

# Holy Moly Under the Terebinth Tree: A Response to My Friends

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## **Abstract**

The author responds to the five insightful reviews of his book, *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato*. He focuses upon their questions regarding the degree to which the daimonic form of political friendship he expounds can operate under conditions of modernity, and on the symbol of this daimonism in Hermes.

**Keywords:** Friendship, Politics, Festivity, Modernity, Hermes

## **Introduction**

We love our friend as ourselves, but our friend enables us to understand ourselves better than we can on our own. This is the root of the wondrousness of friendship, as well as the difficulty in understanding friendship. Hermes is the patron god of this paradox because he can rescue us by uprooting us from our personal Hades and providing us with the gift of moly, our souls.<sup>1</sup> Like the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws*, our friend uplifts us by crossing an 'unfordable river' so we too can enjoy the just regime of Terabithia, named after the sacred terebinth tree.<sup>2</sup>

To respond to these five careful reviews, then, is not merely to receive that gift of having ideas reviewed and discussed, but is to participate in the mutual and free exchange of the gift of selves. It is to share, in a vicarious way, over distance and over the internet, what Aristotle calls sunaisthesis, a common beholding of the good that has become inseparable from that beholding of the good with one's companion. In noting the demands the author places upon the reader's attention, the reviewers note, too, the companionship and, indeed, intimacy the author and reader share. Rebecca LeMoine notes that the book 'is a carefully crafted book, one that places serious intellectual demands on readers while at the same time unveiling its many delightful insights through cogent prose.... In short, this is not a book for the faint of heart.' Similarly, Nalin Ranasinghe notes:

[t]hough pleasant to peruse, it's also difficult to march through. Heyking invites interruption in as much as he befriends his readers and forces them to converse with him, thus interrupting the smooth flow of swift reading that is so prized in an age of executive summaries, skimming and instant understanding.

The author demands the reader's attention and invites you to befriend him. It might be said that he forces the reader to 'converse with him,' but this compulsion can only be effected after the reader has freely offered his or her friendship.

The 'serious intellectual demands' the book places upon the reader are the result of the author's aim to follow the logos as far as it permits him. By reading the book, the reader offers her profound gift when she deigns to accompany the author along that long and difficult road. In offering their responses in written form, the reviewers extend their hands of friendship to mine, and together enable all of us to go and see both further and more deeply than we could on our own. Even so, that the form our inquiry into friendship matches the substance of friendship reminds us how our practice of friendship will elude our theoretical understanding of it, even

when the practice of our friendship consists of a theoretical exercise. And it is this paradox, not just of the relationship of theory to practice that informs friendship, but also in the general relationship between theoretic reason to practical reason, that we need to bear in mind as we attend to some of the criticisms and questions arising from my theoretical treatment of friendship. In the passage cited above, Hermes tells Odysseus that moly, which is black at the root but has a white flower, is ‘hard for mortal men to dig up from its roots, but all things are possible for the gods.’ Let us follow up that thought.

### Thoughts

Leah Bradshaw asks whether my model of *sunaisthesis* really does constitute the highest form of friendship:

I recount for readers one of the most profound and moving connections that I have seen in my life. My doctoral thesis advisor, Christian Lenhardt, a reserved, stoical and deeply German intellectual, lay for many years in an institution while his body and mind atrophied from the ravages of Huntington’s disease. His good friend Ross Rudolph, a fireworks kind of mind, Jewish and American, effusive and emotive, visited him every week and played for him the classical music that they loved together. When I think of friendship, real friendship, I think of these two men, my teachers.

Theirs was less a shared intellectual vision of the good and the beautiful than simply a shared being together. Perhaps there was something deeper and more visceral, but perhaps still rooted in shared understanding of how things should go.

One is reminded of Leo Tolstoy’s short story, “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” in which the main character, lonely and in despair and dying of appendicitis, is cared for by his servant Gerasim:

Gerasim was the only one who did understand his situation, and he was sorry for him. This was why Ivan Ilyich felt comfortable only with Gerasim. It was a comfort to him when Gerasim, sometimes for nights on end, held his legs up and refused to go to bed, saying, ‘Please don’t worry about it, Ivan Ilyich. I’ll catch up on my sleep.’ Or else he would suddenly address him in familiar language and add, ‘It’d be different if you weren’t ill, but with things the way they are why shouldn’t I help you out?’ Gerasim was the only one who didn’t lie to him; everything showed that he was the only one who understood what was going on and saw no need to hide it.<sup>3</sup>

Bradshaw’s teacher, Rudolph, like Gerasim, understood Lenhardt’s plight and offered him a similar kind of companionship and comfort, in the form of playing classical music. Socrates acknowledges how music insinuates itself into the inmost part of the soul, prior to reason, and Rudolph’s playing music for Lenhardt serves an example of music reaching more deeply into the latter’s soul than reason alone could.

There is something in both examples that shows a friendship beyond reason. Both examples suggest *caritas*. Thomas Aquinas explains that:

charity is ruled by the wisdom of God, and surpasses the rule of human reason.... So

charity is not in reason – not as in its subject, as prudence is, nor as in its ruling part, as justice and temperance are – but only by a certain affinity of the will to reason.<sup>4</sup>

Bradshaw concludes her essay by asking me to write a sequel to this book that untangles the ‘tortuous tensions between sunaesthetic friendship and caritas.’ I am presently at work on the sequel but I should note that sunaisthesis is not exclusively a union of theoretic reason because theoretic reason cannot be sufficiently untangled from practical reason, for reasons alluded to above. Partners to sunaisthesis can be silent. Rudolph and Lenhardt’s days of sharing intellectual vision were behind them, perhaps, but practical reason certainly leads them, especially Rudolph, to carry out the task of sharing a good life. Though equality is a central aspect of friendship, perfect equality is as impossible to realize as is extremely unequal friendships. Moreover, Lenhardt and Rudolph, like Ivan Ilyich and Gerasim, certainly shared a recognition of the gift of life for mortals, especially the elderly. As Gerasim tells Ivan Ilyich: ‘We’ve all got to die one day. Why shouldn’t I give you a hand?’<sup>5</sup>

Concerning political friendship, Bradshaw notes there ‘are some uncomfortable parallels here between Heyking’s Athenian Stranger and Rousseau’s legislator.’ She notes the fundamental difference between the two is that the Athenian Stranger’s foundation of political friendship is rooted in friendship with his interlocutors, while Rousseau’s legislator is a ‘singularity’ that somehow fully comprehends ‘the passions of men without experiencing any of them.’ However, Bradshaw correctly notes that, from the perspective of the citizen, there may be little to distinguish them. Rousseau’s legislator suggests the modern dream of neutrality, whereby laws are general and agreeable to all, which also resembles a mixture of the God of the Israelites, as well as the pagan gods of Epicurus, to ensure a degree of divine providential care, but not too much. Rousseau’s political rationality requires the legislator to understand the passions of human beings to enable him to craft their laws, but he cannot experience their passions because that would intrude his partiality.

Conversely, the Athenian Stranger, who serves as a ‘safe cable’ that enables his interlocutors to cross the ‘rather swift and perhaps almost unfordable’ river to safety<sup>6</sup>, also experiences their passions. As teacher, he bridges the chasm between himself and his interlocutors but in the end he cannot implant knowledge into their souls. He must stand aside to preserve their freedom. Like Socrates, the Athenian Stranger is a midwife for his regime, whereas Rousseau’s legislator, whose ‘task was to extirpate the “enemy within the breast of each citizen,” and that enemy is the particular will of the individual that might contravene the collective General Will,’ indulges in the sophism of forcing men to be free. It seems to me that whatever difficulties citizens have in distinguishing philosopher-statesmen from sophists (a point I consider at some length in my book, e.g., p. 179-80), they would probably be able to distinguish the Athenian Stranger’s agathos pseudos from that of Rousseau’s legislator.

There is something paradigmatic about the friendship of statesmen, especially founders (e.g., Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in the United States or Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine in Canada). Their political prudence must exercise utmost creativity to bring order to the chaotic passions and competing opinions of a regime. Their field of action is greater than that of the citizen. Consider, for instance, the example of Abraham Lincoln. Was there anyone else in the United States, least of all the theologians, who could have exemplified his concluding words in the Second Inaugural?:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

In keeping with the order of charity, Lincoln applied this point above all to himself. Afterwards, he explained to Thurlow Weed that:

Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them.... It is a truth which I thought needed to be told; and as whatever of humiliation there is in it, falls most directly on myself.<sup>7</sup>

Aquinas notes the paradigm of the statesman's friendship for political friendship: 'As political friendship more principally looks to the city's sovereign, on whom the city's entire common good depends, so that to him most of all is owed faith and obedience by the citizens.'<sup>8</sup> Thus I think the Athenian Stranger would want the citizen to be able to distinguish between him and Rousseau's legislator because the Athenian Stranger wants the citizen to experience political friendship as a matter of individual moral agency, at which Rousseau's legislator only appears to aim.

The comparison of the Athenian Stranger and Rousseau's legislator points to Bradshaw's final main point, which is whether political friendship is even possible in the modern world. As she succinctly puts it: 'There is absolutely nothing about political friendship in John Locke.' I shall return to this question at the end after I have gathered up similar reflections made by the other symposiasts.

Rebecca LeMoine perfectly and succinctly summarizes my argument, and offers probing criticisms and questions about the limitations of my analysis. She asks whether festivity as the culmination of political friendship also means that festivity can bring about political friendship. She discerns that I seem to make both arguments: 'Is festivity a mere indicator of the health of the polity, or is festivity itself the cause of political health?' On a related point, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) asks whether liturgical worship is redundant and whether 'our divine worship [is] not a matter of being loving people in our daily life?' Does liturgy make people virtuous? He responds: 'Whoever asks questions like these touches on a crucial dimension of the Christian understanding of worship, but overlooks something essential.'<sup>9</sup> Liturgy is sacramental and therefore something separate from moral or intellectual virtue. Or perhaps, as religion, it is a moral virtue but one that exists in that liminal place between moral and intellectual virtue, between action and contemplation, or (for Christians) between the moral and theological virtues.

Benedict speaks of the Christian understanding of worship but the same point may be seen in Plato and Aristotle. Does intellectual virtue produce moral virtue? Does moral virtue culminate in intellectual virtue? Is justice the same as wisdom? Can virtue be taught? I lack answers to these questions but LeMoine's question, which is a very good one, is of the same kind. As to whether festivity teaches political friendship, the evidence suggests no, as countless manufactured political festivals in despotic and totalitarian regimes illustrate. If festivity is then to be the culmination of political friendship, it seems instead its cultivation must take place

elsewhere, even at a subpolitical level.

LeMoine also asks whether festivity could take the form of comedy in addition to tragedy. It is difficult to answer this question because we lack Aristotle's lost writings on comedy. More to the point, this question revolves around whether comedy can instill wonder to the same degree that Aristotle claims of tragedy. This is a wonder that enables us to see the essential humanity of the main character. Let us recall that the Athenian Stranger claims 'the affairs of human beings are not worthy of great seriousness; yet it is necessary to be serious about them.'<sup>10</sup> While he notes the *nomoi* take the form of tragedy, he seems to claim comedy is best suited to reveal the human condition because human presumptiveness concerning their importance is funny. The Calgary Stampede is comedic. There is something funny about seeing presumptive cowboys getting bucked off gigantic smelly bulls. But life in general does that to us, so there is also something tragic about it as well.

LeMoine asks whether utility friendships can serve as a more effective model for cultivating political friendship. That seems a less demanding and perhaps more realistic way to promote civic bonds among those who 'exhibit a complete lack of understanding of the sacrifices made by one another and thus do not realize how much their own self-interest depends on "strangers" they sometimes vilify.' I think LeMoine, who is here referring to Danielle Allen's work on political friendship, has in mind reciprocal justice (as Aristotle calls it) that recognizes that our political association is predicated upon human neediness and fragility. Here I would simply respond with Aristotle that the purpose of the political society is not life but the good life. We treat our neighbors not simply as we do those with whom we exchange economic goods (the paradigm of utility friendships), but our neighbors are just that — those we share a common life together with in proximity. As citizens united by debate about the advantageous and the noble, our stories are intertwined with one another. The political association Americans have with one another differs from the economic association they have with Canadians. With citizens we share our stories, and this points us towards virtue friendship.

LeMoine asks why I do not devote attention to symposia. Indeed, Plato's *Symposium* has much to teach about politics and my 'eroticized friendship' (Nalin Ranasinghe's term) points in that direction. I am unsure how much I could add to other excellent treatments of the *Symposium*, such as those by Stanley Rosen, Allan Bloom, or James Rhodes. Moreover, disentangling friendship (*philia*) from the speeches on eros would be extremely vexing. Is Socrates friends with the other interlocutors? If so, what does that tell us about political friendship? I have no answers to these questions. Even so, I would argue that Socrates' speech concerning eros gives us a version of friendship presented in my book, and I make direct allusions to it in my discussion of Hermes in the *Lysis*. Moreover, while not symposia, the discussion of political friendship in the *Lams* is predicated upon Megillus' affirmation of common meals as the basis of political friendship. There the example is a military one but that may be the point. Military common meals, like politics, are rooted in necessity, which serves as a platform for inquiring after the good and the beautiful. There is something apolitical in a symposium's leisurely freedom that makes it difficult to discern its political import.

Finally, LeMoine asks how much diversity a regime can accommodate and asks whether my version of political friendship is a 'thin' Rawlsian conception of the good whereby citizens share a commitment to seek the good life, rather than a 'thick' conception of the good whereby citizens 'must also agree on what the good is.' I am unconvinced this is a satisfactory distinction. For example, even the master of 'thick' conceptions of the good, Alasdair MacIntyre, frustrated

readers of *After Virtue* by describing virtue as the shared quest to understand the meaning of virtue. The point is that we are never in possession of the good; we are always in transit. We find ourselves seeking the good life with our fellow citizens (I avoid the language of ‘agreement’ which suggests a contractual and ‘thin’ model of political association). We disagree on the good life but perhaps despite ourselves and our conscious choices (and our presumptive view of ourselves as fully autonomous rational actors) we find that it is with our fellow citizens that engage in that quest. We disagree over the good life but it is with you I pledge to live it. Political friendship is that pledge, which is most clearly expressed as festivity.

LeMoine’s question concerning how much diversity a regime can accommodate brings me to Nalin Ranasinghe’s daimonic essay and its commentary on the significance of Hermes. He notes that friendship is more than simply shared opinions and emotions. Friendship is a ‘daimonic event, uniting the divine and human parts of reality, and opening us up to the tragic beauty of the Agathon.’ It profoundly unsettles the categories and ties into which our political regime organizes us. Despite this, elsewhere he states: ‘In short, the polis does not define philia, erotic friendship gives birth to true politics.’ Theory and practice are united in this event, which is the founding act of genuine political society. Friendship is profoundly subversive:

This experience fills us with erotic generosity towards others; this is how the prisoner leaves the cave and why he returns, as a philosopher, to free souls, find friends and restore the polis. By friendship we practice true politics and reverse the cosmos towards justice. The view that philia activates the soul, sparks a polity into being, and brings the Cosmos into sight, is at least as reasonable as the regnant belief that selfish egotistic behavior is best for the economy and even helps nature evolve.

Ranasinghe characterizes my account of friendship as ‘erotic Platonism,’ and his essay is an extended meditation upon the daimonic event of friendship that constitutes genuine politics, and whether modernity provides sufficiently fertile ground for that event. Before turning to friendship’s possibility in modernity, a question posed by all the reviewers, I shall attend to Ranasinghe’s discussion of Hermes, which is the focal point of this daimonic event.

Hermes is the key figure of this erotic Platonism, as I highlight in chapter four of the book. Ranasinghe clearly describes the ways that the iron cage of modernity destroys friendship. Hobbes and, behind him, Augustine of Hippo, are the twin enemies of friendship: Hobbes for the ‘commercial morals and economic fetishes Hobbes substituted for political rights when he denied virtue or friendship and declares the war of all against all’ and Augustine who ‘hippo-like wallows in the soul’s unconscious and preys on its darkest urges’ that propounds self-hatred and scorches the earth of the possibility of friendship.<sup>11</sup> Even Aristotle is too flat-souled to help us moderns because his scientific reduction of eros shares too much with our regime of technology.

Ranasinghe sees Hermes as perhaps our last and only hope for friendship in modernity. Only Hermes enables us to see our friend as the irreplaceable soul she is, in its Apollonian height and Dionysian depth, and his hermeneutic skills enables us to penetrate, unsettle, but also to save the multiple surface layers of our respective family, economic, ethnic, and social bonds:

[T]he Hermes inspired friend unselfishly sees the unique soul of the befriended one in all of its uncanny and tragic potential. What is seen is not my eternal form or divine essence but what is most fury-ridden and god-haunted about me; only these energies can propel

my soul out of its own underworld and towards the divine siren voices that promise a restless psyche self-knowledge and recognition.

Just as Hermes crosses the ocean and sky to come to Odysseus who wails on Circe's island, Hermes forces us 'to engage and interpret the very symbols that had previously contained its erotic motion,' and sets us loose: 'he uproots Odysseus' soul from its furies and follies and gives it to him.'

It is Hermes who brings Priam to Achilles and he liberates Odysseus to embark on his odyssey 'to inaugurate a pre-democratic polis, where a worthy swineherd and cowherd would live as his son's equals.' The youngest of the Olympians who is 'most interested in the human soul's polymorphous perversity and transgressive tendencies' is that patron best able to uproot our souls from the furies of modernity and hand ourselves to us because he transcends 'Apollo's proud piety and Dionysus' destructive rage.' The modern incarnation of the former is found in the 'oligarchic substances of family, piety and money' and the modern incarnation of the latter is found in 'demagogic anarchy.'<sup>12</sup> Hermes is like Socrates who, through handing our souls to ourselves, liberates us from those cages and 'makes it possible for tired old symbols to be revered.' Hermes provides a way for us to follow Eric Voegelin's counsel to recollect the experiences behind the symbols of order. For example, Hermes can help us recollect the sunaesthetic vision of 'Jesus appearing before two once and future disciples on the road to Emmaus' that informs the Church. Perhaps, too, he can help us recollect the Socratic and Platonic eros behind ossified Platonism and other academic philosophizing. Hermes is one cool cat bohemian who, like Socrates, is enigmatic but whose transgressive creativity appeals to our modern sense of self. One has to look at Kierkegaard's account of Socratic irony for a similar evocation of this kind of eros.

Ranasinghe wonders whether there can still be a modern daimonic statesman. Commenting on my example of the friendship between the Duke of Marlborough and Eugene of Savoy, he writes: 'Heyking gently implies that genuine virtue friendship between real statesmen, in the truest sense of this aristocratic ideal, is obsolete in a once oligarchic and now demagogic age filled with dodgy dossiers, smug sanctimony and crafty calculation.' He suggests more recent examples of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King Jr., and Popes John XXII and Francis, but one could add to those examples Pope John Paul II, Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela, and even François Mitterrand.<sup>13</sup> He cites Roosevelt gleefully promoting 'the liquidation of the British Empire' as evidence against Churchill as a daimonic statesman. However, Churchill is a good candidate for a modern statesman who practiced daimonic friendship; he viewed his great ancestor as his contemporary and the biography constituted the capstone of Churchill's political education. Concerning Roosevelt, one must remember that statecraft is a tough game and the friendships among statesmen of separate nations, with shared and competing interests, are far more agonistic than the friendships most other people enjoy.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Churchill was well aware of the Apollonian and Dionysian dimensions of modernity, even before confronting Hitler, when he pondered the complications of governing brought about by 'mass democracy.' His understanding of the iron cage of modernity was far deeper than most realize, and far deeper than that of his contemporaries, including Roosevelt.

Thomas Heilke cites children's novels as a key place where the teaching of friendship, both person and political, can take place: 'The novel offers, therefore, a training in judgment that enables political friendship when such education is fully realized. It prepares the souls of its

readers, when they are mature enough to realize it, for sunaisthesis and mutual wonder.’ Focusing on E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia*, and Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak the Mighty*, he shows how they fulfil many of the requirements for education in justice set out in Plato’s *Republic* Book Two, as well as the mimetic education in political friendship set out in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which I consider in chapter three of *The Form of Politics*. There Aristotle provides a model of mimetic education that is a shared beholding of a drama that balances realism and imagination to instill wonder.

Heilke identifies the novel as the proper form for this kind of teaching in the modern world. His point is a qualified one that needs some elaboration. The novel is different in kind from spectating a tragedy or listening to a story. It is solitary, as befitting the modern self. Walter Benjamin explains:

What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature — the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella — is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience — his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere he states:

A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else.<sup>16</sup>

Benjamin’s understanding of storytelling informs Hannah Arendt’s insights on storytelling and political action in *The Human Condition*. Part of learning sunaisthesis and mimetic learning of political friendship is beholding and contemplating the action with others, and responding to the drama with others. The modern novel is by an isolated self for an isolated self. There is a kind of vicarious literary friendship between author and reader that thinkers including Montaigne and Kierkegaard have explored and that this symposium reflects. However, the experience of reading a novel and learning from it differs from that found in contemplating tragedy at the theater with other citizens.<sup>17</sup> My favorite modern example of this is Abraham Lincoln’s frequent visits to the theater — he loved Shakespeare plays — to gauge, remarkably, the mood of the American public. These plays took place in small, crowded theaters, and though Lincoln sat in the presidential box, ‘he could still enjoy the communal experience, which allowed him to feel the pulse of the people, much as he had done when he traveled the circuit in his early days.’<sup>18</sup>

Having registered these qualifications regarding the form of the novel, Heilke’s exposition of the political education provided by the imaginary cosmos evoked by these novels is undeniable. All three works present friendship as a Hermetic matter of one friend uprooting the soul of another ‘from its furies and follies and gives it to him.’ This is true of Charlotte saving Wilbur from the slaughterhouse (*Charlotte’s Web*), Kevin saving Max from his criminal father (*Freak the Mighty*), and Leslie transforming Jess from the son of philistines into a king of the enchanted land of Terabithia (*Bridge to Terabithia*). The friendships enjoyed by these characters create political, or at least pre-political (as Heilke notes), communities. The barnyard of *Charlotte’s*



*Web* is a community with deliberative proceedings, the kingdom of Terabithia is a well-ordered kingdom that opens up human possibilities otherwise unavailable on the other side of the stream, and it is at the Fourth of July celebration that Kevin rides on Max's shoulders and they both, in an act of sunaesthesia, become Freak the Mighty. Indeed, all three novels treat political community in terms of festivity. Moreover, such festivity gets expressed as the culmination of the virtues being learned in the drama, which expresses the Platonic-Aristotelian point that festivity is civic virtue in action. Their magical realism reflects as well the Platonic-Aristotelian point that the best regime is "dreamlike", while also being the telos of political action. These examples validate Heilke's insight that children's literature provides a dramatic form suitable for presenting political friendship because it presents a playful and somewhat innocent education experienced by the young.

The example of Leslie attending Easter service at Jess's church is important for the plot of *Bridge to Terabithia* but not simply to show that the 'celebration of this festival pales for Jess in comparison to the "magic" of Terabithia.' The death of Leslie when she fell trying to cross the stream is explicitly compared to Israelites crossing the Red Sea,<sup>19</sup> which for Christians prefigures salvation through Christ. Plato's Athenian Stranger also fords an 'unfordable river' to reveal the nomoi to his interlocutors, while recognizing that they maintain complete freedom to understand it. While they played in their imaginary kingdom, Leslie, the eventual sacrificial lamb, would even tell Jess to 'arise,' as Jesus commanded the dead. Leslie's gift of herself enabled Jess to reconcile with his sister May Belle when he helped her cross the stream: 'Anybody'd be scared. You just gotta trust me, OK? I'm not gonna let you fall, May Belle, I promise you.'<sup>20</sup> Leslie fulfilled the true meaning of Easter by making reconciliation possible among the siblings.

Paterson inadvertently took the title of her book from C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

[A]t about the time I was to check the final galleys for the book, I happened to re-read *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. As you all know, there is an island in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* named "Terabithia." I was appalled. I had pinched my word right out of Narnia. At first I thought I would have to change it. I didn't want everyone complaining that I was hanging on to Lewis's coattails. But the thought of finding a word of exactly that length and going through the galleys and making all those the corrections spurred me to seek another solution. And my kindly brain supplied the needed justification. Leslie Burke had read the Narnia books, too. She would very probably come up with a name for her kingdom that closely resembled something she had seen in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and thought she had made it up out of the blue. Besides, Lewis obviously got the name for his island from the terebinth tree in the Old Testament. It wasn't really original with Lewis, either.<sup>21</sup>

The terebinth tree was sacred to the Old Testament as the public place where human and divine join. Reaching deep into the well of the past, behind the Old Testament, Thomas Mann launches his story of Jacob by describing the tree's political and cosmic significance:

This beautiful tree was sacred. Beneath its shade counsel might be obtained in various ways, both from the mouths of men – because who were moved to share their experience of the divine would gather listeners beneath its branches – and by higher means.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of *Bridge to Terabithia* is that it shows the “daimonic event” of Jess receiving his soul from his friend, and enables Jess to constitute perhaps not political community but to reconstitute his family life, which is a beginning.

Finally, Thierry Gontier offers Montaigne over Plato and Aristotle as a guide for understanding the political significance of friendship, especially under modern conditions. Montaigne is one of the primary sources of “modernity” and his treatment of friendship and political order conveys a richer sense of the possibilities of friendship under modern conditions. Gontier treats friendship as a matter of the self’s perfect freedom with another, as expressed in Montaigne’s essay that is a tribute to La Boétie. Friendship is a “mystery” that is singular and cannot be referred to or justified by metaphysical notions of the Good. For Gontier, this permits a deepened sense of personalism unaccounted for by the ancient philosophers. Politically, it enables a sphere of freedom in private that seems to inform the modern state, which he characterizes not as political friendship, but as something close to it, ‘civil conversation’: ‘Montaigne thus moves towards a form of political liberalism which is not reduced to a simple *modus vivendi* between the *libido dominandi* of individuals.’

There are significant differences between Montaigne’s teaching and that of the ancients, as well as significant and perhaps unnoticed similarities. Gontier claims Montaigne represents an advance on the ancients by treating friendship as a relationship of freedom. We choose another for his own sake, and not on account of any external advantages, whether material or even on account of the character of our friend. Montaigne’s famous explanation for his friendship with La Boetie (‘Because it was he, because it was I’) reflects this singularity:

The most evident feature of this new map is the disappearance of the Aristotelian relations of analogy between the natural and voluntary forms of friendship.... It is this continuity which is broken with Montaigne. What emerges from this exposition of the involuntary forms of friendship, is really the divorce between ‘regular friendship’ and true friendship. It is thus only equivocally (and not analogically) that we are still able to speak about friendship in referring to familial or amorous relations.

Gone is Aristotle’s attempt to ‘save the phenomena’ of friendship in imperfect friendships. Is this a case of having a purer sense of friendship’s singularity? Or is it the immoderation reflective of modern humanism and scientism?

While there is something sublime about Montaigne’s formulation, there is something indeed immoderate about it, which Gontier notices in citing his essay, “Three Kinds of Association”:

I am very capable of forming and maintaining rare and exquisite friendships [...]. In ordinary friendships I am somewhat barren and cool, for my pace is not natural if it is not under full sail. Besides, my fortune, having trained me from my youth for a single perfect friendship and given me a taste for it, has in truth given me a certain distaste for the others [...]. And furthermore, by nature I find it hard to communicate myself by halves and moderately, and with that servile and suspicious prudence that is prescribed to us for association in these numerous and imperfect friendships.

This may be a case of aristocratic reserve according to which friendship is not offered unless the potential friend has passed numerous tests. It is not the easygoing friendship of the democratic

soul. Yet there is something immoderate about the soul that must be either ‘somewhat barren and cool’ or going ‘full sail.’ A soul unpracticed in a half sail befriending seems ill-equipped and lacking the seriousness to practice not just ‘full sail’ friendship but also to engage in those relations that characterize citizenship that are generally ‘cooler’ than personal friendships but also can demand great tests of character in times of political difficulty.

Such a self is also Gnostic in its self-understanding of one whose only authentic relations are found in perfect freedom, and whose necessary relations tie him down. I am more convinced by Augustine when he characterizes our neighbor as the one who appears before us as if by chance. Only angels can obtain a condition of perfect freedom, and the view seems strained that we are in full possession of ourselves for choosing our friends, as if chance, accident, or even necessity played no part in their coming into our lives and even impressing themselves upon our souls. For this reason, Montaigne’s dismissal of marriage as merely necessary is off the mark. Similarly, such a self who guards his freedom will regard those who are not his friends as burdensome, the crowd whom he approaches only as a calculation of duty.

Gontier instead presents the modern state as a ‘civil conversation’ ‘between people of wit who have no other goal than to meet in order to converse with one another.’ Personal friendship is a prelude to this realm of civic freedom. Gontier sees in Montaigne a movement of withdrawal from the public into the free realm of friendship, and then back outward: ‘Solitude of place, to tell the truth, rather makes me stretch and expand outward; I throw myself into affairs of state and into the world more readily when I am alone.’ However, it is difficult for me to see how, given his desire to go ‘full sail’ with friends, Montaigne would readily throw himself into the affairs of the state. Or if he did, how he would avoid going ‘full sail’ in those relationships when going half sail would be the moderate thing to do and more appropriate for political action. But the capacity to go half sail would require affirming those imperfect friendships Montaigne rejects and that Aristotle preserves by maintaining the phenomena.<sup>23</sup>

The challenge for this sort of argument that tries redeeming the public realm as a function of the good found in the private is that it needs then to show how the world of politics actually displays that positive influence. Just how politics is to look like a ‘civil conversation’ informed by friendships of perfect freedom is not shown in Gontier’s treatment except for an allusion to liberal democratic representative institutions. But even there the point of debate is not ‘exercise of minds, without any other fruit.’ Here I would observe that when Hannah Arendt celebrates politics as conversation without ulterior purpose, she has in mind the ancient Greeks. Even so, I have tried to show how the personal informs the political by suggesting sunaisthesis serves as a model for political friendship understood as festivity, which operates at a higher level of causality than deliberation.<sup>24</sup>

I have emphasized so far the differences between Montaigne and the ancient philosophers. In so doing I pointed to a whiff of Gnosticism in Montaigne that Gontier would reject. However, I think the grounds for rejecting my claim would require Montaigne to admit a closer association of friendship with virtue than what Gontier presents. He is probably correct to see in Montaigne the inheritor of a view of the human person that is richer than that of Plato and Aristotle. For instance, Timothy Fuller has written that:

Montaigne introduces a Christian and a Romantic element for our consideration: Christian because the encounter with a true friend is a kind of moment of incarnation, a revelation within human experience; and romantic because it is an adventure in which

the ineluctable temporality of the human condition is challenged by the power of the human imagination to live as if it were eternal, while remaining creatures of time which sweeps everything away.<sup>25</sup>

Fuller's incarnational interpretation is in some tension with Gontier's nominalist interpretation.

Gontier claims Montaigne's personalism enables him to love the individual person and not simply as an instantiation of the universal. James Rhodes demonstrates how this criticism Gregory Vlastos makes of Plato falls short of its mark,<sup>26</sup> and I think it falls short in the case of Aristotle as well. Even though Aristotle provides a theoretical account of friendship instead of a 'perpetual funeral' to his friend as in the case of Montaigne, the priority Aristotle gives to practical reason over *theoria* prevents him from subsuming the individual under the universal. Moreover the form of Plato's dialogues provide a personalist account of how friendship is actually lived.

Gonther's thesis that personal friendship and solitude enables Montaigne to 'stretch and expand outward' into the political realm bears a marked similarity with my claim that sunaesthetic friendship informs political friendship. Gontier claims Montaigne can do this because he has removed the unnecessary metaphysical baggage the ancient philosophers have placed upon friendship: 'What is this mystery of friendship that ancient moral philosophy has not understood? It is that of a unity unmediated by a higher value which will always sully friendship with a form of heteronomy.' Yet it seems the conditions of freedom that Montaigne requires for friendship and conversation suggest at least a mediated, if not unmediated, "higher value." One must be capable of acting freely. One must be conversable. These are terms predicated upon the self's enactment of its potentialities connected to a "higher value" that is higher precisely because it is the target at which those potentialities aim. These capacities require certain habits and virtues, not the least of which is the capacity to choose well and act upon moral principle instead of simply following blind instinct. In Kantian language, the ability to follow the categorical imperative is the capacity to act selflessly in the face of overwhelming injustice. Morally vicious people cannot and will not do this. These virtues are cultivated in what I call the "prohairesis life" of friends living together and seeking the good together.

Moreover, my account of friendship and Gontier's Montaigne also share the view that the goods discovered and nourished in what I call "sunaesthetic" friendship are more "real" and of a higher goodness than those found in politics. It seems Montaigne needs something like sunaesthetic friendship to proceed, with moderation, into the public realm. What I would dispute in Gontier's very fine presentation of Montaigne is that Aristotle does not treat friendship as "useful" for virtue. Their relationship does not have that nature. Friendship is fundamentally the expression of virtue. Put another way, virtue's aim is friendship. All the virtues that Aristotle describes have as their aim the practice of friendship. This is why when we comes to describe sunaesthesia in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.9 he means to include in the soul's work all the virtues he described previously in the argument.

All the symposiasts ask whether Plato and Aristotle's understanding of the 'daimonic event' of friendship can be replicated under modern conditions. However, contrary to the co-editors' claim, I do not praise the 'modern version of political friendship... for its "model" character.' In one way or another, each of the symposiasts provides an affirmative answer to this question because the power of friendship supersedes modern individualist and instrumentalist constructions of selfhood. Indeed, I have my reservations as to whether these constructions

obscure other, more personalist possibilities inherent in modernity that recognize the limits of theoretical, scientific reason and emphasize rather the primary of practical reason. These take their bearings from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* but in many respects reflect Aristotle's own understanding of their relation.<sup>27</sup>

My own approach to this question also draws from my study of empirical examples of political friendship in the modern world. I have examined Churchill in depth. I have also drawn from Tilo Schabert's important studies of François Mitterrand and former Boston mayor Kevin White, and his reflections upon political creativity, cited above. At one point, Schabert makes this important remark about Boston politics that should caution us about relying too much on historical categories like "ancient," "medieval," or "modern":

Boston was moving along an historical axis which cuts our conventional image of "history" — "history" proceeding with the course of calendar years. The city entered into another "history" — the "history" of societies where the art of organizing a personal party, that is a party of "friends," has been shown to be the essential art of politics. Considering the story which these societies tell, we do not view a process in the ongoing time of the physical world, but view a process in the rhythmic time of continuing creation — we view the creativity of the politician. Once a full view of this process has been gained, one can easily recognize that all the societies which are "contemporaneous" with each other beyond the "ages" suggested by the conventional image of history.<sup>28</sup>

The creativity of politics contains many layers and histories, meaning all are simultaneously present and absent in the process of creation. Schabert and Heilke elsewhere remind us of the primordial significance for politics of the friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and of course the gods.<sup>29</sup> This is a thought Eric Voegelin articulates when he rejects the linear model of history in favor of one of "equivalences," replacing the historiogenetic model with one that views history as a field of tensions in metaxy, whereby the analysis of history must 'move backward and forward and sideways, in order to follow empirically the pattern of meanings as they revealed themselves.'<sup>30</sup> For this reason, the editors of this symposium are right to complain I overlook medieval Christian formulations of friendship and charity but for the wrong reasons, for I am not writing a history. Nor am I suggesting Plato and Aristotle offer us the last word on friendship. Even so, the next installment of my friendship project will consider Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante on this very question because the manner in which charity unsettles virtue friendship has profound implications for political friendship understood as festivity.

The multi-layering of history also explains why, as Ranasinghe points out, the friend pulls out the other out from her furies and follies. The 'daimonic event' happens despite our plans for or against it. One finds acts of love and friendship in the most awful and horrific circumstances, including concentration camps, where the incentives favor hatred and betrayal. In the darkest of circumstances, human beings still (or perhaps especially) can experience their freedom.<sup>31</sup> This point can, of course, be easily exaggerated and must be handled with utmost fear and trembling. As Pierre Manent has argued, one of the biggest obstacles to political friendship under modern conditions are the crimes committed by modern regimes in the twentieth century:

It is precisely the crimes committed by such regimes in the twentieth century that now prevent Europeans from turning to Providence with confidence and faith. It can be

argued that the destruction of Europe's Jews has made it impossible to believe in a God who is friend to humanity and master of history. I have touched on this question in other contexts with a trembling hand. It bears down on Europe in more ways than one. The Judge seems to be under judgment. Where was He?<sup>32</sup>

In *The Form of Politics*, I note that my favorite modern example of festal political friendship is Estonia's "Singing Revolution."<sup>33</sup> This is a case study of the 'Magnesian synthesis of freedom and friendship' operating under some of the toughest conditions modernity metes out. Estonians were thrice cursed by having been carved up by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 and had first to endure Soviet occupation, then Nazi occupation, and then Soviet reoccupation until the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989. They sustained themselves during those dark times of death, destruction, and imperially imposed forgetfulness primarily through their songfests, when tens of thousands would congregate at the singing grounds in Tallinn, the capital. Singing is Estonia's national sport. As Texans play football, Germans play football (soccer to North Americans), or Canadians play hockey, so too Estonians sing choral song. Civic virtue is learned not in the songfests themselves, but in the choir rooms where they practice singing their songs of recollection. Indeed, the documentary focusing on their independence from the Soviet Union, *Singing Revolution*, includes an interview with an Estonian who explains her political identity as, 'I am a singer.'<sup>34</sup> With this illuminating statement, the interviewee asserts both her individuality and her experience of being a part within a greater whole of Estonian nationhood. As a singer, she contributes her unique voice to the common song, but she also performs her nationhood side-by-side with other individuals reciprocating with their own performances. It is the political form of sunaisthesis in festivity.

The Estonians sang national songs recollecting the freedoms of their ancestors, with titles like "Land of my fathers, land that I love," as well as songs of hope. Estonian poet Heinz Valk is credited with coining the term, "Singing Revolution," and its slogan, 'One day, no matter what, we will win!' which reflects Plato's Magnesian second 'minimum dogma' that the gods care for human affairs. Politics as friendship, indeed all politics, is predicated upon the faith that the regime's justice provides the best route for human happiness, and the hope that one's regime has support for a cosmos in which justice is, in the end, stronger than injustice. As Manent has written, 'in order to act for the common good, we must have confidence in the possibility of the Good.'<sup>35</sup> Politics depends upon a God who is friend of human beings.

The singing of their songs was peaceful, indeed innocent, in a manner not unlike the innocence of dreamlike Terabithia, and image of the best regime, which opened up a moral space of freedom and fortitude for Estonians to navigate peacefully the difficult path to independence.<sup>36</sup> Their festivity opened up the possibility for authentic politics, in the manner that gifts of generosity, loyalty, mutual benefit and forgiveness in friendship opens up the possibility of authentic politics. Singing together was "our power" that overpowered the furies of modernity.

I described the Estonian singing revolution once during a public lecture and one of the respondents, an Albertan of Norwegian descent, responded that it reminded him of his childhood when his Norwegian immigrant community would celebrate Canada Day (July 1), the scene of less furious modernist furies than ones experienced by the Estonians. Everyone would gather around the local storyteller who would relate stories of the community's activities over the course of the previous year, and tying that to their broader history and broader Canadian society.

It helped that the storyteller was usually drunk. The point of this is that this Norwegian immigrant community participated in Canada's nationhood not with the usual Dionysian and militaristic displays of modernistic fury that usually accompany national celebration, but with storytelling. Storytelling as an act of communal and political friendship.

Human beings are always in need to have our souls uprooted from its furies and follies and given to us. Socrates understood this perfectly when he claimed himself the true statesman for engaging in dialectic instead of those presumptive statesmen who make laws and deliver speeches to the many. Uprooting souls must be done person by person, which is why philosophers like Aristotle observe that we can only really have a few friends. Modern politics aspires to be technological, universal, and homogeneous, and its Apollonian and Dionysian impulses place numerous obstacles between Hermes and his beneficiaries. But Hermes, the last-born Olympian whose creativity makes him resemble human beings, astonished his brother Apollo by teaching him music and outsmarted him by stealing his cattle. Dionysius likely found him mad. As Heilke shows, Hermes operates under various guises that surprise us by imparting experiences of order that ossified symbols might otherwise obscure. His example of *Bridge to Terabithia* shows the author of the novel inadvertently pinched "Terabithia" from C. S. Lewis, who perhaps inadvertently pinched it from the Old Testament, whose author perhaps inadvertently pinched it from what Mann calls the 'deep well of memory.' As psychopompos and patron to Socrates' oaths, he represents the 'windfall' that from the depths shines forth before us in our need.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by Joe Sachs. See Nalin Ranasinghe's contribution to this symposium.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Heilke's discussion of Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* in his contribution to this symposium.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", 199-200.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Question 24: The Subject of Charity," in *Questions on Love and Charity*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," 200.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, (*Laws*, 968d-e

<sup>7</sup> Lincoln, letter to Thurlow Weed, March 15, 1865.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, "Question 26: Order of Charity," in *Questions on Love and Charity*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI), *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 803b.

<sup>11</sup> I am unconvinced of his reading of Augustine and suggest ways that Augustine gives much greater allowance for friendship and even political friendship. See my *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001) and "The Luminous Path of Friendship: Augustine's Account of Friendship and Political Order as Common Objects of Love", Chapter in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 115-138.

<sup>12</sup> In the spirit of Dionysius, Barbara Ehrenreich makes an impassioned plea for festivity within modernity, which she regards as overly Apollonian. Hermes makes no appearance in her discussion (*Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007)).

<sup>13</sup> On Mitterrand, see Tilo Schabert, "A Classical Prince: The Style of François Mitterrand", *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics: Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz and How World Politics is Made: France and the Reunification*

of Germany. For commentary, see my “Friendship as Precondition and Consequence of Creativity in Politics” in *The Primacy of Persons in Politics: Empiricism and Political Philosophy*.

<sup>14</sup> I have analyzed Churchill along Platonic and Aristotelian lines in “Comprehensive Judgment” and “Absolute Selflessness”: *Winston Churchill on Politics as Friendship*, (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, 1969, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 100.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched*.

<sup>18</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, 610.

<sup>19</sup> Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 113.

<sup>20</sup> Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> Paterson, “Where is Terabithia?” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 9 (4) 1984: 153-7).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> For discussion of the significance of maintaining the phenomena of imperfect friendship, see Heyking, *The Form of Politics*, 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> See Heyking, *The Form of Politics*, 57-65.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Fuller, “Plato and Montaigne”, in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, 207.

<sup>26</sup> James M. Rhodes, “Platonic Philia and Political Order”, in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, 22-4.

<sup>27</sup> Consider the work of David Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence, and Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being*. I have commented on Walsh’s achievement, with special attention to the question of the possibility of friendship in the modern world (“David Walsh’s Anamnesis of Modernity: A Preface to a Preface,” *Political Science Reviewer*. Spring 2010: 140-69).

<sup>28</sup> Tilo Schabert, *Boston Politics*, 102-3.

<sup>29</sup> Schabert, *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence*, Epigraph (no page number); Thomas Heilke, “Friendship in the Civic Order: A Reformation Absence,” in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, 167.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age, Order and History* IV, 24.

<sup>31</sup> See David Walsh, *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom*.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Manent, “Repurposing Europe,” *First Things*, April 2016

(<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/04/repurposing-europe>). This article abbreviates his book, *Beyond Radical Secularism*.

<sup>33</sup> Heyking, *The Form of Politics*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> James Tusty, Maureen Castle Tusty, and Mike Majoros, *Singing Revolution*.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Manent, “Repurposing Europe,” *First Things*, April 2016. This article abbreviates his book, *Beyond Radical Secularism*.

<sup>36</sup> See Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, “‘Singing oneself into a nation’? Estonian Song Festivals as Rituals of Political Mobilisation,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 20 (2) 2014: 259-76.

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