

***Aristotle on Forms of Altruism: A Darwinian Reading***

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**Abstract:** Aristotle's account of relationships between kin is somewhat similar to the Darwinian view. He sees *biological relatedness* as the key to explaining kin-*philia*. (This fits with his view that animals strive to leave copies of themselves.) But it is not clear that he grasps that the biological goals of the human animal are to be distinguished from our conscious goals. He seems to believe that we can be *aware of* our biological function, and I argue that he connects function too closely with goals in his account of relationships between non-kin (i.e., friendships). He calls the weaker friendship that exists between citizens 'advantage friendship': he holds that the *function* of such co-operation is to secure material advantages for the co-operators, but also supposes that function also determines the *motives* of civic co-operators, i.e., that they cooperate in pursuit of their own advantage rather than for moral reasons. Conversely, he calls close friendship 'virtue friendship'; he holds that close friends exercise virtues in their cooperation and have virtue-generated *motives* and an interest in each other's virtues; but he also supposes that those motives also expose the *function* of close friendship. He thinks that the function of close friendship is *to give us opportunities for the exercise and contemplation of our virtues*. The Darwinian view is that the biological function of *all* forms of friendship is the same: to secure material advantage and improve chances of survival and reproduction, and that all involve distinctively ethical motives (even if closer friendship is more affectionate); also, that an account of the biological function of relationships must be kept separate an account of our own reasons and motives.

Aristotle's treatment of *philia* covers relationships between both kin and non-kin. This is clear right from his introductory remarks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VIII.1), where he says, first, that parents have a natural *philia* (love) for their offspring, not only in our species but many others as well (1155a15-21), and then that *philia* (now meaning 'friendship' between citizens) holds communities together and has a close connection with civic justice (1155a22-28). But we should not assume that the subsequent division of *philia* into three classes (friendship based on advantage, pleasure and virtue) is also supposed to cover relationships between kin. Later in the account (from *NE* 1161b12) Aristotle treats kin-altruism separately, and in both

treatises (cf. *EE* 1242a ff) he offers another division of *philia* which names kin-altruism (*sungenikê*) as a separate class.

From a Darwinian perspective these two forms of *philia* differ in an important respect. Our children and siblings and other kin carry copies of our own genes. Our friends do not. We have evolved a predisposition, so the theory goes, to love our own kin because that predisposition aids the propagation of those genes. Friendship, if it likewise was shaped by natural selection, cannot be explained in the same way. The standard view is that it evolved as a mechanism for maximising our material interests through cooperation and reciprocation.<sup>1</sup>

These are not claims about our own desires or goals, or our reasons for loving our children or our friends. Darwinian theory is not claiming that gene-replication is what *we* are really striving for, in the way that a psychological hedonist might claim that deep down we are all after pleasure. Rather, biological theories of this sort ask us to adopt the point of view of our genes, or the goals and ‘rationale’ of our biological nature. Genes do not have conscious goals, but we speak of them as having the *biological* goal of self-replication, and we attribute that biological goal or function to the whole organism, and to its parts. Parental love has a biological function: it makes parents much better at propagating their genes. But from their own point of view, of course, parents simply love their children, have strong obligations towards them (expressed in a very wide variety of cultural idioms), and want them to flourish, and typically have no further reasons at all for feeling that way and having that goal.

This central Darwinian idea of purely biological goals and functions (of living things in general) has a rough counterpart in Aristotle’s teleological theory of nature. It works in much the same way as his idea of the natural (but *unconscious*) goals and purposes of living things and their parts.<sup>2</sup> For Aristotle even a plant has purposes, and its soul (*psuche*) is the source, locus, organiser and beneficiary of those purposes.<sup>3</sup> The eyes, limbs, and other organs of animals likewise have purposes<sup>4</sup> (determined by the

'lower' parts of the *psuche*) independent of the conscious goals that are present in the desiderative and rational *psuche* of those animals (i.e., in their minds, if they happen to have one).

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So we said that there are these two broad categories of human altruism, between kin and between non-kin, differing in their adaptive rationale. The difference shows itself in the presence or absence of reciprocation. Kin-*philia* typically involves doing good things for other people (especially one's own children) without receiving an equal return. Friendship between non-kin, by contrast, is essentially reciprocal. Aristotle notices this, and it features prominently in his account. He stresses that paradigm friendships require 'equality', by which he means an equal exchange of goods and favours, and an equality of status, and of emotional commitment, that makes an equal exchange possible (*NE* 1157b36, 1158a34, 1158b1, 1158b29; *EE* 1239a4, 1239a20). In a normal friendship material goods and favours cannot flow only in one direction or with any great imbalance. The same feature in a parent-infant relationship is inevitable, and in other family relationships it is common.<sup>5</sup>

It's not hard to see that his main analysis of *philia*, with its well-known three-way division (advantage, pleasure, virtue) is not designed to accommodate kin-altruism. In that three-way division he says that feelings between friends must be mutual and acknowledged,<sup>6</sup> but he elsewhere notes that a mother can continue to love her child even if the child doesn't know her.<sup>7</sup> Also, he claims that only *good* people can be friends of the kind that really care about one another (*NE* VIII.3-5). But if that standard were applied to kin, he notices that it would produce the absurd result that mothers cannot love their own infant children (*EE* 1235a31). Also, alongside the standard three-way division, he separately parcels *philia* into love between kin (*sungenikê*), love between close friends (*betairikê*), and other less affectionate forms of co-operation (e.g., between citizens).<sup>8</sup> He discusses *philia*

between kin separately, and gives an account of it the core of which makes no use at all of the (other) three-way division:

Love between kin seems to come in many forms, but they're all ultimately dependent on parental love. Parents love their children because they're something of themselves, and the children their parents because they're something that came from them. Parents more so, because they more easily know what's from themselves than the offspring know they're from the parents. (Also, the thing generated belongs to the begetter more than the maker belongs to the thing created, e.g. we say that hair and teeth belong to an animal, much less, if at all, that the animal belongs to its hair.) Then there's the matter of time: parents love their offspring the moment they're born, but offspring can only love their parents later, once they acquire intelligence or perception. (These things also explain why mothers love their children more.) So, parents love their children as being their own selves (the things that come from them are like other selves [*heteroi autoi*] created by the division) and children love their parents because they were born from them. Siblings love each other because they're born from the same parents. Their sameness with one another, relative to the parents, makes them the same thing — hence the talk about 'the same blood' and 'the same root' and so on. They really are the same thing, in a sense, even in their separate [bodies]. [NE 1161b16-33]

On the view sketched here parents do not love their children for advantage or pleasure or because they admire their virtues. The account focuses on biological relatedness. The offspring is a version of the parents, 'another self.' This is not a metaphor but a physical fact:<sup>9</sup> the child is a kind of replica. Likewise, the siblings are 'the same thing' (as each other) in separate persons, and that somehow explains why they love one another. Aristotle thinks that kinship itself is the basis of kin-altruism, and that it accounts for the emotional dispositions of parents, children and siblings.

What sort of explanation is this? Aristotle is open to the criticisms made against evolutionary psychologists, because he does not distinguish between the biological and the psychological, between underlying human nature and overlying human thoughts. What does it mean to say that parents cherish their children ‘because they are of themselves’ or because they are ‘other selves’? He seems to mean that parents have some form of those thoughts in mind. But he may also be talking about a deeper drive that explains their love for their offspring without being their *reason* for it: a biological ‘desire’ for copies of themselves to persist. In Aristotle’s view, all living things have such a desire. It is not a conscious desire (he attributes it even to plants) but a natural goal just like the unconscious goals that we now attribute to our genes:

The primary natural function of every living thing...is to create another thing like itself [*heteron hoion auto*], an animal an animal, a plant a plant, so as to exist forever in the only way that it can and thus share in the divine as far as possible. That is what all living things desire, and it is for that purpose that they do all the things that they do by their nature. [*De Anima* 415b26ff]

He surely has this principle in mind in the other passage.<sup>10</sup> It seems a good guess that he thinks that parental love and care, which is crucial to the child’s survival, is instrumental in accomplishing this natural function, self-copying. On that reading, his idea of the ‘physically separated other self’ need not report the content of our thoughts. It captures the biological fact that something in the offspring replicates the parent, but he wouldn’t thereby mean that mothers, any more than cabbages, actually think in those odd Aristotelian terms (just as Darwinians do not claim that parents think about genes).<sup>11</sup> But it is not clear that he grasps that there is a difference, in the human case, between conscious reasons and biological purposes.<sup>12</sup>

In other parts of the passage he talks about what parents, infants and siblings ‘know’ and ‘perceive’ and what people *say* in giving reasons for their attachments. (‘I love him because he is my own flesh and blood.’) There is a blending of two quite different modes of explanation.

Parental dispositions lend themselves to this ambiguity, because they can give rise to overtly biological thoughts. Parental love is not a desire to ‘leave behind another self’ or to spread genes. But a desire to care for one’s child, as such, has at least some biological content, since ‘child’ is itself a biological category, and our use of that category in our reasoning shows that, to our own minds, some biological fact or other gives our children a special ethical status. Likewise, phrases like ‘the same flesh and blood’ reveal a conscious intuition about the biological basis of our attachments. Notice also Aristotle’s aside that ‘these things also explain’ why mothers love their children more than fathers do.<sup>13</sup> He means that mothers ‘more easily know’ that their children are ‘from themselves.’ This is a reproductive difference between men and women that Darwinians invoke in much the same way to explain the same thing: the tendency of women, on average, to be slightly more attached to their children. Yet there is an important difference. Aristotle probably assumes that mothers and fathers think this through — that fathers are slightly less affectionate because they are less confident of their paternity.<sup>14</sup> Darwinian theory, more plausibly, proposes an innate tendency shaped by natural selection, not by shrewd dads.<sup>15</sup>

All in all, the passage shows that Aristotle does not draw a clear line between the unconscious goals of human nature and the goals that enter our own reasoning. This is entirely unsurprising. He uses the idea of *unconscious* biological goals when he is discussing plants or non-reasoning animals, or our eyes and lungs, for which it is the only sensible option. But he has no reason to think that the purposes and functions of our *virtues* might be independent of conscious thought in the same way.

That is a strange new idea, and one we still very find difficult to accept. Opponents of evolutionary psychology typically treat claims about the biological function of our behaviors as being claims about our deepest reasons for behaving that way. (That's why such claims strike them as implausible, or cynical.) Conversely, they assume that if no further reason for this or that ethical commitment *presents itself to introspection*, then there is no further explanation of it worth looking for even at the biological level. These common non-sequiturs show how hard it is for us to imagine that ethical dispositions might have functions that we just don't know about.

Aristotle says that we do not deliberate about ends, only about the means to ends (*NE* 1112b11, 1113b3, *EE* 1226a7, 1227a8). This has a local application (deliberation presupposes a goal that stays fixed while that act of deliberation goes on) but he also means, more generally, that human beings do not deliberate about *whether or not* to pursue the ultimate goals of life. In his view our practical goals derive from our nature developed by the right kind of (pre-rational) upbringing.<sup>16</sup> They are not deduced, or justified philosophically.<sup>17</sup> 'Thought on its own moves nothing' (*NE* 1139a36): to be moved to act, we need patterns of *desire* that spring from good character and its natural virtues (*NE* 1139a-b, *EE* 1227b35). Reason has the important task of grasping our goals and figuring out how to balance and best accomplish them. This well thought-out view already gives reason a relatively modest role in the ethical sphere. But Darwinians (who otherwise have a very similar view) reduce reason's role one crucial step further. For Aristotle *phronesis* at least implies *awareness of* our biological goals. He assumes that one of reason's capacities, in the only animal that has reason, is to *have some sense of* the overall function of the animal. That is what his foundational question about the 'human function' means: he is asking what the human animal, as such, is ultimately *for* (*NE* 1097b22ff), and he takes it for granted in posing that question in an ethical rather than a biological treatise that we may try to grasp our overall function and give ourselves 'something to aim at' (*NE* 1094a24): an

outline of the human good *consciously understood* as the proper *telos* of our nature. Darwinians disagree on this point. They propose that practical wisdom does not imply that kind of awareness of function, either of the whole organism, or of our nature, or of our behavioral dispositions. On their view, it is truer than Aristotle realises that we deliberate only about means. *Even our ends are means*. That is to say, our ultimate ends are often the means to some biological end of which we remain unaware, so that even the wisest people shape their practical goals without having any thoughts at all about what a human life is ultimately *for*. This important difference becomes especially pronounced in Aristotle's account of friendship.

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Let's assume that Aristotle's three-way division of *philia* does not include love between kin. (So I shall use 'friend' to refer only to non-kin, and 'friendship' to refer only to reciprocal relationships with non-kin.) In that case the three classes of friendship — based on pleasure, advantage, and virtue — correspond, on a standard reading of Aristotle's account,<sup>18</sup> to three different forms of *reciprocal altruism*. Aristotle's idea seems to be that they involve different levels of attachment and different motives. At one extreme is 'virtue friendship'<sup>19</sup> which appears to be his label for the closest friendships, involving the strongest affections and most unselfish motives. At the opposite end are weaker attachments, of which a central example for Aristotle is the bond that exists between citizens. It is not my aim here to explain all of Aristotle's claims about the three classes of (reciprocal) *philia*, and I shall respect the exegetical controversies as far as possible. I want to say something about those of Aristotle's claims about civic friendship and close friendship that make for a clear comparison with the findings of evolutionary psychology. But I at least need to begin by making some general claims about the nature of 'advantage friendship' (in the civic case) and 'virtue friendship.'



Aristotle gives plenty of examples of ‘advantage friendship.’ They suggest more consciously self-interested, less emotionally involved forms of cooperation, not ‘friendship’ in the standard sense. They include (i) a farmer and a shoemaker who, as fellow citizens, buy each other’s goods (*NE* 1163b34, *EE* 1243b30) (ii) people who (having never previously met) find themselves travelling on the same ship (*NE* 1159b28, 1161b13) (iii) cities that enter into military alliance (*NE* 1157a26) (iv) human beings and their domesticated animals (*EE* 1236b7) (v) grumpy old men who help each other out but don’t enjoy each other’s company (*NE* 1158a1-10) (vi) crocodiles and the birds that pick the leeches from their mouths (*EE* 1236b9). Aristotle is thinking of reciprocation in the broadest terms, and the last example suggests that he is again thinking biologically. Just as he illustrates kin-*philia* with the example of birds caring for their offspring (*NE* 1155a18, *EE* 1235a34), he picks an example of cooperation between two non-human species to illustrate reciprocal *philia*. The example is well chosen. We know that the plovers and the crocodiles aren’t related.

Consider the farmer and shoemaker, who buy goods from one another. They exemplify civic friendship, and we may understand his example as follows. The farmer buys shoes made by the shoemaker, and the shoemaker buys bread made from the produce of the farmer. They are not friends in the ordinary sense (they may not even meet). The shoemaker does not provide shoes for the farmer out of affection. He gives him shoes to make money, to buy food, and if the farmer doesn’t have any money, he doesn’t get any shoes. What makes them ‘friends’ in a weaker but important sense is the fact that they at least exchange goods. They are civil. They don’t kill or rob each other: they respect the obligations of their ‘advantage friendship.’ Aristotle’s idea here is the same as Adam Smith’s: that ‘it is not from the *benevolence* of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest.’<sup>20</sup> So, even though citizens are not ‘friends’ in the usual sense,<sup>21</sup> let’s assume that Aristotle means ordinary civic

cooperation to be a case of ‘advantage friendship,’ and that the name means just what it says: that citizens engage in that cooperation in pursuit of their own advantage, rather than because they care about one another. That reading seems to be well supported by his various allusions to the motives behind of ‘advantage friendship.’<sup>22</sup> It is also a perfectly plausible view, and one that appears regularly in social contract theories.

His description of ‘virtue friendship’ (*NE* VIII.3) commits him to the following claims: (1) that you only do good for a friend *for the friend’s sake* if you believe that they are of good character (at times he also seems to say that you love your close friends *because* they are good) and (2) that only good people can have friends who care about them in that way. These claims are often seen as puzzling. Critics wonder why Aristotle would think that only good people, who take such a close interest in each other’s goodness, could have genuine concern for one another.<sup>23</sup> Surely you can care about people without believing they are paragons of virtue? But we would do better to flip our question around. We know that close friends are genuinely concerned for one another’s welfare. Let’s hypothesize (charitably) that Aristotle means close friendship by ‘virtue friendship.’ What we should ask, then, is why he calls close friendship ‘virtue friendship?’ That is, why does he think that if two friends really care about each other they must have an interest in each other’s character? And why must they be good people?

Put the question that way, and Aristotle’s idea seems perfectly reasonable. Close friends depend on one another for large amounts of help over a long period. These exchanges are not a matter of law or contract, but voluntary, and regulated only by emotional attachments. For that reason alone close friendship implies an interest in the friend’s emotional dispositions. You have to trust that your friend will help you, and return your favours, long into the future, and the best guarantors of that willingness to reciprocate are marks of character: generosity, gratitude, loyalty,

love and affection. The best indication by far that someone will treat you well is the fact that they care about you and will be motivated by their love to do those things for your sake. By contrast, we have no such interest in the affections of the person from whom we merely buy bread. We only require that he has, and is willing to sell, bread. As Aristotle puts it, in advantage friendship (e.g., in our typical dealings with fellow citizens) we only look to *the thing*, not to character.<sup>24</sup>

The dispositions that we have to exercise in any close friendship, and that we look for in our friends, and that regulate our exchanges, are very closely connected with a common sense idea of virtue. Caring about others unselfishly, helping them for their own sake, being generous, affectionate, kind, grateful, helpful, loyal, trustworthy — these make up a very large part of our idea of what it is to be a good person. The friendship-enabling virtues are also the central ethical virtues, period. That fact features very prominently in Aristotle's thinking, and surely motivates his central idea that close friends must be good people.<sup>25</sup> They have to *be* good, and they have to notice each other's goodness. He is not thereby claiming that you can only care about other people if you admire their character. That was an uncharitable reading. To see what he means we must first leave kin-*philia* to one side (you can care about your own children and siblings whatever they're like), as well as erotic attachments (which are *sui generis*), and then exclude sympathetic concern for others that is not reciprocated (since that is not any form of friendship). We may then take him to mean that you have to believe of your close friends that they have the relevant friendship-enabling virtues — which seems obviously correct. And those virtues make up such a large part of being good as to justify his claim that you must take your close friends to be good people.<sup>26</sup>

I have stressed this connection between the virtues and long-term reciprocation (between non-kin) so as to vindicate Aristotle's basic idea that close friendship depends on virtue. The Darwinian explanation of this connection helps us

to see more clearly how plausible Aristotle's basic idea is. The virtues in question have evolved *because* they facilitate reciprocation. That is what they are for, biologically speaking. The goodness we exercise in our dealings with our close friends is the *organ* of friendship. Close friends need goodness as animals that chew need teeth. If you lack that organ — if you are incapable of loving other people, have no generosity, or gratitude, etc. — then you simply cannot have any close friends.<sup>27</sup> You can have pleasure friends (e.g., sexual partners that you don't care about) and advantage friends (e.g., people you trade with, buy groceries from, or make treaties with) but not friends in the standard sense.

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So on the reading I shall adopt here Aristotle thinks that mere citizens, unlike close friends, cooperate for their own advantage<sup>28</sup> — unless they become 'virtue friends,' which (he thinks) is the only way that their reciprocation could be regulated by ethical motives.<sup>29</sup> he stipulates that advantage friendship does not involve an interest in what is honourable (*kalon*).<sup>30</sup> Aristotle notices that fellow citizens, especially in large societies, inevitably lack affection for one another, and assumes, reasonably enough, that no other ethically attractive motive is available to them. So their cooperation must be driven by self-interest. What this theory denies or overlooks — if my reading is correct — is that citizens might be treating each other fairly out of a commitment to *fairness itself*. That would be an ethical motive, one that does not require any personal affection at all, and yet which is also distinct from, and at times in sharp conflict with, the pursuit of one's own advantage.

We should not be at all surprised to find Aristotle making this claim about the 'advantage friendship' of ordinary citizens. We find exactly the same view presented by various (unplatonian) characters in Plato's dialogues,<sup>31</sup> and it turns up later in the ethical theory of Epicurus.<sup>32</sup> It was evidently connected with naturalistic, secular ethics, and with the contract theory of civic justice in particular.<sup>33</sup> Aristotle

shows sympathy for the contract theory, in line with his commitment to ethical naturalism.<sup>34</sup> Traditional Greek religion based the absolute obligations of justice on the will of Zeus. When Aristotle remarks (*NE* X.8) that the gods have nothing to do with justice, he casually sweeps away that supernatural foundation. Similarly, he takes time to dismiss Plato's transcendental Form of the Good (*NE* I.6), which for Plato is the only route to grasping the objective value of justice. Even the idea of pursuing justice *for its own sake* (another Platonic formula) seems to him to require transcendental meta-ethics, and so that formula is nowhere to be found in Aristotle's treatises, and is carefully excluded from his account of justice considered as a virtue (*NE* V).<sup>35</sup> For Aristotle our interest in justice must be based in more tangible human desires and concerns. His theory that civic cooperation is a form of 'advantage friendship' derives ordinary civic justice not from a separate ethical motive — an interest in justice itself — but from citizens' pursuit of their material advantage. Each citizen, for the most part, gets more of the 'fought-over goods' (*perimacheta agatha*) if society as a whole sticks to fair dealing. On this view, they have agreed on fairness, or justice, as a means to that advantage. This is both a plausible theory, and just the kind that we should expect from him.

Essentially the same view underlies all versions of the social contract theory. The central idea is that our commitment to fairness is a cultural artefact, a product of human intelligence and collective agency. On the Darwinian view this is a mistake — a version, oddly, of the faulty 'argument from design,' except that here we wrongly attribute design not to God but to ourselves, rather like thinking, say, that bees' honeycomb is designed *by the bees*. The fact that fairness benefits us, and that it is in principle something we might deliberately institute, doesn't show that we designed it ourselves. Darwinians have made an excellent case for their claim that we have an instinctive attachment to a biological 'strategy' of fairness.<sup>36</sup> Our instinctive love of fairness evolved because, on average, it maximised the material interests (and

reproductive fitness) of the individuals who had it. This instinct manifests itself in our psychology in the form of a keen interest in fairness itself. That is why we very often pursue fair outcomes even when we believe they go against our own advantage. In the long run it pays us to treat others fairly, but from our own point of view fairness feels like an *allogrion agathon*: ‘someone else’s good.’<sup>37</sup> That is because it also pays us to be fair without caring about the fact that it pays us to be fair.

This splitting of the two perspectives, the biological and the human, therefore solves a stubborn problem in social-contract theories (including Aristotle’s theory of ‘advantage friendship’ as I have represented it here). Plato articulates the problem in the opening books of the *Republic*. If we adopted fairness only *in order to* promote our own interests, Glaucon argues (358e3ff), then surely we have no reason to act fairly when acting unfairly will benefit us.<sup>38</sup> Plato saw this as a decisive objection to any ethical naturalism, but on the Darwinian view the problem simply dissolves. Our attachment to fairness, even if it evolved because it benefits us materially (an idea that would have horrified Plato) is not thereby from our own point of view merely a means to those benefits. To worry that our attachment to fairness might vanish as soon as it is not in our interests to act fairly is, on this view, exactly like worrying that sexual desire will vanish whenever we know that it cannot lead to reproduction.

So this means that Aristotle’s idea of ‘advantage friendship’ in the civic case conceals a blend of the two different perspectives: its biological purpose and our reasons for engaging in it. Cooperation between citizens certainly *in fact serves* their material advantage, but it is not *motivated* by our pursuit of those advantages. It requires an important natural virtue (our attachment to fairness) even in the most anonymous exchanges, and several other finely tuned dispositions as well (civility, shame, honesty, integrity). We carefully watch for those virtues in others. We refuse to deal with people who show themselves to be cheats or liars, or who are merely uncivil. So ‘advantage-friendship’ is a virtue-friendship in those (more or less Aristotelian)

senses, and it seems a mistake on Aristotle's part to think that the 'vulgar' interactions of 'most people' involve no interest in what is noble and decent. Our attachment to fairness, even if it involves no great affection for others, is certainly a very important part of our interest in doing what is *kalon*. In fact, all forms of (stable) reciprocation must be 'virtue-friendships' to some degree, in the limited sense that they all rely on very complex ethical instincts that have been honed by natural selection for that task, operating alongside our pursuit for our own advantage. It makes no biological sense that human beings (uniquely among social animals) should have to *work out* the value of fairness, from principles of bare self-interest, without the guidance of any more specific instincts. One might as well propose that bees have figured out, with nothing to guide them but their hunger, the value of using hexagons rather than squares or triangles in their honeycomb.

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So, on this reading, Aristotle overplays the selfishness of the weaker forms of reciprocation. There is really no such thing as cooperation in which we aim *purely* at our own advantage. All cooperation is regulated by independent ethical interests. When it comes to virtue friendship, he does something like the opposite. The biological function of the closest friendships, on the Darwinian view, is to help individuals accrue material resources (and genetic fitness) just as with civic friendship — only more so.<sup>39</sup> From the point of view of our genes, all friendships have to be *advantage* friendships. They all have to pay their way into the genome. Even the most selfless dispositions of the warmest friendships evolved because they increased the fitness of individuals through material benefits to themselves or their kin. Aristotle certainly notices that close friendships are especially beneficial in the purely material sense.<sup>40</sup> But he fixates on the ethically attractive motives that are typical of close friends. He sees that we help our close friends out of love for them, and *for their sake*; and we freely give up our material goods for them. From that he infers that the

ultimate biological function of these friendships could not possibly be to serve our own material interests, but must be something closely connected with those ethically attractive motives. His very distinctive proposal is that the goal of virtue friendship is to enable us to exercise and contemplate our virtue. Virtue itself, in the Aristotelian view, is the biological goal of ‘virtue friendship.’

This idea that we need close friends *because we need virtue* flows from his conception of the ideal life and the human biological function. The ideal life is a life of exercising our finest virtues. That, in his view, is our biological *telos*. It is what the human animal is for (NE 1097b22-1098a16). So it makes sense that it should also be the ultimate goal of the best form of friendship, along side the lesser goals that we pursue in pleasure and advantage friendship.<sup>41</sup> On this view, we seek out the ethically richest and noblest forms of reciprocation — the closest friendships — in order to have opportunity to exercise our noblest dispositions, since that activity is what we are designed for, and so makes a human life as good as it can be.

If friendship means doing good more than receiving it, and if helping others is a mark of a good man, a key part of virtue, and if it’s finer to help friends than strangers, it follows that a good man will [always] need friends, because he’ll need people *to be the objects of his good deeds*. [NE 1169b10ff]

People who are rich and powerful, even emperors and kings, need friends more than anyone. What’s the use of all that material prosperity if they have no way of doing good deeds with it? — and typically, and most commendably, doing good means doing good for their *friends*. [NE 1156a6]

The righteous man requires people on whom, and with whom, to exercise his righteousness, and it’s the same with moderation, bravery and so on. [NE 1177a29]



So we need friends *qua* people on whom to exercise our virtues. Friends can be the ‘tools’ of our virtuous activities (*NE* 1099b1); they are external goods, providing both the means and the objects of the superior goods of the soul. In both treatises he adds a supporting argument that appeals to the value of self-awareness (*NE* IX.9, *EE* 1244b21-1245b9). Since being fully alive implies awareness of our best natural activities, we need friends to assist us in being conscious of those activities. Good people have good people as friends, and it’s easier to watch your friends being good (in the knowledge that they are just like you) than to watch yourself being good. This rather complex argument is set out in biological terms,<sup>42</sup> and rests on the premise that the exercise of human virtue is the human function.<sup>43</sup>

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It might be objected here that I am myself conflating biological goals and conscious goals. We might suppose that when Aristotle says that the exercise and awareness of virtue is the goal of the best sort of friendship, he is only talking about a *reason* for having those friends, and that biological function is a different matter, of little interest to him. But that would be quite wrong. His account of the ideal human life (*eudaimonia*) is explicitly based on an account of biological function. The ‘function argument’ sets out the function of the human animal as such, and it locates that function in the successful activity of the *psuche*, another thoroughly biological concept. He means, without any doubt, that the exercise of our distinctive virtues is the goal of our biological nature, not merely our highest conscious goal. Otherwise the whole appeal to function is philosophically vacuous.<sup>44</sup>

In that case, the Darwinian account of our biological function — the only view now worth taking seriously — seems to flip Aristotle’s explanation. Aristotle thinks that we have been constructed by nature to exercise our virtues, as a plant has been constructed to grow and reproduce. He thinks that it is a kind of biological truth that *ethically complex reciprocation is a means to the exercise and consciousness of our*

*virtue*. But we now know that it is precisely the other way around. Friendship is not a means to the exercise of virtues. Virtues are enablers of friendship. That is the correct order of explanation. The biological function of friendship (and hence also of the virtues that enable it) is to secure the reproductive benefits that arise from it. Our ethical activities are a sophisticated means to that end, at least from the biological point of view that Aristotle asks us to occupy.

What has gone wrong here? Consider the following analogy. Suppose we came across a group of robots building a brick wall, exercising an impressive array of mechanical skills. Let's say that we know that someone designed and built them, and that they have a function. Suppose we can ask the robots themselves what their function is. 'We are designed to exercise our skills,' they say. 'What skills?' 'Our wall-building skills.' That, of course, just raises the question of what their wall-building skills are for in the first place, and a good guess would be that the robots' function is to build walls. But suppose they were indignant at that suggestion: 'Walls? No, we don't care about walls. We only build walls so that we can exercise our *skills*.' We would then infer that they were just not aware of their own function. And suppose we noticed that they also efficiently divided their labour and worked in teams, with one mixing the cement, another carrying, another laying the bricks, and so on. 'Why do you work in teams?' we ask (although the answer is obvious enough). 'We work in teams so that we can contemplate one another, and be conscious of our own skills the more easily. It's hard to watch *oneself* being skilful.' That would seem an even weirder confabulation.

Similarly, we find human beings skilfully engaged in altruistic behavior (our 'skills' are the complex virtues that enable our altruism). We ask ourselves what the purpose of this intricate behavior might be. A very good guess is that the function of these virtues is to facilitate reciprocation (as they manifestly do). But Aristotle proposes that the function of friendship (i.e., of reciprocation) is to give us

opportunities for exercising and observing our virtues (i.e., our reciprocation-skills). We cannot be satisfied with this as an account of its biological function, which is what it aims to be. From *our* (first-person) perspective the virtues are something we value for their own sake, and it seems an obvious and easy point that exercising them is noble and worthwhile. But the importance of the virtues *to us* can't explain what friendship, conceived as a natural activity of a certain kind of animal, is ultimately for. That is to muddle two different points of view: ours and the biological. We still need an explanation of why are predisposed by our nature to value and admire those dispositions in the first place. That is to say, we still lack *any* real explanation of the virtues and their function.

A secular and naturalist account of ethics, like Aristotle's, in principle should aim to explain virtues and our ethical concepts in non-ethical terms,<sup>45</sup> and it is on that score that he seems to fall short here. His explanation of friendship moves towards the ethical, rather than away from it: he explains reciprocation between close friends in terms of its facilitation of virtue. But it is virtue itself, and related ethical categories (like *to kalon*) that need to be explained — and that perhaps can be explained if ethical virtue is, essentially, a facilitator of reciprocation and reproduction.<sup>46</sup> This failure is all the more striking given that Aristotle elsewhere sketches such a promising ethical naturalism. He proposes (in *NE* II.6) that a virtue is, by definition, a disposition that makes any physical organ, or any animal, better at performing its biological function, whatever that might be. That seems a good start, because we might reasonably hope that biological function will turn out to be explicable in non-ethical terms.<sup>47</sup> It is also identical to the current adaptationist view. This Aristotelian idea is the central tenet of evolutionary psychology: that behavioral dispositions are (a) just like the dispositions of physical organs, performing biological functions, and (b) fundamentally the same thing across all species of animals. The problem is Aristotle's accompanying account of the human

function: he thinks that our function is the exercise of our intellectual and ethical virtues. In the ethical case that quickly leads to a problem of circularity. What exactly, after all, do ethical virtues enable us to do? What tasks, to ask Aristotle's excellent question, do they make us do well? That question is the first step in 'reverse-engineering' our virtues. They obviously enable us to form families, and friendships, and to sustain communities. But what's the ultimate function of those? As we have seen, Aristotle's idea is that the highest purpose of friendship, and indeed of society, is to give us opportunity for exercising and watching our virtues (which is the human function). So his proposal, in the ethical sphere, ends up being the tautology that virtues make us better at exercising our virtues.<sup>48</sup>

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The Darwinian view, otherwise similar to Aristotle's, is that friendships and communities ultimately make us better at reproducing, and that is their function. For Aristotle that idea is never even an option, because this is a fact that *sits outside of practical reason*. He doesn't guess that biological goals might be invisible to us; that we might have them, in some sense, yet not be aware of them. So he could not have imagined that the natural purpose of our virtues is to make us better at acquiring material resources, and at reproducing, because those are not the conscious goals of a wise man in the exercise of his virtues. In the closest friendships we primarily love our friends, or think about *to kalon*, and only secondarily pursue the material advantages of the friendship. Aristotle is looking for the rationale for these dispositions in the wrong place: in our own thoughts and deliberations.

He hits upon the right view — by accident, as it were — in those cases where biological goals are rather close to our own psychology and thus suit his faulty assumptions: the case of parental and sibling love that we considered earlier. He notices that parental love targets people who are biologically related to us, and supposes (as I argued) that this fulfils a natural but unconscious 'desire' to have

copies of ourselves survive into eternity. He makes analogous claims about the natural (i.e., biological) purposes of *philia* between husbands and wives.<sup>49</sup> He is close here to the idea that parental (and conjugal) dispositions facilitate a conceptually distinct biological function: creating copies of oneself. That explanation avoids circularity (unlike the idea that friendship exists to enable us to exercise friendship-skills). It is also correct. Aristotle seems conceptually equipped to extend this approach to other dispositions, but in other cases the underlying (biological) function is much harder to discern in general, and impossible to discern if we assume that their function must be evident to our own minds. Anyone can see that getting married and caring for our children is going to make us more likely to have grandchildren — not least because couples and parents think in those terms. It is far less clear that loving your friends, or being brave, or generous, also makes you more likely to have grandchildren (as it does); and nobody ever died for his friends because he wanted greater reproductive fitness.

Aristotle's distinctive view of the purpose or function of close friendship explains a well-known and puzzling detail in his account. Since the biological goal of close friendship is *not* virtue-acquisition (or virtue-gazing), but reciprocation, we certainly don't demand that our friends be *absolutely* good. We only need them to be good *to us*. They need exactly those virtues that make them good reciprocators. That's why two corrupt politicians, two unfaithful husbands, two gangsters or thieves can be close friends in the full sense, as long as their vices have no bearing on how they treat each other. But Aristotle denies this (*NE* 1157a16, 1157b1, *EE* 1236b10, 1238a32) and seems to place the bar of 'virtue friendship' far too high, if it is his term for close friendship. His theory tells him that the goal of close friendship is the exercise and contemplation of virtue. So your 'virtue friends' had better be absolutely good (*NE* 1156b13, *EE* 1238a3). If they're good to you but bad in any other way (e.g., in their treatment of other citizens) then they cannot serve as enablers of *that* kind of

functioning: they can't be people in whom to observe and savour the operations of virtue. In this regard, the new, Darwinian account of the (underlying, unnoticed) function of friendship does a much better job of accounting for the strong and universal intuition that bad people *can* be close friends.

Consider also his claim that advantage friendship dissolves along with the material exchange that is its basis (*NE* 1156a19), whereas virtue friendship persists 'as long as the friends are good' (*NE* 1156b12). The implication is that what underlies virtue friendship is an interest in virtue itself, rather than the material benefits that the close friends exchange. I argued above — against a common criticism of Aristotle — that he is quite right to claim that close friends monitor each other's virtues. But a weakness of his account is that he never asks why we are interested in those virtues in just that way. It's true that we expect our friends to be generous, loyal, and grateful. But it is also true that those dispositions (whether or not we think of them in these terms) are, without exception, *indicators of stable reciprocation*. A disloyal, ungrateful, cold or ungenerous friend is not going to stay a friend for long. But why not? Not because we are connoisseurs of virtue per se, but because those vices signal that the friend is a bad investment. Aristotle assumes that a direct interest in reciprocation (typical of advantage friendship) and an interest in a friend's virtues (typical of virtue friendship) are two different things defining two very different classes of relationship. He does not notice that our conscious interest in our friends' virtues is a fine-tuned, instinctive gauging of their reliability *as reciprocators*.

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Alongside these claims about function, Aristotle's theory also throws up distinctive conscious *reasons* for cultivating friendship and helping our friends that are shaped by his biological theory. That's probably why those reasons sometimes seem awkward. The wise man, Aristotle thinks, cultivates friendship because he wants to exercise his virtue, and to contemplate his goodness in the mirror that is his friend, his other self.

Motives of that kind make sense if the exercise of virtue is our ultimate biological *telos* — if it is what the human animal is naturally designed to do. But if we no longer accept that pre-Darwinian view then we should not strive too hard to find plausibility in these theory-laden claims about human wisdom. Also, his account takes it for granted that we can consciously pursue our biological *telos*. But it now seems much more likely that our motives should not (and typically do not) contain any teleological thoughts of that kind, seeing as our actual *telos* — gene-replication — is not something that has any practical significance to us.<sup>50</sup> Of course, Aristotle is not saying that we should pursue our biological *telos* as it is now described in Darwinian theory. But if we think that our *telos*, correctly described, is not something to be deliberately pursued, then it is very odd to think that it can be deliberately pursued as long as it is incorrectly described. Nor can we coherently propose that human beings can have two kinds of *telos* at the same time, one Aristotelian and one Darwinian. Rather, these are two competing theories about the very same thing — *the* human function — and if Darwinians are right, then Aristotle is wrong, and vice versa.

Certainly this part of Aristotle's account always seemed problematic, although it has generated plenty of spirited apologies. The difficulty takes a general form: in Aristotle's world people seem to spend too much time contemplating how good they and their friends are, and exercising their virtues too self-consciously. It poses a particular problem when he has to explain why people make the very large material sacrifices typical of the closest friendships — why people give away their lives for their country or their friends (*NE* IX.8). His proposal is that the brave friend finds exquisite pleasure in a supremely noble action (outweighing a lifetime of lesser pleasures) or accrues enough of 'the noble' (*to kalon*) to offset his losses — a sufficient quantum of virtue (*NE* II69a20). This view makes virtue itself, conceived here as a kind of commodity, the goal of close friendship, and puts that goal into our thoughts.

The result is an awkward doubling-up of the friend's motives: he acts for the sake of his friend, yet at the same time for his own sake, in that he pursues his own good in *to kalon*. (And even more awkwardly, it is the fact that he is acting only for his friend's sake that makes the action *kalon* in the first place.) That awkwardness is removed by a Darwinian account, with its two distinct and separate domains, one for human motives, and another for the quite different matter of why the animal, conceived biologically, is so constructed as to have those motives.

A brave man does sometimes have reason to die for his friends or his country. Let's say we agree on that. For Aristotle, that is because (at some level) he cherishes bravery — or virtue, or *to kalon*, or some part of his own soul — and has the goal of performing his noblest functions and thereby improving his own life. But why then would he allow his bravery to *end* that life and decisively thwart all of those functions? He has to argue that even fatal acts of bravery are somehow extravagantly beneficial to the brave man. (Even Aristotle himself doesn't quite believe this: elsewhere he says, referring to the very same action, that bravery *isn't* doing you any good when it destroys you.)<sup>51</sup> The Darwinian view offers a cleaner solution to the same problem — the problem of accounting for strikingly altruistic actions of this kind — within Aristotle's own framework of natural and *functional* virtues. On that Darwinian view, the good man dies for his friends, or his country, or his family, because he loves them and feels that it is noble to do so. That is all that is to be said about his motives. (He may well have other thoughts, but if he has no other thoughts at all, nothing whatsoever is missing from his virtue.) *Without his knowing it*, his virtue serves a biological function which accounts for its existence: it improves the odds that his own genes — the very ones that have created *that* virtue — will persist. In the case of dying for friends, the explanation for that is as follows. If you can make and keep friends of the kind that you'd willingly die for, then those devoted friends will, over your lifetime, help you in countless ways, and for that matter be as likely to



die for you instead. For most people most of the time in our history as a species that proved a (materially) beneficial relationship. For that reason the virtues that enable and sustain it, strongly favoured by natural selection, have become a central part of the human character. But the ancient logic of its evolution sits outside the scope of our own present deliberations; these *historical* facts are ethically irrelevant. The fact that his bravery increased his genetic fitness certainly does not constitute, in itself, any kind of benefit to a dead or dying man. But conversely, the fact that his brave death *doesn't* benefit him causes us no headache either (as it does for Aristotle) because we are not saying (as he is) that our ethical dispositions *always* benefit us; we only claim that they are biologically very well designed, and as such fully explicable. We now have a good explanation of how altruistic dispositions and their characteristic motives can arise — are *bound* to arise under certain conditions of life — and that explanation precludes the need for any extra conscious *reasons for having* those virtues, the meta-reasons that Aristotle seems to offer us.

We may make the same point like this. Suppose we ask *which part of the soul* is benefited by these virtues (these strongly altruistic behavioral dispositions). For Aristotle, it is the highest part, the thinking *psyche* — the man himself — that must receive all the benefits of his natural virtues. On the Darwinian revision, it is, paradoxically, the nutritive and reproductive soul (the *threptikê*) that is the ultimate beneficiary of deeply innate behavioral dispositions.<sup>52</sup> The *threptikê* 'benefits' in that these dispositions make it more likely that more copies of the *threptikê* will be created and left behind. So in that sense there is indeed a part of the animal's soul that benefits functionally from these virtues, exactly as Aristotle intuited. But if we identify the man himself with only his *thinking* and *perceiving* soul (as Aristotle does, and as we should) then on that view, as in common sense uncorrupted by philosophy or religion a man who dies for his friends gains nothing at all. The thinking, conscious soul does not need to be gaining if the *threptikê* is running the show.

Darwinian theory raises this rather bleak and disturbing idea: that the conscious self is a tool of the *threptikê*, a tool of the genes as we now say. And a tool does not have to benefit from its own efficient functioning. It might be expendable: to be dispensed with if and when it suits the maker and user of the tool.

Evolutionary psychology also provides quite good theoretical grounds of another kind for thinking that close friends need no further reason, at any level, for helping one another (beyond the ones given them *unreflectively* by their affections). The most attractive and desirable friend is the one who loves you and wants to help you for your sake, *period*. The friend whose help is conditional on some further reasoned or deliberated goal (financial gain, status, pleasure, virtue, *to kalon*, happiness, utility, an afterlife, whatever) is less predictable than the one whose devotion is conspicuously passionate and unreflective. So we should expect the dispositions of close friendship to be unreflective in that way, seeing as they have had to prove themselves as mechanisms for winning the trust of potential reciprocators, over millions of years, in competition with alternative behavioral strategies. Even if it's true that my friend will win maximum virtue or the greatest amount of *to kalon* by dying for me in the heat of battle, I certainly don't want that to be his reason for helping me. What if he gets that calculation wrong? What if he decides (wrongly, but understandably) that sixty years of being a very good friend *to someone else* will result in more virtuous activity overall? The only guarantee that he won't make the wrong calculation is if he doesn't have to make *any* calculation. That is what the very strong emotions and unreflective commitments of close friends are for: they take all calculation out of the picture, which is a much better design for a clever animal that needs to win the trust of other clever animals.

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of kin-altruism, see Pinker 1999, 429-42, Singer 1995, 84-97, Dawkins 1989, 88-108; for discussions of reciprocal altruism, see Axelrod 1984, 88-105, Singer 1995, 129-53, Dawkins 1989, 202-33, Pinker 1999, 402-6, 502-9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Physics* II.8. Aristotle thinks that biological structures exhibit purpose (*to heneka tou*); but not conscious purpose. He distinguishes the products of nature from products of intention (*dianoia*), deliberation (*bouleusis*) and craft (*technē*) (199a20-b33). That is, he sees nature as goal-directed but mindless, and conspicuously avoids any mention of *divine* intention in his natural teleology. This is functionally equivalent to the Darwinian view of mindless biological goals and functions. On both views, for example, the eyes have a function, or purpose, without anyone having designed them with that purpose in mind.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle thinks of the soul (*psuche*) as (a) an organising principle, the ‘form’ (*eidos*) or *logos* of a living thing, and hence as the cause (‘the thing whence the movement’) of its growth, structure, organs, and its capacities (*De Anima* 415b21-416a18), and (b) as ‘the thing for the sake of which’ living things are the way they are: i.e., the *beneficiary* of all its features and all its doings (415b 14-21). This is similar to the modern conception of the *genome*, which we think of as both (a) the ‘recipe’ of a living thing, and the cause of its phenotype (‘recipe’ would be a fair translation of Aristotle’s ‘*logos*’ in this context) and (b) the thing *for whose benefit* the organism is the way it is. There are, of course, also very important differences that we shall consider below.

<sup>4</sup> We tend to think that biological goals are only ‘goals’ in some *metaphorical* sense. Aristotle sees real goal-directedness as a feature of all life. Popper 1999, 57-73 and Dennett 1991, 171-87 & 1995, 401-27 agree: they argue that conscious problem-solving should be seen as an *extension of biological problem-solving*.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle treats the relationship between parent and child as the paradigm case of unequal *philia*: *NE* 1158b11, *EE* 1238b22. This is of course not a form of friendship, but of love between kin. For an example of stable but unequal *friendship* he cites the relationship between husband and wife, and ruler and ruled (1158b13). It is not clear to me how good these examples are. His treatment of husbands and wives is impoverished by his neglect of the importance of romantic attachment, which he inadequately treats as a basis for ‘pleasure friendship’ (cf. 1156b1, 1162a25), when in reality it closely resembles virtue friendship. The political cases are too complex for any easy analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *NE* 2, esp. 1156a2, *EE* 1236a14.

<sup>7</sup> He says that mothers who give up their children for adoption might still love them, without any reciprocation (*NE IX*, 1159a28).

<sup>8</sup> In both treatises this rival division of *philia* (*NE VIII.14* = *EE 1242a-1242b*) is embedded in a discussion of political justice that seems to intrude into the overall account. It looks a separate (earlier?) lecture. That may be why the two divisions of *philia* do not exactly mesh. The *NE* discussion of kin-*philia* (but not its *EE* equivalent) makes a minor attempt to use the other division: love between brothers can be a form of ‘virtue friendship’ (1162a10). But this just amounts to saying that brothers can *also* be like friends. This does not justify Whiting’s claim (2006, 288) that ‘even in the case of relations among kin Aristotle treats character-friendship as the ideal.’ Aristotle knows that even when two siblings are not friends they have a special bond, and that it would be far from ideal if they were *only* character-friends (cf. *NE VIII.9*).

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle recognises these two different senses of ‘other self’. Cf. *EE 1245a30*.

<sup>10</sup> We can see clearly, in fact, that he was thinking in broad biological terms from the fact that he used the neuter gender for ‘parent’ and ‘offspring.’ He uses it in the same biological sense, explicitly, at 1155a16.

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere he claims that the human desire to self-replicate is not a matter of choice (*prohairesis*) but ‘natural.’ See *Politics 1252a26*.

<sup>12</sup> At any rate the Greek suggests he isn’t straining to mark it. The ‘as being of themselves’ could perhaps mean ‘*because they are*’ (whether the parents think about that fact or not); but is more likely to mean ‘*because they think of them as being*’.

<sup>13</sup> Whiting, 2006, 298 thinks his remark here means ‘so that explains why mothers love their children more *than the children love them*.’ But her translation has to ignore the *kai* (‘also’) and it has Aristotle using ‘mothers’ to mean ‘parents’, contrary to the usage of just a few lines earlier.

<sup>14</sup> As does Euripides (fr. 1017) when he makes the same claim.

<sup>15</sup> The Darwinian explanation goes like this. Over our evolutionary history, mothers almost never directed their love at someone else’s child by mistake (because they knew who their children were). Maternal love therefore always increased the number of a mother’s

descendants. But fathers quite often directed their resources at other people's children (because they could be mistaken about who their children were) and mistaken fathers left fewer children of their own. So paternal love was not as uniformly favoured by natural selection as maternal love. Notice that even the Aristotelian explanation requires unconscious instincts: he takes it for granted that fathers *instinctively* feel more love for their own offspring than for other men's offspring, rather than having some reason for doing so.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *NE* 1144b4 (on ethical instincts); *NE* 1095b (on pre-rational habituation). See also *NE* 1103a23.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *NE* 1151a15: He says there that a practical goal like an axiom in mathematics, and that there's no justification of goals [no *logos* of them], any more than of mathematical axioms. Rather, a virtue is a '*natural* and/or *habituated* tendency to just have the right goals to begin with.' This is strikingly similar to the Darwinian view. See also *NE* 1139a-b, and 1145a5.

<sup>18</sup> For this standard reading, see, e.g., Bostock 2000, 168-9, Shields 2007, 334-6, Irwin 1985 (notes on VIII.2 and IX.5), Stewart 1892, 274-5. For a different view, see Cooper 1980, esp. 309-16. At issue is whether the three classes of *philia* are all friendships in something like the standard sense, or have a wider scope. I accept the wider reading.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle has several labels for this kind of friendship. 'Virtue friendship' is a theory-free translation of *philia di' areten*, 'friendship based on virtue.' Most often Aristotle calls it 'the friendship of good people.' For this terminology, see below, note 41.

<sup>20</sup> Cooper 1980, 314 thinks that Aristotle means that only a shoemaker and a farmer who *become friends* — in the ordinary sense — *as a result of* their trade have an 'advantage friendship.' *NE* VIII.9 proves that Aristotle does not mean this at all. There he says that each kind of *philia* brings with it its own *dikaia* — which (as he explains) here means something like 'obligations.' Thus, our obligations to our children and parents (connected with kin-*philia*) are stronger than our obligations to our close friends (*betairoi*), which in turn are stronger than our obligations to citizens (1160a1-7). He means that we have stronger obligations to our friends than to fellow-citizens *as such*. He is not talking about obligations to those fellow-citizens *who have become our friends*. So, given that he has just said that 'each

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kind of *philia* brings its own *dikaia*, it follows that *philia* between citizens refers, here, to the ordinary bond that exists between all citizens *qua* fellow-citizens.

<sup>21</sup> It is not a problem at all (*pace* Cooper, 1980, 316) that the weaker forms of *philia*, on this reading, do not look like ‘friendship’ in the standard sense. It would be a much bigger problem if they did. Aristotle uses the expression ‘friendship in the standard (*kuria*) sense’ (NE 1157a30) to refer exclusively to virtue friendship. He reports that some people refuse to call the other kinds ‘friendships’ at all (EE 1236a28). He is reluctant to call them ‘friendships’ himself (NE 1157a25). He thinks that the lesser forms are called *philiai* only because each has some *point of resemblance* to the central case (NE 1157a31). These several claims go well with the idea that he is discussing *reciprocation*, not just friendship. The point of similarity between reciprocation between citizens, and between close friends, is that they both involve an exchange of benefits.

<sup>22</sup> e.g., NE 1157a15. Also, he asserts that advantage friendship does not involve benevolence: EE1241a4ff, NE1167a.

<sup>23</sup> Cooper (1980, 305-15) thinks this claim is so implausible that Aristotle must be saying something else. Cf. Annas (1977, 549): ‘We can like a person for what he is, as opposed to inessential qualities, without regarding him as in the least good. Aristotle is wrongly insisting that friendship involves approval of and respect for the friend’s character, and ignoring the irrational element in friendship, which can lead us to like and love people of whom we strongly disapprove.’ For similar criticisms, see Telfer 1970, Vlastos 1981, 33.

<sup>24</sup> He often puts this by saying that close friends (virtue friends) take an interest in each others *prohairesis*, which in the context means something like ‘commitment’. Cf. EE 1243a34: EE 1243b10; a close friend, he says, can fail to repay a favour as long as they *wanted* to repay it and *tried* to do so. But you can’t expect to get groceries just by *trying* to pay for them. See also NE 1163a22: The close friend’s *prohairesis* is the only ‘measure’ of repayment. I.e., a greater commitment to helping you (whatever the outcome) demands more gratitude.

<sup>25</sup> This is perfectly clear if we examine Aristotle’s explanations of why bad people cannot be close friends. He explains (EE 1236b13) that bad people will *wrong one another*, and for that reason can’t be friends; that they are *untrustworthy* and *malicious* (EE 1237b27); that they

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choose material goods over friends (*EE* 1237b31); that they are *inconstant* (*EE* 1239b15); that they are *selfish and greedy* (*NE* 1167b10, 1168a30). In every case, these are obviously vices that directly disable friendship if they affect the way one friend treats the other (which is what Aristotle means). The corresponding virtues are, precisely, *friendship-enablers*.

<sup>26</sup> At any rate, people who have the friendship-enabling virtues must be, roughly speaking, good people. But close friends don't seem to need *all* the virtues, because not all the virtues affect how we treat our friends. We shall return to this question below.

<sup>27</sup> This is why it makes no sense to think that 'virtue friendship' might refer to just one species of close friendship among several. All close friendships, *by definition*, call this same set of virtues into play and require us to exercise them and to require them in our friends. Cooper thinks (1980, 313-16) that pleasure and advantage friendship are varieties of close friendship, in which the friends care about one another, to some degree, unselfishly. But for Aristotle that feature itself is a *mark of virtue*, as are the other regulators of any close friendship; so by Cooper's own account such friendships must be virtue friendships in the Aristotelian sense. See above, note 25. Also, cf. *NE* 1162b8; there he implies that (*any case of*) being eager to help your friends is 'characteristic of virtue' and implies a virtue friendship.

<sup>28</sup> *EE* 1242a6. Also see below, notes 29, 30, 33, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle discusses the difference between citizens who are advantage friends (which he thinks is typical) and those who become 'virtue friends' or 'character friends.' Advantage friends exchange goods by contracts (*NE* 1162b25). But if they come to know one another and develop trust and affection for one another, and become 'virtue friends' then their exchanges stop being a matter of law and are regulated by character (*NE* 1162b31, *EE* 1242b36). So citizens who interact lawfully but *without any affection* are paradigm 'advantage friends.' Citizens who care about each other and help each other without regard for their legal obligations have become 'character friends' (= 'virtue friends') that is, friends in the ordinary sense (*betairoi*). This is another strong piece of evidence for the wider ('reciprocation') reading of *philia*.

<sup>30</sup> *EE* 1243a34, *NE* 1162b34. Thus, most people, most of the time, are forced to choose their own interests over what is *kalon*. That, Aristotle says, forces them into advantage friendships.

<sup>31</sup> The idea that selfishness underlies civic cooperation appears in Callicles' contract theory in the *Gorgias* (483a-d) and Glaucon's in the *Republic* (358e) it is again implied (though more favourably presented) by Protagoras's theory in the *Protagoras* (322a-d, and see 327b1-4).

<sup>32</sup> Bailey 1926, 102: *kuriiai doxai*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> It also seems to have been connected with the prejudices of leisured, aristocratic philosophers. Cf. *EE* 1243a38. Aristotle means that for ordinary people honorable motives are a *luxury*. They usually can't afford them. This is the 'gentleman's' notion that the lower classes are too busy to be morally decent. They 'prefer to live the lives of cows' (*NE* 1095b19). Cf. also *EE* 1236a33ff. The use here of *hoi pleistoi* and *hoi beltistoi* plausibly have their common social connotations. Likewise *NE* 1158a21: advantage friendship is 'for the *vulgar*.'

<sup>34</sup> The contract theory states that justice arises from our pursuing what is communally advantageous. On this view our *pursuit of advantage* (*to sumpheeron*) accounts for our interest in justice. For this idea in Aristotle, cf. *NE* 1160a7ff. He also speaks of 'contract' (*homologia*) in the context of civic friendship: *EE* 1243a34, *EE* 1242b5, *NE* 1161b13ff. Most strikingly, Aristotle asserts that in the absence of contract *there is no justice*, an odd-sounding view that clearly implies the contract theory. Thus, there is no possibility of justice between man and animal, or between master and slave (*NE* 1161a35ff), or *only* to the extent that there can be agreements between them. This is identical to the later Epicurean contract theory: Bailey 1926, 102: *kuriiai doxai*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> For this feature of Aristotle's account of justice as a virtue, see Williams 1980.

<sup>36</sup> The basic view is that we are 'hard-wired' to pursue something close to a policy of 'Tit for Tat' in our dealings with non-kin, and that a complex suite of emotional and ethical dispositions channel us into that biological strategy. See Trivers 1971, Axelrod 1984, Kitcher 1993, Cosmides and Tooby 1992, Dawkins 1989, 202-33, Singer 1995, 129-53, Ridley 1997, 53-84, Pinker 1997, 402-6, 502-6, Hauser 2006, 59-110, 251-63, 383-92.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle reports this as a common opinion, or common intuition, at *NE* 1130a2.

<sup>38</sup> Assuming we are certain to escape punishment. The story Gyges' ring is designed to provide conditions under which we can be sure of pure gain from our injustice; it would be 'utterly pathetic' of us (Glaucon argues) to persist in treating people fairly in that case (359c-



360d). Plato means that the naturalistic contract theory implies that justice has no *intrinsic* value, and so must fail as a theory of justice.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Pinker 1997, 506-9.

<sup>40</sup> Materially, that is (leaving aside his ideas about their other benefits). He notes (*NE* 1155a11) that ‘in poverty and other misfortunes’ [close] friends are ‘our only refuge.’ Also, that close friends even die for each other (*NE* 1169a18), and make any lesser sacrifice.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle sometimes calls it *di’ aretên* friendship — exactly matching *dia to chrêsimon* (‘because of advantage’) and *dia to hêdu* (‘because of pleasure’). ‘Because of virtue’ may sometimes mean *aimed at virtue*. Aristotle’s idea is that virtue friendship gives us opportunities for exercising virtue, and thus literally *gets us* virtue. This sense of the phrase is clear at, e.g., *EE*1244b15-19. Here *di’ areten* does not mean ‘because of he friends’ virtue’. It means ‘*for virtue*’, i.e., for the exercise of our own virtue.

<sup>42</sup> His claims about what it is to be living, and references to the *energeia* that constitutes living, and his assertion that living, for human beings, means perceiving and thinking (*NE* 1169b31, 1170a15 *EE* 1244b23) are all taken from his biological theories. Cf. *De Anima*, 413-414.

<sup>43</sup> I have greatly compressed the argument. For a full discussion, see Kenny 1992, 43-55, Nussbaum 2001, 354-72, Veltman 2004, Sokolowski 2001, Jacquette 2001, Kahn 1981, 30-34.

<sup>44</sup> The very idea of a *human* function minimally implies that the human animal is *constructed for a purpose* or set of purposes. But constructed by what, if not by our biology? It might be possible to argue (from an entirely un-Aristotelian point of view) that human beings, and their natural dispositions, have no function at all. But once we allow any version of the idea of a human function and functional *natural* virtues then *we can only mean* biological function.

<sup>45</sup> I take naturalism to imply, minimally, that human beings (and all their moral interests) are part of nature, *which does not itself share or endorse those interests*. See Williams 1995, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle alludes at *EE* 1234b24 to a more fully naturalist view held by unnamed others, that the point of virtue *is* to enable cooperation. He is possibly referring to *Protagoras* 322b-d, which sets out just such a theory, or perhaps to some hedonist theory.

<sup>47</sup> And of course, he *does* explain the function of the other examples (eye, horse, dog) without any further reference to their virtues. The function of the eye, he says, is *to see well*. But his

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account of human function ('to exercise reason *in accordance with virtue*') as applied to the ethical case, gets all its content from the reference to virtue. It's like saying that the function of the eye is just 'to be a good eye.'

<sup>48</sup> This problem shows itself in particular cases, too. Thus at NE 1120a he applies his function theory to generosity: 'Each virtue makes us use something or other in the best way.' Generosity causes us to use *money* in the best way; namely, *for exercising our virtue*. Thus, he literally asserts that generosity's function is to give us opportunities for being generous.

<sup>49</sup> NE 1162a16.

<sup>50</sup> The Darwinian view, which treats virtue as a natural *means*, gives us good reason to agree with Aristotle that ethical activity is an important part of life. But the Darwinian view is that our ultimate *telos* is reproduction, not the exercise of ethical virtue (still less the exercise of intellectual virtue). What difference that will make is a question for a different discussion; but it will certainly make some kind of difference.

<sup>51</sup> NE 1094b16. He means that when bravery destroys you (e.g., when you bravely die for your friends) then a (usually) good thing — bravery — is on that occasion bad for you. This seems exactly right.

<sup>52</sup> Of course, in most cases the person himself *also* benefits from his virtues (often, what's good for our genes is also good for us): but self-sacrificial bravery is not one of those cases. Aristotle assumes that the 'lower' parts and functions of the soul exist for the sake of the higher, rational part of the soul. The Darwinian view is that the rational capacities of the soul exist to serve the *threptikê* (and that the *threptikê psuche* only partially reveals its goals to its *organ*, the conscious mind). The person himself is not the soul's ultimate 'that for the sake of which.'