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A PROTO-SOLIDARITY? FRIENDSHIP, JUSTICE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ARISTOTLE

1. *Setting the issue*

Solidarity is increasingly regarded as a normative ideal of considerable theoretical and practical significance within liberal democratic contexts, being frequently invoked for its potential to mediate the complex relationship between moral motivation and political commitment[1]. If considered from the point of view of political theory, such an ideal might be thought to offer a promising perspective of analysis for a wide variety of demands for social justice that can be addressed at the institutional level – i.e. demands that could be framed as "claims for solidarity". To those same claims, it might encourage responses consonant to principles of mutual recognition, respect of individual and group rights – and suggest the need for a sense of shared responsibility towards the redress of certain conditions of asymmetry, exclusion, or systemic disadvantage[2].

Within contemporary political theory and moral philosophy, solidarity is often conceptualized as a factor of public cohesion, and also as an ideal whose normative strength develops against the backdrop of a shared awareness of human interdependence and of the risk of widespread vulnerability[3]. If operationalized through appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms, it may foster the creation of a sense of unity not only within relatively homogeneous political communities – such as Nation-States bound by (relatively) shared cultural, religious, or ideological commitments – but also within pluralistic societies characterized by deep diversity and normative pluralism[4]. As a normative

[1] On this perspective on solidarity see Blais (2017).
[2] See Sangiovanni (2013, 2015, and 2023).
[3] See Blais (2001: 175, and 2007).
[4] See Banting & Kymlicka (2017).

principle, it calls not merely for affective identification or empathetic concern for certain conditions of vulnerability and distress, but also and especially for various kinds of collective agency and coordinated action – both within civil society and institutional systems.

Facing the issue from an exquisitely historic-philosophical *côté*, it might be said (in agreement with a vast majority of scholars) that the idea of solidarity seems to have found proper theoretical articulation only in the modern age. Having developed in the aftermath of the French Revolution[5], that concept experienced significant success across the entire nineteenth century – e.g. in the leftist milieux before the revolution of 1848, and also in the growing intellectual and ideological movements that opposed the imperial regime from 1852 to 1870. Solidarity notably gained political consecration in the 20th century, especially through thinkers like Léon Bourgeois, who considered it to be an alternative between an atomizing liberal individualism and collectivist socialism[6], and Pierre Leroux, who believed that the notion of *solidarité* could play a crucial role in rethinking the distinctive aims and strategies of political (democratic) activity[7].

Despite the distinctively modern development of that notion, it might be supposed that some of its core elements can be detected in embryonic form in ancient political thought – most notably in Aristotle's philosophy[8]. In this essay, I will suggest that some features of Aristotle's ethical and political reflections provide fertile ground for rethinking modern and contemporary notions of solidarity. My approach is twofold: on the one hand, I

[5] See Blais (2001: 175). As the author contends, solidarity was seen at that time as a possible remedy against the risk of citizens free and equal in law, but isolated from each other and unaware of their reciprocal needs.
[6] See Blais (2001 and 2007).
[7] See Furia (2022). At pp. 16-17 the author points out that Pierre Leroux calls himself the inventor of the term "solidarity", being one of the first authors to make systematic use of it since he makes it a pivotal element in the architecture of his political thought and his vision of democracy.
[8] This has been noted by Bayertz, who speaks about a natural sense of human sociability in Aristotle (See Bayertz 1999: pp. 9-10). See also Jang (2018), who speaks about Aristotle's idea of "political friendship" as a form of solidarity in the modern sense.

will consider how modern theories of solidarity can illuminate certain aspects of Aristotle's political thought; on the other hand, I will examine how Aristotelian insights might, in turn, enrich and refine contemporary understandings of solidarity. In the following section I offer a cursory overview of the relationships between solidarity and justice in contemporary political theory – with special focus on the ideas of solidarity as "joint action" and "justice within a community". In the following sections I take issue with some aspects of Aristotle's political philosophy, starting from an examination of his theory of friendship (φιλία) and its connections to the ideas of "justice" (δικαιοσύνη) and "community" (κοινωνία). In the last section, I will propose that Aristotle's idea of civic friendship as a "community-based justice" resonates with some of his views on the possibility of an inclusive citizenship (this to be understood as active participation of "equal", although not necessarily virtuous, people in the political life). I will contend that a special form of solidarity might arise between people endowed with equal access to political participation.

2. Solidarity and community. A provisional definitory attempt

In everyday understanding, solidarity is generally conceived as an other-regarding attitude, which might be expressed in practice through words and/or actions designed to offer material support and/or recognition to people in vulnerable situations. The concept of "solidarity", however, is notoriously elusive and can assume different (and often incompatible) shapes, provided that it can be operationalized though initiatives that intercept a heterogeneous variety of actors, dynamics, and contexts, at the private, as well as at the public level[9]. On the one hand, solidarity can be compared to individual altruistic behavior which does not demand reciprocity; on the other, it can be conceptually framed as an ideal capable of informing juridical dispositions which, as a consequence, commit the concerned subjects to reciprocal justice. Addressing the issue from a normative point of view, it might be conceptualized as a duty –

[9] See Furia (2022: 8); Bayertz (1999: vii).

moral and/or legal. From an analytical one, instead, it might be described either as a private, subjective inclination – one which does not presuppose any juridical regulation – or as a principle that guides and shapes the inner organization of informal groups and contract-based partnerships. Leaving aside the idea of solidarity as unilateral and spontaneous individual initiative, it is perhaps more fitting – especially from the perspective of political philosophy – to understand it as a network of reciprocal practices within groups and associations, sustained by mutual care and concern, as well as by attention to the well-being of the collective to which each individual belongs. Even so, however, some distinctions are in order. As the sociologist Jodi Dean for instance contends, group-solidarity might be based on features like a shared identity, value-grounded similarities, or common experience. In that case, solidarity would exclude difference, and would prove to be a bond of cohesion strengthened by conformity. A similar view of solidarity, as she notes, risks to marginalize those who do not fully fit the identity and/or the experience of a certain group[10]. A second – and more promising for the scopes of contemporary liberal democratic theory – is what Dean names "reflective solidarity". This second form of solidarity, which fits pluralist societies marked by various kinds of disagreement, relies on reciprocal communicative commitment. Solidarity, in this respect, evokes a sense of responsibility, responsiveness and accountability, rather than homogeneity of views[11].

A further conceptualization, proposed by Sally Scholz, emphasizes how, within associative forms characterized by substantial homogeneity of views, we can speak of *social solidarity* – one that does not involve particular adversities, struggles, or unrecognized demands. A different form of solidarity, which might be named *political*, is the one arising from a shared experience of exploitation or oppression, being based on a shared commitment to combating various types of injustice. This form of solidarity, which we might consider "horizontal" (in that it can be structured between individuals united by a shared situation), generates bonds of cohesion that, depending on the in-

[10] See Dean (1995: 117-123).
[11] Ivi: 123-137.

tensity and closeness of the members of the structured group, will in turn constitute a source of moral obligations[12]. A third type of solidarity, one not necessarily related to the prospect of homogeneity of views, is named by Scholz *civic solidarity*. Being "vertical", it finds expression in the obligation of civic institutions to protect citizens from various kinds of vulnerability – mostly through welfare measures[13].

The tendency – documented in recent academic scholarship – to articulate the semantic scope of solidarity by differentiating meanings and contexts of application does not appear to be driven by mere speculative curiosity. Such differentiations are rather due to the urgency – both metalinguistic and ethical – of selecting and formulating a definition of solidarity that proves epistemically valuable and efficient in addressing issues of justice within specific domains of inquiry (whether empirical, sociological or distinctively philosophic-political)[14]. If understood as a social and/or political force, solidarity can be defined as "cooperative action", which is to say, a form of acting together to overcome significant adversity, where participants identify with one another and display a shared willingness to come to each other's aid in the pursuit of group-goals. A similar way of understanding solidarity involves reciprocity[15],

A theory of solidarity as "joint action," such as the one formulated by Andrea Sangiovanni[16], requires that the subjects involved in cooperative agency consider each other to be equally endowed with a certain threshold of epistemic capacity to contribute to the process. Reciprocal accountability and recognition of the moral (as well as intellectual) authority of the persons involved underlies a communicative dimension enervated by the use of mutual respect and public reasons – i.e. justifications consonant to liberal principles that reasonable citizens

[12] See Scholz (2008: 5).
[13] *Ibidem.*
[14] This aspect of academic research on solidarity has been stressed in Sangiovanni (2025).
[15] See Sangiovanni (2025: 35).
[16] Sangiovanni (2015).

would recognize, regardless of substantive reciprocal disagreement[17].

In Sangiovanni's view, persons displaying solidarity as (and also in the context of) joint-action are (aware of being equally) committed to the achievement of a shared goal. To this purpose, they are ready to overcome some significant adversity[18], to display the intention to do their part in achieving the shared goal in ways that converge to it. This is not to say that each of the committed subjects should perform the same actions, nor that they should be endowed with an equal, specific and measurable degree of epistemic capacity and authority to intervene in a shared process.

It is interesting to note that, among the various theoretical and normative requirements applicable to a view of solidarity as 'joint action,' Sangiovanni also includes the tendency to "share one another's fates in ways relevant to the shared goal"[19]. Reciprocity in commitment, as well as the awareness of a shared goal, would seem to cement a bond that does not necessarily have to do with pre-existing and similar identities, but which finds in the very undertaking of the goal a reason for structuring and development.

If understood as a process able to activate joint, collaborative and reciprocally respectful dialogue, solidarity could be framed as a form of justice empowered by a sense of "community", i.e. partnership. The idea of solidarity as a principle that develops contextually to the emergence (and consolidation) of communal ties, rather than through abstract rules. In short, practices that might be defined as "solidaristic" do not simply concern the performance of just acts from a neutral, impersonal detached

[17] On the idea of "reasonableness" as an individual attitude concerned with respect of fairness, reciprocity, and the willingness to propose and abide by fair terms of cooperation in a liberal democratic society (given the assurance that others will likewise do so) see Rawls (1993: 48-54). On his idea of public reason see pp. 212-247, especially p. 213: «public reason is characteristic of democratic people: it is the reason of its citizens, of those sharing the status of equal citizenship».

[18] On this point see Sangiovanni (2015: 343), who allegedly diverges from Rawls. Rawls believes instead that cooperation among citizens in liberal democratic societies should not be based on actions that impose significant costs on those who undertake them (See Rawls 1999: 294).

[19] See Sangiovanni (2015: 348-354).

perspective; they rather engage people in forms of communication concerning how to live together, acknowledging both individual and collective needs, and working towards solutions that reflect the lived experiences and desires of the community as a whole.

A well-known conceptualization of a (possible) correspondence between justice and solidarity is notoriously the one outlined by Jürgen Habermas. The author's interest in solidarity is part of a decades-long investigation into the factors that undermine the legitimacy of contemporary democracies. Habermas specifically questions the role that a communicative rationality between citizens and institutions, informed by principles of respect, tolerance, and the sharing of experiences and needs, can play in structuring bonds of political friendship (both nationally and transnationally). The formation of such bonds, in turn, will hopefully lead to a reduction in conflictual tensions and margins of disagreement between the parties involved. In the attempt to search for the principles able to determine and justify a deontological ethics of public discourse, Habermas initially presents solidarity as a universal moral value, which can be theoretically framed within a deontological discourse ethic, without, however, eliminating references to the dimension of care for specific individuals and groups in particular cultural, social, and value-based contexts[20]. In his exploration of the concept of solidarity, he theorizes solidarity as a normatively binding value, which can be consolidated through the exercise of democratic citizenship rights within specific political entities. More specifically, Habermas frames solidarity as an ideal capable of guiding and strengthening the exercise of such rights in the direction of authentically democratic social policies[21].

Regarding the relationship between justice and solidarity, his following statement is well known:

> [J]ustice conceived deontologically requires solidarity as its reverse side. What we are dealing with here is not so much two moments

[20] Habermas (1990a).
[21] See Habermas (1990b).

which supplement each other, but rather, and much more, two aspects of the very same thing[22].

Although acknowledging the limits of a philosophical-deontological approach to the problem of solidarity in a second phase of his reflection[23], what is argued in the above-mentioned sentence expresses a principle that is also valid for research on solidarity that does not attempt to qualify it as a source of political obligations.

Justice and solidarity, in fact, should not necessarily be understood as complementary dimensions of civil coexistence and political cooperation, as if each lacked certain qualities that the other virtually filled. On the contrary, solidarity can be interpreted as a specific and privileged mode of observation of justice—that is, its prospects, critical issues, and potential developments. This mode, in Habermas's reflection, is linked to the vision of solidarity understood as a true "form of justice", capable of developing within a framework of human coexistence founded on the sharing of fundamental values such as equal respect and the recognition of human dignity in its many facets: bonds of citizenship, rights, and mutual responsibilities. The framework in question should not be understood as a reality characterized by homogeneous views on certain areas of human life (such as religious communities or specific cultural groups), but as a terrain of civic coexistence and cooperation governed by a shared political-legislative system, and inspired by specific public values. It is in this sense, as I will suggest throughout this paper, that solidarity can be characterized as a form of "enhanced justice", that is, as justice that is not impersonal, but rather grounded in shared experiences of citizenship that also encompass a distinctly deliberative and political dimension.

3. *Aristotle's view of friendship (φιλία). Its relationship to justice and community*

[22] See Habermas (1990a: 244).
[23] See Carrabregu (2016).

Aristotle's examination of the idea of friendship (φιλία) is part of a metaethical discussion[24] on the nature of human good and its relationship with the development of attitudes and corresponding forms of virtuous conduct. The human good is notoriously identified with εὐδαιμονία, i.e. a condition of well-being that resides in the active exercise of the human rational faculty[25]. Being conceived as the highest and ultimately desirable goal (cf. *NE* I, 5.1097a14-b7), that good elicits a natural individual tendency to bring the human ethical and intellectual potential into actualization. The realization of individual flourishing calls into play not only a propensity for speculative knowledge relative to the principles of human and natural reality, but also the inclination to establish righteous paths of evaluation and judgment with a view to virtuous decision-making (i.e. the process of human reasoning leading to the realization of what is good in specific contexts, and in an objective sense – a condition which Aristotle names "practical truth" in *NE* VI, 1.1139b21-31).

As Aristotle makes it especially clear in Books V-VIII-IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book VII of the *Eudemian Ethics*, the pursuit of the practical good, as well as the one of knowledge, can be characterized as a joint enterprise. Friendship is initially presented (in agreement with common understanding[26]) as an ingredient of the happy life. In the first place, it is described as «a kind of excellence, or goes along with excel-

[24] See Garver (2006), who explains that Aristotle's ethical writings are not specifically designed to offer concrete and context-related solutions to practical problems.

[25] A detailed treatment of human happiness in Aristotle's philosophy goes outside the scopes of this paper. Suffice it to say that, at *NE* I, 6 (especially at 1097b24-a18), happiness is presented in terms of the actualization of a distinctively human "function" (ἔργον), that resides in the practical use of reason (1098a2-3). Happiness is described as an activity of the human soul according to virtue (1098a15-16).

[26] Aristotle's investigations in ethical matters (as well as those in physics and metaphysics) adopt as a starting point generally held opinions (ἔνδοξα), or views held by intellectuals, some of which are generally "saved" through critical examination, as Aristotle himself explains at *NE* VII, 1.1145b2-7. On this method (which might be called "dialectical" or "diaporetic", given that it develops the consequences of opposed views; See Aristotle, *Topics* I, 2 and *Metaphysics* III, 1), see Berti (1989: 125-139).

lence»[27] (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a1-2), and also as an extremely necessary (ἀναγκαιότατον) – but not for this reason, purely instrumental – aspect of the human life, given that «no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good things» (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a5-6). What is more, people generally believe that φιλία belongs to the domain of fine things (τῶν καλῶν), i.e. one that Aristotle keeps conceptually separate from what is purely necessary (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a29-32). Indeed, fine things can virtually be situated beyond the sphere of material urgency, and "the fine" itself is treated by Aristotle as a sort of "end", and as the mark of that which achieves its formal completeness and perfection[28] (completeness which, generally, is an end in itself and the object of intellectual contemplation, rather than something instrumental to the achievement of further ends)[29].

It is a value which, by presupposing an open display of reciprocal benevolence (εὔνοια)[30], is by nature other-regarding, and extends over a wide variety of relationships – such as those that can be established within the sphere of the family, as well as the one between people who share specific group-experiences, values and life projects. As Aristotle says for instance at *NE* VIII, 11.1159b27-32, «people address as 'friends' those sailing with them or on campaign with them, and similarly too with their partners in other kinds of sharing community». Most crucially, "φιλία" is considered to be a relational structure

[27] Trans. Rowe in Rowe and Broadie (2002) (from which all the passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be taken, unless differently specified).
[28] This idea is especially evident in Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* (*PA* I, 5. 645a23-26), where beauty is presented as a property of living things that have achieved their full-fledged biological form.
[29] On the idea of (moral) beauty as an inherently desirable object of contemplation (which is also stressed by Aristotle in *Rethoric* I, 9. 1366a33) see Richardson Lear (2006). Richardson Lear believes that Aristotle's reference to beauty in the sphere of morality and politics sheds light on the approximability of the relevant objects and methods of inquiry to those of metaphysics and speculative science. A different view (one I disagree with) is held by authors like Irwin (1988: 349-350) and Engberg-Pedersen (1983: 37-93), who believe that Aristotle uses the idea of beauty as a synonym for "common utility".
[30] See *NE* VIII, 2.1155b33-1156a5, where Aristotle explains that benevolence, reciprocity and openness in the expression of benevolence are requirements of any kind of friendship.

(either symmetrical or hierarchical) underlying the *polis*, which Aristotle considers to be the most complete, self-sufficient and all-encompassing community[31].

It is noteworthy that Aristotle's discussion of friendship in *NE* VIII is conducted against the backdrop of a constant critical comparison with the ideal of justice. The issue of the possible relationships between justice and friendship, which spans the whole book, is a complex one, made of spaces of correspondence and conceptual differentiation. Notwithstanding the claim that justice and friendship concern the same persons (*NE* VIII, 11.1159b25-26; *EE* VII, 10.1242a19-22), several conceptual differences exist between justice and friendship in general (which is to say, independently of the specific qualifications that Aristotle outlines in his ethical works for the two separate notions). In the first place, being conceived as a subjective attitude, justice does not necessarily presuppose reciprocity, nor the intimacy and shared experienced from which friendship instead arises. That difference also appears particularly evident with regard to his account of "perfect" justice, which is presented as lawfulness – i.e. a conformity to laws that, in their most efficient configuration, are not simply meant to promote a vague idea of common interest, or the exclusive benefit of the best people, but also the acquisition and the stable consolidation of each virtue of character (cf. *NE* V, 3.1129b14-27). Viewed in this light, justice is "perfect virtue" (τελεία ἀρετή) and, as such, those who possess it use virtue in regard to another person (πρὸς ἕτερον) (*NE* V, 3.1129b31-35).

Despite the structural link between that kind of justice and concern for others, no explicit mention is made of reciprocal interactions or exchanges of benefits. This also applies to Aristotle's view of particular justice, which is described as a circumscribed section of complete justice and, just like the whole of which it is part, presupposes both other-regardingness (*NE* V, 4.1130b1-3) and abidance by established public norms. Partic-

[31] See *NE* VIII, 11.1160a8-30, where Aristotle notes that the political community, unlike the others, does not pursue a partial goal or benefit. Being the community to which the others are subservient, the political one does not aim at immediate utility; by contrast, it tends to the one extending to human life in its entirety and complexity. See *Pol.* I, 1.252a1-8.

ular justice is notably illustrated in *NE* V, 4 through two distinct definitory approaches: on the one hand, one that focuses on justice as an individual disposition of character [named ἰσότης and implying a subjective tendency to avoid greediness (πλεονεξία) – i.e. pretending more than is due to one (*NE* V, 4.1130a19-20) – in the field of public honours, wealth, and security; *NE* V, 4.1130b2-5]; on the other hand, one which frames justice as an institutionally determined state of affairs[32]. In the latter case, justice would concern either the distribution of offices according to established criteria (such as the case of distributive justice, which follows a principle of proportional equality according to value; *NE* V, 4.1130b30-1131a1), or the rectification of damages, (which, by contrast, looks just at possible inflicted damages, and adopts a principle of arithmetical proportionality in the restoration of broken balances in giving and taking; *NE* V, 4. 1131a1-9)[33].

The only kind of justice that directly implies reciprocity in human interaction – one which Aristotle does not seem to ascribe to the domain of particular justice[34] – is one that might be defined "commutative", and is generally found in economic exchanges. This type of justice requires public agreements and criteria of mutual giving and benefit that follow a geometric proportionality (*NE* V, 8.1132b22-1133b28)[35]. When compared to commutative justice, friendship would seem to share the fundamental presence of reciprocity – and, as we might assume, also transparency in the terms in which the relationship is established. In its broadest and most widely accepted sense, however, friendship based on common values, shared experiences, and altruistic benevolence seems to extend over and above the domain of a purely material exchange. For the ex-

[32] On the two approaches of particular justice see Ritchie (1894).
[33] On the idea of "the equal" according to "arithmetic" proportionality see *NE* V, 7.1132a29-b20. This sort of proportionality does not contemplate that shares are given in proportion to merit or contribution.
[34] See Ritchie (1894: 185-186).
[35] As Aristotle explains, the goods to be exchanged, being qualitatively different, are "equalized" in such a way that a higher quantity of qualitatively inferior goods would correspond to an inferior quantity of qualitatively superior ones. When the exchange is not directly a barter, money enables the evaluation of each good and comparison in value with others.

change of benefits that can occur within a friendly relationship involves a display of mutual benevolence that, however tied to a certain extent to the pursuit of profit[36], appears to transcend the realm of a purely instrumental agreement.

A further – and noteworthy – aspect of analogy, although not full identification, that might seem to unite commutative justice and friendship resides in the fact that both relations refer to the perspective of a cohesive *polis*. The idea of a commercial exchange is associated to the fact that the people committed to it have needs, and need (χρεία) is what keeps the *polis* together (συνέχει) (*NE* V, 8.1133b6-7). Similarly, the idea of friendship as a force able to promote cohesion between the parts of the city stands out in the opening section of *NE* VIII, where Aristotle draws on a common understanding of friendship to express the view that

> [F]riendship also seems to keep cities together (ἔοικε δὲ καὶ τὰς πόλεις συνέχειν ἡ φιλία), and lawgivers seem to pay more attention to it than to justice (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a23-24).

While the bond created by need in commercial exchange primarily refers to the idea of an "impersonal" interdependence between commodities, the technical skills needed to produce them and the individual necessities experienced by the skill holders, the binding power of friendship in the *polis* appears to have a broader scope. As the passage above appears to suggest, the alleged axiological priority that lawgivers are expected to attach to friendship with respect to justice points to a fundamental limit of "sheer" justice. For when justice is understood as a purely formalized institutional order, it is not in itself an ideal capable of ensuring the stability of the city. Unlike pure justice, understood as abidance by laws, φιλία in the *polis* encapsulates

[36] This is for instance the case of the kind of friendship which Aristotle qualifies as "by utility". This kind of friendship is the one of those loving each other in view of an individual benefits. Such people do not love another for what the other is in essence, but simply for the benefit that accrues to the lover (a notable example is the friendship between oldw-aged people, who need to live together to have mutual assistance (*NE* VIII, 3.1156a9-32). Utility-based friendship, however, does not reject the idea of mutual benevolence. On this view see Cooper (1977: 625-626), and Riesbeck (2016: 45-96).

an ideal of concord (ὁμόνοια), i.e. a form of "like-mindedness" which can be obtained only when its members converge on substantive issues (e.g. who should rule, what should be done in specific occasions, consonantly to the resources of its city). In fact, straight after noticing that lawgivers appear to devote more attention to friendship than to justice, he says:

> [F]or like-mindedness seems to be similar, in a way, to friendship, and it is this that they aim most at achieving, while they aim most to eliminate faction, faction being enmity; and there is no need for rules of justice between people who are friends, whereas if they are just they still need friendship – and of what is just, the most just is thought to be what belongs to friendship (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a24-29).

The idea of ὁμόνοια evokes a sense of joint adhesion and participation in various dimensions of the life of the *polis* on their members' part. Concord in itself does not presuppose the cultivation of affectionate feelings; as an essential feature of political friendship, it contributes to shape it as a stable relationship between people who share meaningful views on the way in which their joint-life should be organized within the community[37]. It is also noteworthy that ὁμόνοια is identified as a distinctive trait of a particular kind of friendship: the one which Aristotle relates to people similar or equal in virtue. This sort of friendship (named "perfect" [τελεία] at *NE* VIII, 4, 1156b7, b34 and 7.1158a11), binds persons who, by sharing their love for virtue and by using virtue as a well-established attitude, are inclined to love their friends and, accordingly, to perform reciprocally good actions for their friends' sake without the need of coercion[38] (and independently of the benefits that inevitably a simi-

[37] See Lockwood (2020); Bartels (2017).

[38] See *NE* V, 4. 1156b7-17. The correct translation of the Greek phrase at lines b7-9 is debated (τελεία δ᾽ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ᾽ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων: οὗτοι γὰρ τἀγαθὰ ὁμοίως βούλονται ἀλλήλοις ᾗ ἀγαθοί, ἀγαθοὶ δ᾽εἰσὶ καθ᾽ αὑτούς). While some scholars translate it as implying that virtuous love is sparked by the virtue of the beloved ones, others (in my view, more consonantly to the relevance that Aristotle attaches to active virtue, especially in *NE* VIII, 10.1159a33-35), interpret it as entailing that the active virtue of each person "as lover" is what prompts them to perform correspondingly virtuous actions towards people who share the same values. For a detailed treatment of this kind of friendship see Gillet (1995: 58-77).

lar kind of friendship generates in terms of general well-being, ethical and intellectual growth[39]). The shared love for virtue appears the ground of their altruistic, reciprocal benevolence.

Being also applied to friendship within the city, concord might appear to play a central role in what Aristotle considers to be primarily (μάλιστα) – but perhaps not exclusively – a friendship based on utility: the political one (*EE* VII,10.1242a6–12). This latter type of friendship, although predominantly focused on the pursuit of individual utility, requires stability and an expression of joint adherence to the goals of the *polis* that cannot fail to take into account the necessity to strike a balance between individual needs and the needs of one's fellows (given the awareness that the satisfaction of individual needs depends on the satisfaction of other people' needs)[40]. The shared quest for justice in the city extends over and above contingent desires and acquisitive propensities, and encourages agreement on forms of justice that, in the best possible degree, pursue the common well-being and encourage the development of virtuous other-regarding habits in its citizens.

4. Justice, Friendship, and Community: different ways of looking at the city

The commonsensical view about civic friendship introduced in *NE* VIII, 1 finds its conclusive formulation in the following remark:

> [T]here is no need for rules of justice between people who are friends, whereas if they are just they still need friendship – and of what is just, the most just is thought to be what belongs to friendship (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a28-29).

This passage attests to a profound conceptual affinity between justice and friendship. By declaring that the highest form of justice is somewhat "related to friendship", Aristotele paves the way for an idea which he will fully develop in a more sophisticated way in sections 11-14 of *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII: the

[39] *NE* VIII, 1.1155a12-16.
[40] See Riesbeck (2016).

view that a tight correspondence can be outlined between different kinds and degrees of justice and friendship. In fact, he often suggests that justice and friendship coexist in different ways within certain communities. What is more, in the context of a discussion of the issue of political friendship, he points out that several constitutions (as well as their respective institutional settings) can be referred to particular kinds of φιλία – symmetrical (such as those underlying democracies and timocracies/polities[41]) and asymmetrical (such as monarchies and aristocracies among those constitutions that pursue the common interest, and oligarchies, which, by contrast, structurally aim at the preservation of the ruler's power, often at the expenses of the common interest). To understand the inner dynamics of various forms of political friendship, Aristotle notably adopts various models of family-friendship and uses them as a *ratio cognoscendi* for each specific constitution (for instance, the pattern of friendship between husband and wife, which helps to understand aristocracy, the one between a father and his children, which, if based on correct conduct, can evoke the idea of monarchy, or the one between brothers, which could be compared to a democracy, which does not presuppose correct education, or a timocracy, in which the relationship between citizens can be compared to the one between brothers within a family with a head of the family; see section 13 of *NE* VIII).

It is noteworthy that the idea of a correspondence between justice and friendship could, at least *prima facie*, collide with the idea that friends would have no need of justice. A tentative harmonization of the two ideas could rest on the assumption that, in a solid friendship, we find interiorized those criteria of ethical conduct and reciprocity which an impersonal justice, i.e. one rooted in coercive respect of laws, would not possess by its own nature. In that case, friendship would not simply rely on a correspondent kind of justice, but it might supposedly bring

[41] Aristotle refers to polity and timocracy as interchangeable notions, which design a constitution in which government is attached to a rich number of people of decent quality. See especially *Pol.* III, 13.1297b13-27, where Aristotle presents it as a constitution made by people who served and currently serve as middle-class hoplites. Moderate wealth and military training in a well-organized group might contribute to a characterization of *polity* as a multitude of decent, law-abiding and cooperative (although not fully virtuous) people.

such justice to a higher, potentiated level: i.e. the one of a justice between people who share a community-dimension and recognize each other as subjects committed to a joint endeavor.

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that political friendship, in its most perfect shape, cannot express itself as a pure alliance based on legal agreements that are destined to disappear once the specific reason for the stipulation of covenants has ceased to be meaningful and urgent[42]. As we read for instance in *Pol.* VII, 8.1328a35-37, where Aristotle speaks of the *polis* in terms of its highest ambitions,

> the city is a community of similar persons, for the sake of a life that is the best possible
> (ἡ δὲ πόλις κοινωνία τίς ἐστι τῶν ὁμοίων, ἕνεκεν δὲ ζωῆς τῆς ἐνδεχομένης ἀρίστης).

The theoretical image of similarity, which recurs in Aristotle's theory of virtue-based friendship, might seem to support the idea that even a utility-based friendship like the political one can and should admit the use of virtue. This is made especially clear in *Pol.* III, 9.1280b7-13, where he insists on the fact that the city should not only care for virtue, but also avoid to be reduced to a pure alliance – i.e. something far from perfect friendship:

> [I]t is [thus] evident that virtue must be a care for every city, or at least every one to which the term applies truly and not merely in a manner of speaking. For otherwise the community becomes an alliance

[42] In *NE* VIII, 15.1162b25- and *EE* VII, 10.1242b35-1243b39 Aristotle speaks of "legal friendship" in terms of a utility-based friendship that, by virtue of the clear terms out of which it is generated, avoids recrimination – unlike "moral utility-friendships", which, being based on unspoken ethical commitments, might engender recrimination. Despite its positive character of legal friendship as a suitable basis for clear covenants, Aristotle does not argue that it exhausts the scope of civic friendship. Indeed, it risks to be compared to a pure alliance based on a convergence of contingent and temporary needs. This is for instance the case of a civic friendship compared to a pure economic exchange in *EE* VII, 10.1242b23-29: «But civic friendship […] is based on utility; and just as cities are friends to one another, so in the like way are citizens. 'The Athenians no longer know the Megarians'; nor do citizens one another, when they are no longer useful to one another, and the friendship is merely a temporary one for a particular exchange of goods».

which differs from others – from alliances of remote allies – only by location, and law becomes a compact and, as the sophist Lycophron said, a guarantor among one another of the just things, but not the sort of thing to make the citizens good and just.

In this light, civic friendship stands out as a virtual terrain for the development of care-based forms of reciprocal justice. This involves not only the existence of a good legislative apparatus in the city, but also conditions (institutional and, all the same, education-induced) that make its members ready to abide by them[43].

Reading Aristotle's theory of political friendship through a "Habermasian" lens, it might be supposed that justice and friendship, like justice and solidarity, represent two different ways of looking at the same issue – where friendship can be framed as justice within a community teleologically oriented to the good life. As for the correspondence between, justice friendship and community (or "partnership"; see the Greek κοινωνία), this has often been interpreted by Aristotle's scholars as "coextensiveness". In the first place, as we have already seen with reference to the specific analogies between constitutions and corresponding forms of friendship, Aristotle establishes a strict correlation (if not a full identification) between the ideas of "friendship" and "community". In *Pol.* IV, 11.1295b25, for instance, community is described as something "related to friendship" (ἡ γὰρ κοινωνία φιλικόν), and in *NE* VIII, 12.1161b11 it is claimed that every friendship resides in community (ἐν κοινωνίᾳ μὲν οὖν πᾶσα φιλία ἐστίν). Along a similar line, however, the idea of an existing community implies not only friendship, but also the existence of a corresponding type of justice. This is explicitly claimed in *NE* VIII, 11. 1159b29-31:

> And to the extent that they share in it [i.e. the community], they are friends; for that is the limit of the justice between them too.

[43] On the institutional and the personal dimensions of the good government, See *Pol.* IV, 8.1294a3-7.

In the same vein, friendship is said to vary in kind according to the specific structural order of each constitution – which presupposes a certain kind of justice:

> Corresponding to each kind of constitution there is evidently a friendship, to the extent that there is also justice (*NE* VIII, 13.1161a10-11).

By taking issue with these passages, several scholars have argued that the co-extensiveness between justice and friendship can mainly be interpreted in terms of conceptual affinity between the two notions – therefore, without necessarily presupposing the existence of a causal relation between the two[44]. Another standpoint is the one of those who contend that, in Aristotle's ethical writings, justice and friendship in the city are simultaneously generated by an already existent community-bond between "fellows"[45]. A different elaboration of the "causal" reading is the one of Riesbeck, who suggests that, rather than shared membership in already existing community, it is individual need that prompts people to join together and establish bonds of justice and concord[46]. In line with this view, a not-fully explored possibility within the "causal interpretation" of the relationships between justice and friendship is that not only justice and friendship, but also community itself can be understood as a reality that gets structured across time and progressive steps. A similar possibility, in my view, would find support in the above-mentioned passages at *NE* VIII, 9. 1159b29-31 and *NE* VIII, 13.1161a10-11).

Reference to justice, in the two passages in question, could plausibly suggest that justice delimits (and, in this respect, also enables) the activity of sharing things in common – thus promoting friendship, which arises precisely when people share those things. The causal connection between justice and friendship might perhaps find better support in a passage of the *Eu-*

[44] On this view see Riesbeck (2016: 81), who attributes it to Pakaluk (1998: 106-111), and Lockwood (2003).
[45] See Riesbeck (2016: 81), who attributes (correctly, in my view) to Stern-Gillet (1995: 154); Yack (1993: 34), and Konstan (1997: 70-72).
[46] Riesbeck (2016, especially 85-88).

demian Ethics. In *EE* VII, 9.1241b12-16, Aristotle handles justice in terms of equality – an ideal which justice itself shares with friendship[47], and describes justice itself in terms of a device able to make community possible:

[I]t is thought both that justice is a kind of equality and that friendship exists in equality, unless it is said to no purpose that "friendship is equality". All the constitutions, too, are a form of justice; for there is in them community, and every common thing is established through justice, so that there are as many forms of justice and community as of friendship[48].

Provided that justice is a means for the establishment of community and partnership, an already settled community will not get rid of justice once achieved its completion and self-sufficiency. By contrast, it will incorporate it as its foundational order. This might be evinced from *EE* VII, 10.1242a19-22, where justice can be used as a *ratio cognoscendi* of friendship:

[T]o inquire how one should relate to a friend is to inquire about a sort of justice; for in fact, quite generally all justice is in relation to a friend, since justice exists among particular people who also share something in common, and a friend is a person who shares something in common, one sort sharing in family, another in a way of life.

[47] For the idea of friendship as ἰσότης see *EE* VII, 3.1238b15-17; 4.1239b1-4 (See *NE* VIII, 6.1158b1). In that context of examination, friendship by equality (καθ᾽ἰσότητα) (which appears to be rooted in substantial similarity of personal qualities and pursued values, such as in virtue-based ones, and/or motives, such as in the pursuit of respectively utility and pleasure) is distinguished from friendships based on asymmetry and superiority (καθ᾽ὑπεροχήν). In *EE* VII, 3.1240b, however, friendship is identified as ἰσότης in its broad sense, and in *EE* VII, 9.1241b10-40 every kind of friendship (even those based on superiority) is said to incorporate a form of ἰσότης. For in this second context of investigation, asymmetry-based friendships are treated as relations rooted in forms of proportional equality, unlike democratic friendship and friendship between companions (κατ᾽ἀριθμὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡ δημοκρατικὴ κοινωνία καὶ ἡ ἑταιρικὴ φιλία; 9.1241b35-36), which presuppose arithmetic equality (See *NE* VIII, 7.1158b32-1159a3).

[48] Trans. Woods (1992) from which the passages of the *Eudemian Ethics* cited in this paper will be taken.

5. *Solidarity as "inclusive participation"*

In *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 7.1158b29–35, Aristotle gives the relationship between justice and friendship a turn that goes beyond mere correspondence. Equality does not appear in the same way within the sphere of justice and the sphere of friendship. While in matters of justice equality is primarily based on proportion to merit (κατ᾽ ἀξίαν) equality "according to quantity" (κατὰ ποσόν) – i.e. arithmetic equality, which not look at the merit of people – is only secondary. In friendship, however, the reverse is true: equality according to quantity comes first, and proportion to merit is secondary. Aristotle points out that the priority of friendship over justice becomes particularly evident when there is a large difference in excellence, vice, wealth, or anything else between the parties that, if considered as criteria of justice, would not allow stability.

Aristotle appears well aware of the existence of a profound tension between the need for an inclusive participation in the political community (one based on a form of solidarity) and the respect for the skills and civic virtue of individuals that ought to be praised for their outstanding excellence. Nor is he insensitive to the fact that, in a condition of political coexistence far from the ideal one (e.g. the one of an aristocracy of equally virtuous citizens depicted in Books VII-VIII of the *Politics*), civic friendship between excellent and non-excellent individuals can reach such levels of asymmetry that it jeopardizes the very functioning of the city. In that case, it is preferable that the relationship of civic friendship involves equal people, even if they are not necessarily virtuous. In that context, it is possible that an equal and broad participation in political and legislative activity guarantee a degree of stability that, instead, might not be found in constitutions inspired by the use of ethical and political excellence. Evidence of this could be reasonably found in *EE* VII, 10.1242b9-16, where Aristotle conceptualizes civic friendship in terms of a relationship "mostly by utility", but also arising from desire for human sociability. Interestingly enough, he speaks of such friendship – and its "degeneration" (παρέκβασις; b9-10) as "real" friendships, inasmuch as they contemplate the possibility that friends share things in common (ὡς φίλοι

κοινωνοῦσιν). In this respect, as he notes, those friendships differ from the ones based on superiority (b11). In all likelihood, the degeneration evoked in the passage concerns democratic constitutions, which encourage participation of non-excellent people in ruling activity, without necessarily guaranteeing a correct pursuit of the common interest[49]. The admission that a positive factor like φιλία can be present even in a "deviant" constitution resonates with the idea – explicitly laid down in *Pol.* III, 1.1275b7-8 – that the concept of "citizenship" – which Aristotle conceptualizes in terms of participation in deliberative and judicial activity[50] – would most eminently suit the case of democratic cities, for these confer a multitude of citizens the authority (*Pol.* III, 1.1275b18; ἐξουσία) to contribute to the ruling (and legislative) process. Despite their imperfect nature, democracies undeniably legitimize the exercise of a set of powers which human beings by their nature possess (regardless of the possible degrees of excellence in which such powers can be exhibited). The powers at stake, as it is made clear at *Pol.* I, 2.1253a8-18, are the same that qualify man as a (rational, as well as sociable[51]) "political animal" (πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῷον), and also as one whose political nature differs from the one attributed to other (gregarious) animals[52]:

> That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear. For, as we assert, nature does nothing in vain; and man alone among the animals has speech. The voice indeed indicates the painful or pleasant, and hence is present in other animals as well; for their nature has come this far, that they have a perception of the painful and pleasant and signal these things to each other (τοῦ ἔχειν αἴσθησιν λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος καὶ ταῦτα σημαίνειν ἀλλήλοις). But speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust. For it is peculiar to man as

[49] For the idea of democracy as a deviant constitution see especially *Pol.* III, 7.1279a29-32 and 37-39.
[50] The issue of a correct definition of citizenship is initially introduced in *Pol.*, III, 1, especially 1274b33-1275a32.
[51] On the issue of human sociability See *NE* IX, 9.1169b18-19, where man is described as a "political animal" and "naturally inclined to live with others" (πολιτικὸν γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ συζῆν πεφυκός).
[52] On the political anthropology expressed by the passage (and an overview of the annexed scholarly debates) I refer readers to Knoll (2017).

compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and the other things of this sort; and community in these things is what makes a household and a city (τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα ζῷα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἴσθησιν ἔχειν: ἡ δὲ τούτων κοινωνία ποιεῖ οἰκίαν καὶ πόλιν).

As the passage reveals, the capacity for "perception" (αἴσθησις) on the just, the advantageous and their contraries is complemented by the one of reciprocal communication of personal views. The idea of a "sharing" (κοινωνία) of views, rather than pointing to an initial condition of homogeneity, could rather indicate the possibility of communicative processes designed to achieve a state of concord.

On the one hand, as Aristotle declares in *Pol.* III, 4, a distinction should be made between the cognitive states (and corresponding virtues) that respectively good citizens and good rulers are expected to possess. For while the distinctive virtue of rulers is practical wisdom (φρόνησις) – which involves a capacity to autonomously and correctly deliberate by rational evaluation of the particular condition of each specific context and mastery of ethical virtues[53] (*Pol.* III, 4.1277b25-26)–, the one of good citizens, who are expected to conform to the specific constitutional prescriptions in force in the city, is a "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθής). Although the capacity to rule and the one to obey are said to require different forms of training (*Pol.* III, 4.1277a22-24), several are the occasions in which he points out that, generally speaking, a good citizen should be able not only to appropriately obey orders, but also to know what is required for a proper exercise of ruling activity (at some unspecified level) (*Pol.* III, 4.1277a25-32; 1277b13-17).

The exercise of citizens' powers of practical reasoning and deliberation, regardless of their level of competence, is also underlying a theoretical experiment that Aristotle conducts in *Pol.* III, 11. In this context, he justifies the possibility that a gov-

[53] A detailed treatment of the nature of φρόνησις and the (highly debated) issues concerning its specific role in righteous practical agency goes outside the scopes of this paper. On the structural link between φρόνησις (which in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle classifies as an agency-oriented intellectual virtue), and ethical virtues See *NE* VI, 12.1144a 34-36.

ernment of the many, even if not virtuous, can contribute to a richer, more nuanced and more fruitful debate than the one which can take place among members of a small elite of excellent men. At *Pol.* III, 11.1281b1-7, just after pointing out that such an idea could involve some truth, he claims:

> The many, of whom none is individually an excellent man, nevertheless can when joined together be better—not as individuals but all together—than those [who are best], just as dinners contributed by many can be better than those equipped from a single expenditure. For because they are many, each can have a part of virtue and prudence, and on their joining together, the multitude, with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so also with respect to character and mind.

The development of individual faculties concerns not only decision-making, but also the ability to evaluate and judge specific situations — such as musical works and the creations of poets, for which it would seem that the many judge better, as each focuses on one aspect. Therefore, it remains that they participate in the functions of counselor and judge. Although the remainder of section 11 might suggest that a better politics is the one in which the highest (and more complex) charges are to be held by outstanding individuals (cf. especially *Pol.* III, 11, 1281b26-35)[54], Aristotle insists on the idea that wise legislators such as Solon understand the need to integrate the contribution of the many in a cooperative manner – by entrusting them with "minor" offices, such as the task of electing magistrates and holding them to account.

6. Conclusive remarks

Reading Aristotle through the contemporary lens of solidarity contributes to highlighting a significant dimension of his ethical-political thought, in which friendship, justice, and civic participation converge toward the building of a stable and cohesive community. Although solidarity is a modern concept, an embryonic form of such an ideal can be found in the Aristotelian

[54] This aspect is especially highlighted by Nichols (1991).

treatment of φιλία and in its relationship to justice. Like Habermas' view of solidarity as "a different way of looking at justice", Aristotle's φιλία is not an abstract or universal ideal, but a practice rooted in the sharing of common goods, in reciprocal concern, and also in the capacity for joint deliberation. In this sense, solidarity does not merely supplement justice, but enhances it constituting a way of living together that incorporates care, responsibility, and concord.

On the other hand, a comparative examination of Aristotle's treatment of φιλία and certain contemporary formulations of solidarity might contribute to enrich the scope of the conceptual connection between political friendship and justice. For such connection would show that social bonds cannot be reduced to the mere observance of laws or to contracts of mutual utility, but require a fabric of relationships oriented toward the common good – something that calls for adoption of joint responsibility in (concern for) political activity. Similarly, Aristotle's reflections on the wisdom of the many might reveal the possibility that a community of citizens, even if not individually excellent, generate richer forms of judgment and shared justice. Understood in this way, Aristotelian "proto-solidarity" would not just appear as a historical precedent; it would rather stand out as a theoretical horizon capable of enriching the vocabulary of contemporary political philosophy. It reminds us that the construction of a just and inclusive society depends not only on impersonal rules or institutional structures, but also on the citizens' capacity to recognize one another as co-participants in a common project founded on care, dialogue, and shared responsibility. From this perspective, Aristotle's ancient lesson does not lose its relevance: it still offers valuable conceptual tools for thinking of solidarity as a living form of justice.

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Abstract

A PROTO-SOLIDARITY? FRIENDSHIP, JUSTICE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ARISTOTLE

Keywords: Solidarity, Friendship, Aristotle, Joint-Action

While solidarity is a modern notion, often tied to collective action for justice in plural societies, Aristotle's civic friendship sustains justice by binding the *polis* through reciprocity and concord. Engaging contemporary theories of solidarity, especially Habermas' idea of solidarity as justice's "reverse side", this paper highlights affinities between modern debates and Aristotelian thought. Civic *philia* emerges as a participatory practice where equality and shared deliberation enhance justice itself, alongside the strengthening of a sense of community. Thus, Aristotle's ethics and politics reveal an embryonic solidarity, especially in contexts of inclusive political participation.

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