

FROM EROTIC PASSION TO OBLATION LOVE: FRIENDSHIP ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE, NICOMACHEAN ETHICS¹

DA PAIXÃO ERÓTICA AO AMOR PELA OBLAÇÃO: AMIZADE DE ACORDO COM ARISTÓTELES, ÉTICA NICOMACHEANA

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Abstract: For Aristotle, friendship is the act of necessary mutual love that constitutes, with its three levels, the cement of the “polis,” the political community, and the “city.” It can be studied according to Aristotelian categories themselves as well as to the theory of matter and form, potency, and act. This paper, after analyzing what friendship is as an act of love, applies such Aristotelian theories to the understanding of friendship.

Keywords: Aristotle. Friendship. Political community.

Resumo: Para Aristóteles, a amizade é o ato de amor mútuo necessário que constitui, com seus três níveis, o cimento da “polis”, a comunidade política, e a “cidade”. Ela pode ser estudada de acordo com as próprias categorias aristotélicas, assim como com a teoria da matéria e da forma, da potência e

do ato. Este trabalho, após analisar o que é a amizade como ato de amor, aplica tais teorias aristotélicas à compreensão da amizade.

Palavras-chave: Aristóteles. Amizade. Comunidade política.

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Introduction

The importance of the act of friendship is so significant for Aristotle that he states that “[...] for no one would chose to live without friends, but possessing all other goods” (Book viii, i 1).² Of all the possible and concretely realized riches, friendship is the greatest and the only one that seems to be indispensable to a proper human life. If, for the prudent economist that is Aristotle, but also for Aristotle the biologist, there are forms of wealth that permit not only mere human subsistence, in the manner of other living beings, but their life as something worthy of being lived as life proper to the human being, and he thinks of possible happiness as a form of life in which the necessary mediations must be in the act in a balanced way, in a perfect intermediate term between extreme excesses, all this ceases to have great significance if it exists without co-existing with friendship.

The act of friendship is thus revealed as the great human act, the onto-anthropological, ethical, and political axis around which all human life must revolve, constituting its “logos,” its medial finality and, perhaps, its maximum eschatological finality, if the maximum of eudaimonia, which consists in the contemplation of the eternal, has in itself something of a phyletic act. It is well known that, for Aristotle, the pure-act/immobile-motor, which moves everything, makes everything move towards itself, being the unattainable ultimate end of all nature - that which moves -, has with the latter no relationship that transcends this purely logical-metaphysical one. Perfect eudaimonia coincides with the perfect pure noetic contemplation of the eternal, that is, of the act-pure/immobile-motor by the human being. This contemplation is accessed, in the Socratic and Platonic lineage, which Aristotle does not interrupt, through the practice of philosophy, of which friendship in the act is a necessary part.

Thus, the philosophical path that leads to the contemplation of the eternal and the consequent ultimate happiness is a path of love, of love of wisdom (which, ultimately, is the pure act/ immobile-motor itself). To be a phyletic relationship, it would have to correspond to the same level, and it is not, it cannot be, for the pure act/immobile-motor, divine, does

² The Portuguese quotes were taken from the edition: ARISTOTHESES, *Ética a Nicómaco*, translation, preface, and notes by António de Castro Caeiro, Lisbon, Quetzal Editores, 2012; for this quote (1155a 5), p. 197; the text is “[...] ninguém há-de querer viver sem amigos, mesmo tendo todos os restantes bens.” In this translation, the work used is ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean ethics*, translation by H. Rackham, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, Harvard University Press, 1934.

not relate to something that transcends it. However, since there is no friendship in act between that divine and the human being, the relationship of the latter to the former is only possible because there is an engine that moves it ultimately, and that engine is the act-pure/immobile-motor.

This means that the absolute teleology that is constituted by the pure act/immobile-motor is *the metaphysical standard of the possibility of and for any love relationship*, hence, *a fortiori*, of the supreme love relationship that is friendship, especially pure friendship.

Thus, *in pure friendship, each friend loves the other friend as if the other friend were the act-pure/immobile-motor paradigm* or cannot even begin to love because he has to love him infinitely and this infinitude is given in and by the paradigm of the divine act.

What is friendship? The original text contains the expression “peri philias,”³ when Aristotle announces that he is going to reflect about friendship. He thus announces a treatise “on friendship”. He then states that “philia” is an “arete”, a “certain arete”, or is accompanied by “arete”.⁴ So, what is an “arete”?

According to the Bailly dictionary,⁵ “arete” is “mérite” or “qualité par quoi l’on excelle”, “qualité de l’intelligence, de l’âme”, “mérite de l’artisan, de l’homme d’État”, in a moral sense: “merit” or “quality by which one excels”, “quality of the intelligence, of the soul”, “merit of the artisan, of the man of state”, “virtue”.

Apparently, these proposed translations all point to a similar sense of the apex of anthropological greatness, in the case of their application to the human being, although they can also be applied to what is considered to be the positive greatness proper to other entities in their realization of possible maxima. It will be taken for granted that the Portuguese translation we use to quote chooses the term “excelência”: “excellence” to carry “arete”, in this context, into the language of Camões. The translation into English of “excellence” can be accepted too, but for the critical points that follow.

However, it is not the same to speak of “merit” – which necessarily refers to the positive merit for something great that has been accomplished, and, in this context, it is nonsensical to speak of “negative merit,” as if it were a mathematical vectorial magnitude – or to speak of “quality by which one is excellent”. The term “demerit” is quite clear as to its

³ These two are the fourth and fifth words of the sentence that opens “Book VIII” of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ BAILLY A., *Dictionnaire Grec Français. Rédigé avec le concours d’E. Egger*, Paris, Hachette, [1997], pp. 263-264.

relation to the term it denies, regarding the ontological relation of both to the acts to which they respectively refer.

The “quality by which one is excellent” is something neutral: it can be applied either to an activity that represents something humanly great or to something humanly mean or even degrading. The quality by which Sophocles was the great tragic poet that he was, the quality that made Socrates of Athens the magnificent human being that he was, are something very different from the quality that makes the model figure of the ruler proposed by Thrasymachus in “Book I” of the *Politeia*⁶ what he is.

To be excellent is not synonymous with being “good”. One can be excellent at being a beast: in this case, negatively paradigmatic, one possesses the excellence of beasts, which is not much. This is precisely what we find in the ethical and political figure proposed by Thrasymachus as “the just”, excellent in ethical and political perversions.

The “arete” is thus not excellence without more, but the excellence proper to the merit of positive action.

It is not the same the “arete” of Penelope, magnificently rewarded by Athena, or the “arete” of the would-be desecrators of her body, rewarded by Odysseus’ bow. It is not the same the “arete” of Europa or the “arete” of Zeus who raped her. It is not the same the “arete” of the Odysseus before the journey of nostalgia to Ithaca and after that same journey. Not the same is the “arete” of the Oedipus king in “hybris,” that of the blind and outcast Oedipus, that of the positively sacred Oedipus who was sent into the sanctuary of the Erinyes. Such examples, all taken from Hellenic culture prior and coeval to Aristotle and which Aristotle was not unaware of, are illuminating.

Thus, the ancient meaning of “arete” as that which speaks of the ontological greatness proper to the action of the human being seems to be the most correct, keeping intact the uncomfortable but inalienable *distinction between the one who practices the good and is even excellent, the one who does it only mediocly, and the one who does not practice the good and is consigned to the bestial level of a being who, although he may be the holder of the “logos,” is nothing more than its degrader.* Let us remember that Aristotle is the one who defines the human being as the possessor of the “logos”. Without “logos”, one is a beast, that is, an irrational animal, not a human being.

Friendship, being “arete,” is thus of the order of the *possibility of action* and the *reality of action* that deserves to be called *properly human*. Virtue in act, in the act that it is, or the act that is accompanied by virtue are proper only to beings in which the “logos” is given in the form

⁶ Of interest is the entire “Book I”, between quotas 336b and 354c, which marks the end of this book.

appropriate to the human being. Analogies are possible, but they can be anthropologically very harmful. False friendship with the gods or with dogs, for example, will always be an alienating form, because it does not respect the proper level of ontological grandeur implied by the notion of merit implied in the act of friendship.⁷

Friendship is thus a meritorious act. But meritorious acts there are many. So, what is this meritorious act and what is its proper mode, its essence, and its substance?

We think that the key to understanding what is the essence and the substance of friendship is found in the very brief passage from the *Iliad* that Aristotle quotes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a 15: “Quando dois vão em conjunto”, in the Portuguese version, “deux êtres qui marchent unis”, in the French version,⁸ “When twain together go”, in the English version⁹. In the Belles Lettres translation of the *Iliad* itself, it is: “Quand deux hommes marchent ensemble”.¹⁰

The versions are very close. But what is fundamentally at stake in this very brief passage of the great epic poem?

To what paradigmatic situation does this “walking together”, this “walking in pairs”, this “walking together” refer?

The *Iliad* is very rich in these pairs of beings who love each other with a reciprocal benevolence and who constitute paradigms of friendship, long before Plato had theorized love in its many current forms in his *Banquet* and Aristotle had thought about “*philia*”. From Achilles and Patroclus, to Hector and Andromache, to the very singular Ulysses and Penelope, the work is a showcase of these relationships of reciprocal and similar good-will, which found a dual but one common life between excellent human beings in the form of their acceptance of the necessary “*logos*” of action towards the good of another, and

⁷ In Aristotle, technically, a human being can only be friends with another human being, another human being who is ontologically, ethically, and politically similar. Not in the true sense of friendship. One can be a “friend” as a relationship of utility or enjoyment, which are not forms of true friendship. I cannot, therefore, be friends with a dog or with a god. In this sense, in Christian terms, I cannot be friends with God as Father or God as Holy Spirit, who are transcendent, but I can be friends with the man-Christ, because he possesses a humanity similar to mine. I could not be friends with the Christ-God if these two aspects of divinity in him were separate, but since the Christ-man is one, my friendship with him is possible because it is the friendship with a man humanly similar to me. Whether I am worthy of such a friendship that is another question.

⁸ ARISTOTE, *Éthique de Nicomaque*, translation by Jean Volquin, Paris, Flammarion, 1965, p. 207.

⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean ethics*, translation by H. Rackham, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, Harvard University Press, 1934, Book viii, i, 2, p. 451.g

¹⁰ HOMERO, *Iliad*, Chant X, v. 229 (quoted from the French translation, *Iliade*, translation by Paul Mazon, notes by Hélène Monsacré, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2007, p. 71).

reciprocally immediately setting up the common good, that is, the cement of any “polis,” whether it be only the two constituents of the pair or millions.

The walking referred to in the *Iliad* passage quoted is, then, *the actively loving co-presence of* those who, because they love each other, mutually accompany their steps throughout life, in joy, in pain, in suffering, without defection, without abandonment, preferring to die rather than to betray their love for the beloved. Always in a regime of necessary reciprocity.

And it is in this permanent act of love for the other that the possible link with the pure act/immobile-motor can take root, since in this act of love, in each of these acts of love, mutually, such a link can make sense, at least in an analogous way. In the love for the friend there is already and always love for the “telos” that inhabits and moves him and which is love, in the last analysis, for the pure act itself, as the final “telos” of everything. But if this “telos” is unattainable, the “telos” of each beloved, on the other hand, is attainable, given his or her necessary finitude, sealed by death.

Only death fully demonstrates whether or not there was friendship.

In this sense, friendship is a path of life, but a path to death, not just any death, but a death that is the culmination of an act of love that has not ended in and of itself, but only because it has been interrupted – in the case of the Aristotelian doctrine, annihilated – precisely by death. Love itself does not end, it is not self-terminated, it is terminated by death.

Since love is the act of exercising the good of the other, in every act of love I contribute so that the “telos” proper to the other can be realized and is indeed realized. This act of love is not, of course – but in the context of the rarity of “philia” this must be stated expressly – , an act in which I perform something that depends not on the beloved’s own possible good, but on my own whim, in what is the very definition of the act of tyranny, but *a liturgy to his/hers possible good*. Friendship has tyranny as its contradiction; if there is friendship, there can be no tyranny; if there is tyranny, there can be no friendship.

Thus, in the act of friendship, it is not exactly what the friend is that I love, but *what he can be*, to the best of his/her own possibility. And this is the act of love to his/her “telos” as the best possible of himself or herself. This necessary way of friendship being in each of its acts corresponds perfectly to what Plato calls the common good. In this way, immediately, this allows us to understand the reason why Aristotle thinks that friendship is the bond of union that enables the city.

It is this unconditional and mutual love for the possible good of the other that allows a community to be constituted, which is not a community of interests, much less a community of petty omphalocentric interests, but *a community that is founded on mutual benevolence in act*. This indefectible mutual benevolence, if universalized, becomes mechanically the common good, the currently perfect “polis,” that which will later be, in another way of thinking, the “City of God”, made of the universal love of human beings for one another, in the analogous sequence of the genesis-type love incoherently given by God.

This lineage of thought, which originated in the ancient mythical Homeric poems and ends with Augustine’s *City of God*, has a nobility and an ethical and anthropological beauty unrivaled in the history of humanity, a history mostly written with the exploits of predatory beasts, tyrants and lesser human entities, always ready to grow ontologically at the expense of parasitizing their renegade fellow human beings. This is also the world that has been recovered, modernly, by Hobbes’ political analysis, and that still today constitutes the practical and pragmatic referential of universal political life, with very few exceptions.

Let us remember, for example, the world of bestial and depredatory competition in which we are immersed, which had its paradigm and, until now, corollary in the theory formulated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*: life is a merciless struggle for *my own* good or, analogously, for the good of *my* people, to the detriment of you and your people, universally. My good depends on your annihilation, if I so decide.

Friendship is thus love for the best final and successive medial entelechy of the one you love.

But it is also a form of double contemplation of the absolute of the act present in the loved one. Friendship is thus the realization of the highest level of human action, precisely the contemplation of the absolute of being present in every act, which is the same as indirectly contemplating the teleological absolute of the pure-act present in every human being, in the form of the absolute that indirectly summons every being, in its very act, to be. In contemplating, directly, the act of the other, I contemplate, indirectly, in him or in her, the pure-act that is his/her ultimate transcendent “telos”. To love him/her, I have to contemplate what he/she is and, in what he/she is, what he/she can become in his/her best possible being. Ultimately, the best possible in every human being is the indirect presence of the divine in him or in her.

Thus, in friendship, in the perfect form, there is a metaphysical dimension and a remission to the divine. The act of love for the friend makes the friend an altar on which to celebrate the liturgy to the god who is its possibility. To love a friend is to be immediately of the stuff of the divine, even if of the far-off divine, intangible, in the Aristotelian way.

But this absolute intangibility of the divine on the part of the finite human being is symbolic of the intangibility of the friend, for our act towards him or her is really a liturgy, serves him/her at his/her best and that is his/her possibility, but never allows, if the continuity of the act as an act of love is to be assured, to violently interfere with the being of the beloved.

The act of love absolutely respects the possible good of the other. *Love is incompatible with violence.*

This implies that the act of love is, very Aristotelian like, an act that fulfills and always perfectly fulfills the “mesotes”, the medial situation of the real act between extreme possibilities, both of which are violent either by default or by excess. The act of love towards the friend is always an act that mediates his or her possible good, with the necessary energy (“energeia” = act), the only one that is capable of achieving that best possible good.

To achieve this, the realization being of extreme difficulty, implies that the relationship between friends must be mediated by practical and pragmatic instruments that allow for a perfect evaluation of what is needed and how it is needed, and what is appropriate to do. What are these instruments?

Before we deal with the instrumentality of friendship, let us point out as a perfect model of this same instrumentality the case of the pair of friends Ulysses-Penelope. Both proved to be expert connoisseurs not only of each other, but of the needs of each other and of both, in context and in an evolving and complex context. Both revealed themselves to be masters of how to build instruments and how to operate them so as to serve the common good of their friendship, with the sole and inexorable end of their reunion as elements of a full metaphysical unity of their own, but also ethically, politically, anthropologically and physically, intensely carnal, that transcended everything and that overcame everything so that finally such a fundamental unity of the two could be rebuilt, in what was the longest night in the mythical history of humanity. This celebratory night was a divine gift, operated by the goddess Athena.¹¹

¹¹ HOMER, *Odyssey*, Chant XXIII, vv. 241-246.

The world of friendship is a world of mediations, impossible without these. These mediations are what we can call the *flesh of friendship*, in a sense that transcends any denial of the physical dignity of human worldliness and in which the body is not a sarcophagus of life, but its political mediation, the only possible one, as Aristotle knew very well, and as Plato himself, who witnessed Socrates' death, was bound to know.

Now, what better tools to analyze the mediational character of friendship than those that Aristotle himself forged? We will thus use the Aristotelian categorization to analyze friendship. We will dwell only on the pure form of friendship proper; the lesser forms may be subjected to a similar analysis.

Purpose/finality of Friendship

The extrinsic purpose of friendship is to ensure the general political mediation that enables the common good, which is the unifying act of the polis. Without any one of the levels of friendship, there can be no city, for without the unitive relationship that "philia" is, without the love of interest, pleasure and oblation, all of which are mutual, there *is no way to unite human individuals*, who, through these three types of reciprocal love, in act, *are* the act of the city, its dynamic and kinetic entelechy in permanent evolution. The dynamics and kinetics of this movement, that is, what is alterable and changes, correspond to what in the city is accidental; what is substantial in it is the love that supports such accidents. We can thus define the city as the substantial general act of "phyletic" love that has as accidents all the details in which such an act of love is realized.

The substance is friendship, the accidents are the different concrete details, potential and kinetic, with which such friendship is being constituted. Those change, this one remains, under pain of there being no friendship, of there never being friendship, even of there never having been friendship, because friendship is a total act that receives its substantive characterization only at the death of at least one of the friends. If it has not been constant, it simply was not. Friendship is indeed a very rare thing.

But there is an intrinsic finality to the act of friendship. And it is on this intrinsic finality that depends the extrinsic finality just explained. Intrinsically, the act of friendship has as its finality the service of the possibility of being for those who, through it, love each other. Friendship is thus doubly liturgical from the political point of view, but also the ethical point of view.

Friendship is liturgy - service - from the political point of view, for, whether at the intrinsic level of the relationship - between the lovers - or at the extrinsic level - of the city - , each act that embodies it is an act of service to the good of the beloved and, thus, transcendently to the city, to all the human beings who constitute it; all to all, in universal reciprocity (note that this is the Platonic notion of the common good, to which Aristotle is thus faithful).

Friendship is liturgy from the ethical point of view because it is a personal act - there is no other way to put it, respecting its anthropological grandeur - of service both to the intrinsic realm of the possible good of the lovers and to the extrinsic realm of the common good of the city as a whole. Without each of these personal acts of phyletic love, there is and there cannot be friendship intrinsically considered, but neither can there be friendship extrinsically considered, that is, there can be no city. Now, it has been known since the Platonic analysis that without a city there can be no humanity.¹²

The substance of humanity, politically understood, is the act of friendship itself. Such is its importance.

It is now better understood what Aristotle means when he says that without friendship human life has no great value.

Friendship according to the quadrature of causes

Final cause

In this way, it can be seen that the final cause of friendship resides in the very *possibility of humanity's being* as such. That which absolutely moves and causes a friendship to move, that which summons its act is the absolute of humanity's *power of being*. Without this final cause, there would be no mutual act of love, macro-politically understood, and not only would there never have been humanity, but there also could never be humanity. If humanity has a historical origin, its historical origin depends on this possibility, a possibility that is always something metaphysical. All the formal mediations constituted by the other three causes associated with this one do nothing more than serve this absolute metaphysical end. Plato would say that there is an idea of friendship, Aristotle would say no, but he found the

¹² See our research in PEREIRA Américo, *Estudos platônicos*, Covilhã, Lusosofia Press, 2015. Accessible at www.lusosofia.net.

way to explain how the total real structure of this act derives from a determining end. Plato would have realized that his disciple had found the mediation that he had not been able to explicitly find.

Formal form/cause

The form of friendship consists on being a reciprocal act of active benevolence between human beings. In logical terms, it can be defined thus, in a scheme applicable to the three levels: A loves B and B loves A in the same act, that is, concomitantly. This implies that there is a relationship, which may be distant in space, but which has to be coincident in time: wherever the phyletic lovers are, their acts of love have to coincide in time. This implies that this act cancels physical space, because it takes place in a logical simultaneity since physical simultaneity is impossible. This very sharing of time by these acts implies that one and the other act are necessarily part of the same bi-univocal act, which can be symbolized by the same straight line, which has only one direction, but two opposite senses. Friendship in the act is this straight line in which the act of reciprocal love has only one direction, but necessarily two senses converging in and through the supporting straight line.

The form of friendship, its formal cause, that which the cause formally is, is this single act consisting of two movements along the same direction with two senses, each pointing to each of the extremes of such a straight line. The straight line is the act of reciprocal love, the senses, that towards which such act is directed. Friendship in act is not only the line, but the totality of the relationship that the line symbolizes, a relationship that, in order to be, puts the senses themselves and that to which they point. It is therefore not trivial to say that friendship creates friends, being logically prior to them, as form always is in relation to those that are formable and those that are formed. This happens because the form depends only on the finality, and the finality puts the whole of the relation as an absolute of possibility, including that which is to be related.

Matter/material cause

The material of friendship is constituted by friends *as something to love*. It is each human being *as passible of being loved*. If the form coincides with the scheme of the possibility of the act of mutual love, the matter is that upon which such a scheme can be applied. The matter

of the act of friendship is the other as lovable. If there were no other or others, friendship would be impossible, for, there being formally the possibility of loving, there would be nothing to love. On the other hand, humanity as a whole is formally nothing more than lovable. And it could remain forever just that, even in the also formal presence of the form of friendship, as long as there was no actualization of such a form in such a matter. Such actualization is the intrinsic mediation of friendship and coincides with its efficient cause.

Efficient cause

The efficient cause of friendship is each of the acts of love that exist between lovers. It is these acts that realize the friendship. Without them, the relationship would be only a form, that is, a pure possibility. The reciprocal acts of love make friendship incarnate.

This implies that for there to be a city, there must be a realization, effectiveness, of the acts of love. The more effective these acts are, the better the city is. A city in which all acts of friendship corresponded to their perfect possibility would be a perfect city, in which nothing that depended on the loving action of the human being would be lacking. Everything else might be lacking, all the riches, all the other goods, but this would not make the perfection of the act of friendship lack, therefore, the act of the “polis”, lacking. It is because of this perfection in its efficacy that the city is not only possible - this possibility depends on its purpose and form - but *realizable*. The realization of the possibility depends on the efficacy available and in act.

It is this efficacy in act that makes life according to friendship humanly worthy and humanly desirable, it is its absence that makes life properly human not only undesirable – for there is no metaphysical horizon for it –, but actually impossible.¹³

¹³ It is interesting to see how, in the Nazi extermination camps and the like, everything was done to eliminate the possibility of friendship, and therefore of the “polis,” thus preventing people from uniting, which facilitated their submission and control. This was not fully achieved in Treblinka, where a successful political movement emerged, and in the Warsaw ghetto, which became a liberating city, promoted a battle with the Nazis, and paid the price of human dignity with the almost complete extermination of the people united in this way. Such unity would not have been possible without a true and perfect three-mode friendship. In Auschwitz, instead of the acronym “Work makes free” there should have been the acronym “Here friendship is impossible”. Aristotle would have immediately understood its scope and consequences.

Friendship according to the binomial potency/act

Power

The potency of friendship is twofold and consists both in the possibility of there being friendship, without more, in what is a transcendental and transcendent logical structure, and in there being agents capable of realizing such a possibility, that is, powerful enough for it. Everything begins with the potency of loving another. Everything passes through the actualization of this potency. Everything ends in the act, always ephemeral,¹⁴ of reciprocal love.

This ephemerality is due to the fact that friendship is an act which is only truly judged as such when there is no longer the possibility of its cessation through the initiative of one of the friends, that is, when at least one of the friends dies: then, since there has never been any act which would negate friendship, friendship can be judged as a continuous act, without a solution of continuity, constituted by the act of love - ephemeral - between two friends/lovers (beings who love each other). Before such cessation, the ephemerality of friendship because of the ephemerality of the acts that constitute it is always a threat. Friendship is potent in each possible concrete act of love and is potent as a perfect terminal act in which the successive perfection of all the partial acts is consolidated and consummated. In this way, friendship gains the status of eternity. If we apply to this perfect act the Platonic sense of possible perfection to a perfection that guarantees eternal happiness, present at the end of “Book X” of his *Republic*, in the famous “Myth of Er,”¹⁵ we can understand that both friends guarantee for themselves, through the perfection of friendship, an eternal happiness and that friendship is the perfect door either to earthly happiness - Aristotle - or to happiness, purely - Plato.

Act

The act of friendship is the realization of the possibility of loving in reciprocity. This act is a movement of actualization, but it is, above all, *an ontological*, ethical and political apex, anthropological also, of the *realization of humanity*. Whenever two or more human beings love each other, especially at the pure level of that same love, humanity reaches, in the act, in that

¹⁴ See, *infra*, the point dedicated to “time”.

¹⁵ 614b-621d.

complex act, its maximum possible, thus real as precisely an act. At this “kairotic” moment, the humanity under consideration here could be no better than what it is. If it were to remain at this level, humanity would always be living as the act of the best of itself, perennial fullness of the common good, the full and perfect form and act of friendship, absolutely perfect friendship, in what would be the true Elysian Fields, always dreamed of but never realized. A thing possible for human beings, not only for gods.

It is this moving possibility that is at stake in the myth of Prometheus, especially in the version that Plato gives of it in his *Protagoras*.¹⁶

Friendship according to the categories

‘First’ Substance

The ‘first’ substance of friendship is its own act: it is what each real, concrete act of friendship is in itself. Since every act of friendship is an act of reciprocal love between two or more human beings, the first substance of friendship is this act of reciprocal love. Note that since friendship is an act of relation, *Aristotle has unwittingly substantialized the relation of friendship*.

In friendship, relationship is no longer a category applicable to a substance, but is itself the substance of the act in question.

This proves that the great thinkers, because they think about a reality that they really know, often overcome the theoretical bays they impose on themselves, seeing much further than such bays would allow if they served as blinkers to thought.

‘Second’ substance

The ‘second’ substance of friendship is properly affirmed of its transcendental character towards every act of reciprocal love of which every act constitutes its first substance.

This transcendental obeys not only to the universal accompanying sense of every act of reciprocal love, but also implies its universality: every act of reciprocal love, in its ephemerality, is an act of friendship. It is this very transcendental that constitutes the

¹⁶ See our study, “Prometeu salvador. O mito de Prometeu presente no *Protágoras*, de Platão” (“Prometheus the Savior. The myth of Prometheus present in Plato’s *Protagoras*,”) in PEREIRA Américo, *Eros e Sophia. Platonic studies II*, Covilhã, Lusosofia Press, 2015. Accessible at www.lusosofia.net.

unitive character of friendship with respect to the possible diversity of acts that can constitute a city. Without this transcendental, such diverse acts, diverse acts would remain and there would be no city at all. The transcendental of friendship transforms, metamorphoses a mere aggregate of acts of relationship into a single act of reciprocal love, a unity that creates the city in its own difference, the first physical substance of the city, that is, concrete nature incarnated in the city.

Quantity

Quantity is a fundamental category in friendship. There can be no friendship of one. In order for there to be friendship, there must be two or more human beings in mutual loving relationship. Now, two or more human beings in interaction immediately constitute the realm of the political. What distinguishes friendship as a political act is that such interaction is necessarily and universally an act of mutual love.

On the other hand, friendship establishes the unity of the diverse, so, from this point of view, its quantity is unitary: only *one* friendship constitutes the “polis”, as its act of universal reciprocal loving interaction, or there is no city.

Quality

The qualifiability of friendship is plurivocal. But, following the Platonic lesson, only what falls under the aegis of the good of each of the related is properly applicable to friendship. Thus, of friendship it must be said that it is good because it is the transcendental act of the good of its subject-objects.

Relation / Relationship

Important considerations on this special category have already been made, to which we refer. However, it is important to note that friendship is a relationship and is so substantively, in that it does not follow the common Aristotelian categorical scheme.

Place / Location

The place of friendship is the “polis”. However, it is *friendship that institutes the city*. Thus, it is friendship that establishes, that marks and demarcates what is its place. The place of friendship is the whole human world formed by two or more human beings who love each other. Nevertheless, there are two other places proper to friendship, which are, on the one hand, the relationship that constitutes it, its logical place, and on the other hand, the sphere of ethical interiority proper to each philetic lover, in which the act of love is generated. Since this act is reciprocal, the place of such an act of friendship is twofold, for it is situated in both the ethical core of those who thus love each other.

Time When

The time of friendship is all the measure of the difference, that is, of the absolute of the movement that the act of reciprocal love produces, creates. *Friendship lasts as long as such an act lasts*. But each such act, because it is an act of enabling the other, opens up a metaphysical horizon, a horizon of the possible in terms of its formal absolute. As such, each act of philetic love transcends time and inserts the lovers into eternity. Eternity paradoxically ephemeral, unless friendship is indefectible, not only extending in time, as is commonly thought, but being in the eternity of possibility thus perennially renewed. *The time of friendship is the time of openness to the eternal*. Perhaps this is truly the great reason why one does not wish to live without friendship: that the other wants my eternity; that I want the eternity of/for the other.

Position

Without a vain play on words, one can say of friendship that it is the true human “position,” the true “thesis” of humanity. More than a geometric-spatial way of being, the position considered in relation to friendship implies the reciprocal thesis in onto-anthropological terms that the act of reciprocal love imposes. *Each of the lovers absolutely posits the other by loving him*. Each is thus put by the other’s act of love.

The other is posited in two ways: as concrete reality loved and as possibility. As concrete reality loved, because the act of loving is directed to a first substance; as possibility, because this first substance, as loved, in and by this act, is lovable in and by possible others.

Herein lies the ephemeral character of friendship in each act - or, if one prefers, of the threat of absolute ephemerality of friendship in each of its acts, before each materiality of

these is actualized in yet another act of love - for to it corresponds an actual entelechy - in what the act of love is - and an objective entelechy - in what the act of the I who loves is - which are always non-ultimate, that is, which are, as entelechies of love in act - lover and beloved, reciprocally - potencies for eventual other acts.

This double thesis, or human thesis in double act, immediately takes on an active and passive character. Each act of love for the other affirms the other as the end of that same act, and each one is affirmed by the reciprocal act of the other.

Possession

What does friendship possess? Fundamentally, friendship possesses the form of the “polis.” This possession is not something extrinsic, but coincides precisely with what friendship is as form of the possibility of the city. Thus, friendship possesses *the possibility of being* of the city. This possession is intrinsic because it coincides with what friendship is in itself. Friendship is the possibility of the city. In this coincidence, friendship is a paradigm of what true possession is, because one only truly possesses that which one is; possession is always something interior to one’s own being, as logical form, as “logos” - one possesses the meaning -, there being no possession of something exterior.

Friendship is the fundamental act of human life because it is, from this point of view, the possession of the only fully human act that can be possessed by human beings, the act of loving. Everything else belongs to the order of passions.

Action

Outside the purely formal realm of reality, there is no friendship except in act. Therefore, concretely, friendship is always an act. But it is always an act which is constituted by concomitant acts of reciprocal love. There is, thus, no friendship which is not in act. Friendship is always a practical reality. There are no theoretical friends or purely possible friends. To be a possible friend is to be part of a purely logical-theoretical transcendental structure, but without practical reality.

This is the profound reason why there are so few relationships of true friendship in its purest sense. It is because friendship, being necessarily practical, compels a constant active

effort of good for the beloved. *Friendship is transcendentally providential of the good for the beloved.* Each friend functions in the relationship as if it were a provident God for the good of the friend. In this way, one can better understand why friendship can be called creative, since each act of good done for the friend is an act that creates the friend, since, by maintaining the friend in being, in the good, it maintains his or her own possibility of being. And it is through this network of acts of mutual love that I can build the city. This is the universal act of mutual love that mutually maintains human beings in being.

Passion

There is, also, a necessary passive dimension in friendship, but a passivity that is posed by the act of love. In loving someone, I make that object of my love a subject that is the receptacle of my act. As receptacle, it is patient, not agent. What is proper to friendship consists in the fact that, being an act of reciprocal love, such a patient, because he, or she, loves the one who loves him, or her, is, in this, an agent. Therefore, friendship is a relationship in which those related are agents and patients at the same time, in the same act.

Physics and metaphysics of friendship

Is there a physics of friendship?

Since friendship is a movement, there is necessarily a physics of friendship. In the limit, since friendship is the movement that allows the city to exist, it mobilizes all the resources necessary for the constitution of the city. The physics of friendship is the physics of the city. If we want to give the term “physics” its proper meaning of “nature,” we can say, in this context, that *the nature of friendship is structurally the nature of the city.*

This implies that, for example, from the economic point of view, the physics of friendship is that which should impose the mode of governing on the physics of the economy, as Plato, in his peculiar mode, had already understood:¹⁷ all the economic wealth of the city is a particular good in the service of the common good, that is, the practical and pragmatic application of the nature of friendship to the domain of politics. Without the proper respect for this inherent physics, one falls into pre-chaotic political forms: anarchy, tyranny, modes of being of the political entity that do not respect the nature of friendship.

¹⁷ We refer to *Platonic Studies I*, in which this theme is studied.

Is there a metaphysics of friendship?

This dimension has already been alluded to earlier. The metaphysical dimension of friendship is constituted by its formal transcendental character, thus transcending the physical realm, as the absolute of the human being's power of being in relation to another human being or other human beings. This power-of-being, according to an act of reciprocal love, constitutes a form, and all forms are, as such, metaphysical entities.

Conclusion:

Friendship and happiness: a true “eudaimonia”? Why?

Because it is only in the midst of a perfect relationship of friendship can one achieve a good that is worthy of the best of what the human being is capable of, *through the practical potentiation that the love of the one who loves brings to the beloved*. One cannot be happy without living in friendship and in the form of pure friendship, because it is in this relationship and only in this relationship that such potentiation and its actualization takes place, can take place.

From the theory of friendship and what it means as the radical mode of the relationship of oblation love, in its purest form, totally centered on the good of the beloved, we wonder if this “eudaimonia” sought by Aristotle does not correspond not only to a state of perfection of the “daimon” of myself, that I myself am, but to the presence, in this “daimon” of mine, of the act of another “daimon,” of the one who loves me, and who is the “good daimon” that makes my life the life of a “daimon,” thus and only thus, good?

This way, we better understand what Socrates' “daimon” represents, the one who wanted the best for him, who, thus, loved him, and who allowed him access to the “kairos” in which his life culminates in peace, in an atmosphere of own happiness, of hope, serving as a source of hope for his disciples.

Let us think again of Ulysses and Penelope and how only in each other's presence, in their unconfused fusion, do they find happiness, that “good spirit” – “eudaimonia”, blessed by Athena.

Friendship is thus the act in which the human being finds the possibility and the realization of his best possible. An act of love. The only act of love that is worthy of the best of human beings. Anything else approaches humanity to bestiality.

What is this love?

The love of friendship is the highest point of the possibility of human action and the glorious fulfillment of anthropological and cosmic evolution, by way of human action, begun with the eroticism of “Khaos” itself. Note that, in the realm of pagan Hellenic myth, there is no god who has reached the philetic sublimity of Ulysses and Penelope.

Friendship makes human beings superior to the gods of a pantheon that is slow to be replaced either by human beings themselves, the response of humanism with a tendency toward atheism, or by another form of intuition of the divine, precisely the new intuition which leads Socrates to death, Plato to the search for an un-hypothetic good, Aristotle to the conception of an act without any pro-chaotic taint. But it is the same Aristotle, the one who distances the divine from the human, who thinks of the ultimate relationship between human beings as something in which each beloved functions as the immovable motor of and for his or her lover’s love.

In Christian terms, the indirect relationship between the distant creator God and human beings having failed, the message of Job not having been understood, it is with the incarnation of the “Logos” that a direct, carnal relationship of God with *human beings* is possible: the *incarnation is the possibility for human beings to enter into friendship with God*.

Christ is God made friend of human creatures who either love him in an act of possible concrete reciprocity, or do not love him; and the refusal to love is always a form of death, because it is love that allows us to live.

Christologically, the birth of Christ is, with the Child in Mary’s arms, the first moment when, absolutely, God looked at a friend in the flesh of human eyes, and a human being did the same with respect to God. The “Pietà” is the carnal impossibility of the friend looking the friend in the eye, and yet the love for the friend’s good is so strong that it continues in action after the friend’s death.

Mary’s lap, not the sepulcher, is the logical place of Jesus’ resurrection: it is the closeness to the womb of the Mother that humanly saves, as if God asked Mary to once again be the absolute matrix of humanity’s good.

So, also in Christian terms, it is friendship as the absolute of the act of reciprocal love between persons that enables the city. The paradigm is the indefectible friendship between Mary and her Son.

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