



Educating for shared values: A role for civic friendship, concord and deliberation?

Andrew Peterson

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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4865

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk



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Andrew Peterson, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

andrew.peterson@canterbury.ac.uk

Abstract

Across a number of Westernised democracies, educationalists have been grappling with the question of how to frame and bring about a commitment to shared values in increasingly plural and heterogeneous societies. In recent times, such practices have become shaped (and not always in helpful ways) by perceived threats to unity (of which violent extremism is perhaps the most notable example). While often focusing on the importance of balancing shared values and plural interests, very rarely do educational policy and curricular make reference to notions of friendship or civic friendship.

The aim of this paper is to explore the potential educational benefits and implications of Aristotelian civic friendship as a way of conceiving the relationship between citizens in plural, heterogeneous political communities. The exploration offered comprises three parts. First, I will say something about the educational context. Here, I concentrate on England as a particular illustration of how the commitment to shared values within plural communities has been (mis)represented in educational policy and curricular. Second, I sketch some key elements of Aristotle's ideas on civic friendship and concord. In doing so I also pay some attention to the role of deliberation between citizens. Third, I draw out some possible educational benefits and implications of approaching the shared values / plural interests tension through the idea of civic friendship.

Introduction

Writing about the ties that bind Europeans in the week before the United Kingdom European Union referendum, the Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans (2016) drew the following analogy to make a case for fostering cohesion within a political community:

Think of a newcomer, a refugee maybe, like someone asking to take part in a

football match for the first time. He wants to join in, but he has no idea about the rules, so he spends the entire game in an offside position. Everyone grumbles at him, and after a couple of tries, no one passes him the ball any more. He doesn't understand what he's doing wrong and decides that the others just don't like him. He turns around and walks off. He is more excluded than before he went on the pitch; he feels unwelcome, rejected, and different. This is exactly the wretched position in which many migrants and their children (or grandchildren) have ended up in. Of course he needs to make an effort to learn the rules too, but someone needs to be there to show him what they are.

The tension Timmermans identifies is not one concerned solely with new migrants to a given political community. For all citizens of a given community – including its lawgivers – the question of how social cohesion can be formed and expressed in the context of heterogeneity and plural interests is pressing, yet vexed. Across Westernised nations, and for an extended time now, various official strategies have been followed in an attempt to cultivate a sense of social cohesion amidst increasing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. A common element in many Westernised nations – including the United Kingdom – has been an appeal to a set of shared, national values common to all citizens, irrespective of their own ethnic, cultural and religious commitments. Typically, the education and schooling of young citizens forms a key element of such strategies.

Yet, despite the fact that advocating a commitment to national values has been commonplace, official strategies and policies to this end have been faced with a great deal of scepticism and criticism, both generally and more in relation to education more specifically. In the United Kingdom, for example, and as is explored in more detail in this paper, the recent attempts to foster social cohesion through British values have been criticised by teachers and the wider

public for their ambiguity (DCLG, 2016) cultural supremacism (Espinoza, 2016), superficiality (DCLG, 2016), as well as for being counterproductive (Weale, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to explore the potential educational benefits and implications of Aristotelian civic friendship as a way of conceiving the relationship between citizens in plural, heterogeneous political communities. The exploration offered comprises three parts. First, I will say something about the educational context. Here, I concentrate on England as a particular illustration of how the commitment to shared values within plural communities has been (mis)represented in educational policy and curricular. Second, I sketch some key elements of Aristotle's ideas on civic friendship and concord. In doing so I also pay some attention to the role of deliberation between citizens. Third, I draw out some possible educational benefits and implications of approaching the shared values/plural interests tension through the idea of civic friendship.

Fostering social cohesion: the recent educational context

Echoing concerns across wider society, and prompted by a range of high-profile public tensions, an important strand of education policy in England over the last fifteen years has sought to respond to the question of cultivating social cohesion while recognising cultural plurality. Two related, though differentiated, discourses have been prevalent in this regard.

Building on the commitment to citizenship, civic activism and social capital of its predecessors since 1997, the discourse of Gordon Brown's Labour government emphasised a need to foster a commitment to shared British values. Though this focus on Britishness and British values was not new – both the Parekh (2000) and Cattle (2001) reports had spoken of the need for cohesion based on shared values – the commitment to British values gained greater traction in Brown's government. Speaking in 2006, for example, Brown (2006) himself contended that:

Britishness is not just an academic debate—something for the historians, just for the commentators, just for the so-called chattering classes. Indeed in a recent poll, as many as half of British people said they were worried that if we do not promote Britishness we run a real risk of having a divided society... And I believe that out of a debate, hopefully leading to a broad consensus about what Britishness means, flows a rich agenda for change: a new constitutional settlement, an explicit definition of citizenship, a renewal of civil society, a rebuilding of our local government and a better balance between diversity and integration.

Education and schooling was identified as a key site for this project. Speaking in 2007 the then Secretary of State for Education, Alan Johnson, argued that ‘We must teach children about our shared British heritage while fostering an understanding of our cultural diversity and the uniqueness of our individual identity’ (Garner, 2007). As these illustrations make clear, this discourse was one in which Britishness and British identity were as much to be forged in contemporary, multicultural Britain as they were to be forced, though many criticised the perceived ambiguity concerning precisely what it meant for given values to be “distinctively British”.

Commissioned by the government to explore how diversity and citizenship were being, and could be, taught in schools, the *Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship* (known commonly as the Ajebo Review (DfES, 2007)) found the quality of education for diversity in schools to be ‘uneven’, with some school leaders and teachers lacking the clarity and confidence needed. In addition, the Review found links with the community to be ‘often tenuous or non-existent’ (DfES, 2007: 6), and also that:

The term 'British' means different things to different people. In addition, identities are typically constructed as multiple and plural. Throughout our consultations, concerns were expressed, however, about defining 'Britishness', about the term's divisiveness and how it can be used to exclude others.

On the recommendation of the Ajegbo Review, and in line with government rhetoric, the revised statutory curriculum for Citizenship education in 2007 included a new strand entitled *Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK*.

While also focusing on British identity and shared British values, government policy discourse on social cohesion since 2010 has been shaped increasingly by concerns about violent extremism and radicalisation. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government (2010-2015), and successive Conservative governments (2015-2017, 2017-) have positioned the need for protecting and promoting British values as a way of preventing radicalisation with, once again, education and schooling playing a key role. In June 2014, for example, the Coalition government stated its intention to 'to create and enforce a clear and rigorous expectation on all schools to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (Wintour, 2014).

The connection between fostering British values through education and countering violent extremism strengthened in November 2014 with the advice that schools 'promote' Fundamental British Values as part of their provision for pupils' Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural education. The document advises schools 'should promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2014: 5). While the focus here on British values represents a continuation of the policy and discourse of the previous Labour administration, two related changes were included. The first was to replace the general notion of British values as something to be shaped and fostered through dialogue and mutual understanding with non-negotiable

fundamental British values. The second was to directly link the promotion of fundamental British values with wider home office policies aimed at counteracting radicalisation and violent extremism. Indeed, the list of fundamental British values cited were taken directly from the government's controversial Prevent strategy, one of the four strands of the wider Contest counter-terrorism strategy¹.

The policy discourses and provisions briefly outlined here have been widely criticised. Both Labour's focus on British values/identity and the Coalition/Conservatives' focus on fundamental British value have been critiqued as promoting ethnocentrism and, particularly the latter, in fostering mistrust of ethnic minority groups, leading to further discord rather than cohesion. The recent Casey Review (DCLG, 2016) into *Opportunity and Integration* in the United Kingdom highlighted the fact that cohesion was compromised by continued economic inequalities, suggesting that government policy for integration since 2010 had been underfunded and as failing to engage with contentious issues. However, in its recommendations on fostering greater community cohesion through education, the Review returned to the discourse of shared understanding and British values:

The promotion of British laws, history and values within the core curriculum in all schools would help build integration, tolerance, citizenship and resilience in our children. **More weight should be attached to a British Values focus and syllabus in developing teaching skills and assessing schools performance.**

(DCLG, 2016: 168; emphasis in original)

Presently, the policy discourses, and indeed the resulting policy provisions, outlined in this section take as their main concerns the following: (1) that citizens should understand, be aware and be tolerant of fellow citizens and the multiple identities they hold, to a reasonable extent; (2)

¹ The other three strategies which comprise Contest are Pursue, Protect and Prepare.

that alongside the heterogeneous interests within the contemporary United Kingdom, a set of British values can be identified around which a sense of social/community cohesion can be fostered; and, (3) education and schooling has an important role to play in regards to both 1 and 2. What seems to be missing from the policy is the question of what sort of person a citizen is/should be, and what sort of relationship citizens should possess in relation to other citizens. My claim here is not that a focus on mutual understanding and national, shared values is not either needed or of value. Rather, it is that these can only ever form part of fostering social cohesion - necessary, that is, but unlikely to be sufficient for the cohesive, democratic polities desired by policy discourses. Not least, shared values – particularly those that appeal to abstracted notions of British identity – remain a reference point somewhat external to citizens and their engagements with other citizens. For these reasons, it can be suggested that successive government policies have underplayed – or perhaps worse, ignored – the extent to which citizenship is at least partially a question of character as well as the extent to which positive relations and attachment to values are built on notions of mutual concern and collaborative endeavour rather than a general idea of respect. Here the Aristotelian notion of civic friendship would appear *prima facie* to offer a potential response.

Aristotelian civic friendship

Because he does not offer a detailed and precise conception of civic friendship, commentators have looked across a number of Aristotle's work to understand its meaning and importance. While explicit references are found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*, key passages of the *Politics* also give implicit shape to the role Aristotle envisaged civic friendship to play in a well-functioning political community. In broad terms, civic friendship refers to the bond between citizens in a political community, a bond based on mutual concern and fellow-feeling. More precisely, Aristotelian civic friendship can be said to possess a number of features and conditions.

First, **civic friendship is a form of friendship based on utility or common advantage**, rather than a deeper form of friendship based on character and virtue (or, indeed, a third type of friendship based on pleasure)². Aristotle writes, for example that ‘civic friendship, more than any other, is based on utility, for it is the lack of self-sufficiency that brings people together’ (EE 1242a6-9). He also makes clear that character friendship is of a more intimate kind and that enforcing deeper communal bonds between members of a political community of the form advocated by Plato, is neither possible nor desirable:

Those who have many friends and mix intimately with them all are thought to be no one’s friend, except in the way proper to fellow citizens, and such people are also called obsequious. In the way proper to fellow citizens, indeed, it is possible to be the friend of man and yet not be obsequious but a genuinely good man; but one cannot have with many people the friendship based on virtue and the character of our friends themselves, and we must be content if we find even a few such (NE 1171a16-20).

Second, a condition of civic friendship is that it involves **the good will of each citizen for each citizen for their sake**³. Aristotle defines friendship in its general sense as ‘*wishing for someone what one thinks to be good things, for his sake and not oneself, and being productive of these up to one’s capacity*’ (Rh. 1380b- 1381a; emphasis in original). Moreover, this is a good will between citizens of which all are aware and which prompts actions on in support of others. Indeed, respecting the other in this sense, and not viewing others as a means to one’s own end is generally understood as a necessary condition of friendship for Aristotle (see, for example, Cooper, 1980; Schwarzenbach, 1996; for an alternative view see Price, 1989).

² I take the view that civic friendship is a form of utility friendship based on common advantage to be correct. This position is taken by, for example, Cooper (1999b), Leontsini (2013). For alternative positions which present civic friendship as involving virtue. See Price (1989) and Stern-Gillet (1995).

³ Schwarzenbach (1996: 100) presents friendship as (1) a mutual awareness and liking; (ii) a reciprocal wishing well for the other’s sake; and, (3) a reciprocal “doing” for that other.

Third, while civic friendship is not a form of character friendship, it does nevertheless relate to good living. In this sense, **civic friends are concerned with the moral character of their fellow citizens**. That is, and as Aristotle makes clear in the *Politics*, civic friends care about the ‘kinds of persons’ their fellow citizens are (Schwarzenbach, 1996). In addition, they also seek to know and understand the character and interests of their fellow citizens, requiring them to develop empathy (Schwarzenbach, 2000).

Fourth, **civic friendship is a sense of fellow-feeling within and across the whole political community and is general rather than intimate in nature**. In making this particular claim, some clarifications are necessary. The suggestion that – properly constituted – civic friendship applies within and across the whole political community is to recognise that associations which are *ad hoc*, narrow associations or based on factional interests do not count as civic friendship (Mayhew, 1996). Second, and we have to rely somewhat on extrapolating from Aristotle’s work, the knowledge and understanding of fellow citizens’ intentions, interests and characters is only required and is only practically possible at a general, rather than intimate, level (Cooper, 1980; Mayhew, 1996; Schwarzenbach, 1996).

Fifth, **civic friendship is intimately bound with concord**, which is the condition of agreement or unanimity within the political community. Here Aristotle is somewhat equivocal, at times seeming to position civic friendship as making concord possible and at others viewing civic friendship *as* concord as in the following: ‘concord seems, then, to be political friendship, as indeed it is commonly said to be; for it is concerned with things that are to our interest and have an influence on our life’ (NE 1167b2-4). Elsewhere he states that ‘concord is friendship in citizenship’ (EE 1241a32). Aristotle defines concord in the following terms: ‘it is not identity of opinion... nor do we say that people who have the same views on any and every subject are in accord..., but we do say that a city is in accord when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common’ (NE 1167a22-29). Concord does not refer to a stifling form of homogeneity. Here, Yack’s (1993: 125; in Bickford) qualified metaphor of members of the political community as travellers ‘all in the same boat’ is instructive. The qualification is thus:

Because the goals of political action are not nearly as clear as the destination of a ship, the sense of sharing obstacles and dangers is not as certain to develop among citizens as it is among fellow travellers. Moreover, because these goals, unlike fellow travellers' destination, are always in the distance, this sense often dies as the result of resentment and disappointment. Nevertheless, however fragile it may be, participation in political community, Aristotle would argue, does dispose us to developing a fairly extensive and powerful sense of mutual concern.

Sixth, **civic friendship and concord are not fixed conditions**, which a political community can only possess either in full or not at all. Rather, the sum of civic friendship and concord within a political community is better understood as a spectrum permitting degrees. Certainly, Aristotle understands that civic friendship and concord are compromised in deviant constitutions and also that they are well developed in an idealised political community. This means that in actual communities, there will be different degrees and extents of civic friendship, changing over time and according to salient contextual conditions (Mayhew, 1996).

Seventh, **civic friendship requires cultivation within the political community** and operates through a variety of mechanisms, including '*via* a society's constitution, its public set of laws, its major institutions and social customs' (Schwarzenbach, 2015: 11). Indeed, according to Aristotle, the cultivation of is something at which lawmakers should aim (NE 1155a25-26). Cultivation of civic friendship develops from a range of informal and formal processes within the political community, including through the operation of laws, deliberative institutions and deliberative practices, as well as through formal education. For Aristotle, deliberation requires citizens to enter into dialogue with others about 'the expedient and the inexpedient, and therefore also the just and unjust' (Bickford, 1996: 400).

Eighth, **civic friendship is a form of civic justice, and indeed is more important than purely justice itself.** The moral basis of the relationship between civic friends is examined in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle suggests in relation to civic friendship that ‘when men are friends they have no need for justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality’ (NE 1155a26-29). The vital connection between civic friendship and justice is rendered absolute in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where Aristotle suggests that civic friendships ‘are the only ones that are not merely friendships, but partnerships between friends. Other kinds of friendship are based on superiority. The justice on which a friendship of utility is based is justice par excellence, because it is civic justice’ (EE 1242a10-14). A further example of the role civic friendship plays in relation to justice is that citizens accept that their own immediate interests may have to be conceded in support of the immediate interests of others.

We do not necessarily have to like someone, but view them as friends in the sense that despite our dislike we still have a concern for them *qua* fellow citizens. Indeed, it is precisely because they are a fellow citizen that we consider them to be a friend in the civic, common-advantage sense rather than in some other form. That is, we may or may not view them as friends for other reasons (that we share similar personalities, for example) but these other reasons are not a necessary condition of civic friendship.

Cultivating civic friendship through deliberation

The teaching of British values, or what are now termed in policy discourse fundamental British values, brings both a significant responsibility as well as a substantial challenge for schools in England. Not least is the complex yet crucial question as to how the teaching of fundamental British values can move beyond the current and narrow focus on developing awareness of other cultures alongside a commitment to a set of, perhaps ambiguous, values. In this section I raise

some tentatively ways in which a commitment to Aristotelian civic friendship could move policy and practice towards a deeper sense of civic concord and through developing active concern and mutuality between citizens in ways connected to moral character. In setting out my position, it should be noted that the sorts of change in focus required in policy discourse do not necessarily necessitate a wholesale change, but rather entail a change of emphasis – a change, that is, which plays explicit attention to the mutual concern and care central to civic friendship.

Currently neglected in policy discourses on social cohesion, including those that relate directly to education, is the understanding that meaningful connections between citizens requires the development not just of an awareness of fellow citizens, but a concern and care for fellow citizens – including for their moral character. The discourse of concern and care for one’s fellow citizens is presently absent from policy on the teaching of fundamental values in schools. Here, tolerance and a general commitment to democracy and democratic institutions is required, but the caring relations which may help to motivate citizens to actually be tolerant and democratic (particularly if we understand both tolerance and democratic participation to be more than purely cognitive commitments) are absent. Civic friendship is illustrative in this regard, given that, as Leontsini (2013: 32) reminds us while ‘Aristotelian political friendship does not require us to feel the same strong feelings of affection and liking that virtue friendship does’, civic friendship ‘does, nevertheless, require us to have concern for our fellow citizens; ‘concern for others’ as opposed to the mere ‘respect for others’ that contemporary liberalism advocates’.

Crucial here too is the extent to which developing a concern for others is connected to working with, and in support of, others. Several studies have evidenced the ways in which empathic concern and the principle of care are important factors for altruism (usually presented in the form of helping-behaviours; see Eisenberg and Miller, 1987; Batson, 1991, 1994; Welp and Brown, 2014; Lim and DeSteno, 2016). In their analysis, and drawing data from the *General Social Survey* in the United States, Wilhelm and Bekkers (2010), for example, interrogate the relationship between dispositional empathy, caring and helping behaviour among adults. Summarising the results of the study, Wilhelm and Bekkers report that both empathic concern and the principle of care are positively associated with many helping behaviours.

As Aristotle understood, and is perhaps even more relevant in contemporary heterogeneous societies like the United Kingdom, the subject/s upon which concord might be arrived are not immutable. For this reason, civic friendship permits a deliberative dimension. If we take this claim (i.e. that concord requires deliberation) alongside the wider contention that civic friendship involves a sense of fellow-feeling characterised by mutual concern and caring, then it can be posited that the communication and exchange of ideas central to deliberation must be of a kind which sustains mutual concern, care and trust between citizens rather than the kind which severs such important factors. This point is not insignificant given that, as Curren (2017) reminds us:

A well-established finding about moral motivation and the internalization of values is that people tend to internalize the norms of caregivers or social groups they perceive as acting to protect their interests. This implies that a social group, institution or society that is serious about inducing all of its members to accept the values it espouses must espouse and adhere to norms of justice or equal respect for all its members. Groups, institutions and societies that do not protect the interests of their members equally are likely to encounter difficulty in earning the respect and adherence of those who are not accorded equal respect or who experience tension and conflict associated with failures of equal respect’.

If we accept (1) that concord and civic friendship have a deliberative dimension and (2) that concord and civic friendship involve a feeling of concern and care for one’s fellow-citizens, then the question remains as to what constitutes dialogical exchange which is deliberative in this regard. On this matter, Hess (2009: 85; emphasis in original) reminds us that, educationally speaking, we can aim at ‘teaching *for* and *with* discussion’. In other words, deliberative inquiry which is both collaborative and caring can be viewed as both a process and an aim of education

and schooling. I have suggested elsewhere (Peterson, 2011) that deliberative encounters of this form possess the following characteristics:

- (i) *civic commitment*: participants who have a desire to engage in open and unforced dialogue on philosophical and practical matters, who view consensus as a possible outcome and who are attentive to the views of others. Such dialogue is likely to be ineffective if it is forced or tokenistic, or if no possibility of consensus is deemed possible.
- (ii) *civic knowledge*: participants need not only to know and understand certain facts, and also to apply such this to their actions and deliberations. It is not a sufficient condition of democratic and deliberative dialogue to simply know.
- (iii) *civic speaking*: in their verbal communication participants employ reason, but do not eschew the use of rhetoric and rhetorical devices in order, and when appropriate, to stir the emotions of others or to express their own emotions. Civic speaking is a particular brand of talk which aims at making clear one's own position and interests, but in a way which invites others to respond to these in the spirit of civic commitment;
- (iv) *civic listening*: The clearest illustration of civic listening comes from Benjamin Barber (2003: 174) who asserts that '...talk as communication... involves receiving as well as expressing, hearing as well as speaking, and emphasizing as well as uttering';
- (v) *civic empathy*: participants engage in dialogical forums in order that they come to understand the perspectives and interests which others hold dear. Participants learn to empathise not only with the interests of others, but also with the public interest, particularly when these may be in conflict with their own;
- (vi) *internal-reflection*: Involved in each of the other five elements, internal-reflection aims at the process which Dewey (1933: 9) describes as the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends'. This reminds us that when participants engage in dialogue with each other, they are likely to be involved in reflecting upon and amending their views, based on the interests and evidence which they encounter.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that paying attention to, and the cultivation of, Aristotelian civic friendship might provide a useful addition to current policy discourses on educating for social cohesion. By focusing on the relations between citizens as participants in a collective enterprise, and by being interested in notions of mutual concern and fellow-feeling, civic friendship and integral notions of concord and deliberation speak to the moral character of citizens. As such, and as I have argued here, they provide a deeper basis for social cohesion in contemporary heterogeneous societies than an appeal to shared national values can achieve alone.

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