UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

THE JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

Solidarity and Civic Friendship: An Exploration of a Dynamic that Improves Human Flourishing

Katie Elrod

This is an unpublished conference paper for the 10th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Thursday 8th – Saturday 10th September 2022.

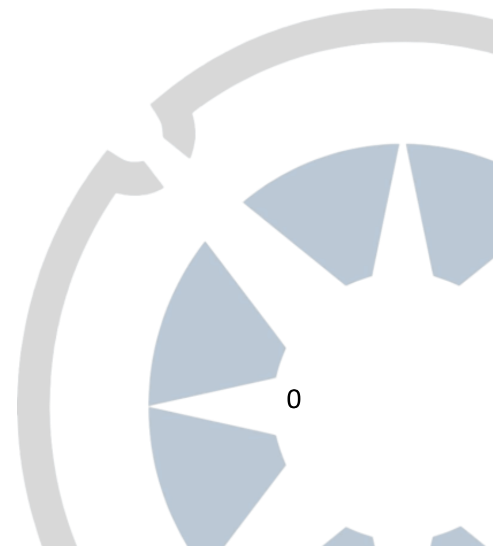
These papers are works in progress and should not be cited without author's prior permission.

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 4875

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



Solidarity and Civic Friendship: An Exploration of a Dynamic that Improves Human Flourishing

Katie Elrod

1/2/23

Introduction

Last year, I was delighted to read Anderew Peterson's paper on" Cultivating Civic Friendship in Education". In this article, Peterson lays out what Aristotle means by civic friendship and "what virtues are central to civic friendship (Peterson, 2021:1)." Peterson not only points to the virtues that are prerequisites for civic friendship, such as civility, open-mindedness and intellectual humility, but also points to the virtues needed "for civic friendship to develop or flourish" (Peterson, 2021:7). Peterson thinks four virtues, solidarity, forgiveness, sacrifice, and service, are necessary "if we are serious about helping children to come into meaningful relation with others in their community" (Peterson, 2021:7) Of the four virtues, solidarity caught my attention. For the past three years, I have been appealing to this principle/virtue in my school community in order to help us navigate through a global pandemic. In letters, speeches and one-on-one conversations with students, parents and faculty, I have tried to help each of us become more unified by appealing to the common good using this principle. However, the more I thought and read about solidarity, the more questions I had regarding its relationship to civic friendship. And that led me to this question for this paper–what is the relationship between solidarity and civic friendship? This paper is an exploration of this dynamic. I would like to propose that solidarity is a fresh way to better understand the significance of civic friendship. I hope to illustrate this concept through some textual analysis and case studies.

Context: The Importance of Civic Friendship in Education

"The truth is that the city...is a plurality; and education is therefore the means of making it a community and giving it unity." (*Politics*: II.1263b29).

This statement from Aristotle is an excellent summary of the critical importance of education as a way to ensure the health and success of the polis/city. Even in Ancient Athens with a homogeneous population compared to the 21st century West, Aristotle understood that

the polis/city is constituted with different opinions creating a "plurality" of voices. And that plurality could be a liability in political decision making. How to unify the polis? Education is the way to ensure that the polis becomes a "community" by unifying it with a clear shared *telos* or aim. That *telos* for Aristotle is *eudaimonia* "an activity of the soul in conformity with virtue" (NE:I.7.15). Since the cultivation of virtue or excellence is how we practice *eudaimonia*; education must consist of ways for students to build "habits of mind, heart and character"[1].

These virtues will ensure the stability and health of the *polis*. For Aristotle, it is clear: education (in virtue) helps each citizen become just so the citizen becomes qualified to justly participate (ie legislating) in politics. We know that Aristotle wrote the *Ethics* before the *Politics* since he ends the *Ethics* "asking which constitution is best…and what laws and customs it must use."(*NE*:X.1181b20). The last line of the Ethics , "Let us make a beginning of our discussion"(*NE*:X.1181b21-23), is an introduction to the *Politics.* The ordering of the books is intentional: the study of ethics must precede the study of politics in time and importance.

Despite the clarity on why ethics is the foundation of politics, the question remains: How does education help the city/polis become "a community" that has "unity"? What are the mechanisms and components of a virtuous education that prepare the citizen to participate in a pluralistic regime? As an educator, I see now more than ever the need to investigate this phenomena for the sake of the health of society. With the declines in adolescent and young adult social skills–including the rise in digital dependence, the isolation strains caused by COVID, the distrust caused by political polarization, and the general breakdown of formative institutions, the question that needs exploration is how do we remediate these gaps in order to

[1] Please read https://www.montroseschool.org/character for more information

cultivate moral virtue in schools in order to help our pluralistic polis become a "unified community"? What do these young people need from their educational experience in order to flourish and pursue the common good?

One way to approach this larger question is to zoom in on the relationships that make up a school community. As an educator for almost thirty years, I have been increasingly interested in how the quality of the relationships that students build between themselves (and their mentors/teachers) have affected the quality of their character development. One thinker who wrote extensively on this dynamic is Aristotle. We know that Aristotle provides a paradigm of friendship to explain how different kinds of friendships provide arenas in which different virtues are cultivated (*NE:VIII*). Teaching Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for twenty years, many of my students found his three kinds of friendship insightful and inspiring. Of the three kinds of friendships, the "good friendship" seemed the most attractive to my students twenty years ago. With a healthy early childhood of many friendships based on utility and pleasure, many late adolescents twenty years ago seemed ready and eager to find a few "good" friends that they could mutually pursue virtue together. However, in the past ten years, I have noticed that many of my students are more curious about how the friendship of utility can be considered a friendship. On the one hand, they seemed surprised that this kind of relationship can even be defined as a friendship. I think they conflate a friendship based on utility as one where a person is used as an object. On the other hand, they express how few relationships they have at all. Many claim that they do not have many friendships of utility. And furthermore, friendships based on the mutual pursuit of virtue, seem too idealistic and and even unattractive. I am sure there are many reasons why adolescents perceive friendship very differently than they did twenty years ago. However, I think one reason why their lack of interest in the "good friendship" and confusion on the

legitimacy of the “useful” friendship stem from a lack of experience and therefore understanding of a particular kind of friendship of utility: civic friendship.

For Aristotle, civic friendship is a “friendship based on utility”(EE: 1242a), because he understood humans as naturally dependent on one another since we are not by nature “self-sufficient” (EE: 1242a6-9). It is our “lack of self-sufficiency that brings people together” (EE:1242a9). Friendships of utility make up a majority of our relationships in society, but this assumption of human nature bears a bit of reflection and explanation. For Aristotle, we do not need each other only to accomplish tasks or goals; he thought more broadly that humans cannot flourish or “live well” without many different relationships. “Man is by nature a political animal and, not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity. (*Politics*:
1253 a2-5). Only god-like humans/hermits or vicious humans do not need other people. In short, the vast majority of people need other people to flourish or function well. In a school setting, the whole enterprise of education could be characterized as a kind of friendship of utility. Since “man is the only animal who has the gift of speech” (*Politics*: 1253a10), schools work on the assumption that children need adults in order to learn. Most humans are not autodidacts and therefore depend on others to learn anything. Since for Aristotle, to flourish or function well means that we are striving to build excellent habits of mind, heart and character, civic friendship becomes the arena or the context where virtue is cultivated. We can’t build virtue autonomously; we need many kinds of friends to practice virtue. But how is civic friendship built in schools?

In order to create an environment that is conducive to cultivating virtue, schools strive to teach civic friendship as a model of the friendship of utility. Civic friendship has essentially three components that educators see as critical to forming children ready to participate in society. What does a civic friend look like? Peterson describes that a civic

friend is someone "who understands themselves as part of a common endeavor, viewing and acting with care and concern for their fellow-citizens (here again the idea of mutual fellow-feeling is crucial), and doing so with the interests of their fellow-citizens at heart"(Peterson, 2021:6). The kind of friend in a civic friendship is one that hits the mean between the excess of stifling the freedom of the person by invading personal space and time ("cloying or codependent") and the deficiency of not acknowledging her presence ("indifferent").

As an educational leader, I have noticed that more children arrive today at secondary school without a large repository of friends of utility. This reality of course increased from 2020-2022 due to pandemic restrictions. Children are in fewer groups of friends with a "common endeavor" –spanning from neighborhood to extended family gatherings. This dearth of the quantity of friends of utility impacts the school setting. Without many groups of friendships in elementary school, many adolescents actually have a more difficult time understanding how a school community is a "common endeavor." To remediate this deficit, at Montrose, we have a number of programmatic activities that directly address what civic friendship is and how to build it. For example in the 9th grade, we overtly teach civic friendship by defining and then building them with activities such as the "fortune teller." The activity begins with the question: what kind of conversation builds community? The first tier of questions are superficial or "drive by" questions that can be answered as you pass in hallways. Examples of drive by questions are–What is your next class? How are you? When is your next game? The second tier of questions is more open ended and launches deeper conversations such as Who is your favorite character and What do you believe about x and why? The third tier are principles that guide conversations to build community. Some examples are active listening, eye contact and open body language. This activity helps the students see and understand, perhaps for the first time, what others are thinking. These civic

friendships are then nurtured and challenged when the conversations become deeper and more nuanced about contentious societal issues[2].

As the pandemic emerged in March 2020, I realized that although civic friendship is necessary for students to flourish, it was not enough to sustain us through the unknown challenges of this volatile time. I think the reason is because civic friendship as a friendship of utility is based soley on the virtue of justice. (Peterson, 2021: 4) And justice is not sufficient to meet the human vulnerabilities, suffering and anxiety of this current time. To lead and ground our community, I turned to another concept which perfected and enhanced Aristotle's understanding of civic friendship: solidarity.

Solidarity: The Bridge to Community Flourishing

Solidarity, as Peterson notes, can help "children to come into meaningful relation with others in their community"(Peterson, 2021:7), since it aims for something more than justice.

What is solidarity? Merriam Webster defines it as "unity (as of a group) that produces or is based on shared interests and goals". The word first appears in "Napoleon's famous statute book of 1804. A few years later, Charles Fourier incorporated the word into his vocabulary, lending it the political and ideological nuance that it has retained to this day"(Liedman). For this discussion, since Montrose School is a faith based institution, I will draw from the Catholic

Church's understanding and reappropriation of the principle of solidarity from socialism. In the Catholic Church, solidarity is a principle of Catholic Social Teaching. Catholic Social

---

[2] . To support that growth, I highly recommend Bohlin and Whitlock's "Courageous Dialogue Toolkit" to give. To learn more, click on this link.
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeY2uc_zPlkdtL9SJhqbKQQKjV9asV8j82ig89FbRmrJqszRA/viewform

Teaching, as an official body of teachings, debuted in 1891 with Pope Leo XIII offering a robust response to the harms of capitalism and socialism on human dignity drawing on the natural law tradition and Biblical truths in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* . Pontiffs from Leo XIII to our current Pontiff Francis have studied and have tried to apply the principle of solidarity to current societal challenges. St. John Paull II sums up this history, "This principle [solidarity] is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term "friendship", a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term "social charity". Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a "civilization of love." (*Centesimus Annus*: 10).

The most comprehensive definition of solidarity according to the Catholic Church originates from Saint John Paul II. He explains that [Solidarity] "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: 38). This definition of solidarity shares some of the same elements with civic friendship. For example, both concepts aim for the common good or least a common endeavor. Both concepts also help citizens/students act with care and concern for their fellow citizens/students by recognizing "the good of all". But how are they different?

The differences between civic friendship and solidarity are varied and significant. The first difference resides in the essence of the concepts. Civic friendship is a <u>relationship</u> in which virtue can be cultivated while solidarity is a <u>principle</u> that has become, for Catholics, a moral <u>virtue</u> itself. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 193). As a principle, solidarity "highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards

an ever more committed unity." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 192). The Catholic Church hopes political and economic leaders will apply this principle to remediate "injustice on a global scale." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 192). In addition to solidarity as a social principle, the Church argues that all relationships due to their interdependence "have to be transformed into relationships tending towards genuine ethical-social solidarity"
(*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 193). St. John Paul II remarks that "solidarity seeks to go beyond itself to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation." (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis:* 40). This description of solidarity can appear to be a tall order. In fact, unlike civic friendship which aims at the cultivation of justice, solidarity aims at charity (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 196). Charity, as the aim for human flourishing, helps call the person to give more than what is due. This reality helps this person live concretely with more generosity and mercy.

Why does solidarity as a moral virtue aim at charity? There are two Biblical sources that ground the Catholic conception of solidarity. The first source is from Hebrew scriptures. St.
John Paul II draws on the story of Cain and Abel to highlight the limitations of autonomy and points toward our ontological interdependence.

> At another level, the roots of the contradiction between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in a notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. . . It is precisely in this sense that Cain's
> answer to the Lord's question: "Where is Abel your brother?" can be interpreted: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). Yes, every man is his "brother's keeper", because God entrusts us to one another.
> (*Evangelium Vitae:* 19)

The second source that highlights the more robust aim of solidarity to cultivate charity can found in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). To analyze this

passage, it is helpful to first read it[3]. As an exegesis, it is important to point out that the questioner is a "scholar of the law" or legal scholar dedicated to the study of justice, specifically the Mosaic law. He asks Jesus what he must do to earn eternal life. Jesus' answer builds on the ancient Jewish commandment from Deuteronomy 6:4-7 *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind. Jesus* adds you also have to love *"your neighbor as yourself."* This additional component of the commandment, which draws from God's insistence in Genesis that we are all our "brothers' keeper", is then strengthened by the proceeding parable of the Good Samaritan.

This parable begins as an answer to the question, who is my neighbor? As a response,

Jesus tells the legal scholar a story of a man beaten by robbers and left for dead. Two other prominent Jews ignored the suffering man by the side of the road, but the Samaritan did not. Why did the Samaritan stop? The Jews listening would have been shocked by this development. Who are the Samaritans? The Samaritans were hated by the Jews , "because of their imperfect adherence to Judaism and their partly pagan ancestry" (Catholic Answers: website). Obviously, Jesus is making a point–even a perceived enemy is our neighbor. This part of the story must have shocked Jesus' listeners. Analogously, I think Aristotle would have reacted similarly if the story had a Spartan rescuing a victimized Athenian. In the

[3] *There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."zBut because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite sideBut a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him.The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.'Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*
Luke 10:25-37

ancient world, the Others (those outside your tribe or polis) were not considered fully human, yet Jesus points out in this parable that all humans are worthy of care and affection. Notice also that the Samaritan's charity not only exceeds the bounds of justice but also charity itself. The Samaritan's care of the man is exorbitant: he not only cleans and bandages his wounds; the Samaritan takes the man to an inn on his own donkey and finally pays for his stay at the inn similar to a medical stay at a hospital. This kind of charity seems almost obscenely gratuitous. What kind of charity is this? The legal scholar answers clearly that the Samaritan treated the man as a neighbor because the man was treated "with mercy." How ironic that that legal scholar concludes that the Samaritan was merciful. Mercy towards a stranger points way beyond justice which is giving what is due perhaps to a fellow citizen or believer of the same religion. Jesus turns justice on its head; he transforms justice as giving what is due to the right person into a lavish abundance of mercy for all. Hence, to live in mercy means to live in solidarity with all. Benedict XVI remarks "true solidarity—though it begins with an acknowledgment of the equal worth of the other—comes to fulfillment only when I willingly place my life at the service of others," (Benedict XVI). Thus the practice of solidarity "entails weaving a fabric of fraternal relationships marked by reciprocity, forgiveness and complete self-giving, according to the breadth and the depth of the love of God offered to humanity in the One who, crucified and risen, draws all to himself" (*World Day of Peace* 2014).

How do we practice solidarity at Montrose? Now that the pandemic has receded, Montrose students continue to find new ways to live this moral virtue at Montrose and, more importantly, beyond the walls of the school. Montrose students act locally, but think globally. One example from the current academic year is a student designed and executed podcast on service at Montrose called "Service in our Community and Across the World:

Watts2Boston and Student Leadership"[4] In eighteen minutes, five different Montrose students explain how they are living in solidarity with those in Needham, MA, Los Angeles, Philippines and Haiti through specific different service initiatives. Some of these service initiatives involved partnering with other schools to have a greater impact on the community. One student remarks how "helping people is like engrained at Montrose." And that one student learned at Montrose that service is "more than the community you are in.' And most importantly, the student podcast host referred to all of the service at Montrose as a 'formative experience that they [the students] will take with them as they move into the future."

Pope Francis' recent Christmas message highlights again why solidarity has become the bridge that moves civic friendship beyond justice toward community flourishing. Using Aristotle's scale of virtue, we know that the deficit of solidarity is indifference or a coldness towards others. And the excess of solidarity emerges as an unreflective mob mentality. What we all need, especially those most vulnerable to violence and poverty, says Pope Francis, are "concrete gestures of solidarity" (*Urbi et Orbi*: 2022). The Pope is calling all people of good will to lavish expressions of generosity *a la* the Good Samaritan; however, these acts must be particular to our specific place and role in the world. As an educational leader, I look forward to continuing to explore the concept of solidarity with new research and initiatives at the school and beyond in order to help our students embrace this moral virtue as a way to sow peace and justice in the world.

---

[4] https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/CbVzwTM8kvb to listen for more context

Bibliography

Aristotle. (1984). *Politics* (B. Jowett, Trans.). Oxford.

Aristotle. (1984). *The Nicomachean Ethics* (D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford.

Aristotle. (1984). *The Eudemian Ethics* (J. Solomon, Trans.). Oxford.

Arora, Chaitanya. (2022). Service in our Community and Across the World: Watts2Boston and Student Leadership. https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/CbVzwTM8kvb

Benedict XVI (2008). Address of His Holiness to the Participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Science. (Vatican Translation) https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-x vi_spe_20080503_social-sciences.html [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Catholic Answers Staff (?). Who were the Samaritans and why were they important? https://www.catholic.com/qa/who-were-the-samaritans-and-why-were-they-important [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Francis. (2014). Message of His Holiness on the World Day of Peace. (Vatican Translation). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_ 20131208_messaggio-xlvii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014.html [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Francis (2022). Urbi et Orbi. (Vatican Translation). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/20221225-urbi-etorbi-natale.html

John Paul II. (1987). *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Vatican Translation. St. Paul Books and Media

John Paul II. (1991). *Centesimus Annus*. Vatican Translation. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_0105 1991_centesimus-annus.html [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

John Paul II. (1995). *Evangelium Vitae.* Vatican Translation. https/;/www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_2503 1995_evangelium-vitae.html [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Liedman, S. (2002). Solidarity: A Conceptual History. https://www.eurozine.com/solidarity-a-conceptual-history/#footnote-7 [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Merriam-Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solidarity [Accessed on December 9, 2022]

Peterson, A. (2020), Cultivating Civic Friendship in Education. Onlinehttps://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/CivicFriendship_A Pete rson_Final.pdf [Accessed on October 15, 2021]

Pontifical Council For Justice and Peace. (2005) *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. (Vatican Translation). USCCB Publishing.

United States Conference of Bishops. (2022). Holy Bible https://bible.usccb.org/bible/luke/10 [Accessed on December 9, 2022]