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Slippery Fellows: The Meaning of Thinking and Friendship

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by

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In memory of Robin Carl Vaughan (Grandpop, to six of us), who printed out my email to him containing the first description of this project and kept it in close sight on his desk. He was an exceptional thinker, and I cannot think of anyone more devoted to friendship than he.

Words are not sufficient to express how eternally grateful I am to…

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INTRODUCTION

This project is a written laudation of two uniquely human experiences, the activity of thinking, and the bond we call friendship. While these experiences themselves are ubiquitous, their meanings turn out to be exceedingly difficult to capture in certain terms. Many times over the course of writing this project I felt that the meanings of both thinking and friendship, and the intimate connection between them, while so palpably present in my daily life, kept slipping through my fingers. I believed I knew the meaning of thinking when I withdrew from the world of appearances and engaged in a dialogue with myself. Likewise, I believed I knew the meaning of friendship when I saw, hugged, walked with, played with, laughed with, and most importantly, thought with a friend. If I stepped away from the friend, however, or was not fully removed from the appearing world in my thinking place, suddenly it felt as if I had only hugged the friend, or understood the experience of thinking, in some sort of dream, and my understanding of the two experiences vanished into thin air before me. Every time I put pen to paper I rediscovered how complex, deep, and vast the experiences of thinking and friendship truly are, making the project seem somewhat impossible, but at the same time, all the more urgent and important.

When I first conceived of this project, I was inspired by Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking in *The Life of the Mind*. Going against the history of philosophy, Arendt establishes a distinction between two mental faculties, thinking and knowing, with knowing corresponding with a quest for truth and thinking corresponding with a quest for meaning. I sought out to explore the theme of thinking and friendship in the classical world with Arendt's conception of thinking as the theoretical foundation of the project. I wanted to make sense of what I saw as a somewhat miraculous phenomenon, the fact that one can withdraw from the appearing world,

and upon one's return, communicate one's findings with another person. Arendt calls thinking a dialogue with oneself, but there is always the potential for this solitary business to move to a public space. I set out to explore what exactly is occurring when the dialogue with oneself becomes a meaningful dialogue with another. My questions going into this exploration were whether thinking occurs exclusively in language, whether a thought truly exists before it appears in the world, whether a thought is meaningful before this appearance, and what method of making thoughts appear in the world is closest to thinking: writing or speaking? Most importantly, I wished to stress through this exploration how crucial this thinking together is to the human condition, on both the personal and plural dimensions. For there is something truly wondrous and exhilarating when one can say one has found a friend who "speaks their language;" and this can happen too on a grander scale, through all the ways people find to share a kind of "universal meaning."

As I read for the project, and explored the topic in writing however, I discovered that so great in number are the questions about how to define both thinking and friendship, the project became mostly a matter of exploration through long attempts at definition. Eventually, the topic narrowed down to discussing just two thinkers, Arendt and Aristotle, and trying to see how I could make the two fit together to describe friendship and thinking as I conceive of it. Arendt's conception of thinking in *The Life of the Mind*, paired with Aristotle's definition of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* evokes a complex series of questions about how to think about friendship and thinking. While Aristotle's definition of friendship in many ways reaffirmed my original theory that friendship *is* thinking in communion with the friend, the goals of this project were complicated by the fact that his conception of friendship is tied up with his conception of thinking. In order to make Arendt and Aristotle fit in the way that I wanted, so loyal I was to her

idea of thinking, I had to first begin to untangle the difference between their conceptions of thinking, namely whether it is oriented toward meaning or truth, and from there settle on my own definition of friendship, and thus also the process of thinking with the friend. Most of the questions that inspired the project originally thus remain open, since the process of merely defining these terms turned out to be such an extensive project that is still ongoing, and I think, always will be.

This project is a kind of written evidence of what thinking about meaning in the Arendtian sense is. My words are a reflection of my thinking process, and an example of the way we use thinking to make sense of the world in which we live, and the endlessness of this collective sense-making project in which we all participate. Exploring these concepts in writing made me realize how important this project is because I came to appreciate even more just how vast the human project of trying to make sense of our daily experiences is, and how beautiful it is that we have the ability to explore this vastness with our friends. This project is not only written evidence of the process of thinking, but also the process of thinking with friends. For there are few ideas in this project that I did not think through with a friend, and I owe everything I say in this project to my ability to think with my friends. In a way, I think that is my best evidence that thinking with one's friends is important. I also believe this project will never truly be finished, and I will be thinking about these ideas with my friends forever. I hope, however, that it at least begins to introduce the idea that we are not living if we are not thinking, and that while we are certainly capable of thinking alone, we are also not living if we only engage in the practice of solitary thinking.

I am eternally grateful that I have found friends with whom I can think, because my desire to write this project partially arose from my fear that in our increasingly connected world,

we are more disconnected than ever, and have lost the value for thinking, particularly about the unknowable. This is not a profound observation and fear; countless people have written and spoken about how the instant gratification in our modern world, the rage bait headlines that people fail to click past, and parasocial relationships, have worrying effects on our plural society. This is also not a new observation and fear, for William Wordsworth had the same concerns amidst the rise of industrialization.

> The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incidents which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies…—When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonorable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible; and did I not further add to this impression a belief that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed by men of greater powers and with far more distinguished success.[1]

My hope for this project is similar to Wordsworth's optimism about the "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind." I hope simply to encourage a refocusing on the greatest human virtue: our ability to think, both alone and with others, about all the big questions, which though unanswerable, humans cannot resist thinking about.

[1] William Wordsworth, "Preface," in *Lyrical Ballads: With Other Poems*, *1800*, vol. 1 (Pennsylvania State University, 2013), https://spensabayalibrary.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/lyrical-ballads.pdf.

ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ

—Plato, *Apology*[2]

"One can't say how life is, how chance or fate deals with people, except by telling the tale."

—Hannah Arendt[3]

CHAPTER I

THINKING

An Introduction to The Life of the Mind

The theoretical foundation for the particular sort of thinking central to this project comes from Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking as it is explored in *The Life of the Mind*.

The Life of the Mind serves as a quasi-sequel to her earlier work, *The Human Condition*, which she describes as an inquiry into the *vita activa.*[4] Her sense that former inquiries into the question of the active life were incomplete, as well as her concern that the term itself was coined by men devoted to the contemplative life motivated her undertaking of the project. This exploration of the *vita activa* then ignited an interest in re-examining how the *vita contemplativa* had thus far been conceived, largely as a pure passivity, the objective of which was truth. Arendt separates herself from the tradition of conceiving of a state of contemplative passivity as the end goal of thinking. Her definition of thinking develops into something more expansive, into an

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[2] From Plato's *Apology* section 38a.

[3] Hannah Arendt, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary Mccarthy*, *1949-1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 295.

[4] It is quite evident from the content of *The Life of the Mind*, and the way it directly picks up from the end of the *Human Condition*, that is a sort of sequel, but evidence for the fact Arendt also conceived of it this way is in a letter from her to Mary McCarthy on February 9, 1968: "I am not preparing a bomb by any means. Unless you would call preparations for writing about Thinking-Judging-Willing (a kind of part II to the Human Condition) preparing a bomb. On the contrary. I have a feeling of futility in everything I do. Compared to what is at stake everything looks frivolous. I know this feeling disappears once I let myself fall into that gap between past and future which is the proper temporal locus of thought." Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), hereafter cited as LOTM.

activity oriented toward meaning.[5] Arendt ends her examination into the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition,* and likewise begins *The Life of the Mind*, with a quote from Cicero attributed to Cato: "Never has he more to do than when he does nothing, never is he to be less alone than when he is alone." (*Numquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset.)*[6] This seemingly paradoxical statement exhibits the blurred line between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* which so puzzles Arendt, and which she comes to believe has been previously overlooked. Arendt concludes her study of the *vita activa* with a sense that action is not simply "what man does" in opposition with "what man thinks," and this notion becomes the foundation of the questions which make up the thinking section of *The Life of the Mind.*[7] She sets out to answer the question of what we are "doing" when we think, since we can sit and do "nothing" in the appearing world as our mind explodes with invisible activity, as well as "where" we go, since we can never really depart from our world, and yet we are also not fully present in it when we think. These questions aim to begin to enlighten some of the darkness in the "bottomless abyss" of the history of metaphysics, [8] and they begin to untangle the mystery of our own mental activity, the past study of which "has never produced 'general conviction concerning [its] function…nor indeed much consensus of opinion concerning its subject matter."[9]

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[5] This is one of two reasons Arendt gives for writing *The Life of the Mind*, and the more important one for our interests. However, she was also motivated to write it after she wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, as she became interested in the question of whether, if thoughtlessness could result in evil, thinking could prevent it.

[6] The translation of this quote from Cicero attributed to Cato is my own.

[7] Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 419 is cited by Arendt as her source for describing Marx's conception of action in terms of "what man does" as opposed to "what man thinks" in LOTM 7n6.

[8] Arendt cites Kant as referring to metaphysics as a "bottomless abyss" in LOTM, 9n12.

[9] Arendt is quoting Richard McKeon, "Introduction," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library, 1941), xviii in LOTM, 9n13.

The Life of the Mind addresses the crisis of philosophy and metaphysics, that is, the belief of many theologians and philosophers—catalyzed by the assertion associated with Nietszche that "God is dead"— that philosophy and metaphysics had reached their end.[10] Arendt recognizes there is a crisis of philosophy and metaphysics, but she does not identify this crisis as being comparable to death, as other philosophers had. The crisis for Arendt is rather that the framing of, and answers to, the "old questions" have become implausible and unsatisfying. Arendt uses the dissolution of old conceptions of metaphysics to her advantage; for it frees the conception of thinking from the burden of tradition and allows her to explore the miraculous full potential of our ability to think. The scope of this potential is best introduced by her words in the introduction of this text, "... men have an inclination, perhaps a need, to think beyond the limitation of knowledge, to do more with this ability than use it as an instrument for knowing and doing."[11] Although this statement doesn't explicitly use the term "meaning," it is the first introduction to one of the central assertions of the thinking volume of *The Life of the Mind,* that is, that thinking is an activity in pursuit of meaning as opposed to truth. What "meaning" exactly is, is a question that will be discussed later in this chapter, but this is our first hint: It is something beyond the limitations of knowledge. It is thus not necessarily something one can collect as one can collect knowledge, nor something one can act on, but something toward which humans are nonetheless inexplicably drawn. An equally essential element to this statement, and an especially relevant element for the purposes of this particular project on friendship and thinking, is that *all* men have this inclination and need to think in this way. Thus, this thinking with which all men engage also has the potential to move from a private sphere into public spheres, from a solitude of the mind into a fellowship of men.

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[10] Arendt notes that Hegel was the first to assert that God is "dead," including a quotation from Hegel "[the] sentiment underlying religion in the modern age [is] the sentiment: God is dead." LOTM, 9n10.
[11] LOTM, 11-12.

Central to Arendt's conception of the activity of thinking is her reading of Immanuel Kant's distinction between *Vernunft*, which Arendt translates as "reason," and *Verstand*, which Arendt translates as "intellect." Arendt transforms Kant's terms into her own distinction between two mental activities: thinking and knowing. Kant drew the distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand* to describe the phenomenon of our need to consider matters which cannot be settled by verifiable means; that is, certain questions from which we can never derive answers or concrete knowledge. Kant recognized that this "need of reason" to think about the unknowable is different from the desire to acquire knowledge,[12] and in fact goes beyond it, as it is concerned with that which does not physically appear to us, and transcends the "limitations of knowledge," captivating the mind with an unquenchable curiosity. Arendt suggests, however, that Kant and others did not pursue this distinction to its greatest potential;

> He remained less than fully aware of the extent to which he had liberated reason, the ability to think, by justifying it in terms of the ultimate questions. He stated defensively that he had "found it necessary to deny knowledge…to make room for faith," but he had not made room for faith; he had made room for thought, and he had not "denied knowledge" but separated knowledge from thinking. [13]

Kant's distinction does not make room for faith, because thinking, the pursuit of meaning, has to do with having the room and interest to explore "ultimate questions," rather than coming to believe anything in particular. Nor did he deny knowledge, for the pursuit of knowledge is still its own important mental faculty, only it is separate from thinking.

The mistake those who followed Kant made after he drew this distinction, the reason the full breadth of the thinking activity was subsequently ignored, is due to the expectation that reason would produce cognitive results. Arendt clarifies that her identification of this mistake is not meant to deny that these activities are connected; for it is the fact that man thinks about

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[12] Cited by Arendt in LOTM, 14n23: Immanuel Kant, "Prolegonemna," in *Werke*, vol. III, 245.
[13] LOTM, 14.

unanswerable questions which makes him the question-asking being who also wishes to know.[14] By this she means that if man no longer possessed the curiosity which makes him ask the unanswerable questions, he would also likely lose the curiosity which makes him pursue the answerable questions which become knowledge. It is indeed the degree to which the two are related that has tempted thinkers in the past to "accept the criterion of truth–so valid for science and everyday life–as applicable to their own rather extraordinary business as well".[15] According to Arendt, the best thing one can do for reason, or the activity of thinking, is "to extend, albeit only negatively, our use of reason beyond the limitation of the sensorily given world, that is, to eliminate the obstacles by which reason hinders itself."[16] Once one recognizes the distinction between the activities of thinking and knowing, one must accept their ends too, as separate categories. Knowledge yet to be discovered is infinite, so it may seem hard to imagine how the conflation could dramatically limit the extensive potential of the thinking ego; but the collection of knowledge always leaves behind evidence, while thinking does not. At least, it does not leave behind evidence of the same sort. Thinking indeed does leave behind little artifacts of itself throughout our appearing world, for instance, "thought-things we call works of art." However, they can be wispy, and at times easy to miss, while at the same time completely all-consuming, in a fashion different from pieces of knowledge.[17] Arendt at one point calls the thinking ego a "slippery fellow," an epithet equally appropriate to its "end."[18] For meaning too is a slippery business, one which will never produce the results of cognition, nor should it be expected too, as the insatiable search for meaning gives us our very reason to live.

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[14] LOTM, 62.
[15] LOTM, 62.
[16] This quote comes from Kant, but Arendt is using it to her advantage to go further than Kant. „Dadurch unseren Vernunftgebrauch über die Grenzen der Sinnenwelt, obzwar nur negativ, aus-zudehnen, d.i. die Hindernis, die die Vernunft selbst." Cited in LOTM, 62n81
[17] "thought-things we call works of art" is from LOTM, 62.
[18] Arendt refers to the thinking ego as a "slippery fellow" in LOTM, 167.

The Distinction Between Meaning and Truth

Since Arendt separates the activities of thinking and knowing according to their ends, meaning and truth, it is important for one to understand what meaning and truth might be if one is to begin to imagine what thinking and knowing might be. Truth is an element ruled by cognition. Arendt references the first line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature desire to know [to see]"[19] (*πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει)*.[20] The questions which emerge out of this desire to know turn into questions in pursuit of truth, and these are answerable by common sense experience and reasoning. Due to the insatiable nature of human beings, the quest for truth never ends, and we are constantly abandoning former discoveries and questions in pursuit of new ones. This insatiability, however, does not contradict the objective of the desire to know, for questions in pursuit of knowledge are always answered by common-sense reasoning, coming from common-sense experience. Many of the answers to questions concerning truth are eventually accessible through the evidence of the senses in the appearing world. Our senses function as the irrefutable evidence truth requires. Questions of meaning do not function the same way.

Questions of meaning are unanswerable, and thus no evidence for them will be found in the senses. "The quest for meaning is 'meaningless' to common sense and common-sense reasoning."[21] The quest for meaning is "meaningless" to common-sense reasoning, because common-sense reasoning is concerned with the pragmatic issue of what something is, and occupied by proving its existence. Thinking assumes the existence of the thing and is concerned

[19] This is Arendt's translation, but the brackets are my addition.
[20] In ancient Greek the verb "to know," "εἰδέναι," comes from "εἶδομαι," "to be seen," so there is a linguistic connection between seeing and knowing, or more generally, between the senses and knowing.
[21] The quotes around meaningless indicates that when Arendt writes about meaning, she has in mind a very specific use of the term to describe a particular phenomenon of thinking, and the reader has to do some of the heavy lifting to uncover what "meaning" "means" in Arendtian terms.

more with what it *means* for it to exist.[22] Knowing is concerned with finding concrete answers, whereas thinking is more concerned with the activity itself, rather than producing any answers. Thus the activity of thinking, because it adds nothing to the accumulation of knowledge, is useless to common-sense reasoning. More accurately, it *appears* meaningless to common-sense reasoning, but as I have already suggested, the desire to know might very well depend on our natural curiosity obsessed with pursuing the unknowable. The crucial difference between the activities of thinking and knowing are their relation to the world of appearances. The pursuit of knowledge demands that one engages exclusively with the evidence the senses produce in the world of appearance. When one thinks, one must withdraw from the world of appearances, to a world that Arendt says implies remembrance of the world containing our senses. She credits Augustine with composing the best description of the process of preparation the mind undergoes to transform our experience of the sensory world into thought, which indirectly but essentially enables our faculties to will and judge.

> Sense perception, he says "the vision, which was without when the sense was formed by a sensible body, is succeeded by a similar vision within," the image that re-presents it. This image is then stored in memory, ready to become a "vision in thought" the moment the mind gets hold of it; it is decisive that 'what remains in the memory'—the mere image of what once was real—is different from the "vision in thought"—the deliberately remembered object. "What remains in the memory…is one thing, and…something else arises when we remember," for "what is hidden and retained in the memory is one thing, and what is impressed by it in the thought of the one remembering is another thing."[23]

Augustine's description of this preparation process is indeed elegantly worded, however this world with which we are all familiar and to which we all withdraw, remains rather ineffable. The world to which we withdraw seems to contain more than just the memory of the appearing world turned into images in the mind, but it is impossible to accurately express with language what else

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[22] LOTM, 57.

[23] Arendt is pulling these quotations from Augustine, *The Fathers of the Church: The Trinity,* vol. 45, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), book XI, chapter 3.

it contains, and how it contains it. We all participate in the sensory world, and we all experience this world of withdrawal, which is indeed the mind's reproduction of the sensory world in which we all participate, and yet this world of withdrawal does not *only* contain images of the sensory world. It is important for Arendt, however, that one does not fall into the fallacy that the world removed from the world of appearances is "higher" in any way than the world of appearances. The world of appearances is essential as the place in which we all dwell and meet again after we return from our withdrawal into the land of thought. Though we withdraw from it when we think, it is from our shared world of appearances that we gather all of our food for thought. It is in this world of withdrawal where we reflect on all of our experiences and turn them into thoughts, which are responsible for making our experiences meaningful. Thus, one world is truly inseparable from the other, and they depend upon one another for survival.[24]

This leads us to the important question of what meaning *means* in the Arendtian sense. Arendt does not give a direct answer to this essential question, but she offers slivers of hints which reveal what meaning might mean. The most obvious way to begin to define meaning is as the "ultimate questions" with which we are all familiar. These are the questions of god, freedom, and immortality, which Kant relies on to describe the category of questions that do not serve knowledge, but which nevertheless never cease to occupy our minds. These questions, however, do not fully satisfy the "meaning" of meaning. Conceiving of meaning simply as the "ultimate questions" hinders the whole project of understanding meaning, because they can lead one to easily begin to conflate meaning and truth. For the "ultimate questions" are those questions which are already "proven" to be unknowable.[25] Therefore to conceive of meaning only as these questions is once again to assume the criterion of truth as applicable to the extraordinary

[24] LOTM, 87.
[25] LOTM, 14.

business of the thinking ego, and we are again in danger of limiting the extensive potential of the thinking ego. One could also fall into the trap of conflating truth and meaning by conceiving of the questions of god and immortality, not as unknowable questions, but rather as questions with definitive answers, which some do. Arendt proposes that the activity of thinking extends well beyond the "ultimate questions," to any reflection which requires the removal of oneself from the world of appearances, and does not serve knowledge. Heidegger calls this kind of reflection "out of order."[26] The "order," it seems, is any ordinary activity in the appearing world. Thinking interrupts this order; "all thinking demands a '*stop*-and-think.'"[27] Once we free thinking from the restrictions of merely "ultimate questions" we can begin to understand what meaning might be, and we begin to unlock the miraculous full potential of our ability to think, that I mentioned earlier.

The Thinking Ego's Magnificent Authority Over Life

For Arendt, the relationship between the activity of thinking and living is complicated, but the two are nonetheless undeniably inseparable. Thus, teasing out what thinking and the pursuit of meaning might mean for Arendt, also begins to describe what life might mean for Arendt. It is in our nature to think about that which is beyond our knowledge, that which is unknowable, but these terms can make it sound as if everything we contemplate is a mysterious, inaccessible, and intellectual philosophical inquiry into our existence. When Arendt refers to thinking beyond knowledge, or thinking about the unknowable, she is not referring to some select exclusive group of philosophical thought-objects. Arendt's conception of the *need* to think about the unknowable encompasses nearly everything in the sensory experience of man. There is

[26] This phrase from Martin Heidegger is cited in LOTM, 78n19 as coming from *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 12.
[27] For a more thorough exploration of Arendt's use of the phrase "out of order," see Thomas Bartscherer, "Thinking Out of Order," *The Philosopher* 109, no. 4 (Fall 2021): 44-51.

nothing in the common experience of man that cannot become a thought object, and it is not the experiences themselves which are meaningful, but because we think about them that they become meaningful. When we tell a story about our experiences, the experience has always already gone through the process of the thinking ego, and it is not the experience we are sharing, but rather the *meaning* of the experience, as it has already been processed by the mind.

However, it is important to note that although Arendt credits the activity of thinking with giving meaning to our experiences, she does not believe thinking leads directly to action. Thinking is activity itself, and starting with Aristotle, the motion of the activity has been frequently likened to a circle, a movement which produces no end product, another reminder that it is a mistake to assume that truth could possibly be the result of thinking. Arendt doesn't cite Augustine in this instance, but he too refers to the endless wheel of thinking: "...through all these do I run and flit about, on this side, and on that side, mining into them so far as ever I am able, but can find no bottom"[28] (*per haec omnia discurro et volito hac illac; penetro etiam, quantum possum, et finis nusquam: tanta vis est memoriae, tanta vitae vis est in homine vivente mortaliter)*. Arendt likens the circular nature of the activity of thinking to Penelope's web in the *Odyssey*: "...it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before."[29] She clarifies the connection between thinking and Penelope's web by emphasizing that no answers, no results of thinking, will satisfy the need to think and the desire to ruminate again and again over the same thought. The use of this metaphor seems to imply an urgency to thinking that the simple circle metaphor does not. Penelope was not weaving and unweaving her web just for the sake of the activity; it was a trick she devised to avoid being married off to one of the many suitors invading her home. The use of this metaphor thus implies that the weaving and unweaving of our thoughts

[28] Augustine, *Confessions*, vol 2. of *St. Augustine's Confessions*, trans. William Watts, ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), X, XVII.
[29] LOTM, 88.

is essential to our existence; this weaving and unweaving prevents our story from ending prematurely. Thinking is an activity with no end, but the endlessness of this activity maintains our reality. This point is certainly the most difficult of Arendt's to accept. It is difficult for humans, who fancy themselves as creators, to imagine that something we do constantly might actually produce nothing, and doesn't even lead to action, but is rather mere activity.

The proper response to any hesitancy one might have toward Arendt's argument, on the basis of doubting the importance of an activity which produces nothing, is that to refer to thinking as "mere" activity is actually underselling it; for thinking is not a meager activity. It is important to emphasize, as Arendt does, that there is nothing in the ordinary experience of man that cannot become food for thought, but one should not make the mistake in assuming that thinking itself is ordinary, just because it can be fed by ordinary experience. The full breadth of the thinking ego—which Kant calls a "bottomless abyss" and Augustine describes as innumerable fields, dens, and caves—is actually the most extraordinary thing man possesses.[30] The experience of thinking is so extraordinary, at times its "out of order" nature makes it seem "*contrary to the human condition.*"[31] Men dwell together in the world of appearances, where they are enslaved to temporality and mortality. Thinking seems contrary to the human condition, and it is extraordinary, because through thinking, men are able to "mentally transcend these conditions," as well as "will the impossible, for instance, eternal life; and they can think, that is, speculate meaningfully, about the unknown and the unknowable."[32] Perhaps we ought to pay more attention to children, who place the utmost importance on the magnificence of their imagination, often testing whether it has any limits. The cavernous depth of our mind's potential

[30] For the Kant, see note 5; Augustine, *Confessions*: "*in memoriae meae campis et antris et cavernis innumerabilibus"*
[31] LOTM, 78. Italics in original.
[32] LOTM, 70.

is so great, there are moments the ineffable artifacts it fabricates cannot be properly expressed by the spoken or written word. Arendt cites multiple philosophers who grapple with the issue of the inadequacy of language when faced with the task of reproducing what has occurred in the mind, including Heidegger: "The internal limit of all thinking…is that the thinker never can say what is most his own…because the spoken word receives its determination from the ineffable."[33] Although she seems to dispute the claim to a certain extent that language is inadequate. According to her, we think in words and we cannot think without them, and it is the expectation that thought should produce knowledge, that we think language is inadequate, when it is really that meaning is slippery and it will always slip away as we speak about it for that reason.[34] Our thoughts will never change reality, but our ability to "do *more*" with the faculty of thought than to "use it as an instrument for knowing and doing," our ability to imagine things that defy our common sense experience, and the fact that we value thinking without "purpose," is central to the human condition.[35] Arendt says there is "no clearer or more radical opposition than that between thinking and doing," but the way we choose to live our lives still depends "ultimately on the life of the mind."[36]

To understand how the way we choose to conduct our lives depends on the life of the mind according to Arendt, it is helpful to turn for a moment to Aristotle, who is a major influence for Arendt's thinking. While Arendt and Aristotle's positions differ significantly on the matter of the relationship between thought and action, as well as between thinking and truth, both maintain that thinking is essential to how we choose to live our practical lives in the appearing world. Aristotle separates thinking into two main categories, thinking concerned with

[33] LOTM, 115n98.
[34] LOTM, 122.
[35] LOTM, 12. Emphasis on "more" is mine.
[36] LOTM, 71.

action, and thinking that is not concerned with action. Aristotle says there are three faculties of the soul that rule over action: sense perception, intellect, and longing. Longing is the origin of choice, which is in turn the origin of action, and a choice cannot be made unless the kind of thinking that is concerned with action is present. Thinking concerning action considers whether the reasoning involved is true and the longing of the thinker is correct. It is choice, which is the result of thinking that Aristotle says "*is* a human being." There is also thinking that is not concerned with action, and this is contemplative thinking. Contemplative thinking is concerned with identifying what is true and distinguishing it from what is false.[37] All kinds of thinking for Aristotle are concerned with finding truth, whether they are concerned with action or not. He further defines thinking by breaking it up into five categories: art, science, prudence, wisdom, and intellect.[38] The most relevant category for our concerns is prudence, which is the practical thinking that considers matters concerning living well in general. Prudence is "bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being."[39]

As we already know Arendt's definition of thinking is an activity oriented toward meaning, and not truth, and Arendt agrees with Heidegger's assertion that thinking does "not endow us directly with the power to act."[40] She and Aristotle are united however, in the idea that life cannot be lived properly without thinking. Aristotle says that there cannot be choice "…either in the absence of intellect and thinking or in the absence of a moral characteristic, for there cannot be acting well… in the absence of thinking and character."[41] Arendt's idea is different but in the same vein. She points out that thinking, like the other mental faculties, is invisible, but an important "outward manifestation of the mind is absentmindedness, an obvious

[37] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1139a20-1139b5.
[38] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b15.
[39] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1140b5.
[40] LOTM, 71.
[41] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a35.

disregard of the surrounding world, something entirely negative which in no way hints at what is actually happening within us."[42] As we have already discussed there is nothing in man's common sense experience that "cannot become food for thought…All the metaphysical questions that philosophy took as its special topics arise out of ordinary common-sense experiences; 'reason's need' –the quest for meaning that prompts men to ask them–is in no way different from men's need to tell the story of some happening they witnessed, or to write poems about it."[43] The reason that for Arendt, the way we choose to live our lives depends ultimately on the life of the mind, even though it does not play a direct role in action, is because the alternative, thoughtlessness, does not engage at all with all the food for thought life in the appearing world has to offer.

Now that we have emphasized the miraculous nature of the thinking ego, and discussed how the way one chooses to live one's life relies on thinking, we must focus even more on how in Arendt's model this is true for *every* man. Her pluralistic model points out the irrelevance of the "age-old distinction" between the many, that is, "ordinary" men, and the few, that is, "professional thinkers." Arendt emphasizes that every ordinary man possesses the potential to exercise this extraordinary business. Thinking is not only a job for the few, but rather a need of the many, at least the many who want to lead a full life.[44] Not only does everyone depend on the life of the mind to conduct their life, but thinking seems to be a force even stronger than that for Arendt, a force that actually drives the reason for living.

Thinking in its non-cognitive, non-specialized sense is a natural need of human life, the actualization of the difference given in consciousness, is not a prerogative of the few but an

[42] LOTM, 72.
[43] LOTM, 78.
[44] Arendt also emphasizes that thinking should be expected from everyone, because of the other motivation Arendt had for writing *The Life of the Mind* that I described in footnote 2. Her theory is that if the absence of thought might lead to wickedness, then it is also possible that thinking may have something to do with being able to tell right from wrong. If that is the case, then it is of the utmost importance to be able to demand the exercise of thought from everyone.

ever-present faculty in everybody… Thinking accompanies life and is itself the dematerialized quintessence of being alive; and since life is a process, its quintessence can only lie in the actual thinking process and not in any solid results of specific thoughts. A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence—it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers.[45]

I mentioned before that Arendt sees the existence of our experiences themselves as meaningless before they can pass through the thinking ego. Here she makes this point more vital. It is not just that existence is meaningless without undergoing the process of thinking, but it is comparable to being asleep. Not only are all men *capable* of thinking, Arendt has qualified it as a necessary criteria for life. She makes even stronger connections between thinking and living at other points in the book. Earlier, Arendt proclaims that the only metaphor for the endlessness of the activity of thinking is "the sensation of being alive," and she quickly adds, "*Without the breath of life the human body is a corpse; without thinking the human mind is dead.*"[46] To say unthinking men are like sleepwalkers is not enough. Not only is life meaningless without thinking, unthinking men are like dead men. She equates thinking to breathing. She points out that Aristotle made the same metaphor 2000 years before in his *Metaphysics*: "The activity of thinking [energeia that has its end in itself] is life." Later, the same point surfaces again as she discusses Socrates. She says that he too thought that life without thought is meaningless, even though thought gives no answers which produce anything. She says that he too was concerned purely with exercising the activity, and clarifies "…to put it differently: To think and to be fully alive are the same, and this implies that thinking must always begin afresh; it is an activity that accompanies living, and is concerned with such concepts as justice, happiness, virtue…"[47]

All of these arguments drawing this profound connection between thinking and the experience of being alive appear to indicate that the activity of thinking, this activity with no

[45] LOTM, 191.
[46] LOTM, 123. Italics are in the original.
[47] LOTM, 178.

answers, might be the answer to the question of the "meaning of life," or our reason for living. However, drawing this conclusion without reservations would be rash considering this reflection that comes after Arendt discusses Aristotle's metaphor comparing living and thinking:

> "Yet these metaphors, although they correspond to the speculative, non-cognitive way of thinking and remain loyal to the fundamental experiences of the thinking ego, since they relate to no cognitive capacity, remain singularly empty, and Aristotle himself uses them nowhere else–except when he asserts that being alive is *energein*, that is, being active for its own sake. Moreover, the metaphor obviously refuses to answer the inevitable question, Why do we think?, since there is no answer to the question, Why do we live?"[48]

Arendt is not fully satisfied by the metaphors comparing the activity of thinking to the experience of living, for she feels they leave the questions of why we think, or why we live, unanswered. I happen to disagree with her in this case. Perhaps I will be accused of begging the question, but I think the very fact she is able to ask "Why do we think?" and "Why do we live?" is also the answer to those questions. Our search for meaning is insatiable. All of the questions that the thinking ego invents are going to remain unanswered, including the questions of why we ask these questions, and why we are alive. Why should we need any answer other than we live to think? Why should we need any answer other than we think to give the experience of being alive meaning? Arendt says in a letter to her friend, Mary McCarthy, in which she mentions she is writing *The Life of the Mind*, "I have a feeling of futility in everything I do. Compared to what is at stake everything looks frivolous. I know this feeling disappears once I let myself fall into that gap between past and future which is the proper temporal locus of thought." When Arendt enters the "out of order" state of thinking, life becomes meaningful and now longer futile. Is that not the reason we think, and the reason we live, all in one?

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[48] LOTM, 125.

The Compulsion to Think, The Compulsion to Speak

The compulsion of all men to think is accompanied by a compulsion to express one's thoughts to another, to transform the dialogue with oneself into a dialogue with someone else. Arendt sees the compulsion of people to communicate their experiences to others as so ubiquitous, she compares it to the compulsion to seek meaning, in a quotation we have seen before:

> All the metaphysical questions that philosophy took as its special topics arise out of ordinary common-sense experiences; 'reason's need'--the quest for meaning that prompts men to ask them–is in no way different from men's need to tell the story of some happening they witness, or to write poems about it.[49]

All of the material for thinking comes from the ordinary common-sense experiences we all share, and after we all withdraw from this shared world, ultimately, we all must also return to it. Upon our return, as political animals existing in the plural, we have the compulsion to bring back to our shared world what we thought about in our time of withdrawal. Arendt says thinking beings have an "*urge to speak*," and their speech makes "manifest what otherwise would not be a part of the appearing world at all."[50] She uses the idea of *logos* in Aristotle's treatise on language, *De Interpretatione*, to explain how this urge is related to thinking as an activity oriented toward meaning. Words in themselves are neither true or false, but they mean something in themselves. Arendt uses an example of a centaur, and Aristotle uses a goat-stag to say that these words have meaning, but they are neither true or false "unless one adds 'non-being' or 'being,'" thus either claiming their existence is true or not.[51] *Logos* is speech which is made meaningful through synthesis of words meaningful in themselves. The urge to speak is therefore oriented toward a quest for meaning and not truth (*ἀλήθεια*) or falsehood (*ψεῦδος*).[52] Arendt says that words and

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[49] LOTM, 78.
[50] LOTM, 98.
[51] LOTM, 98-99
[52] LOTM, 99. She cites Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16a4-17a9.

thoughts "resemble each other," but points out that Aristotle did not claim a certain order to the relationship between language and thinking. The question of whether speaking is a mere instrument for communicating thought, or we think because we have the ability to speak thus remains open in *De Interpratione*. Arendt also does not entirely answer the question of priority, but emphasizes instead that thinking is unimaginable without the existence of meaningful words. Thought does not need to be communicated to occur, but thoughts must be "spoken," either in the mind or aloud. Thinking beings have an urge to speak because they exist in the plural, not because thinking *needs* to be communicated.[53] However, Arendt suggests that because man exists in the plural, if deprived of communication, he is "likely to go astray."[54]

How can one go astray in an activity that has no end, and is not interested in knowledge? Do we actually think better together, as Aristotle suggests in the *Nicomachean Ethics*?[55] Arendt follows up her claim with a quotation from Kant in which he says reason "is not fit to isolate itself, but to communicate."[56] I imagine the meaning of going astray in this case would be that one would become too consumed by one's own thoughts, and thus would cease to participate in the plural world to which we all belong. The effects of failing to communicate thought then, may resemble those of not thinking at all. Thinking may not be concerned with truth and falsehood, but it is the way we "come to terms with whatever may be given to our senses in everyday appearances." Does it not make much more sense to perform the activity we use to make sense of our world with the other people who live among us? We have already noted, however, that many philosophers express the challenges of expressing one's thoughts to another, because sometimes it feels as if language fails to express the "ineffable" activity of the mind. This complicates the

[53] LOTM, 99.
[54] LOTM, 99.
[55] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a15.
[56] LOTM, 99n61.

process of fulfilling our need to communicate our thoughts. Plato focuses on this issue most of all, with more of an emphasis on the issue of the written word. This is Arendt's account of the arguments against writing in the *Phaedrus*:

> There is first the fact that writing "will implant forgetfulness"; relying on the written word, men "cease to exercise memory." There is the second the written word's "majestic silence"; it can neither give account of itself nor answer questions. Third, it cannot choose whom to address, falls into the wrong hands, and "drifts all over the place"; ill-treated and abused it is unable to defend itself…[57]

Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedrus* argues for the superiority of the liveliness of speech over the inevitably static nature of the written word. Speech in contrast to the written word is ideal for "the art of talking things through" (*τέχνη διαλεκτική*). This art of talking through is also "praised because it knows how to select its listeners."[58] Supposing this is true, what better listeners could one select to move the dialogue with oneself into a dialogue with others, than one's friends?

The possibility of being led astray by being deprived of communication also calls to mind another way one could be led astray, which Arendt cites as laudable, in her essay "The Crisis in Culture." Arendt quotes Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* "I prefer, before heaven, to go astray with Plato, your reverence for whom I know, and admiration for whom I learn from your lips, rather than hold true views with his opponents" *(Errare mehercule malo cum Platone, quem tu quanti facias scio et quem ex tuo ore admiror, quam cum istis vera sentire)*.[59] Arendt praises this statement from Cicero as being that of an ultimate humanist, for valuing the company of a particular person and their thoughts over the truth. The preference for being led astray with a friend, or simply wandering through thought with a friend on topics that do not concern the truth, is central to this project. It is important to recognize however, that truth has its place in our minds

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[57] This is Arendt's account of the objections to the written word in Plato's *Phaedrus*; LOTM, 115-116.
[58] LOTM, 116.
[59] Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," in *Between Past and Future* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), 224-225. Arendt left out some parts of the Cicero quotation, but I quote it here in full. The translation comes from Cicero, *Tuluscan Disputations*, trans. J.E. King (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 47.

and in the world, and there is a certain degree of danger involved in this kind of loyalty. Aristotle, who also greatly values loyalty to those we hold dear, warns against loyalty that makes one blind to the truth, and ultimately makes the opposite claim to Cicero's:

> As for the universal [good], perhaps it is better to examine it and to go through the perplexities involved in the ways it is spoken of, although undertaking such an inquiry is arduous, because the men who introduced the forms are dear. But perhaps it might be held to be better, and in fact to be obligatory, at least for the sake of preserving the truth, to do away with everyone's own things, especially for those who are philosophers. For although both are dear, it is a pious thing to honor the truth first.[60]

Arendt's invested interest in thinking and the pursuit of meaning is not to the exclusion of valuing knowing and the pursuit of truth. She only wishes to point out that they are indeed separate, and to conflate the activities of thinking and knowing is to limit the full potential of the activity of thinking. Supposing a good friend is there to lead the other friend to what is good for both himself and the friend, an idea we will explore in the next chapter, good friends will both think together, going astray together in those unknowable mysteries of our world, and they will also lead each other toward those truths which are knowable. Cicero's loyalty to the friend is praiseworthy to a certain degree, but it is also the extreme. True friends will encourage each other to both honor the truth, and take pleasure in wandering through ideas together, as they grasp both for the truth, and for meaning.

[60] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a10-15.

"To the Ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it. We admit of course that besides a wife and family a man needs a few "friends." But the very tone of the admission, and the sort of acquaintanceships which those who make it would describe as "friendship," show clearly that what they are talking about has very little to do with that Philia which Aristotle classified among the virtues or that Amicitia on which Cicero wrote a book. It is something quite marginal; not a main course in life's banquet; a diversion; something that fills up the chinks of one's time. How has this come about?" —C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*[61]

CHAPTER II

FRIENDSHIP

The Meaning of Friendship

Friendship is one of those words whose use is overextended, making its employment at times nearly meaningless, due to a lack of alternative vocabulary to describe all the relationships that are crammed under its domain. It is not an issue unique to our time, or language; for in the beginning of Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he notes "not a few things about friendship are in dispute," meaning a great many are. The miscommunications resulting from this, sometimes with one person considering someone a friend while the other considers them a mere acquaintance, other times between two friends who are not in agreement about the nature of or depth of their friendship, are all too familiar. There is also the issue that friends cannot exactly put their finger on what makes them friends. A few months ago while dining with a handful of my friends, some of whom are intimate friends with whom I share everything, and some of whom are just people I like passively spending time with, someone asked what we think makes us all friends. Despite having considered and read about the topic for

[61] C.S. Lewis, "Friendship," in *The Four Loves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 262-263.

many months I was not completely satisfied by any of my attempts at an answer, nor anyone else's. One person suggested each of us had at least one shared interest, and many objected to that answer on the grounds of the perception that we don't each share interests. I think we do, but I objected to the suggestion on the grounds that while that is true, it is not what makes us all friends, for there are plenty of people we know with whom we share more than one interest and yet who are not our friends. In an effort to oversimplify, I suggested friends were united by a shared worldview. People objected to that on the grounds that we didn't all agree on politics or religion. I meant it more in the sense that I think we all think in a similar way and approach living in a similar way, but as I said, it was an oversimplification and I wasn't convinced myself. Part of the issue, I think, was that we were approaching the question in terms of the whole, when we likely should have approached it at the angle of each individual relationship. However, it still seems the question of what draws us all as a group together should be easier to answer. We all assume we understand friendship, something that is so ubiquitous in daily human affairs, and yet when pressed it turns out to be difficult to define and categorize. Even when one considers their real-life friends as examples in search of the answer of what makes a friend a friend, no explanation feels complete. Nonetheless, it is essential for the purposes of this project that we clarify what "friendship" might mean, and discuss whether there are "friendships" of different kinds or degrees. In his discussion of friendship in Books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle not only addresses the issue of defining friendship but also strongly emphasizes the importance friendship plays in living a good life.

Aristotle begins his discussion of friendship by asserting that it is either a virtue in itself or at least accompanied by virtue and it is "...most necessary with a view to life: without friends, no one would choose to live, even if he possessed all other goods…"[62] He goes on to emphasize

[62] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a5.

that no matter the condition of one's life, whether rich or poor, young or old, one is always in need of friends. He says repeatedly that delighting in the company of one's friends, and passing individual days and life as a whole with them, is the mark of friendship.[63] Again, however, friends are not good only for the sake of delight, but also because they are a necessary aid in navigating the world. Aristotle offer as examples, the young, who are in need of friends to save them from error, and the old, who are in need of care as they lose their capacity for action, and even those in their prime benefit from friends, because "'two going together' are better able to think and to act." The last suggestion, that friends think better together, is, of course, a vital point for our considerations. Aristotle does not say this so directly but I will: it is not only that delighting in the company of one's friends is the mark of friendship, but also that having the privilege of passing through life with one's friends is the mark of life truly lived. We will return to this idea, and whether or not Aristotle makes the same claim later, as it is intimately tied to my former claims about the necessity of thinking. For the moment, however, we shall only focus on the task of defining friendship, an important pleasure for men of all ages and skill.

Friendship is first and foremost, not just the sensation of having friendly affection or goodwill toward another, but rather Aristotle says it is "like a characteristic." Mutual recognition is necessary for a friendship to exist, and it is a characteristic because "people reciprocate love as a matter of choice, and choice stems from one's characteristic."[64] This mutual love and recognition also takes time to build. Goodwill and the desire for friendship may be immediate but true friendship does not come swiftly.

Aristotle separates friendship into three forms, which are in accordance with what he deems to be lovable and this is what is useful, pleasant, or good. The three forms of friendship

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[63] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1158a10 and 1157b20.
[64] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 11556a and 1157b30.

are those based in utility, pleasure, or goodness.[65] In a friendship of utility, people love each other only because they have something good to gain from the other. The friendship is thus based in one's concern for what is good for the self and one is not concerned with what is good for the other.[66] Both, however, benefit from the friendship even though one is concerned only with one's own benefit and not the other, because there would be no friendship if there were no mutual use of one for the other. In a friendship of pleasure, the affection is rooted in what is currently pleasant to the self, and friends of pleasure are friends for the sake of their own pleasure.[67] These two forms of friendship are "incidental" according to Aristotle, and not complete friendship.[68]

Complete friendship is between those who are "good and alike in virtue." These kinds of people, who contain within themselves that which is lovable, both goodness and pleasantness, wish for good things for the sake of their friends. They are thus both good "simply and for the friend," and they are also both pleasant to each other, since the good are "pleasant simply and pleasant to one another." This kind of friendship is rare because according to Aristotle "people of this sort are few," this sort being good people, because this kind of friendship can only occur between two good people. Even once one good person has found another, the development of friendship takes time, for they cannot trust or love one another until they form habits from living with each other and eat the "proverbial salt" together.[69] These complete friendships also contain within them the other kinds of friendships, for the good are both useful and pleasant to each other. The major difference between this complete friendship and the two of the other sort then is that base people are friends with others because they are only pleasant or useful to them, and "it is in this respect that they are alike," while the good are friends because of who they themselves

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[65] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 115b20 and 1156a5.
[66] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1156a10.
[67] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1156a15.
[68] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1156b10 and 1157b.
[69] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b20-30.

and their friends are. It is possible for the base and the good to be friends of utility and pleasure, so the good and base alike are capable of having friendship of utility or pleasure, but only the good can be friends by delighting in who the friend is.[70] Aristotle says that we call those who are affectionate toward each other on account of pleasure or utility friends, because these relationships resemble friendships between the good, which is friendship in the "primary and authoritative sense." "Insofar as there is some good involved and some likeness" friendship is present, and thus friendships of utility and pleasure are friendships because they resemble the utility and pleasure present in complete friendship.[71]

It is difficult to tease out from the *Nicomachean Ethics,* who "the good" are to Aristotle, and who is thus capable of complete friendship, so complex is the system of moral and intellectual virtues presented to its readers. Chapter 7 of Book 10, however, returns to the idea continuous throughout the text that it is our intellectual capacity that makes us most ourselves, enables us with our ability to act, and is the greatest human activity. "For this activity is the most excellent one: the intellect is the most excellent of the things in us, and the things with which the intellect is concerned are the most excellent of the things that can be known."[72] This seems to align with the arguments I have already made for the magnificence of the thinking ego in chapter I, and the idea that being an unthinking being is analogous to being dead. Since the intellect is "the most excellent of the things in us," and "happiness is an activity in accord with virtue" and happiness presumably will "accord with the most excellent virtue," we may say that the people who exhibit this virtue the best and most nobly are "the good" in the Aristotelian sense.[73]

> …whereas the activity of the intellect, because it is contemplative, seems to be superior in seriousness, to aim at no end apart from itself, and to have a pleasure proper to it…such that

[70] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1157a15-20.
[71] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1157a, 1157a25-35, and 1157b.
[72] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a20.
[73] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a15.

what is self-sufficient, characterized by leisure, and not subject to weariness to the extent possible for a human being, and all else that fall to the lot of the blessed person, manifestly accord with this contemplative activity—if this is so, then this activity would constitute the complete happiness of a human being.[74]

Amidst Aristotle's argument that the contemplative life is the happy life, he also emphasizes the self-sufficiency of the contemplative person: "And though perhaps it is better to have those with whom he may work, nonetheless he is most self-sufficient."[75] A complex tension in Aristotle's various arguments thus arises, for the good person capable of complete friendship seems to be the same as the good and happy person who is self-sufficient. Yet, there is another section in which Aristotle argues that even the happy person is in need of friends[76] Thus, Aristotle argues that only the good are capable of complete friendship, and the good person seems to be the person who pursues the contemplative life, but this person is also self-sufficient and therefore not necessarily in need of friends, and yet elsewhere he argues that they are. I will discuss in the next chapter at length what to make of these seemingly contradictory statements. Something important to note at this point, however, is that in the section in which Aristotle addresses whether the happy man is in need of friends, he includes as a particular essential feature of complete human friendship, the activity of thinking together. He says, "...one ought to share in the friend's perception that he exists, and this would come to pass by living together and sharing in a community of speeches and thought—for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of human beings, and not as with cattle, merely feeding in the same place."[77] This point is obviously important for the force of this project, although, we should note that for Aristotle, thinking is always in pursuit of truth, and this is in opposition to the definition of thinking we laid out in the last chapter. This does not mean, however, that the expansive potential

[74] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b20-25.
[75] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b35.
[76] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1169b-1170b.
[77] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b10.

of the thinking ego is limited by Aristotle's belief that it is always in search of the truth. He emphasizes, as Arendt does, the amazing human ability to transcend mortal conditions.

> But one ought not—as some recommend—to think only about human things because one is a human being, nor only about mortal things because one is mortal, but rather to make oneself immortal, insofar as that is possible, and to do all that bears on living in accord with what is the most excellent of the things in oneself.[78]

We will return later to the idea of thinking and friendship, and for now just conclude with what complete friendship seems to be. It is a friendship between the good, in which each loves the other because of who the other is, and they live together, sharing in the activity of thinking, pursuing the ultimate good, the contemplative life.

Now that we have examined the different kinds of friendship, we must come to understand what dissolves them. The incidental friendships, those for utility and pleasure, are fleeting unions, since both are based on what the friend provides rather than who the friend is. Accusations from one against the other occur often in friendships of utility. For one always wants more from the other and blame arises when one does not receive all that one believes is deserved. As soon as this conflict arises the relationship is dissolved, because they are not friends to each other, but rather the profit, and they have ceased to receive the desired profit from the friendship.[79] In friendships of pleasure, there is not as much conflict as in friendships of utility, because the friends get what they want from the friendship at the same time, since what they desire is delighting in each other's company. Aristotle says it would in fact be foolish for an accusation against a friend to arise in a friendship of pleasure, because one can simply choose to stop spending time with the friend with whom it is no longer pleasurable to spend time. Although conflict does not often arise in this kind of friendship, it is still an inconsistent relationship, since what people find pleasing is subject to change, as are the people themselves, and thus also the

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[78] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30.
[79] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1157a15.

pleasing qualities they provide to another.[80] Young people are especially subject to the swift acquisition and loss of this kind of friendship.[81] In friendships of virtue Aristotle says there are "no accusations or fights: no one is annoyed by someone who loves and benefits him, but if he is refined, he retaliates by doing some good to his friends…for each longs for the good."[82] It is possible that a complete friendship must be dissolved, however, if someone believes someone else to be good, and then the other person becomes a base person. That is only if the person who has become base proves to be unable to be rehabilitated. The friend, unchanged in virtue, then should try to come to the aid of the person who has become base, before deciding the friend cannot be helped and the friendship cannot go on.[83] It is also important to emphasize that there is an activity of friendship, which seems to be living together in a community of thought, and it is the distance of two people from this activity that has the potential to dissolve any sort of friendship, not distance by location.

Friendships of utility and pleasure appear to be both friendship and not friendship. They are friendships on account of their likeness to complete friendship, which involves both utility and pleasure. Yet they are unlike complete friendship in their instability.[84] Despite their unlikeness to complete friendship, Aristotle still refers to relationships based in utility or pleasure as friendship, and separates friendship of virtue from the other two kinds by calling it complete and framing it as friendship "most of all."[85] Aristotle thus seems to think it appropriate to keep using the term friendship in the flexible sense it is commonly employed, so long as virtuous friendship is emphasized as complete friendship.

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[80] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1156a15 and 1156a20.
[81] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1156a35.
[82] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1162b5.
[83] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1165b10-25.
[84] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1158b5-10.
[85] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1157b25.

The issue of what to call these other relationships, which resemble friendship but are ultimately incomplete appears to me to be ultimately unresolvable. It is unfortunate that the word friendship is employed to describe relationships that are only given the title due to their resemblance to the relationship, rendering the meaning of the term murky, as demonstrated by the quotation from C.S. Lewis that is the epigraph of this chapter. However, I am not interested in making any sort of semantic argument that this ought to be different. Part of the reason so many relationships are thrown under the umbrella of this term, is that it is hard to determine, as Aristotle acknowledges, what sort of relationship you have with another as the relationship is unfolding in real time. That is not to say we are completely incapable of distinguishing between different relationships, but when the difference is clear, we do have language available to communicate those differences. We say of our most intimate friends that they are "close friends" or "best friends" to distinguish them from friends we know to be on a different tier, or of a different sort. We say of people toward whom we have goodwill, but with whom we don't have any sort of time devoted relationships, that we are "friendly" with them. We say of friends that we know are on a different tier than those most important to us that they are "friends, but not close friends." While our methods for separating these different relationships in our lives may be crude and imperfect, sometimes our understanding of friendship is also so, especially when we're in the midst of it. As we have already said, it is the resemblance to complete friendship, the aspects of complete friendship contained in these other friendships, that makes them kinds of friendship, even if they are incomplete. It seems senseless to me to reserve the word only for the definition of complete friendship as we have described it, ignoring that these other relationships are related to complete friendship. While it seems fitting to claim that complete friendship is rare, it strikes me as somehow against the spirit of friendship, to exclude the friendships that

resemble complete friendship, but are ultimately incomplete, from the category of friendship. This is especially so considering that even incomplete friendships add pleasure and value to life. The case of the young, who Aristotle says are saved from error by their friends, who presumably are not necessarily all complete friends, being an example of this.

My first reaction to the way Aristotle divides up the different forms of friendship, was that they made immediate intuitive sense to me, as they resembled the way I generally divide up different relationships in my life. Almost immediately afterwards, however, came the existential fear that the friendships of mine that I believe are complete friendships, are not so. Worse was the fear that I could be incapable of finding such friendship, should I turn out not to be part of "the good." As I have presented these forms to my friends throughout the months I have devoted to this project, they have had similar reactions. First comes the intuitive understanding, next comes the panic. What troubled me the most is that Aristotle calls out the young in particular for having fleeting friendships. The most poignant contribution to this anxiety in Aristotle is when he acknowledges the very real human fault that "most differences arise among friends when the sort of friend they suppose themselves to be is not the same as the sort of friends they actually are."[86] A sort of comfort comes soon after that crisis inducing comment, as he talks about what one should do about the former friend who is no longer a friend, because the friend has changed. "One ought rather to remember the life lived together with him; and just as we suppose that a person ought to gratify friends more than foreigners, so too he must, of their prior friendship, render something to those who were once friends, when its dissolution was not due to excessive corruption."[87] I take comfort in this suggestion, because it suggests that even those fleeting friendships one makes in one's youth are worthy of honor and respect for what they once were.

[86] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1165b5.
[87] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1165b30-35.

This encourages me to carry this attitude too into my current and future friendships. I try to focus on honoring as best I can both my past and current relationships, and focus on loving the friend for who the friend is, and thinking with the friend as best I can. There is little sense, I think, in plaguing oneself by worrying that what one perceives at any given moment as complete friendship may not be so. The best we can do is keep after the search for complete friendship, and treasure it, and prioritize engaging in the activity of friendship, that is, thinking together, when we believe we have found it.

The Makings of Friendship

Since we have discussed the different kinds of friendship, it is also essential to explore more closely how friendship functions, and what it is made up of, rather than merely categorizing it into types. First there is the question of how one builds the friendly affection needed for a friendship. I mentioned earlier that friendship is not merely having goodwill for another person, and that goodwill arises swiftly whereas friendship does not. Goodwill, similar to friendships of utility and pleasure, resembles friendship, but it is not friendship in its complete form. Goodwill is simply the wish for another to do well, and a sharing of their intent, without any action toward making this abstract wish a reality. Aristotle says this can arise even between competitors, because although competitors will not do anything to aid each other, one can develop the wish for a competitor to do well and an affection for competing with a particular competitor. Goodwill is different from friendly affection because it lacks the intensity and longing associated with friendly affection, and it is a sudden feeling rather than a cultivated one. Goodwill thus seems to be the first feeling between friends, and it develops into friendship after a considerable amount of time has been devoted to the relationship, and the habit of living among one another and passing days together has been established. Goodwill is “friendship that

lies idle," and friendship makes goodwill active; no longer is goodwill just an abstract wish for good for the other but one actually assists the friend in achieving goodness.[88] Friendship thus cannot arise without two people first having goodwill for one another, but goodwill can exist without friendship ever developing. Although Aristotle describes the different forms of friendship, as well as how friendship functions, he does not directly explain why some good people are friends, and between others friendship never arises thus making the phenomenon rare even for the good. One can find the answer to this question embedded in his description of the marks of friendship. The idea that goodwill can arise even in relation to those whom one does not know and without their being aware of it, and that friendship is a mutual choice that must be cultivated, begins to explain how two pleasant people could know each other without a friendship arising between them. Thus it seems, the development of friendship is partly left to chance and circumstance. As I said, however, that only begins to answer the question, and it remains a mystery as to why Aristotle did not address what seems to be such a crucial question.

The next step in determining how two particular people come to develop goodwill into genuine friendly affection is asking the degree to which like-mindedness is present. We have already established that Aristotle believes true friends should be alike in their goodness, but to what degree must they be alike in mind? Must friends always agree? Must friends only agree on the answers to the big questions? Or should they only agree on how to approach them? Do friends think in the exact same way? Aristotle says like-mindedness (*Ὁμόνοια*)[89] resembles friendship.[90] Thus, like-mindedness for Aristotle seems to be neither the defining feature of friendship, nor merely a feature of friendship, but a thing in itself, ultimately related to the

[88] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167a10.
[89] Many scholars translate *Ὁμόνοια* as "concord," but Bartlett and Collins translate it as "like-mindedness." I chose to use Bartlett's and Collin's translation, because I believe "concord" omits that the meaning of *Ὁμόνοια* [literally coming from *ομο* (same) and *νους* (mind)] includes specifically oneness of *mind*, not just a general union of two people or things.
[90] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a25.

political layers in Aristotle's discussion of friendship.[91] Like-mindedness between two people is not simply sharing an opinion; for like goodwill, this can occur between strangers or competitors. Being of like-mind concerning one thing or just anything, such as "concerning the things in the heavens," does not make two people like-minded overall.[92] Aristotle rather defines like-mindedness as being concerned with what is advantageous for living and action aimed at achieving in common these advantageous things. Being like-minded does not mean to "have the same thing in mind, whatever it may be, but to have it in mind in the same way."[93] To explain what that might mean in practice, Imagine two people go to the same church and choose to say the same prayers aloud for an hour or so every Sunday. This shared practice does not necessarily mean they are of like-mind. One may be going to church and saying these prayers aloud for an hour or so every Sunday because he believes in the teachings of his church, and believes that he must worship God for happiness in life on earth and life after death. The other may be going because he was raised in the church, has made a habit of it, and he likes the music, but he doesn't believe it is necessary for his salvation. Simply having the same thing in mind (choosing to go to church every Sunday) does not make these two like-minded. Only if they had the choice to go to church every Sunday in mind in the same way (i.e. for the same reason) would they be of like-mind. Aristotle goes on to say this kind of connection "appears to be political friendship."[94]

Richard Klonoski, in his essay "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics" critiques scholars for assuming that *homonoia* is synonymous with the idea of political friendship, a kind of friendship of utility, that Aristotle discusses elsewhere in his work. He believes that this assumption limits the full range of the meaning of *homonoia* in Aristotle. While *homonoia* is not

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[91] Crucial to my understanding of Aristotle's discussion of *Ὁμόνοια* is Richard J. Klonoski's essay "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," *History of Political Thought* 17, no.3 (Autumn 1996): 313-325.
[92] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167a25.
[93] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167a35.
[94] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.

the same thing as friendship, Klonoski believes that its resemblance to friendship separates it from political friendship, which he describes as a "pragmatic or expedient manifestation of concord which is rather *both* essentially moral and primordially political in its nature."[95] *Homonoia* "appears to be political friendship," because it "concerns advantageous things and those that relate to life [or livelihood]."[96] Klonoski argues that the section following seems to be a glimpse at why *homonoia* resembles friendship. Aristotle says that this kind of like-mindedness is "present among the decent, since they are like-minded both with themselves and with one another," and these decent like-minded people aim for what is good for the commons.[97] The indecent cannot be like-minded in this way. Klonoski notes that although Aristotle describes *homonoia* in the context of the role it plays in a city, we should not ignore the "apparent importance of concord as a principle of unity for the individuals who make up the city."[98] Klonoski says it is even more interesting, however, that Aristotle includes the idea that the like-mindedness within a city relies on the like-mindedness within the individuals with themselves, which is an essential point in his discussion of the complete friendship we will discuss later. I believe it is even more interesting that Aristotle makes that connection, and then swiftly moves onto a new topic. Like-mindedness also seems to be closely connected to Aristotle's emphasis on friends living together and passing their days together, since it is based in action with the aim of living well. Klonoski says *homonoia* appears to be "a kind of 'political friendship' (*philia politikē)* which has a unifying function in the city which is analogous to the unifying function of friendship for the individual."[99] The resemblance of *homonoia* to complete friendship between the good indicates it is a "more noble, much more comprehensive or

[95] Klonoski, "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," 323.
[96] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.
[97] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b5.
[98] Klonoski, "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," 318.
[99] Klonoski, "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," 319.

complete kind of political friendship," than friendships of utility and it is both pleasant and useful like complete friendship.[100]

Claudia Baracchi, in her book *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift* similarly notes that there is significant overlap between the concepts of goodwill (*εὔνοια*) and *homonoia*, with the two never being completely neatly separated.[101] We mentioned before that in the beginning of his discussion of friendship, Aristotle says *homonoia* resembles friendship. Immediately before this assertion he describes the natural friendly attraction humans have to each other: "One might see in one's travels too that every human being is kindred to every other human being and a friend to him."[102] Baracchi calls this traveler "a figure of the human condition."[103] As this traveler navigates unknown territories and endless possibilities, he recognizes those that are like himself, those to whom he can relate and belong, who are therefore dear to him. The traveler for Baracchi represents the primordial grounding of friendship. It is "first and foremost, the name of an elementary feeling, of a solidarity that comforts, accords, connects in sensing and thinking."[104] This interpretation of the traveler is, of course, meaningfully in accord with the ideas of this project, but since our concern at this moment is predominantly defining friendship, we shall leave it aside for now. Baracchi sees the proximity of *homonoia's* resemblance to friendship to the statement about travel in Aristotle as an indication that *homonoia* is not only a matter of political friendship, but also "indicates the primordial feeling of bonding and recognition" in the whole of humanity.[105] Goodwill, although not the same, also represents this bond. Baracchi also

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[100] Klonoski, "'Homonoia' in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," 325.
[101] Baracchi translates εὔνοια as "benevolence," but Bartlett and Collins translate it as "goodwill," a term we have already seen earlier in the chapter, so for the sake of clarity εὔνοια will be translated as "goodwill," throughout this chapter. Baracchi is also in the camp of scholars who translates Ὁμόνοια as "concord," so we will use the Greek word where she uses "concord." Claudia Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, trans. Elena Bartolini and Catherine Fullarton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023).
[102] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1155a20.
[103] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 103.
[104] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 104.
[105] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 105.

ends up making a similar point to Klonoski, that Aristotle's inclusion of the idea that only the good are capable of *homonoia* and the later discussion of *homonoia* within the self "conveys that political friendship should be clarified with reference to the phenomenon of individual friendship, to that relationship in the context of which individuals can become fully themselves and exercise, magnify, further cultivate excellence and goodness."[106]

As I mentioned above, the term *homonoia,* or like-mindedness, appears not only in Aristotle's framing of it as a political union, but also in his connection between the relationship of a good person to themself and their relationship to the friend. Aristotle says that the criteria by which friendship is defined and judged, comes from that of the relationship to the self. Earlier in his exploration of friendship, Aristotle describes the good friend as someone who wishes for good things for the sake of one's friend, with whom one chooses to pass one's days, who makes similar choices, and who shares in the other's painful and joyous feelings. All of these features, Aristotle says, are present "in the decent person in relation to himself."[107] The concept of *homonoia* reemerges when Aristotle describes the decent person's relationship with themself, for the decent person is of like mind with themself. Being of like mind with oneself entails wishing good things for the self and acting upon these good things for one's own sake. One who is decent also finds one's own company pleasurable, and one thus desires to pass one's day with oneself. The decent one also shares in one's own pleasures and pains. This is all opposed to the base person, who finds their own company miserable and is not of like mind with themself, and thus attempts to flee the self by taking pleasure in the company of others.

Most interesting for our purposes is that Aristotle says that acting for the sake of oneself is acting for the "thinking part" of oneself, which is "in fact what each person seems to be."[108]

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[106] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 107.
[107] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a10.
[108] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a15.

Wishing the good for the thinking part of oneself, however, never entails wishing to become another person, because, it seems that it is the "thinking part" that each person "is or is most of all."[109] Obviously one is not honoring what is good for the "thinking part" of oneself, if one becomes another while striving for the good; for then, the "thinking part" of oneself ceases to be. Since the relationship between the decent person and the self is the model for complete friendship, and complete friendship means being friends for the sake of who the friend is, it would follow that the decent person is only a friend to the self if the decent person does not do anything which makes the decent person another. Considering it is the "thinking part" of a person which seems to most make a person themself, Aristotle says the decent person's thought is "also well supplied with objects of contemplation."[110] Since each of these qualities are those of the decent one in relation to oneself, and the decent one relates to the friend as the decent one relates to oneself. The decent one is thus a friend to oneself, the friend "another self," and friendship, another quality decent people and the friends of decent people possess in relation to themselves and each other.[111]

As Klonoski and Baracchi point out, *homonoia*, while resembling political friendship, and while being a thing in itself, is meaningfully connected to the same unifying function of individual friendship. Considering that in the discussion of how the conditions for complete friendship emerge from individual friendship, Aristotle says that one must be like-minded with oneself to be a friend to oneself, it would follow that like-mindedness is also a feature of friendship with the other. It is important to note, however, before moving forward with describing what like-mindedness between two friends will mean, that being like-minded is not the defining condition of friendship. Two people can be like-minded without being friends,

[109] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a20.
[110] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a25.
[111] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a30.

which is what makes like-mindedness like political friendship, rather than complete friendship. Like-mindedness, then, while being a feature of complete friendship, manifests differently in complete friendship than in political friendship.

It is hard to say how like-mindedness should manifest in complete friendship, since Aristotle does not explain what it means to be like-minded with oneself. Considering it is the thinking part of oneself that is most the self, and that in complete friendship, friends think together, since it is made up of two good people in pursuit of the contemplative life, it would follow that like-mindedness is related to this mutual pursuit in thought. As I have wrestled with what it might mean to be like-minded in complete friendship, I went back and forth on the matter of whether or not people of two different religious beliefs could be complete friends. My inclination was that they could, and indeed that friends need not be in agreement about everything. The thought was complicated, however, by the idea that if one friend thinks, for example, that the Christian God is the ultimate truth and the other thinks that we can't possibly know an idea like God is truth, how could they possibly truly think together, and truly love the other for who the other is, if they can't even agree on something so fundamental.

Augustine, notably, in a letter to his friend Martianus, takes the position that two friends must be in agreement about such things.[112] He quotes Cicero's *Laelius de Amicitia* in which he says that friendship "is an agreement on things human and divine along with good will and love." Augustine expresses to Martianus that while they were always in agreement about human things, they were not always in agreement about things divine, and this was a hindrance to their friendship. While Augustine seems to always have considered Martianus a friend, after Augustine converted he felt their friendship was incomplete: "And in that way you and I had to

[112] Boniface Ramsey, ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. 4, Letters 211 - 270 (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005), 194, hereafter cited at Letter 258 .

some extent a benevolent and loving agreement on things human. But now how shall I explain in words how much I rejoice over you when I presently have as a true friend the man whom I long had as a friend in some way?"[113] Augustine seems to apply a similar logic to that which I suggested earlier, which is to use the word friendship, even when talking about a form of friendship that is incomplete. For he always considered Martianus a friend in "some way," only now that they agree on divine things he is a "true friend." He speaks of the agreement on things divine as an addition: "there has also been added the agreement on things divine."[114] He adds that if two people do not agree on things divine, then in the end they also cannot completely agree on human matters either. This leads him to go back on his former claim that they were still friends in "some way," and he says rather that because they did not agree on divine matters and therefore were not even fully friends when it came to human affairs, Martianus was not even "partly" his friend. Augustine asks his friend not to be offended, however, because he was not even a friend to himself prior to his conversion. To Augustine then, being like-minded with oneself means believing in the truth that is God, and one cannot be a true friend to another until one is a friend to oneself in this way, and one can also not be a true friend to another who is not like-minded with themself in that way.

As I have said, I am inclined to think that friends can disagree even on something as fundamental as religion, and still achieve complete friendship. For example, someone may believe the Christian God is completely real, but within Christianity there remain several mysteries upon which Christians reflect. Why do good things happen to bad people? What is life after death really like? There are also Christians, on the other hand, who do not think it is appropriate to dwell on those questions. Those Christians who refuse to ask questions, who

[113] Letter 258, 194.
[114] Letter 258, 194.

consider it disrespectful and fear to ever lean into the aspects of doubt that come even with complete faith, I would argue are unthinking Christians. Those people, who are unthinking, are incapable of complete friendship, just as any unthinking beings are. Those who are willing to ask questions, however, despite having an ultimate truth that guides their life, still think about meaning, as we described it in the chapter on thinking. These people are not just capable of complete friendship, but they are capable even with those who do not believe in their faith. Should any topics remain off limits within a friendship, however, it can not be a complete friendship. Complete friendship requires both parties to love the other completely for who they are, and it requires that the two are like-minded in their mutual respect to explore all questions of meaning together. Both parties must greatly respect the activity of thinking, are "well supplied with objects of contemplation," and believe thinking is essential to the pursuit of living well. If one reaches a different conclusion from the other, it shouldn't affect the friendship so long as that topic is never declared to be off limits. Thoughts about higher things especially should not be off limits in a friendship since they are central to the pursuit of the contemplative life: "But one ought not…to think only about human things because one is a human being, nor only about mortal things because one is mortal, but rather to make oneself immortal." It is worth noting that reaching sure conclusions about the divine does not seem to align with Arendt's conception of the activity of thinking. As I have said, however, people with a religious truth also think about meaning, as Arendt defines it; for meaning encompasses everything in the experience of man. This is not to say that two friends who disagree will not try to convince each other of their own perspectives, since I imagine two thoughtful friends would want to guide the friend toward what they believe is the truth. I also do not mean to imply that it is excessively common that people with different fundamental beliefs achieve complete friendship, or that it is easy. Complete

friendship is rare, and it is certainly made easier if one agrees with the friend about matters like religion. I only mean to say it is still possible for two people who disagree on major matters to achieve complete friendship, and go on disagreeing as they go on being friends, so long as they are like-minded in the desire to think about everything together.

Guy Mansini, in his article "Aristotle on Needing Friends," makes a similar claim to Augustine, which he admits is based on an assumption. His claim also seems to differ from Augustine's, only slightly, but meaningfully.[115] Responding to Aristotle's idea that "one ought to share in the friend's perception that he exists, and this would come to pass by living together and sharing in a community of speeches and thought,"[116] Mansini says the point of this "presumably, is to have the same thought (even if it can sometimes be the same thought as to why there is a difference of understanding)."[117] Mansini's claim leaves a bit more room for disagreement between friends than Augustine's, though he doesn't elaborate on what "the same thought as to why there is a difference of understanding" would look like. Whatever he may mean by that, I believe my thoughts about like-mindedness in friendship more closely resemble his. While I was not surprised by Augustine's position on the matter upon reading this letter, I was disappointed considering he would be a great candidate for the kind of religious person I imagine being capable of friendship with a non-religious person. While Augustine's *Confessions* is ultimately a book about Augustine's conversion, and discovering divine truth, it has always struck me as also being about the process of thinking about the unknowable. As Catherine Conybeare notes in her essay, "Reading the *Confessions*," though Augustine discovers the divine truth of God, many of the questions he poses in the beginning are the same questions at the end of the text,

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[115] Guy Mansini, "Aristotle on Needing Friends," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no.3 (Summer 1998): 405-417.
[116] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b10.
[117] Mansini, "Aristotle on Needing Friends," 413.

demonstrating that they are matters for lifelong exploration.[118] Of course thinking with the friend is made easier if you agree on a divine truth, and your mutual thinking together about meaning branches off of this same point, but I maintain that the alternative is not impossible, and the most important aspect of like-mindedness with the friend is the interest in each other's thoughts, and a like-minded interest in the activity of friendship, the process of thinking together.

A Divergence

There seems to be, however, an issue with my argument on friendship and like-mindedness, as well as Augustine's, if they are to be applied to complete friendship in the full Aristotelian sense.[119] Aristotle's definition of complete friendship is intimately tied up with his conception of thinking, since complete friendship entails the good living in a community of thought together. To understand why my conception of like-mindedness in friendship, as well as Augustine's, may not fit with Aristotle's definition of complete friendship, we must come to a better understanding of his idea of thinking, and where it diverges from Arendt's. Aristotle breaks up the intellectual part of our soul into five different categories: art, science, prudence, wisdom, and intellect. All of these categories are the "things by which the soul attains the truth, by way of affirmation and denial."[120] He says that it is indeed the work of the thinking part of us to determine truth and falsity: "So of both of the intellectual parts [of the soul], the work [or task] is truth."[121] These two intellectual parts of the soul are contemplative thinking, which is not concerned with action or making, and practical thinking, which is concerned with action. It is contemplative thinking which is the most relevant for this discussion, for it is contemplative

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[118] Catherine Conybeare, "Reading the *Confessions*," in *A Companion to Augustine* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 99-110.
[119] It should be acknowledged that Augustine is not trying to argue that his conception of true friendship aligns with Aristotle's definition of complete friendship. I am only expressing that it is possible neither of our conceptions of the role of likemindedness in friendship are compatible with Aristotle's definition of complete friendship.
[120] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1139b15.
[121] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 139b10.

thinking that Aristotle says is the most excellent activity, and the activity of the happy person we have discussed from Book 10, who, through contemplation, pursues wisdom. Wisdom is "a science and intellectual grasp [*nous*] of the things most honorable by nature."[122] As we discussed a bit in chapter I, it is prudence that is bound up with thinking about what is advantageous for the human being, and allows the human being to act. Aristotle says that one should be both prudent and wise, and consider both the particulars of what is advantageous for one's own life, as well as "things that are extraordinary, wondrous, difficult, and daimonic."[123]

Arendt and Aristotle differ in their conceptions of our intellectual capacities, both in the categories into which they place our different capacities, as well as in their idea of what constitutes truth. As we have discussed at length, Arendt conceives of knowing and thinking as being two separate activities, with two separate ends, truth and meaning respectively. Aristotle on the other hand puts several different modes of the intellect all under the umbrella of thinking, and conceives of them all as being in pursuit of truth. He also makes distinctions in different kinds of thinking where Arendt does not. Arendt writes about thinking in pursuit of meaning both in the context of extraordinary matters, as well as daily matters in our common sense experience. It may in fact be an issue for some that she does not make a clearer distinction between the different kinds of thought objects. It appears clear to me from how she emphasizes the miraculous potential of the thinking ego, that one's use of thought would be incomplete if one were not thinking beyond the barriers of the human condition, but I am not certain she makes that explicit enough. If that is the case, there is the danger that one could believe merely thinking about the daily occurrences of one's life is sufficient. Aristotle separates practical thinking, which is concerned with what is advantageous for our life and is concerned with action, from

[122] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b.
[123] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b5.

contemplative thinking, which is concerned with the higher things beyond our regular mortal matters. Arendt does not believe thinking leads directly to action like Aristotle does, so the thinking she describes as being concerned with our daily affairs is notably different from Aristotle's practical thinking. It is still notable, however, that the thinking concerned with our everyday experiences that she discusses is not put in a clear separate category from the thinking concerned with extraordinary matters. One needs both to be a fully thinking being, but they are two different kinds of thinking for Aristotle.

On the matter of truth, Arendt and Aristotle also differ. When Arendt writes about thinking and the pursuit of meaning, she insists that what we think about is the unknowable, and what we know and what is potentially knowable, falls under the activity of knowing. Aristotle does not appear to put anything into the category of the unknowable; everything to him seems to have the potential of being knowable, and all kinds of thinking seem to be concerned with grasping all that is potentially knowable: truth. That being said, this does not mean that all the questions that Arendt calls unknowable are settled for Aristotle merely because he believes they could conceivably be made into knowledge through the process of thinking. Aristotle does not claim to have all the answers, and there even remains a fundamental openness in his conception of thinking, but it is an openness to what he conceives as the potentially knowable.

It is this openness to potential truth, and the emphasis on thinking being an ongoing activity, with a particular focus on thinking about the highest things, that makes it possible that my theory about like-mindedness may not fit completely with Aristotle's conception of complete friendship. For as we have said, Aristotle conceives of complete friendship as the good living in a community of thought with one another, and if they are to do that in the Arsitotelian sense, then presumably they too should have a fundamental openness to the truth, if they are to think about

the highest things with one another. This might mean that in the Aristotelian model of complete friendship, someone who believes fully that the Christian faith *is* truth, cannot be complete friends with someone who is open to that possibility but is also open to other possibilities of what the highest things might be. It may very well be that these two people cannot truly think about the highest things together in the way Aristotle conceives of the activity. If that is the case, then true friendship as Augustine conceives of it, that is, two people being like-minded in the idea that God *is* truth, is also not compatible with the particular Aristotelian notion of complete friendship.

This is just one reading of Aristotle, and an imperfect one, but working under the assumption that it is a correct reading, my conception of like-mindedness seem to be a kind of melding of Arendtian and Aristotelian ideas, due to my natural inclination toward Arendt's conception of thinking. My theory of like-mindedness is an Arendtian model of thinking attempting to solve an Aristotelian problem: In what way should complete friends be like-minded? For Aristotle it seems that thinking together about the highest things requires that both parties approach the highest things with a fundamental openness to what might be the truth. Arendt also emphasizes the importance of thinking about extraordinary matters, but she does not believe these matters are bound up with truth. Working under her model of thinking, it seems that it should not matter if two friends have a different conception of what truth is, even if their idea of truth does not fall under her conception of truth. For it should not affect their ability to explore meaning together, since the pursuit of meaning for Arendt produces nothing. That is not to say that the pursuit of meaning between two friends who disagree about the truth is meaningless. As I said as I explored my theory of like-mindedness, there still remain an endless amount of unanswerable questions to be explored with the friend for those who have a religious truth and

have remained thinking beings. Again, there are those whose interest in thinking and the pursuit of meaning has been immobilized by their possession of a religious truth, and these people do not seem to be capable of true friendship. It may seem somewhat counterintuitive, but I believe a discussion of what each person in a friendship believes truth is, could easily fall under the activity of the pursuit of meaning for Arendt, and could be quite meaningful for both parties. Even when one friend is certain they know what the truth is, since the activity of thinking in itself, especially in the company of others, is meaningful.

My desire to solve an Aristotelian problem with an Arendtian concept stems from my anxiety about, and distaste toward the exclusive nature of Aristotle's idea of complete friendship. Part of what I find so appealing, and convincing, about Arendt's definition of thinking, is the rejection of the idea of "the few," and her insistence that every person is a thinking being and has the potential to explore the full breadth of the thinking ego, and indeed that each person ought to. While Aristotle also seems to include everyone in the activity of thinking, since thinking for him too is human and *is* living, he does create a category of "the few" in the form of "the good," or those who are "wise." It seems ridiculous to me to deny that there are people who are more thoughtful than others. In that sense, "the few" is a real category, and I don't believe Arendt would dispute that such a distinction exists. What I take issue with in Aristotle's definition of complete friendship is just how excessively limited the group of people capable of complete friendship appears to be, if it is indeed the case that only those who approach the truth about divine things with a fundamental openness to different possibilities are candidates for complete friendship. I am in agreement that true friendship is living in a community of thought with others, and that means that friends should think about everything together, especially fundamental questions about the highest things. I am also in agreement that such friendship is

hard to obtain. I cannot in earnest, however, fully endorse Aristotelian complete friendship, due to the extent of its exclusivity.

True friendship, as I conceive of it, is what I described amidst my arguments on like-mindedness in friendship. Friends in a true friendship should love each other for who each person is, and friends should likewise love the activity of thinking, believe it is essential to living, and love participating in the activity together, and this means taking full advantage of the thinking ego's extraordinary capacities. Applying the Arendtian model of thinking to reshape the Aristotelian idea of complete friendship allows the inclusion of those thinking beings that I believe should not be left out of candidacy for true friendship, but are if one only uses Aristotelian ideas. It is actually not only a matter of who *should* be included in the concept of true friendship, but actually, who *is*. For I believe these friendships which have members like the people I described exist, and these friends who certainly think together by my account, are the living breathing example of true friendship.

"The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend, –and, forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friendship"[124]

Chapter III

THINKING AND FRIENDSHIP

Aristotle on the Necessity for Friendship

Now that we have discussed what friendship is in the Aristotelian sense, and settled, to that extent that we can, on a definition of friendship that employs both Arendtian and Aristotelian ideas, it is necessary to approach the question of whether friends are necessary. As I mentioned in chapter II, while Aristotle devotes two books in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to explaining the meaning of friendship, he delivers conflicting positions on the necessity of friends. If Aristotle's position lacks clarity, which it seems to, I hope that even if my evidence is incomplete, my position will not be ambiguous. For as I hinted in chapter II, life, which is made up of the activity of thinking, is so enhanced by friendship, the activity of thinking with others, that I believe it to be indispensable to a life well lived. My position is that it is not just that no one would "choose to live without friends even if he possessed all other goods." It is that one is not truly living if he is without friends, "even if he possessed all other goods," just as I have already suggested one is not truly living if one is without thought.[125]

In Book 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle responds to the question of whether or not the otherwise happy person is in need of friends, arguing, ultimately, that they are, but this is not the only position he takes in the text. Aristotle says that there is an assumption that those who are

[124] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friendship," in *Essays: First Series*, *1841*.
[125] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a5.

fortunate and self-sufficient are not in need of friends, because the friend, acting as another self, is someone who only provides what someone cannot provide on their own, and he refers to a saying from Euripides: "when a *daimon* gives well, what need of friends?"[126] It strikes Aristotle as strange, however, that just because someone is happy and self-sufficient, they should be deprived of friends which he calls "the greatest of the external goods."[127] Humans are naturally inclined, as political animals, to live with others, and it is better to pass the days with friends, who know you, rather than strangers. This applies, even to a happy person, and Aristotle says multiple times that the happy person *needs* friends, employing the Greek verb δέω. Aristotle suggests that living is perceiving or thinking; for according to him, living for humans is defined as the capacity for perception or thought, and capacity ultimately relies on the activity, which would be perceiving or thinking. This activity entails, as I have mentioned in chapter I and II, various kinds of thinking, one of which being prudence, which employs reason in the interest of living well. Aristotle also suggests that "if we are better able to contemplate those near us than us ourselves, and their actions better than our own," then the good and happy man will also need good and happy friends whose actions he may contemplate, "*if* indeed he chooses to contemplate actions that are decent and his own."[128] We will return to that puzzling suggestion a bit later, though I doubt we will make much progress in making it any less puzzling. He also says that a part of perception is the acknowledgement that both the self and the friend exist, and this comes to be through passing days together "and sharing in a community of speeches and thought."[129] Aristotle compares human friendship to how cattles live together, by merely grazing in communion. It is not only being with the friend, but actually thinking with the friend that

[126] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b5, from Euripides, *Orestes*, 667.
[127] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b10.
[128] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b30. Emphasis on the if added by me.
[129] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b10.

constitutes human friendship. For the good and happy person, living, which again is perceiving or thinking, is a pleasant and therefore choiceworthy thing, and the good friends, whose life and existence the good and happy person acknowledges, "would be among the most choiceworthy things."[130] If something is among the most choiceworthy things, it would follow that if one were to lack it, one would be in need of it.[131] Thus, the friend, who is among the most choiceworthy things, is a need, even for the good and happy person. This choiceworthy existence with the friend can arise in different forms, depending on how the person and the friend choose to spend their days together. "So it is that some drink together, others play at dice, still others exercise and hunt together or philosophize together…For since they wish to live with their friends, they pursue and share in those things in which they suppose living together consists."[132] Aristotle concludes with a statement of certainty: "...he who will be happy will need serious friends," the force of which is twofold: not only will even the happy person be in need of friends, but one will be in need of friends in order to be happy.[133]

Aristotle also address whether one needs friends more in good fortune or in bad. Friends are good, he says both in good times and bad, and "choiceworthy in all cases."[134] Being with the friend is a pleasant activity in itself and being with the friend, who knows you and what may cheer you, alleviates suffering. Likewise, it is a good thing to share in good fortune with the friend, for it is a good thing to do good for the friend and to enjoy the good with the friend. While he says it is good to have the friend both in good times and bad, it is more noble to share in the good, and thus one should be somewhat hesitant to drag the friend into one's own misfortune. However, one may also gain a reputation for unpleasantness should they refuse the

[130] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1170b15.
[131] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b15
[132] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1172a-5.
[133] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170b15.
[134] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171b25.

extension of kindness from a friend too much. Thus, it is a good thing both to extend help and to accept help from the friend, but it is best to enjoy living together. Arendt makes an interesting observation on this matter in her essay, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing:"

> As is well known, the ancients thought friends indispensable to human life, indeed that a life without friends was not really worth living. In holding this view they gave little consideration to the idea that we need the help of friends in misfortune; on the contrary, they rather thought that there can be no happiness or good fortune for anyone unless a friend shares in the joy of it. Of course there is something to the maxim that only in misfortune do we find out who our true friends are; but those whom we regard as our true friends without such proof are usually those to whom we unhesitatingly reveal happiness and whom we count on to share our rejoicing.[135]

I am not sure I would say Aristotle "gave little consideration to the idea that we need the help of friends in misfortune," or that he believed there "can be no happiness" without the friend, but there is certainly an emphasis on sharing in the joy of living with the friend, as opposed to sharing in misery. I find Arendt's reframing of how one discovers one's true friends striking. She acknowledges that the typical model with which we are all familiar, that we discover our true friends in times of misfortune is true, but that it is just as possible to find one's true friends in moments of happiness. Given the deep connection between thinking and friendship that we have already seen, the image of unhesitatingly sharing in joy with the friend also evoked for me the idea of unhesitatingly sharing an exciting idea with the friend. As Emerson says in his essay on friendship, "A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud."[136] Having friends in misfortune is indeed important, for misfortune is a reality of life, and one needs people whom one can lean on. It seems more important, however, to frame friendship positively, and the friend as someone with whom you excitedly explore the world, rather than someone with whom you drown your sorrows. Framing friendship in this way, helps one to frame life, and the exploration of life, thinking, in a similarly positive way.

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[135] Hannah Arendt, "Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1968), 24.
[136] Emerson, "Friendship."

The section in which Aristotle continually says the good and happy person is in *need* of friends is complicated by Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he argues that the contemplative life is the happiest and the most self sufficient. In the midst of making this claim, he says that "and though it is perhaps better to have those with whom he may work, nonetheless he is most self-sufficient."[137] It is interesting to return, in contrast to this statement in Book 10, to the very first thing Aristotle says about friendship: "For friendship is a certain virtue or is accompanied by virtue; and, further, it is most necessary with a view to life: without friends, no one would choose to live, even if he possessed all other goods…"[138] This sentence, while intriguing and seemingly helpful for the argument of the need for friends, does not close the case as easily as one might hope. For Aristotle says friendship is a "certain virtue or accompanied by virtue," but we know that elsewhere he argues that contemplation is "the most excellent virtue," and those who possess this most excellent virtue are self-sufficient. Do those people need this other virtue, or this thing accompanying virtue? Possessing "all other goods" is also not necessarily analogous to possessing the most excellent virtue, so it might be that one will still be in need of friends if they possess all external goods, but it is unclear if one is still in need of friends when in possession of the most excellent virtue. This is not to say that this statement is rendered meaningless; for Aristotle still chose to begin his discussion of friendship by saying it is "most necessary with a view to life," and that "without friends, no one would choose to live," and it is not insignificant that he chose to begin in this way. We also cannot forget that soon after this opening he says that "'two going together' are better able to think and to act," and I do not believe that claim should be taken lightly, even though it comes early in the discussion.[139] Nor do I think his claims about the contemplative life in Book 10 make his discussion of the *need* of

[137] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a30.
[138] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a5.
[139] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a15.

friends for the good and happy man in Book 9 invalid. Aristotle says he finds it strange people assume the happy should be excluded from the greatest of external goods, friendship. I, similarly, find it strange that he insists on the self-sufficiency of the happy person who pursues the contemplative life, considering that he seems to also say that it is only the good and happy person who is capable of complete friendship. What do we make of the conflicting message that only the good and happy person is capable of friendship, but they are also not in need of friendship, because they are self-sufficient, and yet even the happy and good people are in need of friends? How can it be that the only people who are capable of complete friendship, also may not need it?

Guy Mansini, again in his essay "Aristotle on Needing Friends," argues that friendship is a "sort of surplus." Mansini follows Richard Kraut's argument in his book, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, which is that the contemplative life is the happiest life, but this does not prevent Aristotle from acknowledging and praising other intrinsic goods.[140] Mansini says that first, friendship is indeed an intrinsic good, second that it can be missing from one's life and one can still be happy, but third, if one does have friendship it is constitutive of one's happiness, "for the friend is another self." Friendship, according to Mansini, is not like another intrinsic good, health, which contributes to happiness because some degree of it is necessary for the exercise of the virtues. Rather, friendship "will directly and immediately make for happiness, although not as a *conditio sine qua non.*" This is when he goes on to say friendship is "a sort of surplus," and he says the fact that it is a surplus makes it even more precious than if it were a necessity. Mansini also says that while the nature of the enhancement of happiness that friendship offers is hard to define, the enjoyment of friendship is "the most powerful and remarkable overcoming of loneliness." The idea that friendship has the potential to help one overcome loneliness is no small

[140] Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), Chapter 5.

matter. Mansini emphasizes that it is the melding of two minds that helps one overcome loneliness: "The achievement of friendship on the level in question in the deeper argument means an appreciation of mind, of minding, that liberates it from mine or thine."[141] Again, given his assumption that thinking together should mean that two friends always have the same thing in mind, he is heavy handed with the idea that two minds become one and that this leads to some sort of transcendence. I think it is rather the friend being another *different* person with whom the good person has a relationship, resembling one's relationship with oneself, that makes thinking with the friend potentially transcendent, but more on that later. The most important point is Mansini, as someone who argues friendship is not a necessity, does not minimize the value of friendship. He too sees it as a powerful and beautiful relationship, only not a necessary one, but rather an additional blessing.

It is difficult for me to make any claims with absolute certainty about Aristotle's intentions in expressing the need for friendship. I will say, however, that his argument for the need of friends even for the happy person, in Book 9, stands stronger in my mind than his argument for the self-sufficiency of the contemplative person in Book 10, and this is not only because of my obvious biases. In Book 9 he says "...people assert that those who are blessed and self-sufficient have no need of friends…Yet it seems strange to allot all that is good to the happy person, but not give him friends…"[142] What is often read as the competing idea in Book 10 is that he says "and though it is perhaps better to have those with whom he may work, nonetheless he is most self-sufficient."[143] But are those two statements truly in conflict with one another? It seems Aristotle is only saying here that compared to other people, the one who pursues the contemplative life is the most self-sufficient, because one is able to think alone, whereas the just

[141] All of the Mansini quotes in this paragraph come from Mansini, "Aristotle on Needing Friends," 416.
[142] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1169b5-10.
[143] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a30.

person needs others toward one may act justly. Being the most self-sufficient out of all other people, and being able to perform one's activity alone, is not in direct conflict with the idea that this person is still in need of friends. He has already acknowledged in Book 9 that these people are indeed self-sufficient, and this does not exclude them from the need. There is also the question of whether the self-sufficiency of the contemplative person might come in degrees, and at what point the person in pursuit of the contemplative life becomes the good person capable of complete friendship. For he says: "The wise person, by contrast [to the just or courageous person], is capable of contemplating even when by himself, and the wiser he is, the more capable of doing so he will be."[144] It appears, there are degrees of wisdom, and thus also degrees of self-sufficiency. It would follow, then, that there might be people who nobly pursue the contemplative life, but are not yet wise, or have the potential to become wiser, and are thus also not yet completely self-sufficient and still in need of friends. I can still understand, however, arguments such as Mansini's that the self-sufficient point makes it so that friendship is a surplus, rather than an absolute need for Aristotle.

What I believe is the stronger inconsistency between Book 9 and Book 10 is Aristotle's position on the effect of friends thinking together. For as we have noted multiple times, in Book 9 he says with certainty that 'two going together' think and act better, and yet that idea is softened by Book 10, in which he says it is "perhaps better" to have others with whom one can think. There is no enlightening evidence, as far as I can tell, as to which of these two positions presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle truly endorses. As I have said, I am not terribly concerned with making definite claims about Aristotle's intended position on the need for friendship; for we can't really know his intentions. The purpose of this project, however, is to

[144] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1177a30. The bracketed phrase is my addition, for context of who he is contrasting with the wise person.

suggest that we are not living if we are not thinking, nor without the possession of friends, and we are not in possession of true friends if we are not thinking with them. Moreover, while thinking is, of course, first and foremost a solitary business, having friends with whom we can think makes us better thinkers. Thinking is our way of coming to terms with everything that we experience. Considering a central part of the human experience is that we live among our fellow men, we have an urge to communicate our thoughts with them, and they aid us in coming to terms with the life that we all share.

The Importance of the Other

As we discussed in chapter I, Arendt says that if people were deprived of communication they would be "likely to go astray,"[145] and she quotes Kant saying that reason "is not fit to isolate itself, but to communicate."[146] I used those ideas to introduce the idea in chapter I that it is best to think with others, and we may very well get lost if we remain always in a state of withdrawal. That idea which I introduced briefly at the end of chapter I is strengthened by another section of *The Life of the Mind*, immediately before the section on the urge to speak, in which Arendt directly mentions ancient ideas of the superiority of the intentionally withdrawn, and supposedly self-sufficient, contemplative life. She cites Aristotle as being "the first to elaborate it" in *Politics*.[147] An early example of the "act of deliberate, active non-participation in life's daily business," can be found she says in a parable which we acquire from Diogenes Laertius but is attributed to Pythagoras: "Life…is life a festival; just as come come to the festival to compete, some to ply at their trade, but the best people come as spectators, so in life the slavish men go hunting for fame or gain, the philosophers for truth."[148] The Greek word for spectator is *θεαταί*,

[145] LOTM, 99.
[146] LOTM, 99n61.
[147] LOTM, 92-93.
[148] LOTM, 93. Translation comes from G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 228.

from which we get the word theory, and Arendt says that "the word 'theoretical' until a few hundred years ago meant 'contemplating,' looking upon something from the outside, from a position implying a view that is hidden from those who take part in the spectacle and actualize it."[149] The idea of the parable is clear: the spectator, withdrawn from the activity of a spectacle, is able to contemplate and understand the "truth" of the spectacle.[150] It is only the spectator, removed from the activity, who is able to see the whole, just as "the philosopher is able to see the *kosmos* as a harmonious ordered whole."[151] The actor, by contrast, plays a role in the whole, and is not in complete control of the meaning of his actions once they have been performed; they are determined ultimately by the spectator. Arendt points out that Pythagoras's spectators are unlike philosophers, since they are members of an audience, and only retreat from acting in the spectacle, whereas the philosopher withdraws from the appearing world. Pythagoras's spectators are not solitary like philosophers when they withdraw to think:

'Nor are they self-sufficient, like the "highest god" the philosopher tried to emulate in thought and who, according to Plato "is forever…solitary by reason of his excellence, able to be together, he himself with himself, needing nobody else, neither acquaintance nor friends, he sufficient with himself."[152]

Arendt conceives of thinking as the solitary business that it is, and thus recognizes a certain degree of self-sufficiency of the thinking being. She is also deeply invested, however, in the idea of human plurality, and she admires Kant for being more conscious than other philosophers of plurality. She says that "Kant's spectators exist in the plural." So it seems that when she says, "...it is not through acting but through contemplating that the 'something else,' namely, the meaning of the whole, is revealed. The spectator, not the actor, holds the clue to the

[149] LOTM, 93.
[150] I have put truth in quotes, as Arendt does, presumably because she has a different position on the idea of truth than the ancients, as we have discussed.
[151] LOTM, 93.
[152] LOTM, 94. Since Arendt does not note otherwise, it appears she translated the quote from Plato, *Timaeus*, 34b herself.

meaning of human affairs," this idea can easily be applied to the thinker in a pluralistic world, and then, to the relationship between two thinking beings who are friends.[153] For it seems that Arendt's spectators very well may also be members of an audience, the spectacle being the appearing world we all share.

I recalled the idea of the actor and the spectator because of that strange passage from Aristotle we mentioned earlier, in which he suggests that even the happy need friends "if we are better able to contemplate those near us than us ourselves…if indeed he chooses to contemplate actions that are decent and his own." If we are the actors of our own lives, which it seems we are, since we perform our own actions, then it would follow that we might need spectators to help us make sense of the meaning of our own life. Likewise, we will know other actors, our friends, for whose lives we are spectators, and they might need us to help them make sense of their lives. Of course, it is not so simple, for we are able to think, a process during which we withdraw from the world of appearances and engage in a dialogue with ourselves, then in a way it seems we are able to become spectators to our own lives. In this way, it seems we are both the actor and the spectator of our own lives, since we certainly are able to contemplate meaning in our own life. For what would thinking be if that were not the case? Since we are both the actor, and the spectator, however, our view of the whole must be incomplete to a certain degree, for we are actors in our own lives with its daily personal affairs, but in a vast and mysterious world, a world which prompts us to think about things beyond the appearing world. It seems to me that if one focuses too much on the self-sufficiency of the thinking being, one runs the risk of becoming nothing more than a spectator to oneself, and one's own experiences, opting out of the plural nature of man. To think, and not to communicate one's thought with others then, appears to be

[153] LOTM, 96.

fundamentally unnatural, and I struggle to imagine how one can only engage in solitary thinking and still claim to be living fully, or thinking properly.

What is so strange about Aristotle's comments about the fact that we might be better able to contemplate those near us than ourselves, is that he both suggests this might be true, and says that happy people will then need friends whose actions they may contemplate, and frames it as a choice in an "if" statement. It appears to be a matter of choice whether or not one contemplates others like oneself. It is also interesting because just a bit earlier he says that the friend is "another [or different] self" who "provides only what someone is unable to provide on his own," and people assume the good person has all that a person needs, so the friend cannot provide anything in addition.[154] If the happy person is truly self-sufficient, then why would it be true that one might be better at contemplating others than oneself? It is also strange to me that as he claims we might be able to better contemplate those near us than ourselves, he seems to emphasize that friends are the same, and that contemplating a friend's actions is like contemplating actions that are one's own. Clearly this idea stems from the idea that the relationship between the good person and the friend originates in the relationship between the good person and the self. When Aristotle refers to the friend being another self who provides what someone is unable to provide on one's own, however, he uses the word *ἕτερος*, which not only means another, but also different, as indicated by the brackets in the Bartlett and Collins translation. The whole benefit I see in contemplating the actions of a friend is that the friend is a different being who thinks differently and acts differently, even as you both have a shared interest in living a life that values the activity of thinking above all else. This difference between a person and a friend, it seems to me, would deepen the experience of any person, even a wise

[154] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b5.

person, for the difference between people helps one better contemplate the vast complexity of our plural world.

Perhaps, I have not come into contact with the truly wise person presented to us by Aristotle in Book 10, and perhaps wisdom and self-sufficiency does indeed come in degrees like I suggested earlier. If that is the case, then maybe the truly wise person is not in need of other or different selves to think with and about. However, if the majority of people are not that fully wise person, but there are still good people in the pursuit of wisdom, then perhaps these are the people who are in need of friends, and it is possible to reach a level of self-sufficiency where friends cease to be a necessity, and are only the sort of "surplus" suggested by Mansini. I think, once again, I am trapped in imperfectly juggling a complex system of competing ideas in my mind, due to my inclination toward Arendt's system of thinking. It is hard to conceive of a thinker in Arendt's system of thinking that could possibly become "wise" enough in the endless and collective pursuit of meaning to cease to need friends, and who could therefore opt out of plural thinking.

I am reminded of the end of Plato's *Phaedrus*, which, while being concerned with the difference between writing and speeches, pieces of it feel applicable, even if imperfectly, when thinking about the importance of the expression of thought. Arendt was certainly interested in its arguments in relation to thought, as we briefly discussed in the first chapter. In the *Phaedrus* Plato's Socrates critiques writing for its odd staticity:

> Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who

understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak.[155]

Though the comments of Plato's Socrates are about writing, I cannot help thinking about some solitary thinker, trapped in their own mind, with only their own ideas bouncing against the wall. Thinking *is* a *dialogue* with oneself, and thus not as static as the written word; for one does ask oneself questions, such questions are not met with silence, and the dialogue is endless. The connection I see, however, is that similarly to a piece of writing, like this one, which may be filled with questions posed to itself, as well as answers, when one thinks alone there is only one speaker asking and answering all the questions. Writing cannot answer the questions that come later, and it cannot defend itself, and the dialogue surrounding its ideas thus falls flat, because it cannot really be exposed to anything beyond itself. If someone were to cut their thinking off from collective thinking, couldn't this happen too with the dialogue with oneself? Socrates goes on to describe how speaking makes it so that a thought lives on.

…when one employs the dialectic method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process for ever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest possible limit of human happiness.[156]

This statement, we should remember, comes from someone that conceives of thinking as being oriented toward truth, and it is worth noting that they are also speaking about someone giving speeches who is actually knowledgeable on a topic, not just wading through it. Once again we hit against the difference between thinking in pursuit of meaning and thinking in pursuit of truth. The sentiment of the statement, however, still strikes me as relevant. If someone should choose to not have friends, because they are supposedly self-sufficient, won't their wise, self-sufficient thoughts die with them? Even if they become a teacher and pass their thoughts on to students,

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[155] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 275d.
[156] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, 276e-277a.

will the thoughts not be much more alive if they are given to the friend? If we are talking about thinking in pursuit of meaning, which I am, most of the time, it makes the most sense to give your thoughts to others, particularly a friend, who, as another, different self, will care for them, receive joy from them, and make them spring into new things in this endless activity that will always benefit from collective thinking. Since all thinking beings are connected, one's thinking then will live on not only in the friends, but potentially in the collective whole, with our collective meaning continuing on forever, all of us being actors and spectators in our shared lives.

Claudia Baracchi is especially interested in the inherent plurality which makes friendship intimately connected with thinking in her book, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*. As I mentioned in chapter II, Baracchi transforms Aristotle's idea that "one might see in one's travels too that every human being is kindred to every other human being and a friend to him" into an extended metaphor. She speaks beautifully and eloquently about this nomadic traveling figure of the human condition, who confronts "the unknown, insidious possibilities, and wandering across strange places" and as they pass through the unknown, they delight in seeing those who travel along with them, and it is this elementary feeling that unites us and is the beginning of friendship and thinking.[157] Baracchi calls friendship a "way of looking, of being touched, of receiving" and she says that it is rooted in our plurality "where what is held in common are not so much properties of attributes (what one is, what one has, what one knows), but shortcomings and inadequacies (what one is not, what one does not have, what one does not know)."[158] This seems to align well with the Arendtian conception of thinking, in which we are constantly grasping after the unknowable, and thus everything we think about is what we do not know, and the

[157] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 103-104.
[158] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 17.

common human project is to explore with each other the knowledge that we lack (and will always lack since thinking is in pursuit of meaning). As I have said before, does it not make the most sense that in this vast and confusing world, that we should benefit greatly from consulting our fellow spectators?

Baracchi also points to the fact that it is the difference of the friend from oneself that makes the friend so valuable to us, and in fact actively opens up the whole world to us.

> …friendship is the work of difference. Thanks to the friend, thanks to my going out of myself toward and with the other, I become a place of otherwise unimaginable openings, and I expand myself in directions to signify a passage through the image, not of me, but of the other, and eventually the image of me as other than me…Therefore friendship, like myth, entails an unfolding through and in images, an excessive and uncontrollable passage through exteriority: both belong inextricably to the world.[159]

Although we can certainly think alone, when thinking alone we can only think with ourselves about a world full of things different from ourselves and mysterious to us. How should we engage in the activity of thinking properly if we shut ourselves off in the dialogue with oneself, and ignore the thoughts of others which open us up to different possibilities, perspectives, and questions? What is the sense in talking with a friend who is exactly the same as us? If it is through the process of thinking that we make our experiences meaningful, it is in difference, in thinking with another who is different from us that makes thinking in the plural society in which we live meaningful in the fully proper, plural sense. As Arendt said to Mary McCarthy, "One can't say how life is, how chance or fate deals with people, except by telling the tale." Is it not our friends with whom we are most eager to tell the tale, and who make the tale feel meaningful? To return once again to that section from Arendt's Lessing essay our friends are those with "whom we unhesitatingly reveal happiness and whom we count on to share our rejoicing." It

[159] Baracchi, *Friendship: The Future of an Ancient Gift*, 23.

strikes me as a necessity to have those with whom we unhesitantly rejoice, and to whom we excitedly tell our tales and our thoughts.

Conclusion

I am well aware that the thoughts I have expressed here remain incomplete; for many of the arguments in this chapter come in the form of questions, and if one were to just shake the foundation on which they stand, much of the logic would come crashing down. I wouldn't want to claim it is any other way, however, because this project represents the process of working through life's most important questions, and many of them seem unanswerable by definite means. If I felt I had reached the end of all these questions, and thought through everything, then something went wrong. We could go on forever to discuss some of the ideas here, so tied up with the meaning of our lives they are, and so insatiable our pursuit of meaning is. I hope that even though this project comes in the form of written words, it will have a life as similar to speech as it can, since its words are the indirect result of many conversations with friends. I hope it will be read and questioned by friends and I hope it will "spring up in other minds" in "other words capable of continuing the process for ever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest possible limit of human happiness."[160] In a way, this project is really a very long winded call to action: Love the friend for who the friend is, love the activity of thinking, love the friend's thoughts and honor them, think with the friend and pursue the limits of the ever expansive thinking ego together, doing whatever it is you love to do together. Whether you drink with your friends, play dice, exercise together, watch terrible movies, whatever you do with the friend, do it as you help each other navigate what can feel like a senseless world.

I thus depart on a note similar to how Plato concludes the *Lysis*:

[160] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, 276e-277a.

"I said, however, a few words to the boys at parting: "Now Lysis, and Menexenus, we have become ridiculous—I, an old man, and you. For these fellows will say, as they go away, that we suppose we're one another's friends—for I also put myself among you—but what he who is a friend is we have not yet been able to discover."[161]

[161] David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).

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