

John von Heyking, *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. Pp. xv + 233 pages. ISBN 978-0-7735-4756-8 (paperback).

The book's grand project is to remind us of something we according to the author have lost: an appreciation of the importance of friendship to politics. Accordingly, a return to sources is required. The book's two main parts deal with Aristotle and Plato, respectively, with musings on more recent persons and events interspersed especially at the beginning and end of the volume.

The topic is a great one, and von Heyking manages to make us think through how central to Plato and Aristotle is friendship (or perhaps better: goodwill—I'll return in what follows to challenges connected to using Aristotelian friendship as a model for politics). The author implies that friendship needs to be regained as a category of political analysis, and that we post-romantics have trouble seeing such relations in terms other than those of the body and of eroticism; accordingly, "[t]his book focuses on the importance of what Aristotle called virtue friendship for political life" (15).

The sixty pages or so on Aristotle include an enlightening and very promising sketch of *sunaitheisis* as a phenomenon central to friendship, and manages to concretize what this might mean. After quoting *Eudemian Ethics* VII, 1245a1-11, von Heyking writes that it "is simply impossible to describe in a straightforward manner an intellectual act of such complexity, in which the thinking subject simultaneously beholds the good, beholds the friend, and beholds oneself and one's friend beholding the good" (43).

The possibility of transferring some of this insight over to the broader political sphere is also of definite interest. For there is at least an analogy between the deep and abiding interaction and shared action of two virtue friends and the sense of community that can be engendered from civic activities. However, there seems to be an unresolved matter in the book's purpose and theme. While intra-elite personal relations are exemplified not least through Winston Churchill's friendships, the author then goes on to speak in most of the book of broader political relations among the populace. But these relations are not like the deep personal friendships between two representatives of the ruling elite, and it is never made entirely clear what exactly are the differences and likenesses.

In this respect, *The Form of Friendship* suffers from a lack of detailed analysis or defence of its ideas. An issue that would need to be addressed is just how it might be true that citizens are each other's friends as two (or perhaps three or even four) individuals might be Aristotelian virtue friends. To Aristotle, the paragon of friendship is characterized by nothing so much as by living together

and knowing each other well over a long period of time. These are not arbitrary strictures but have something to do with how virtue friendship is about sharing the activities of life not in an abstract or metaphorical manner but in a way that is only possible if you know the details of the other's life and history as an individual, and your life is intimately intertwined with hers. Now this is not the way we may construe friendship as characterizing the relations between thousands (or many more) people who share a political framework. These people do not, and should not, know all each others' personal details, and they do not normally act together in a way that requires them to do so. While the question about how and to what extent they might share some of this, or something analogous to this, is a fascinating and important one, von Heyking does not go into argumentative detail about these differences in his assertions that friendship is the form of politics.

A perhaps more striking lack is the absence from the book of a treatment, or even acknowledgement, of corruption. The obvious question pressing on us to the extent that we acknowledge a place for friendship in politics is where friendship ends and corruption begins. Especially for a model suggesting that political relations are essentially more of the same as what is found in close individual relations, this is both a necessary and an intriguing question.

For the many singing, dancing and enjoying mimesis together, we might say that they are partly functions of others initiating, controlling, and surveilling the events. But in a culture where friendship is supposed to function as a political basis on all levels, how is corruption to be faced? Both Aristotle and Plato display extreme awareness of this tendency of human nature. But *The Form of Politics* does not address the challenge explicitly, preferring only to suggest a picture where citizens are happily celebrating community and individuality together, and powerbrokers like Churchill enjoy excellent and close friendships with other representatives of the elite.

Plato is seen mainly through the *Lysis* and, first and foremost, the *Laws*. The *Lysis* treatment holds interest for its weaving together of Hermes motifs, but builds on many secondary authors by citing their opinions more than their arguments, and creates its cloth from several dialogues without critically considering their relations to the primary text. The ensuing *Laws* discussion remains closer to the source and is more focused in emphasizing how that text "elaborates a policy whose first principle is friendship" (132). Much of the agenda of these pages, to my mind among the most interesting in the volume, is summed up as follows. "The *Laws* presents a city ruled politically by reason (Nous). It is political because it finds a place for the non-rational. Through music, it creates friendship and 'consonance' (*symphonia*) between reason and the passions, and eros is ruled in such a way that its main public manifestation