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Friendship, politics, and Augustine's consolidation of the self

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Abstract: Friendship plays a central role in Augustine's thought. It also played a crucial role in structuring the political and social world of the ancient Greeks. Augustine's treatment of friendship, especially in his *Confessions*, retains some of the terminology that was central to the Greek account, but it simultaneously transforms friendship, and with it the relationship between individual and community. Augustine's formulation of the inner life is reflected in his transformation of friendship, which loses its inherently social character and political dimension even as it sets the stage for the introduction of political thinking based on the primacy of the individual.

Introduction

St Augustine has played a central role in the development of the modern understanding of personal identity. He is credited (and blamed) with facilitating a so-called inward turn, with inventing an inner space that has profound theological and philosophical implications. Augustine's connection with Greek thought, largely by way of Neo-Platonism, has been substantially documented. Receiving relatively little attention, however, is a central component of political and social life in the Greek tradition, namely friendship. Augustine's treatment of friendship, especially in his *Confessions*, retains some of the terminology that was central to the Greek account, but it simultaneously transforms friendship and with it the relationship between individual and community. Augustine's stress on the inward-looking life is reflected in his transformation of friendship, which loses its inherently broad social character and political dimension.

I aim to present an account of this Augustinian transformation of friendship that draws attention to the implications for political thinking of having the political and social core of friendship, as it was developed in Greek thinking, replaced

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by Augustine's particular theological premises. Among these implications is the creation of individual persons who are constituted and conceptualized as the possessors of inalienable autonomy vis-à-vis other members of political communities. I suggest that Augustine's consolidated understanding of the self, wherein individuals are related to their friends through God, makes possible later developments in political thinking, such as Lockean liberalism. These later developments do not follow of necessity from Augustine's thinking, but they do rely heavily on Augustine's work to prepare the ground.

Any present-day study of friendship is likely to be hampered by a bias against the very term. Friendship has largely come to be associated with idle pleasure, unethical favour-trading, or a form of self-disclosure that is somehow unseemly. As an important political concept it has historically received limited attention from political thinkers since Augustine. It is only in the last generation that a sustained effort on behalf of academic political theorists has resuscitated the study of friendship as a political concept. Taking friendship seriously once again, political scholars have that variously argued that friendship should be called upon to help (re)build our communities and associative democracy (Bellah *et al.* (1996)), to foster an appropriate political ethic of toleration and encouragement (Scorza (2004)), and to inform us about the boundaries of the moral relationship between citizen and the liberal democratic state (Derrida (1997); Martel (2001)). Friendship has become many things to many people. One of the few things that contemporary treatments have in common is the recognition of the debt owed to the Greeks in this area. What is less often recognized is the debt that contemporary political and social theorists concerned with the political implications of friendship owe to Augustine.

Augustine's treatment of friendship is important not only because it represents an eclipse of Greek thinking in this realm, but also because it is representative of his transformation of the concern in the Western tradition with one's social and political standing to one's inner life. The logical antecedents of liberal political thought can be found in Augustine, and this is especially clear when we consider the dynamic he sets up between the self, one's friends, and the political community at large. To make this claim is not to claim in any way that Augustine was a liberal or proto-liberal political thinker. Rather, I am only affirming that the inherent dynamics that Augustine sets up are the same as are used by later liberal thinkers, thinkers who could not get to where they were going, theoretically speaking, by appealing solely to Greek or Roman formulations of the relationship between self, community, and friends. In what follows below I will briefly recount some key aspects of the various Greek approaches to friendship in order to set the stage for a discussion of Augustine. The retelling of the story of the Greek concept of friendship will be necessary brief and incomplete. My goal in this paper is to draw attention to Augustine's treatment of friendship, and in so doing draw attention to his role in creating an alternative

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conceptual backdrop against which novel political theories could develop. I argue that Augustine's reconceptualization of friendship represents a fundamental break with received notions about the relationship between the self and the political community.

Friendship in the early Greek context

It is difficult to overstate the role that friendship played in ancient Greek thinking and politics. Indeed, Aristotle points out in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that 'friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel factions as their worst enemy' (Aristotle (1947), 1155a23–25). The word that comes to us as friendship was for the Greeks *philia*; the translation is, at best, imperfect and perhaps even misleading. Something that was *philos* to somebody was dear, and was the object of special affection, desire, or communion. *Philia* included relationships that went far beyond the psychological pleasure or participation in a shared activity that we moderns might associate with friendship. It was a central, in many ways the central, organizing principle of Greek life.

Friendship is integral to the action in Homer's *Iliad*, and to the archaic period from which that work emerged. It is also a theme in much Athenian tragedy. Antigone's famous stand-off with Creon can be read as a fundamental disagreement about the nature of obligations imposed by *philia*. Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* are concerned first and foremost with the proper treatment of individuals according to a code of conduct, at the centre of which is friendship. The crucial first book of Plato's *Republic* explores tensions in the relationship between justice and friendship, and the claim that justice is nothing more than helping friends and harming enemies would have been as familiar to classical Greeks (or more so) as was the golden rule to generations of Western thinkers and school children. However, it is Aristotle to whom most contemporary scholars return for a treatment of friendship in ancient Greece.

Aristotle developed a systematic account of friendship in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, devoting roughly one-fifth of the whole to the topic. Friendship, he maintains, can be broken down into a number of categories, depending on what an individual is pursuing. 'Not everything seems to be loved', Aristotle tells us (1947, 1155b17–18), 'but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant, or useful'. Corresponding to the three forms of things loved are three forms of friendship: friendship based on the pursuit of something useful (utility friendship), friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on the love of the good (often called virtue, character, or complete friendship). Friends form a community (*koinonia*) held together by the pursuit of a common goal, *a* good but not necessarily *the* good.

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In the highest friendships especially, friends do not act selfishly or based on egoistic calculation but rather seek the good for their friends. They pursue the good on behalf of the friend, and for the friend's own sake. This concern for the friend for his or her own sake is captured in the famous Aristotelian maxim: 'The friend is a second self'. The highest form of friendship, then, becomes a kind of exchange of selfhood, a series of self-disclosures that continues over long periods of time. Virtue friends become part of one another, seeking the good for one another and becoming closer to one another because of shared virtuous activity. The good acts that friends undertake over time bring them closer together and since the object of their communal action, i.e. the good, is unchanging so, too, is their friendship. Whereas friendships of utility and pleasure dissolve as the object of the friendship changes, friendships of the good only grow stronger over time (Aristotle (1947), 1156a18–24).

It is the stability over time of the highest type of friendship that allows it to be described as complete. As the several goods which are available to human beings become woven into this higher form of friendship the individuals involved therein approach a more complete form of goodness. That is to say, in the highest type of friendship man reaches his *telos* and achieves *eudaimonia*. Friendship proper brings about completeness and allows for the fulfilment of one's human nature. It involves a mutual completion of the selves involved. Aristotle describes humans as political animals but he also suggests that we are friendly animals, i.e. creatures that fulfil our natures not only within the context of the *polis*, but additionally within the context of *philia*. Curiously, Aristotle relegates the political iteration of friendship to the lowest order; he describes it as one instance of a friendship of utility. Complete friendship depends on the *polis* to allow for the conceptual and practical space for friendly seeking of the good; it requires the *polis* but is not itself political. Complete friendship involves direct participation of the friends with little or no mediation from outside sources, even though the *polis* was essential for providing the space within which character-driven, complete friendship could flourish.

For the Greeks, we learn from Aristotle and others, friendship is paramount and to lose it is to lose one's connection to those aspects of the world that make us most human. Aristotle describes *philia* as 'one of the most indispensible requirements of life' (1927, 1155a4). When Aristotle says (1947, 1155a5–6) that 'without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods', he is referring to the same reality that confronted Philoctetes in Sophocles' play of that name. Philoctetes, abandoned by his former friends on the isle of Lemnos – his *philoi* found it inconvenient to keep him on board their ship due to an illness he had contracted – is left without friends and as 'an outcast from human sympathy' (Sophocles (1957), 191).[1] With 'no friendly face near him', Philoctetes' 'life lacks *everything* [my emphasis]' (Sophocles (1957), 173, 182). Because he has 'been alone and very wretched, without friend or comrade', Philoctetes, by his own

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admission, has 'grown a savage' (Sophocles (1957), 227, 226). Near the end of the play, when Philoctetes believes that a promised rescue is to be abandoned, undone by the deceitful Odysseus, he laments that 'without friends or comrades or city' he is nothing, merely 'a dead man among the living' (Sophocles (1957), 1018).

For Sophocles, as for Aristotle, to be friendless is merely to exist at some basic biological level, but it is not to have an existentially meaning life. (On the question of different levels of selfhood in Aristotle, namely existential and biological, see Simpson (2001).) Friends endow us with an ethically and politically meaningful life, in a sense creating us. As Elijah Millgram points out (1987, 368), 'over the course of a friendship, one becomes ''causally'' responsible for the friend's being who he is'. Millgram distinguishes between two forms of procreation, one parental and one friendly: 'The being of a child for which his parent is causally responsible is, we can say, his *human* being; the being of one's friend for which one is responsible is his *virtuous* being. The former is … *what* he is; the latter is *who* he is' (1987, 368). What we are is a biological matter, who we are is a political and ultimately existential question. Political friendship provides the ground for the creation of our individual selves as political beings.

In the best cases, the rare cases of complete friendship, our *philoi* support us and enable us 'so far as we can [to] make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best in us' (Aristotle (1947), 1177b31–32). However, it must be noted how precious indeed are the few individuals able to meet such demands. As a form of the utility-driven mode of the relationship, political friendship does not aspire to this great height. Aristotle's well-known argument that the *polis* is a site for creating ethical persons and helping individuals to flourish as human beings had led some commentators to gloss over the distinctions between political friendship and its more complete cousin, portraying political friendship as something that 'inevitably slides into ethical friendship' (Tessitore (1996), 88). John von Heyking (2001, 80) sets the bar for political friendship equally high, suggesting that the 'society that Aristotle calls ''political friendship'' … consists of spiritual agreement (*homonoia*) among human beings, and that agreement is possible only when human beings live in agreement with *Nous*, the most divine part of themselves'. Von Heyking (2001, 80) quotes from Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'A city is in accord when men have the same opinions about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common'. However, reading the rest of this passage makes it clear that this *homonoia* refers to sameness-of-mind, not 'spiritual agreement', about such practical ends as electoral systems and military alliances. This practical unanimity refers not to the good, the spiritual, or to *eudaimonia* per se, but rather 'to the interests and concerns of life' and only insofar as agreement can be reached (Aristotle (1926), 1167b5–8). Aristotle admits (1947, 1167b5–10) that bad men will achieve this unanimity only to a small extent, but it is possible.

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Even more difficult than the achieving of this unanimity among bad men is maintaining it in the face of what amounts to an early statement of the so-called free rider problem: bad people want everybody else to be good and to play by the rules. One should not confuse, however, the definition of political friendship with the difficulty associated with maintaining it. It is this very difficulty that drives lawgivers to be more concerned with political friendship than justice. As Bernard Yack has pointed out (1993, *passim*), Aristotle is concerned with the type of conflict that can arise from this tension. Yack suggests (1993, 117) that political friendship 'is best practiced when it eliminates any element of the so-called ethical advantage friendship [which] would only exacerbate the already potent sources of conflict and disagreement in any political friendship'. The conflation of political friendship with spiritual or ethical unanimity is, Yack argues, not 'based on anything that Aristotle actually writes on the subject', but rather 'on the expectation that a community that exists for the sake of the good life must promote a higher form of friendship than the shared advantage friendship that Aristotle explicitly associates with it' (1993, 113–114). For Aristotle, friendship differs based on the things that are loved, and just as advantage is categorically different from the good so, too, is an advantage-based political friendship different from the higher, complete friendship.

Friendship in a post–Aristotelian world

The rise of the Macedonian hegemony of Philip and Alexander gradually undercut the traditional Greek political theories based on the primacy of the *polis*, 'the actual space of the politics of friendship' (Hutter (1978), 119). As a result of changing ideas regarding the possibilities of *polis*-centred life, friendship, as one of the main organizing principles of political and social life, suffered a fall from grace. Since Homeric times friendship had been linked with political success and excellence, but post-Aristotelian Greeks did not feel themselves as tightly bound to the traditional ideals for which Aristotle himself had such deep and abiding respect (even while he sometimes criticized these ideals). What we see is a withdrawing from the public sphere, and a transformation of friendship into something primarily concerned with philosophical enlightenment.

This closing of ranks among friends is evident in Epicurean circles. Konstan sums up the Epicurean approach to friendship: 'Members of local Epicurean societies were evidently encouraged to conceive of themselves as friends or to develop ties of friendship with one another … . Friendship remains a bond between individuals, but it is communally fostered and exploited in the service of philosophical instruction and development' (1997, 113). Noticeably absent from the Epicurean worldview is the intimate connection between friendship and politics that is characteristic of Aristotle. This may be a consequence of Epicurus'

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own experience as a witness to the unsuccessful post-Alexandrian revolt of Athens against foreign influence, or it may be a reaction to the diminished possibilities for individual participation in politics in the face of political life that reached the scale of empire. Whatever the reason for the divorce between politics and friendship, Hutter's assessment summarizes the result:

> [For the Epicureans], friendship is an institution apart from politics and the life of society. The wise man will lead a life apart from involvement in politics and will concentrate mainly on cultivating philosophy among his friends. For Epicurus there is intrinsically no connection between politics and friendship. Rather, the state and friendship are antithetical. The Epicurean sage, in distinction from previous Greek philosophical heroes, escapes from the political life into friendship. (1978, 117)

The tightly bound connection between politics and friendship seems to have evacuated Athens at the same time, and for some of the same reasons, that its most famous proponent (Aristotle) also fled; the world of Alexander seemed inhospitable to both.

The Epicurean desire to cleave friendship from politics does not stem exclusively from the practical difficulties experienced by political *philoi*. Like Aristotle before him, and countless philosophers after him, Epicurus sought happiness, dedicating his life and his philosophy to the pursuit of this elusive goal. Teaching in his Garden – a school Epicurus set up in Athens, challenging the dominance of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum – Epicurus proclaimed true happiness to be the result of pleasure, rightly understood. Rather than the crass hedonism that has come to be associated with his name, Epicurus preferred moderation and pleasures of quality over licentious indulgences of sheer quantity. Extremes of anything, including activities that would otherwise be pleasurable, are ultimately sources of stress, agitation, and pain, each of which disrupts the peaceful repose aimed for in Epicurean thought.

Epicurus shares Aristotle's high estimation of friendship, believing that 'the noble man is most involved with wisdom and friendship, of which one is a mortal good, the other immortal' (Epicurus (1994), 40). For Epicurus and his followers, these goods are to be enjoyed in relative solitude, in the Garden and far away from politics. Politics involve extremes of emotion, eliciting unseemly desire and thirst for power that destroys the moderate enjoyment of moderate pleasures for which mankind is suited. Epicurus disagrees with Aristotle's belief that political activity is necessary for us to reach our *telos*, for he is averse to thinking of happiness in terms of Aristotelian metaphysical biology. Happiness is, for the Epicurean, attainable in this world, but only with the proper attitude, training, and environment. The proper Epicurean environment is replete with friends, but remarkably (given Epicurus' temporal proximity to Aristotle) devoid of political dimensions. MacDonald (2003, 71) notes that 'Epicurean doctrines … had little influence on Neo-Platonic, Patristic, and medieval philosophy'. In most particulars this may be true, but the generally apolitical spirit that accompanies Epicurean friendship

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survives the Garden, as does the spirit of non-political community that Epicurus tried to foster among his followers.

The relative influence of Epicurean thought seems diminished when placed up against the other great Hellenistic philosophy: Stoicism. Stoicism did have an important influence, especially in Rome, with followers as diverse as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and the slave-philosopher Epictetus. Like the Epicureans, the Stoics aimed for a life of happiness, but happiness derived not from pleasure and calm repose, but from virtuous knowledge. Knowledge, Stoics such as Zeno taught, could enable one to master the world by mastering one's emotional responses to the world, including death: 'I cannot avoid death. Instead of avoiding the fear of it, shall I die in lamentation and trembling?' (Epictetus (1925), 175). In *The Enchiridion*, Epictetus teaches that

> … some things are under our control, while others are not under our control. Under our control are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing' (1925, 483).

The wise sage will recognize the truth of Epictetus' teachings, and act accordingly. The fool, on the other hand, will seek to control things not in the power of human beings to control.

Knowledge and emotional self-sufficiency are possessions of the sage, and are endangered by the fools who everywhere outnumber the wise. In order to keep this knowledge and virtue secure against the relentless onslaught of worldly distractions and disequilibrium, Stoics cautioned against friendship with the unwise. In essence, Stoic sages, possessed of a refined and cultivated ability to draw upon their natural reason, avoided the friendship that Epicureans often sought, and that seems absolutely necessary to achieve the tangible, yet often unwise, co-operation required of a successful political community. For the Stoics, 'true friendship is a function of wisdom: in all other relationships, loyalty is contingent' (Konstan (1997), 113). Indeed, 'personal friendship, far from being a necessity due to man's social nature, is actually a hindrance since it impedes the attainment of the famed Stoic detachment or *apathia*' (Hutter (1978), 121). Stoic friendship retreats even further from the public square, and on to the porticos of the select few.

But just how are these few selected? Wisdom, for the Stoic, is largely a matter of achieving a dispassionate balance between the natural, reason-driven demands of one's true nature, and the unreasonable, shifting, and overly emotional callings of the world. 'Only the virtuous are not estranged from themselves. They are their own friends because they live and follow their true selves which consist of right reason' (Hutter (1978), 124). Stoicism takes as a starting point a more coherent picture of man's inner self. In his study of the concept of mind and soul in Western thought, Paul MacDonald (2003, 75) concludes that 'Stoics stressed unity

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of the soul far more than Aristotle did; beings that are capable of perception and reaction are unified selves'. As possessor of a stable, unified soul, an individual is less dependent upon the cultivation and training – the German, *Bildung*, really is the best word here – that a political community might offer. Consequently, the political communities with which Stoics were familiar were to be shunned as much as they were to be celebrated. Politics, in the real world, is a distraction from the pursuit of wisdom, and is dominated by unreason and passionate activity.

The case is quite different for the ideal polity. Since the Stoic understanding of human beings entails their natural reasonableness, there is a common link between all people: reason. Yes, reason can become perverted, it can remain underdeveloped, and it can be overshadowed by the passions, but it does exist in each of us at some level – at the level of our true selves. Thus, for all its exclusivity and determination to keep the sages at safe remove from the more numerous fools, Stoicism does introduce an important universalization into the understanding of political friendship. Insofar as we are reasonable creatures, we are capable of being worthy of the friendship of the Stoic. And we are all reasonable creatures; we all carry a 'divine spark'. At the level of the ideal, then, Stoicism results in a friendship of all with all, *philanthropia*, and the friendship of mankind. The following passage from Marcus Aurelius, worth quoting at length, addresses the universal humanity that we all share:

> If our intellectual part is common, the reason also, in respect of which we are rational beings, is common: if this is so, common also is the reason which commands us what to do, and what not to do; if this is so, there is a common law also; if this is so, we are fellow–citizens; if this is so, we are members of some political community; if this is so, the world is in a manner a state. For of what other common political community will any one say that the whole human race are members? And from thence, from this common political community comes also our very intellectual faculty and reasoning faculty and our capacity for law. (Aurelius (1960), 35–36)

By changing the focus of their philosophic inquiry (from an Aristotelian concern for the development of the individual within a political community, to the development of the potential for a cosmopolitan political community that is contained within each individual), Stoics set the stage for a more thoroughgoing attempt at universalizing friendship in Christian thought.

The Greeks' reputation for learning endured far better than their political and economic influence. Much of the thought developed in the Hellenic world took root in the Roman Republic, contributing to the intellectual and conceptual worldview of Roman citizens and thinkers alike. This is evident in Cicero's famous description of friendship and the ideal relationship between friendship and politics. Like the Stoics before him, to whom he owed a great intellectual debt, and Christian and pagan thinkers that followed him, Cicero borrowed liberally from the stock of Greek sayings regarding friendship. The similarities did

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not, however, extend very deep, and there is quite a distance between, for example, Aristotelian and Ciceronian friendship.

In large part this distance can be explained by the peculiar dangers to which friends were exposed in Roman politics. Hutter (1978, 136) notes that 'the connection between conspiracies against the state and the theory and practice of friendship was apparent to thinking men of the day. Cicero warns repeatedly against the dangers that may arise for the state from the union of friendship and conspiratorial ambitions.' Cicero felt that there is 'no greater danger to friendship, for ordinary men, than greed for money, and for truly good men, than ambition for public office and distinction' (Cicero (1967), 34).[2] His own experience with Roman government reinforced his conviction, as he witnessed numerous plots, assassinations, whisper campaigns, and other unfriendly machinations in the quest for power. These disappointing realities did not cause Cicero to turn against friendship, but they did lead away from Aristotle's model.

Cicero did share with Aristotle an estimation of the general importance of friendship in a complete life, and he agreed that it was 'a subject that everyone ought to think about' (1967, 4). 'Nature abhors solitude', Cicero argued, and he urged his readers 'to put friendship ahead of all other human concerns, for there is nothing so suited to man's nature, nothing that can mean so much to him, whether in good times or in bad' (1967, 88, 17). Friendship, Cicero maintained, 'is just this and nothing else: complete sympathy in all matters of importance, plus goodwill and affection, and I am inclined to think that with the exception of wisdom, the gods have given nothing finer to men than this' (1967, 20). Friendship is an expression of our human nature, rather than merely a tool that avails us of the opportunity to progress toward our nature. For Cicero, the impetus towards friendship is already within us:

> And so I should say that friendship takes its beginning from our very nature rather than from our sense of inadequacy that it is due to an inclination of the heart together with a feeling of affection rather than to a consideration of the advantages which we might derive from the relation. (1967, 27)

Note the important contrast with Aristotle, for whom friendship is predicated upon the desire for some good. That the variety of goods loved by friends might include wisdom, virtue, pleasure, or material advantage does not alter the fact that, for Aristotle, friendship can never escape some element of calculation and discrimination. All Aristotelian friendship is advantage friendship, but Aristotle assigns a rank order to the advantages gained based on traditional categories of what is noble and what is base. Ciceronian friendship eschews advantage as a primary consideration: 'For if we put friendship together through the expectation of advantage, a change in our expectations would also rend it apart. But our essential nature cannot be changed, and for that reason true friendship endures forever' (Cicero (1967), 32). Again, the divergence from Aristotle is instructive.

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The highest class of Aristotelian friendship endures because the parties to the relationship seek, and love, the good in one another, and it is the good that endures. As was discussed above, Aristotle does leave room for the possibility, however, slight, that a good person may again become bad. However, goodness itself remains constant. For Cicero, the self that is able to enter into the friendship in the first place already possesses a stable nature – 'our essential nature cannot be changed' – and it is from that nature that friendship springs. The Ciceronian friend is one for whom virtue plays an important role, for 'it is hard to keep up a friendship, if one has deserted virtue's camp' (Cicero (1967), 37).

This concern for virtue is exactly what keeps friendship and politics separated in Cicero's thought. Having been witness to a number of betrayals on the political front – as a politician, Cicero was familiar with the un-virtuous behaviour that often accompanied political success – it seemed clear to Cicero, as it was to many Romans of the time, that mixing politics and friendship was a recipe for disaster. Indeed, 'the politics of the late Roman Republic decisively influenced the nature and quality of friendship and enmity. Political disagreement tended to sharpen and deepen enmities to the point where honour, loyalty and humane considerations disappeared entirely' (Hutter (1978), 133). Cicero was concerned that friendship would degenerate into political advantage, and, having lost its foundation in nature, and the natural 'inclination of the heart', would effectively cease to exist in the lives of individual citizens of the Republic. For this reason he resolved to cleave politics from both the practice and theory of friendship. With political malfeasance at the front of his mind, Cicero laid down the following 'law for friendship: we must not ask wrongful things, nor do them, if we are asked to' (1967, 40).

In attempting to insulate the state from the deleterious effects of friendship gone awry, Cicero makes it clear that friendship can, in no way, be enlisted to advance an end which is harmful to the political community. 'It is our duty', he writes (1967, 42), 'to teach good men … that they must not consider themselves so bound that they may not abandon their friends when they go wrong in matters of state'. Friendship is a gift of the gods, but it is a gift for which one proves one's self unworthy if one should undercut the legitimate political authorities. For those who would stand with a friend against the political community, Cicero has a clear warning:

> And so a community of interest with wicked men … must not be glossed over by the plea of friendship; rather it must be suppressed with every stern measure at our command, so that no man may deem it lawful to stand by a friend when he bears arms against his country. (1967, 43)

Konstan (1997, 132) suggests that Cicero is here expanding upon the tension between friendship and other duties articulated as early as the work that Theophrastus offered, *On Philia*. Theophrastus departed from Aristotle by

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suggesting that friendship may get in the way of performing some other, morally worthwhile, action, perhaps even an action that is criminal in nature. The Aristotelian notion of complete friendship suggests a unity of virtues, effectively precluding the dilemma envisioned by Theophrastus, but that approach also depended upon a particular relationship between the individual and the *polis*, a relationship that was no longer possible as the Athenian star dimmed. Cicero simply extended the notion of crime to include action taken against one's country.

Cicero's dialogue about friendship is not startlingly original. Indeed, it incorporates much of the language, and a number of the underlying assumptions of the Greek tradition, put together in light of events that profoundly impacted the author, including those surrounding the assassination of Julius Caesar. The fact that so many of the assertions contained in such a typically Roman account of friendship have their genesis in the Greek experience, and the fact that so much of the language is drawn from Greek sources, cannot overshadow the fact that the friendship described by Cicero is no longer Greek. The underlying assumptions about the nature of the selves involved in friendship have changed, and these changes subsequently transform the conclusions drawn about friendship (even in cases where the language is virtually identical). At this stage, however, the changes are subtle and often only hinted at. It is with the Augustinian notion of friendship that we see a more substantial, and revolutionary, alteration in the nature of the self – and the (friendly) second self.

The Christianization of friendship

Understanding the originality of Augustinian friendship can help us to understand better the changing relationship between the self and the political community in Western thought. Of course, early Christian doctrine was not created *de nova*, but rather drew heavily on Judaism, classical Greek philosophy, Hellenistic ideas, and the wisdom and experience of the Roman Republic and Empire. Konstan notes (1997, 156) that St Luke drew directly upon classical definitions of friendship (especially in Acts), expanding its classical parameters to include 'the entire community of believers'. Carolinne White explains the central role of classical ideas of friendship in evolving Church doctrine by pointing towards 'the continuity of cultural heritage made possible by the forms of education and government which' Church Fathers and Doctors experienced (1992, 60). Not to be overlooked are the substantial and ongoing theological debates that preoccupied many of the early Church's most agile thinkers. Many of the branches of Christian belief that came to be called heretical took as their foundation earlier pagan cosmological and metaphysical arguments. Furthermore, individuals such as Plotinus served as a bridge between Athens and Catholic Rome, serving up variations of Greek (usually Platonic) philosophy that were again adapted to fit an evolving Catholic orthodoxy.

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Relative to its prominence in archaic and classical Greek thought, friendship plays a minor role in the overall structure of Christian political thinking. However, for our purposes here it is very instructive to note the changes to friendship effected in Christian thought, especially since, as I will argue, these changes actually have a great deal to do with the shape of modern political thought. The rhetoric of friendship remains fairly consistent over the half millennium from Aristotle to Augustine, but the underlying assumptions about selfhood, and the relation of the self to the political community point to major differences in the content of friendship. Specifically, the transformation from Greek to Christian friendship involves three distinct stages: the creation and elevation of a particularly Christian self; the consecration of the individual; and, ultimately, the subordination of this consecrated individual to an otherworldly authority. Christian friendship traces these stages and conducting an examination of friendship, especially its political form, allows us to come at the complex question of the relationship between self and others from a new angle. It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive treatment of the variety of early Christian formulations of the self, but rather to sketch in outline Augustine's particular contribution in the context of political theory and friendship.

The concept of the self that established the foundation of the vast majority of Aristotelian friendships was incomplete, and, in important ways, often nearly incoherent. In pursuing goals that were unstable, most people found themselves at odds with themselves and their friends. Only in rare cases, where individuals were able to spend sufficient time in the pursuit of virtue, did friends achieve selfhood in its fullest sense. As A. O. Rorty suggests,

> Aristotle does not draw a sharp distinction between those vital activities which, like self-nourishment, just keep an organism alive, and those that express the nature of the thing, that constitute a way of living. The view is severe: an organism that can survive but not engage in its 'higher' activities is only equivocally (homonymous) a member of its species. (1992, 10)

To be fully a member of the human species, that is, to be a true self, is something that few people achieve. Rorty is right to call this view severe, and many commentators gloss over the severity of the implication of Aristotle's argument. For Aristotle, the *telos* of any individual member of a species, including human beings, is fixed and can be determined through a series of appropriate questions that differentiate one species from another. However, this is not to say that we can know individual selves, as the self must be constructed before it can be known. By the time we reach the end of the first stage of Christian doctrinal development the picture had changed substantially.

Building on the philosophical advances of the Stoics, as well as Christianity's Hebrew heritage, early Christian doctrine develops an image of the self that is much more stable, more internally coherent, than the earlier Greek model.

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As MacDonald (2003, 89) puts it, 'an amalgamation of Hebrew and Greek ideas about human nature slowly gathered momentum over several centuries', and 'several writers attempted an overt syncretism in an effort to reconcile apparent inconsistencies in diverse ''schools'' of thought'. As a result of the theological demands made upon the individual – new expectations of faithfulness, charity, and self-sacrifice accompanied the introduction of a Christian cosmology – 'Christian thought recognized in a special way the idea of the inner man as the locus of faith' (Konstan (1997), 152). If Socrates brought philosophy down from the heavens and into the *agora*, then Christian thinkers, with Augustine chief among them, moved philosophy once again, from the public space of the *agora*, to the semi-private world of personal faith. In so doing a new understanding of self emerged, one that took for granted the existence and responsibility of a self fully possessed of the capacities that we moderns might recognize as constitutive of selfhood.

The Christian path to a stable concept of the self, a self that could bear ultimate moral and political responsibility, can be said to be traceable back to the creation narrative, especially the Garden of Eden. For it is in sin that we see the foundation of selfhood. However, it is not until St Augustine combines his perpetual concerns about good and evil with Neo-Platonic and Stoic philosophy that we see the Christian self move from the unplumbed depths of religious psychology to the lively pages of philosophical discourse. The vehicle enabling this movement was St Augustine. He was famously obsessed with the problem of evil; how could evil exist in a world that is inherently good, or created by a good God? It was this issue more than any other that led him to embrace the dualism of the Manicheans.

Even though he came to argue against the Manicheans, their dualism continued in Augustine's more mature thought, although the exact manifestation evolved in tandem with Augustine's orthodoxy. The Christian Augustine continued to see man as fallen and the flesh as the source of weakness, and, consequently, the de facto source of much sinfulness. The mystery of man, however, is that redemption is at hand for those who would seek it. We are sinful creatures and wisdom allows us to recognize this about ourselves, and, consequently, to take steps to repent of the sinful life of the flesh and of worldly temptation. This wisdom, this self-knowledge, however, is only available through the grace of God. As C. Fred Alford puts it, 'for Augustine, the self knows itself only in terms of its relationship to God' (1991, 186). The Augustinian self is the locus of moral responsibility, but remains partially shrouded in holy garb, since 'Man does not make himself, and thus does not know himself. He is understandable only in terms of God's providential intention and this he sees only through a glass darkly. One's recollection of oneself is radically and essentially incomplete' (Hartle (1983), 103). Our recollection of our respective selves may be incomplete, but the concept of the self, the morally responsible agent for whom utter, existential ruin,

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or blissful eternal salvation are equally possible, is more robust than at any point previous in Western political thought.

Indeed, Taylor (1989, 131) suggests that 'it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought'. Interestingly, Augustine's innovation is rooted in tradition, specifically the traditional Platonic notion (shone through the prism of Plotinus' interpretation) that there is a most real stratum of existence from which other things emanate. For Augustine, the ultimate source of the emanations was not the *eidos* of Platonic theory, but God. In Platonic philosophy, phenomena have purchase on reality through their participation in the Forms, or Ideas, but for Augustine 'created things receive their form through God, through their participation in his Ideas. Everything has being only insofar as it participates in God' (Taylor (1989), 127–128). This 'everything' includes us, so that to know God is to know one's self as a participant in God's love. Augustine tells us, if we seek truth: 'Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man truth dwells' (Augustine (1953), 262). The Christian self is coherent and unified in a way that the Greek self (Aristotelian or otherwise) is not, and this coherence is the result of individuals being creations endowed with an independent worth relative to one another. Put plainly, we are endowed by our creator with what amounts to inalienable autonomous value.

Not only is the Christian concept of the self different in important ways from the Greek, it is also to be evaluated differently. The Christian self is consecrated because in it can be found evidence (or, putting it in stronger language, instances) of the divine. How, exactly, is this partial identity achieved? Drawing on Arendt's analysis of Augustine, James Martel suggests that

> Saint Augustine's answer is to see God as our 'creator' (by configuring us as God's 'creatures'). In so configuring God, Augustine argues that although not 'exactly' God, we are yet related to him, by this act of creation, so that the God who 'circulates within us' is also the source of and thus somehow part of us. (2001, 11)

Augustine recognized that insofar as one cultivated his or her Godliness, he or she participates in divinity. In this recognition the newly created inner self, a source of truth and wisdom, was seen as partially sacred. The individual could no longer be seen as a means to greatness, as a mere political resource to be drawn upon when the great hero or Emperor needs 'friends' with whom he can battle, whom he can betray, whom he can save from peril, or with whom he can revel in false enlightenment. In Augustine's thought is prefigured not only the Cartesian *cogito*, but also the Kantian categorical imperative.

Yet, for all the safety gained by this newly empowered, newly 'worshipped' individual, there was a problem, the catch of all catches. The Christian self was self-aware (if only dimly), and possessed of an inherent self-worth, but was

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still not self-directing. As a created self, the Christian existed in God's image, and failure to gain knowledge of God was also failure to gain knowledge of self. In that case, where potential knowledge becomes replaced by ignorance, the self-as-creature becomes alienated from its foundation in divinity. Faith in God, and the attempt to follow in the word of God, represents the connective tissue tying the self to reality; when this connective tissue disintegrates (through sin or wilful ignorance) the individual's basis in reality is also undermined, leaving the shell of a self, but not its essence. Sin, especially, leads to the evacuation of the ontological self from the biological self.

It is this belief that a life of vice and/or sin is equal to a lack of meaningful selfhood that makes Aristotelian thought appear more closely related to Christian thought than it truly is. The key difference, often overlooked by scholars eager to pronounce on 'Christian Aristotelianism', is that the Aristotelian self is an endpoint, a goal, to use Stern-Gillet's (1995) term, an 'achievement'; the Christian self is a beginning, a gift received, like God's grace, without proof of merit. This lack of merit entails a debt that must be paid, a debt that presents itself as either a covenant or, in the majority of Christian thought, an imperative. God's law is to be followed, and individuals are to be subordinated to such law. There is no court of appeal, no outside standard by which the fairness of the deal can be adjudicated. If the individual cares little to live up to an agreement to which she did not agree, God is also able to withdraw from His side of the bargain. However, given that what God has contributed to the equation is the very existence of the aggrieved party, we are predictably content to live according to the rules that Augustine and his counterparts describe (at least until the rules can be re-described). Early Christians lived, for the first time in the Western philosophical tradition perhaps, lives as individuals. But, they most certainly did not live alone, as friendship continued to play a vital role in their lives.

Augustine and the new politics of friendship

The types of friendships that can be entered into by such empowered individuals are different than those available to the Greeks, and this is especially true in the case of political friendship. Christianity's greatest divergence from the classical world may be in its emphasis on a new kind of communal bond that owes more, perhaps, to its foundation in Judaism than to the philosophical or ethical formulations of the pre-Stoic Greeks. Augustine retains the language of the Greeks, but the spirit which infuses his words with their particular meaning is virtually unknown to the Greek mind. Whereas both archaic and classical Greek communities were held together by a bond – some form or another of friendship described above – that united persons by means of a common vocabulary, pursuit, *koinonia*, or *politeia*, for Christians unity was to be found through *agape*,

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a unique form of affection made possible by the love and grace of God. Strictly speaking, *agape* 'is God's love for man, nothing else. Man responds to God's love in gratitude and faith, but his response is not, strictly speaking, agape. Man's love for his neighbor is agape only insofar as and to the extent that it reflects God's agape which has been received' (Harrelson (1951), 169). Unlike the conceptual disharmony between the Greek concepts of *eros* and *philia*, Christian love and friendship are of a piece; for the early Christian love and friendship both are only possible through God.

Augustine recognized the fact that two of Christianity's greatest commandments – 'love thy God' and 'love your neighbour as yourself' – appear to devalue the self-love that Aristotle found to be central to friendship. Augustine's solution, found in his *City of God*, is clear:

> In [the two commandments] man finds three beings to love, namely, God, himself, and his fellow man, and knows that he is not wrong in loving himself so long as he loves God. As a result, he must help his neighbour (whom he is obliged to love as himself) to love God. (Augustine (1958), 460)

In God and through God all forms of devotion appear acceptable. Indeed, as Jules Toner suggests, the Christian *agape* tends towards universal love and friendship in a way that was impossible for the Greeks. 'By *agape* the preferential love of *philia* is purified of exclusiveness so that everyone is affirmed as a person' (Toner (2001), 32). That affirmation, that elevation and consecration of the individual, comes at the cost of subordination to God. However, by creating a consecrated individual, early Christian thinkers like Augustine brought about a fundamental rupture with the Greek ideal of friendship. Notwithstanding their creative and significant contributions to the history of Western thought, Hellenic philosophers did not break from the Greek tradition of which they themselves were a part; though they did make possible the inward-looking approach of Augustine, an approach to questions of the self, of the self's obligation, and of the possibility of friendship that nearly eradicated the Aristotelian premise that the *polis* preceded the individual. The self's subordination to God was only made possible by emancipating the self from the *polis*, and from the *polis*'s demands for political friendship.

This reinterpretation of the self in early Christian thought results in a novel interpretation of friendship. This rethinking of the meaning of friendship is best exemplified in the work of St Augustine, for Augustine's personal experiences with friendship, his wide-ranging scholarship, and his often confessional style of writing combine to give us a clear understanding of the role of Christianized friendship in the history of political thought. Aristotelian friendship strove for the perfection of virtue within the context of the political community, while Hellenistic and Roman friendship increasingly divorced friendship from the ethical demands of the state, with Cicero stressing the non-political naturalness

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of friendship. Paul Wadell describes a different reality for Christian friendship, as expressed by St Augustine:

> Unlike Cicero or Aristotle … Augustine saw Christian friendship envisioning a much different possibility. In Christian friendships, he believed, each friend wishes for the other a life of holiness and grace on this earth and everlasting happiness with God and the saints in heaven. Of course, the good that friends seek for one another would also include well-being and happiness in this world, but the primary aim of benevolence in Christian friendships, Augustine believed, was to help one's friends grow in the new life of grace. (2002, 83)

Augustine retains much of the Greek's language for describing friendship, but the essence of Augustinian friendship shares little in common with his predecessors.

Augustine knew what he was talking about when he spoke of friendship, having had many close friends throughout his life, and finding in friendship a peace and comfort only surpassed by his relationship with God. We know from Augustine's own *Confessions* (especially Book IV) that many of the activities that comprised the Church Father's misguided and sinful youth took place in the company, and often at the behest, of friends. We also know that the death of a close friend was one of the most profound crises of Augustine's crisis-filled life, and that it was the solace of other friends that gave him the strength to deal with the situation (Augustine (1999), 59–62). There can be no doubting that Augustine's proclamations regarding friendship were heartfelt and genuine. It is because Augustine felt such affection for his friends that we are truly able to judge his love for God, for Augustine felt that friendship between men and women was worthless, perhaps even an evil in and of itself, except for the presence and blessing of God.

Augustine's long and enduring struggle for wisdom, and for plausible answers to his abiding questions, led him to his belief in the Christian God. Therefore, we should not be surprised that, for Augustine, God represented a principle of reason and of organization that pervades the entirety of existence. The state, the family, the self, and friendship could all be seen through the prism of the divine. Like Cicero, for whom friendship approached the divine, Augustine also saw God's hand at play in friendship. For Augustine,

> … the only true friendship is sent by God to those who love each other in Him. That is the heart of Augustine's conception of friendship and his great innovation. It is God alone who can join two persons to each other. In other words, friendship is beyond the scope of human control. (McNamara (1964), 220–221, cited in Burt (1999), 66)

God plays the central role in friendship for Augustine, perhaps because Augustine found that God's friendship was constant and not likely to disappear (as, for example, the result of sudden death). Augustine is not shy about praising God in this respect. 'Blessed', Augustine writes in his *Confessions* (1999, 62), 'whosoever loveth Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee. For he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him cannot be lost. And who is this but

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our God.' God offers the security in friendship that Augustine knew, from personal experience, is otherwise lacking. More importantly, for Augustine, God offered the moral constancy that human friendship often lacked.

Augustine felt certain that true friendship must be mediated by an omniscient, benevolent God, through whom Christian virtue could be cultivated, along with a suitable love of the heavenly Father. Augustine tells God that he has come to realize that friendship cannot be true 'unless in such as Thou cementest together, cleaving unto Thee, by that love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us' (1999, 57). God is needed for friendship, and is the medium in which true friendship may thrive, for it is only with God that one is able to cast off the earthly temptations to which each of us is subject. 'He truly loves a friend', Augustine told his congregation, 'who loves God in the friend, either because God is actually present in the friend or in order that God may be so present. This is true love. If we love another for another reason, we hate them more than love them' (Sermon 336, cited in Burt (1999), 62).

This love of God in the friend, and of the friend in God, exemplifies the *caritas* synthesis of *eros* and *agape*. Christian friendship, then, is radically apolitical in nature, subordinating earthly authority to God's and the individual to both. Augustine makes explicit his understanding of the hierarchy of authority in which country and religious devotion may both be involved in Sermon 62:

> If your parents are bringing you up in Christ, they are to be heard in all things. They must be obeyed in every command, but let them not command anything against one above themselves … . Your country again should be above your parents. Thus, if they command anything against your country, they are not to be listened to. And if your country should command anything against the laws of God, it should not be listened to. (cited in Burt (1999), 155, n.11)

In empowering the individual, conceptually speaking, to challenge and even ignore the authority of the political community, Augustine sets up a dynamic that prefigures early liberal thought.

Having created a coherent centrally important self, the location of sinful responsibility and divine possibility, early Church thinkers uncoupled the individual from the *polis*, and the self from the community. Yes, the Christian individual was subordinated to the rule of God, and with such subordination lost a degree of heroic freedom, but with selfhood came a new dignity as one of God's creations, and a strengthening of the Stoic idea of *philanthropia* as the Church recognized the equal status of all people as God's creations. The difference between Christian thought in this regard, and, for example, the autochthony of Greek mythology cannot be overlooked. The archaic or classical Greek and the early Christian both had a political philosophy of friendship that contained the concept of being indebted to one's creational force. For the Greeks, this meant the land upon which their *poleis* were constructed, and the debt manifested itself in terms of a political theory that set aside a place of primacy for the *polis* (a sentiment expressed most

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obviously in Socrates' dialogue with the personified Laws of Athens in the *Crito*). In Christian terms, the debt of creation entailed a duty to the creator, His plans, and His laws. The idea of existing debt did not change so much as the understanding of the nature of the debtor.

In Augustine's enormous body of work we will find little systematic treatment of friendship compared to other areas of concern. Even those passages wherein Augustine does discuss friendship, such as in the *Confessions*, can run to the sentimental and uncritical. However, in considering Augustine's treatment of friendship we concern ourselves with more than just the surface of the matter. What are important are the assumptions about the self that both underlie and follow from Augustine's Christian friendship? What Augustine gives us is an understanding of friendship that separates friends before bringing them back to one another through God. This transformation is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is because it signals the possibility that an individual is somehow valuable, worthy of dignity, deserving of respect, and possessed of the ability to make claims to protect or enforce these other characteristics. If only before God, and through God, the individual is nevertheless elevated.

In rising above the need for self-creation through political interactions with one's community, the Augustinian individual leaves behind the type of concern with honour and reputation that Arendt associates with Greek life. Without companionship, without friends, the Greek man is reduced to mere biological existence devoid of political meaning; this is as true in the tragedies of Sophocles as it is in Aristotle's maxim about individuals who are able to live outside the *polis*. There is something decidedly savage, and perhaps even non-human, about individuals able to thrive *sans* friends. In a very literal sense for Aristotle, as Millgram suggests, friends create one another.

With Augustine the case is different. Friendship is not needed in order for an individual to command respect. All that is needed is a belief in God's unlimited creative powers, and the recognition that God is in us. Augustinian friends come to one another as fully respectable and constituted selves. The dignity that the Homeric or Sophoclean self had to earn – often within the ethical complex of friendship and by performing some identity-defining feat – adheres to the Augustinian self upon birth or conception. It is exactly this belief in an adhesion of dignity and claim-making ability to a pre-social, pre-political self that liberal political thinkers articulated. Logical precedence of the individual over the community is a hallmark of liberal thought. To be able to possess rights and to make claims against others, whether these claims be in favour of positive liberty or negative liberty, requires an understanding of self and community that puts personal political interaction through some sort of mediating principle. Augustine provided this principle (God), and in so doing he cut the ties that bound one self to another, choosing instead to bind all selves to this principle.

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A plausible interpretation of the significance of Augustine's innovation for political theory removes God as the aforementioned mediating principle, substituting natural rights (which may still be traced back to God). Augustine's conceptual conversion of friendship, and with it the transformation of the relationship between individual and community, points to the logical underpinnings of a Lockean political theory that claims rights for individuals based on an autonomous status relative to other social actors. This is *not* to claim that Augustine was a liberal theorist in disguise, but merely to point out that he undercut the conceptual linkage that tied the individual directly to a community and replaced that linkage with a system that, through God, conceives of individuals as separate, reflexive entities possessed of inherent, natural autonomy that was not alienable.

Locke, and later political thinkers, placed Augustinian individuals, not Aristotelian or Platonic individuals, at the centre of his political thinking. A world in which everyone was potentially a Philoctetes, stripped of membership in the human community, is not a world in which Lockean theory could survive. Not all implications of Augustine's inward turn are readily discernible, but setting the Augustinian and pre-Augustinian understanding of selfhood against a backdrop of friendship does afford us a clearer picture of Augustine's conceptual innovation.[3]

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Notes

1. All references to Sophocles' work are to line numbers.
2. This and subsequent references to works of Cicero will be to verse number, rather than page number.
3. The author would like to thank Morton Schoolman as well an anonymous reviewer for *Religious Studies* for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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