equality across their diverse memberships; each of these thinkers takes seriously the challenges that diversity – of race, of religious practice, of political partisanship, of socioeconomic status, of cultural heritage, and so on – may pose to friendship between fellow citizens. These thinkers also come together in their recognition that self-interest is a powerful motivator of human action and that it often interacts with important other-regarding

tendencies to produce results that, at the very least, look a great deal like those phenomena that I have grouped together as registers of civic friendship. And they also use wide-ranging methods as they describe their visions of civic friendship, whatever they call it – whether community, social capital, or friendship, respectively; they include interviews, exemplars, surveys, and interpretations of historical events and works of art – all in an effort to be widely applicable and accessible. Because they aim (and succeed) in setting the public discussion about community and civic friendship, and because of all that they share in doing so, I examine these three works in particular.

Next I discuss three canonical sources – Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (chapter 3), Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (chapter 4), and Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (chapter 5) – in order to see if they can fill any of the gaps left by the contemporary sources, and to decide on what kinds of resources and insights they offer as we try to come to terms with the idea of civic friendship in vast and diverse democratic communities in the present. Aristotle is the only among these that uses the term “civic friendship” specifically (in translation, of course), and Tocqueville is the only one who discusses the workings of democracy, but each has a distinctive account of the ways in which citizens can be said to be friends with or care about or for one another. I focus on these three canonical sources in particular because they mirror the contemporary sources in several ways. They, too, each discuss the relationships between civic friendship and equality, between civic friendship and self-interest, and between

civic friendship and conflict and diversity. And each is concerned with ordinary life and approaches questions about civic friendship not only as a theorist but also as a proto-sociologist in their prioritizing of everyday life as the context of their discussions. My aim in attending to these canonical works is not to get a fulsome sense of their authors' thought, only of what these most pertinent works offer given my particular aims in elucidating concepts of civic friendship. And I order them as I do to match the continuing value of their offerings as I see them; my readings of these three works develop upon one another and reach their conclusion in Smith's account of sympathy, which I find to be the most resourceful of the three.

More precisely, in chapter 2 I offer close readings of *Habits of the Heart*, *Bowling Alone*, and *Talking to Strangers*, in order to better understand the worries, hopes, and demands that characterize contemporary talk about civic friendship in diverse democratic communities, focusing on the United States in particular. Each of these works has slightly different accounts of civic friendship, but they share enough that they are considered together fruitfully. Bellah et. al., in *Habits of the Heart*, worry not only that Americans have lost a sense of community in attitude and action but also that even when they do act in the interest of the community they cannot provide an account of why they do so. This loss of an understanding of why and how others are important to us and deserve our consideration helps to explain why civic friendship (though they do not rely on this term) or a sense of community is missing in the contemporary United

States. In its place, they see merely the reliance on what they call the politics of interest. They focus on several exemplary kinds of citizens, involved in volunteering and activism, as alternatives to the status quo that are sorely needed for the health of community in the United States, and they use these exemplars to provide an account of politics of community as an alternative to the politics of interest.

Putnam, in *Bowling Alone*, worries that political, civic, and religious participation in the United States are waning. His work is anchored within the framework of his argument that social capital, the consequence of such participation, results in a generalized reciprocity that calls us to act so as to benefit others without any expectation of a specific return, but with the confident expectation that we will benefit similarly by someone else's action at some undetermined time. In this way, practices of mutual aid begin to develop. This is where I locate the broad contours of civic friendship in his account. However, Putnam also recognizes that social capital can grow up in conditions of diversity (bridging) or in conditions of exclusive identity (bonding). In this way it can be either and both salutary and dangerous, and so much of his work is spent reflecting on how to and if we can get to more bridging social capital in particular.

And Danielle Allen, in *Talking to Strangers*, calls for us to actively and willfully cultivate habits of friendship and she argues that "friendship is not an emotion, but a practice, a set of hard-won, complicated habits that are used to bridge trouble, difficulty, and differences of personality, experience, and aspiration" in contemporary democracy

(Allen 2004, xxi). Her aim is a workable vision of a political world in which burdens and successes are shared more equally across the citizenry than they currently are, though not one that is entirely unified or without conflict or variety. She argues that this requires efforts to keep unreasonable, unequal, unrecognized, and unjustified sacrifice to a minimum and she proposes that these must be grounded in what she calls equitable self-interest. This first chapter as a whole provides much of the framework for the remaining chapters. It leaves readers with a sense of what recent calls for more civic friendship in the United States entail, but it also ends with a set of guiding questions for the analyses of canonical sources that follow. In some cases, these questions are informed by gaps in the accounts of Bellah et. al., Putnam, and Allen; and in others, they grow out of similarities between all of the accounts, both contemporary and canonical.

The chapters on canonical works that follow thus all loosely share a similar structure. They first seek to outline the political problems to which something like civic friendship is meant to respond. They then discuss the motivations and results of their versions of civic friendship respectively. Each of them specifically speaks to two shared concerns: The ways in which self-interest and a regard for others interact in individuals to either bring about or hinder the growth of attitudes or behaviors of civic friendship; and the ways in which different understandings of equality are at play in civic friendship. The chapters also discuss the location and extent of civic friendship in political communities. And I conclude each of them by deciding on the conceptual

advantages and limits of each account of civic friendship given my overarching concern for a civic friendship as robust and as rooted in contemporary concerns as those models described by Bellah, Putnam, and Allen.

In chapter 3, I lay out some of Aristotle's accounts of both politics and friendship in general before moving on to an analysis of his conception of civic friendship in particular. After a discussion of Aristotle's three kinds of friendship – of shared virtue, shared pleasure, or shared utility – I argue that Aristotle's account of civic friendship falls firmly in the latter category. I then try to make as strong a case for it as a source of the goods of civic friendship as laid out in the first chapter as I can, but in the end find it too limited by its strong emphasis on interest and exchange in political life. Along the way, though, I also emphasize the helpful insights found in Aristotle's account of civic friendship. His distinction between moral and legal utility friendship helpfully clarifies how optimistic we should be about the results of mutual interest. Additionally, Aristotle draws close connections between civic friendship and equality and justice; and he roots his account of politics in a context of diversity and shared deliberation. These are strong foundations on which to begin to build and develop an examination into the very concept of civic friendship itself.

In chapter 4, I locate Tocqueville's account of civic friendship in his discussion of the interactions between association, self-interest well understood, and compassion in the burgeoning American democracy. These salutary social and political phenomena

respond to the twin dangers of democracy as Tocqueville sees them, excessive individualism and democratic despotism. I then account for the ways in which each of association, self-interest well understood, and compassion is left similarly underdeveloped and ambiguous in Tocqueville's account. Association, as in Putnam's account, can be inclusive or exclusive, and can have a whole host of aims that may or may not be politically desirable; self-interest well understood can be interpreted narrowly or generously; and compassion is sometimes proposed as a result of self-interest well understood and sometimes as an alternative to it. In the end, I find that though it is similarly limited by its reliance on self-interest, Tocquevillean civic friendship nevertheless provides several insights that I consider indispensable to the contemporary conversation about civic friendship. These include the way in which his work distinguishes between two registers of civic friendship, one more individual and private, the other more public and political in nature; his further development of the relationship between equality and civic friendship beyond Aristotle's account; and his proposal of compassion as an emotional motivation whose range expands in conditions of democracy.

In chapter 5, I find Smith's work specifically on beneficence to be the best approximation of the more demanding visions of civic friendship with which I began, in which we concern ourselves with the good of others growing out of a sense of interdependence beyond one rooted in self-interest, whether well understood or not.

This aspect of Smith's thought relies on his precise and complex account of human sympathy, which develops upon Tocqueville's brief hints about compassion. Smithian beneficence relies on the refinement of sympathy by our cultivation of impartiality, though, and I show that both are limited by a host of obstacles including, most salient for contemporary democratic communities, convention and cultural diversity. The concept of negative justice is proposed as a second best social impulse, more realistic and dependable than beneficence, but I argue that its development ultimately also requires impartiality. I conclude with some concrete suggestions about how we might get beyond this problem.

In my conclusion to the project (chapter 6), I revisit the most salient insights from each of the models of civic friendship that I investigate in order to come to a better sense of the work that still must be done to make sure that thinking about civic friendship and related phenomena in contemporary democratic communities is accurate, clear, concrete, and realistic. And I then reflect more generally about what my work throughout offers to this line of thinking and about what else we absolutely must attend to as we continue to think through the concept of civic friendship given the particularities of the contemporary social and political scene, specifically in the United States. I anticipate these reflections briefly here, before moving on to chapter 1. In the end I argue, first, that if we think of self-interest as the strongest human motivation in our social and political lives, then we have reason to be extremely cynical about the

scope and even the possibility of a civic friendship grounded in equality and justice in contexts of extreme diversity. We must conceive of an alternative. Second, and as a consequence, we must allow, in our contemporary accounts of civic friendship, for something like compassion or sympathy as an essential mechanism in the cultivation of solidary attitudes and behavior. This emotional and imaginative capacity, coupled with a profound sense of equality and interdependence, is our best bet in generating care for others' well-being that is not bounded by our self-concern and that can bridge across the deep diversity that is ubiquitous in contemporary pluralist democracy. Finally, I argue that civic friendship is a multivalent concept that attends to both moral and political phenomena, and that speaks to the experiences of individuals and institutions, and that thinkers must work to be clearer about this fact in their work. Lack of clarity about this issue leads to flippant and optimistic suggestions about what specific behaviors lead to more civic friendship. As a result, I end with a call for alternative sources that use concrete evidence about such matters and that could thus more sufficiently ground contemporary political theory about civic friendship.

## 2. Contemporary Visions of Civic Friendship: Bellah, Putnam, Allen

I now turn to three recent, well-known, and widely discussed works, each of which centers on questions about the nature of community and the ethos and practices of citizenship in the contemporary United States of America. The works I have chosen to highlight below – *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985, 1996, 2008) by Robert Bellah et al, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) by Robert Putnam, and *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (2004) by Danielle Allen – are similar not only in substance, but in approach and style. These are works of public philosophy, whether they are also works of sociology, political science, or political theory, as the case may be. When I call them works of “public philosophy” I mean two things: that they are strongly committed to the health of the public sphere as they envision it and that they discuss this in ways meant to engage the general public – that is, by bringing our ordinary and everyday experiences as citizens to the forefront as their primary sources. In so doing, these authors mean for their works to be accessible both in language and in thought.

These three works have been widely read across disciplines within the academe, as well as outside of it. I turn to them as works that have had a special influence in initiating and continuing public conversations about the ways in which Americans do and ought to relate to one another. If civic friendship has to do with things like justice,

equality, association, shared interests and activities, trust, and mutual concern, then these works focus on the state of civic friendship – its possibility and meaning – for us today, whether or not they employ that term in particular for the subject of their studies. I contend that these works are meant as antidotes to obscure, elitist, and overly abstract or idealistic work on similar questions. But they too have shortcomings.

In what follows, I try to identify these work's most important insights on civic friendship while isolating questions about both the meaning and the implications of each of their visions of civic friendship. Each of these works supplies us with a picture of community in American life in which much is wanting, and suggests means by which we can improve it. The authors recognize that the contemporary United States – like many other nations – is incredibly diverse, hence the great significance in discovering how to make sure that such variegated communities can hold together and remain coherent and livable for *all* of their members. Critically engaging with these visions of civic friendship allows me to problematize contemporary thinking about civic friendship, and helps to reveal the need for clear thinking about its character, sources, and limits.

## **2.1 *Habits of the Heart***

Written over 25 years ago, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* sought to identify the ways in which ordinary, mostly white, middle-class Americans thought about the individual's relation to community. The authors found

that, in general, concern for the life we share with fellow citizens, especially those very different from us, has steadily diminished – and that the language that we use to talk about such concerns has eroded, so that even when some sense of civic responsibility or solidarity is present and important for us in our political and social lives, we often cannot coherently account for its source, significance, or meaning. Individualism that excludes concern about our wider (diverse and unequal) community is the authors' greatest concern, but they also emphasize the importance of our being able to understand and account for that concern in language and thought in our own lives. Each new edition of *Habits of the Heart* emphasizes the work's lasting importance, especially as the United States continues to become an increasingly unequal society. Newer prefaces, written in 1996 and in 2008, link excessive individualism specifically to our failure as a society to respond to or reincorporate a growing and ignored "underclass" (Bellah et al. 2008, xxxviii). The authors lament the fact that Tocqueville's "sense that equality was on the march turns out to have been a mistake after all" (Bellah et al. 2008, x).

The overarching aim of *Habits of the Heart* is to show that Americans have lost a sense of the way that we each fit into the larger social (and, ultimately, national) community. They do this by examining and evaluating the ways in which those citizens that do feel compelled to advocate or act on behalf of the common good, and against inequality of various kinds, take up and account for this commitment of theirs. *Habits* is based on hundreds of interviews; the results of these are distilled in a handful

of portraits of several exemplary types of citizens. I focus on two of these types because I take them as the authors' most fulsome description of the kinds of citizens who embody civic friendship.

The authors begin by laying out what they see as a deeply lamentable lack of a sense of community:

"We are facing trends that threaten our basic sense of solidarity with others: solidarity with those near to us (loyalty to neighbors, colleagues at work, fellow townsfolk), but also solidarity with those who live far from us, those who are economically in situations very different from our own . . . . Yet this solidarity – this sense of connection, shared fate, mutual responsibility, community – is more critical now than ever. It is solidarity, trust, mutual responsibility that allows human communities to deal with threats and take advantage of opportunities." (Bellah et al. 2008, xxxviii)

I locate the authors' definition of civic friendship here, in their reflections on the links between community, shared fate, and mutual responsibility – all in a context of deep diversity and inequality. It is not my aim to confirm whether their position about its disappearance is correct or not. I wish only to locate a definition of civic friendship in their work, and to investigate how the authors explain its cultivation and operation.

The authors describe American society as one "in which the individual can only rarely and with difficulty understand himself and his activities as interrelated in morally meaningful ways with those of other, different Americans" (Bellah et al. 2008, 50). In framing the discussion of community and commitment in later editions with an emphasis on numerous and pervasive inequalities rooted in race and class differences,

*Habits* underlines that these differences that divide Americans are in no way superficial but have to do instead with the very capacity of many to live healthy, comfortable, and secure lives. Considered in this light, our inability to see the ways in which our lives are bound up with our fellows is especially troubling. If we can be said to share in the lives of our fellow citizens in some sense, then we can ask what we can do about the forms of inequality that hinder their ability to flourish, as well as how it is that any sense of responsibility for injustice or inequality develops at all.

Near the end of their investigation, the authors observe that, even when the citizens they meet and talk with feel strongly drawn to community involvement – and even when this involvement cuts across lines of race or class difference – most still have trouble giving an account of a community made up of culturally, socially, and economically diverse groups. Instead, the ideal they seek is a community made up of similarly autonomous and effective individuals (perhaps all comfortably settled in the middle class); the fact that there are currently groups of people that do not fit into this vision, “who do not meet the criteria for full social participation,” must then be explained in a way that undercuts its status as a morally legitimate problem. Instead, their existence must be someone’s fault, “either their own – perhaps because their culture is defective, and they lack a work ethic or there is something wrong with their family system – or someone else’s: economic or political elites perhaps oppress them and prevent their full participation” (Bellah et al. 2008, 206). In this way, we cut off the

possibility that we can ever take up these differences as political issues to be grappled with, and we lose any sense of how we might be implicated in systems of inequality.

It is difficult to see how anyone might be motivated to move outside of their familiar circles, whether of family, friends, or small town, in order to build links of solidarity beyond them if we have no way to understand ourselves as related to those who live in our neighborhood, city, or country, but with whom we are not already intimately acquainted. This is especially true because the ways in which our lives are tied up with those of others are so opaque to us – especially those who are so different from us that we rarely encounter them, or rarely take these encounters seriously, in the course of our daily lives. The authors of *Habits* thus begin their work with a notion of civic friendship and with the sense that it is extremely important to communities; the question that structures the work is: How can we get more civic friendship? In other words, how does it happen that citizens feel connected with their fellows so that they then feel moved to spend time, attention, or resources on eradicating social and political inequalities that persist for some members of their community?

### **2.1.1 Civic Volunteers and Civic-Minded Professionals: On Care in Politics**

In order to answer this question, *Habits of the Heart* focuses on two types of citizens isolated from interviews. Both are not as guided as most by what the authors see as the primary obstacle to civic friendship – individualism – although they are able to

understand and account for their alternative and community-minded motives in different ways and to different degrees. These are “civic volunteers” or “civic-minded professionals,” on the one hand, and “professional activists” or “movement activists,” on the other. Although these exemplary types remain vaguely defined and leave open questions about how they develop and the degree to which all members of a community should embody their ideals, they help in conceiving of the ways in which citizens can be said to take seriously the concerns of their fellows.

Examples chosen from among their interviewees help the authors draw the contours of each of these two kinds of community-minded citizen. Eleanor Macklin stands in as a *civic-minded professional*. When a controversial public housing project is set to be built in her community and hostile disagreements arise about how the community will change as a result, she is committed to the notion that a solution that will satisfy all parties is possible only if the procedure is fair and open to all stake-holders. While Eleanor reveals concern for all involved – including those who need housing, and who are overlooked or marginalized by other members in her community – the authors find that this position lacks an understanding that an entirely satisfying solution might not be found after all, as well as an account of why we should take anyone else’s interests seriously, especially when they work against our own.

In contrast, Mary Taylor is a civic-minded professional involved in environmental issues in California who is able to offer an account of why work with and

on behalf of fellow community-members matters. For her, a strong sense of the interdependence of American society leads to a recognition of a debt to it and a responsibility to future generations. This sense of responsibility grounds Mary's work in her more local community, while it reveals a wide-ranging understanding about the ways in which her life is implicated in that of many others and vice versa. It is precisely in this way that the authors find in Mary an example of a robust understanding of community that is then embodied in her civic action out in the world. This sense of interdependence shows itself as care for others. The authors explain that the primary source of Mary's "sense of social responsibility seems to be the experience of caring and being cared for in the course of her volunteer work" (Bellah et al. 2008, 194). This link between care and interdependence is a personal one for Mary.

The second strand of community, embodied by the professional or movement activist, refers to those whose community work is dedicated to bringing about more radical change in over-arching institutions. In this way, it is more political than Mary's perspective. However, like the civic-minded professionals, activists remain rooted in the concerns of their local community and they also can get stuck at a vision of community as merely "a voluntary gathering of autonomous individuals" (Bellah et al. 2008, 206).

In the case of Wayne Bauer, who works with the Campaign for Economic Democracy on tenant-organizing projects, the authors conclude that his goal of helping Mexican-Americans to become more politically autonomous and efficacious is

essentially an education in middle class skills (Bellah et al. 2008, 206). In both of Eleanor's and Wayne's perspectives, the question of justice has to do simply with getting a fair chance to try to achieve what one wants in the public sphere. However, Wayne's work is additionally motivated by a recognition that social power in the United States is unequally distributed, and that we will not be able to achieve fair outcomes without working to chip away at this institutional inequality. Just like Eleanor's neutral take on the conflict surrounding a proposed housing development, Wayne does not provide an account of the common good behind his aim to help new citizens advocate on behalf of their rights and interests. The authors conclude that what many civic-minded professionals and activists lack alike is the ability to give an account of the moral commitments that underlie their political work or, ultimately, to answer this most important question: "As long as one has the power to get what one wants, why should one care about others who do not?" (Bellah et al. 2008, 191).

But are the authors of *Habits* right about Wayne Bauer, for example, when they trivialize his organizing work by characterizing it as an education in middle class skills? Understanding and participating in political affairs as they affect our daily lives – in personal experiences with landlords and tenant laws, for example – is the only way for us to make sure that our voices are heard and that our interests are at least considered. Why do the authors discuss the political agency and efficacy associated with the middle class in a way that belittles its importance? What is Wayne's kind of work and

commitment missing? Because Wayne does not have (or, at least, does not articulate) a moral grounding for his political activism, his organizing is only a practice of what the authors call the “politics of interest.” They explain that “one enters the politics of interest for reasons of utility, to get what one or one’s group needs or wants, rather than because of spontaneous involvement with others to whom one feels akin” (Bellah et al. 2008, 200). This is politics as usual as we know it today – a realm of diverse and competing interests governed by neutral rules and characterized by unequal power. By making sure that more and more alienated members of his community can participate in a meaningful way in these interest politics, their criticism is that Wayne merely extends its reach without questioning its ground as a divisive, individualistic, and rivalrous struggle.

The authors note a similar deficiency in the organizing work of Saul Alinsky; he assumes that an underlying sense of community can grow out of coalitions of citizens who come together initially only to fight for an interest in common. They counter this view with an alternative that they find embodied in Philadelphia’s Institute for the Study of Civic Values. The work of this organization is comparable to the Campaign for Economic Democracy for which Wayne works in its focus on organizing for the empowerment of local communities, but the authors find that the Institute is better equipped to explain why empowerment itself is important. Its founders articulate the need to have a fundamental sense of community alongside more practical knowledge

and skill: “economic skills and knowing about how to organize and lobby effectively don’t add up in any direct fashion to citizenship as a cooperative form of life. If you don’t start from things like equity, you’ll never get there” (Bellah et al. 2008, 216). The content of this equity, they suggest, is embedded in the desire we all have for dignity, and this desire is itself rooted in our interests, no matter the rest of their content. In this way, we are all alike.

The authors of *Habits* suggest that dignity is attained in the trust and respect that comes from membership in a community. So they prize the kind of work Wayne does because it helps to secure this dignity for others, while they gently question his lack of reflection about the worth of his work as well as the larger question about why we ought to care about other citizens’ political interests at all. For the founders of the Institute, Edward Schwartz and Jane Shull, the proper end of politics is justice rather than power; and justice here refers to the necessary economic and political resources for enabling participation in the political realm – now envisioned as an ultimately cooperative rather than competitive realm of human life.

In comparing Eleanor Macklin with Mary Taylor, and the Campaign for Economic Democracy’s Wayne Bauer with the founders of the Institute for the Study of Civic Values, *Habits of the Heart* distinguishes between two visions of political life: one in which struggles for power arise out of citizens’ competing interests and one in which divergent interests conflict but in which citizens also measure their immediate interests

against the good of the wider community because of an underlying sense of social interdependence and of the dignity of all community-members. Although the former can have salutary consequences in the political realm if participants, like Wayne or Eleanor, are concerned about how the system excludes some groups in society, the authors of *Habits* highlight the importance of having ways to articulate the need for an inclusive political realm grounded in the sense that we all have claims to equal dignity and we depend on each other for this dignity; with an account of its importance such a vision is in less danger of being superseded by narrow self-interest, presumably.

### **2.1.2 Politics of Interest, Community, and Nation**

We have discussed the notion of the politics of interest, but there are two additional visions of politics described in *Habits*: the politics of community and the politics of the nation. These three types of politics are only isolated by the authors in order to clarify how they interact with one another. While the politics of interest is pluralistic and competitive, the politics of community is characterized by the sort of moral consensus arrived at in face to face discussion, as in the ideal of the New England small town meeting of days gone by. The politics of the nation takes up the tasks of uniting diverse citizens and of creating and maintaining a vision that moves beyond individual interests.

As the authors of *Habits* show in their various profiles, local involvement need not translate into more wide-ranging concern; instead it can remain insular and

exclusive. But even when people do not willfully isolate themselves from the broader community, out of fear or disgust, for example, they find it difficult to feel that they have accomplished anything of significance in their participation in local voluntary associations, whatever their aim; “they have difficulty relating this ideal image [of small-scale local community] to the large-scale forces and institutions shaping their lives. . . . Many of those we talked with convey the feeling that sometimes their very best efforts to pursue their finest ideals seems senseless” (Bellah et al. 2008, 199). But in *Habits* there is explicit criticism of the notion that being involved in the local community is an effective means of making national culture or institutions more inclusive or equal. This is important because the kind of civic friendship all of these works call for is supposed to have wide-ranging effects even if it only takes place in a local setting.

The authors argue that because a fulsome understanding of the complex social order in the United States is impossible for us, “many individuals tend not to deal with embedded inequalities of power, privilege, and esteem in a culture of self-proclaimed moral equality” (Bellah et al. 2008, 204). This avoidance prevents the kind of broad-based community that the authors think is needed in a society as divided as the United States was in the 1980s and still is today. The authors’ most robust use of the term “community” refers, as we saw in the example of the Institute for the Study of Civic Values, to a civic friendship that is distinctly political, and that aims to change political circumstances rather than merely to connect with others personally.

Their brief discussion of the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. helps to illustrate these distinctions. By characterizing legal disenfranchisement, poverty, and many other deprivations of African Americans in the United States as “denials of personal dignity and social participation,” and as a failure of collective national responsibility, racial equality came to be understood as a question of justice because it “reawakened recognition by many Americans that their own sense of self was rooted in companionship with others who, though not necessarily like themselves, nevertheless shared with them a common history and whose appeals to justice and solidarity made powerful claims on their loyalty” (Bellah et al. 2008, 252). This is in stark contrast to the sort of public involvement that is motivated only by a concern to “protect one’s hearth and home and one’s decent friends and neighbors from the evils of a mysterious, threatening, complicated society composed of shadowy, sinister, immoral strangers,” who will have to take care of themselves (Bellah et al. 2008, 185). But how do we move beyond such an isolating and exclusive understanding of friendship and community? And how do any of us begin to sense that interdependence and recognition of equal dignity ought to be the standards guiding a sense of community (rather than cultural uniformity, patriotism, affection, or something else)?

*Habits* does an excellent job in elaborating a vision of civic friendship rooted in contemporary conditions. The authors argue that attempting to understand and ameliorate deep difference and inequality requires that we recognize the equal dignity

of our fellows and put this into practice in our lives in some way, and they provide helpful examples of individuals enacting civic friendship in their daily lives. They advocate for civic friendship as an alternative to the politics of interest (seeking power) and the politics of community (engagement in the local community) in order to show that institutions matter. That is an extremely important offering to the conversation given how vast contemporary democracies are. But the question of how to cultivate attitudes and self-understandings compatible with their vision of civic friendship remains open.

## ***2.2 Bowling Together: On Social Capital***

In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam emphasizes that political, civic, and religious participation in the United States are waning: Americans' participation in public meetings on local affairs or as members of committees, their attendance at club meetings and at churches, and their time spent on volunteer work are all, for the most part, in decline. Putnam mines these trends in order to see if and how they might be linked. His work is anchored within the framework of his own take on social capital theory. He defines social capital as "the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them", and likens it to civic virtue (Putnam 2000, 19). Social connections (arising from our extended family, a pottery class, a church group, professional networks, or volunteer involvement, and so on) make us more productive by widening

our sphere of trust; and they might at some point benefit us financially, emotionally, or physically. Social capital can be at once a private and a public good. Reciprocity in personal relationships means that a favor we perform will be (or ought to be) returned to us at some point in the future. Generalized reciprocity means that we may act so as to benefit others without any expectation of a specific return, but with the confident expectation that we will benefit similarly by someone else's action at some undetermined time. Community-wide trust thus makes for coherent and efficient communities.

However, Putnam also recognizes that social capital can have terrible consequences; he distinguishes between what he calls bridging – a more inclusive way to build social capital, and bonding. Examples of bridging associations are those, as in the civil rights movement, with a diverse membership that seeks to include people of different genders, ethnicities, and religions. Bridging social capital extends our sense of reciprocity to include a greater diversity of our fellow citizens, while bonding social capital emphasizes the significance of some very particular identity-markers shared by those involved. Bonding associations reinforce distinctions, and can grow out of organizations designed to include only those of a certain ethnicity or religious tradition. Putnam notes that “social capital is often most easily created *in opposition* to something or someone else. Fraternity is most natural within socially homogeneous groups” (Putnam 2000, 360-1). Nevertheless, Putnam particularly focuses for most of this work

on the benefits rather than the dangers of social capital, and laments its loss over the past few decades of American history. In the context of my overarching project – an investigation into ancient, modern, and contemporary concepts of civic friendship – I focus on his description of social capital as part of this tradition of thought.

In his account civic friendship has much to do with how face-to-face engagement with some of our fellow citizens has repercussions for the wider community. In this way, he sees himself following Tocqueville's observations about local civic culture in early democratic America, and he pits himself against Bellah et al. in their suspicion about the wider effects about face to face interaction in and of itself. Putnam asserts that as circles of associated citizens overlap, trust expands. How does this happen? And why should it drift sometimes towards bridging differences and sometimes towards bonding only between those who are very much alike? To answer these questions, we must look to what motivates association in the first place, as well as what causes it to move beyond mere association – spending time together in shared activities of any kind – in order to include mutual aid in some way. According to Putnam, do we associate simply because of common interests – as though we would be friends with anyone who shares with us a love of bowling, record-collecting, or some other hobby; or a religious practice; or a political affiliation? And, further, how can such sometimes narrow common interests expand to become something more meaningful and politically salient – like generalized trust and reciprocity? Only with such knowledge will we be able to resolve the question

of “how the positive consequences of social capital – mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness – can be maximized and the negative manifestations – sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption – minimized” (Putnam 2000, 22).

### **2.2.1 Friendship, Freedom, and Equality**

One way in which Putnam addresses such questions is to show positive connections between social capital (or fraternity, as he calls it at this point in his argument, in order to invoke the tripartite rallying cry of the French Revolution) and each of liberty and equality. He cites evidence to show that there are positive links between fraternity and liberty, and between fraternity and equality (Putnam 2000, 355). In this part of his investigation, he argues that these three political virtues are not mutually exclusive simply by showing that these two pairs of political virtues coexist. In the first case, Putnam links liberty with tolerance and argues that community does not require conformity (hence the possibility of bridging social capital) by showing that high levels of community involvement along with increasing tolerance have coexisted in the past. In the second case, Putnam responds to critics who wonder if social capital merely encourages social divisions and hierarchies and who wonder if it merely benefits those most capable of self-organizing rather than benefitting all. In order to counter this position, Putnam argues that social capital and equality reinforce one another. He points to the 1950s and 1960s as decades in which levels of both were high and emphasizes again that both have decreased in recent years (Putnam 2000, 359). He also notes that the

same trend can be seen across various states at present; his numbers show that at the state level, where civic association is high so is economic equality.

I find Putnam's interest in explaining the links between fraternity, liberty, and equality to be an extremely important way of examining the phenomenon of social capital, or civic friendship generally. However, at this point in his argument, Putnam does not spend sufficient time teasing out the various meanings of liberty or equality as complicated concepts in themselves, nor how they might relate to his conception of civic friendship. He merely chooses a couple markers of tolerance and of economic equality and finds a moment in time when they were both accompanied by some kind of community involvement. But it's hard to get a handle on what any of the concepts at play mean. And it remains unclear how the kinds of activities Putnam discusses fit together: agreeing to water your neighbor's plants while they travel; your participation in your PTA; your decision to have an organized dinner with friends once a month; your position as a volunteer with a local non-profit; or your participation in a protest for gay rights in your state – I do not think that these kinds of behaviors have enough in common when it comes to the goods that social capital is said to provide that they should be linked together as similar socio-political phenomena. So Putnam leaves us with several deeply significant questions, which I carry into subsequent chapters as a means to evaluate other accounts of civic friendship: What is the relationship between civic friendship and other political virtues (like freedom and equality)? What does each

thinker mean by, for example, freedom or equality, and how does that help us to understand civic friendship itself? And what more specific examples of civic friendship in action can we glean?

### **2.2.2 Bridging vs. Bonding**

A second theoretical offering I take from Putnam is his recognition that social capital is, in a sense, often at war with itself. It can bridge communities across difference or it can serve to bond only within narrow groupings; and these can sometimes directly conflict. Putnam's example of such a conflict is a disagreement about implementing bussing in schools in order to increase diversity in the schools' populations. In this case, increasing diversity is considered an effective way to create bridging social capital, increasing tolerance and trust across a wider swath of a community; while opponents who assert the importance of maintaining "neighborhood schools" that serve the community that directly surrounds a given school worry most about preserving more local ties of friendship. Putnam argues that both are right; and that each kind of social capital is a good in this instance, although they are mutually exclusive.

But Putnam concludes that bonding social capital may be optimal for children attending school. He writes:

"Here a little 'familism' would go a long way, no matter how civically 'amoral' it might be. For improving public schools we need social capital at the community level, whether these be residential communities (as in the neighborhood school model) or communities of like-minded families (as in the charter school model). For other issues – such as deciding what sort of safety net, if any, should replace

the welfare system – surely it is social capital of the bridging kind that will most improve the quality of the public debate. In short, for our biggest collective problems we need precisely the sort of bridging social capital that is toughest to create.” (Putnam 2000, 363)

It makes sense that bridging social capital would help with discussion and decision-making about a government’s administration of welfare programs; with a sense of community that extends beyond our neighborhood and beyond our particular identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on), we will be better equipped to take on fair and informed positions about such matters, and press our representatives to do the same. But how does Putnam think this will happen? Can we ever prize bonding social capital over bridging social capital when given the choice if the latter is what’s needed for “our biggest collective problems”? The two issues Putnam discusses above – what kind of public schools and what kind of social safety net we might want – would seem to be connected in important ways that he does not address adequately, given his very broad account of social capital itself, and of its consequences. Couldn’t the experience of diversity in public schools help in cultivating the kind of generalized and wide-reaching trust and reciprocity for which Putnam calls in discussions about social policy? At least more than a bridge game or bowling league or dinner party? After all, isn’t that what it’s designed to do? Here, too, I locate a question to return to in my review of others’ work on civic friendship: How do they account for diversity both in their account of politics in general, and of civic friendship in particular?

There is an undeniable ambiguity in Putnam's conception of social capital that makes it difficult to weigh in on the importance of social capital itself, as well as how we might begin to cultivate it in its bridging form. One of the most important benefits of social capital according to Putnam is that it widens our awareness of the ways in which our fates are linked together with those of others (Putnam 2000, 288), and this in turn leads to a greater sense of concern for others; this sense of interdependence and resultant concern, Putnam notes, is linked to civic engagement of many different kinds – club meetings, church picnics, dinners with friends. Putnam also connects participation in these kinds of social activities with altruistic behavior, like donating blood or volunteering or donating to charities, and with reciprocity in public deliberation. These are among the most salutary political or social (rather than personal) effects and manifestations of social capital.

Putnam suggests that being able to put ourselves in others' positions and having a sense that our lives are bound together in important ways with those of many others in our polity help us to converse more civilly and openly, and encourage us to behave altruistically. Putnam argues that "people who have active and trusting connections to others – whether family members, friends, or fellow bowlers – develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society. Joiners become more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others" (Putnam 2000, 288). Later in the work, he moderates his view: connections with our fellow citizens don't guarantee

that we will be empathetic and tolerant, but social isolation nearly always guarantees that we lack any such civic virtues (Putnam 2000, 340).

If all it takes to increase social capital and cohesion is for individuals to join a bowling league or occasionally have dinner parties together, why is Putnam so worried? It seems unlikely that there are, relatively speaking, very many Americans who have neither family, nor friends, nor bowling team-mates, nor co-workers. Social connections, even (especially) if fleeting, are hard to avoid in human life; but Putnam's observations about a lack of empathy, trust, and reciprocity in contemporary American society still ring true. At the very least, many readers have agreed with Putnam that we can do better; that our communities can be more cohesive and caring. But because Putnam couples his very broad contention that any social activity is a catalyst for social capital with the insight that social capital can be exclusive or inclusive, hateful or tolerant, his account raises some important questions and very few answers about the phenomena related to civic friendship.

For one thing, Putnam makes it difficult to draw the line between helpful and hurtful social capital. Some bonding (and thus exclusive) social capital is intentional (a hate group), while other bonding can occur incidentally anywhere that social participation occurs in a segregated area (a particular neighborhood, school, or church, for example). In a neighborhood school, as we saw, just as in a large and segregated city, bridging capital may be difficult to achieve. Putnam writes, with great optimism, that

“people who have active and trusting connections to others – whether family members, friends, or fellow bowlers – develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society. Joiners become more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others.” (Putnam 2000, 288)

However, we can recall Bellah et al.’s contention that local face to face contact of whatever kind does not automatically trickle up to affect society as a whole in a good way, for example by making national culture or institutions more inclusive. Perhaps we should be still more skeptical when the activity under question is bowling together, an entirely non-political activity in and of itself. In the end, Putnam does not leave us with either a clear picture of how to achieve bridging social capital nor with a good understanding of the mechanisms through which some extremely diverse social activities (from sports teams to political organizing) lead to change in overarching social and political norms. We still need more specific information about the kinds of attitudes, actions, and institutions necessary to encourage reciprocity and empathy – or, in other words, civic friendship – across lines of difference, given how diverse contemporary democracies are.

### **2.3 Talking to Strangers**

Danielle Allen’s *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* is the only work of these three to invoke friendship explicitly by name as a tool for reconstituting the American political community so that it is more just and sustainable. Her work focuses on the inevitable loss and sacrifice that takes place for

some but not all in democratic politics, and aims to propose ways in which these can be redressed so that a sense of community can persist. She defines democracy as “a political practice by which the diverse negative effects of collective political action, and even of just decisions, can be distributed equally, and constantly redistributed over time, on the basis of consensual interactions. The hard truth of democracy is that some citizens are always giving things up for others” (Allen 2004, 29). This inevitability of sacrifice, loss, and disappointment means that citizens’ trust – for one another and for their government – is always at risk of giving way to anger or resentment unless efforts are made to keep unreasonable, unequal, unrecognized, and unjustified sacrifice to a minimum. One of the very few concrete examples she gives of such sacrifices is the ideal of a natural rate of unemployment, but in general the overarching question that guides her discussion of citizenly sacrifice is: “How are citizens to think about the fact that a regime constructed for the good of all (liberal democracy) must make day-to-day decisions that are better for some or that are directly hurtful for others?” (Allen 2004, 41). We can think, too, of decisions that liberal democratic polities have made in the past which, although currently overturned, continue to impact negatively certain segments of their populations (Allen’s subtitle refers to segregation, for example).

What can we do, as citizens rather than politicians, about such imbalances in sacrifice, both large and small? Sacrifice, understood broadly, is precisely what connects citizens to one another: “citizens of different classes, backgrounds, and experiences are

inevitably related to each other in networks of mutual benefaction, despite customary barriers between them, and despite our nearly complete lack of awareness, or even disavowal, of these networks” (Allen 2004, 45). As a result, Allen’s proposal of friendship as a means of mitigating the ills of excessive sacrifice has to do with recognizing these networks of interdependence in order to make sure that some members are not always losing out for the sake of others – whether willingly or due to overarching political structures or histories. She urges us to cultivate habits of friendship (like talking to strangers) in which we treat others as friends in important ways, but without emotionally identifying with them as friends. We ought to *act* like friends of some sort with our fellow citizens; and in this way, we will do justice to their sacrifices.

### **2.3.1 Rivalrous vs. Equitable Self-Interest**

In order to define political friendship in general, Allen carves a distinction between two forms of self-interest; the first she calls *rivalrous*, and the second is *equitable*. What she calls political (and what I most often call civic) friendship requires the latter, and Allen spends much time showing that the former is not some kind of natural rule in human life. In other words, it is not necessarily a rule of human behavior that we seek for power after power over our fellow citizens; in this way, she sets herself in opposition to so many in the history of political philosophy, perhaps most especially Thomas Hobbes. Allen asserts that in her view of political friendship, our self-interest can and should be moderated so that it is “equitable.”

What is not clear from Allen's account is what motivates this moderation; is it our concern for fairness and equality as values that we seek to uphold once we recognize our interdependence, or is it our prudential capacity to choose long-term interest over short-term interest coupled with an understanding that Allen's vision of friendship is in our interest in the long run? Whatever the answer, the aim of Allen's friendship is the cultivation of trust, which arises when we feel that our sacrifices, whatever they might be, are not taken for granted. But if recognizing the sacrifice of others in our community is a crucial prerequisite of Allen's political friendship – then how does it happen? In other words, how and why do we come to care about the sacrifices or losses of others? Allen argues that “a democracy needs forms for responding to loss that make it nonetheless worthwhile or reasonable for citizens who have lost in one particular moment to trust the polity – the government and their fellow citizens – for the future” (Allen 2004, 47); and she emphasizes that not only politicians can create this trust.

We each ought to do it in our everyday lives – on buses, at movie theaters, in airports, in schools, at work, and in churches (Allen 2004, 48). These are the sorts of places in which friendship among citizens is cultivated, according to Allen. Allen's account of the need for friendship in democracy I find incredibly moving and persuasive. But, as with the other authors discussed above, the question of motivation, or of how and why we begin to care for one another, is one that I think remains open

and that I wish to take on to proceeding chapters. However, Allen does hint at an answer focusing on Aristotle's vision of use friendship.

By recognizing the ways in which our lives and interests are entangled with those of our fellow citizens (many of whom are strangers to us), specifically the ways in which we each sacrifice for and benefit from one another in turn – and, in the best of circumstances, as equally as possible – we can cultivate habits that embody respect for sacrifices made and the desire to repay these debts in some way or other. In other words, sacrifices must be made to be felt worthwhile. Allen sums up her vision of friendship thusly:

“we have . . . found a new mode of citizenship in friendship understood not as an emotion but a practice. One can use its techniques even with strangers and even in the absence of emotional attachments, as in utilitarian friendships like business relations and most other relations among citizens. Political friendship consists finally of trying to be *like* friends.” (Allen 2004, 157)

Allen's political friends merely *resemble* friends. She invokes Aristotle's account of friendships of utility as a model for her vision of civic friendship because it fits with her sense of the importance of moderated self-interest that grows out of a kind of agreement between two parties (rather than out of emotional attachments or shared virtue or anything else). We must realize that maintaining relationships with fellow citizens is in our interest; as a result, it is in our interest to take others' interests into account. We do this by cultivating habits (rather than emotions) that increase equality and reciprocity in the distribution of political power and of sacrifices in our communities. Doing so leads

us away from rivalrous self-interest towards a more equitable self-interest. Allen finds that the former is the major threat to democracy, while the latter is the only form of self-interest that can maintain any kind of social bond (Allen 2004, 138). Here, she builds on her reading of Russell Hardin's work on trust. Hardin affirms that trust grows out of a belief that our interests are included or "encapsulated" in those of another, so that they shall have good reason to act in our interest. She cites a passage from his *Trust and*

*Trustworthiness*:

"I trust you because I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously in the following sense: You value the continuation of our relationship, and you therefore have your own interests in taking my interests into account. That is, you encapsulate my interests in your own interests. My interests might come into conflict with other interests you have and that trump mine, and you might therefore not actually act in ways that fit my interests. Nevertheless, you might have at least some interest in doing so." (Allen 2004, 190, note 2)

Allen's conception of friendship thus has everything to do with our rational calculations about the ways in which our interests are tied together with those of others. Thinking of friendship in this way allows Allen to respond to potential objections about the unlikelihood that all, or even most, Americans will come to have much affection for one another any time soon.

However, in describing *how* we come to see the way in which our interests are intertwined with others', as well as how we enact that awareness, Allen approaches a description of empathy in our common sense of that term – although in this case it is

certainly a rational rather than an emotional practice. In a chapter that focuses on rhetoric she suggests that any speaker in matters of public concern ought to ask themselves whether the narratives they use will seem to their audience to be convincing accounts of reality: “The willingness to be judged by anyone whatsoever cultivates in citizen-speakers the regular habit of checking how different proposals look from perspectively differentiated positions within the citizenry” (Allen 2004, 152-3). Using our imagination in this way – imagining what our words mean to different kinds of people with different experiences – helps to generate trust because it shows that we aim to take everyone into account when we communicate our positions, and that we recognize the fact that some will inevitably lose out if we get our way.

Allen also asserts that to be a good rhetorician (or, simply, citizen) we must try to see ourselves as others do, since only then can we come to some understanding about the ways in which we are implicated in strangers’ lives, for better or worse *for them* (Allen 2004, 171). This sounds like what we might ordinarily call empathy because we imagine what something – a policy decision, say – must be like for fellow citizens. We stand in their shoes. But, in Allen’s account, we imagine the experience of others’ sacrifice not in order to be moved to habits of friendship by the fellow feeling of sacrifice, but because we realize that excessive sacrifice on the part of others may lead them to act in ways that run counter to *our* long-term interest. So if we want things to turn out well for us in the long run, we moderate our self-interest so that it is more

equitable. This is the least friendly reading of Allen's rendering of friendship, and in its connection between self-interest and friendship it follows parts of Putnam's account and works against that of Bellah et al. And it foreshadows the more comprehensive discussions in the chapters that follow of Aristotle's utility friendship, Tocqueville's self-interest well understood, and Adam Smith's concept of sympathy as models of civic friendship in which self-interest looms large.

### **2.3.2. Soft Berets and Crossing Early: The Strategy of Political Friendship**

Allen's friendship is, in a word, strategic. And this seems opposed in many ways to what we commonly mean by friendship – no surprise there – but also runs counter to what we have seen in Bellah et al.'s and Putnam's most optimistic moments, in which they suggest that things like care and mutual concern beyond rational calculation of self-interest as we commonly think of it are what define civic friendship. Let's take a closer look at some of the more concrete examples of political friendship put forth by Allen. Towards the end of the book, Allen discusses the work of the British soft berets in Iraq. This clearly isn't an example of civic friendship within the boundaries of a particular nation, but it is nevertheless useful to discuss here. Wearing soft berets was meant by the soldiers to show to Iraqi civilians that they were willing to share power with them; in this case, the British army's vulnerability was seen to be a useful tool in generating trustworthiness (Allen 2004, 152). Allen uses this example to show that friends cannot

seem to be patronizing; they must take each other's concerns seriously and respond to them in some way.

However, although Allen grounds her account of political friendship in day to day life, there is a lack of concrete examples of what exactly ought to happen in our grocery stores, buses, and movie theaters in order to cultivate civic friendship in our quotidian lives. There are a few, though: Talking to strangers, as recommended in the title itself. And Allen also invokes her efforts to encourage the University of Chicago to engage with its urban community as an example. Her idea is that the surrounding public can be brought in to conversations both scholarly and administrative that previously have taken place only within the narrower university community.

Another quotidian example comes in a discussion of what we should do when faced with the prospect of encountering a stranger on an empty street late at night. Allen encourages us to cross the street early, since "to cross early is to leave open the possibility that one has crossed for reasons unrelated to the stranger's approach; that possibility gives the stranger a chance not to take personally the fact that one has crossed the street" (Allen 2004, 167). In this imagined example of political friendship, we are scared of or intimidated by the stranger whether we cross the street in good time in our effort to avoid them or whether we bolt across the street at the last possible moment. Crossing early, then, is a habit that does not change our emotional response. And this is important to Allen: she thinks that we do not need to feel friendly with fellow citizens,

only to act in a way that is not blatantly divisive. However, crossing early could be a passive aggressive behavior in which our emotions of fear or uneasiness related to certain kinds of citizens remains intact and is only meant to hide those emotions from their objects. In this case, friendship means keeping our fear secret; we fear strangers we pass in the dark, we just don't want them to know that. A more pressing question about cultivating civic friendship might concern how to change the fact of this fear in the first place. Crossing early means avoiding rather than engaging with our fellows. It is true that this is the least robust of her examples. I focus on it in order to ask if perhaps emotions are more important after all in their motivation of habits more demanding and more meaningful than "crossing early."

Throughout her account, Allen relies heavily on her intuition that friendship in the political realm, in order to be effective, must be something that we do, rather than feel – and, indeed, we ought to do it despite how we may really feel. Habits of friendship are to be enacted based on the recognition that burdens and benefits of citizenship ought to be shared, and that doing so is in our best interest – presumably both normatively (because it is the right thing to do) and practically (because our interests will be advanced at least some of the time, and we shall more easily accept when they are not). I find, though, that Allen's account lacks a clear explanation of the mechanisms that lead to citizens' enacting habits of friendship and abiding by norms of reciprocity.

At times, equitable self-interest seems to be the source. But the importance of the emotions, at the very least in diminishing trust (in the case of anger or fear, for example), also plays a role in her account, as does the demanding force of a moral regard for equality and fairness themselves. We are left wondering about the source of the motivational force behind our deciding to act – or feel, if we do – that we are friends with fellow citizens at all. Is a commitment to habits of friendship really only rooted in our sense that they are the best way to secure our own interest? Or does this account need something more? Perhaps the recognition that we *owe* reciprocity and respect to our fellow citizens – a moral intuition or commitment – or that the development of our social emotions is actually instrumental in the cultivation of equitable self-interest? These questions remain, I think, partly because there is some ambiguity in her work about whether political friendship is normative or strategic – and also because of the use of the term “friendship” itself, which seems to suggest something more than mere self-interest, even if it is equitable rather than rivalrous.

## ***2.4 Road Map and Guiding Questions***

These three works have done much to highlight the importance of and to sustain public conversation on questions about civic friendship and political community. I choose to focus on them as works that have been taken up outside of the academy and that have stimulated public conversation about the state of community in contemporary democracies in similarly concrete ways that focus on citizens’ everyday lives. Each of

them also prizes civic friendship as necessary for just and sustainable democratic communities. I also follow them in this insight in what follows, that of linking civic friendship not with patriotism or common values but with things like trust, reciprocity, and equality. My project takes this part of their arguments for granted. Considered together, however, these works also provoke stimulating questions about how it is that civic friendship might bring us to more just and sustainable – equal and trusting – communities because their thinking about what motivates friendly actions, habits, or emotions lacks clarity, as do their discussions of what even counts as civic friendship.

I find similar salient questions about the phenomenon of civic friendship that remain unanswered in each of these works, and these are what I turn to in the chapters that follow. These questions concern the role that emotional responses like care and compassion may or may not play in building solidarity; the varieties of self-interest that we embody in communal life and how they encourage or interfere with civic friendship; the links between equality and social justice on the one hand and civic friendship on the other; and the recognition on the part of citizens that their lives are bound together with those of their fellows, even when these connections are not obvious, which each of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen seem to see as a requirement. These three contemporary works leave these crucial questions unanswered. Each of these issues is important in coming to terms with the meaning and possibility of civic friendship for us today, and will guide the work of the chapters that follow as I seek to find answers to them.

I agree with what these three texts have to say about why we need civic friendship, and with their general insights about what we could call friendly values or virtues – care, equality, trust, and so on – but we need more specificity about how all these moving parts work together. How can we encourage citizens to talk to strangers, to join a bowling league, or to take part in political organizing? Should all of these activities really be joined together as similarly related to civic friendship? What motivates recognition of interdependence if this is a cause of civic friendship in action? And how does friendly face-to-face interaction have an influence on broader social and political norms in communities? I ask all these in service of the overarching question of this project, which is: Can we get to a workable picture of civic friendship for democratic communities characterized by their vast size and their diversity? In order to try to answer this question, I turn to figures in the history of political philosophy that are most often invoked in these kinds of discussions. I do this in order to see how these canonical sources either help or hinder our thinking about civic friendship, and how assumptions they make may be embedded, for better or worse, in our contemporary thought on the matter. I now turn in chapter 2 to Aristotle as an early and exemplary thinker on friendship to see if he can clarify or develop these questions in his accounts of virtue, pleasure, and utility friendships in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

### 3. Defining Aristotelian Civic Friendship

Aristotle devotes two chapters of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (as well as smaller parts of several of his other works) to an investigation of the meaning and kinds of friendship that develop in human life. Friendship is a necessary part of life in the sense that we could never do without it, in Aristotle's estimation – I think both in the sense that friendship is a natural impulse, since he stretches his conception to include even the relationships between parents and children, in humans and also in some other animals – and in the sense that it seems impossible to go through life without cultivating friendship of some kind along the way, since he observes that “every human being is akin and beloved to a human being” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a20). It is clear at the outset that what Aristotle means by friendship is much broader and more inclusive than we ordinarily allow for in everyday discussion.

He begins his account of friendship by emphasizing that “no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all other goods” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1155a5) – and he gives a long, though surely not exhaustive, list of all of the reasons that friendship is good for us: When we are well off, we need friends to help us protect what we have and we also need friends to allow us the opportunity to be beneficent, and both of these are good for us; and we need friends to help us when we encounter misfortune – presumably whether they can help us materially or emotionally. Aristotle notes too that the young need friends for guidance (“to keep them from error”), the old need friends to care for

them when they need it, “and those in their prime need friends to do fine actions” together (*Nic. Ethics*, 1155a10-15). With such various examples of human friendship and all that it might entail, including support, care, and instruction, it is clear that Aristotle’s sense of friendship is particular to his thought in the way that it is used to describe so many different relationships, whether familial, social, or political.

Can Aristotle’s understanding of friendship speak to us today, as we wonder about civic friendship and its influence in expansive and extremely diverse political communities? In what follows, I first discuss the political context in which Aristotle locates a need for friendship, in order to get a sense of the kinds of problems that friendship might solve in the political realm of human affairs. I then move on to discuss Aristotle’s three kinds of friendship – of virtue, of pleasure, and of utility – and I conclude that utility friendship is most accurately and easily cast as such a kind of friendship in Aristotle’s thought. I then proceed to weigh the advantages and disadvantages, to democratic communities in particular, in conceiving of civic friendship as Aristotle does. I do so by attending to secondary literature that attempts to fashion a robust civic friendship from Aristotle’s view of it as based in interest and conclude that, in the end, although Aristotle’s thought on the matter is extremely useful in some ways – it helps to clarify several questions about the nature of civic friendship – it does not yield as robust a model of civic friendship that these Aristotle scholars hope for and is not as good a resource as Bellah, Putnam, Allen, and their fellows need.

Aristotle tells us that “friendship would seem to hold cities together, and legislators would seem to be more concerned about it than about justice” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1166a20-25). He further asserts that friendship appears in various political orders insofar as justice appears in them (*Nic. Ethics*, 1161a10). For Aristotle, then, friendship has an extremely important role to play in political communities, specifically in their attainment of justice. This is an insight that we have seen several contemporary thinkers maintain in their own thought. In Aristotle’s conception, friendship is not just a pleasant possibility in human experience but is, in some sense, necessary; we are social and political beings who require company and relationship. And friendship is not only personal and private since it must be cultivated, as he argues above, to the extent that we might wish to have justice in our political communities. So friendship in one form or another is necessary in personal life and in political life. But how does Aristotle think such political friendships develop, and what is their relationship to justice? He catalogues friendship by its sources: it can begin in mutual utility, in mutual pleasure, or in what is often called shared virtue. The latter kind is best, according to Aristotle, because it is least adulterated by ulterior motives – but how likely is this kind of relationship to occur in political communities that bring together diverse interests and diverse backgrounds? Aristotle reminds us that complete friendship between people equal in virtue and in goodwill, and who know each other long and well – this is the best kind of friendship – is rare and takes a great deal of time (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b). We

cannot have these sorts of complete friendships with very many people and so we must ask what kind of friendship, and how much of it, is needed to reap the distinctly political benefits Aristotle wants to claim for it. I begin to answer these questions by setting the political scene in which Aristotle sets his discussion of friendship in general and civic friendship in particular.

### **3.1 *Politics and the Greater Good***

Aristotle recognizes that wide gaps in virtue or wealth – or, presumably, race, religion, political affiliation, and so on – can break friendships and leave them with no hope for repair, but he also affirms that “the state consists not merely of a plurality of men, but of different kinds of men; you cannot make a state out of men who are all alike” (*Politics*, 1261a22). Below, we will see how difference is maintained in Aristotle’s account of friendship despite his emphasis on the importance of having goods in common with our friends (*Nic. Ethics*, 1159b30). I will ask in particular about how much difference *political* friendships can stand, in Aristotle’s account, and about how demanding civic friendship can be, given the size of and diversity inherent in contemporary democracies.

Whatever small communities we are a part of – families, sports leagues, social clubs, political organizations – we are part of a larger political community; in the *Politics*, Aristotle notes that this political community has natural priority over households and individuals (*Politics*, 1253a18), in the same way that parts of something relate to the

whole that they make up together. And Aristotle conceives of the project of political communities as working towards the greater good for that community overall. This greater good is characterized as having a long time-horizon (*Nic. Ethics*, 1160a20), and as being concerned with justice (*Nic. Ethics*, 1160a10). This insight is echoed in the *Politics*, in which political communities (called variously “state,” “city,” “polity” in these translations) are not just collections of people who happen to live together, but are directed toward something greater than mere coexistence. Aristotle writes:

“It is clear therefore that the state is not an association of people dwelling in the same place, established to prevent its members from committing injustice against each other, and to promote transactions. Certainly all these features must be present if there is to be a state; but even the presence of every one of them does not make a state *ipso facto*. The state is an association intended to enable its members, in their households and the kinships, to live *well*; its purpose is a perfect and self-sufficient life.” (*Politics*, 1280b29)

Here we see just how important a human phenomenon Aristotle considers politics to be. It is either a source or a site of noble action in some way (*Politics*, 1281a2) – not simply focused on allowing for survival, as in the case of Hobbes’ Leviathan for example – not merely a compromise, but providing space for something that is best in human life. In this it echoes the hopeful conversation with which I began. Bellah et al., Putnam, and Allen have high hopes (some higher and more demanding than others) about the kinds of relationships and lives we can foster or care for in the political realm.

However, in *The Problems of a Political Animal*, Bernard Yack argues that the reason Aristotle gives primacy to the political community is not because it is the locus of relationships of shared virtue, the most developed form of friendship in which lives and concerns are shared, but rather because political community exists in a way that makes friendships of shared virtue *possible* – most often in other realms of human life (Yack 1993, 104); in the passage above, Aristotle mentions households and kinships specifically. Perhaps those are the sites most appropriate for the more demanding friendships of shared virtue. In other words, political community provides only a stable environment in which the best kinds of friendship can be cultivated, but that is not the kind of friendship that develops between citizens as citizens. A virtuous or excellent life characterized by virtuous and excellent friendships is not guaranteed by or required for participation in politics, but stable political community allows for citizens to cultivate such lives outside of the political realm. That is Yack’s argument, and it is one that we will revisit at several points below when we reckon with each of Aristotle’s kinds of friendship. For now, it is enough to note that I follow Yack in this reading because it allows us to consider Aristotle as a still valuable resource, rather than as an antiquated and overly idealistic thinker no longer appropriate to consider except historically.

Nevertheless, Aristotle thinks that living in a political community with others does convey certain responsibilities: “It is not right . . . that any of the citizens should think that he belongs just to himself; he must regard all citizens as belonging to the state,

for each is part of the state; and the responsibility for each part naturally has regard to the responsibility for the whole" (*Politics*, 1337a11). Here we see echoed something like the interdependence that each of Bellah et al., Putnam, and Allen suggest is a condition of civic friendship. Just what kind of action this individual responsibility for the whole entails for Aristotle, and how it develops, are significant questions – and these guide the analysis that follows. The answer will reveal how Aristotle envisions civic friendship on the ground in his time so that we can see what we can take from it for ours.

### **3.2 Political Potluck: Diversity in Community**

As we've seen, Aristotle considers humans to be "political animals" (*Politics*, 1253a1); we naturally associate with one another and build political communities together. How do we do this? Aristotle links our natural inclination towards politics with our unique capacity for speech and judgment. Whereas we share voice or sound – a capacity for expressing immediate, sensual experience – with animals, in speech we make our thoughts and opinions about political and ethical matters known, and we likewise hear and at least attempt to understand those that our fellows share with us. Aristotle writes that speech "serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, just and unjust, etc. It is the sharing of a common view in *these* matters that makes a household and a state" (*Politics*, 1253a7). Here we learn several things: That those most important questions in

politics – about policies, laws, morals, and so on – that grow out of our standards of goodness and justice are not given to us but arise out of reflection, since Aristotle suggests that they can either be shared or not, and thus we can conclude that conflict and deliberation have a role to play in arriving at such standards together, out of an initial context of conflict. We also learn that having such standards or ideals in common is required for Aristotle’s conceptions of households and states. This latter point may account for the ways in which scholars (especially communitarians) assume that Aristotle is their ally in advocating for the importance of shared values and identities in political communities.

At the same time, though, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of diversity in politics, which suggests that concord between citizens (“*homonoia*,” being “of one mind”), an important ingredient of friendship for Aristotle, may not be so easily achieved when it comes to political questions. After making the obvious point that states need more than one, or even a few, citizens, Aristotle extends this line of reasoning to advocate for states inhabited not only by many citizens (within limits), but for a citizenry that comprises many different opinions and perspectives. Aristotle writes that “the state consists not merely of a plurality of men, but of different *kinds* of men; you cannot make a state out of men who are all alike” (*Politics*, 1261a22). Aristotle holds this to be true in at least a couple of important ways: First, different kinds of citizens help to make a self-sufficient city. The varied skills and interests of a political community are

required for a functioning polity in which basic needs are met and some kind of stability persists. Aristotle notes at once that “neither life itself nor the good life is possible without a certain minimum supply of the necessities” (*Politics*, 1253b23) and that the state comes into existence in order to sustain human life itself, but that it continues in order to allow for good human lives to develop (*Politics*, 1252b27). Put simply, diversity is a functional requirement for a political community, which will need farmers, mechanics, teachers, professional politicians (at least in our day), butchers, bakers, doctors, and so on, in order to operate effectively in supporting the lives and the livelihoods of its inhabitants.

But variety is also important in a more complex way; Aristotle affirms that diversity of opinion is important in public deliberation because it leads to better thinking about matters of public interest. He writes:

“it is possible that the many, no one of whom taken singly is a sound man, may yet, taken all together, be better than the few, not individually but collectively, in the same way that a feast to which all contribute is better than one supplied at one man’s expense. For even where there are many people, each has some share of virtue and practical wisdom; and when they are brought together, just as in the mass they become as it were one man with many pairs of feet and hands and many senses, so also do they become one in regard to character and intelligence.” (*Politics*, 1281a39)

When more people are included in collective processes of deliberation, the results will be saner and more accurate. Aristotle seems to suggest that it is precisely the ways in which we differ in our thinking from our fellows that brings the group of us closer to

discerning judgments. Aristotle uses the example of a painting: some of us will be able to see and understand one part best, others another, and so together we will have a fulsome sense of what the painting as a whole may mean to us, and thus we are a better interpreter of it when we do so together. In light of this, we need not think of concord as a complete identity of mind; after all, Socrates' mistake in Aristotle's reading of the *Republic* was to reduce concord to a rhythm of a single beat whereas Aristotle thinks education and deliberation ought to bring about unity out of difference of opinion (*Politics*, 1263b29).

Although Aristotle recognizes that this notion of a political potluck (we all bring something, often very different, to the table, and each is valuable in some way) is not a strict rule about human beings and may not hold true for all communities, he also recognizes its importance not only because of its results but because of what it means to a community's own members. Aristotle makes sure to say that even those free citizens who are not moneyed or well-born (these are the "masses") ought to be included in public deliberations because they will feel wronged if they aren't and thus may become a source of unrest and instability. This speaks to the importance Aristotle believes that all give to being a functioning part of a larger community. And it also clarifies what Aristotle has to say about friendship in politics, or how his larger taxonomy of the sources and kinds of friendship map onto politics as a realm of human relationships.

Since politics is defined by deliberation (and thus disagreement of some kind), the best kind of friendship – that of shared identity based on shared values and judgments, really, almost a life in common between friends – is not what Aristotle has in mind as the kind of friendship that could persist between most citizens as citizens. So whatever concord may exist in political communities, it will not be as unified as we might expect given Aristotle’s description of it as unity of mind. I leave to others the work of describing what concord as musical harmony (rather than the identity of single beat) might look like in communities such as the United States – what deliberative practices as well as social policies, for example, might help to bring about an Aristotelian concord (via potluck) on the contemporary scene – and focus instead on the ways in which Aristotle can help us (and to what degree) to understand friendship between citizens – but in a very diverse political community. Here I simply want to emphasize that a context of diversity, such a pressing concern for us as political actors and thinkers today, is present for Aristotle, too, in order to show that there is reason to listen to some of what he has to say on the matter of friendship between citizens – and that Aristotle’s concern for justice and the common good as these relate to friendship between citizens takes place within this context of difference and contention.

### ***3.3 A Taxonomy of Aristotelian Friendships***

I now outline Aristotle’s taxonomy of friendship in order to argue that civic friendship is not an example of friendship of shared virtue, the best and most enduring

kind of friendship according to Aristotle, but is instead based on advantage or utility. For this reason, a need for justice persists in political communities, no matter how much friendship we may find in them. The relationships between Aristotle's three kinds of friendships, and between friendship and politics, are more ambiguous than they initially seem given Aristotle's tendency towards classification via strong distinctions.

Aristotle divides friendship into three kinds: one based on shared utility, one based on shared pleasure, and one based on shared goodness or virtue; the latter is best because it is most firmly rooted in equality and in virtue, and as a result is the most enduring and, ultimately, most beneficial to our characters. In friendships of utility, we choose our friends for what they might provide for us, whether a good, service, or pleasure. Our friends' characters in this case are not our primary concern – nor in the case of friendships of pleasure, in which our primary concern is for the enjoyment a friend will help us to obtain, however that might be. The final kind of friendship, which Aristotle thinks of as the most complete form of friendship, is “friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own right” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b5).

In this chapter, my central question is: What can this taxonomy of friendship tell us about contemporary political life in democracies such as our own, if anything? I now turn to an analysis of Aristotle's descriptions of friendships of various kinds, and then move on to discuss his account of the relationship between politics and friendship in his

notion of civic friendship in particular. I show that, for Aristotle, civic friendship is not an instantiation of the best kind of friendship – that of shared virtue – but is rather a friendship based on utility or shared advantage. I also clarify whether Aristotle provides an account in which concern for and action on behalf of the well-being of one’s civic friends for their own sake can arise given that civic friendship is grounded in self-interest.

If the best kind of friendship as conceived by Aristotle was rare in his time it is even rarer now that political communities stretch to span thousands of miles and include many millions of citizens. Nevertheless, there is much in his work that informs contemporary debate about community and friendship in politics. To begin, Aristotle tightly links these two notions – of community and friendship – and not only abstractly. For Aristotle, friends must live together, and they must share conversation, thoughts, and goods. Aristotle’s limits on the size of political communities (somewhere between ten and a hundred thousand [*Nic. Ethics*, 1170b30]) grows out of this thought; a community can only be so big before it becomes impossible to know each and every fellow citizen. Beyond this number, we simply cannot be friends. (Never mind that a hundred thousand seems even too large for friendship!) What we have then might be goodwill (*eunoia*) instead. Aristotle tells us that goodwill, though it may be a part of friendship, is not sufficient for it. We can feel goodwill towards those we don’t know, but goodwill in the end is only a feeling: it is a fleeting reaction that makes us wish

another well, but does not call us to act cooperatively with them or on their behalf (Aristotle uses the example of spectators at a sporting event; spectators might feel for contestants and root for them, but nothing more than that [*Nic. Ethics*, 1166b30]).

Aristotle emphasizes throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* that friendship is a state rather than an emotion or feeling; Aristotle argues that while “loving [a feeling] is directed no less toward inanimate things . . . reciprocal loving [i.e. friendship] requires decision, and decision comes from a state; and [good people] wish good to the beloved for his own sake in accord with their state, not their feeling” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1157b30-35). Friendship lasts longer than friendly emotions, then, and requires some kind of commitment in action to do our friends well – either for their own sake or for some other reason.

Concord, like goodwill, is an ingredient of friendship that by itself does not give rise to friendship. Concord among citizens means that they agree on the aims of the larger political community of which they are a part, and that they are of one mind about how to achieve it. Aristotle explains that good and decent people look out for the common good, while base citizens do not and thus concord is more difficult to achieve with them (*Nic. Ethics*, 1167b10). This suggests that all we need to do to be of one mind with our fellow citizens is to keep the common good in mind; at first glance, Aristotle does not seem to leave much room here for disagreement about what counts as the common good, and so neither for politics as we most often experience it, rife with conflict. However, this description of concord seems to run against Aristotle’s own

prizing of deliberation in speech, as we have seen – and, of course, is an implausible description of politics for us, today, given the recurring and serious disagreements that we continue to encounter about what is in the best interest of our political communities. These kinds of conflicts and controversies are so ubiquitous for us that we see them as the stuff of politics itself. We now assume that disagreements about the common good, and about how our visions of the goods of our own lives intersect with the common good, are inevitable and may be impossible to reconcile completely. Is there no friendship in politics then, if there isn't very much concord? In order to attempt to answer this question, we must reckon with Aristotle's divisions between his three kinds of friendship.

### **3.4 Friendship of Shared Virtue**

In friendship we not only wish our friends well – but we must *do* good for them as well. While Aristotle recognizes that we all have friendships of varying importance and intimacy, this seems to be common to all of them in his conception. We have obligations to ourselves, to our parents, children, and siblings, to companions – and then beyond all of these to include those relationships we most often conceive of as friendship. But in all of these relationships, Aristotle holds that some kind of friendship persists and is active and stable rather than passive and fleeting. Aristotle writes: “friendship seeks what is possible, not what accords with worth, since that is impossible in some cases, as it is with honor to gods and parents. For no one could ever make a

return in accord with their worth, but someone who attends to them as far as he is able seems to be a decent person" (*Nic. Ethics*, 1163b15). So we wish and do good for our best friends for their own sake as much as we can (*Nic. Ethics*, 1166a). But friendship isn't only a relationship of obligation. In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Book 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the ways in which we ought to relate to ourselves as to friends; wishing and doing good is included in his inventory, but so is being of one mind, sharing worries and pleasures, and enjoying one's company. This is how an exemplary person thinks of or relates to herself, and also how she relates to her friends.

So the best kind of friendship is also source of pleasure most of the time, though this pleasure is not the motivating source of friendship in this case. This best sort of friendship Aristotle isolates is often called "virtue friendship" or friendship of shared virtue, and he describes it thusly: "complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own right" (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b5). Do these best friends share similar ideals or moral principles, and in that way "share their virtue"? Are their moral characters *identical* – or equal in some other way? Or do virtue friends love their friends specifically for what is good in them, that is, their character?

Aristotle claims that "those who wish goods to their friend for their friend's own sake are friends most of all; for they have this attitude because of the friend himself, not coincidentally" (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b10). This important quality – caring about our friend's

well-being *for their own sake* – is, I think, at the heart of any question about the kind of friendship that might persist between citizens. Can we care about our fellow citizens in this way, like Bellah et al.’s most prized exemplars? If so, under what circumstances? Or is too demanding? I will return to these questions after describing Aristotle’s other kinds of friendship – but at this point, we can note Aristotle’s extreme skepticism about the likelihood of such kinds of friendship: He claims that they

“are likely to be rare . . . they need time as well, to grow accustomed to each other; for, as the proverb says, they cannot know each other before they have shared their salt . . . and they cannot accept each other or be friends until each appears lovable to the other and gains the other’s confidence. Those who are quick to treat each other in friendly ways wish to be friends, but are not friends . . . For though the wish for friendship comes quickly, friendship does not.” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b25-30).

Trust, and the familiarity that comes from sharing daily activities (passing the salt at meals shared together, as Aristotle suggests) are needed for the cultivation of friendship that is built on a concern for our friend for their own sake. Perhaps this kind of motive for friendship can grow alongside other motives, but we see here that it is by far the most important motive in friendships of shared virtue, the best friendship, so that caring for our friends for their own sake looms so large that it eclipses any other motives.

For Aristotle, virtue friends “are friends without qualification; the others are friends coincidentally” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1157b) – and it is their own particular motives that make these other kinds of friendships so. Broadly speaking, these motives are pleasure and utility, and I discuss them next. I contend that concern or care for a friend with no

ulterior motive is the mark of friendships of shared virtue, rather than of all friendships, and thus they both are extremely rare because they are so intimate. For this reason, it is not a helpful model of civic friendship for us, and so we are left wanting a model of care that is appropriate for our relationships with our fellow citizens.

### **3.5 Friendship of Shared Pleasure**

Aristotle's second kind of friendship grows out of and is rooted in shared pleasure. This sort of friendship might resemble much, though not all, of what Putnam describes in *Bowling Alone*: people spending time together on shared activities that bring pleasure to all involved, whether bowling – or religious societies or dining clubs (*Nic. Ethics*, 1160a20), and so on. Pleasure or enjoyment is the motivation for these cooperative activities. As a result, Aristotle thinks that this kind of friendship is at root superficial; an Aristotelian hierarchy of friendship from best to worst would move from character or virtue to pleasure to utility. Speaking about the latter two, Aristotle notes that “friendship for pleasure is more like [real] friendship; for they get the same thing from each other, and they find enjoyment in each other, or [rather] in the same things” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1158a15-25). Is it the activity that we enjoy or the company of those that join us in it? For Aristotle, it seems the two are intimately entwined, and this is what makes the friendship less than best. We see this in his assertion that friends for pleasure's sake rarely fight or disagree; since they spend time together only for their own enjoyment, their friendship ends whenever that pleasure ends (*Nic. Ethics*, 1162b10-15). Whereas

Putnam seems to suggest that friendships based on pleasurable shared activities will develop into the something like the best kind of friendship according to Aristotle – in which there is a sense of generalized reciprocity by which each party seeks to do good by others though not in a formal sort of exchange – Aristotle remains silent on this matter, suggesting that each kind of friendship is distinct depending on its motivation or focal point, and that pleasure friendships end when shared pleasure does.

While Aristotle recognizes that the best kind of friendship is *also* pleasurable and beneficial to friends (though firmly rooted in concern for friends for their own sake), he doesn't give an account of the ways in which friendships of either pleasure or utility can transition into the kind of friendship that rests on a concern for our friends for their own sake – whereas Putnam seems to assume it in his deep concern for things like bowling leagues. There is, however, a passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle seems to conflate friendships of pleasure and friendships of character:

“whatever someone [regards as] his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in his friend's company. Hence some friends drink together, others play dice, while others do gymnastics and go hunting, or do philosophy. They spend their days together on whichever pursuit in life they like most; for since they want to live with their friends, they share the actions in which they find their common life.” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1172a5)

Here Putnam's and Aristotle's accounts of social capital and of friendship seem to come close, in the sense that high expectations grow out of everyday activities; except, I think, that Aristotle really means to suggest a shared life *built upon* drinking, or hunting, or

philosophizing together (the latter presumably as the best of all activities) – rather than one in which such activities are scheduled now and then, here and there, with one circle of friends or another, and yet accompanied by the expectation that all this will lead to something more, as in Putnam’s case. Even friendships of pleasure, in Aristotle’s account, are more demanding than Putnam’s picture of the kind of friendships (or social relationships, more broadly) out of which social capital develops and, as a result, skepticism remains about the connections he makes between things like bowling leagues, social clubs, even dinner parties, and generalized trust and reciprocity as political goods. However, because the political realm is not created by our desire for pleasure but by our living together, friendships of pleasure is not Aristotle’s model of civic friendship.

### ***3.6 Friendship of Shared Utility***

The third kind of friendship that Aristotle discusses grows out of calculations of utility. Aristotle writes that in friendships of utility “the beloved is loved not insofar as he is who he is, but insofar as he provides some good or pleasure” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156a15). In this case of utility, friendship will grow out of the recognition that friends can get things they want or need from one another. What kinds of goods? Aristotle doesn’t specify what these goods might be, and I take this to follow from the fact that such goods may be almost anything: some skill or knowledge, money (or anything that money can pay for), reputation, or simply some company. But this friendship, too, is

based on a kind of equality, since both parties should be served in some way by the friendship. Mutual advantage motivates and anchors this kind of friendship.

Utility friendships are further divided into two types by Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics*. The distinction is extremely important for coming to a fulsome understanding of the possibilities of Aristotelian civic friendship. A *legal* friendship of utility is based on some kind of contract, so that an exchange between two people is formalized in such a way that each have recourse to a legal process to get whatever benefit or recompense they've agreed upon with their friends, while a *moral* friendship of utility is one in which both friends will gain some benefit or advantage from each other but in which that exchange will be less specific and more ambiguous; they will have trust rather than a contract binding them together. Here, too, there are echoes of Putnam's account of the growth of social capital and, in particular, of his account of generalized reciprocity – in which we do for others with a sense that somehow our favors will be returned to us at some unspecified time and in an unspecified way. However, after classifying utility friendships in this way, Aristotle goes on to mount a strong argument that this second notion of moral utility friendship is actually the result of a twin misunderstanding in which friends misunderstand the nature of friendship itself, and they misunderstand the particular relationship that they share with their “utility friend.” As a result, this pseudo-friendship will be full of conflict and resentment:

“this is the kind of friendship in which recrimination is most likely, the reason being that it is unnatural, for friendships based on utility are not the same as those based on virtue. These people want to have things both ways: they associate for the sake of utility but as if they were decent people; they *represent* their friendship as a moral rather than a legal one, *as if* they were trusting each other.” (*Eudemian Ethics*, 1242b35-40, emphasis mine)

So we deceive ourselves if we think that we can have the best kind of Aristotelian friendship when calculations of utility are what has brought us, and what keeps us, together. This distinction will be useful below when we decide on the relationship between each of Aristotle’s kinds of friendship and the political relationship of shared citizenship. As in the case of friendships of pleasure, Aristotle does not provide us with an account of how friendships of utility might develop into the best kind of friendship; each of Aristotle’s types of friendship seems to be quite distinct.

This distinction is of the utmost importance in my search for an Aristotelian picture of civic friendship. If moral utility friendship is a contradiction in terms, tenuous and likely to lead to conflict or abuse, then legal utility friendship is the best option Aristotle has for a model of civic friendship. It is one in which parties to it are brought together by their need for a community to support their survival and, beyond that, their vision of the good life. And in which there are rules that structure fellow citizens’ interactions so that, if we think of Allen’s example, some citizens are not always sacrificing things for others. However, unlike Allen’s account, it does not rest on individual habit but on something like a contractual agreement. It remains always in

some sense formal, and rooted in shared self-interest. Now that we have a firm grasp on each of the three Aristotelian friendships, I will tease out their implications for civic friendship below by engaging with recent thinkers who wonder, as I do, whether Aristotle can offer much to us as we wonder about the place of civic friendship in contemporary democracies. I begin by arguing against John Cooper's position that all Aristotelian friendship consists fundamentally in caring for our friends' well-being for its own sake; I find this to be too charitable a reading. As a result, Aristotelian civic friendship depends on self-interest. I then join a conversation with several other Aristotle scholars – Susan Bickford, Bernard Yack, and Jill Frank – as they wonder about how severely that limits Aristotelian civic friendship. I choose them because they attempt to offer robust interpretations of Aristotle that cast him as offering a picture of civic friendship that could speak to the demands of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen (Bickford does this but from a critical standpoint). Ultimately, however, I think Aristotle's champions, Yack and Frank, fail to succeed in doing so.

### **3.7 Against Cooper on Care For a Friend's Own Sake**

At this point I must recognize that in arguing that concern for a friend for their own sake comes about only in the best kind of friendship, I go against a popular thread in Aristotle scholarship as articulated by John Cooper in his essay "Aristotle on Friendship." In it, Cooper argues that *all* Aristotelian friendship has to do with wishing well and doing well to our friends for their own sake; he pinpoints his opponents on this

matter as all those who think that friendships of pleasure and advantage or utility are “exclusively self-centered,” while only virtue friendship cultivates or comes from a purer concern for one’s friend (Cooper 1980, 303). He grounds his counter-argument with support from the *Rhetoric* and also with reference to the fact that Aristotle discusses this selfless aspect of friendship before he distinguishes between its three kinds in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This claim of Aristotle’s stems from a discussion in which he explains that we cannot be friends with inanimate things, such as wine, since we do not wish them well in the same way that we do to human beings (no big surprise there). Immediately after this Aristotle tells us that to a friend “you must wish goods for his own sake” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156a). And then immediately after that, Aristotle begins his discussion, in the third chapter of book 8, of the three different kinds of friendship.

The way that Aristotle structures his account of friendship at that point is Cooper’s primary support for his own argument that friends of *all* kinds wish and do good things for their friends’ own sake. Cooper thinks that his argument needs to be made because otherwise it might seem as though Aristotle is arguing that if only virtue friends care unselfishly about their friends, then very few of us will ever have or be such friends (because virtue friendships are so rare). He writes: “I shall argue that despite initial appearances Aristotle does not make friendship of the central kind the exclusive preserve of moral heroes and that he does not maintain that friendships of the derivative kinds are wholly self-centered: pleasure- and advantage- seeking friendship are instead

a complex and subtle mixture of self-seeking and unself-interested well-wishing and well-doing" (Cooper 1980, 305). However, I think that we can take Aristotle at his word when he asserts that virtue friendship is rare; not rare in general, but rare for each of us in the sense that few of our friendly relationships will live up to it – but some of them, for all of us, surely will. As a result, perhaps Cooper need not make the case for the presence of selfless care in all friendships, specifically those that Aristotle would claim rest on pleasure or utility.

However, in the course of Cooper's argument he provides a helpful account of just what friendship of shared virtue might mean, since Aristotle's discussion can at times be otherworldly or overly abstract. In Cooper's view, it is a friendship based on character, and it grows out of the recognition of good qualities in the character of our friends (Cooper 1980, 308-9). Isn't this precisely what wishing and doing well for our friends *for their own sake* means – for the sake of who our friends are in themselves? If so, then pleasure and utility friendships are quite different in their reliance on some mutual advantage. Aristotle recognizes as much when he writes that "those who love for utility or pleasure . . . are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, not insofar as the beloved is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant" (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156a15-20). When such friends are no longer useful or pleasant, their friendship ends. Cooper notices this weakness in his account of Aristotelian friendship but does not

adequately respond to it. Of friendships based on use or pleasure, those that Aristotle calls “incidental,” Cooper writes that in such cases we wish good things for our friend

“for his own sake, and not merely as a means to one’s own good; nevertheless, one does not want him to prosper in such a way or to such an extent that one no longer gets the pleasure or benefits one has received from associating with him . . . in wishing someone well, for his own sake, because he is pleasant or advantageous, one’s first commitment is to his retention of the property of pleasantness of advantageousness.” (Cooper 1980, 313)

Cooper continues that the “the overriding concern of the advantage-friend is for his own profit” (Cooper 1980, 315) and goes on to argue that this doesn’t exclude the possibility that we can care about our friend in an unselfish way.

Of course, it is true that we can care about friends who are also advantageous or pleasurable to us, but in that case perhaps we aren’t simply friends for utility or pleasure after all, but are friends of character or virtue in friendships that are also at the same time advantageous and pleasurable. Instead of having friendships of all kinds growing out of concern for our friends for their own sake, I argue that on Cooper’s own reading, the concern that we have for friends of pleasure or utility stems instead from what Danielle Allen calls equitable self-interest, as discussed in the previous chapter, and from what Aristotle himself calls reciprocal justice below. In regards to motivation for human action, Cooper wants to argue that selfless care for others is always present in our human relationships, but I don’t think Aristotle makes a strong enough case for this. We *can* do our friends well in important ways even while we think primarily of our own

interests – and perhaps this is what happens in use and pleasure friendships. We do good for our use or pleasure friends or act in their best interest because it is in our interest, as in Allen’s discussion of Hardin’s concept of “encapsulated interest.” I argue that Aristotle does not give us the grounds to take the extra step, as Cooper does, of trying to make a case that this is so because we care for our use or pleasure friends in themselves. Before reckoning with whether or not this is a flaw in Aristotle’s overall picture of civic friendship, I turn to several more secondary sources in order to get a more fulsome picture of what counts as Aristotelian civic friendship.

### **3.8 Bickford Against Civic “Friendship”**

In her article “Beyond Friendship: Aristotle on Conflict, Deliberation, and Attention” and in a chapter on the same subject, in her book *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* Susan Bickford offers an alternative account of how Aristotle can speak to contemporary conversations about friendship. In what follows I focus on her article for its succinct focus on Aristotle in particular. While Cooper attempts to show that Aristotelian friendship of all kinds includes care, Bickford wonders in particular about the possibility of any kind of Aristotelian friendship in the public sphere. She concludes that Aristotelian friendship is too strong to demand, or even hope for, in contemporary democracies. Instead, she writes about an alternative to civic friendship that isn’t as demanding for us given the discord and diversity in contemporary democratic politics, and she finds it in the work of Aristotle himself. It is

what she calls *attention*. This is a habit that inheres in the practice of deliberation itself, which Bickford characterizes as “adversarial communicative interaction” (Bickford 1996a, 399) and which, as we saw above, is an extremely significant part of politics for Aristotle – when he calls for all citizens to bring their thoughts to the table when it comes to deciding on political questions.

Bickford’s discussion of deliberation, following Aristotle’s, is rooted in conflict, especially between classes; attention is the means by which we come to recognize and acknowledge fellow citizens’ needs, interests, and perceptions. She emphasizes that Aristotle’s argument for this grows neither out of a concern for maintaining or gaining either political power or stability, but out of a concern for keeping conflict *political* rather than mortal (Bickford 1996a, 405). It does so by ensuring that citizens feel that their perspectives are being taken seriously, since the best way to do this is to include all citizens in deliberative decision-making (Bickford 1996a, 406). This practice of attentive deliberation is a practice that Bickford thinks that citizens have in common, and she also holds that this indeed may be the only thing that they have in common. She argues that such attention “need not, and in most of Aristotle’s political examples *does not*, arise from the bond that scholars most commonly cite: friendship” (Bickford 1996a, 407). She takes Bernard Yack as an example of a thinker who, though he recognizes much complexity in Aristotle’s account of friendship, still over-emphasizes its importance as a bond between citizens. Bickford argues that he goes too far in his sense that mutual

concern must persist in some way in the political realm as Aristotle casts it. Yack is her foil as Cooper is mine above. However, I find that in the end Bickford's account is not so different than Yack's; they differ most especially just about the use of the word "friendship," but I find what they discuss to be quite similar.

### **3.9 Yack on Political Fellow Travellers**

Bickford dismisses the term "friendship" in her account of what causes political communities to cohere despite conflict and difference because she takes Yack's "mutual concern" – which he construes as the least demanding version of Aristotelian friendship – as requiring too much in the way of unity with and care for our friends themselves, following Cooper's thinking on this question, and on his assertion that all friends of any kind develop care for their friends for their own sake. Yack develops his sense of the kind of mutual concern that develops between citizen-friends in the image of fellow travellers; he writes that "being in the same boat" disposes us to help one another more than we would on dry land (Yack 1993, 125). In his metaphor, it should be noted, these are not merely fellow travellers, since they share more than just the physical space of a ship but instead also share in decision-making about their voyage in important ways; the comparison hinges on this fact. Although he recognizes that being a part of the same political community is not exactly like being fellow ship-mates – since political relationships are far more fragile and tenuous given that their final aim or destination is unclear and in some sense always being revised, and their shared experience is far less

concrete and immediate – Yack still thinks it an important image in order to illustrate the ways in which citizens care about one another. They do so because their fates are tied together in a shared endeavor.

Yack reads Aristotle as a proponent of the sense that “whenever we share ends and actions we develop some sense of mutual concern” (Yack 1993, 125). This is the kind of political friendship that Yack finds in Aristotle’s work. It doesn’t rely on shared ideals or beliefs, but instead grows out of the shared activity of deciding on and enacting processes of political justice in our communities (Yack 1993, 125). This brings us back to Bickford’s account of attention. She uses a different term, but she seems actually to be in agreement with Yack about what the best we can hope for in terms of political community building might look like. What she calls attention in deliberation sounds very much like Yack’s vision of political friendship, rife with conflict and arising only from a shared experience that we are in many ways simply born into rather than actively choosing, that of living together in an organized political community and deciding together (somehow) on the standards of justice that ought to preside over that community. Yack’s emphasis on justice within this picture of civic friendship arises because of Aristotle’s distinction between legal and moral use friendship, and Aristotle’s belief that this latter kind is, if not impossible, then extremely unstable. As a result, laws and contracts as instruments and regulators of justice are needed to help specify the demands of civic friendship and to reduce conflict within it. Yack writes that “we need

political justice to resolve the problems that arise within political friendships. The political form of justice, with its legal standards and public deliberation grows out of the political form of friendship" (Yack 1993, 112).

Bickford grounds her critique of Yack in a reading of his ship example. She argues that though we do have something very important in common as fellow travellers – we have a shared interest in the boat not sinking – this may coexist with many intransigent conflicts. We may disagree on many things in the course of our shared journey, such as the route, speed, safety, weather, and on various questions of justice and fairness (for example, on the distribution of labor or of limited resources on the boat, as in a state). Bickford emphasizes that our shared experience in this case leads rather to the shared work of settling arguments rather than to mutual concern (Bickford 1996a, 409). She goes on to argue that though she recognizes that Yack makes his picture of Aristotelian civic friendship as lukewarm as possible, this reliance on mutual concern (which she describes as well-wishing and well-doing for the friend's own sake – what Aristotelian friendship means in Cooper's account, as we saw above) is too much, too idealistic, too demanding (Bickford 1996a, 410). We can be in the same boat, or the same political community, without any such concern for our fellows, especially since even what we have in common (the boat or the community) may be at the very root of so many conflicts between us. As a result, we must give up on civic friendship, so Bickford's argument goes, along with an attentiveness that stems from care or concern.

Attention to our fellows that arises because of our commitment to the civil processes of public-problem-solving, rather than to people themselves, is the best we ought to hope for; and Bickford reminds us that this kind of attention does not need to be affectionate, that it can be strategic or grudging instead (Bickford 1996a, 420). For this reason, she rejects “friendship” as a useful name for relationships between citizens because she finds that other thinkers use it to invoke something more demanding in its requirements for why and how we care about our fellow citizens. I have argued above that what she and Yack are describing are actually very similar, and below I refer to the work of Jill Frank to elaborate on how mutual concern (what Bickford criticizes in Yack’s account) can be just as grudging and strategic as what Bickford calls attention. In other words, what Yack – and Frank following him – take to be mutual concern is not the same as concern for a friend for their own sake, as we saw in Cooper’s thought; instead it can be the result of recognizing the ways in which our interests are included within those of another, so that we must take them seriously if we wish to act in our own interest. Both Bickford’s and Yack’s account of citizen relationships describe this phenomenon, and Cooper’s insistence on care for a friend’s own sake in all kinds of friendships only serves to confuse any attempt to take seriously Aristotle’s own declaration that political relationships are friendships of some kind. Both Yack and Bickford leave it aside in their take on Aristotelian civic friendship – or just “attention” as the case may be.

### **3.10 Frank on the Marketplace**

Now that we have a good sense of Aristotle's three kinds of friendship, and we have seen a little of what contemporary thinkers make of his work on friendship and politics, we can delve into the ways in which they might help us to understand civic friendship for Aristotle and in general. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly describes his vision of a specifically civic (political) friendship. Although he notes in this work, too, that concord refers to friendship between citizens when they are of one mind on political matters, he also argues that citizens who are friends are, more than any other kinds of friends, likely to be friends for the purpose of advantage or utility (*Eudemian Ethics*, 1242a5-10). This builds upon Aristotle's claims in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtue friendships – friendships of character – are extraordinarily intimate and rare:

“the friendship of companions is not found in groups of many people, and the friendships celebrated in song are always between two people. By contrast, those who have many friends and treat everyone as close to them seem to be friends to no one, except in the way fellow citizens are friends; these people are regarded as ingratiating. Certainly it is possible to have a fellow citizen's friendship for many people, and still to be a truly decent person, not ingratiating; but it is impossible to be many people's friend for their virtue and for themselves. We have reason to be satisfied if we can find even a few such friends.” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1171a15)

When we are friends with our fellow citizens, it is of course not as intimate as when we are companions, or close friends based on character. If we think again of Aristotle's distinction between moral and legal utility friends, we must conclude that the kind of utility friends that citizens are to one another is of the legal rather than the moral sort.

If we must rely on rules and contracts to regulate such friendships, are they really friendships after all? Is Aristotle's conception of friendship specifically between citizens thus too cynical, or at least too facile to be called "friendship" – or if we retain "friendship" as a name must we give it at least an entirely different, much impoverished definition? Jill Frank, in her *Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics*, doesn't think so. Her account of the importance of Aristotelian proportional reciprocity in the everyday exchanges that happen in diverse communities leads her to conclude that something like friendship does persist between citizens because of the ways in which relationships of mutual advantage, even when legalistic, help to cultivate concern for the interest of others after all, rather than merely appearing to do so while stoking self-interest.

Frank grounds her account of citizen friendships in a discussion of reciprocal justice as a third and final companion to Aristotle's notions of distributive justice and of corrective justice, and it interests me in particular because it is the one that persists between individuals as individuals; rather than trickling down from above, it persists between equals in some sense. It exists in those moments in which we get things from and give things to our fellow citizens. When we engage in exchange, Frank argues, we must decide what someone else is worth, while also keeping in mind what we desire from the exchange. Because in such instances we must take ourselves *and* another into account, Frank locates here an important instance of equality, specifically one that does

not get rid of difference between those exchanging goods or services, i.e. between builders and shoemakers, citizens and non-citizens, or better and worse off (Frank 2005, 83-4). This equality, I take it, stems from the fact that both parties to an exchange must reconcile the claims of their own interest with those of another. Frank writes that “reciprocal justice in the context of exchanges of goods and services, though often geared toward subsistence, does not result only in an association to the end of mere life. Teaching phronesis even as they depend on it, the practices of commercial exchange . . . [cultivate] virtue that, in Aristotle’s understanding, orient a polity toward a good life” (Frank 2005, 99). Frank here wants to rehabilitate the notion of exchange; rather than merely a means to our getting what we want from others – preferably at another’s expense rather than our own – it teaches and encourages good judgment, moderation, a sense of justice; and it contributes to an extended sense of concern in which we include the interests of others in our rational calculus. This is a lofty account of utilitarian exchange.

Frank recognizes that most recent political theorists consider Aristotle’s picture of civic friendship to be based on friendship of utility, rather than character or pleasure, no matter what that concept might entail for them. She notes that character friendship is rejected “on the ground that it demands a unity that is impossible to achieve among citizens and an intimacy that is, in any case, undesirable for political life” (Frank 2005, 150). But, she asks, how does utility friendship as the basis of civic friendship fit with

Aristotle's assertion that the polity exists for something better than mere trade and markets? Here is her answer:

“Against the backdrop of their competition for more, use friends, must, if they are to reach an agreement to their mutual benefit . . . negotiate and compromise and, to some small degree, trust one another (they must trust, for example, that neither is misrepresenting the item offered up for exchange). As a result, the agreement they reach does not reflect their naked self-interest alone. It reflects rather, an enlarged sense of their self-interests, one that takes into account the interests of both friends.” (Frank 2005, 153)

In Frank's understanding, taking others into account happens incidentally in ordinary everyday practices of exchange and not because of any innate tendency for citizens to care for others. In other words, mutual concern arises out of self-interest. The common good arises as a result of a concern for reaching a mutually beneficial agreement – mutually beneficial because if not then an agreement might never be reached, and then in the end no one would get what they want or need. Frank invokes an example of a pair of people: one needs a pen and has a watch, the other has a pen and needs a watch (Frank 2005, 153). Thus, it is in the interest of both actors to come to an agreement; in such an exchange, one person getting what they want or need requires that the other gets what they want or need as well. This recalls Danielle Allen's take on friendship in which “encapsulated interest” (a term she borrows from Russell Hardin and sees as essential to Putnam's thought on social capital) leads to trust which, in turn, leads to reciprocity or a willingness to take others' interests into account.

When our own interest is included within the interest of another (as in an exchange), we must look to our mutual advantage in deciding how to proceed. Frank puts it this way: “Representing the use friends’ *mutual advantage*, the agreement embodies, with respect to their exchange, a good that gives them both their due in accordance with their judgments about fairness, that is, it embodies the common good” (Frank 2005, 153). So we see that friendship based on self-interest need not exclude consideration of others; in fact, it requires us to take others’ interests into account – but not out of love or concern for them. Allen’s equitable self-interest, and Frank’s reading of Aristotle’s use friendship are meant to show how ordinary practices of getting something from someone help to cultivate some communal virtues – moderation and judgment among them – while also standing in as examples or analogues to the practice of politics in general. Frank notes that “use friends need not be, and usually are not, particularly oriented toward one another: they need not particularly like one another nor need they be especially virtuous” (Frank 2005, 153), again echoing Allen’s insight that political friendship does not grow out of affection – and indeed may never even cultivate it. Instead, if Aristotelian utility friendship is our model, it requires only that we take others’ interests into account, and it shows that if we understand our own interests well, we are actually required by them to do so.

The main offering of Frank’s discussion of Aristotelian civic utility friendship, for our purposes, is its demonstration that trust, via compromise and sacrifice (even if ever

so slight) of one's self-interest, are part and parcel of citizens' relations with one another, which are based in utility, and that these habits or qualities make a difference not only in the marketplace (which Frank exemplifies as the site of use or utility friendships) but in the political sphere as well (Frank 2005, 163). This description comes very near to Aristotle's description of moral utility friendship, in which informal trust is thought to arise from exchange of goods due to a misunderstanding by those involved. Remember that Aristotle thinks that this is a mistake, and that a relationship of this sort will be characterized by resentment and disappointment. But Frank emphasizes that she does not wish to rehabilitate the ethical or moral friendship of utility of which Aristotle is so skeptical – only to point out that some amount of trust and concern for others can be found even in relationships that we take for granted as built on self-interest (Frank 2005, 153). In this way, Frank provides us with a framework for appreciating the ways in which relationships that begin in self-interest can result in outcomes that at least look like friendship as we ordinarily conceive of it – and she emphasizes that this isn't insignificant.

One reason to be optimistic about the political salience of exchange in the marketplace is Aristotle's (and Frank's) recognition that it can produce generalized and spontaneous reciprocity – and even generosity. Aristotle writes that cities are maintained by reciprocity, and that “that is why they make a temple of the Graces prominent, so that there will be a return of benefits received. For this is what is special to

grace; when someone has been gracious to us, we must do a service for him in return, and also ourselves take the lead in being gracious again" (*Nich. Ethics*, 1133a1-10). And yet reciprocity is not the same as generosity or graciousness. We can see this in another of Aristotle's examples, and discussed by Frank, too. Commercial exchange is one important example of use friendship for Aristotle, and sailors working together on a ship is another, as we have seen. Sailors working and travelling on a boat together must often make difficult decisions about matters that affect them all – they are utility friends, since they have been brought together by work on a common project rather than by the bonds of intimate friendship (though these may develop in such a utility-based setting); in this way, they resemble citizens living together in a community.

In the example of the sailors on the ship, Frank's reading helps us to see how utility friends make decisions with concern for their specific kind of friendship rather than individual self-interest. If one sailor is sick and needs medicine or treatment on shore, but the waters are choppy and their passage there is dangerous, how are they all to decide together about what to do? Frank points out that a simple majoritarian vote, which would likely end in a decision not to go to shore since all except the sick sailor would prefer not to make the dangerous trip, is not the way to keep their utility friendship intact by giving it its due. Instead, rather than tallying each individual expression of self-interest, they are to look to what brings them all together in the first place – the ship itself. The good of the ship is their mutual interest, so the decision not to

go to shore for its sake is based on mutual advantage. The result is the same – they don't go to shore – but the focus is different. Frank considers this to be more just and thus sustaining of friendship (Frank 2005, 154-5). She writes that “looking to the thing of mutual benefit . . . makes it possible for use friends to resolve their conflict *as use friends*” (Frank 2005, 155). Frank's reading of Aristotelian use friendship is a generous one, and allows us to take seriously the possibility that friendship based on self-interest between citizens is not nothing and in fact cultivates something more; though it seems minimal, it nevertheless offers an account of some kind of care between citizens, even if that care arises out of interest rather than concern or compassion for others. Instead, it requires only that would-be strangers treat one another justly by moderating their self-interest. In doing so, they practice making decisions based on mutual interests, and they hone their judgment and their capacity for compromise. These are all excellent and important political skills for individuals trying to sustain community together. Frank thus brings together the kinds of insights that Bickford and Yack offer about grudging but just attention on the one hand, and a minimal solidarity based on shared aims and conditions on the other – and show that they are not so dissimilar after all despite Bickford's move to distance herself from talk of friendship. Instead, her notion of attention fits in with Yack's and Frank's pictures of utilitarian civic friendship as practices of moderating our self-interest once we understand how it is bound up with that of various others around us.

Bickford takes issue with the word “friendship” because it implies so many things that she thinks are anti-political: warmth, affection, identification, care, and so on. But a close reading of what Aristotle himself says about civic friendship shows that these things do not define civic or political friendship in his account – though they may accompany other kinds of friendship in his taxonomy. As a result, if Bickford had to choose from a range of kinds of civic friendship, she might choose Aristotle’s over Bellah et al.’s, for example. To conclude this chapter, I mount a case that these two stand in for very different accounts of civic friendship. The kind of civic friendship that we get from reading Aristotle alongside Yack and Frank is one that offers some concepts and insights that serve us well as we wrestle with finding a place for civic friendship on the contemporary democratic scene; however in many ways Aristotle’s account leaves us mired in the status quo that thinkers calling for civic friendship today, like those with whom we began in chapter 1, claim that we must move beyond.

Aristotle argues in the *Politics* that

“the state is not an association of people dwelling in the same place, established to prevent its members from committing injustice against each other, and to promote transactions. Certainly all these features must be present if there is to be a state; but even the presence of every one of them does not make a state *ipso facto*. The state is an association intended to enable its members, in their households and their kinships, to live *well*; its purpose is a perfect and self-sufficient life.” (*Politics*, 1280b29)

In his emphasis on a state’s or political community’s role in making sure all citizens are capable of living well, he echoes the most optimistic hopes of thinkers like Bellah,

Putnam, and Allen, who link civic friendship with our capacity to live well and justly together. However, the close reading of Aristotle's works in this chapter has shown that his picture of civic friendship only brings us the first set of ingredients of a state as listed in the passage above – the prevention of injustice and the promotion of transactions – via legal utility friendship. Living well and self-sufficiently is, as a result, relegated to household and family relationships and not to relationships between fellow citizens as citizens in themselves. Perhaps the prevention of injustice is the best we can hope for, but it does not live up to the demands of those who argue that accepting formal rules of social justice requires some kind of motivational underpinning, and who claim that this is what civic friendship offers to us. For Aristotle, civic friendship is located precisely in those rules of justice and is not more robust than that. I recognize that their importance should not be underestimated; however, given the robust models of civic friendship under discussion today, they leave us wondering about whether we are right to hope for more, and about what exactly we should hope for.

In service of these goals, I use Aristotle to help clarify confusion in contemporary thought on civic friendship that we now take for granted as correct in important ways but which, at the same time, remains obscure and opaque, as we saw at the outset of this project. Below, I pull together the insights we've examined above in order to evaluate what Aristotle's vision of civic friendship ultimately gives to us as we think through the concept itself as well as its contemporary obstacles and instantiations. Does Aristotle

help to clarify the contemporary conversation about civic friendship that we now take for granted but which is rife with confusion?

### ***3.11 The Uses of Aristotelian Civic Friendship***

To answer this question, I begin by focusing on the positive offerings of Aristotle's account. He is an ancient voice in a conversation that claims civic friendship as a necessity for political community. And he tells us that civic friendship is a complex concept that requires unpacking. In both of these insights he supports my overall project. In general, his position is that in order to understand why and how civic friendship is necessary for the health of political communities we must have a clear understanding of the components of civic friendship. In this, too, I endeavor to follow his approach throughout and find it extremely useful in setting the scene for inquiries into the concept of civic friendship.

The idea that civic friendship holds cities (or states) together is no small thing and it sets the tone for all thought on civic friendship that follows, since it allows us to ask: How exactly does civic friendship do this? Aristotle's account of civic friendship, besides giving us the idea that it is an ingredient in sustainable and just politics, also allows that it not only survives in environments of citizen diversity but in many ways requires it (leaving aside his own impoverished view of what counts as diversity given his exclusion of women, slaves, and foreigners). This association between diversity and civic friendship is a huge conceptual strength of his account given how diverse

contemporary democracies are. Bernard Yack writes that “for Aristotle political friendship is a fact of ordinary political life rather than a moral ideal, a source of conflict as well as a means of promoting greater cooperation” (Yack 1993, 110). This focus on everyday citizen relations and on the assumption that civic friendship grows out of an environment of conflict (and does not necessarily rid politics of such conflicts) speaks to the accounts provided by Bellah, Putnam, and Allen as they wonder about friendship’s relation to social justice, political organizing, social capital, and sacrifice in a context of deep diversity.

And another way in which Aristotle speaks to the ongoing conversation about civic friendship is in his assertion that “friendship is said to be equality” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1158a). The recent work on friendship that I cite argues that civic friends need to see others’ interests as in some sense equal to their own. Those who comment specifically on Aristotle on civic friendship use the examples of travellers on a ship and of market exchange, as we saw above, to get at this equality between citizens. Aristotle reminds us “the question we must keep in mind is, equality or inequality in what sort of thing? For this is a problem, and one for which we need political philosophy” (*Politics*, 1282b14-1282b23). Thus, for Aristotle, political philosophy has to do with figuring out who is equal with whom and how, and then what this means for just politics and for civic friendship. This is a question that I attend to in the remaining chapters as well, because it looms large for Tocqueville and Smith, too. Aristotle’s answer to this question lies in

the fact of the shared interest of citizens in living together relatively peaceably and the fact that when they reflect on how to pursue their self-interest they see that to do so they must co-operate with others. I will address this further below when I discuss the ways in which Aristotle's account of civic friendship falls short if we are looking to it to bolster something more robust than what we already have at work in contemporary democracies. Nevertheless, pointing to equality as a condition of friendship is significant and illuminating, even if the equality that Aristotle ends up focusing on is interest-based. Talking about civic friendship as a manifestation of equality requires that we ask ourselves how exactly citizens are equal and how this ought to be enacted, and Aristotle's thought is helpful in that it demands that we do so.

A final strength I find in Aristotle's account of civic friendship is his distinction between moral and legal use friendships, along with his argument that the former are not tenable. I don't find this to be a strength in the sense that it helps to furnish us with a roadmap to more care, more trust, more equality – more civic friendship, in short – but because I think it helps to clarify a conceptual move that is not available to us. Aristotle makes a convincing case that relationships (or friendships, in his more wide-ranging usage) that begin in mutual utility do not transform into anything else in and of themselves. Aristotle argues that more lofty, intimate, informal, and demanding friendships do not grow out of strictly utilitarian friendships; and he goes on to argue that for utility friendships to be functional and sustainable they must be rooted in clear

agreements about who owes what and why. That's what civic friendship looks like for Aristotle.

I elaborate below on the ways in which this limits our imagination of what civic friendship can be for us today. However, I think it is immensely clarifying to follow Aristotle's argument that if civic friendship has to do with self-interest then it will be extremely limited in the kinds of friendly attitudes and actions it might motivate. For example, we can no longer hopefully assume that generalized trust will be a result of civic friendship that is based in mutual utility. Aristotle writes that

“with friends for utility or pleasure perhaps there is nothing absurd in dissolving the friendship whenever they are no longer pleasant or useful. For they were friends of pleasure or utility; and if these give out, it is reasonable not to love. We might, however, accuse a friend if he really liked us for utility or pleasure, and pretended to like us for our character. Friends are most at odds when they are not friends in the way they think they are” (*Nic. Ethics*, 1156b).

Since resentment and conflict arise from not understanding the nature of our friendship with our fellow citizens, it behooves us not to mistake courtesy, mutual interest, and law-abidingness for generalized and informal reciprocity or trust or care or solidarity. Aristotle tells us that the former need not lead nor be related to the latter. Aristotle's point here helps us to avoid mistaking utility friendship for friendship of character in the realm of civic relations. This is a clarifying move that helps to call into question any approach to contemporary civic friendship that wants to bring about caring or solidary action for citizens different from us out of a ground of mutual self-interest. I take this to

be an advantage or strength as well as a disadvantage or weakness of Aristotle's account of civic friendship. It helps to excise misunderstanding, but it severely limits what civic friendship can be.

### **3.12 The Limits of Aristotelian Civic Friendship**

In the end, basing civic friendship in relationships of mutual utility means that Aristotle's account of civic friendship does not get us beyond the status quo of politics and civic relations as usual, as disappointing as these are to contemporary thinkers of civic friendship. We see this most concretely in Aristotle's discussion of specific examples of civic friendship, and in the analysis of these that Yack and Frank provide. Yack and Frank want to rehabilitate Aristotelian civic friendship as a resource for our thinking about it today. As a result, they offer the most robust reading of his account. Nevertheless, however, I argue that they fall short in proving the benefit of turning to Aristotle to get to a picture of a civic friendship that we're missing or that we ought to strive for. This is seen specifically in a discussion of political friendship via proportional reciprocity in which Aristotle notes that when friends do not have identical aims in friendship, their friendship may even out and thus be preserved in an exchange, not of identical goods but of goods of comparable worth, as when a weaver and a shoe-maker exchange their wares (*Nic. Ethics*, 1163b30). Here, as we saw above, political friendship grows out of the practice of bartering – a relationship in which goods, and not necessarily conversation, concern, or goodwill, are exchanged. How does this square

with Aristotle's insistence that friendship holds cities together? Friendship between citizens as proportional justice contributes to the coherence of a political community. An argument can be made – as Frank does – that something like concern is in some way implicated even in the practices of the market, of buying and selling. However, what does this line of argument really give to us if we're looking for new ways of thinking about what kinds of relationships we owe to our fellow citizens?

If the problem with which we began is that there doesn't seem to be much civic friendship these days, and if we're trying to figure out what to do about this state of affairs, then looking to the ways in which we interact in the marketplace is, I hold, outdated and insubstantial. In the first case, Aristotle's example of marketplace interactions in which citizens trade goods with one another and in so doing are forced into allowing that their fellows are worth something is long gone. Strangely, Jill Frank follows Aristotle's use of this example and does not modify it so that we might understand how to make use of it today, in a world in which the marketplace has been completely transformed in its impersonal nature and in its reliance on money. Her rosy picture of the civilizing effects of trade in the marketplace is antiquated. In the end, Aristotle and his contemporary supporters are too optimistic about the civic influences of quotidian activities – especially those that are transactional and based in self-interest. For example, if the weaver in the example above is Christian and the shoe-maker is Muslim, it's true that in order to come to a mutually acceptable agreement, each will

have to figure out how to make sure the other knows that they understand the others' worth in a fair and equitable way. However, I don't think we're given grounds in this example to think that as a result we will always think of others, especially those who are fundamentally different from us, in an equitable way except when we are forced to. At best, we are guaranteed a temporary courtesy. This isn't nothing, but it also doesn't respond to the hopes of Bellah, Putnam, or Allen. And besides the insufficiency of this example to suggest the growth of friendship as Frank hopefully imagines it, as a civilizing force in general, this kind of relationship no longer occurs in our political world in a concrete way anyway.

The other example that Aristotle and his followers use to illuminate the phenomenon of civic friendship is that of fellow travellers on a boat. Unlike the example of the marketplace, which could be taken (and is, by the thinkers above) as a concrete example of a utility relationship or as a metaphor for other kinds of utility-based relationships, this image is a metaphor only. It could lead to a more robust kind of friendship than using market exchange as an example because in it all involved not only have their own personal interests (as in the market) but also share more concretely an interest in the well-being of their ship or their journey. Still, though, this metaphor leaves us with the same question with which I began in my reading of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen: Because communities like the United States are so vast, seeing and feeling the ways in which we are engaged together with our fellow citizens in anything like a

shared journey in which our fates are intertwined and interdependent is extremely difficult. How can we get to something like it? The contemporary problem of civic friendship is that this perception of community isn't a given. What kinds of actions or habits cause it to arise? I argue that no matter the image we use to stand in for utility friendship, the fact of its fundamental basis in utility itself remains, and remains problematic.

Utility friendships depend on a formal kind of justice – formally agreed upon – and on proportional justice, in which we figure out how to get what we want from other people without ignoring their needs or desires. So they can lead to moderation (like Allen's equitable self-interest) and to trust, but not trust in others only trust in the overarching system of justice. General attitudes, like Putnam's generalized reciprocity or social capital, are different. In the contemporary thought on things like civic friendship, they are meant to be something beyond the settled rules and laws of a community – intended to shore up, strengthen, or improve them. And utility friendship enacted in the political sphere is what Bellah et al. calls the "politics of interest," and it is even further from what they praise as a commitment, based in the recognition of equal dignity of others, to work on behalf of social justice. Indeed, utility friendship does not even provide us with an argument for "crossing early," the least robust contemporary example of civic friendship. Utility friendship is fleeting, liable to cause resentment and conflict, and grounded in individual self-interest. These are the political problems that

contemporary thought on civic friendship means to fight against, so it's no surprise that Aristotelian civic friendship is not a particularly good resource for helping to imagine alternatives to a divided and antagonistic politics.

The best that we get from Aristotle, in Bickford's view, is a vision of deliberation that makes a place for everyone's views. I end this chapter with a brief reflection on this aspect of his thought, because it leads the way to the chapters that follow on Tocqueville and Smith and what they have to say about caring or friendly relations between citizens. Bickford writes that Aristotle's vision of deliberation as a "conflictual communicative practice" (Bickford 1996a, 418) helps us to see that we don't need to have much in common with our fellow citizens beyond the practice of decision-making itself, and the sense that the process behind it is just (Bickford 1996a, 409). And an important part of this just model of political deliberation is "the capacity to try to see from another's perspective, to imagine their perceptions, not in order to be selfless or morally good, but because we are creatures who are capable of politics" (Bickford 1996a, 411). For Bickford, this is rhetoric rather than friendship, and it arises out of Aristotle's thought on rhetoric. For Allen, we can recall, rhetoric was part and parcel of her vision of political friendship. Rhetoric builds community by bringing divergent positions into a coherent and just whole. In the end, having access to and taking seriously another's' perspective is important but it doesn't necessarily lead to care or concern for others. Although this

sounds like empathy, Bickford makes the case that it has nothing to do with habits or attitudes of friendship.

In the next chapter, I take a long look at the work of Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, in order to see what resources for re-conceptualizing civic friendship for contemporary democracies we might be able to find in his work. In doing so, I hit upon many similar themes and questions to those in this chapter; most importantly, I focus on this interaction between civic friendship, empathy or compassion, and self-interest in order to see if and how Tocqueville can help us clarify our thinking on civic friendship today. In many ways, he picks up where Bickford leaves us here as we wonder about how politics based in utility and interest is changed by taking on the perspective of our fellow citizens.

## 4. Defining Tocquevillean Civic Friendship

In this chapter, I explore what Tocqueville himself has to offer to an account of the kinds of friendship that can spring up in democratic communities, as well as what obstacles stand in the way of such developments. What political phenomena make up the context in which civic friendship can or should spring up? And what political problems is civic friendship meant to solve in Tocqueville's account? I begin with a discussion of democratic despotism and individualism in order to put forth answers to these questions. I then elaborate on three threads of civic friendship that I find tied up together in Tocqueville's description of early America; though he does not use the term civic friendship for them, they follow in the spirit of all that has come before in this discussion, and I argue that they help to move it forward still further. These threads of civic friendship grow out of Tocqueville's thought on association between citizens, on the nature of compassion in democracy, and on self-interest well understood as a novel motivation for Americans' public action.

We can find in Tocqueville's work echoes of Aristotle's thought on civic friendship. Tocqueville discusses the ways in which Americans associate, spend time, or share their lives with one another as well as the ways in which they do concrete good for each other and, finally, the ways in which these two phenomena are linked, just as Aristotle does. And the two thinkers root whatever civic friendship they find in the communities they observe in self-interest, thus saddling civic friendship with interest-

based obstacles and limits from the very beginning. This similarity comes about because in their approaches – observation and description, rather than proposing ideals – they are more like sociologists than philosophers. But Tocqueville’s thought adds something new in its explicit discussion of the democratic pre-conditions for civic friendship; in his focus on the dangers but also the political and moral possibilities of increased equality; and in his tentative reflections on the nature of compassion as a motivation for civic friendship.

Because of his focus on the moral and political consequences of the growth of democracy (and, I argue, in the cultivation of civic friendship itself), and because of his intertwined discussion of self-interest well understood and compassion, it is difficult to arrive at any firm and final understandings of his most important conceptual insights. I refer to secondary work on Tocqueville to show this to be true. I conclude with some judgments about what Tocqueville’s thought on democracy in early America can offer to us now, if anything, and thus about the advantages and weaknesses inherent in it for our thought on civic friendship today. I turn now immediately to an account of the beginnings Tocqueville’s work on democracy in America, followed by a description of his thought on democracy itself as the most salient feature of the political and social context out of which his vision of civic friendship develops, as I see it. He wrestles with a sense of loss as aristocratic political orders dissolve, but he also endeavors to highlight the ways in which democracy does justice to the fact of human equality. Finally, before

moving on to describe the three facets of Tocquevillean civic friendship, I discuss the ways in which Tocqueville sets up a need for civic friendship given the dangers of democratic despotism and individualism he finds inherent in democracy.

#### **4.1 Tocqueville's Travels**

Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in America with his friend Gustave de Beaumont in 1831, on a mission from the French government to study the American prison system; the pair spent nine months travelling throughout the United States, making notes for their study of American prisons (and eventually publishing a report soon after their return to France), but taking note of many diverse aspects of the new and burgeoning democracy there as well. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* – the result of his more wide-ranging observations – was initially published in two volumes, in 1835 and 1840 respectively, and focused on the public and private consequences of the spread of greater social equality and the gradual disappearance of aristocratic or noble classes in America. These changes are what he most significantly associates with the development of democracy in America.

Tocqueville himself was split in his evaluation of what he saw as a social and political trend that would continue to grow and develop around the world. He took as his task the enumeration of insights about the advantages and disadvantages of heightened equality and democracy so that other communities would be well prepared

to meet the changing social and political environment and to avoid its greatest potential dangers as he saw them.

In his travels throughout the still young country, observing politics and industry and speaking with the many different kinds of people he meets, Tocqueville isolates social equality as the most powerful influence on the character of public and private life in America. And he makes sure to emphasize that this is unlike anything he has seen before: “of all the novel things which attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck me more forcibly than the equality of social conditions.” He sees its influence not only in government, but also in civil society; social equality “forms opinion, creates feelings, proposes ways of acting, and transforms everything it does not directly instigate itself” (Tocqueville 2003, 11). It is important to note that democracy is synonymous with social equality in Tocqueville’s account. He recognizes and discusses other factors tied to democracy – including the ways in which the people can be said to be sovereign in America (the roots of the word “democracy” in ancient Greek – *demokratia* – refer to the people’s rule, after all) but when he discusses democracy in America, his primary focus is on the political and social effects of equality, specifically between classes, and the indirect rather than direct political power that results from the more wide-ranging associations that spring up under such circumstances. Whereas nobles or aristocrats had once assumed a benevolent responsibility for the poor, and “watched over their fate as though it were a duty placed in their hands by providence”

(Tocqueville 2003, 17), Tocqueville sees that these class distinctions and relations have dissolved in the United States, where he discovers that “barriers raised between men are being lowered; estates are being split up and power shared; education is expanding and men’s intelligence tends toward equality; the condition of society is becoming democratic and the authority of democracy is finally taking root peacefully in all institutions and social customs” (Tocqueville 2003, 18).

## ***4.2 The Rising Tide of Democracy***

In general, Tocqueville’s take on the consequences of democracy is that, though much is lost when equality is increased in a community, there will nevertheless be some goods to balance these out. He writes that, though a society such as the United States, in which social equality is the guiding force in the life of the community, “displays less brilliance than an aristocracy, there will also be less wretchedness; pleasures will be less outrageous and wellbeing will be shared by all; the sciences will be on a smaller scale but ignorance will be less common; opinions will be less vigorous and habits gentler; you will notice more vices and fewer crimes” (Tocqueville 2003, 18-19). It cannot be denied that Tocqueville is an aristocratic snob. Despite the fact that life in a democracy, as he describes it above, is more pleasant and sustainable for more people, he also considers democracy to be the cause of the loss of the peaks of civilization and in general sees it as a middling and leveling force in human civilization – and in these ways, he considers it degrading.

Throughout *Democracy in America*, we see him reckon with his disappointment with the rise of democracy at the expense of the cultural heights of aristocracy. He laments: "I cast my eye over the countless crowd of similar beings among whom no one stands above or below the rest. The sight of this universal uniformity saddens and chills me and I am tempted to regret the state of society which no longer exists" (Tocqueville 2003, 820). In the end, though, Tocqueville links the development of democracy with God's will, and recognizes the limits of his own superficial and time-bound vision. He argues forcefully, despite his inclinations to the contrary, that

"it is a natural belief that this creator and preserver of men derives the greatest satisfaction not from the unusual prosperity of the few but the widespread wellbeing of all. What seems to me to be a decline is, therefore, progress in his eyes; what bruises me is a pleasure to him. Equality persists at a lower level perhaps but is fairer and this fairness constitutes its greatness and its beauty. I struggle to penetrate God's point of view, from which vantage point I try to observe and judge human affairs." (Tocqueville 2003, 820)

Tocqueville claims not to pass final judgment on the development of democracy when he writes: "I have not even intended to judge whether this social revolution, which I believe to be irresistible, is advantageous or disastrous for mankind" (Tocqueville 2003, 23). Instead he provides a rich account of those aspects of it that he predicts could be of great benefit as well as those that could be of great danger to political life in general.

### ***4.3 Twin Dangers of Democracy: Democratic Despotism and Individualism***

Of the many dangers that Tocqueville worries may come to pass in America (and in other burgeoning democracies), the two I focus on in order to contextualize the political climate in which civic friendship develops are intertwined: democratic despotism and individualism. Tocqueville thinks that both grow out of expanding equality and especially a concern for equality that supersedes a concern for freedom to the extent that citizens will be willing to endure any sort of political regime so long as equality persists (Tocqueville 2003, 587) and, as a result, Tocqueville argues that it is easiest to establish despotic governments in democratic nations (Tocqueville 2003, 809). Tocqueville worries that “as a nation’s social conditions grow more equal, individuals seem smaller and society bigger or rather, each citizens, having grown like the rest, melts into the crowd and only a vast and imposing image of the whole nation now stands before the observer” (Tocqueville 2003, 778). Under such conditions citizens, once they elect representatives, relinquish their power, satisfied that they have chosen their authority and no longer need to be involved neither in the workings of government nor in limiting the power of government. The public, as a result, becomes reluctant to withdraw its trust, no matter the ways in which their representatives err (Tocqueville 2003, 783). In this case, the citizenry becomes apathetic and mindless followers of an

overarching and extremely powerful government. As a result, paradoxically, democracy itself undercuts the rule of the *demos*.

Tocqueville considers this to be a new kind of despotism in which people isolate themselves while above them an immense protective power watches over all; this central power provides security, directs citizens' personal concerns, and, in general, removes all trouble and thinking from life (Tocqueville 2003, 805-6). In this way, democratic despotism is kinder than other kinds of despotism; Tocqueville notes that it debases citizens without tormenting them (Tocqueville 2003, 804). Instead, it saps their autonomy and depends on their servility, turning them into a "flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as shepherd" (Tocqueville 2003, 806). Tocqueville believes that should this happen in America it would not be accidental given the very nature of democracy itself: He argues forcefully that "the very constitutions and needs of democracies make it inevitable that their sovereign authority has to be more uniform, centralized, widespread, searching, and powerful than in any other nation" (Tocqueville 2003, 810). This kind of despotism grows specifically in conditions of democracy.

A related development in Tocqueville's vision of democracy, and equally problematic, is the tyranny of the majority that arises because of the significance given to the position of the greatest portion of the population in deciding on social and political matters. When the principle of equality is applied to our capacity for judgment, the

result can be that the majority easily overtakes the deliberative field. If we are equally capable then whatever the majority decides must be best, we assume, to the detriment of the public conversation. The public sphere thus loses dissenting voices, for better or worse. Tocqueville writes that, in conditions of extreme equality, “the predisposition to believe in mass opinion increases and becomes progressively the opinion which commands the world” (Tocqueville 2003, 501); there is almost limitless trust in the judgment of the group with the greatest number of voices. It thus resembles democratic despotism in its encouragement of conformity. The tyranny of the majority can reign not only in the political realm but inserts itself into the very thought processes of citizens. Tocqueville considers this to be the cause of a lack of freedom in America in general, in speech and even in thought. The voice of the minority is ridiculed and excluded until it ceases to exist at all – and, in cases of such tyranny, it has no recourse to either legal or executive powers, since they too will be under the sway of majority public opinion. In these two ways – the subtle and in some sense accidental tyranny of a large and extensive government that accompanies a passive and withdrawn citizenry on the one hand, and the crushing power of the majority on the other – equality cuts away at Americans’ freedom. Whether an intensely bureaucratic and over-arching executive power or a forceful majority in the public realm Tocqueville urges vigilance and resistance.

A strong sense of the importance of private life is also a consequence of democracy in the United States and, as with many of the phenomena Tocqueville describes as new developments linked to the advent of democracy, has both positive and negative possibilities. Because neither the community nor the individual are given natural priority over the other in the new American democracy, Tocqueville worries that private concerns could overtake all interest in the community; this, as we have seen, is a cause of democratic despotism. Tocqueville writes that Americans' submission to democratic government can school citizens in feeling duty toward the wider community, but that significant freedom from political duties also leaves them with a sense that much of their lives ought to be free from the intrusion of others. On the strong importance that an American gives to private life, Tocqueville writes:

“while he has become a subject in all the mutual duties of citizens, he remains master in his own affairs where he is free and answerable only to God for his actions. Out of that grows the general truth that the individual is the sole and best placed judge of his own private concerns and society has the right to control his actions only when it feels such actions cause it damage or needs to seek the cooperation of the individual. This doctrine has universal acceptance in the United States.” (Tocqueville 2003, 78)

By itself, this freedom – having a private life with private concerns – is, and I think that Tocqueville agrees, a salutary development. And with increasing equality, more people get to enjoy such freedom.

Tocqueville reflects on the fact that personal independence is broader in aristocracies – but at the expense of the independence and economic well-being of most

citizens; he is critical of this sacrifice of much of society for the independence and greatness of a mere few (Tocqueville 2003, 810) despite his mourning the loss of those great few in democracy. Though he approves of the increasing scope of personal freedom in America, he fears that it can go too far and that democracy itself helps it to do so to its detriment: When individuals sink too deep into their private lives, individualism – the name Tocqueville and his translators give to this phenomenon – eats away at concern for community-members outside of our inner circles as well as for the over-arching political operations of our wider community, as we saw in Tocqueville’s account of democratic despotism. Tocqueville describes individualism as “a calm and considered feeling which persuades each citizen to cut himself off from his fellows and to withdraw into the circle of his family and friends in such a way that he thus creates a small group of his own and willingly abandons society at large to its own devices” (Tocqueville 2003, 587).

Bellah and Putnam, as we saw, as well as numerous other recent thinkers who take on Tocqueville’s concerns as their own, continue to worry about increasing individualism and political apathy, though they differ on which loss – commitment to working toward the well-being of others, willingness to band together with fellows, or active participation in established political institutions – are most worrisome. My concern throughout is for the first two, and how they work together; and in the end, all of these are connected for Tocqueville. He describes groups of citizens in America who

have been able to build comfortable lives for themselves; no longer as powerful as the aristocratic class whose disappearance Tocqueville mourns, they are nevertheless easily self-sufficient. He describes them as follows:

“Such people owe nothing to anyone and, as it were, expect nothing from anyone. They are used to considering themselves in isolation and quite willingly imagine their destiny as entirely in their own hands. Thus, not only does democracy make men forget their ancestors but also hides their descendants and keeps them apart from their fellows. It constantly brings them back to themselves and threatens in the end to imprison them in the isolation of their own hearts.”  
(Tocqueville 2003, 589)

In the relatively new democracy in America, more citizens have the opportunity to participate in public life than ever before and more citizens have access to means that will allow them to achieve comfortable lives, too; the tension between these two phenomena worries Tocqueville because he suspects that the latter fact will turn people away from activity in the social and political realms. Uninvolved, isolated, and unwilling to associate with many others, citizens will be powerless to influence government should they eventually wish or need to do so – or they may stop thinking about what their government ought to be like altogether.

Tocqueville argues that equality can make association, which can bring along many benefits with it, both harder and easier, and either more insular or more open. This observation foreshadows Putnam’s about bridging and bonding social capital. Tocqueville thinks this is so because a hierarchical class system provides a sense of place within an overarching order, and this helps people to know exactly how and why they

ought to interact with their fellows; without it, Tocqueville sees that “equality places men shoulder to shoulder, unconnected by any common tie” and they can become indifferent to one another as a result (Tocqueville 2003, 591). Even when they must come together, as in political meetings or courtrooms, and so on, Tocqueville doesn’t necessarily think that this *must* have any other long-lasting consequences: “each of them is very willing to acknowledge his equality with his fellow citizens [i.e. in those moments] but he only ever accepts a very small number as his friends or guests” (Tocqueville 2003, 701). As in Putnam’s account, we are left to wonder whether association itself leads to anything more; but we will investigate these links in more detail below.

Tocqueville’s fear is that despite all the ways in which democracy can be said to bring, even to force, citizens together – through the workings of government, for example – they will nevertheless most often end up in very small groups: “in general, they all meet to manage those affairs which influence the destiny of the community; I have never heard it said that there was ever any intention of persuading them all to amuse themselves in the same way or to take their pleasure indiscriminately in the same locations” (Tocqueville 2003, 701). Here, Tocqueville suggests that meeting as citizens must in the course of the administration of their community does not necessarily move into spending time together willingly with very many of them.

The intense individualism at worst (or insular – bonding, in Putnam’s terminology – association at best) that can result from the loss of the class system and the rise of private concerns is linked with the possibility of democratic despotism and the tyranny of the majority as the most significant dangers that Tocqueville sees as potential threats to the political sustainability of democracy itself. But these new dangers are accompanied by their own antidotes in Tocqueville’s analysis. He finds that new practices of association between citizens as well as more inclusive and gentle moral norms also come along with the development of early democracy. His aim is to show both good and bad consequences of this new kind of political community in order to encourage the former and prevent the latter. The salutary developments of democracy are what so many contemporary scholars have taken up in their own thinking on civic engagement and the health of democracy in the United States today. And they are at the root of what I see as threads of civic friendship in Tocqueville’s work. I now turn to describing and evaluating the ways in which Tocqueville’s conceptions of association, compassion, and self-interest well understood in early democratic America make up a Tocquevillean account of civic friendship. I begin this next section with a discussion of the various kinds of association that arise in Tocqueville’s work.

#### ***4.4 Civic Friendship as Association***

Equality is at the root of the dangers of democracy as well as of its most advantageous developments. Equally capable and in need of citizen organizing or the

company of our fellows, we gather together to get things done for our communities and in our common interest or to pass the time in shared pursuits; and equally susceptible to the winds of fortune, we seek to help those in need because we would want the help we can offer now to those in need, if roles were reversed; these are salutary benefits of increased equality that work against democratic despotism and individualism.

Association is the general term for ways in which citizens get together to share in common efforts or pursuits, and Tocqueville describes several different kinds of associations into which Americans enter with one another; there are townships, civic associations, and political associations, each with their own character, consequences, and purpose. Below, I focus on those associations that aren't mandated or required by government but instead spring up spontaneously spurred on by citizens themselves, because I locate in them a potential source of civic friendship in Tocqueville's work.

Tocqueville's fears about the dangers of democratic despotism and individualism are not fully borne out by what he sees – they stand instead as warnings about what could be if newly democratic citizens are not watchful of the habits they develop. Tocqueville sees association, the various ways that citizens come together for various reasons, as an antidote to both of these social ills. He writes: “a political, industrial, commercial, or even scientific and literary association equals an educated and powerful citizen who cannot be persuaded at will nor suppressed in some shadowy corner and who saves the liberties of all by defending its own rights against the

demands of the government” (Tocqueville 2003, 811). Here, associations are good for something: they encourage the cultivation of the kinds of political skills and agency that prevent democratic despotism; and by their very nature as pursuits undertaken together with others, they counteract individualism. In this way, associations of all kinds have politically salutary results, according to Tocqueville.

Of the various kinds of associations Tocqueville discusses, those fostered by the structure of early townships provides insight into the specifically political benefits of associations. Townships are small and tightly-knit communities that still retain much power over local administrative concerns. Of course, we live in a different world now; towns and cities stretch to include thousands and millions. Nevertheless, many of the activities that Tocqueville describes as defining the township – as well as benefits that result from these – could take place today. Most importantly, Tocqueville sees townships as providing grounds for community spirit and love of freedom to grow, and he considers both together to be indispensable to the stability of democracy. He likens townships to primary school; what the latter is to knowledge, the former is for freedom: “they bring it within people’s reach and give men the enjoyment and habit of using it for peaceful ends. Without town institutions a nation can establish a free government but has not the spirit of freedom itself” (Tocqueville 2003, 75). People exercise agency and express their interests through their involvement in the administration of their townships; as a result, participation is a source of profit for them – as well as a kind of

political education, as they use power together with others to get things done in their community. And it is also a source of affection for the township itself and for fellow members (Tocqueville 2003, 80).

Although Tocqueville argues that citizens of townships share many concerns in general (Tocqueville 2003, 74), he also emphasizes the diversity he finds in them, and in America generally:

“No sooner do you set foot in America than you find yourself in a sort of tumult; a confused clamor rises on every side; a thousand voices reach your ears at once, each expressing some social need. Everything stirs about you; on this side, the inhabitants of one district have met to decide on the building of a church; on the other, they are working to choose a representative; further on, the delegates of a canton are hurrying to town so as to consult over certain local improvements; at another spot, village farmers leave ploughing furrows to discuss the plan for a road or school; a few citizens gather simply to declare their disapproval of the government’s course, while others join together to proclaim that the men in office are the father of their country” (Tocqueville 2003, 283)

This diversity of concerns and of associations within a larger community, even in Tocqueville’s time, is what contemporary thinkers claim justifies bringing his work to bear on America now that it is ever more diverse and in ways that stretch to include so many more different kinds of communities – based on geography or ethnicity or shared opinions or whatever else. The responsibilities placed upon citizens for the administration of their township in Tocqueville’s time are what force them together in this case. They may not have much in common, and they may not have much affection for one another (though they could), but they come together to make sure that their

town is run in an effective way – this is where their common interest lies. Contemporary thinkers see their own calls for increased association, engagement, and concern and sacrifice for the greater good of the community – all despite differences in class, race, religion, and so on – as echoes of Tocqueville’s descriptions of the most salutary outcomes of increasing equality in early America, those that bring citizens together in the midst of diversity through common interest despite differences.

Tocqueville sees these salutary outcomes of association as results especially of what he calls public or civic association. Tocqueville describes their vast range as follows:

“Americans of all ages, conditions, and all dispositions constantly unite together. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations to which all belong but also a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very specialized, large and small. Americans group together and hold fetes, found seminaries, build inns, construct churches, distribute books, dispatch missionaries to the antipodes. They establish hospitals, prisons, schools by the same method. Finally, if they wish to highlight a truth or develop an opinion by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association.” (Tocqueville 2003, 596)

In his study of the new democratic structure of social and political life in the United States, his investigation into the various ways in which Americans choose to band together to get things done stands as a central focus and has continued to influence scholarship since its publication over two centuries ago. In particular, Tocqueville emphasizes the ways in which association acts as a counter-balance to the dangers, outlined above, of increased equality. In order to work against the inclination to turn

towards natural and more private associations, such as the family, Tocqueville argues that citizens must learn to help each other voluntarily (Tocqueville 2003, 597). This is the only way, he believes, that citizens will be able to maintain any power and agency in their lives – that is, if they cultivate and maintain their ability and willingness to join up with their fellows.

If we think of association as one aspect of Tocquevillean civic friendship then it is one that doesn't require any particular care or concern for those with whom we associate, only that some political, moral, social, or material interest that we want to get for ourselves is somehow folded into the association. Tocqueville writes that "the most democratic country in the world is that in which men have in our time perfected the art of pursuing in concert the aim of their common desires and have applied this new technique to the greatest number of objectives. Has this just resulted from an accident or is there in reality a necessary connection between association such as this and equality?" (Tocqueville 2003, 596). This power that citizens build up together in common projects, "countless small enterprises," is one that Tocqueville thinks cannot be substituted by any more formal political power (Tocqueville 2003, 598).

Tocqueville uses temperance as an example. He writes of his surprise that so many Americans would commit themselves *publicly* to abstain from alcohol, together, and wonders why they wouldn't merely be content to do so in the privacy of their own homes. He concludes that private teetotaling is not enough if one wishes to give one's

support to a movement (Tocqueville 2003, 599). Instead, our action must be public, and must join up with something larger than our lives. Tocqueville thinks that association for the purpose of common ends helps to get things done in one's community and helps to maintain alternative voices in a community. This is a good thing because it works against the tendency toward both individualism and democratic despotism in the way that it brings citizens together to build political power in alternative channels.

When people associate in order to achieve some mutual benefit, they learn how to meet and to work together despite the differences between them; this is Tocqueville's argument. Discussing political associations specifically, but with insights that I believe he means to extend to associations in general, Tocqueville writes that "a political association draws a lot of individuals at the same time out of their small circle; however separate they may feel naturally through age, attitude, and wealth, association brings them together and puts them in touch. They meet once and forever know how to meet again" (Tocqueville 2003, 605). What skills does Tocqueville think are required for such meetings? In order to work together on a common desired end, Tocqueville argues that individuals must "learn to surrender their wishes to others and to subordinate their individual efforts to the common endeavor" – this is Tocqueville's "general theory of association" (Tocqueville 2003, 606). Association is the way in which our opinions and ideas are renewed and our hearts are enlarged. These processes do not happen naturally in democracies, according to Tocqueville; instead, association is the artificial means by

which they occur (Tocqueville 2003, 598). So we ought to take care that we cultivate the habit of association, otherwise we risk losing the very ability to associate, as well as all of the habits of mind and of action, that go along with it. Equality makes association possible, and then association can help to bring about the best results of a growing social equality, or not. As a result, Tocqueville argues that “in order to ensure that men remain or become civilized, the skill of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as the spread of equality of social conditions” (Tocqueville 2003, 600). If not, the dangers Tocqueville finds in the development of equality may come to pass.

#### ***4.5 Civic Friendship as Compassion***

I now argue that Tocqueville’s thought on compassion comprises another facet of his vision of a distinctly democratic civic friendship. In order to describe the compassion Tocqueville sees as a new development growing alongside association under conditions of ever-increasing social equality, he turns to an aristocratic counter-example: He cites a letter from Mme. De Sevigne, a French Marquise and writer, written in 1675 to her daughter, about the hanging and quartering of lower classes who had recently and publicly opposed a new tax in her district. For Mme. De Sevigne it is merely a piece of news about punishments well deserved or justice done, and there is no hint of difficulty in accepting such horrific cruelty, since no cruelty is perceived. Tocqueville explains this fact thusly: “it would be wrong to think of Madame de Sevigne, who wrote these lines, as a selfish and insensitive person. She was passionately fond of her children and

showed herself very aware of the sorrows of her friends . . . But Madame de Sevigne had no clear conception of people's suffering when they were not of noble birth"

(Tocqueville 2003, 652). She simply could not understand the sufferings of others whose lives were so different from her own. Almost a century later, Tocqueville recognizes that no one could be so indifferent, at least not publicly, so strongly has a more compassionate convention grown up in the intervening time. And yet, he reminds his readers, slavery persists in America.

Here are his observations about the strange dichotomy between the coexistence of a growing compassion and of slavery in the America he visits:

"it is easy to see that the lot of these wretched people evokes but little pity in their masters who look upon slavery not merely as a source of profit but also an evil which does not affect them. Thus, the same man who is full of human feeling for his fellow men when they are also his equals becomes insensitive to their afflictions the moment equality ceases. [An American's] mildness has, therefore, to be attributed to this state of equality much more than to the impact of civilization or education." (Tocqueville 2003, 653-4)

Here, Tocqueville makes a compelling case that if we do not see others as our equals, we cannot feel compassion for them; in other words, we cannot understand their feelings or experiences of the world, and it is thus easy for us to disregard them. And he also shows that equality is not a stable phenomenon. It includes some and not others at different times and in different places; and this insight suggests that it is in some ways arbitrary in that it can be lost and gained, granted or not – in this way, it is a social rather than a natural phenomenon. However, there is ambiguity here: association is the artificial

means by which our hearts are enlarged, and yet Tocqueville wonders about the natural development of equality around the world, never quite certain if it is an inevitable development or not – and not certain either if it is always accompanied by a development in our sphere of moral concern, so that we take into account a wider range of our fellows.

Tocqueville seems to leave as an open question the relationship between the growth of compassion and of equality: “we have seen for centuries that social conditions have been growing more equal and at the same time we have realized that customs have softened. Are these two things simply coincidental or is there some secret link between them which ensure that the one cannot make headway without prompting the other into motion?” (Tocqueville 2003, 649). Tocqueville offers a tentative answer to his question by making perceived equality a prerequisite for having a sense of another’s suffering. The reason Americans as he sees them are becoming ever more compassionate is because the sphere of perceived social equality has grown wider than it once was; though he recognizes that it was not as wide as it could be, and I think he would agree that it still isn’t. For reasons that will become clear, I reflect further on the nature of Tocquevillean compassion below rather than here, and first touch on another conceptual offering related to civic friendship in Tocqueville’s work, that of self-interest well understood.

#### **4.6 Civic Friendship as Self-Interest Well Understood**

The final facet of civic friendship I locate in Tocqueville's work is what he calls self-interest properly or rightly or well understood;<sup>1</sup> it is an innovation Tocqueville finds in the American community in which individual self-interest as a motivation is moderated by a sense of how it fits together with the interests of our surrounding community – whether in whole or part. We can think here of Allen's equitable self-interest; I think the two map onto one another well. But how limited are newly democratic Americans – and how limited are we now, if self-interest rightly understood can still be said to operate for us – by the first half of Tocqueville's coinage, that is, by self-interest itself? I have argued that Aristotle's vision of civic friendship is severely limited by its grounding in calculations of interest. How does Tocqueville's vision measure up? While on the one hand, Tocqueville singles out compassion, softer hearts, and gentler habits as new developments that accompany greater social equality in America, on the other he makes sure to emphasize that Americans make no great sacrifices for one another; they are simply slightly more gentle than their forebears, specifically to only those they perceive as their social equals – without much to say on how these perceptions change.

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<sup>1</sup> I use these various translations of the original "intérêt bien entendu" because I think they resemble one another well enough.

Of course, it is no surprise that, despite the novelty of democracy in America, Tocqueville sees that self-interest continues to play a role in guiding the lives of early Americans; they are not completely taken up by concern for others since their concern for their own well-being, and for those closest to them, will always be strongest. This is a fact of human nature against which I don't wish to quarrel. Tocqueville does not focus on the ways in which Americans do not go far enough (though he does mention several groups of peoples in America for whom this is poignantly true, specifically in the case of slavery, native peoples, and industrial workers) but rather on the ways in which their moral practices and considerations have expanded in general given the development of democracy.

Tocqueville sees self-interest well understood as a kind of doctrine or general theory or philosophy (Tocqueville 2003, 610-11) that has developed particularly in the social climate of burgeoning democracy in the United States because of the ways in which expanded equality helps us to see one another as at once more necessary to our own individual well-being and as similarly subject to harm and suffering. Of these two perceptual consequences of social equality, I find the former linked with self-interest rightly understood and the latter with compassion in Tocqueville's account, although he does not go to great lengths to delineate the differences between them. One has to do with cultivating a nuanced understanding of how our fates are linked up with those in our polity so that we will know who to associate with, and how and when to associate

with them, balancing our interest and that of the greater good. The other, as we have seen, has to do with understanding the condition of others in some way, most often of their suffering, and being moved either in emotion or action to come to their aid in some way (even if in the end we do not actually do so in a concrete way).

The content of the doctrine or philosophy of self-interest rightly understood is founded on the belief that it is in general always true that “man helps himself by serving others and that doing good serves his own interest” (Tocqueville 2003, 610). Self-interest rightly understood motivates by reminding us that it is in our own self-interest to help others so that, in such a climate of general reciprocity, we can expect help should we come to need it; and also that sometimes our own immediate needs or interests must be tempered for the public good, which is in turn a good for us, though an attenuated one; and also that we can band together even with those for whom we feel no affection in order to get things done when our individual interests are somehow intertwined, despite the fact that there may be nothing else that connects us. This will sound familiar, for Putnam adopts this position as his own, and attempts to show how it is still in operation today, though he laments that it seems to be on the wane.

Tocqueville finds that the focus on moderated utility as a guiding philosophy hides the fact that Americans do for others not simply out of a rational self-interest tempered by a long view of things, but that they also are often taken up by emotions,

natural and spontaneous human impulses, which sometimes cause the same kind of doing good for others:

“They are quite willing to show that enlightened self-love [self-interest well understood] continually leads them to help one another and inclines them to devote freely a part of their time and wealth to the welfare of the state. My opinion is that in this they often do themselves an injustice because sometimes, in the United States as elsewhere, citizens yield to those disinterested and spontaneous impulses natural to man. But Americans rarely admit that they are giving way to such kinds of emotions; they prefer to attribute the credit to their philosophy than to themselves.” (Tocqueville 2003, 611)

It is my position that by these “disinterested and spontaneous impulses”, Tocqueville means to refer to compassion. So at this point, he argues that compassion is a universal human emotion that Americans actually deny (rather than increasingly enacting, as he argues at other points in the work). So what does it mean that Americans disavow its existence, even when they are motivated by it to come to the aid of their fellows? Their community spirit comes to rely on self-interest, on the one hand, as a steady and reliable doctrine, while compassion – described here as a fleeting and natural, thus universal, emotion that only sometimes strikes Americans – is discarded as a reason for action.

Would things be better or worse if Americans had instead thought of the compassionate emotions as legitimate support for community-oriented action? They are not as reliable, but perhaps they demand more from us. Do they demand as much as some more contemporary political thinkers wish they saw more of – more work for the greater good accompanied by a coherent understanding of why such work is important?

With all his emphasis on the strong development of social equality, and of association, moderated self-interest, even of compassion, Tocqueville nevertheless recognizes that these will always meet several obstacles, at the levels of individuals and of society itself, and he focuses in particular on the obstacles that democracy in particular produces. In the first case, Tocqueville thinks that human beings will always, in general, want inequality in their own interest: “Whatever the general efforts of society to keep citizens equal and similar, the personal pride of individuals will always strive to rise above the common level and will hope to achieve some inequality to their own advantage” (Tocqueville 2003, 702). We must ask about the robustness of Tocqueville’s civic friendship, and also if the resources for its development between citizens offered in Tocqueville’s account can stand the test of all of the phenomena that he also claims get in the way of it.

#### ***4.7 Making Sense of Motivations and Manifestations of Tocquevillean Civic Friendship: Interactions Between Association, Compassion, and Self-Interest***

Tocqueville suggests that equality, one in which citizens are generally pretty equal in social standing and economic means, is the initially forceful link in the development of the three aspects of civic friendship that I locate in his description of democracy in America. Both self-interest well understood and increased compassion move us to associate with our fellow citizens in many different ways and to many different ends. And association then combats both individualism and democratic

despotism, depending on the forms it takes. Self-interest well understood and compassion in themselves depend upon our ability to see and feel equality with our fellows – either in order to understand how our interests are intertwined or to understand others’ experiences (Tocqueville focuses especially on others’ negative experiences). I say “either,” but Tocqueville’s account is much muddier than that.

Tocqueville argued above that the results of self-interest well understood and of compassion are very similar when he described the ways in which Americans explain their motivation for helping one another by referring to self-interest well understood to the exclusion of compassion, which at that time Tocqueville characterized as spontaneous impulses natural to humanity and also directed in general to humanity. A little later, Tocqueville writes that “in democratic ages, men scarcely ever sacrifice themselves for each other but they display a general compassion for all the members of the human race. One never sees them inflicting pointless cruelty and when they are able to relieve another’s suffering without much trouble to themselves, they are glad to do so” (Tocqueville 2003, 653). There is a great deal of ambiguity in Tocqueville’s conception of compassion, and about the ways in which it interacts with the practice of and intersects with the concept of self-interest well understood. At times, the two approach one another very nearly, and at times they are set up as opposed. To see clearly how Tocquevillean civic friendship can help or hinder us in our contemporary theorizing I attempt to highlight the confusion in these relationships in Tocqueville’s

thought by working through some of these ambiguities as well as attending to relevant scholarship about it.

The trouble is that self-interest well understood and compassion are sometimes distinct in Tocqueville's account, as for example when they are set up as opposed motivations above. Self-interest well understood serves others in a tempered way and grows out of calculations about balancing self-interest in the short term and in the long term with shared interest of fellow community-members; while compassion is a universal capacity to be moved, emotionally and/or imaginatively, by others' suffering, and it is common to all beings considered human. But then at other times, Tocqueville seems to suggest that compassion actually grows out of self-interest well understood, or that what might begin in grudging acceptance of shared interest can end in lofty, demanding, or more spontaneous and committed ways of serving fellow citizens, as in compassionate responses to the needs of others.

Tocqueville explains the transition from self-interest well understood to compassionate service thusly: "attention is paid, in the first instance, to the common interest out of necessity and later out of choice; what started out as calculation becomes instinct; and by working for the advantage of one's fellow citizens, finally the habit and taste for serving them takes root" (Tocqueville 2003, 595). So, to begin with, the ways in which we serve others and their interests in our community takes its source in our perception that such service is actually in our own best interest and only after being

repeated becomes a habit. The services we do for others are linked initially with our common interest, and so what is also in our own interest, but then this shifts into actual concern for others. This development is linked to an insight that accompanies greater social equality: that we are all equally subject to similar hardships. Tocqueville writes that “equality of social conditions makes men feel their independence and at the same time reveals their weakness; they are free but exposed to a thousand accidents. Experience soon teaches them that, although they usually do not need another person’s help, the moment will almost always arrive when they cannot do without it” (Tocqueville 2003, 661).

We all come to recognize that we are equally subject to inevitable and unexpected change, loss, and suffering that can arise in the course of human life, and this recognition prompts us to lend a hand to those we encounter who need it – because we understand that it could be us, at some point, who needs the help of our fellows; but Tocqueville thinks that we don’t only offer help because we know that we might need the same help at some point, so that we do a good in the hope, or with the expectation, that the same will be done for us in the future – this isn’t merely *quid pro quo*, for Tocqueville. Instead, he suggests that “sympathy” and “concern” (Tocqueville 2003, 662) do have a role to play in the good that we do (or try to do) for others. This comes about via the similarity that grows up in a democratic community; despite the diversity that Tocqueville recognizes, he argues that “when all the members of a community are

almost equal and all men have almost the same way of thinking and feeling, each one of them can judge in a flash the feelings of all the others; all he needs to do is to cast a quick glance at himself" (Tocqueville 2003, 652-3). As a result, Americans supposedly understand one another's thoughts and feelings better than members of non-democratic communities have in the past – whether these Americans are intimates or strangers or even enemies (but not if they do not share a minimal amount of equality – for example, not if they are slaves or natives).

Tocqueville invokes imagination as the capacity that enables compassionate feelings and action; imagination allows us to put ourselves in the place of another, allowing us to feel personally the suffering of another almost immediately, "in a flash," as he says. He seems to suggest that such fellow-suffering immediately moves us to act – that there is not a second moment in which we rationally understand that something similar could happen to us in the future, so that we had better follow some golden rule and do as we would hope others will do for us in the future. Here, as in other places, Tocqueville separates compassion from what he calls self-interest well understood, which is a more rational and less emotional motivation for civic friendship in which we extend a helping hand to or band together with fellows in order to get something good or useful done together or in the long run. Self-interest well understood and compassion seen in this light each correspond with two registers of equality that Tocqueville finds increasing in America, and each allow us to identify with our fellows – either with their

interests (in order to see how ours are connected to theirs) or with their suffering (in which case we are moved to help as we can). Association of many different kinds can be the result of either of these, with those directed towards the aim of service in particular stemming from compassion. At the same time, Tocqueville's discussion of self-interest properly or rightly understood severely undercuts his own argument that compassion in America motivates citizens more than in most other places. I address what this all means for contemporary accounts of civic friendship in my conclusion, but now turn to an investigation into the ways in which scholars of Tocqueville in particular (rather than civic friendship in general) make sense of Tocqueville's offerings to serious thought about the kinds of relationships that democracy at once needs and also helps to cultivate between citizens.

#### ***4.8 Taking Tocqueville Seriously***

How do recent thinkers take up Tocqueville's insights as they cast their critical eye over politics as they function today, and do they use him well? His thought looms in the background of each of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen – and so many others who write on democratic community in general. I contend that no matter their politics, they unwittingly inherit the confusion that is at once implicit in his account of the tension between association and the ills it is meant to combat (individualism and democratic despotism), and the confusion that also persists, as a result, in his explanation of the

roles that self-interest well understood and compassion have to play in ordering the lives of Americans as individuals and in communities.

Cheryl Welch, in her introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, begins by noting that “although Tocqueville lends his name to disputes over social capital and communitarianism in the United States, his own texts are rarely analyzed for direct theoretical insight” (Welch 2006a, 11). In my discussion of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen, we have seen this to be true; Tocqueville inspires rather than directly informs many contemporary discussions about the state of community, civic friendship, civic engagement, social capital, and so on. As a result, I want to consult contemporary work in political theory that wrestles with Tocqueville’s work directly in order to see if or how they can clarify Tocqueville’s arguments in order to see what possible resources really exist in Tocqueville’s work on democracy in America for those who want to invoke him in arguments about the importance of concern for fellow citizens’ well-being and in their suggestions for how we ought to encourage such sentiments and behavior. But, as we shall see, even those works that proclaim to be stricter interpretations of Tocqueville’s work are wildly divergent in their claims; this is made possible by the fact that *Democracy in America*, though it is a work of argumentation, relies heavily on observation and crafts arguments based on predictions about the several ways that democracy might develop in and change political and social life in America. Drawing out these tensions in interpretations of Tocqueville’s work, though it may leave us with

little firm ground to stand on when making overarching statements about what Tocqueville has to teach us about civic friendship, is ultimately productive because it helps us to see what parts of his work we may have to leave by the wayside in thinking through civic friendship as a contemporary phenomenon and object of thought. In particular, I think we have to set aside the idea that Tocqueville gives us a road map to sustainable democratic communities. Instead, I think, he points to concepts that we must develop and phenomena we must clarify. In this more attenuated way, *Democracy in America* is a productive place to begin conversations about civic friendship.

#### **4.9 Knotted Concepts: Compassion and Self-Interest Well Understood**

I showed in the previous section that Tocqueville's conception of compassion is by no means clear, and thus that any attempt to build upon it will inherit such confusion. Specifically, I think it allows those who use Tocqueville for their own purposes to be too optimistic about the possibility in his work to account for self-sacrifice and concern for fellow citizens and thus to be a resource to get more of these despite his claim that self-interest well understood is the most influential force in Americans' motivation. A final succinct way to bring out this confusion is to show it echoed in scholarly literature. Setting commentary by Cheryl Welch, Jocelyn Boryczka, and Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. and Delba Winthrop side by side helps to clarify the limits of the most hopeful, most optimistic, most wide-ranging, and most demanding forms of

citizen relationships that are hinted at in Tocqueville's work, specifically compassion and self-sacrifice.

In her essay "Tocqueville on Fraternity and Fratricide," Cheryl Welch's overall focus is on Tocqueville's numerous writings on conflicts between peoples, especially on clashes and interactions between dominating and subordinating peoples, but her analysis helps to clarify questions about my own more narrow concern of relationships between individual American citizens. In her account she emphasizes the importance of *humanité* in general for Tocqueville's understanding of democracy: "democracy, Tocqueville tells us in many contexts, entails the claims of *humanité* because equality must have some referent, some dimension on which all are equal. That dimension is our common membership in the human race" and she continues, pointing out that "democracy in this sense represents the providential unfolding of Christian ideals of universality and equal fellowship, and for this reason Tocqueville resolved to welcome it" (Welch 2006b, 305). In Tocqueville's own words: "Jesus Christ had to come into the world to reveal that all members of the human race were similar and equal by nature" (Tocqueville 2003, 506). Tocqueville argues that because "the man dwelling in a democracy . . . is aware of beings about him who are virtually similar; he cannot, therefore, think of any part of the human species without his thought expanding and widening to embrace the whole" (Tocqueville 2003, 505). The process that Tocqueville described of equality leading to compassion, in the way that we can understand (to

some significant degree) another's experience when we perceive ourselves to be generally equal in some way is here characterized as universal. However, we have seen at once that this sense of universal fraternity, in Welch's terms, is not always universal in Tocqueville's account. And we have also seen Tocqueville worry that when it does arrive, this feeling is constantly pushed aside and rendered powerless by the doctrine of self-interest well understood – so we really don't get a sense of any practical application of this sense of humanity in the civic or political realm.

Jocelyn Boryczka, in "The Separate Spheres Paradox: Habitual Inattention and Democratic Citizenship," focuses not on the relationship between self-interest well understood and compassion, as I have, but on a related pair of concepts – that of self-interest well understood and of self-sacrifice. She argues that self-sacrifice is relegated to the sphere of home and family life in Tocqueville's account, and that women are the ones who enact it; in her argument, self-sacrifice is opposed to self-interest well understood, rather than an outgrowth (either rare or expected) of it, as Tocqueville himself sometimes claims of a more selfless compassion. Although Tocqueville's account of gender and its implications are not my focus here, her claims support an understanding of self-interest well understood as an extremely limited human capacity, firmly rooted as it is in self-interest. In attending to Tocqueville's various accounts of relationships between men and women in America, Boryczka sees women holding responsibility for care-giving and men as focused on obligation, "the more rigid

requirements and specifications, most explicitly laid out in contracts, arising from the formal rules and promises characteristic of political and economic life” (Boryczka 2006, 286). This she calls “privileged irresponsibility” (Boryczka 2006, 292). She argues that self-interest well or properly understood depends too much on “a rational calculus in which American males assess when, how, and to what degree small everyday sacrifices benefit the community and, thereby, their self-interest” but that they then disregard “those matters disconnected from their immediate self-interest, particularly that of the common good” (Boryczka 2006, 292). I include Boryczka’s view in order to emphasize my own skepticism about assumptions that self-interest well understood leads to anything more than grudging (at worst) or courteous and temporary (at best) association.

Finally, Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. and Delba Winthrop, in their essay “Tocqueville’s New Political Science,” follow Boryczka in their skepticism about self-interest well understood by making it clear that self-interest well understood cannot transcend its ground in individual self-interest, although their critical take is not as forceful as Boryczka’s in that they still see political and social value in self-interest well understood – just not as much as some might hope or as Tocqueville suggests at his most optimistic. Their broad discussion is of innovations in political science that arise in the course of *Democracy in America*, and self-interest well understood is one that they isolate in particular. They write that self-interest well understood “teaches [Americans]

to make small sacrifices of their interest to secure greater gains, and hence to be satisfied with mediocrity. Democrats are also genuinely compassionate, but that feeling is easy for them because their dogmatic belief in equality prompts them to see others as similar to themselves. Their compassion is a tacit bargain that the support they give now will be available to them later if needed" (Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 92).

In the end, according to these two authors, compassion is equated with self-interest well understood after all – not because the latter is so transformed that it responds to strongly and immediately to the suffering of others but because it relies on reciprocity instead, which is not an ordinary or traditional understanding of compassion (we can think of Tocqueville on Mme. De Sevigny for that). And their vision of association is one that takes it as an outgrowth of self-interest well understood and thus also not separate from a calculation of interest. But they also write that "it is not based on compassion, piety or generosity" since these are too demanding; instead "it is hostile to the kind of calculation that accepts the viewpoint of the isolated individual as natural, as if each of us were entitled to return in our minds to the state of nature while calculating" (Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 93). So Mansfield and Winthrop suggest that having in mind a sense of the ways in which our lives are tied up with those in our community need not rest on a grand social emotion directed toward humanity itself, and it need not lead to concern for our fellows' well-being at any level of community, though it could. It is still a calculation of interests, but – and this is no small thing – it recognizes

that each of us are not alone but rely on each other in community, even while we are specifically moved by our concern for our *own* interests. This is reminiscent of Putnam on social capital, Allen on equitable self-interest, and Aristotle's reciprocal justice, as we have seen, with all their attendant salutary, confusing, or limited results for the cultivation of civic friendship.

Understanding the relationship between self-interest well understood and compassion and the kinds of actions that both inspire matters because it helps us to think about what kinds of citizens democracy cultivates and also how they do and could relate to one another. I now turn to considering the arguments of Dana Villa, Ben Berger, and Andrew Sabl on the relationship of Tocqueville's insights on association, self-interest well understood, and compassion to specifically political action. While I invoked the thinkers above to emphasize a lack of clarity in what Tocqueville tells us about individual moral character of citizens in democratic relationships, Villa, Berger, and Sabl bring this discussion to bear specifically on the consequences of Tocqueville's thought for political action and institutions more concretely, at times at the expense of any discussion of character or morals at all, as we see specifically in Villa's work. Ben Berger and Andrew Sabl follow a less extreme path and endeavor respectively to bring together Tocqueville's insights about citizens' characters via self-interest well understood and compassion with reflections on the political salience of association. In the end these three thinkers all disagree about moral and political consequences of the threads of civic

friendship; I include them not to achieve a conclusive understanding of Tocqueville's thought but to show the ultimate ambiguity of Tocqueville's work as it relates to civic friendship, and also to emphasize that politics matter in any conception of contemporary civic friendship. I then end this chapter with a summary of how I think Tocqueville helps us think about civic friendship.

#### ***4.10 Villa on Civil Society***

In his essay entitled "Tocqueville and Civil Society," Dana Villa aims to give a faithful account of Tocqueville's own views on the specifically political significance of association between citizens. Whereas, because of my interest in the literature of civic friendship, I have focused on the ways in which citizens perceive and relate to one another, and on what Tocqueville calls habits of the heart, Villa emphasizes that Tocqueville's primary concern in his discussion of association in the sphere of civil society is not with the difference that associations make to citizens' characters and relationships so much as the important political role that associations in civil society play in Tocqueville's picture of politics in general. In outlining what he sees as the several most important questions we can ask about Tocqueville's account of associations, he includes two that are pertinent to my own discussion: "Why has the 'civil society movement' in the United States focused so intently on community, character, and volunteerism, rather than dissent, joint action, and the activity of self-government? [And] which broad conception of civil society – the largely non-political

one familiar from the American debate, or the self-consciously political one familiar from other parts of the world – is more in line with Tocqueville’s theoretical intentions?” (Villa 2006, 218). Although Villa narrows his focus in the essay that follows to the latter question, I include the former because it helps to specify what precisely Villa means by “political” when he discusses civil society as the realm of various associations.

He contends that, for Tocqueville, “the crucial distinction is between *local* and *centralized* organizations of power, action, and administration,” rather than between political and non-political associations. Villa continues: “this broadly Montesquieuan approach to civil society shifts its center of gravity away from the idea of a (seemingly self-contained) realm of manners and mores, and towards the questions of politics, participation, and public life generally” (Villa 2006, 219). Villa’s priority in this short piece is to argue that the most powerful offering of Tocqueville’s account of association (and of civil society, in which it takes place) is that it is the locus of “politically invaluable mediating organizations” rather than a “seemingly self-contained realm of mores, habits, and feelings” (Villa 2006, 224).

Villa isolates Tocquevillean association into three kinds: permanent, political, and civil, and he prioritizes the first, among which he includes the local administration of townships, cities, counties, and so on. Political associations work to advance specific political interests, and civil associations encompass all other associations. The value inherent in “permanent” associations lies in their dispersal of political duties and

authority; in this way, the massive centralized government that Tocqueville fears could arise under conditions of democratic despotism is avoided and constantly discouraged, while citizen engagement is fostered since it is necessary to the administration of local government. Political associations explicitly help to combat democratic despotism in that they encourage citizens to band together to assert their particular political position on salient issues. Civil associations in particular, however, Villa sees as not having much to offer to the political life of citizens; he suggests that they might even be desired by a large central government because of the ways in which they steal citizens' attention and energy away from public affairs (Villa 2006, 230). As a result, Villa emphasizes, against all those contemporary political thinkers who invoke Tocqueville in their calls for stronger civic ties, that Tocqueville is not a useful resource for their arguments and in fact would have adamantly opposed them in their arguments. Villa claims that these authors either want to argue for civil associations as seed-beds or as substitutes for political association and engaged citizenship when in fact Tocqueville sees, if any, the opposite relation between the two.

Villa writes that "when it comes to learning the fundamentals of the 'art of association' (an art essential to the practice of non-docile citizenship), Tocqueville again leaves little doubt as to the priority of political [and permanent] associations" (Villa 2006, 231). The skills and habits that go along with association can then trickle down into civil associations, rather than the other way around. Why do so many commentators get

this wrong, then? Perhaps, Villa suggests, it is because there are so few contemporary opportunities to engage in the kinds of permanent and political associations that Tocqueville describes; local government (as in the townships that Tocqueville visits) does not persist in the same way, and there are now fewer opportunities to exercise political agency than there may have been in the American past.

In the end, Villa's primary aim in this piece is to show that Tocqueville's most important offering in his discussion of various kinds of association is in its expansion of "public-political life" to include non-state action and organization, and its recognition that "it is in the realm of 'permanent,' political and civil associations that citizenship is learned, self-government effected, and debate and argument suffused through society. Civil society, comprised of these three levels of association, effectively ends the reign of the sovereign state over public life" (Villa 2006, 235). As we have seen, however, civil association, of these three, is seen as the least "political" because it is the most private or personal. Villa asserts that Tocqueville's concept of civil society (the realm of association) is "political at its very core" (Villa 2006, 236), while at the same time noting that, for us today, "public virtues" refers, among other things, to the "average citizens' essentially unpolitical willingness to volunteer (for charity, community work, or military duty). 'Public life' has been reduced to the moralizing cliché of public service" (Villa 2006, 236). It is clear then that Villa does not give much credence to those thinkers who focus on Tocqueville's discussion of changing habits of the heart and of compassion in

Americans. In Villa's view, the good of association – specifically that is political, partisan, public in nature – is the way in which it cultivates “spaces for, and new forms of, political participation, popular sovereignty, and public freedom; that it could preserve the *moeurs* necessary to self-government in an age of individual powerlessness; and that it could challenge – and indeed, undercut – the monolith of majority opinion in a democracy” (Villa 2006, 239). In this account, then, Tocqueville's vision of civil society is one defined by the prominence of political engagement, and its chief benefit is to be found in its opposition to democratic despotism (which itself arises from political quietism in general).

There is nothing here about an increase in compassion or kinder habits of the heart in America, nor about how they arise or how to encourage them, nor about any relation they may have to political engagement. Villa does not mention self-interest well understood once. Villa's emphasis instead is on distinguishing political from non-political forms of association, and on arguing that Tocqueville prioritizes the specifically political benefits of association to a degree so great that Villa sees little reason to discuss anything else, and thinks it is wrong-headed to do so. Self-interest well understood, and American manners and morals in general, are relegated to the private sphere in Villa's account, and thus do not merit discussion in an account of what Tocqueville offers to what is eminently political. These political benefits arise from what we could recognize

as practices of participatory democracy, and nothing else – i.e. those that explicitly have to do with the political administration of a community.

Using Villa's account here to answer questions about civic friendship yields very little help if we wish to use Tocqueville to build an account of the importance of citizens' moral and emotional connections, specifically a sense of care or concern for them for their own sake, which in turn can buttress things like sacrifice for and trust between citizens – within and outside of specifically political associations. Villa dismisses these sorts of accounts. I think his skepticism about such accounts is well-founded, but I also think it is worthwhile to try to figure out why it is that so many thinkers choose to take Tocqueville's thought where Villa thinks it need not go. I showed above that there are resources in Tocqueville that point to the huge importance that he gave to individual moral transformations he noticed taking place in the burgeoning American democracy, but that these are steeped in various confusions. So I do not follow Villa in his certainty that we must eschew Tocqueville's work on manners and morals; but I do think that we ought to follow Villa in his suspicion of anyone attempting to discuss Tocqueville's work without discussing its political implications. However, we ought to move beyond Villa's purview to wonder about the links between personal moral development and citizens' habits of the heart and public, political action; and I think these links move in both directions, so that each influences the other. The conversation on civic friendship ought to keep this in mind.

#### **4.11 Berger on Political Engagement**

In part of his larger *Attention Deficit Democracy: the Paradox of Civic Engagement*, Ben Berger follows a path similar to Villa's in showing that specifically political engagement plays a very important role in Tocqueville's work, however Berger's focus is less on making a case for that than for making an argument about *why* it's so important to Tocqueville. Berger's answer to this question echoes Villa's: political associations of various kinds are good because of their political utility (they work in citizens' interests, whether in traditional or alternative political channels). However, in his discussion of Tocqueville's thought, Berger departs from Villa in his insistence that Tocqueville does indeed have something to offer to a discussion not just of wider political effects of association, but also of the impact of association on individuals themselves, and as a result on their characters and relationships with fellow citizens. In his reliance on the utility of political engagement, this is neither a warm and fuzzy nor a lofty and demanding picture of the sources and significance of political engagement, but it's the one that Berger thinks is most realistic because of its close ties to Tocqueville's idea of self-interest well understood.

Berger follows Tocqueville in recognizing worth in the idea of self-interest well understood precisely because of its democratic nature; it is accessible because it is not particularly demanding, but it is effective in motivating some minimum of sacrifice and moderation on behalf of others; as we have seen, this is the least we can expect from it.

Berger argues along with Tocqueville that self-interest well understood is a “flawed but undeniably useful asset that is the best moral doctrine available to most people. The doctrine of self-interest well understood and its corollary norms are democratic virtues because, while they do not dictate phenomenal sacrifices or individual excellence, they are accessible and appealing to all” – but then he continues by pointing out that “in their absence – should citizens no longer be touched or moved by ‘those great and powerful public emotions’ that can motivate communal undertakings or the mingling of self-interest with the commonweal – then self-government and democratic freedom would be jeopardized” (Berger 2011, 100). Berger’s thought here draws out a tension at work in Tocqueville’s thought as it speaks to the ways in which relationships between citizens can be like friendships, one that we have touched upon in a closer reading of Tocqueville’s text itself: we can spend time with our fellow citizens in order to work together for things that we both need or want, on the one hand, or we can be motivated by great and powerful public emotions like compassion to serve them in some way. In some places, Tocqueville sets up this distinction. Berger here seems to collapse that distinction; he suggests that self-interest well understood *is* one of these strong public emotions, while also claiming it as only (though by no means unimportantly) a moderate and reasonable source of pro-social behavior most of the time – reasonable in the sense that we must reason about an account of the ways in which our interests are

joined up with that of others before we act. Berger can make this move because, as I have shown, Tocqueville's text itself is confused on this matter.

Berger writes of self-interest well understood that "it dictates that individuals pay attention to and act in accordance with those norms 'appropriate to the times,' which include toleration, reciprocity, cooperation, and interpersonal trust. It tells citizens that they must help one another in order to accomplish their own ends, even if they find cooperation temporarily unpleasant" (Berger 2011, 99). Later, though, Berger argues that participation in township associations (an important example of political association both for Villa and for Berger) stems from selfish or self-interested reasons, "the taste for power and self-advertisement" (Berger 2011, 108), but that there is transformative potential in it. It "enlarges citizens' political perspectives by drawing them outside of themselves and their narrow concerns" (Berger 2011, 109) so that they begin to develop a sense of duty and of mutual responsibility out of an understanding of the ways in which their interest is bound up with those of their fellow citizens; what I have earlier called "interdependence."

However, Berger also argues that political associations, because they are especially partisan, are exclusive and thus "do not promote moral virtues such as generalized tolerance and mutual respect . . . This is not to say that political associations are immoral or amoral, or that political associations cannot involve moral engagement. But in general, they do not enlarge the heart in the manner of nonpolitical,

and often nonpartisan, civil associations” (Berger 2011, 112). Like Villa, Berger isolates political engagement as an extremely important element in Tocqueville’s thought, but against Villa, Berger does not claim political engagement as the *most* important kind of engagement, either in general or in *Democracy in America*, and he does claim that political engagement *could* have a personally transformative effect on citizens individually, and that civil associations *do* have this effect.

In the end, Berger is not decisive about the extent of self-interest well understood, probably because Tocqueville is not either. He argues that Tocqueville sees association as on the whole a morally ambiguous activity<sup>2</sup>, but then he claims civil associations as more effective at softening the heart than political associations, so that association tends at least towards salutary moral outcomes and differs only in the degree to which it does so depending on what kind of association is under discussion. And Berger also generally comes to see associations of all kinds as having potentially personally transformative effects on participants without showing why or how, thereby inheriting the problems inherent in Putnam’s account, for example.

What causes some of this confusion about the ways in which citizen associations and engagement of various kinds are sometimes considered personally, morally transformative and sometimes not, is the concept of self-interest well understood itself.

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<sup>2</sup> In doing so, he follows Nancy Rosenblum’s well-known argument in *Membership and Morals: The Personal Uses of Pluralism in America* (2000).

Some thinkers (and Tocqueville himself at times) take it to be transformative, capable of transcending itself, to move from self-interest to something that takes seriously the interests of others for their own sake every once in a while, and from calculation of interest to a moral habit of service or a “great and powerful public emotion” (Berger 2011, 100). But what some want to claim as this fact of the dual nature of self-interest well understood lacks concrete explanation of how it is that in the end it hardly resembles self-interest at all, at least in some accounts of it, including Berger’s. We have seen that this polarity exists in *Democracy in America* itself.

I showed how Dana Villa avoids it by keeping his account firmly rooted in a more traditional understanding of self-interest when he reads Tocqueville: We band together in political associations in order to further our self-interest, and an additional benefit of such behavior is that we will be better prepared in the future to band together again and again to advocate in our self-interest and against any government power which threatens to over-reach; the benefits of association are strictly political. We do not become kinder, gentler, more compassionate, more willing to sacrifice for others through political association in Villa’s account; the fact of our political association helps to combat democratic despotism, and this is no small accomplishment, but it doesn’t necessarily transform us as individuals, at least not in any way that he discusses. So Villa sidesteps this difficulty entirely, because he thinks that talk of personal transformation, which in his piece he locates in communitarian thinkers’ obsession with

civil association in private rather than political association robs Tocqueville's work of its most important and incisive insights. In doing so, Villa elides the importance of Tocqueville's discussion of mores, habits, and feelings. While Berger vacillates on the degree to which self-interest well understood actually does transform our moral characters and relationships, it's clear that he thinks there are some important connections between them.

Next I turn to the work of Andrew Sabl on community organizing as a concrete example of Tocquevillean association. In it, he finds a middle ground between Villa and Berger; he takes seriously the importance of association as a political phenomenon and he ties it to self-interest well understood and even to sympathy, but in the end he finds Tocqueville's work not to be a very helpful resource in understanding citizen relations in general – which is what contemporary thinkers on civic friendship nevertheless endeavor to show. Sabl's conclusions fall between the hearty optimism about individual moral transformation of Bellah's and Putnam's readings of Tocqueville and Villa's dismissal of any salient offering from Tocqueville about how democracy might make us better citizens and better to our fellows, despite its dangers.

#### ***4.12 Sabl on Community Organizing***

Andrew Sabl offers a more concrete look at the meaning and motivation of Tocquevillean association in his "Community Organizing as Tocquevillean Politics: The Art, Practices, and Ethos of Association." In this piece, he proposes that community

organizing is a good example of the kind of political activity Tocqueville had in mind in his discussion of the “art of association.” He writes that “the most distinctively Tocquevillean politics is the politics of community organizing” (Sabl 2002, 2); he finds that this is so because organizing fights the dangers that Tocqueville himself finds inherent in democracy, as I outlined earlier in this chapter – individualism and democratic despotism. In the piece, Sabl argues that “true organizing can serve to correct the excessively universalist, statist, and top-down politics to which Tocqueville feared mass democracy would tend” (Sabl 2002, 1).

One of the primary supports for Sabl’s argument, and salient for my purposes in this project, is organizing’s grounding in self-interest; he affirms that organizers themselves emphasize that self-interest is “*the* main mode of appealing to those with little political experience, since such people are prone to distrust outsiders who tell them to change for abstract reasons” (Sabl 2002, 5). Given that Sabl finds that organizing is so thoroughly steeped in self-interest, it is no wonder that he finds it to be Tocquevillean in nature. At the same time, Sabl also claims that self-interest is a more expansive concept than usually allowed for: “Like Tocqueville, organizers deny that self-interest must be understood narrowly and stress that self-interest can be transformed, given time and experience, into larger bonds of sympathy and solidarity” (Sabl 2002, 5). Sympathy and solidarity are certainly more demanding than merely understanding the ways in which satisfying your self-interest requires you to take the interests of others into account.

At least at this point, Sabl has high expectations for the kind of transformation that self-interest well understood can undergo. But are self-interest and sympathy just too different to be brought together in this way? I concluded above that Tocqueville at times keeps them conceptually separate, in the ideas of self-interest well understood on the one hand and compassion on the other; and at other times that he stretches self-interest well understood to include compassionate and selfless acts as well. As a result, the possibilities and limits of grounding a conception of civic friendship in Tocquevillean self-interest well understood remain unclear.

This ambiguity is made clearer by Sabl's claim that "the dual end of Tocquevillean associations [is that] they exist not only to further instrumental goals (which motivate citizens to combine in the first place) but to do so in ways that respect and develop ordinary citizens' capacity for dissent and political assertion" (Sabl 2002, 6). This emphasis on the strictly political advantages of organizing (that echo Villa's thought) does not explain how sympathy is meant to grow out of self-interest. In this passage, the aim of association via organizing is not to combat individualism as anomie but as powerlessness; in other words, the important thing is not that citizens learn to care for one another's well-being or the public good, but that they strengthen their abilities to assert and advocate for their own interests (preferably with others who share those interests, since together their power will be greater). At this point, association, and

thus self-interest well understood, has more to do with combatting democratic despotism than individualism (as it did in Villa's reading).

We ought to recall that the first has to do with political skills and willingness to participate, while the latter is that "calm and considered feeling which persuades each citizen to cut himself off from his fellows" and thus to abandon everyone else to their own devices (Tocqueville 2003, 587). The only hint we get of a transformation of self-interest into something more expansive in Sabl's account is his description of the ways in which it can happen for the upper classes specifically, and in a way that is strategic rather than generous or caring. He writes that "one central task of an organizer is to persuade the propertied that a new organization resembles the case of "a road past his property" – a matter of interest – rather than a matter of universal respect or caring for all people as such, which (as Tocqueville knew) is not a sentiment natural to human beings (or at least not to the well off)" (Sabl 2002, 8). Here, a grudging concern for others grows out of a much stronger concern for one's own interests once the two are seen to be intimately intertwined. Is this what Tocqueville had in mind when he described self-interest well understood? In that case, we may not have grounds to hope for any "larger bonds of sympathy or solidarity," as Sabl calls them. This is the appearance of friendship, with none of the attendant emotions or moral attitudes that scholars and thinkers wish to include in our definition of friendship (care in Bellah, trust in Putnam);

in this way it approaches Danielle Allen's definition, which emphasizes merely acting *like* friends.

Sabl argues that Tocqueville actually "was not concerned with the ethics of individuals but with political institutions, and moreover with institutions that were functioning well" (Sabl 2002, 9), and that although Tocqueville focused on the art of association "he did not write much about the art itself: how to practice it, what actions it required, what temptations one must overcome to do it well" (Sabl 2002, 9). And Sabl suggests that this is one of several gaps to which contemporary thinkers must attend in their work today, since so many different kinds of new political phenomena have sprung up in the intervening years between Tocqueville and today. I heartily agree. He points to the struggle for civil rights as one example. As a result, Tocqueville is not a particularly good resource after all for thinking through the kinds of relationships that Bellah, Putnam, and Allen wish to encourage, despite his references to compassion, to gentler habits of the heart, to serving fellow citizens. Perhaps this is why so many of the theorists of what I call "civic friendship" generally invoke Tocqueville's work without giving too much thought to the particulars. Because in the end, his thought on relationships between individual American citizens (those that are pretty well off, white, and male in the 1830s) is not meant to be comprehensive, but grows out of more free-wheeling observation and anecdote, rather than from some kind of systematic understanding of American democracy as a whole. That is not at all a critique of

Tocqueville's project as a whole, but I think it is important to recognize the limitations of his thought on this matter specifically.

#### **4.13 *The Uses and Abuses of Democracy in America***

What does Tocqueville's study of early democracy in America help us to understand about the nature of civic friendship? He stands as one of the most important sources, whether superficial or profound, for those thinkers who continue to wonder about the cultivation of community in our neighborhoods, towns, cities, states, and nations, and so we must reckon with his thought – messy, anecdotal, and unsystematic as it is – if we wish to be able to say something about the contemporary thought, both public and academic in nature, that takes up his questions and answers about the nature of things like community spirit and civic friendship in democracies.

I have shown that Tocqueville's insightful observations, far from giving a unitary account of the art of association and its relations to both self-interest well understood and compassion, instead provide many threads that make up a complex account of how, when, where, and to what end Americans get together to get things done or to do good for others. Self-interest rightly understood grows out of calculations of how our long-term self-interest is bound up with that of others, and also how associating with others may be necessary to bring about our shared interest; in this way it is much like Aristotelian reciprocal justice as discussed in the previous chapter. And compassion seems to take on various meanings as Tocqueville's work develops. Reading along with

Mansfield and Winthrop for example, it is actually the same as self-interest well understood. For Berger and Sabl it refers to the best (most generous and other-directed) results or development of self-interest well understood. And in Welch's reading she picks out the ways in which a concern for humanity itself comes to mean a great deal in democracy for Tocqueville – and I showed above how compassion is the means by which Tocqueville explains this development. Tocqueville himself tells us that it is linked to service and to allaying others' suffering. Both of these impulses, self-interest rightly understood and compassion play significant roles in Tocqueville's analysis of social life and relationships between citizens in democracy in America, even while he sees that the former is given pride of place in Americans' self-understanding.

I conclude now with a summary of what offerings we can take from Tocqueville's thought as we endeavor to get to a sense of civic friendship that works for us on the contemporary democratic scene. Although this chapter has focused on my skepticism, given the immensity and ambiguity of *Democracy in America*, about taking up Tocqueville's insights today – I still think there is much to work with. I consider all that we have learned from Tocqueville about the dangers of democracy, the three registers of Tocquevillean civic friendship as I have isolated them – association, self-interest well understood, and compassion – as well as about the influence of equality and the difference between individual moral development and political action and how these factor into an account of civic friendship.

In general, the problems that Tocqueville isolated as dangers that could accompany growing democracy, if left unchecked, are those that contemporary thinkers continue to worry about. In this way, he is a helpful resource for describing the context out of which contemporary thinkers claim that civic friendship must develop for the sake of sustainable and just politics. We can recall that Bellah, Putnam, and Allen decry the lack of concern for the interests of others, the marginalization of minorities, and the rise of centralized power in the hands of government and of elites that they find are endemic in the United States at present. Tocqueville's succinct account of the problems of democratic despotism and individualism thus still rings true for us and helps to set the scene to which contemporary theory on civic friendship can and must respond.

But it is also helpful in another related way. It captures the way in which two different realms of human life are bound up in discussions of civic friendship; democratic despotism speaks to the distribution and use of political action and power in various institutions and across the citizenry, while individualism speaks to relationships between citizens and how these can alter or are altered by our characters (for example, in their cultivation of self-interest well understood and compassion). This is helpful because we ought to be able to tease them apart or clearly explain their connection and not take it for granted that the relationships between these two aspects of human life are clear or given. For example, Villa argues quite forcefully that he thinks that Tocqueville has nothing useful to tell us about our individual characters or relationships – only

about political action. Berger softens this distinction a little bit, on the other hand, when he links self-interest well understood with different sorts of association and then ultimately with grand social emotions. We can look to Putnam on social capital for work that lumps together all kinds of associations, political or not, and all kinds of morally beneficial attitudes between citizens. I think this distinction between the political and moral consequences of Tocqueville's thought is extremely important to keep in mind as we try to parse what kind of civic friendship we need today. Not because these realms are always distinct but because teasing them apart can help us rethink how they relate to one another. Political engagement and moral development are intimately intertwined in human life since each affects the other. Our moral positions affect how and why we engage politically; and political action can in turn develop our moral positions.

Another strength of Tocqueville's account is its development of the links between civic friendship and social equality in the context of democracy. Although, from our perspective, the democracy that Tocqueville observes is limited in scope, his emphasis on the importance of social equality in a definition of democracy itself, as well as to the development of the three registers of civic friendship that I isolate in his account, is illuminating. Any contribution to the cultivation of civic friendship that association, self-interest well understood, or compassion can bring about is limited by the requirement for recognition by some citizens that they are equal with others. Only then can citizens join together in common efforts; only then will they be able to

understand how their lives are intertwined with those of others in their communities and take the interests of these others into account; and only then will they understand the experience of others in order to at least begin to understand how they can respond to the suffering or misfortune of others. So civic friendship requires that we perceive our civic friends as equals. As Bellah et. al. lamented at the very beginning of *Habits of the Heart*, Tocqueville seems to have been wrong that equality would continue to expand as time moved on. In my account, civic friendship and inequality are thus opposed, and Tocqueville helps us to see this. I conclude that we must focus on making sure that citizens consider one another as equals in their desert of justice and dignity. However, the question of *how* to do this remains unanswered.

I now summarize briefly what has been learned about association, self-interest, and compassion. Reading Tocqueville on all three phenomena helps us to understand how Putnam, for example, can take insights from all three and combine them together in his conception of social capital. They are intertwined in Tocqueville's account of them because they are in our lives, too. However, what is needed is a clearer account of how exactly they fit together. Each of the three has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Tocqueville suggests that association helps to cultivate the skills necessary to continue to associate. And it creates alternative channels to established political power. And it can bring together very different citizens working together on some common project in ways that can be personally transformative. However, association in and of itself is morally

ambiguous, since its end could be anything at all, whether salutary to democracy or civic friendship or not. I contend that herein lies the importance of self-interest well understood and of compassion, the other two facets of civic friendship in Tocqueville's thought. Of self-interest properly understood, Tocqueville writes that it "does not inspire great sacrifices but does prompt daily small ones; by itself it could not make a man virtuous but it does shape a host of law-abiding, sober, moderate, careful, and self-controlled citizens. If it does not lead the will directly to virtue, it moves it closer through the imperceptible influence of habit" (Tocqueville 2003, 612). Self-interest well understood is accessible to everyone and urges responsible moderation and a sense of an entire community when tending to one's own needs. In this way it resembles Aristotle's utility friendship.

Tocqueville's description of compassion and how it grows out of conditions of democracy brings something new into my work thus far. Above, I tried to show how confused the concept is in Tocqueville's thought because I think this lack of clarity explains how it is that Tocqueville can be invoked in so many attempts to imagine more robust community. Nevertheless, I want to propose it as a potentially important part of civic friendship and one that we would do well to clarify. At times in *Democracy in America* it is cast as a universal, natural, and immediate impulse toward humanity in general (though not all human beings may be included in "humanity" given Tocqueville's explication of Mme. Sevigne's narrow vision on this matter). At other

times, it grows out of the practice of self-interest well understood itself. As a result, questions about it include: Can it be cultivated, and how? Or is it spontaneous and ephemeral and thus not to be counted on? Is it an emotional response or a habitual exercise of the imagination? In the end, I find it difficult to decide on the final meaning of Tocqueville's conception of compassion. However, I argue that asking about its relation to civic friendship generally could be of great importance.

If we think of compassion as a disposition to take others' well-being into consideration and also to act on that consideration, then we can see how it could have a vital role to play in the cultivation of civic friendship. Take for instance even to the least robust example of civic friendship with which we began, Danielle Allen's call to cross the street early to avoid insulting a stranger we wish to avoid, we should ask: Why would we care to do so, and how do we come to understand that this would mean anything as a gesture of friendship? (Leaving aside its paltriness.) I think something like compassion helps to answer these questions and to motivate such actions – including those that move well beyond merely crossing the street early. And I think that Tocqueville is right that recognizing some fundamental equality with others is a prerequisite for compassion, whatever more precise description we give to it; this too, is an important insight we find in his work. How does it happen? Tocqueville (and many others who follow his work) suggests association; but we must recall that its effects are ambiguous. In Putnam's terms, it can be bonding (exclusive) or bridging (inclusive).

More work thus needs to be done to specify when and how we come to identify concretely with more and more different kinds of citizens who are more or less distant from us culturally and physically. So I conclude that compassion as a moral dimension of human life contributes to an understanding of civic friendship that matters politically. And I assert, too, that civic friendship thus has to do both with politics and morals – and thus with political institutions and movements *and* with personal relationships. However, I also show that Tocqueville’s lack of clarity about compassion means that his vision of civic friendship, such as it is, is a moving target that allows thinkers to invoke it on their ways to vastly different conclusions. But for all that, it nevertheless yields many important insights. In the next chapter, I turn to Adam Smith’s conception of sympathy as outlined in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in order to attend to some of the questions left open about the human capacity for something like compassion and how it makes a difference in our relationships with our fellow citizens.

## 5. Defining Smithian Civic Friendship

In this chapter, I turn to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in order to see if his account of sympathy can help describe the development of pro-social attitudes and behaviors or, in other words, civic friendship. My focus in particular is on contexts of diversity in contemporary democratic communities, despite the ways in which such a setting differs from Smith's own. Although similar in some ways to other accounts of compassion or empathy found in the canon of political thought, I choose Smith's work in particular because it offers a very developed and nuanced explanation of the ways in which we can identify with another's experience – one which touches upon the ways in which this process can be a source of mutual understanding and concern, but also how it is limited by our self-concern as well as by broader social norms.

As we have seen, Danielle Allen emphasizes that her vision of friendship among citizens is not a feeling but a set of habits – but in this chapter I argue that feelings matter a great deal in the enactment of friendship. Allen isolates several emotions – and we can think of many, including anger, hurt, resentment, envy, disgust, and fear – that can cause civic friendship to decrease in a polity. To what degree can Smithian sympathy be considered a means of contending seriously with the presence of such negative emotions and experiences in our fellow citizens? Without some sense of attachment to our fellow citizens, how could we ever be willing to take their well-being or suffering (or sacrifice, to use Allen's term) into account in our daily lives and in our

political decisions? And how could this happen without the emotions? In this section I aim to see if Smith's picture of sympathy can explain this sense of attachment and responsibility.

In assessing the possible connection between Smithian sympathy and the various registers of civic friendship, I will be most interested in answering several questions: How are the mechanisms of sympathy best described. Are they immediate and visceral, or are they instead mediated by some activity of the mind, like the imagination? Can sympathy be cultivated or developed, or not? And what are its limits? It is clear that differences beyond geographical location matter here. In any given country, citizens can be separated by great physical distances, but also by language, religious practice, political partisanship, and so on; this deep diversity is the ground on which civic friendship must grow in contemporary democracies. How can we make sense of Smith's notion of sympathy as a potential bridge across such differences? And how does it fit into the contemporary calls for friendship with which I began: Does it have a role to play in the kind of process Putnam tells us begins simply in association – in a bowling league, say – and somehow ends in generalized reciprocity? Or in what Bellah et. al. describe as political or voluntary action growing out of care and concern arising from a sense of interdependence?

In order to begin to answer these questions, I now turn to a close reading of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – not in order to provide a fulsome account of the

work itself, of its many arguments and how they fit together across numerous drafts – but to draw out some salient concepts and questions at work in Smith’s account of sympathy and the moral sentiments so that we can see how valuable they might be to more recent thought on civic friendship. As in previous chapters, I begin with a brief description of the political and social context that motivates Smith to engage in this investigation, and then move on to discuss how civic friendship appears in his account. In particular I focus extensively on his picture of the inner workings and outward manifestations of what he calls sympathy; and on its relationship to his concept of the “impartial spectator.” I then attend to Smith’s discussion of the differences between what he calls beneficence and justice. I take the former to be closest to what Bellah, Putnam, and Allen approach in their work as outlined in my first chapter. I end by weighing, with the help of others who have undertaken work on Smith, the strengths and weaknesses of adopting Smith’s work as a resource in a conversation about friendship between citizens. As in my readings of Aristotle and Tocqueville, I find resources that help clarify talk of civic friendship today, but I also conclude that Smith’s emphases on the power of self-interest as a human motivator (in this he echoes Aristotle and Tocqueville, too) and also of our own narrow identities, leaves us with a limited sense of the possibility of as robust a civic friendship as hoped for in Bellah’s, Putnam’s, and Allen’s work, despite their differences.

## **5.1 On Smithian Sympathy and Propriety**

*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* begins with an invocation of Bernard de Mandeville's position that self-interest drives all facets of human life. Smith firmly disagrees with Mandeville – and this disagreement is so strong that he sees fit to begin his work asserting his opposed position. He writes: "how selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (Smith 1982, 9). Here, at the outset, Smith expresses a very particular understanding of human motivation; we are not entirely self-interested and in fact take seriously and enjoy the happiness of our fellows. In this way, their happiness or well-being is bound up with our own – and it seems to be so for its own sake, because we take pleasure in it for its own sake. Here we have a succinct expression of the kind of concern that Aristotle reserves only for the best – rarest, most intimate – kind of friends, as we have seen. But Smith seems to think it is a natural part of human being itself. Where does it come from? And what are its results? Smith's account of sympathy is meant to answer such questions. Along the way, he also describes how it is that moral standards develop within a community. This, too, connects with my work here, if we consider civic friendship as a kind of ethos. By the end of this chapter, we will know more about sympathy's role in our relationships with our fellow citizens and about how Smith's own account of the role between self-interest

(or selfishness) and sympathy challenges Mandeville's position and thus provides resources (if it does) for an account of concern for the well-being of others for their own sake when we are civic rather than intimate friends. I begin with a description of Smithian sympathy.

Adam Smith has a very particular definition of sympathy, so any attempt to bring it to bear on contemporary issues must begin with a clear sense of what it is and how it works, and then of its causes and consequences. Most simply, it is the process by which persons come to feel something like what another person feels; in Smith's terms, the former are *observers* or *spectators* while the latter are *agents* or *actors*. How do we feel what others feel? Is it automatic? Is it an activity of the mind or of the emotions? Is it sensation or thought? Is it identification with another, or something limited and more approximate? These are all very important questions in an investigation into how far Smithian sympathy can bring us towards something like civic friendship. To begin, Smith thinks that sympathy is a fact of human being and asserts that he does not need to trouble himself with proving that it takes place since it occurs so obviously in the course of human life; his example is the way in which observing the sorrow of others causes us to feel sorrow as well (Smith 1982, 9). That this happens is evident to all, Smith holds, so there is no question that we are beings who sympathize.

It is a fact about us with which no one could argue. But how does it happen? Smith writes that "as we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can

form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel like in that situation" (Smith 1982, 9) via our imagination: "In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiment of the sufferer" (Smith 1982, 10). Here we learn several very important things about Smithian sympathy: It involves identifying in some way with the emotional experience of another no matter what that is; in other words, we not only sympathize with sorrow and suffering but with all facets of human experience. We also learn that sympathy employs the imagination; and that it involves *trying* to inhabit fully the position of another by an act of imagination rather than as an automatic reaction to our observation of them – although sometimes it seems as though it is actually automatic and unavoidable, as in Smith's initial assertion that observing the sorrow of others causes sorrow in us. Smith writes that "pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (Smith 1982, 10). So perhaps these are different kinds of responses: one is automatic and more like identification and often follows upon the observation of negative emotions in particular, while the other is a cooler, more distant and more considered exercise; whatever we call them, these are two different registers of sympathetic responses to our fellows.

Smith asserts that “the compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment” (Smith 1982,12). At this specific point in his account, “compassion” is meant to invoke Smithian sympathy in particular, and it is broken up into two steps. We begin by imaginatively placing ourselves in the position of another in order to try to feel what our response would be to the same circumstances – and Smith means that we include as much of the experience of another as we can in such an imaginative exercise; not, for example, that we try to imagine how we would feel upon the death of our parent, but how we would feel if we were the agent we observe and their lives were ours, and their parents were ours, and so on. A tall order – but one meant to expand our understanding, approximate though it must be, of another’s life. In the second movement of Smithian sympathy, we measure the reaction we observe in the other against the one we settle on in our imagination – and in this way, we come to judge the appropriateness – or propriety – of the emotions of another. In fact, the first section of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is explicitly in title and in subject focused on *propriety*. This is what is distinctive to what Adam Smith offers to a discussion of human phenomena such as compassion, sympathy, pity, care, concern – whatever name we wish to use: that the same activities of mind, broadly speaking, that allow us to feel with and for others also allows us, and even calls us, to judge them. Consider: “if we hear a

person loudly lamenting his misfortunes, which, however, upon bringing the case home to ourselves, we feel, can produce no such violent affect upon us, we are shocked at his grief; and, because we cannot enter into it, call it pusillanimity and weakness” (Smith 1982, 16). This evaluation is a part of the workings of sympathy; Smith thinks that we either approve of another’s response to their experiences or we don’t, and that this is important rather than a deficiency. We do so by using ourselves as the standard: “Every faculty in one man is the measure by which we judge of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them” (Smith 1982,19). The same is true of our moral sentiments or, really, our sentiments in general. Smith recognizes that this means that our sympathy will be limited not only by the mere fact that our imagination will never fully succeed at bringing home to us the experience of another, but also by our own judgments of propriety.

## ***5.2 Stoicism and Ambition: Sympathy’s Limits***

Another defining characteristic of the work is the strong thread of stoicism that runs throughout Smith’s account of sympathy. If we are aware that we are in the public eye and others are constantly surveying our reactions to our circumstances, and if we know they will judge us harshly if they think we are overreacting, we tend to try to temper our emotional responses – at least in appearance. In this way, tranquility and the

appearance of composure are encouraged by the facts that we are beings who are always on display to our fellows and that we care a great deal for their approbation, which comes via their judgments that we have acted appropriately. Smith explains: "If we are at all masters of ourselves, the presence of a mere acquaintance will really compose us, still more than that of a friend; and that of an assembly of strangers still more than that of an acquaintance. Society and conversation, therefore, are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquility" (Smith 1982, 23). This is at once a description of how sympathy naturally results in our moderated emotions and also a judgment that this is a good thing. In general, Smith discusses the most extreme emotions with disdain and seems to welcome the ways in which being observed by others, even when it doesn't help with the cause of an extreme emotion, at least helps us to *act* as though we are not so strongly affected – and that this acting in turn moderates our feelings themselves so that we come to feel them less strongly. Two examples of this phenomenon: "An upstart, though of the greatest merit, is generally disagreeable, and a sentiment of envy commonly prevents us from heartily sympathizing with his joy. If he has any judgment, he is sensible of this, and instead of appearing to be elated with his good fortune, he endeavors, as much as he can, to smother his joy" (Smith 1982, 41). In this case of observing the good fortune of another, envy prevents our sympathy and it is the actor's responsibility to moderate his emotional response.

On the other hand, Smith also describes our inability to sympathize with the other extreme, that of profound suffering. Of a person experiencing such extreme pain (of any kind), Smith writes that “he always appears, in some measure, mean and despicable, who is sunk in sorrow and dejection upon account of any calamity of his own. We cannot bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself, and what, perhaps, we should feel for ourselves if in his situation” (Smith 1982, 49). Although in other parts of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith notes that we in fact sympathize strongly and sincerely with deep distress (Smith 1982, 43), in the former passage we simply cannot do so, even when we recognize that we would feel the same way if we were in the actor’s position. In addition to joy and to sorrow, we find it difficult, perhaps most especially so, to sympathize with anger, another extreme emotion. Smith writes that “hatred and anger are the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind. There is, in the very feeling of those passions, something harsh, jarring, and convulsive, something that tears and distracts the breast, and is altogether destructive of that composure and tranquility of mind which is so necessary to happiness” (Smith 1982, 37). Hatred and anger threaten the peace of mind that Smith encourages us to cultivate, in addition to being painful presumably both to the actor and the spectator. So a significant limit to our sympathy is the fact that we often cannot bring ourselves to feel what another is feeling – whether extreme happiness, suffering, or anger. This is a serious obstacle in thinking about how sympathy might lead to civic friendship – to care for

another and action on behalf of their well-being – especially given the limits we face in understanding and taking seriously the pain and indignation of others, for example. If we can't do that, why would we work on their behalf to understand their position and to see what we can do about it?

Another limit to our sympathetic capacities is our ambition. We admire the successful and long to be among their ranks – not only because we long to be successful (though this is surely desirable to us in itself) but also because we wish to be taken notice of and, according to Smith, humans have a natural predilection to admire the successful and ambitious – so to be among them is our best guarantee that we will be seen and admired by our peers. He tells us that what is so great about greatness and so awful about poverty is that no one notices us and no one exercises their sympathy upon our state in the latter case (Smith 1982, 51). In a moving passage, Smith emphasizes the strength of our distaste for those beneath us: “The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb their happiness” (Smith 1982, 51). So Smith is not surprised at all by our inability to sympathize with those who are less well off in our community and in fact suggests that because we put such emphasis on rising the ranks, we are disgusted by and dismissive of those who fail to join us in doing so, whatever their reason.

One gets the sense that Smith thinks that this is a fact of human being (though not inevitable, as we shall see), and also deeply lamentable. It is our tendency, but it is not to be accepted for that reason. Smith notes that “we frequently see the respectful attentions of the world more strongly directed towards the rich and the great, than towards the wise and the virtuous. We see frequently the vices and follies of the powerful much less despised than the poverty and the weakness of the innocent” (Smith 1982, 62). This tendency or inclination that Smith finds in his observation of human nature – to worship the rich and powerful and to despise and neglect the poor and powerless, in his own words – is “necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society [and is] at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (Smith 1982, 61). So does Smith think that ambition is some kind of necessary evil in that case? One that comes naturally and also establishes some kind of important order in our communities? I think that the rest of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is intended to show that this is not the case, and to offer a remedy for it. On the matter of ambition as with the extremes of emotion, Smith counsels stoicism. He advises: “Are you in earnest resolved never to barter your liberty for the lordly servitude of a court, but to live free, fearless, and independent? There seems to be but one way to continue in that virtuous resolution; and perhaps but one. Never enter the place from whence so few have been able to return; never come within the circle of ambition” (Smith 1982, 57). Considering the strength Smith attributes

to our desire to be counted by our peers as successful, moderating our ambition will be no small task for us. Smith makes the social realm almost coextensive with the realm of ambition. Extreme ambitions along with our distaste for extreme emotions corrupt our moral sentiments.

### **5.3 Justice as Bare Minimum and Beneficence as Ornament: Two Threads of Smithian Civic Friendship**

So far, Smith has discussed only how sympathy works, and also how *its exercise is limited* (by our interest and admiration for the rich and powerful, for example) and *how its exercise limits* our emotional reactions (via a kind of enforced stoicism that we employ in order to allow others to sympathize with us rather than repulsing them with an extremity they could never match in sympathy). I now account for the resources for an account of civic friendship that we might find in Smith's thought on sympathy, specifically in his discussion of the contrast between justice and beneficence. His version of beneficence comes close to what I and others mean by civic friendship (or community, or care, as the case may be), but we will see that Smith is not particularly confident that it is an oft-occurring phenomenon and he also concludes that, given our limits, it is more spontaneous than cultivated and that it ought never to be enforced. None of the thinkers we have examined so far think that anything like civic friendship should be enforced – it is, for them all, an informal ethos or set of practices that supports a more formal and enforceable legal and political community structure. How confident does Smith

encourage us to be about the cultivation of beneficence, then? And what are the links between sympathy, and justice and beneficence respectively? The rest of this chapter attends to these important questions. Smith's picture of beneficence, as I will show, responds to the most demanding and hopeful claims about civic friendship with which I began by detailing the work of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen when these are motivated by a sense of interdependence and concern for fellow citizens. Smith's notion of justice instead approaches the more limited resources and visions of civic friendship as cast by Aristotle and Tocqueville when they picture citizen relationships as built out on utility of various kinds. In the end, Smith's work approaches theirs in the limits it sets for our ability to act beneficently.

I begin this section by outlining both of these concepts as Smith sees them. Smith gives very much importance to the beneficent action that stems from benevolence.<sup>1</sup> He writes that "to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature" (Smith 1982, 25). To act in a beneficent way enacts what is best about us as human beings, according to Smith. However, he also points out that we do not have grounds to punish those who do not act beneficently when they could have, since it is never

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan Patrick Hanley has a helpful discussion of the literature on the distinction between benevolence and beneficence; the former is used to refer to the intention and attempt to do well to others, while the latter refers to the actual outcome of benevolence (Hanley 2006, n.23, 36-7). However, for my purposes in this project, I use them to mean the same thing, the aim and action at once, because of the way in which they are folded together in human life.

required for us to act in that way. We can disapprove of the conduct of others in such a case (and sympathy is the capacity that allows us to decide on this matter, as we have seen above), but we can never *demand* that beneficence be done. Smith uses a discussion of two similar but also quite different emotions to further develop a distinction between beneficence and justice. He writes that when we observe that some act of beneficence that could have been but is not done, that actor “is the object of *hatred*, a passion which is naturally excited by impropriety of sentiments and behavior; not of *resentment*, a passion which is never properly called forth but by actions which tend to do real and positive hurt to some particular persons” (Smith 1982, 79). Beneficence means doing good for others; however, we are not required to do good for anyone. But we feel badly, and Smith suggests we may even feel hate, when we see that someone who could have treated another well did not do so. When we see someone acting in such a way that harm is done to another, Smith argues that we instead feel resentment, and that “resentment seems to have been given us by nature for defence, and for defence only. It is the safeguard of justice and the security of innocence” (Smith 1982, 79). Here, Smith defines justice as a negative phenomenon, as not causing another any harm or as defending others or ourselves from outright harm.

Smith expands upon this distinction between beneficence and justice at some length, invoking the work of Henry Home, Lord Kames, when he writes that

“the remarkable distinction between justice and all other social virtues, which has of late been particularly insisted upon by an author of very great and original genius, [is] that we feel ourselves to be under a stricter obligation to act according to justice, than agreeably to friendship, charity, or generosity; that the practice of these last mentioned virtues seems to be left in some measure to our own choice, but that, somehow or other, we feel ourselves to be in a peculiar manner tied, bound, and obliged to the observation of justice. We feel, that is to say, that force may, with the utmost propriety, and with the approbation of all mankind, be made use of to constrain us to observe the rules of the one, but not to follow the precepts of the other.” (Smith 1982, 80)

Smith agrees. What he calls here “friendship, charity, or generosity” is precisely what I have endeavored to untangle throughout as a thread of related phenomena that together make up civic friendship. Although Smith does not develop a picture for us of what these virtues, as he calls them, look like in practice in relationships between citizens, he does reveal here that feelings have a great deal to do with our sense of our moral obligations to our fellows (perhaps not a surprise given his focus on sentiment); and in distinguishing these virtues from justice we at least know that they are distinct in important ways. They do not include acts we’d expect to be enforceable and so they don’t have to do with what we owe others. So in a sense the claims of justice are not up for debate; we have an immediate sense of what is just and what is not. I elaborate on this below. It isn’t so with friendship, charity, and generosity; their claims are not clear. But what if our vision of justice is skewed? How does our understanding (using that word loosely to allow for the significance of emotions) of justice expand or change? I think we can find an answer to this question in Smith’s concept of the impartial

spectator, to which I return below. For now, I develop the distinction between Smithian beneficence and justice.

Smith writes that “when a man shuts his breast against compassion, and refuses to relieve the misery of his fellow-creatures, when he can with the greatest ease; in all these cases, though every body blames the conduct, nobody imagines that those who might have reason, perhaps to expect more kindness, have any right to extort it by force” (Smith 1982, 81). Here, Smith approaches the stance of Bellah, Putnam, and Allen in his hope for, in this case, more kindness. More kindness, more generosity, more community spirit, more shared projects, more care in action – these are the things that I’ve kept together throughout under the umbrella of the term “civic friendship.” For Smith, justice is “a negative virtue, and only hinders us from hurting our neighbor” (Smith 1982, 82), while all these other things, though they are not required of us, require more of us in the sense that we must choose to take them on. What prevents us from doing so? Smith’s answer echoes Aristotle’s and Tocqueville’s: it is “the natural preference which every man has for his own happiness” (Smith 1982, 82). For all of these thinkers, this is a given and is not necessarily something to be lamented. Smith writes that “every man is, no doubt, by nature, first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so. Every man, therefore, is much more deeply interested in whatever immediately concerns himself than in what concerns any other man” (Smith 1982, 82-3).

We are naturally more concerned with our own interests and needs than those of any other; and after that, our concern moves outward in concentric circles to include family, then friends, then acquaintances, then strangers. These circles grow outward in social distance and also in physical distance. Those with whom we have more intimate relationships, as well as those with whom we come into contact with in our daily lives, matter more than others.

Smith thinks that societies can take a number of different forms and still be sustainable. In his distinction between two kinds of communities – one more and one less friendly – he helps us to see still more sharply the difference between beneficence and justice. First, he describes a community in which

“all the members of human society stand in need of each other’s assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bonds of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common center of mutual good offices.” (Smith 1982, 85)

Here, citizens see themselves as vulnerable in similar ways and reciprocity supported by many positive emotions and attitudes – including an explicit mention of friendship by Smith – is the result of recognizing this interdependence. The account is similar to Tocqueville’s vision of the source of self-interest well understood in America; we recognize our mutual dependence and this helps us to limit our self-interest, and to act in the interest of others. A big difference, however, is the emphasis that Smith places on

the intentions behind the mutual aid. Tocqueville's account is more practical and utilitarian in name and in motivation; more of a grudging acceptance that sacrifices must be made to help others rather than a sacrifice willingly made out of concern for another, as Smith seems to describe above – at least at first. However, Smith also recognizes that a more utilitarian society than the one he first describes could flourish well enough, too. He describes another alternative in this way: "society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection; and though no man in it should owe any obligation, or be bound in gratitude to any other, it may still be upheld by a mercenary exchange of good offices according to an agreed valuation" (Smith 1982, 86). This is still more reminiscent of Tocqueville's self-interest well understood, and it is also extremely similar to Aristotle's account of the marketplace as an important realm of civic friendship – Smith even seems to echo Aristotle's distinction between moral and legal utility friendship and to follow his lead toward the formality of the latter – whether we find such accounts to be convincing and helpful articulations of civic friendship or whether we find them instead to be too impoverished for such a concept. In this colder and more utilitarian vision of society, Smith describes a community reliant on justice as he described it above; no public sense of beneficence appears in it at all. Contrasting these two communities bolsters Smith's argument that beneficence is less essential to a community's survival than justice:

“Society may subsist, though not in the most comfortable state, without beneficence; but the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it” (Smith 1982, 86).

Without a sense of justice that moves its members to act so as to avoid harming one another, a community simply cannot survive. At this point, Smith writes: “men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for one another, with whom they have no particular connexion, in comparison of what they feel for themselves; the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature, is of so little importance to them in comparison even of a small conveniency of their own” (Smith 1982, 86). So human beings are naturally sympathetic, but they are also naturally (and deeply) self-interested and the exercise and consequences of our sympathy are thereby severely limited, as we have seen. Smith argues that justice is the bare minimum that we can hope for to counteract these tendencies. Without a sense of justice, “a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions” (Smith 1982, 86). Smith describes the source of this sense of justice as the “consciousness of ill-desert” and “those terrors of merited punishment which attend upon its violation” and he argues that Nature has supplied us with these. Their role is to “protect the weak, to curb the violent, and to chastise the guilty” (Smith 1982, 86). Justice is a necessity for human society to continue to function, but beneficence is not; the former is the foundation while the latter is merely an ornament, Smith writes (Smith 1982, 86). But using the term “ornament” suggests that there is no particular benefit to beneficence, other than that it is more pleasing than its absence.

The authors who frame the discussion in this dissertation argue for more than that. They may agree that friendship is not necessary and it cannot be enforced, but they hold that its presence serves the health of communities not just because it is pleasant but in some more vital way; because it helps to uphold rules of justice, for example, or because it helps in the progression of our laws to become more and more inclusive, or because it responds to needs in our communities that would otherwise not be met – whether doing so informally or by pressuring the government to attend to them. Is Smith suggesting that the justice he describes – which brings to mind the work of Judith Shklar, in “The Liberalism of Fear,” among other works, on “negative justice” or justice as the avoidance of harm or cruelty. Is the best we have to rely on? If so, what does this mean for the possibility of civic friendship growing out of Smith’s account? And if not, where can we turn in his work to find a way to get to friendship after all? As with Aristotle and Tocqueville, the closer we read the more we have reason to be skeptical that Smith offers us very much as a resource for rethinking our relationships to our fellow citizens as something other – something more – than merely compromise and moderated self-interest.

#### ***5.4 On The Impartial Spectator***

In his discussion of the differences between beneficence and justice Smith brings his notion of the impartial spectator to bear on his account of sympathy. Naturally self-interested, our sense of justice (hopefully, for the most part) prevents us from harming

others. Smith isolates what he calls the “impartial spectator” as the source of our ability to temper our self-interest, sometimes even still further than the demands of justice when we engage in beneficence. In this way, the impartial spectator fights against the natural limits to sympathy discussed above. Smith writes that to indulge “at the expence of other people, the natural preference which every man has for his own happiness above that of other people, is what no impartial spectator can go along with” (Smith 1982, 82). What or who is this impartial spectator? Smith refers to it as our ability to step outside of our point of view in order to “endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it” (Smith 1982, 110). I think it is no small thing that Smith includes the word “endeavor” here; our success is not guaranteed in such an effort. Whereas our natural capacity for sympathy has to do with our observation of others, the impartial spectator helps us to observe our own comportment. It helps us to see ourselves in the same light that others might – or as we imagine they would, anyway. We imagine ourselves as someone who is trying to sympathize with us. Smith writes that “we can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgments concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them” (Smith 1982, 110). So is the impartial spectator a collection of other people’s imagined

perspectives on us? Is this what Smith counts as impartiality – the sum of our fellows' opinions? It seems that way. Smith argues that we examine our own emotions and actions by considering how they would appear to others if we could access their experience of us. We are the spectator and agent alike. He writes that "this is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct" (Smith 1982, 112).

If we think of Aristotle's friendship of exchange in the marketplace, or of Tocqueville's self-interest well understood, Smith's impartial spectator is the thing that helps us to enact these because it helps us to see that we must consider the needs of others if we want to get along with them, even in the most minimal ways. Smith writes that "it is only by consulting this judge within, that we can ever see what relates to ourselves in its proper shape and dimensions; or that we can ever make any proper comparison between our interests and those of other people" (Smith 1982, 134). This "judge within," one of many names Smith uses for the impartial spectator, is like an abstract other person that we keep in mind – disinterested in and unbiased by our own concerns insofar as it is possible to achieve such a stance in one's own imagination. In thinking about our interactions with another, the impartial spectator is a third person who judges us both using her own capacity for sympathy (Smith 1982, 135). A result of thinking about ourselves in this way is that we come to see what Smith calls the "real littleness of ourselves" (Smith 1982, 137) whereas our natural inclination is to give our

own needs and interests so much more weight than those of others. Smith asks: “what is it which prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others?” In his answer, he makes yet another distinction that helps to crystallize his notion of the impartial spectator. His response is that “it is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power . . . it is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct.” When we remember that we are very small pieces in a much larger community, Smith says that our passions speak more softly and we are better able to respond to the needs of others and see that we are no better and no more important, on the grand scale, than they are (Smith 1982,137). Smith here sets up an interesting relationship between our reason and emotion.

Whereas sentiment refers to our ability to either approve or disapprove our actions or those of another, the “passions” here are an obstacle to our reaching an impartial (and reasonable, Smith says) standpoint. This passage also has something important to tell us about the virtues of “humanity” or of “benevolence” – most importantly that they are fleeting and often not enough to motivate action. The impartial spectator is the source of generous actions. And when these are directed towards people who are not our intimates, they are what I want to call acts of civic friendship. And in

Smith's account, they are linked to the exercise of our unbiased sense of reason. Towards the end of the work, Smith writes that "no man, during either the whole of his life, or that of any considerable part of it, ever trod steadily and uniformly in the paths of prudence, of justice, of proper beneficence, whose conduct was not principally directed by a regard to the sentiments of the supposed impartial spectator, of the great inmate of the breast, the great judge and arbiter of conduct" (Smith 1982, 262). The impartial spectator is what helps us to decide on the proper valuation of prudence – our concern for our own well-being – weighed against justice and also beneficence – our concern to not harm and even sometimes to benefit others. Whereas our generous emotions can be unsteady, the workings of the impartial spectator help us not to waver too much from acting out of the knowledge of our "real littleness."

### ***5.5 Limits and Obstacles to Impartiality***

The impartial spectator corrects the "natural inequality" of our sentiments (Smith 1982, 136). This natural inequality is responsible for the ways in which we evaluate and take seriously our own experiences; those of our intimates and our acquaintances; and those of near and of distant strangers. Smith uses the example of an earthquake in China to illustrate this: After such a calamitous event, someone might express their deep sadness at lives and livelihoods lost, but "when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had once been fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his repose or his diversion, with the same ease and

tranquility, as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance” (Smith 1982, 136). Our sentiments of concern for others are so fleeting – not only when suffering or injustice takes place on the other side of the world, but also, according to those concerned about the sense of community in contemporary democracies, about civic friendship, even when it takes place right around the corner. Working against this tendency, “the man within immediately calls to us, that we value ourselves too much and other people too little” (Smith 1982, 138). In this way, the impartial spectator helps to tip the balance away from self-concern.

However, in some sense, Smith does not think there is much we can do – or should do – to change this ordering by priority that counts our own interests and needs as most important. In this case the impartial spectator is a useful reminder that we ought to reflect upon and judge our own priorities, not so that we can always put ourselves below others but so that we can at least give it serious thought and be deliberate about our moral judgments about ourselves and others. This is what the attempt at a “third-person” perspective of the impartial spectator does for us; it gives us critical purchase on our immediate responses to moral situations. Smith recognizes that of course our own concerns come first. His example in this case is of someone who feels more upon the death of someone else’s father or son than for his own father or son; “such unnatural indifference, far from exciting our applause, would incur our highest disapprobation”

(Smith 1982,142). So in some sense, we should not aim for impartiality (the sense that our father is a person of equal worth to any other person) but for a partiality inflected by a sense of equality that ripples outward in circles and also one that most of our fellows would approve of. This is the essence of what the impartial spectator offers to our sense of moral judgment; it calls us to try to approximate impartiality which in turn can call us to limit our self-interest to a greater (beneficence) or lesser degree (justice).

How do we have access to such a standard? Smith writes: “our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided” (Smith 1982, 159). Our moral sense is cultivated, then, not by ourselves alone, but in a constant kind of conversation, as we judge others and are judged by them. These judgments need not contain harsh censure nor effusive praise, but they must be publicly expressed in some way in order to matter to our society’s cultivation of moral standards. Smith also tells us that “Nature, when she formed man for society, endowed him with an original desire to please, and an original aversion to offend his brethren. She taught him to feel pleasure in their favourable, and pain in their unfavourable regard. She rendered their approbations most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake” (Smith 1982, 116). In the course of this conversation, then, the approval of our fellows is a significant influence, for better or worse.

Speech plays a significant role in this process since it allows us to make our thoughts and judgments public. He writes that “the desire of being believed, the desire of persuading, of leading and directing other people, seems to be one of the strongest of all our natural desires . . . speech is the great instrument of ambition, of real superiority, of leading and directing the judgments and conduct of other people” (Smith 1982, 336). Through our actions and speech, we judge the propriety of others’ behaviour, and are judged ourselves. Smith writes that “the great pleasure of conversation and society . . . arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another” (Smith 1982, 337). It is sympathy that allows us to reach this kind of moral consensus, and it often seems that this moral consensus winds up counting as impartiality. But because Smith suggests that our sociality is an integral part of our humanity and that it requires that we pay close attention to the conventions of our community, and to the cues of those around us, we can ask to what degree this conversation – a constant dialogue between citizens as they judge the propriety of one another’s comportment – relies merely on convention.

In fact, without society we would have no means by which to arrive at standards of moral judgment; Smith writes: “were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own

sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face" (Smith 1982, 110). It seems, then, that because of our constant surveillance by our community, which calls us to moderate our behaviour according to its standards (as we saw above in Smith's discussion of stoicism), the moral sense of our society might be based solely on the conventional – no matter the content. If our moral imagination, in this account, can be constrained by convention even with the influence of the impartial spectator how can we avoid freezing the moral conversation we act out with our fellows each day? And can we think outside of our society's customs at all? The answers to these questions matter very much to questions about whether civic friendship or beneficence can be fostered in a community. If we are worried about the state of civic friendship in our community, we must ask if it can be encouraged and how – as I do throughout. If the impartial spectator helps us to see more forcefully our equality, then this is an advantage for Smith's account if we want to use it to help to explain civic friendship for us today. But if the forcefulness of convention is stronger, then Smith may instead have more to say about why civic friendship is difficult to cultivate and why we shouldn't have high hopes for it in communities that have settled conventions that work against it rather than to support it.

Here and there throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith does hint that a kind of independent judgment, one which appropriately circumvents the judgment of others, is possible. This self-reliance is most often discussed in connection

with our assessment of ourselves, and arises from our ability to discern between praise and praise-worthiness, so that we aim to be worthy of any praise that comes our way. Armed with an understanding of this distinction, we can act rightly for its own sake. Thus, to a man of such sensibility, “when he is perfectly satisfied with every part of his own conduct, the judgment of other people is often of less importance to him” (Smith 1982, 123). Here, then, it is suggested that our judgment of our own conduct need not necessarily be checked by those around us, as if there were some sense of right externally supplied; “the man who is conscious to himself that he has exactly observed those measures of conduct which experience informs him are generally agreeable, reflects with satisfaction on the propriety of his own conduct” (Smith 1982, 116). But is this only because we have merely internalized the standards to which our fellows would hold us? Smith seems to claim otherwise when he notes that, in approving of our actions by putting ourselves in another’s position “we can be more indifferent about the applause, and, in some measure, despise the censure of the world; secure that, however misunderstood or misrepresented, we are the natural and proper objects of approbation” (Smith 1982, 112). So we can decide for ourselves when we have been misunderstood, and in so doing, transcend the standards of those who misjudge us. In this way, Smith seems to allow that we all can arrive independently at a sense of what is meet in a given circumstance – and that we can be right despite the counter judgments of our fellows. This would allow for the growth and development of civic friendship

even in an environment in which it is not an already settled attitude or ethos. Is this possible? How? In Smith's account, it remains difficult to discern the line between the standards we are given to live out when we enter the social sphere, and which we are socialized to accept (via sympathy) – and our ability to assess them and to imagine new possibilities (via the impartial spectator).

So far, we have seen Smith locate our capacity to move beyond selfishness (against Mandeville) in our capacities for beneficence and justice. I interpret these as two different but related threads of civic friendship that we can find in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. I tied both to the impartial spectator's ability to refine the exercise of our Smithian sympathy so that it can move beyond the ways it is narrowed by propriety, ambition, and convention. But it remains unclear just how possible impartiality can be for us, given our inability to completely and accurately put ourselves in another's position in a comprehensive way (while a limit of Smithian sympathy, this is also a strength – at least conceptually – in that it rings true about the primacy of our own experience); and given the force of convention in a community and the fact that Smith may not be able to explain how the impartial spectator could possibly transcend it. If reaching the impartiality of the impartial spectator is closer to impossible, then this impacts the possibilities of beneficence and justice, too, and civic friendship as a result. I now turn to recent work on Adam Smith's thought on sympathy to see if they offer a way out of this problem. I begin with Ryan Patrick Hanley, who proposes self-love of a

certain kind as an alternative source for impartiality and beneficence, but I find his account to be severely limited by its focus on one kind of citizen in particular, the political philosopher, as the locus of impartiality and beneficence. I then move on to the work of Charles Griswold, whose work I commend for its emphasis on Smith's concern for ordinary life. However, his argument that impartiality is possible after all is ultimately unconvincing. I use the work of Fonna Forman-Barzilai to accentuate this fact and I follow her in her assertion that beneficence (I claim that she discusses it using the term "positive justice") is unlikely given the limits that Smith places on our ability to sympathize and on our capacity for impartiality – especially, she claims, in contexts of deep cultural diversity.

### **5.6 Hanley on Beneficence and Noble Praiseworthiness**

If the location of civic friendship in Smith's account is primarily in the event of acting in others' interests for their own sake, or in other words taking seriously others' well-being for no other reason than we think it is important in its own right, then it appears in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in Smith's thought on beneficence, in which we are moved not only to care for others but to take action of some kind on their behalf via the workings of sympathy inflected by the far-reaching gaze of the impartial spectator. Although Smith's discussions of beneficence do not appear to be the main focus of the work as a whole – they are briefer than discussions of sympathy and the impartial spectator, for example – beneficence relates directly to the concerns with which Smith

begins the work as a whole; that is, to show (against Mandeville) that the motivations of human beings in their actions cannot always only be reduced to self-interest. Ryan Patrick Hanley's essay "Adam Smith, Aristotle, and Virtue Ethics" in the essay collection *New Voices on Adam Smith* is helpful in elucidating Smith's thought on beneficence and also in raising some important questions about it, and at the same time he invokes Aristotle, whom we revisit here keeping in mind my conclusions above on what his works contribute to conceptualizations of civic friendship, since I depart from Hanley on the matter of what Aristotle can tell us about our relationship to our fellow citizens as citizens, since his focus is on Aristotle's vision of character friendship (while mine was on utility friendship). I ended the last section with skepticism about how often we might expect to see beneficent action despite Smith's claim that it is an extremely important part of human life given the limits to it he sets out by making self-interest, ambition, and propriety so important as human motivations. Hanley hopes to rehabilitate this aspect of Smith's account.

Hanley argues that what Smith calls beneficence – "activity . . . to promote the well-being of others" – is the source of the fullest kind of human flourishing, and that when engaged in beneficent acts, we are "purposefully at work in promoting the ends for which we have been made" (Hanley 2006, 24). More precisely, he argues that this is Smith's own position on the matter. Hanley argues additionally that Smith and Aristotle are alike in that they share this position. Hanley makes this case because of a similar

distinction between goodwill and action inspired by it in Aristotle's work, and between benevolence (good intentions) and beneficence (good actions) in Smith's (see note 23, Hanley 2006, 36-7). However, in my discussion of Aristotle I argued that his vision of civic friendship really has to do instead with good actions that are the result of formally agreed upon exchanges based in mutual self-interest – like those in the marketplace, as Aristotle (and Frank) argue. Hanley develops his comparison of the two thinkers by pointing out that they both share the problem of accounting for beneficent action – or acting in the interest of others for their own sake. Hanley asks: "if merit consists in performing good deeds but benevolence is too feeble to effect them, to what more forcible mechanism might we appeal to move us to our proper ends?" Hanley's offering to this debate is that Smith and Aristotle seem to offer the same answer: "to be beneficent in practice, it is not to benevolence that we must appeal, but to its inverse: namely, self-love" (Hanley 2006, 25). The wish to be beneficent, or to do good, which finds its source in apprehending our small place in the much larger community, is too weak to be relied upon. Instead, Hanley proposes self-love as a stronger and more abiding resource for beneficent action. Hanley then makes the case that the kind of self-love he means here is not vanity or even something like Tocqueville's self-interest well understood but rather that it is self-approval that is truly deserved. In other words, our desire to be praise-worthy (and not just to receive praise, deserved or not) is the kind of self-love that can push us to act in a beneficent way. In this way, the impartial spectator

is implicated in beneficence because, as we have seen, it is the impartial spectator that Smith argues is the mechanism by which we can get critical purchase on ourselves and others in order to judge well and without bias about moral questions. The operations of the impartial spectator help us to eventually come to a position in which we can tell what is praiseworthy and what is not. And then when we put ourselves to the test, this capacity to judge helps us to *do* good rather than just feel like doing it or seeing that others would approve of us if we did. This is Hanley's interpretation of Smith's account of the impartial spectator and beneficence.

Indeed, Smith writes: "It is not the love of our neighbor, it is not the love of mankind, which upon many occasions prompts us to the practice of those divine virtues. It is a stronger love, a more powerful affection . . . the love of what is honourable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters" (Smith 1982, 137). Hanley attaches great importance to this brief passage and it informs his understanding of the impartial spectator as the source of a higher kind of self-love – one in which we have a sense of the noble and virtuous, and in which our desire to live up to them is a counter-balance to our immense and natural selfishness. Hanley at first compares this desire to be honorable with Aristotle's account of the "magnanimous man." Hanley then goes on to worry that such a concern for honor and nobility of character can be a dangerous temptation. So he concludes that in both Aristotle and Smith, the best kind of person is contemplative rather than magnanimous. Someone too

concerned with honor is easily corrupted by these desires, Hanley thinks, but what he, with Smith, calls the “wise and virtuous” on the other hand are not tempted by glory in this way, and as a result are able to hold on more sustainably to their knowledge of their “real littleness” that the impartial spectator allows us to see. So the desire for praiseworthiness undergirds the possibility of beneficence in Hanley’s reading of Smith.

What do these kinds of people do? Hanley makes the case that they are political philosophers. It is at this point that I most especially take issue with Hanley’s interpretation of the impartial spectator and how it brings us to beneficence. Hanley uses the following passage from Smith for support: “Political disquisitions, if just, and reasonable, and practicable, are of all the works of speculation the most useful’ (Smith 1982, 187) – and he argues that this is what the wise and virtuous man does to “promote the well-being of others by advice and example” (Hanley 2006, 32). While this may be true, I think it does an injustice to Smith’s focus on ordinary and everyday life in a community, and there is no evidence that Smith thinks that philosophers are best able to be beneficent. It also does an injustice to Smith’s focus on action over speculation. This brief reference to the importance of political philosophy only hides the ways in which we should and should not take Smith seriously in the contemporary political scene; I think Smith’s focus is instead, against Hanley, on the qualities and tendencies that all human beings share, and how these impact the kinds of moral relationships they have with one another. Hanley confirms this when he ends this piece with an assertion that even if

Smith thinks that what philosophers do is important, he also recognizes the basic equality between philosophers and everyone else – for instance, a porter, which is the example that Smith invokes in the *Wealth of Nations*.

Hanley sees that Smith recognizes that philosopher or not, we all have something to offer one another whether speculations about ethics, or food, or clothing, or whatever else. He ends by asking “How porters might serve the philosophers is easily enough imagined, but how might the philosopher serve the porter?” (Hanley 2006, 33). For a discussion that began with questions about how beneficence happens in human life, we end with questions about what special role philosophers in particular play in the health of our communities. Hanley is useful in pulling out this question about beneficence, because I think it is really a question about civic friendship. What Smith calls “beneficent action” contemporary thinkers might call “care,” “community engagement,” or “civic friendship.” But I find the direction that his thinking takes on this question to be too elitist for my purposes – and I think for Smith’s, too. So I move on to two additional contemporary thinkers who have spent much time thinking about what the impartial spectator can do for us, not as philosophers, but in general as citizens going about our lives – and I’ll aim to use their insights to think more deeply than Hanley does about the meaning of beneficence in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* for all of us as we try to figure out how it relates to a contemporary notion of civic friendship.

## **5.7 Griswold on Beneficence in Ordinary Life**

Charles Griswold's most important contribution to such a train of thought is found in his book entitled *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*. Griswold emphasizes throughout the work that he sees Smith's moral thought as firmly grounded in ordinary life; he sees this especially in the way that Smith seeks to address moral questions in a way that is attuned to our naturally stronger affections for those to whom we are closest and in Smith's sensitivity to our moral limits as humans. This stance is evident when Griswold explains that "one of the advantages of Smith's doctrine is that it quite explicitly does *not* require us to take a completely universal (Smith would say Stoic) moral standpoint. Impartiality does not require that as agents we treat ourselves as mere parts of the moral universe on an exact moral par with each of the other such parts" (Griswold 1999, 140). Such a universal standpoint for moral judgment, or the possibility for "universal benevolence" is not one that human beings can take on; in Smith's recognition that our personal attachments will always count for a great deal in moral questions, such as who we ought to care for, Griswold especially sees Smith's prizing of ordinary life.

At the same time, Griswold counts the distinction between philosophy and ordinary life as one of the most important themes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, since Smith attempts to show on the one hand how important the figure of the philosopher can be when thinking about moral questions, and on the other to take seriously the real

limits of human life that philosophy sometimes eschews (Griswold 1999, 367). In the end, Griswold connects the “Smithian philosopher” with the impartial spectator (Griswold 369), and that is where I want to leave the discussion about the role of philosophy. I have attempted to show that some deep sense of a basic kind of equality among human beings is a requirement of Smith’s account of sympathy, and as a result I want to sidestep the question about the special value of philosophers because it obscures the ways in which Smith’s account can apply to or be taken up by anyone – for example, in the way that the impartial spectator is meant as guide for all kinds of people, philosophers or not. I follow Forman-Barzilai, my next resource, in this approach.

Griswold’s thinking through Smith’s notions of sympathy and the impartial spectator helps crystallize our sense of the advantages and disadvantages in using Smith to clarify contemporary thought on civic friendship. He writes that, for Smith, “‘sympathy’ resonates with love of humankind, goodwill, willingness to ease the suffering of others. It thus resonates with our common human lot, not with the extraordinary achievements of the philosophical *aristoi*” (Griswold 1999, 83). Although, as we have seen, it is an exercise of the mind (understood broadly to include the emotions) that allows us to get a sense of the lives of others, Griswold asserts that it is also inextricably tied to our moral lives and to our sense of moral judgment. In his view, Smith’s account of sympathy is attempting to respond to two separate but related questions about selfishness; about the degree to which it influences us as a vice or moral

failing, and about the degree to which we are imprisoned by our own experience or to which we can instead come to take seriously the experience of others (Griswold 1999, 81) in our imagination. In this way, sympathy is both a moral and epistemological phenomenon, and these are intimately and importantly related in our exercise of moral judgment.

This is itself a valuable offering of Smith's thought on moral sentiments; that they "are 'cognitive,' in the sense that judgments form part of them . . . Smith therefore speaks of emotions as judging as well as being judged" (Griswold 1999, 137). And an important part of this process of judgment is our taking seriously not only the feelings of others, but also the context of those feelings. "Smith's insistence on the priority of entering into another person's situation, rather than simply of entering into another person's feelings, is important. First, it allows a measure of objectivity" – in the sense of distance from strong emotions; and second, it allows for better judgments based on a more fulsome understanding of a given situation (Griswold 1999, 87). This objectivity and impartiality are already embedded in the practice of sympathy itself, and are further refined by the workings of Smith's impartial spectator. But how much does impartiality have to do with civic friendship after all? At times in Smith's account, the impartial spectator seems focused above all on deciding on the propriety of another's comportment, rather than on the nature of our relationship to that other person – but both are within the purview of the impartial spectator.

Griswold expresses this very well in a longer passage I want to include in its entirety because of the way it links our regard for and responsibility to others and our ability to understand things from their point of view:

“the impartial spectator exemplifies sympathetic understanding at its best, a stance of caring for the other, of caring to understand the truth of the matter and the reasons for which the people in question have acted as they have. This sympathetic care is at the core of morality and sociability; it holds us mutually responsible to each other, drawing us together in the exercise of responsiveness and perceptive judgment. It is the core of reasonable and moral community.”  
(Griswold 1999, 144)

Embedded in our sympathy with others is our judgment of the propriety of their actions *and* our judgment of what might be most appropriate for us to do, too, if there is something for us to do. In other words, we decide what we might have done in a given situation had we been the actor (in Smithian terms) and then also what we should do given our actual position as spectator. The “man within” helps us to understand and feel both positions more clearly. And this clarity, as we have seen, is deeply informed by a sense of our basic equality with others, with our equal “littleness” in the grand scheme of things. Not as though we could ever fully feel that littleness – since this would be beyond human beings’ ordinary abilities, always limited as we are by some degree of partiality for ourselves and for those closest to us. As Griswold reminds us, Smith never relinquishes – despite his calls for impartiality – his assertion that our care for others moves outward from us in degree: “Nature inclines us to first care for our individual selves, then for our family – immediate family first, then extended family, and among

the immediate family, the children first, then our parents, then our friends, acquaintances, our country. Humanity *qua* humanity is last on the list” (Griswold 1999, 208). There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this ordering, but the impartial spectator helps us to weigh it any time we encounter conflicts with it rather than simply taking this priority of ourselves and those closest to us as given.

Griswold writes of the impartial spectator not only as corrective to limited sympathy, but also as the source of our standards of moral judgment. These arise out of a process of reflection on what is given already as rules or habits in our community (mirroring the process of sympathy itself). The impartial spectator’s process of judgment is thus not the result of “writing on a blank slate . . . or to stipulating moral value out of the blue. The impartial spectator may work up several different standards of evaluation and then judge that one or the other is appropriate in the context. His or her determination and use of these standards is definitive; there is in principle no higher court of appeal above the impartial spectator” (Griswold 1999, 146). As the source of our most developed and reasoned moral judgments, the impartial spectator is thus of great importance in Smith’s account. The idea that we ourselves are the highest standard for moral decision-making is perhaps not so shocking to us today, in a time when religion and other sources of a sense of the “good life” are at once so ubiquitous, so diverse, and so often private. But given Smith’s strong account of sympathy’s natural limits it bears asking again how difficult it might be for us to engage in the kind of reflection that

defines the impartial spectator. If it is rare to be able to reach that kind of judgment, will that care for others and for understanding the truth of what has happened in a given situation that Griswold connects above with the impartial spectator also be very difficult to cultivate? If so, then civic friendship as friendship extended beyond our most intimate circles, too, may be seriously limited by our natural inclination to care only for those closest to us on the one hand, and also by our natural inclination to model our judgments on those around us given the strong allure of convention and self-regulation via surveillance that Smith describes as another consequence of sympathy (for better and worse, since it leads to general agreement on moral standards but can also lead to stagnancy or quiescence on moral questions). Griswold argues that Smith's account of beneficence comes into play at this point in our reading of Smith.

Unlike Hanley, Griswold uses beneficence and benevolence interchangeably: "as the virtue of what he terms the 'social passions' and other-regarding conduct, 'benevolence' (or 'beneficence' – Smith goes back and forth between the terms) may in a broad sense stand for social cooperation" (Griswold 1999, 207). But, like Hanley, he gives it much importance in Smith's thought since, "because Smith largely leaves distributive justice to private benevolence, the proper sense of compassion and, thus, the education of imagination and 'sympathy' are crucial. The emphasis on commutative justice makes benevolence more, not less, important" (Griswold 1999, 229). Here Griswold notes that Smith sees civility and justice in relationships of exchange in the

marketplace – for example between the town butcher, brewer, and baker. And commutative justice structures the rules of such exchanges. In a passage about the intersections between *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*, Griswold writes that “elementary processes of exchange require that we look at the situation from each other’s point of view, grasp the other’s situation and perspective, and calibrate our own demands accordingly. This is not merely analogous to the process of sympathy described in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; it is built upon it” (Griswold 1999, 297-8). This analysis recalls Jill Frank’s thought about sources of civic friendship in Aristotle’s thought almost exactly; Griswold does not invoke friendship with this example, but he does conclude that market exchange is “civilizing” and “humanizing” despite its appealing to individuals’ self-interest (Griswold 1999, 297), and that it is the ground of Smithian sympathy itself. Frank, on the other hand, thought this sort of activity and its results epitomized civic friendship.

For Griswold following Smith, though, if we want anything more than civilized market exchange we must turn to beneficence, which does not rely on self-interest. Griswold writes that Smith’s “emphasis on goodwill, friendship, love, harmony, sociality, conversation, ordinary human sympathy (in a nontechnical sense), and all of the ‘agreeable passions,’ testifies to his desire to see benevolence written into our daily lives” (Griswold 1999, 207-8); in this respect, his value as a resource for civic friendship is greater than Aristotle’s in the sense that it offers a more robust vision of caring

relationships between citizens. The question remains how possible it is to bring this vision into civic life in action. Griswold thinks that Smith concludes that we most often and best act beneficently or benevolently within those circles of fellows that are closest to us – that is, among family and friends (Griswold 1999, 229) and that “benevolence allows for warranted partiality toward members of our own circle” (Griswold 1999, 208). But Griswold nevertheless thinks that the impartial spectator can help us move beyond these narrow circles to bring beneficence out into the world. Although I endorse his focus on ordinary life, I don’t follow him in his optimism about the impartial spectator because I don’t find that his account attends shrewdly enough to the limits in Smith’s own account.

### ***5.8 Forman-Barzilai on Negative Justice Amidst Cultural Diversity***

In the end, Griswold thinks that Smith offers us a “skillfully drawn phenomenology of ethical experience” in which he proves that the impartial spectator is the key to our capacity for moral criticism in our ordinary lives (Griswold 1999, 357). In many ways, Fonna Forman-Barzilai’s *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* is a response to Griswold’s book. At the core of her thought is her observation that Smith recognizes many different kinds of gaps that sympathy must bridge – not only physical or affective but also cultural. She writes of her own standpoint, but describing her general concerns, that all these differences make it so

that “I may be remote from someone sitting next to me, or close to someone across the globe” (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 5). This insight follows from her understanding of Smithian sympathy; that it is more than anything a social practice through which we approve or disapprove of the behavior of those around us – and as this process is repeated over and over, social and moral standards begin to develop. For her, Smith’s emphasis on propriety looms large.

She likens this process to Michel Foucault’s account of the Panopticon in his *Discipline and Punish* (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 13), in which the sense of being watched changes the way we act. The most important similarity between the Panopticon and Smithian sympathy is the recognition that each gives to the immense pressure to conform to the norms of those around us; and Smithian sympathy has the added benefit of being able to describe the source of these norms themselves. She argues that Smith’s account of sympathy is “an important and highly original anthropological description of how moral cultures are cultivated and perpetuated over time” but that it also “helps us to appreciate the profound difficulties of cultural self-reflection (knowing ourselves) and of cross-cultural understanding and judgment (knowing others – essentially, the difficulties of transcending cultural bias” (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 21). We can sympathize with those who have internalized the same cultural norms (including moral ones) that we have; but we may not be able to do so with individuals whose cultural norms differ from our own. This is one half of Forman-Barzilai’s primary argument specifically in

response to questions about using Smith as a resource in discussions about cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism is a wide-ranging concept in political theory that in general refers to the idea and phenomenon of sharing world citizenship with all human beings, and can focus specifically on numerous consequences of seeing the world in this way. For example, works on cosmopolitanism might discuss the best way to structure political institutions or markets given the realities of globalization, or they might discuss what ethos or moral theory can best respond to the realities of cosmopolitanism. Forman-Barzilai's work focuses on the latter and asks specifically: can Smith help us to reach a convincing account of cosmopolitan moral theory? Her ultimate answer is positive, but along the way she emphasizes that Smithian sympathy is extremely limited when it comes to bridging cultural difference and that it may thus not be a helpful resource in such an account. Since cosmopolitanism and civic friendship might seem in many ways at odds as concepts, since one is global and the other local, it might seem strange to spend so much time with Forman-Barzilai's work. However, given the porous borders and extreme diversity that characterize contemporary democracies (and that give rise to cosmopolitan political thought), Forman-Barzilai's assessment is extremely pertinent to my own in this project. How different do we have to be, even as citizens of the same national community, before cultural difference, as described by Forman-Barzilai, begins to prevent our sympathizing with one another? And where does she

find resources for a workable moral ethos in Smith's work if not in his account of sympathy?

Forman-Barzilai describes *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as an "empirical description of the very processes through which people learn actively to balance their social and unsocial passions" (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 49). In this way, it echoes Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and its vision of the influence of social equality on our self-interest; as we perceive ourselves to be equal in some fundamental sense with others, we begin to be able to understand the ways in which their interests are combined with ours, and we in turn limit our narrow self-interest in favor of one that includes the interests of others. This doesn't necessarily bring us to anything like friendship, though, and especially not if conditions in our communities are so diverse that we are cut off from familiarity or intimacy with many various sub-communities within them. Forman-Barzilai writes that "if the impartial spectator merely absorbs the norms of social propriety; if within the logic of Smith's account of ordinary morality conscience does nothing more than recapitulate and protect conventional wisdom, then Smith's idea of conscience will look far more like a Humean habit . . . than a mature, independent foundation for moral judgment" (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 89). If she is right about the impartial spectator, then what difference does it make for civic friendship? It means that we may be limited in our ability to take the considerations of some in our communities into account, especially those who are marginalized and who we may never have much

of any contact with in the course of our everyday lives – in that way, they are excluded from the social and moral norms we grow into having. If, against Griswold’s account, convention persists despite the operations of the impartial spectator, then we see as a result “how deeply entrenched our perspectives really are, how difficult it is to cultivate a critical distance from ourselves, and to approach others without historical bias. It is for this reason . . . and not for his alleged cosmopolitanism, that Smith speaks most perceptively to moral and political theory today” (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 161) – and, I think, to conversations about civic friendship, too. Conventional moral standards have been and continue to be racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, and on and on.

Whereas Griswold emphasizes the critical distance that the impartial spectator can create for us in order to access others’ experiences meaningfully and fairly as a way to avoid the “perspectivist trap of identity politics” (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 170-1), Forman-Barzilai takes issues with this position of his and argues that Smith is relevant to conversations about these problems not because the impartial spectator is a robust solution but because, on the contrary, that concept calls us to see the large obstacles to more inclusive moral norms more clearly. At the same time, however, she also sees in Smith a positive offering after all. In cases of cultural difference, when the impartial spectator might not be able to bridge large differences in norms, Forman-Barzilai points to his account of a negative justice as something that might do just that. As we saw above in my reading of Smith, this sense of justice is immediate and calls us only to

avoid harming others. It is akin to Arendt's thought on what Socrates teaches us about moral judgment (first and foremost that we ought to avoid harming others)<sup>2</sup> and to Judith Shklar's thoughts on justice as avoiding cruelty. Fonna Forman-Barzilai argues that in articulating his conception of a negative justice, Smith "was deliberately seeking to navigate a course between the inherent particularity of moral culture and the contentious certitude of positive conceptions of the good" (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 252). She thinks that this conception of justice is one that Smith puts forward as something approaching a universal standard – and as a result, something that is in operation always and does not face the same kind of obstacle in difference (of identity or culture, for example) that sympathy and the impartial spectator face. This justice does not demand very much from us – we are not required to help or to care for our fellows, only to avoid harming them. In all other ways, in this picture of citizen relationships, our guides are our self-interest and the parochial norms to which our Smithian moral sentiments have habituated or trained us. Forman-Barzilai simply wants to point out that justice is something, after all, even if it is not particularly demanding or robust in that it does not bring us beyond what laws ordinarily require of us.

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<sup>2</sup> See "Thinking and Moral Considerations" in *Responsibility and Judgment*. I find her account of judgment and its relation to thinking and to her notion of the "two-in-one" in *The Life of the Mind* and in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* to be a similar and useful complement to Smith's thought on sympathy and impartiality. Their concepts mirror each other's.

In an essay entitled “Smith on ‘connexion’, culture and judgment” in *New Voices on Adam Smith*, Forman-Barzilai elaborates specifically on the distinction between positive and negative understandings of justice. In my close reading of Smith, his parallel analysis of beneficence and justice shows just how ambivalent he was about what justice can offer to our relationships with others. Charity, generosity, care – the signs of robust friendship – are not part of justice. However, Forman-Barzilai sees these as central to a strand of contemporary political thought calling for greater concern for our fellows and for a more robust and “positive” sense of justice, in many ways similar to the thinkers with which I began. The kinds of arguments she has in mind are those that assert that, for example “sitting idle in the midst of suffering when one has resources and capacity to intervene can be as hurtful, *as unjust*, as a willful, affirmative act of harm. One thinks of the myriad arguments for social welfare, for Good Samaritan laws, for humanitarian intervention, the Kitty Genovese case, German citizens who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, and so on” (Forman-Barzilai 2006, 103). Forman-Barzilai claims that Smith does not have much to tell us about this kind of justice; such behaviors and policies are not required by Smith’s negative justice, in his account, but fall under the rubric of beneficence or benevolence – and he offers no clear answers about how to increase these, except by sympathy and impartiality. However, as we have seen, these are extremely limited in his account. I end my consideration of scholarship on Smithian resources for civic friendship with Forman-Barzilai’s work because I think it

gives the most accurate account of what we can take from it. Which, as it turns out, is not much – as I found in my examination of the work of Aristotle and Tocqueville as well. Negative justice as Forman-Barzilai paints it does not provide the grounds on which to build Bellah's, Putnam's, or Allen's kind of vision of civic friendship. However, there are many insights in Smith's work and in Hanley's, Griswold's and Forman-Barzilai's reading of it to sift back through again; I conclude this chapter with a summary consideration of how Smith's thought on sympathy and impartiality helps us in a contemporary envisioning of civic friendship.

### **5.9 Moving Beyond the Limits of Smithian Sympathy**

Smith's work on sympathy is important to a discussion of civic friendship after all, not least of all because of what the serious limits in his account of human sympathy reveal about our ideas of civic friendship. He shows that beneficence – acting on behalf of others' well-being without taking our own interest into account as the ultimate end – is possible in human relationships, even with those who are not our intimate friends. I locate Smith's strongest articulation of civic friendship here, and find it to be more robust than both Aristotle's civic utility friendship and Tocqueville's self-interest well understood. In this way, he disproves Mandeville's claims about human selfishness in their strongest interpretation, as he sets out to do at the beginning of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith shows that beneficence happens when our natural capacity for sympathy, widened by our exercising impartiality as best we can, helps us to grasp the

experience of another person as comprehensively as we can (i.e. by imagining ourselves not only in another's situation, but keeping in mind the entire context of their lives that precedes it – entering into these in our imagination as best we can). From this perspective we decide on how we would feel and act were we in their position – and then we can decide what we ought to do from our own position. And in this way, beneficence happens in the world.

However, it turns out that Smith's account of the difficulties that surround the concept of the impartial spectator actually mean that it may be rare that we make the effort to take on its epistemic position, and even when we do it turns out that impartiality is extremely difficult to achieve given our social convention and cultural bias. As a result, beneficence may be limited in frequency and in reach (since it is easiest within our small circle of intimates). The problem of getting to civic friendship across deep diversity – as we saw with Putnam's questions about bridging rather than bonding social capital – is thus not solved by Smithian sympathy and impartiality, at least not by Smith himself. But he does point to the importance of a certain sense of ourselves that is a prerequisite for beneficence and a result of the attempt to be impartial, which is a sense of our equality with others both in dignity and in vulnerability and also a sense of the ways in which we are interdependent. However, Smith shows that our deep self-concern often prevents us from having these. But all is not lost; these weaknesses point to important insights that we can nevertheless glean from Smith's *Theory of Moral*

*Sentiments*. I now summarize the weaknesses or limitations as well as the strengths of Smith's account of civic friendship as I have interpreted it so far.

Forman-Barzilai has helped to emphasize the narrow range of Smithian sympathy when it comes to cultural differences. And Smith himself emphasizes the obstacle of physical distance in our sympathizing. Despite Smith's, and Griswold's, hopes about the power of the impartial spectator to counter these negative tendencies, I follow Forman-Barzilai in her argument that, ultimately, impartiality is extremely hard to reach and to maintain in our relationships with fellow citizens in general. We have also seen that Smithian sympathy is inherently conservative in the way that it is limited by social convention. This holds true even when we take the influence of the impartial spectator into consideration, given that the impartial spectator really has no other standards with which to judge except for our own – or, at least, Smith makes it difficult to see how we can get enough critical distance from our conventions to be able to decide that they are no longer appropriate and to change them. Without such distance, our judgments and resulting behavior are apt to reinforce established moral norms rather than criticize them – including those that have to do with who we help, in what ways, and why. In this way, the same shared standards that can lead to sense of community, in Smith's account, can lead to oppressive and exclusive moral conventions at worst, or stagnant and unchallenged moral conventions at best.

While Forman-Barzilai sets her discussion of cultural difference in a larger conversation about cosmopolitanism, I assert that differences in race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on, are concrete examples of significant diversity in settings of contemporary democratic communities. Rather than showing how to improve the situation, Smith's strong account of the limits of sympathy helps us to see why it is that marginalized groups continue to struggle to organize for equal rights. As we saw in Tocqueville's (brief) account of compassion, Smithian sympathy similarly and crucially depends on who we perceive as our equals – and it is also the mechanism by which this perception can expand. Since beneficence – or positive justice as Forman-Barzilai casts it – depends so much on the workings of the impartial spectator, but our ability to be impartial is limited by all the same things that limit our sympathy (self-interest, concern for appearances and propriety, stoicism, ambition), and also by the strength of whatever conventions reign in our community, it's unclear how reliable it is as a source for the kinds of actions I counted as civic friendship in the first chapter of this project. At the same time, some of these failings in Smith's thought also point to helpful offerings on the way to a more adequate account of civic friendship. I discuss these next.

The way in which Smith links a sense of interdependence and a willingness to be concerned for and act on behalf of others to impartiality – or in other words, our ability to move beyond self-interest in our moral judgments about what we and others ought to do in situations of moral decision-making – is helpful. It is helpful because it gives an

account of *why* we would consider undertaking actions such as Allen's example of crossing the street early (or, even better, not crossing at all and smiling in greeting), all the way to Bellah et. al.'s example of organizing on behalf of displaced tenants or to Forman-Barzilai's examples of positive justice, including supporting social welfare policies. Smith's account also calls us to reflect on the ways in which emotions and reason are intimately related to one another, and also to the activity of moral judgment, in a way that is much more developed than Tocqueville's ambiguous and stilted claims about compassion. And taken together, these insights help us to see the direction in which the conversation about contemporary civic friendship will need to move if we wish to see if and how we can get out of the limits placed upon it by Smith's (and Aristotle's and Tocqueville's) very strong emphasis on the power of self-interest and parochial concerns. In particular, our ability to imagine ourselves into the experience of others must be continuously expanded, so that our judgments about their emotions and actions are not biased or condescending.

Putnam hints at this when he discusses the kinds of associations that bridge across various differences in identity (against those that bond folks who are already very similar). In his account, though, it is simply assumed that any kind of association with anyone different from us will have beneficial effects as described above; this is an unsatisfyingly vague proposal. But several thinkers find in Smith a latent, and more specific, suggestion for deliberate modes of education as a way of widening the sphere

of those with whom we feel (within limits) and thus care for. Fonna Forman-Barzilai writes:

“if we deliberately add multicultural sensitivity to the “curriculum” of beliefs and conventions already in circulation, which children inevitably internalize through the education of social experience, perhaps it might engender humility and a stance of genuine openness toward others. Surely this was not Adam Smith’s agenda – not at all. But I find it plausible and intuitively appealing that the moral life he so richly described might become more reflexive, ultimately more conscious of itself, if supplemented by exogenous encounters through ideas, narratives, and images *during childhood*, as the young and malleable conscience is developing.” (Forman-Barzilai 2011, 191)

Forman-Barzilai’s suggestion is to add some component to early education that recognizes and teaches something about the diversity that exists within the communities in which we live. Without any more specific proposals, I conclude that this broad suggestion seems right. Griswold also briefly, and more abstractly, discusses the need that arises in Smith’s account for moral education. For his part, he invokes Smith’s interest in the transformative power of literature, and of tragedies in particular. Griswold argues that we are habituated into the perspective of the impartial spectator and that our imagination is extended by experience and literature (Griswold 1999, 214). The proposal of education as a means of honing our imaginative and sympathetic sentiments and thereby making our moral judgment ever more inclusive gets beyond the ambiguity of the suggestion simply for more association (as in Putnam) or simply for more friendly actions (as in Allen). Still, education, and especially multicultural education, is controversial in the sense that it requires broad support across the

community itself; all decision-makers must agree on what differences we want to bridge and what marginalized communities we want to begin to include.

A final important development in Smith's thought is the notion of negative justice that Forman-Barzilai in particular emphasizes. If sympathy and impartiality, and thus beneficence, are extremely limited by our conventional biases, then at least we have a natural and more forceful predisposition not to cause suffering in others. Forman-Barzilai claims this sense of justice as universal and thus not subject to the same limits as sympathy and impartiality. It falls short of giving us the kind of robust emotions and actions of civic friendship as laid out in my first chapter, but it isn't nothing. Although essential for any functional community, as a source of civility but nothing more, it doesn't move us beyond the status quo of things as they are. Theorists of civic friendship want more than negative justice, which is already written into the legal system in some sense. But what if we considered justice and civic friendship as intimately intertwined? Forman-Barzilai's description of positive justice does this work, as we saw above.

Although she does not find that Smith offers a sufficient account of it, I conclude by suggesting that if we could figure out how to educate and expand our capacity for sympathy, we would become increasingly perceptive of inequality and injustice in our communities and thus we might be able to expand our sense of what "negative justice" demands of us. Michael Frazer makes this suggestion as well in his work on Smithian sympathy. In *The Enlightenment of Sympathy*, he writes that "our proper and impartial

sympathetic approval of the warranted resentment of those victimized by an unjust society leads us to demand social reform” (Frazer 2010, 105). Forman-Barzilai, against Frazer, does not think that the resources for such optimism are present in Smith’s thought in particular, and I think she is right about this. But I want to argue that this thought of Frazer’s – that sympathy, justice, and social reform are all connected – does provide us with a better sense of what civic friendship needs in order to work in diverse contemporary democracies. In the end, Smith offers us much in thinking about contemporary civic friendship: His work offers a clear account of the ways in which selfishness, concern for praise and propriety, physical and cultural distance, and ambition all limit our natural capacity for sympathy; and it tells us that emotions matter in moral judgment, that we are often blinded by the differences between us, that we ought to strive for and encourage what he calls impartiality, that “negative” justice is a bare minimum for friendship, and that our understanding of justice in general should be linked with our thinking about civic friendship. In my conclusion to this project, I revisit these offerings in my attempt to crystallize what Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Smith offer together to contemporary discussions of civic friendship, as well as what they fail to offer.

## 6. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have clarified the concept of civic friendship as it is invoked in more contemporary sources and conversations by returning to several canonical thinkers in the history of political thought who are often directly or indirectly linked to this kind of work. Scholars and citizens alike worry about the loss of a sense of community in contemporary democracies, and this anxiety presses them to discuss a whole range of phenomena under various umbrella terms, including “community” itself. For reasons I specified in my introduction to this project, I chose to focus on “civic friendship” as such an overarching concept. To conclude this project, I now recapitulate my findings in each chapter in an effort to emphasize more forcefully the most important insights I have located in my contemporary and my historical sources; and I then dwell on these insights more generally in order to draw out the ways in which they fall short in speaking to some of the most pressing problems and most striking conditions in contemporary democracies, and I end with some proposals for alternative sources to consult in the ongoing conversation about how to envision and cultivate civic friendship today. I began in chapter 1 by drawing some outlines for the concept of civic friendship as I see it developing in contemporary scholarship, specifically scholarship that aims to be widely read beyond academia. The three works that I focused on, by Bellah et. al., Putnam, and Allen, are prescriptive in that they aim to offer suggestions for us to follow in order to make our communities better in some way. They differ in

what they say about what our communities need, but echo one another in important ways, too – and in both cases they set the primary concerns and questions of the dissertation as a whole.

## **6.1 Revisiting Bellah, Putnam, and Allen**

On the subject of civic friendship as I see it in each of their works, these authors all worry about the power of self-interest and parochial concerns in social and political life, and urge us to take the interests our fellow citizens into account more often. This is where I locate a concern with civic friendship in their accounts, in its most rudimentary form, and I trace the ways each individual work develops this kernel of civic friendship in a slightly different account. Bellah et. al. ask: “As long as one has the power to get what one wants, why should one care about others who do not?” (Bellah et al. 2008, 191). They argue that we need to care about others and that we need to understand why. And these authors wonder about how to move beyond the politics of interest and into a politics of community. Putnam asks about how we can get more social capital that bridges across differences between us given how easy it is to fall into association with those who are already like us. Bridging social capital makes for a more efficient, fairer, coherent, and sustainable community in the midst of the great diversity that persists in the United States. And Allen asks how we can begin to make sure that our fellow citizens feel that any sacrifices they are forced into by the workings of democracy are recognized and taken into account so that they can be redressed in some way.

But these works differ most when it comes to both their suggestions of acts that could bring us more civic friendship, and also in their accounts of the motivations of such acts. Bellah et. al. hold up community organizing growing out of a sense of care and equal dignity as the exemplar of civic friendship. Putnam's argument is that all different kinds of activities – so long as they are undertaken together with others – help to contribute to social capital; and these are most often motivated by our interest in getting things done (planning a new school, for example), or simply by our interests themselves (like bowling, say). In the course of *Bowling Alone* he invokes bowling leagues and other social clubs, parent-teacher associations and other forms of small-scale community organizations, volunteer organizations and activities, political parties, and more. Allen's examples, too, are extremely diverse in their scope. They range from individual decision-making and personal gestures to the actions and agendas of institutions. Her examples include our choosing to cross the street early when faced with meeting a stranger along an isolated sidewalk, so that this stranger will not think we are motivated by fear even if we are; and she also uses the University of Chicago as an example in her argument that it ought to take residents of its surrounding community into account when planning programs, so that they will feel welcome to enjoy some offerings and join in some of the workings of the university given the ways in which the university affects and relies on the community around it. In Allen's account such actions (both private and institutional) seem to grow both out of a sense of what is fair for our

fellow citizens and also out of what Allen calls “equitable self-interest.” The former I take to be other-directed, while the latter is rooted in Allen’s recognition of the importance of self-interest as a human motivator; and she then suggests a way to broaden our understanding of our self-interest so that it includes the interests of others to some degree. I found the work of these contemporary thinkers both extremely convincing in their accounts of the importance of more sacrifice and care for our fellows but also ultimately confusing on the questions of how and why members of communities such as the United States would move towards such things.

In *Habits of the Heart*, for example, there is explicit criticism of the notion that being involved in our local community is an effective means of changing national culture or institutions so that they are more inclusive or equal. This is important because the kind of civic friendship all of these works call for is supposed to have wide-ranging effects even if it only takes place in a local setting. So one of the framing questions that arose out of the work of my first chapter was about the role of both individuals’ and institutions’ attitudes and actions in cultivating civic friendship in contemporary democracies. As a result, the question of civic friendship takes place in smaller and larger scales. Other framing concerns that came out of my examination of these sources included questioning the role of emotions and emotional responses, like compassion or care, in a contemporary model of civic friendship; how self-interest either helps to

motivate or hinder civic friendship; and how citizens come to recognize the importance of friendly citizen relations themselves so that they can begin to enact them.

All these guiding questions serve to answer the overarching concern of my overall project, that of how to get to a workable picture of civic friendship in democratic communities characterized as they are today by their vast size and diversity; and I found these questions resurfacing in the chapters that followed my first. This initial chapter set the scene firmly in contemporary and widespread concerns and I then turned to historical sources to measure both what we have inherited from them and what we should take away from them in a quest to understand the meaning and importance of civic friendship today. And each of the historical chapters that follow offers both positive and critical insights in their own models of civic friendship as I see them. I now revisit the arguments of my chapters on historical sources in the ongoing conversation in political thought about civic friendship, before moving on to some more general reflections about what I think matters most in that conversation as it takes place in the present.

## **6.2 Revisiting Aristotle**

In chapter 2 I focused on Aristotle's taxonomy of friendship, described in detail in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and I found that civic friendship is identified with utility friendship in particular in his thought. As a result, Aristotle's vision of civic friendship is limited by utility friendship's reliance on self-interest and on formal agreements about

what such a friendship entails. My close reading of Aristotle's work showed that his picture of civic friendship only promises the prevention of injustice and the promotion of fair transactions via a specifically legal, rather than moral, utility friendship.

However, Aristotle's emphases on the fact that friendship holds cities together and that friendship requires some measure of diversity, and even conflict, are important positive insights that show his continued relevance to contemporary conversations about civic friendship. Aristotle also draws attention to the important role that equality plays in friendship and in politics, and argues that political philosophy is all about figuring out who is equal with whom in what way. I believe that this is one of the crucial insights about contemporary civic friendship that is shared by all the thinkers I examine in this project in some way. Pointing to equality as a condition of civic friendship is extremely significant given the profound economic and social inequality that exists in places such as the United States.

In the end, though, I don't think Aristotle gives us grounds on which to build a robust civic friendship that ends in positive action on behalf of the equal dignity, or to redress the unequal sacrifice, of our fellow citizens in a community such as the United States. And furthermore, in his aforementioned distinction between moral and legal utility friendship, Aristotle gives us grounds to reject any argument that claims that things like solidarity or care grow out of utility friendship. This is an extremely clarifying insight that I want to emphasize. The equality that Aristotle reserves for civic

friendship develops out of calculations of interest – like those that take place in the marketplace, which is the most salient example he uses for civic friendship.

I suppose an argument could be made that an individual could begin to see how, for example, crossing the street early and thus not insulting a fellow citizen, could be in their own self-interest in the long run if they want to avoid creating a socially marginalized group in their community who might in some way eventually challenge them. But I have argued that this is not the kind of interest in others that the contemporary commentators mean to encourage. They want us to take an interest in how others are faring in our political community for their own sake because we consider that they deserve just as much as we do to be doing well – not as our only motivation in social and political life, but by their lights it must be at least part of our motivation in civic friendship. Aristotle's example of sharing a journey on a ship, with fellow travellers standing in for fellow citizens, gets a bit closer to this than his example of marketplace relationships, but I argued that it still leaves us wondering how we begin to recognize our interdependence so that we can act accordingly. Communities like the United States are so vast and diverse, and it's clear that the sense of a shared journey is rare among members of such communities. The simple fact of being part of the same community is clearly not a trustworthy source of this feeling of interdependence, otherwise Bellah, Putnam, and Allen would not be so worried.

### **6.3 Revisiting Tocqueville**

In my chapter on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, I endeavored to see what that classic text about the varieties of democratic civic life could provide for a contemporary model of civic friendship. I located Tocqueville's own picture of civic friendship in his account of the interactions between self-interest and growing social equality, which lead to more association of various kinds, to the novel development of self-interest well understood, and to hints of compassion. I showed that the relationships between these concepts remain slightly ambiguous in Tocqueville's work. In the simplest versions, association refers to activity in concert with our fellows. And self-interest well understood refers to narrow self-interest that has been transformed by the realization that in order to get what we want we may need to moderate our self-interest or extend its timeline given the ways in which our self-interest is bound up with that of others. In this way, it leads to a sense of interdependence, but one limited in some way by its being grounded in self-interest. And compassion is most often cast by Tocqueville as a universally human emotional response to the suffering of others that may or may not result in action on their behalf. Each of these depends on the recognition of our social equality with others. He finds all three at work in the democracy in America because its most salient aspect is its increasing social equality (severely limited, by our current standards, of course). However, self-interest well understood is cast as a novel development, while compassion is often characterized as a universal human tendency.

In my chapter on Tocqueville, I surveyed secondary literature and found a variety of ways in which each of this pair of concepts is interpreted, some more and some less optimistic about the work they each might do in bringing citizens together and building community in democracy.

The problems that Tocqueville predicted would potentially plague democracies in particular – democratic despotism and individualism – and to which he offers association and self-interest well understood as antidotes, still ring true for us, and they articulate quite clearly the worries that we encountered in the first chapter – apathy, isolation, quiescence, inequality, and so on. So Tocqueville still helps us to think through the problems that lead us to wonder about how to get to more civic friendship. And in thinking about the twin problems of democratic despotism and individualism, which speak respectively to deficiencies in our public and our private ties with others, I claim that Tocqueville helps us to see that thought on civic friendship can be about two different spheres of human life, one more political and one more personal. This is a helpful distinction in that it helps press discussions of civic friendship to be clearer. Thinkers ought to be more specific about what precisely they think counts as civic friendship. For example, Villa is strongly in favor of jettisoning anything Tocqueville has to tell us about morals and manners, and he focuses on Tocqueville's thought specifically on the importance of alternative channels of political action. Whereas Putnam, who follows Tocqueville more in spirit than by the letter, lumps all kinds of

things together in making his case for how to get more social capital, some more personal, some more social, and some more political.

Making this distinction between the political and moral (or personal) consequences of Tocqueville's thought is extremely important to keep in mind as we try to parse what kind of civic friendship we need today. Not because these realms are always distinct but because teasing them apart calls us to be specific about how we think they relate to one another. Political engagement and moral development are intimately intertwined in human life since each affects the other. Our moral positions affect how and why we engage politically; and political action can in turn develop our moral positions. So in the end, I set myself against Villa in my sense that Tocqueville points to the political importance of both kinds of community-building – one that is explicitly political and another that isn't – although I agree with Villa that the specifics of Tocqueville's thought on this matter remain unclear. So it is up to us, in our conversations about civic friendship today, to be clearer about this. I develop this point further below.

Tocqueville also helps us to see the important connections between equality and civic friendship. In particular, to be civic friends we must recognize others as our equals in a whole host of ways – equal in our dignity and in having a place in our community, for example, and in our vulnerability to various kinds of harm. This is another offering of his thought that I hold must be central to conversations about civic friendship in

contemporary democracy. Perhaps my observation about the significance of equality to civic friendship seems obvious. However, although it may seem trite to make note of the importance of equality to friendship, since many would likely agree, I think that the lack of perceived equality with our fellows is one of the most intransigent obstacles to contemporary civic friendship. And I think it can be seen any time interdependence, or in other words, the ways our lives are tied together, among citizens is called into question. Allen speaks to this in her discussion of the ways in which the workings of democracy demand that some are in some sense always losing out or sacrificing for others. To recognize and to try to redress these sacrifices, whatever their form, is what Allen proposes as friendship. And it requires a robust sense that our lives are intertwined with those of our fellows, in good and bad. We can begin to think about what this means for what we owe to our fellow citizens only if we have this recognition in mind. Proportional equality in Aristotle's picture of civic friendship helped to explain how we can get what we want from others; but in Tocqueville's linking of equality and civic friendship, and especially given his account of Mme. De Sevigne's lack of compassion (because of a lack of perceived equality), we get a more profound sense of the importance of equality not only in fair exchanges, but in understanding the experience of others in a more wide-ranging way. Tocqueville's account of equality and its links with self-interest well understood and compassion is thus more profound than Aristotle's for our purposes.

Finally, the hints of a theory of compassion in Tocqueville's work, as tenuous as they are, are also important to keep in mind in any ongoing conversation about civic friendship. At times in Tocqueville's account, compassion seems linked with the best and most generous outcomes of self-interest well understood; and at other times with grand and universal emotions that are understood as alternatives to self-interest well understood. In the end I make no definitive claims about what exactly Tocquevillean compassion is, but I do claim that thinking about it calls us to ask important questions about civic friendship moving forward. Compassion is linked by Tocqueville to considering others' experiences (especially negative ones). And I think this is an essential ingredient of civic friendship in contemporary democracies like the United States, in which economic inequality is so great and in which the results of such inequalities can have such dramatic consequences for people's abilities to flourish or not – just as Bellah and Allen worry about, too. And Tocqueville also helps us to see that association in and of itself is too ambiguous in its results to be a reliable source of civic friendship; we can recall that it can be “bridging” or “bonding” in Putnam's terms. Surely the former is more connected with the cultivation of compassion than the latter – but the problem at the center of Putnam's work, for example, is how to get more bridging association and thus more of a sense of community across diverse populations. And we are left with no firm answer to such questions, but we should take these important conceptual offerings from Tocqueville and work to clarify them.

## 6.4 Revisiting Smith

In my chapter on Smith I focused on his account of sympathy, impartiality, beneficence, and justice in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and how these relate to ideas of civic friendship. Although Smith prizes beneficence – doing good for others for their own sake – as the most excellent end of human conduct, he is ultimately extremely doubtful about its power in human life given the strength of ambition, convention, selfishness, propriety, and cultural and physical distance between us and others, all of which work against beneficence in our daily lives. So although beneficence at first seems closest to the kinds of phenomena described in the first chapter as civic friendship – in which we care about others for their own sake and seek to figure out what we ought to do about, for example, injustice or inequality even when they do not outright affect us but those around us, whether we’re acquainted with them or not – Smith suggests that it is extremely difficult to cultivate. Smith’s description of beneficence grows out of his larger account of sympathy as a moral and social phenomenon in which we project ourselves into the situation of another in order to come to some understanding of their experience. I say “project” and not “identify” because Smith recognizes that there are limits to our ability to sympathize (those listed above) – some of which can be corrected and some which, as it turns out, probably cannot without great effort. In Smithian sympathy, we try to come to some understanding of another’s experience by taking in as much as we can of their particular situation, including as much about their past and

identity as we can imagine. Of course, we must fail to get it exactly right. Nevertheless, such a demanding attempt is important, to Smith, because we will be better placed to make judgments about others as a result – both about the propriety of their actions and also about what we ought to do as observers.

Smith's idea of the impartial spectator helps us in this process, and it is also key to the operations of beneficence. Taking on the perspective of the impartial spectator means being able to distance ourselves from our own biases in order to make judgments about the propriety of our own actions and emotions. It is an entirely imaginative exercise in which we endeavor to see ourselves as others would see us. Through it, we recognize our interdependence and our equality with our fellows, our "real littleness" in the grand scheme of things, and we ought to be moved to live out these realizations. This impartiality is also meant to help us in our sympathizing in its ability to move us beyond our selfish and parochial concerns. In this way, it is essential to accurate sympathetic imagination and judgment and to the practice of beneficence. However, in my chapter on Smith I followed the work of Fonna Forman-Barzilai in her argument that Smith saddles even the impartial spectator with obstacles that are too strong to overcome for the most part – specifically our cultural conventions and our concern for ourselves and for those closest to us, either in identity or physical proximity. As a result, Forman-Barzilai proposes that the best guide we can find for our social and political lives in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is instead a negative justice that calls us only to

avoid harming others (rather than actively doing good for them). Forman-Barzilai proposes negative justice as a more universal moral standard that is in some sense prior to culture and in that sense is not as limited as sympathy. It is the bare minimum requirement for community to persist. However useful this concept might seem, despite being a bare minimum, I think it rests on a too narrow definition of harm, one that is immediately understood by individuals in all times and places.

Even if such a universal sense of justice exists, it must be fairly paltry given all the ways in which humans have harmed and do continue to do outright harm to one another – never mind the more conceptual and complex kinds of harm that are suggested in Allen’s account of the burden of sacrifice and how it is distributed in contemporary democracy. A clear example she invokes is the natural unemployment rate, but it seems we could extrapolate to include so many different kinds of things if we look to her examples of friendship itself – perhaps the losing side of a referendum, the community of workers that supports an elite university without reaping the benefits (as in her discussion of the University of Chicago), and the lasting impact of Jim Crow laws. These are harms that citizens could be implicated in without recognizing it as such. Which calls us back to Smith’s sense of sympathy developed by impartiality, since even negative justice – if we wish to move beyond moral or political conventions that are stultified at best and corrupt and unfair at worst – need to be updated somehow. As we saw, some of the contemporary commenters on Smith’s work propose ways we can at

least approach impartial sympathy. Multicultural education and literature are their most significant suggestions. Perhaps they are correct, but their claims remain tentative for the most part; theorists could do well to be more concrete here. In this case, Smith's limits point the way to a more productive direction for thinking about contemporary democratic civic friendship. Deciphering concrete ways to expand sympathy would result in our increasing capacity to detect inequality and injustice in our communities and thus to expand what perhaps both negative justice and civic friendship (Forman-Barzilai's positive justice) demands of us. Thinking through these connections, I argue, is imperative in ongoing conversations about civic friendship.

Before I move on to some final and more general reflections on this project, I want to emphasize an additional insight for us to hold onto from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith calls us to recognize the important and complex role that the emotions play in our moral and political judgments. He links the role of the emotions with impartiality and judgment in a way that allows us to think productively against the strict binary between reason and emotion that is often invoked in discussions about all kinds of political theory. His account of sympathy and the moral sentiments brings us beyond Tocqueville's brief and ambiguous claims about compassion in order to see more clearly the ways in which emotions matter in the practice of civic friendship – not as an alternative to reason or calculation but as part of a complex process of moral judgment. In my chapter on Smith I built a case that his insights about the benefits and

also the limits of a moral judgment that includes all activities of the mind are more realistic and comprehensive and thus a better ground for thinking about how to move towards a civic friendship that might get beyond the strong self-interest that anchors the accounts on which I have focused throughout in order to see when and how citizens are moved to take others' concerns on *as their own* in a way that is reasonably well-informed, responsible, and respectful. Smithian impartial sympathy is a meaningful concept that ought to be developed beyond Smith's thought in order for us to generate a concept of the kinds of emotional identification that allow us to care about the lives of others in our community, even when they are so different from our own.

### **6.5 The View From Here and Now**

I end with some general reflections inspired by but moving beyond the sources on which I've focused in this project. I have tried throughout to elucidate what specific thinkers have had to say about the phenomenon of civic friendship, however they name it, in past and present, so that we can glean useful or critical insights from them. I now revisit these insights briefly in a way that emphasizes their wide-ranging importance in a more pointed way than I have above in my specific analyses. I began by investigating a certain current of contemporary thought on civic friendship that focuses on deliberate action on the behalf of others' interests, and wondered about whether historical thinkers could help explain how to bring about some of these kinds of actions and attitudes. I found that Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Smith are cynical about the possibility of robust

forms of civic friendship given the strength of self-interest and self-centeredness in their accounts of social and political relationships between human beings, and I argued that if we follow them in this thought we might be cynical about such possibilities, too.

Concern about exchange, utility, interest, ambition, social standing, and so on, takes precedence over our other motivations in their work. Some kind of justice, especially explicit in the thought of Aristotle and Smith, is the only limit to these self-interested tendencies; and civic friendship begins to seem rare and difficult to achieve given their strength. The moderation of our interests is proposed as the closest we can get to civic friendship. Despite their skepticism, I found important insights that should help in clarifying future thought about civic friendship.

I now proceed to a discussion about things I find missing from the canonical discussions but that I think are crucial for thinking today about civic friendship. I focus on two gaps in particular: first on diversity and then on the effects of politics on the possibility of civic friendship and as a site of civic friendship. Briefly, although in order to argue for their continued relevance I make a case that a recognition of the fact and the importance of diversity in the health of political communities is recognized by all the canonical thinkers I read, I want to emphasize now that the kind of diversity they discuss is inadequate as we try to come to terms with historic marginalization based on differences in race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (among others), as in the United States for example. Our world, in which many previously disenfranchised and excluded

groups are gaining ground in political equality is starkly different than Aristotle's, Tocqueville's, and Smith's (although Tocqueville anticipates some related phenomena in his thought on the "three races" in *Democracy in America*). So although equality and diversity are extremely important in conceptions of civic friendship past and present, the questions of just what kind of equality is at stake in civic friendship and how to extend it to include previously marginalized community members is of the utmost importance in current conversations about civic friendship – and my canonical sources in this project barely scratch the surface of such important and pressing questions. I contend that movements working against anti-black law enforcement, such as #BlackLivesMatter, or working to get and maintain the right for LGBTQ to marry, for example, while not the same in aims or means, are sites of civic friendship in their organization and in their aims – in which individuals of different identities work together to make changes in policy that extend the reach of justice to include previously excluded groups. My analysis in this project, focused as it is on the work of Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Smith, thus elides the urgent importance of taking identity politics very seriously in thinking about civic friendship in contemporary democracies.

I now turn to the influence of institutional politics on civic friendship, which grows out of a concern for political and social equality in a diverse democracy given the ways in which this equality has partly to do with how individual citizens feel about and treat one another and partly to do with how different citizens are treated by the

government in the workings of institutional politics. I contend that the canonical thinkers don't speak sufficiently to this related issue either – and even the contemporary thinkers in the first chapter don't attend to it very much. The canonical thinkers focus most especially on what we could call psychological motivations of civic friendship (or its lack); in other words, they think deeply about the interactions between our self-interested tendencies (utility, self-interest, ambition, or propriety) and other-regarding tendencies (good will, compassion, or beneficence). This is true because the canonical thinkers focus in these works on relationships between individuals and whether and how concern for our fellows arises from them, rather than how governments themselves can express the concerns of civic friendship through various policies directed at various groups of citizens (we can think here of Forman-Barzilai's brief mention of social welfare policies as "positive justice" or of the recent work on reparations for the legacy of institutionalized racism in the United States by Ta-Nehisi Coates among others).<sup>1</sup> Or, on the other hand, the ways in which government policies can be unequal or unjust in some way and how these can settle into social norms. Perhaps we could say that a lack of civic friendship at the level of government policy calls to community members to work together for change, which itself is an instantiation of civic friendship at a different level of community.

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<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville does discuss these matters in his *Memoir on Pauperism* to which I do not attend here, but which I wish to include in future stages of this dissertation project.

Tocqueville speaks to this issue most closely in his discussion of association, in the sense that he aims to bring attention to the ways in which individual action, in the form of association with specifically political aims, can have an impact on the formal politics (laws and policies) of a community. Villa and Sabl elaborate in different ways on this aspect of Tocqueville's work. However, in Villa's work, the aims of association remain indeterminate in ways that I have discussed; it is the means (political association) with which Villa is most interested, rather than the ends. Sabl focuses specifically on community organizing as an example of association that brings about specifically salutary changes in communities. So, moving forward, we must bring politics back into conversations about civic friendship in order to begin to figure out what kinds of face to face interactions have an effect on individuals' more wide-ranging political views. And we must also figure out what form civic friendship can take in redressing loss or injustice – since this is what many consider to be the work of civic friendship today (we can think of Bellah and Allen again here). In this way, civic friendship encompasses both means and ends.

Sharon Krause, in her *Civil Passions: Moral Sentiments and Democratic Deliberation*, writes of the expansion of what she calls public concern, and what I would consider to fall within the limits of civic friendship as I have developed it as a concept in this project, when she writes that the growing inclusion of LGBTQ citizens in the United States “illustrates how the exercise of sympathetic judgment in the presence of political

contestation has generated new moral sentiments and gradually transformed the public's horizon of concern – and with it laws. Our minds are changed when our hearts are engaged” (Krause 2008, 125), and then our laws follow suit. So the transformation of laws is the most wide-ranging result or form of civic friendship. Thus more work must be done to differentiate between different activities or levels of civic friendship and what work they do and how they are related. The canonical sources remain abstract in their focus on human psychology and community in general. But, as we have seen, contemporary accounts invoke crossing the street early; volunteering in our local community; joining a bowling league; community organizing; and supporting more inclusive laws (via community organizing, social movements, or voting) as all in some way related to civic friendship. Some of these are more or less personal or individual, and some are more or less overtly political. Turning to empirical accounts of such activities and the effects they have on individual citizens and their communities would be helpful here in generating more specific claims and knowledge about civic friendship as it appears in contemporary democracies, otherwise such lists run the risk of losing all meaning.

It is clear that in Allen's account, for example, her concern with political friendship's role in redressing sacrifice is in part grounded in a concern for the legacy of racial segregation in the United States. Is talking to strangers a flippant example of a solution to the problem of unequal sacrifice with the history of racial segregation in

mind? At first glance, it certainly seems so. In large democracies today, one of the primary aims of civic friendship ought to be the dismantling and repair of institutional inequalities. In this way, a concept of civic friendship that can respond to contemporary problems comes to resemble the concept of social justice. It is no surprise that the canonical thinkers do not have much to give us on this score. Their work is rooted in their own deeply unequal political contexts in which, for example, differences in class are treated as natural or given and in which extending support to others across class differences had to do with private charity and magnanimity.<sup>2</sup> In our own time, the results of institutional inequalities, such as poverty and its attendant indignities, are often explained away as a result of personal responsibility and thus are not taken to be political problems that demand political solutions. This is one of the most important failings of civic friendship today, as suggested by Bellah's and by Allen's accounts most forcefully. As a result, more attention must be paid to the ways in which personal relationships and individual experiences can generate something like the best of Smithian sympathy, in which we do the best we can to understand the experience of another with a wide view not only of present but of past circumstances and of the impact these have on the lives of others; and in which we are then moved to act on another's behalf in some way with this more fulsome understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> See Tocqueville's *Memoir on Pauperism* for his take on social justice vs. private charity as a response to suffering or inequality in a political community. He gives a good account of the allure of the former, but it is no surprise that in the end he prefers the latter.

In *Habits of the Heart* I found explicit criticism of the notion that involvement in local communities could trickle up and make national institutions more inclusive or equal. The trouble with being optimistic about activities such as volunteering at a soup kitchen, reading a diverse array of literature, or joining a multi-racial bowling league is that, though it might help cultivate the best kind of sympathy as I've defined it, it belies the force of institutional racism and other deeply entrenched patterns of marginalization, both socially in the form of norms and politically in the form of government policy. The encouragement of bridging relationships of all kinds is undoubtedly a good thing. But the shift from changing individual minds via impartial sympathy to being able to recognize the more abstract power of norms and institutions and figuring out a way to work against them is not an inevitable development.

Imagine a volunteer at a community literacy organization who teaches ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes. In the course of her work, she might come into contact with people from many different parts of the world, and who each have different official citizenship statuses. This volunteer might even become quite close with some of her students, learning more about where they come from or about their families or about their daily struggles; maybe they work two or three jobs, maybe they're homeless, maybe their partner or parent has recently been deported. In this way, the volunteer might be called to think more broadly about political issues in general, and specifically about her positions on immigration and citizenship, and the benefits the

United States government should or should not extend to undocumented people, for example. But there is no easy way to predict how relating to her students will or will not impact the volunteer's more extensive political awareness. The potential for transformative encounters in all kinds of bridging relationships is important, but these don't seem to inevitably lead to any specific results. They could lead to a change of heart, but they might not. And they could lead to interest in and engagement with specifically political means and aims informed by this change of heart, such as demonstrations or voting, but they might not. Volunteering can be the result of condescending or patronizing motivations, or generous motivations, or pleasurable motivations – and its results can be just as varied. At the end of my work here, I wonder if a contemporary conception of civic friendship should issue in something more political than individual relationships, even when they involve some kind of concern and service.

Which brings me back to the importance of interest, and to Bellah's question: "As long as one has the power to get what one wants, why should one care about others who do not?" (Bellah et al. 2008, 191). Before I conclude I want to make sure that my own take on interest and self-interest is not confused by my criticisms of it in the canonical chapters. In the canonical sources, self-interest was most often cast as in conflict (more or less strongly) to the interests of others – and for that reason, I did not find it to be a good basis on which to build a robust concept of civic friendship. But if we take the interests

of others to be our own, too, then self-interest broadly understood can be a motivation for civic friendship after all. Jane Mansbridge, in *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, writes that “if you have made the good of another individual your own through empathy [or Smithian sympathy], then promoting that person’s well-being is in your interest. Likewise, if you have made the good of a group your own (for example, through patriotism), I will say that promoting the group’s welfare is in your interest” (Mansbridge 1983, 26). When an individual’s or a group’s interests are not taken seriously by the government or fellow citizens in unequal or unjust ways, then their interests matter a great deal to them in ways that should not immediately and unreflectively be moderated – and these interests matter a great deal to their civic friends, too, who view them as equals in moral worth and thus find that their welfare is worth considering and supporting. And since the canonical sources do not do so, I am emphasizing now that we cannot afford to leave concerns for welfare and social justice relegated to the purview of private activities and relationships; this insight must be part of a contemporary conception of civic friendship. And in this way, civic friendship is political both in activity (though not exclusively) and in aim. But it must begin with individuals deeply considering the experiences of their very diverse fellow citizens. Smithian sympathetic impartiality was the best source I found in the canonical work, despite its limits, for explaining how this can happen.

I close by reminding readers of the valuable insights that I have nevertheless located in the work of Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Smith. In communities so vast, diverse, unequal, abstract, and attenuated as the United States, seeing and feeling the ways in which we are engaged together with our fellow citizens in anything like a shared journey in which our fates are intertwined and interdependent is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, I follow the contemporary thinkers outlined in chapter 1 in thinking that this is an essential ingredient of civic friendship. How do we get to it? Each of Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Smith, help us to see that perceiving our fellows as equals in some way is crucial in this process, even if who they find deserves such consideration is extremely narrow by our lights. And they show that justice is the bare minimum requirement of community before civic friendship can take place; but we saw, too, that even expanding the norms of justice requires already some kind of civic friendship. Finally, we saw that emotional responses informed by imagination and impartiality, especially in the more developed work of Smith on sympathy, seem to be necessary for civic friendship, too. I close by suggesting that the relationships between compassion (or sympathy), equality, and justice are those to which we must continue to attend in conversations about civic friendship, but we must do so informed by the gaps to which I pointed above.

I return to Sharon Krause, whose *Civil Passions* I find shares similar aims as my work here. She ends her work with all kinds of concrete suggestions about how to educate our imaginative capacities so that we can be better impartial judges via habits of

sympathy in our diverse communities. Her primary source is David Hume on sympathy, but her suggestions follow just as well my work on Adam Smith's conception of sympathy. Her list is various; it includes focusing on accounts of marginalized groups in a variety of formats throughout the education of children and young adults, committing to strong and integrated public schools, affirmative action, Americorps and other service programs, and public displays of art (Krause 2008, 138). All of these she argues might help the cultivation of a certain kind of perspective-taking, one that "does not demand the wholesale abandonment of our identities or an unattainable level of knowledge about the lives of others. Yet it does make our judgments more than self-referential. It causes us to register directly in our own minds and hearts the expressed (and sometimes inferred) sentiments of those affected" (Krause 2008, 163-4). I have endeavored to show that such a perspective is necessary for civic friendship as I understand it today, but that how we ought to go about cultivating it is by no means given. These kinds of lists are intuitively appealing, but as I suggested above, need to be confirmed by further research. I conclude that more concrete and empirical accounts of such activities are a crucial source that must be part of the ongoing conversation about how to cultivate the attitudes and behaviors of civic friendship in vast and diverse democracies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in *Making Volunteers: Civic Life After Welfare's End*, Nina Eliasoph provides an intriguing

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account of the many ways in which projects designed to create bridging relationships between youth of diverse class and race backgrounds often fail to meet these aims. See also, for example: Rebecca Anne Allahyari's *Visions of Charity: Volunteer Workers and Moral Community*, Erika Summer Effler's *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*, Nina Eliasoph's *The Politics of Volunteering*, Paul Lichterman's *Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment and Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America's Divisions*, Jane Mansbridge's *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, and Francesca Polletta's *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*.

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## Biography

Dominique Dery was born in Montreal, Quebec in 1984, and grew up in St. Lazare, Quebec and in Burlington, Ontario before attending McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. She graduated from McMaster University in 2007 with B.A. Hons. in Philosophy and in Religious Studies, and with the Dean's Gold Medal for Excellence in the Humanities. While at Duke University her research was supported by the Duke University's Graduate School and Political Science Department, the Kenan Institute for Ethics, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She helped to organize the Duke University Graduate Working Group on Conceptualizing Justice, was a fellow in the Kenan Institute for Ethics' Graduate Colloquium and participated as a student researcher in its Bhutanese Resettlement Project, and worked as a Research Services intern in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library. She received an MA and PhD in Political Science from Duke University, specializing in Political Theory and in Religion and Politics.