

Aristotle's Civic Friendship

The Ethical Foundations of Political Cohesion

Ana Gavran Miloš*

Summary

*This paper examines Aristotle's concept of civic friendship (*politikē philia*) as a normative framework for addressing key issues in contemporary societies, including distrust, polarization and political fragmentation. It analyzes the nature of civic friendship and its central features with a particular focus on civic *eunoia*, motivated goodwill grounded in shared vulnerability, and *homonoia*, the political concord necessary for sustaining communal life.*

Keywords: *civic friendship; eunoia; homonoia; eudaimonia; vulnerability; political polarization*

Introduction

In the past decade, political communities have faced a series of crises that profoundly challenge their cohesive foundations. The COVID–19 pandemic, the spread of conspiracy theories, the growing distrust in science and institutions, as well as deep divisions over various value–laden issues, all point to an intensifying polarization and social fragmentation. Against this backdrop, the following question creates a new sense of urgency: what kind of relationship among citizens makes political stability and cohesion possible? In recent philosophical and political debates, Aristotle's concept of civic friendship (*politikē philia*) has been revisited as a potential answer to this question. This concept is often interpreted as a form of solidarity (Brunckhorst, 2005), mutual care and reciprocal recognition among citizens (Schwarzenbach, 2009), highlighting its role in cultivating a sense of belonging and political unity that goes beyond mere institutional or procedural affiliation (Leontsini, 2013; Zelič, 2016; Ludwig, 2020; Gavran Miloš

* Ana Gavran Miloš, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Address: Sveučilišna avenija 4, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7142-069X>. E-mail: anag@ffri.uniri.hr
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& Zelič, 2024) and also the need to cultivate civic friendship as a specific civic virtue (Rogers, 2020; Vaccarezza & Croce, 2021).

Building on contemporary interpretations of Aristotle's civic friendship (CF), the aim of this paper is to offer a systematic analysis by distinguishing its ethical and political dimensions and to argue that CF functions as a conceptual link between the realization of the good life and the constitution of the political community. The ethical dimension stems from Aristotle's conviction that human beings are by nature social and non self-sufficient creatures, and that *eudaimonia* can be achieved only through stable, reciprocal and enduring relationships with others. Friendship is therefore a necessary precondition for virtuous action and the most important external good required for human flourishing. The political dimension arises from the insight that the purpose of the political community is to enable the good life, which in turn requires a specific form of relatedness: *politikē philia* (πολιτική φιλία). The author argues that this is a form of friendship based on utility, rooted in reciprocal goodwill (*eunoia*) among citizens and political concord (*homonoia*) concerning the fundamental terms of shared life. In the political context mutual goodwill is interpreted as a specific form of civic *eunoia*, understood as a rationally motivated disposition to care for the well-being of others, grounded in the recognition of our own vulnerability and mutual dependence. Such care is not based on personal intimacy, but in a shared awareness of co-membership within a political community. Also, it does not depend on value-homogeneity, but on political agreement regarding the terms of common life in a plural society.

The structure of the paper is as follows: It begins by showing how Aristotle grounds the concept of friendship in an ethical conception of the human being as a social and vulnerable creature and examines its relation to *eudaimonia*. The author then analyzes the political function of *politikē philia*, exploring the nature of CF itself and the conditions that such a relationship must fulfil. In the conclusion, the author argues that this form of relatedness retains its relevance in contemporary debate.

1. *Friendship in the Ethical Context*

The primary sources for Aristotle's account of friendship are Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book VII of the *Eudemian Ethics*. The considerable attention Aristotle devotes to the question of friendship reflects his concern with the fundamental issues that define the nature of ethics and moral agency. As Michael Pakaluk (2005, 257) notes, Aristotle's ethics does not begin with hypothetical moral dilemmas, such as whether one should redirect a runaway trolley to save five lives instead of one, or whether one ought to keep an unusual promise made to a dying person on a deserted island. His ethical inquiry is therefore "practical" not in the sense of offering moral prescriptions, but insofar as it investigates the principles that make moral action intelligible. Its aim is to understand how reason and character cooperate in shaping a life directed

toward *eudaimonia*. Because our relations with others constitute an integral part of such a life, Aristotle holds that the realization of the good necessarily depends on the quality and structure of our friendships.

Aristotle may be understood as approaching friendship from two complementary levels: a broader level, which encompasses the relationship between human nature and *eudaimonia*, and a narrower one, situated within the discussion of virtue.¹ The broader perspective is articulated in the following passages: »We are applying the term 'self-sufficient' not to a person on his own, living a solitary life, but to a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow-citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a social being« (*NE*, 2014, 1097b9–11). »Surely it is also odd to make the blessed person solitary, since no one would choose to have all good things and yet be by himself. For a human is a social being and his nature is to live in the company of others. So this will be the case with the happy person as well, because he possesses the natural goods, and it is clearly better to spend his days with friends and good people than with strangers or anybody he happens to bump into. So the happy person does need friends« (*NE*, 2014, 1169b16–22).

In the first passage, Aristotle clarifies the concept of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) in the context of his discussion of the highest good (*eudaimonia*), stating that a self-sufficient life cannot be understood as one of solitude, but only as the life of a person living in the company of others. Our orientation toward others arises from human nature itself, which, according to Aristotle, is inherently social. It is therefore impossible to develop fully as a human being apart from relationships with others. This social nature is further affirmed in the second passage, which emphasizes that it would be strange to consider a solitary person happy, since no one would choose to possess all external goods and yet live alone.² From this, we may conclude that, in the broader ethical perspective, Aristotle begins from the social nature of the human being, which renders relationships with others a normative condition for the realization of the good life.

In addition to its fundamental role in realizing the social nature of the human being, Aristotle also presents friendship, from a narrower perspective, as the most important external good without which acting in accordance with virtue is difficult or even impossible: »Nevertheless, as we suggested, happiness obviously needs the presence of external goods as well, since it is impossible, or at least no easy matter, to perform noble actions without resources. For in many actions, we employ, as if they were instruments at our disposal, friends, wealth, and political

1 Although one does not seem possible without the other, distinguishing these two levels of analysis clarifies both the scope and the function of friendship in Aristotle's ethics. The broader, eudaimonistic level shows that *philia* is integral to the teleological structure of human flourishing, while the narrower, ethical level examines it as a specific disposition through which that end is realised in practice.

2 Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* (1253a1–3), where he describes the human being as a political animal (*ζῷον πολιτικόν*); *Historia Animalium* (I.1, 487b33–488a14), where he argues from a biological standpoint that humans possess a natural capacity for cooperative activity through language.

power. Again, being deprived of some things such as high birth, noble children, beauty spoils our blessedness. For the person who is terribly ugly, of low birth, or solitary and childless is not really the sort to be happy, still less perhaps if he has children or friends who are thoroughly bad, or good but dead« (*NE*, 2014, 1099a32–b8).

Aristotle seeks a middle ground between two extremes: the view that virtue alone guarantees happiness, and the view that happiness depends entirely on luck or divine favour. He rejects both as implausible: virtue alone cannot shield one from misfortune, yet happiness cannot be left to chance. Instead, Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia* requires a stable element within our control, but also acknowledges that external circumstances do affect one's ability to live well. As Martha Nussbaum (1986, 321) observes, Aristotle distinguishes between being a good person and actually living a good life, asserting that even a virtuous individual can live poorly. Thus, while virtue — understood as the most important and stable element in human flourishing and being a permanent state of character — is necessary for achieving true happiness, it alone is not sufficient.

Namely, for Aristotle *eudaimonia* cannot be equated with such a passive state of being virtuous, since a good human life implies constant activity carried out in accordance with virtue (*NE*, 2014, 1098a16–17). Living well consists in performing the kinds of actions that human beings are capable of in an excellent way and external goods, as the cited passage shows, can either hinder or enhance virtuous activity. For example, in order to act courageously, one must have bodily health and physical strength; in order to act generously, one must have material resources. As Aristotle claims, external goods function as the necessary equipment that enables us to act in accordance with virtue and to fully realize our human capacities in an excellent way, thereby achieving happiness. Among these external goods, friends occupy the most important place, and are, according to Aristotle, essential for the attainment of happiness (*NE*, 2014, 1169b10).

To conclude, the ethical dimension of friendship in Aristotle arises from an important insight into the relational nature of human life: in order for an individual to realize their own good, it must develop within relationships with others. Friendship is thus not merely a useful means for achieving *eudaimonia*, but a form of shared life that makes virtuous action both possible and sustainable. Individual flourishing is not realized in isolation, but through enduring relationships of mutual care and coexistence with others. As we shall see in what follows, it is precisely for this reason that friendship for Aristotle is not limited to the private sphere, but becomes the very foundation of the political community.

2. *Friendship in the Political Context*

By identifying friendship as a necessary condition for achieving *eudaimonia*, Aristotle confronts a significant challenge: if the good life depends on others, then human flourishing is inherently vulnerable and at risk of loss. How does Aristotle propose to protect the goodness of life from this fragility? For him, the

recognition that human life is inevitably contingent and that *eudaimonia* fundamentally depends on our social nature and vulnerability is central to his ethics and deeply connected to the political sphere. Aristotle sees human beings neither as self-sufficient gods nor as isolated beasts, but as social and vulnerable creatures naturally inclined to form associations that ensure stability and create the conditions for flourishing (*Pol.*, 2017, 1253a27–29). This insight underpins his famous claim that the political community (*polis*) »comes into being for the sake of life, but exists for the sake of the good life« (*Pol.*, 2017, 1280b29–30). Thus, the *polis*'s fundamental purpose is to enable the good life.

Yet, Aristotle stresses that for the *polis* to truly fulfil this purpose, its members must be bound by more than just legal obligations or mutual utility. He makes this point clear in the following passage: »All communities seem to be parts of the political community, since people journey together with something useful in mind, to supply something for life. And the political community seems originally to have come together and to continue for the sake of what is useful, since it is this that legislators aim at, and it is said that what is useful, in common, is just. Other communities aim at particular advantages [...] sailors, for example, at what is useful in a voyage, with a view to making money or something like that, fellow soldiers at what is useful in war, whether their object is money, victory or a city; and similarly members of tribes and demes. [...] All these seem subordinate to the political community, because it aims not at what is immediately useful, but at what is useful for the whole of life« (*NE*, 2014, 1160a9–30).

Aristotle clearly distinguishes the political community from other forms of human association that are directed toward particular and temporary advantages. Communities such as those of sailors or soldiers come together for specific purposes, for instance, to go on a journey for profit or to achieve military victory. These communities are organized around instrumental goals that are both time-limited and, in a sense, external to the individuals involved: once the goal is achieved, the association ceases to exist. The *polis*, by contrast, does not aim at what is useful in a particular situation, but at what is useful for the whole life. As such, it functions as a protective structure for human vulnerability, securing the basic conditions of stability, safety and cooperation without which the realization of a *eudaimonia* would be unimaginable. Yet, its normative value is not exhausted by this protective role: the *polis* is valuable because it provides the space in which a life suited to our social and rational nature can be shaped and fulfilled, giving it intrinsic value as it relates to the fulfilment of the human being's purpose.

However, for the *polis* to truly fulfil this function, Aristotle holds that it cannot rest solely on rules, laws and shared interests. The foundation of its stability and success lies in the kind of relationships that exist among its citizens. If human beings are by nature social and vulnerable creatures, then, according to Aristotle, the realization of their good depends not only on institutions, but also on the quality of interpersonal bonds. This is precisely why Aristotle emphasizes that the political community endures through friendship: »Friendship seems also to hold cities together, and lawgivers to care more about it than about justice; for

concord seems to be something like friendship, and this is what they aim at most of all, while taking special pains to eliminate civil conflict as something hostile. And when people are friends, they have no need of justice, while when they are just, they need friendship as well; and the highest form of justice seems to be a matter of friendship« (NE, 2014, 1155a21–27).

In this passage, Aristotle clearly shows that friendship is a fundamental component of the political community. It is friendship that “holds cities together,” and legislators, according to Aristotle, care more about friendship than about justice. The notion of communal life is here further clarified through the concept of *homonoia*, which will be examined in greater detail later in the paper. *Homonoia* in this context does not refer merely to the absence of conflict or superficial agreement in opinion, but rather to a deeper form of political connectedness: a condition in which citizens share a common orientation toward what they perceive as the common good. This kind of concord is not grounded in complete value homogeneity, but in the recognition of shared interests and a willingness to cooperate in pursuing goals that matter to the community as a whole. It is precisely for this reason that Aristotle claims friendship is a precondition for justice: while laws may regulate disagreements, only friendship can prevent their emergence and sustain political stability through shared action.

Friendship thus emerges as more than an ethical condition for individual flourishing; it becomes a structural requirement for political stability and cohesion. This reveals the intrinsic connection between the ethical and political dimensions of friendship in Aristotle’s thought: the social and vulnerable nature of the human being gives rise to the need for shared life, and from this need arises a political framework capable of supporting and preserving *eudaimonia*. To understand how such a form of friendship can sustain both individual virtue and collective life, we must now turn to the nature of political friendship itself and the specific conditions that make it possible.

3. *The Nature of Political Friendship*

Aristotle introduces a threefold typology of friendship, based on the kind of good that is sought in the relationship: the good or virtue (*ἀγαθόν* or *ἀρετή*), pleasure (*ἡδύ*) and utility (*χρήσιμον*) (NE, 2014, 1155b21). Each type reflects a different motivation and structure of relationship. The latter two forms are subject to change and therefore unstable, whereas friendship grounded in virtue is considered the ideal form. Aristotle’s typology of friendship is not intended merely to distinguish between more and less valuable forms of friendship, but also to offer a deeper understanding of the various ways in which people connect and of the kinds of relationships that can serve as a foundation for a stable life and enable the realization of *eudaimonia*. In the political context, the type of relationship that allows the political community to fulfil its purpose, namely, securing the good life, is precisely CF, which Aristotle classifies as a form of utility-based friendship: »Political friendship exists because of utility above all else. People

seem to come together because they are not self-sufficient, though they would also have come together just for the sake of living together. But only the friendship of a political regime and its deviant form go beyond being friendships and are also communities based on friendship. The others are based on superiority« (*EE*, 2013, 1242a6–13).

In this passage, Aristotle explicitly states that CF is a form of utility-based friendship, emphasizing that people come together primarily because they are not self-sufficient.³ Yet he adds something further: according to Aristotle, human beings would unite for the sake of shared life (*ζῆν κοινωνεῖν*) even if necessity did not force them to do so. From this, we can infer that CF, although it originates in need, carries the potential for more than mere interest. By contrasting CF with forms of association grounded in superiority, the passage brings into view its normative foundation: such friendship must be characterized by reciprocity and a certain measure of equality, rather than domination. This raises the question of what makes a relationship a friendship and how such a bond can take on a political character.

Aristotle defines friendship as a reciprocal emotional attachment in which both parties wish well to one another for their own sake and states: »Affection for soulless objects is not called friendship, since the affection is not mutual, nor is there any wishing good to the object (it would presumably be absurd to wish good to one's wine — if anything, one wishes that it keep, so that one may have it oneself). But people say that we ought to wish good things to a friend for his own sake. People describe those who do wish good things in this way, when the wish is not reciprocated, as having goodwill (*eunoia*). For goodwill (*eunoia*) is said to count as friendship only when it is reciprocated« (*NE*, 2014, 1155b27–33).

Although friendship is grounded in a certain kind of emotional connection, Aristotle insists that not every emotional relation qualifies as friendship. The first requirement is that one must wish well to the other for their own sake, a disposition Aristotle calls goodwill (*eunoia*). Moreover, this goodwill must be mutual; for this reason, Aristotle excludes the possibility of friendship with beings incapable of reciprocating it. He further emphasizes that there must be an awareness of this mutual goodwill, distinguishing true friendship from one-sided affection or unreciprocated wishes for another's good (cf. Tadić, 2003, 474; Vučetić, 2007, 578). There is a further condition according to which the friend »also has to act on what he wishes for« (*EE*, 2013, 1241a12), which means that goodwill alone is insufficient unless it is expressed through action. Paul Ludwig (2020, 83–85) interprets this distinction as one between passive goodwill and friendship as an active relation, which, in addition to mutual goodwill, involves joint activity.

3 This is a common point of disagreement among interpreters. On one side are those who maintain that political friendship is undoubtedly a form of friendship based on utility (Yack, 1993), while on the other are those who argue that it shares more similarities with moral friendship (MacIntyre, 1981; Stern-Gillet, 1995). Some authors argue that political friendship is primarily utility-based, yet it also resembles virtue friendship and cannot be reduced merely to utility (Irrera, 2005; Leontini, 2013; Ludwig, 2020; Schwarzenbach, 2009), a view shared by the author.

Aristotle then specifies the nature of this joint activity as occurring »only with the actions of like-minded parties and the things which pertain to their living together« (*EE*, 2013, 1241a17–18). In other words, friendship requires concrete forms of shared action grounded in agreement about the conditions of shared life (*τὸ κοινωνεῖν τοῦ ζῆν*). Since mutual goodwill, reciprocity, awareness of that reciprocity and active cooperation toward a shared good constitute the normative core of friendship, the question remains how these conditions are fulfilled specifically in the case of political friendship.

Some authors note a problem with the first condition, mutual well-wishing, since Aristotle claims that *eunoia* is absent in friendships based on utility and pleasure (*EE*, 2013, VII, 1241a1–14; cf. Annas, 1990). In such friendships, he states there, goodwill is directed not toward the other as a person, but toward oneself, because the relationship depends on what the friend provides rather than on who they are. If *eunoia* is a constitutive element of friendship, then can a friendship based on utility genuinely be called friendship? How can Aristotle's assertion that *eunoia* is lacking in such relationships be reconciled with the fact that they are nevertheless called *philia* elsewhere in his *Ethics*?

Elena Irrera (2005, 573–577) offers an interesting solution by starting from Aristotle's claim that friendships based on utility and pleasure are still considered *philia* because they resemble (*κατὰ ὁμοιότητα*) moral friendship (cf. *NE*, 2014, 1157a30–31). For Irrera, this resemblance arises from shared residual conditions of friendship such as reciprocity and common interests, as well as, to some extent, mutual well-wishing (Irrera, 2005, 575; cf. *NE*, 2014, 1156a5–10). However, the good wished for in these relationships is not good in itself (*ἀπλῶς*), but instrumental, since it derives from the benefit or pleasure the relationship provides. In such friendships, *eunoia* is not a fundamental condition but a possible outcome that develops over time; it is contingent on external benefits and therefore unstable, lasting only as long as what makes the relationship desirable endures. Irrera thus shows that Aristotle includes lower forms of friendship in the category of *philia* due to their structural similarity to the ideal form, while simultaneously maintaining a hierarchical difference in their moral value. But what does *eunoia* mean in the context of political friendship? Can it even exist among citizens who do not know one another personally, who lack a shared history, and whose differences often seem unresolvable?

In the political context, in the author's view, *eunoia* does not arise from the immediate recognition of another's moral character, but from a rational awareness of interdependence and the shared conditions of political life. Since, according to Aristotle, human beings are not self-sufficient, the realization of one's own good requires the existence of a stable community that ensures the conditions for action, security, and mutual recognition. The political community, as a community aimed at the good life as a whole, thus becomes the framework within which *eunoia* develops from the insight that the well-being of others is a condi-

on for one's own political stability and fulfilment.⁴ The author argues that within this framework, a specific kind of *eunoia* emerges, civic *eunoia*, which arises from the understanding that the well-being of every citizen depends on the stability of the shared life. Such civic *eunoia* is a form of reciprocal, though limited, goodwill that comes from shared vulnerability and a common orientation toward political coexistence. Civic *eunoia* expresses a motivated readiness to care for the well-being of others precisely because we recognize that their well-being secures our own.⁵ Citizens do not feel love for one another as in moral friendship, but rather a kind of impersonal love, which Irrera (2005, 580) also identifies as a form of »reciprocal respect, guaranteed through the excellence of justice, assures mutual reliability and the possibility of living without fear of continuous recriminations«.

The other conditions Aristotle sets for friendship are also present in a specifically political form. First, reciprocity in the civic context does not rest on personal reciprocation of affection, but on mutual recognition of equal status among citizens within the legal-political order. As Irrera (2005, 571) explains, this involves an institutionalized balance of rights and duties that provides a stable framework for mutual interaction, whereby citizens are regarded as equal participants in a shared political project, thus fulfilling the formal reciprocity required for *philia*. Second, awareness of the reciprocal nature of the relationship, though without personal intimacy, is present in the political community through laws, customs, and political practices that affirm mutual belonging and common goals. Irrera (2005, 571) highlights that such awareness fosters trust among citizens and strengthens the political identity of the community, since citizens do not act merely as individuals engaged in a simple exchange of benefits, but as fellow citizens bound by the normative structure of shared life. Third, joint action in the political context takes the form of participation in deliberation, law-making, public service, and the fulfilment of common tasks. Yet this action is not mechanical cooperation; it requires a certain form of internal agreement among citizens, which Aristotle calls *homonoia*: »Concord also appears to be a characteristic of friendship. For this reason, it is not agreement in belief, since this can occur even among people unknown to one another. Nor are people described as being in concord when they agree about just anything, for example, the heavens (since concord here has nothing to do with friendship), but a city is said to be in concord

4 Cf. Sherman (1987, 600–602) interprets *eunoia* as a normative disposition to act for the common good, expressed through coordinated action and *homonoia*. Algra (2003, 273) develops the concept of »social appropriation« which dissolves the boundary between self-interest and others' interests. He introduces the idea of a community of interests, where friends are valued as part of one's own sphere, eliminating real conflict between them.

5 The concept of civic *eunoia* developed here is closest to Vaccarezza and Croce's (2021) account of civility. While their civility includes both rational and affective elements, it remains primarily impersonal and discursive, aimed at sustaining public deliberation among moral equals. In the author's view civic *eunoia* expresses a relational and ethically motivated form of goodwill and trust, grounded in shared vulnerability and mutual responsibility that underpins the very fabric of political belonging and solidarity.

when people agree about what is beneficial, rationally choose the same things, and carry out common resolutions« (*NE*, 2014, 1167a21–33).

In this passage, Aristotle directly links *homonoia* to political friendship, but he clarifies that it is not just any form of agreement. *Homonoia* goes beyond mere similarity of opinion and does not refer to abstract or general consensus, such as agreement about celestial phenomena, since such consensus is politically irrelevant. As a characteristic of CF, *homonoia* signifies citizens' alignment on matters concerning the common good: the choice of political regime, the formation of alliances or the selection of rulers. This form of concord requires not only the rational acceptance of shared goals but also a willingness to act together to achieve them. Although *homonoia* is a form of political agreement, it is not synonymous with complete uniformity of opinion or the elimination of pluralism. Rather, it denotes an accord on the fundamental aims of the political community, which includes acceptance of diverse individual paths to eudaimonia, provided they fit within the shared framework of the political good and enable stable coexistence and collective action among citizens.

On this basis, the author argues that civic *eunoia* constitutes the ethical core that unites *homonoia* and *politikē philia*. It transforms the awareness of shared vulnerability and mutual dependence into the motivational disposition that makes civic concord possible. While *homonoia* expresses the rational and institutional harmony of citizens acting together for the common good, civic *eunoia* provides the affective and ethical condition that enables such harmony to endure. Because it is embedded in the structures of law and shared deliberation, this form of friendship, though concerned with what is advantageous, acquires stability through its orientation to the common good. As a political disposition, civic *eunoia* animates the procedural and deliberative cooperation through which citizens willingly sustain the shared terms of collective life. It translates the recognition of interdependence into a readiness for cooperation and restraint, giving justice its motivational and communal substance. In Aristotle's political framework, civic *eunoia* thus operates as a structural precondition for sustained praxis within the *polis*, linking ethical motivation with the stability of collective action. CF, understood in this way, does not merely accompany justice as its moral counterpart but sustains it from within: it provides the mutual goodwill and trust through which justice becomes an active relation among citizens rather than a merely formal rule. The following section briefly outlines the contemporary implications of this interpretation and indicates the directions for further development of the concept of civic *eunoia*.⁶

6 The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer for drawing her attention to Lockwood's (2020) and Bartels's (2017) interpretations of *NE* VIII.1. Both authors convincingly show that Aristotle's concern is primarily political, aimed at concord and the preservation of the *polis* rather than an affective ideal of friendship among citizens. Their analyses, however, remain largely at the level of institutional or prudential explanation and do not address the motivational grounds of citizens' willingness to act for the common good. Author's concept of civic *eunoia* seeks to fill this gap by identifying the ethical and affective disposition that underlies such cooperation, a line of inquiry that merits a more detailed treatment in future research.

4. *Reconstructing Aristotle's civic friendship through civic eunoia*

To summarize what has been said about Aristotle's concept of CF, let us return to the challenge outlined at the beginning: the fragility of political cohesion in contemporary pluralistic societies marked by deep divisions, distrust and the erosion of mutual belonging. This challenge highlights the limitations of relying solely on legal and institutional frameworks to sustain political unity. Therefore, Aristotle's account offers a valuable perspective by emphasizing that political stability depends not only on laws and justice but also on the quality of the relationships among citizens grounded in mutual goodwill and shared responsibility.

Within this framework, civic *eunoia* stands out as particularly relevant to the contemporary context. As a stable and conscious disposition of motivated goodwill and mutual care, civic *eunoia* can serve as a normative resource for repairing damaged political bonds and fostering cohesion across deep divisions. Its value lies in its capacity to reshape how citizens perceive one another: not as enemies or morally inferior political others, but as fellow participants in a shared political life. In situations where fundamental values are not shared, nurturing civic *eunoia* helps transform disagreement into a space for respectful engagement and preserves the conditions for continued cooperation. It allows us to: (1) Develop an affective perception of the other (the emotional way in which we experience others within the political space; we refrain from demonizing the other in public discourse as, for example, a "traitor" or a "threat to our children," and instead recognize them as a politically legitimate fellow citizen with different beliefs; this includes trust that the other will not act to delegitimize or exclude us as political subjects); (2) Foster an ethical disposition toward dialogue (manifested as a willingness to listen to the other, even when we know they will not change their views, and a readiness to engage in dialogue with the aim of understanding the other); (3) Embrace a shared institutional framework and political responsibility (expressed in the citizen's readiness to take responsibility for preserving the common political space, especially in times of heightened disagreement; this includes the recognition that, despite differences, citizens share basic needs and vulnerabilities, such as security, dignity, and belonging, which leads them to support common institutions as a framework for political coexistence).

In this sense, civic *eunoia* does not eliminate political disagreement but transforms it into a form of engagement that is respectful and constructive, enabling citizens to remain connected despite their differences. It demonstrates that the stability of the political community depends not only on value homogeneity or procedural-institutional frameworks, but also on the willingness of citizens to maintain strong, meaningful relationships as mutually responsible participants in shared political life. In a time when differences increasingly lead to exclusion and disagreements to delegitimization, civic *eunoia* reminds us that political unity is sustained not just by rules, but by the quality of the relationships that give those rules meaning and legitimacy; relationships grounded in mutual recognition, responsibility and the willingness to stand in relation to one another as civic friends.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Aristotle's account of civic friendship integrates the ethical and political dimensions of human association. At the centre of this unity lies civic *eunoia*: a rationally motivated disposition of mutual goodwill grounded in shared vulnerability and sustained through deliberative cooperation. By turning rational concord into a lived practice of trust and mutual recognition, civic *eunoia* provides the motivational depth that makes justice effective and secures the stability of the *polis*. In this sense, civic friendship illuminates an important Aristotelian insight: that the stability of any political community depends not only on just institutions, but on the quality of relationships that give them substance and meaning.

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Aristotelovo gradansko prijateljstvo

Etički temelji političke kohezije

Ana Gavran Miloš*

Sažetak

U radu se analizira Aristotelov pojam gradanskoga prijateljstva (politikē philia) kroz razlikovanje njegove etičke i političke dimenzije, pokazujući kako to razlikovanje povezuje individualnu dobrobit i stabilnost političke zajednice. Etička dimenzija temelji se na Aristotelovu uvjerenju da se dobar život (eudaimonia) ne ostvaruje izolirano, nego unutar trajnih, uzajamnih odnosa koje imamo s drugim ljudima, među kojima je prijateljstvo najvažnije jer omogućuje djelovanje u skladu s vrlinom. Politička dimenzija nadovezuje se na to polazište i pokazuje da je prijateljstvo nužan uvjet stabilnosti i kohezije političke zajednice u obliku gradanskoga prijateljstva. Tvrdi se da je gradansko prijateljstvo kod Aristotela oblik prijateljstva iz koristi, čiji su ključni elementi gradanska dobrohotnost (eunoia) i političko suglasje (homonoia). Eunoia se ne temelji na osobnoj bliskosti ni emocionalnoj povezanosti, nego na racionalnom prepoznavanju međuovisnosti i dijeljene ranjivosti, što motivira uzajamnu dobrohotnost i spremnost građana na suradnju. Homonoia, s druge strane, omogućuje koordinirano zajedničko djelovanje u pitanjima koja se odnose na opće dobro i zajednički politički život. Na kraju se pokazuje kako takav aristotelovski okvir može pružiti relevantne uvide za suvremena pluralna društva, koja se suočavaju s krizom povjerenja, sve većom fragmentacijom i političkom polarizacijom, te naglašava važnost razvijanja odnosa međusobne odgovornosti kao temelja političke stabilnosti.

Ključne riječi: gradansko prijateljstvo; euonoia; homonoia; eudaimonia; ranjivost; politička polarizacija

* Doc. dr. sc. Ana Gavran Miloš, Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci. Adresa: Sveučilišna avenija 4, 51000 Rijeka, Hrvatska. E–adresa: anag@ffri.uniri.hr