FRIENDSHIP AND NATION-BUILDING

A THOMISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF DIVERSITY IN THE POLIS

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To an age where the spirit of nationalism has been exhausted and economic growth leads to a separation of social roles, the combined thought of Aristotle and Aquinas provide a practical understanding of what should constitute unity in the polis. They discuss friendship as expanding one's idea of the *self*, something that necessarily brings others of different status or character into one's self-development. In this process, diversity is cherished as educating the person and providing balance to outlook. Applying Aristotle's interpretation of friendship to the challenge of nation-building, therefore, we find that in order to obtain social unity, emphasis should be placed on the underlying virtues that give inspiration to culture. These are appreciated within cultures and yet can also be held in common between them.

A seventy-year-old grandfather stunned a Nyeri court yesterday when he admitted that he wanted to commit suicide, following disappointments caused by the political turmoil in the country. Stephen Nyamu Ngari said he wanted to escape the political wrangles witnessed since the introduction of multi-party politics. He caused laughter when he said that he was tired of life under the current political order. The magistrate ordered that he be taken for a mental check-up and be produced in court on Friday.
—East African Standard, 19 April 2006[1]

[1] Quoted in Wrong, M., *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), p255.

The title of this conference—'The Role of Ethics in Nation-Building: The Balance between Unity and Cultural Diversity'—refers to the need to '*balance*' unity with cultural diversity. This is a view supported by studies not just in ethics but economics, politics and law as well. Diversity seems like a *matatu*: every road it drives down it causes mayhem. What is the problem with cultural diversity? In ethics, diversity means there is likely to be conflicting views about what right action involves. In politics and law, diversity means disagreement over what the state should promote and coerce. In economics, diversity means different ideas about what constitutes a contract, what should be produced, and what determines a good price.

The problem

A united society brings about economic flourishing and peace. This is not light-minded dreaming but the hard truth. For example, since the late 1990s, research findings have clustered around an empirically-based consensus that public services are organised and provided worse in communities that are ethnically heterogneneous. Such is the strength of the consensus, in fact, that Banerjee et al describe it as 'one of the most powerful hypotheses in political economy.'[2] Studies of the United States, for example, reveal a negative relationship between community diversity and funding for schools, roads, sewers and rubbish collection, as well as levels of participation in a census.[3] And findings do not stop there. Bardhan observes an association between caste heterogeneity and poor maintenance of local irrigation schemes in India.[4] Okten and Osili show community diversity in Indonesia to be related to low labour, material and financial contributions for local public goods.[5] The same relationship has been interpreted for community-based collective action in Nepal and the upkeep of public infrastructure in Pakistan.[6]

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[2] Banerjee, A., Lakshmi, I. & Somanathan, R., 'History, Social Divisions, and Public Goods in Rural India'. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 3 (Apr-May 2005), pp. 639-647, p639.

[3] Poterba, J., 'Demographic Structure and the Political Economy of Public Education'. *Journal of Fiscal Analysis and Management*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1997), pp. 48-66; Goldin, C. & Katz, L., 'Human Capital and Social Capital: The Rise of Secondary School in America, 1910-1940'. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (1999), pp. 683-723; Alesina, A., Baqir, R. & Easterly, W., 'Public Goods and Ethnic Divisions'. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 114 (Nov 1999), pp. 1243-1284; Alesina, A. & Ferrara, E. L., 'Who Trusts Others?'. *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 85 (Aug 2002), pp. 207-234; and Vigdor, J., 'Community Composition and Collective Action: Analyzing Initial Mail Response to the 2000 Census'. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (2004), pp. 303-312.

[4] Bardhan, P., 'Irrigation and Cooperation: An Empirical Analysis of Forty-Eight Irrigation Communities in South India'. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2000), pp. 847-865. The same applies to irrigation projects in Mexico with respect to levels of social diversity. See Dayton-Johnson, J., 'Determinants of Collective Action on the Local Commons: A Model with Evidence from Mexico'. *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2000), pp. 181-208.

[5] Okten, C. & Osili, U. O., 'Contributions in Heterogeneous Communities: Evidence from Indonesia'. *Journal of Population Economics*, Vol. 17 (Dec 2004), pp. 603-626.

[6] Baland, J., Bardhan, P., Das, S., Mookherjee, D. & Sarkar, R., 'Inequality, Collective Action, and the Environment: Evidence from Firewood Collection in Nepal'. Ch of Baland, J., Bardhan, P. & Bowles, S.

Compared to most social science hypotheses, therefore, the correlation between ethnic heterogeneity and poor public goods provision is firm and reliable. More generally, Easterly and Levine correlate a lack of economic growth with ethnic diversity in Africa.[7] Apart from economic implications, some of the worst displays of violent conflict in culturally divided societies are only too evident (for example, Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia & Eritrea, Uganda and Kenya).

Turning to Kenya, diversity looks likely to become more pronounced, not less, as our lion steps forward through history.

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Kenya's economy has been growing rapidly, especially since the turn of the century,

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and this has supported an increase in average incomes, shown here in the GDP per capita.

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At the same time, however, the level of economic inequality in the country is high, evidenced here by the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient is shown as a percentage where a figure of 0 would represent the most economically equal nation and a figure of 100 the most economically unequal. Kenya's 2010 figure of 47.7% compares in East Africa to Uganda's 42.6% and Tanzania's 34.6% (the GPI rating shows Kenya's world ranking for peace).[8] According to In perhaps a unique way, Kenya is also seeing its economic divisions become entrenched through the use of language, which is beginning to separate economic and age groups in urban zones (tribal languages for the old and Sheng for the young; Kiswahili for the poor and English and Kiswahili for the rich).

(eds.), *Inequality, Collective Action, and Environmental Sustainability* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Khwaja, A., 'Can Good Projects Succeed in Bad Communities? Collective Action in the Himalayas'. Unpublished paper, Harvard University, Massachusetts.

[7] Easterly, W. & Levine, R., 'Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions'. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 112 (Nov 1997), pp. 1203-1250.

[8] Global Peace Index (2011) Found on: http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2011/GINI (accessed 18/10/11).

To this vertical, economic inequality can be added the horizontal differences between Kenya's 44 ethnic communities.[9]

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From a sample of 42 African countries, Kenya is the ninth most ethnically and linguistically divided.[10] The number on the right shows the probability that two Kenyans drawn at random will be of different ethnic groups.

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In a smarter rating of *politically relevant* divisions, out of the 42 African countries Kenya comes twelfth place in terms of being most ethnically divided.[11]

So, in this one case study in which we sit, there are three things that threaten social unity:

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1. the specialisation of roles that comes with economic growth;[12]
2. ethnic diversity; and
3. economic inequality.

In gross over-generalisation, we can say that the *liberal* approach to society tends to count the first as a good thing, and believe the second and third to lose significance if poverty can be eliminated and a genuine meritocracy established. The *republican* approach, on the other hand, ignores the first, and overcomes the second and third through an emphasis on strong, equal citizenship. Here I consider a Thomistic approach, which focuses less on institutional politics and more on human relationships, the fabric of society.

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[9] Ng'ang'a, W., *Kenya's Ethnic Communities: Foundation of the Nation* (Nairobi: Gatũndũ Publishers, 2006), p xxiii.
[10] Data obtained from the Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization (ELF) category of Posner, D. N., 'Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa'. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2004), pp. 849-863, p856.
[11] Ibid. Here, data is drawn from the Politically Relevant Ethnic Groups (PREG) rating.
[12] For the theoretical substance to this thesis, see Smith, A., *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1776]) and Weber, M., *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (London: University of California Press, 1978).

Diversity as wine, friendship as bottle-opener

It is the argument of this paper that the works of Aristotle and Aquinas—the Thomistic school—can shed light on the correct way we should approach the challenge of diversity. Aquinas and Aristotle provide a stimulating account of friendship and virtue that offer a blueprint of the incremental advances of the person towards closer unity with those around. What is the nature of this unity?

In a detailed consolidation of Aquinas's understandings of friendship, Schwartz explains that Aquinas never dedicated an individual piece of work to the topic of friendship. Nevertheless, numerous topics, throughout his writings, provide context for such discussion, most importantly his *Commentary* on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[13] Schwartz's thorough treatment of friendship generates most profit from Aquinas's understanding of how wills conform. In six different places at least, Aquinas writes that: 'Concord is a union of wills, not of opinions.'[14] Introduction of the term 'concord' (*homonoia*) comes through Aristotle, who originally advanced how it 'seems to be something like friendship'.[15] Conformity of wills is defined by Schwartz as 'a property of individuals which is logically prior to the constitution of their social links: it is the readiness to join others in their wills (projects, paths of action, etc.) even when doing so undermines one's thoughts of one's own excellence.'[16] Though persons may disagree in their respective analyses of a subject matter, a fundamental agreement can still at the same time be operative. Indeed, as Schwartz notes, 'Aquinas quotes Aristotle to make the point that 'friendship or concord is not incompatible with diversity of opinions, but only diversity of wills''.[17] This begs the question, what is it about friendship that can achieve a union of wills irrespective of diversity in opinion?

The answer lies in what friendship is. The terms *philia*[18] and *amicitia*,[19] used by Aristotle and Aquinas respectively, are offered only poor translation by the modern English term friendship.

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[13] Schwartz, D., *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p1.
[14] Ibid, p22. See Aquinas, T., *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardiensis* (II) d.11 q.2 a.5 ad 1; (III) d.27 q.2 a.1c; (IV) d.13 q.2 a.3 obj.1 ad 1; *Summa Theologiae* (II-II) q.29 a.1 obj.2 ad 2; (II-II) q.37 a.1c; and Gils, P. M., 'Textes inédits de S. Thomas: Les Premières Rédactions du *Scriptum super Tertio Sententiarum*', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 46 (1962), p611-2.
[15] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), translation by J. A. K. Thomson, 1155a25.
[16] Schwartz, 2007, p69.
[17] Ibid, p31.
[18] One of the four Greek words for love, philia means the love between friends.
[19] Latin for friendship.

> One element of *philia-amicitia* that is often considered to be at odds with modern friendship is its wide reach. In the Aristotelian tradition, fellow soldiers, fellow travellers, and fellow citizens are friends, as are those who interact with a view to utility and those whose bond is founded on erotic love. Indeed, it would seem that almost anyone who is not an enemy, and is in some way engaged in a more or less stable and mutually beneficial relationship, is a friend.[20]

Aquinas describes the workings of such a broader concept of friendship to lie in three acts of friendship, which he describes as:

> First benevolence, which consists in this that someone wills the other person good and his evil wills not, second, concord that consists in this that friends will and reject the same things, third, beneficence, which consists in this that someone does good deeds for the person he loves and does not harm him.[21]

Not only is the concept of friendship thus a broad one, it is also deep. Friendship reaches towards acknowledging a common appreciation of the *telos*,[22] the final end to which the person aims. Fundamental agreement between two persons on their *telos* runs deeper than common desires for immediate goods, towards instead the ultimate happiness of the other. It is together with this deeper perspective that Aristotle makes his controversial claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that 'a friend is another self'.[23]

Controversy arises in the interpretation of the way Aristotle suggests friends to be a good thing. Is the claim being made that we have a friend for our own sake, or for the friend's sake? If the latter, how can the bettering of the friend have any relation to our own happiness? Because Aristotle also argues that, 'it is for himself that everyone most of all wishes what is good',[24] it seems that, as Field remarks, 'Aristotle's account makes [morality] ultimately selfish.'[25] We wish the happiness of the friend because it makes ourselves happy. After all, how can one at the same time want the best for ourselves *and* for our friend?

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[20] Schwartz, 2007, p2.
[21] Quoted in Schwartz, 2007, p6-7. See Aquinas, T., *Commentarium super Epistolam ad Romanos* 12. 3 ad v.
[22] Greek for end, purpose or final aim.
[23] Aristotle, 2004, 1166a32, 1169b6-7 & 1170b6-7. See Stern-Gillet, S., *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p12.
[24] Aristotle, 2004, 1159a12.
[25] Field, G. C., *Moral Theory: An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Methuen & Co, 1921), p109.

The tension is resolved through an understanding of what is being meant by 'self'. In between both the view that a friend is a literal part of oneself and the view that a friend is in every way an independent being, Aristotle's understanding of 'another self' considers the friend to be an *extension* of oneself.[26] A friend is another self in that the other's virtuous activity has become an object of one's own choice.[27] The identification with the other is such that the development of his or her character may be considered in the interests of one's own. Shared norms are thus held in common, as that which is considered good for oneself is also thereby considered good for the other, with whose self one's own self is joined. Amongst "perfect friends", therefore, one would expect dispositions and values to be perfectly mirrored. Such identification with the other goes on to produce common principles of action. Between the two persons, commonly held values—subjectively appreciated and yet commonly acknowledged—have emerged. This is, further, what it means to trust. Trust is to *believe in another*, not in blind self-giving but in reasoned commitment to another based on a common awareness of shared values.

What the Thomistic approach demonstrates is that a fundamental unity of wills between persons is possible despite differences. From the society-wide point of view, this suggests that unity is a product of common understandings of happiness and goodness, more than levels of wealth equality or ethnic similarity. How can this perspective lead us to a practical solution? The answer is not to become such altruistic people that we are able to ignore any divisions and treat everyone exactly the same. Rather, the answer is to foster a *learning disposition* in people that looks towards other culture's perceptions of the good and is able to draw out the common virtues that support the pursuit of happiness. To give one example, consider the following two proverbs, the first Kikuyu and the second Luo:

The Kikuyu saying

Cia thogori itiyũraga ikũmbĩ

literally translates as: bought things do no fill the granary. The meaning is that you should not hope to become rich without cultivating your fields, that doing well requires hard work.[28]

The Luo ngeche saying

Giri ema chodi luya

literally translates as: it is your possession or something you own that makes you sweat. The meaning here is that achievement through your own sweat is what gives satisfaction.[29]

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[26] This altruistic interpretation of Aristotle is maintained by Schollmeier, P., *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
[27] Aristotle, 2004, 1169b10-13.
[28] Barra, G., *1000 Kikuyu Proverbs* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 2010), 3rd Ed., p6.

Despite their different cultures, languages and expressions, the two sayings are both emphasising the value of the virtue of industriousness, being someone who is hard-working.

Drawing out common virtues is difficult in the sense that it is not just something we can tell the state or the international community to do (as is the case with poverty reduction, for example), and it will always be a gradual process. However, there are some ways in which learning about others' sense of the good is easy. Human beings are the same species everywhere and all are searching for happiness. The cultures that form around this pursuit thus naturally share the goal of trying to ensure good human conduct. Furthermore, the virtues that link the pursuit of happiness to the habit of action are relatively few and so interpretable and communicable across different scenarios. The hardest thing about this solution to the challenge of diversity is that it is in our hands. Its opening moves are in the interpersonal context of relationships. Only after this comes political discourse, and only finally the shaping of institutions. Friendship opens the wine of diversity.

[29] Odaga, A. B., *Luo Proverbs and Sayings* (Kisumu: Lake Publishers, 1995), p31.