The recent critical edition of the 219 doctrinal articles condemned at Paris in 1277 includes a new condemned article, Quod caritas non est maius bonum quam perfecta amicitia, that is, charity is not a greater good than perfect friendship. However, the discovery of this article has negligible importance for the study of the condemnation’s doctrinal framework because it was already known to scholarship through Raymond Lull’s Declaratio, written not very long after the condemnation, and because the article is present in only four of the more than thirty manuscripts in which the text is preserved, none of these four being significant to the establishment of the text. This being so, textual criticism concerning the new article leads one to the conclusion that it has only minor philosophical significance. Indeed, it is reasonable to conclude that the
article did not form part of the original condemnation of 1277 and that it was never actually condemned.⁴

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Lull commented on the article, and the way in which he explains it can shed light both on the problems posed by the Aristotelian theory of friendship and the way it was received at the Arts Faculty of Paris. In the Declaratio, the Catalan author does not criticise the statement that perfect friendship is above charity, but the fact that the Aristotelian theory of friendship, based on the virtuous man’s love of himself, does not take into account love for God and God’s love. For Lull every form of love depends on God’s love (i.e., charity), which is not only much broader than human friendship but also and most importantly the source of any kind of love. Moreover, according to Lull, friendship is more often achieved propter sensitivum quam propter aliud,⁵ which implies that friendship has a more limited extent than charity. Thus the point is not about the superiority of human friendship to charity—a statement which we can hardly imagine professed in the Middle Ages and thus difficult to imagine condemned—but about the possibility of a perfect human friendship without any dependence on or reference to divine love, so that charity becomes superfluous to the attainment of a virtuous life. This superfluity accords with an idea expressed in another article of the condemnation, Quod non sunt possibiles alie virtutes, nisi acquisite uel innate, that is, there are no other virtues than those acquired or innate.⁶ Although this article probably reflects a misunderstanding of Albert the Great’s position on the limits of philosophy, we can, all the same, grasp the heart of the problem in the two articles. The idea that the commission of 1277 and Lull are trying to avoid is the possibility of an entirely human anthropology and morality, in which God is not the basis and, therefore, unnecessary. As the Aristotelian theory of friendship offers a model of the highest and most virtuous life attainable in this life, without any appeal to charity, it allows the philosophical life to become an alternative to the theological one.

⁴ As Roland Hissette has shown, the new article is likely to be a contamination in the manuscripts due to a corruption in the transcription of the word castitas that gave rise to the word caritas, implying then the insertion of the corresponding word amicitia instead of abstinentia at the end of the article, so that the sentence of the condemned article could make sense. See Roland Hissette, review of La condamnation parisienne de 1277, Revue philosophique de Louvain 100 (2002), 621.

⁵ Lull, Declaratio, 384.

⁶ La condamnation parisienne, 132–133 (article 177), with bibliography.