

ON THE CULTIVATION OF CIVIC FRIENDSHIP

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ABSTRACT: I examine the possibility of civic friendship to solve the problem of over-doing democracy, paying close attention to how it can counter affective polarization and social homogeneity. In Section I, I explore civic friendship as a solution to polarization. In section II, I argue that Talisse’s civic friendship—in the context of nonpolitical collaboration—is akin to Aristotle’s utility *and* pleasure-friendships. Given the nature of civic friendship, in Section III–VI I make amendments to Talisse’s proposal. I argue that if civic friendship is to address not only desaturation but polarization, *and* it has these Aristotelian features, then the cultivation of taste, equity, and ethical attentiveness are necessary.

KEYWORDS: friendships, Aristotle, civic friendships, democracy, virtues

IN *Overdoing Democracy* (2019), Robert Talisse, claims that democracy is being overdone. And it’s being overdone because of how we view and treat each other. More specifically, when we *see* others as only “political agents who either obstruct or help enable our own political projects,”¹ and we become steadfast in political activity and engagement, we are overdoing democracy. When everything we do together is either tied to our political allegiances, and every place we go is politically saturated, then it’s clear we need to do less, not more politics. This for Talisse is not an undemocratic recommendation. Rather, it’s a call to put politics in its place. When we fail to put politics in its proper place, we dissolve “the other social goods that democracy requires if it is to flourish.”² Thus, such overdoing becomes counterproductive to the aims of democracy.

Talisse rejects the notion that democracy is boundless and should be expanded—even though the temptation for thinking so arises out of deliberative democracy. Although we aspire towards deliberative democratic practices that include talking, arguing, objecting, providing reasons, and informing ourselves, this doesn’t mean we ought to do it at every turn and everywhere. When “our everyday activities serve as prompts for the intensification and radicalization of our political identities, which in turn exacerbate our political divisions,” then we know we need to do things differently. And as Talisse shows, such overdoing makes even deliberative democracy unproductive. This is due to polarization and the over-saturation of politics, which lead us to see our opponent as irrational, untrustworthy, apt targets of enmity. Polarization also leads us to create information bubbles in media spaces, and it makes our social spaces, politically homogeneous.

What prescription does Talisse offer? The solution isn't found in more political activity. "Better democracy initiatives in the form of enhanced deliberation venues, do not suffice as a solution to the problem of overdoing democracy, and in the absence of measures of another kind they may even exacerbate it."³ Politics shouldn't be all we do. The solution is that we should do non-political things with each other—activities that allow us to obtain the social goods that democracy allows and that "nurture[e] . . . things beyond politics."⁴ And Talisse's proposal is enabled by civic friendship. Civic friendship can solve the problem of overdoing democracy by desaturating social spaces, getting us away from homogenous environments, and helping us to counter enmity.

In this paper, I examine the possibility of civic friendship to solve the problem of over-doing democracy, paying close attention to how it can counter affective polarization and social homogeneity. In Section I, I explore civic friendship as a solution to polarization. In section II, I argue that Talisse's civic friendship—in the context of nonpolitical collaboration—is akin to Aristotle's utility *and* pleasure-friendships. Given the nature of civic friendship, in Section III–VI I make amendments to Talisse's proposal. I argue that if civic friendship is to address not only desaturation but polarization, *and* it has these Aristotelian features, then the cultivation of taste, equity, and ethical attentiveness are necessary.

CIVIC FRIENDSHIP AND POLARIZATION

When thinking of friendship, philosophers are likely to immediately think of Aristotle's taxonomy. Aristotle makes a distinction between friendships of virtue, pleasure, and utility. Talisse suggests that civic friends are different from typical, modern conceptions of friendships. They don't need to know each other or interact. They don't even have to like each other. Their friendship consists of mutual respect. This respect is grounded in "regarding each other as sharers in a social enterprise, entitled to play an equal role in shaping and directing that enterprise."⁵ Such friendship is an ongoing joint activity that involves characteristic dispositions and behaviors. A general term that captures these capacities of regard, respect, etc. for Talisse is *civic friendship*. The capacities and dispositions constitutive of civic friendship "enable citizens to uphold their investment in democracy even in the wake of political losses"⁶ Talisse divides these faculties into self and other-regarding capacities.

An example of a self-regarding ability is persistence. Democratic persistence consists of persevering in democratic action despite political losses. So, after an election in which one's candidate losses, the democratically persistent would strategize for the next election—improving their platform, registering voters, and holding those in office accountable. Democratic persistence would not include overturning democracy. Other self-regarding abilities include patience, ingenuity, and the exercise of prudence; as well as collaboration with others.

Reasonableness and sympathy are examples of other-regarding capacities. The capacity of reasonableness involves hearing and listening. When exercising reasonableness, we provide reasons in favor of our views and revise them if necessary. And we trust that others can be responsive to our reasons. We are, in response,

also willing to listen to their challenges to our commitments. Another capability is democratic sympathy. Exercising democratic sympathy consists of regarding others with fellow feeling. Even when we judge their views to be distasteful or misguided, fellow feeling doesn't allow us to conclude that they are therefore unfit or disqualified from citizenship. Democratic sympathy helps us recognize that they, like us, aspire to "deploy democratic politics for the sake of their sincerely held values."⁷⁷

While it seems that these self and other-regarding capacities—which are constitutive of civic friendship—are only appropriate when we are engaged in politics, Talisse disagrees. He claims that civic friendship involves more than using these capacities to engage in politics. Civic friendship is not "one-dimensionally absorbed by the travails of politics"⁷⁸ Moreover, to cultivate civic friendship requires us to exercise these capacities beyond politics, and this is possible only when we are able to regard each other as more than our civic roles.

Civic friendship involves "acknowledge[ing] each other as equal persons whose lives are devoted to valuable projects and pursuits that lie beyond politics"⁷⁹ On one hand, this is a descriptive claim. It articulates the fact that citizens don't just have civic roles but familial, communal, and leisurely roles as well. On the other hand, there are normative claims that follow from the description. Given this fact about our lives, we should then *recognize* each other as such—that is, more than our civic roles. And we should also *engage* each other beyond the civic roles we have.

To do this, Talisse suggests that our efforts to cultivate civic friendship must begin "from encounters and cooperative activities that do not make salient our political profiles and division, endeavors in which politics is not merely suppressed or bracketed, but risen above."⁸⁰ In other words, we should engage each other in other activities and roles beyond the civic, being careful not to pollute it with the travails or primacy of politics. We should, instead, enjoy together the social goods that democracy brings without saturating those encounters with our political commitments.

We may immediately detect the tenability of this recommendation when we reflect on our interpersonal relationships. To enjoy the social good of leisure with my best friends it would be easy to convince them that politicizing our time is a waste of time; if we are to truly enjoy our time together, as well as the activity we are currently engaging. And we can say the same thing about family events, although I'm sure many will still find it tempting to transgress. We should see each other in our familial or *philia* roles, and not our civic ones if we are to enjoy our activities.

The controversial aspect of Talisse's argument has to do with the extension of the normative claim beyond our current interpersonal relationships. Talisse's recommendation is not just for intimate friends and family who do in fact know each other, and often cooperate with one another. He claims that civic friendship should be cultivated to extend outside of our intimate worlds. That means that we should attempt to see strangers as more than their civic roles. *And* he claims that the self and other-regarding capacities of civic friendship can only be cultivated when we do so. These capacities are necessary for solving a ubiquitous, destructive problem in our society—polarization.

There's platform polarization in which members of political parties "diverge sharply on nearly every issue."⁸¹ There is also affective polarization in which there is high distrust and antipathy between groups. Together, it's not just that liberals

and republicans can't agree on anything. But they also dislike those who they see as their political opponent with whom they disagree. Talisse acknowledges that the United States has a high level of affective polarization. This polarization is not simply the result of disagreement. It's due to the political saturation of social space and sorting.

Citing social psychology and political science studies, Talisse calls our attention to research that shows that when we are around people who think as we do, our beliefs intensify, our opposition grows more resolute, and our attitudes become more uniform. In other words, we become more extreme across several dimensions due to this sorting problem. The sorting problem manifest in social space. Our social spaces are not only saturated with politics, but where we go are often spaces saturated with people who share our political orientation and signify theirs, thus creating homogeneity. This sorting and saturation contribute to belief polarization because when "our everyday activities serve as prompts for the intensification and radicalization of our political identities, [they] exacerbate our political divisions."¹² And it is this problem that Talisse thinks civic friendship, along with its capacities, can help solve.

In the next section, I will examine and respond to Talisse's prescriptive claim that civic friendship can serve as a solution to polarization. Instead of questioning its tenability, I will offer up important amendments. I will argue that a deeper attentiveness to the nature of Talisse's account of civic friendship requires that we cultivate additional capacities of civic friendship to adequately respond to affective polarization, and thus help us put politics in its place. Given such a task, it's important to begin by returning to Aristotle and the nature of friendship.

CIVIC FRIENDSHIPS AS UTILITY AND PLEASURE-FRIENDSHIPS

While Talisse refrains from "provoking longstanding debates among philosophers about the precise nature of friendship,"¹³ I think attending to them, albeit briefly, is important. One philosophical account I think is worth attending to is Aristotle's. In what follows, I will argue that Talisse's account of civic friendship fits two—not one—of Aristotle's distinctions. And this gives us reason to cultivate additional capacities that can help us attend to the distinct nature of civic friendship, and address the sorting and saturation problem.

While Aristotle proposes three types of friendships in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, two of them are worth noting for our purposes—utility and pleasure friendships.

A friendship of utility is based on what we gain from it. For example, business partners and consumer/hairdresser relationships share a utility-friendship. The business partners relationship is based on the profit that they will gain from their relationship. The consumer/hairdresser relationship is based on the consumer getting satisfying service and the hairdresser getting a fair monetary exchange for providing it. A friendship of pleasure is based on the enjoyment of a shared activity, or the pleasurable emotions the parties provide to each other. Examples of pleasure-friendships are workout partners and erotic relationships. Workout partners enjoy going to the gym, running, biking, or hiking together. In an erotic relationship, partners share the feelings of love and joy. In both examples, participants enjoy

each other's company, and they live among one another. Utility-friendships and pleasure-friendships are reciprocal relationships. Rather than being necessarily exploitative relationships based only on the gain and enjoyment participants both receive, these friendships can—and often do—involve worthy qualities such as trust, communion, and dependence.

Is Talisse's civic friendship an example of utility-friendship or pleasure-friendship? It may appear that the answer is utility. At least this is how political theorist Danielle Allen in *Talking to Strangers* (2004) describes such a relationship.¹⁴ Allen reminds us (inspired by Aristotle) that citizens are utility-friends. The core activity of the friendship is equity. Utility-friends—like citizens—share in power and aim to achieve excellence at living together. These utility-friendships help us recognize that we share a common good, that we need to cultivate equitable cultural habits, and that only equitable rather than rivalrous self-interest is able to help us all benefit and maintain our social bonds as citizens. John Cooper, echoing Aristotle's influence, also notes how civic friendship is a type of utility friendship. "Civic friendship, then, as the special form of friendship characteristic of this kind of community, is founded on the experience and continued expectation, on the part of each citizen, of profit and advantage to himself, in common with the others, from membership in the civic association. This is to say that civic friendship is a kind of advantage-friendship."¹⁵ These accounts of civic-friendship as utility-friendship matches onto Talisse's account. However, there is more to say about the nature of civic friendship.

Talisse's civic friendship also fits the criteria of pleasure-friends. Contrasted with the buddy who "engages with us in some activity. . . . [And] depend[s] on the reliability of parties in supporting and accompanying each other in some limited and often sharply delineated activity,"¹⁶ friendship, for Talisse, has to do "with the variability of the endeavors that they support and enable."¹⁷ Although Talisse is careful to clarify his recommendation so as not to be interpreted as him suggesting that citizens form friendships or gather together, but rather that they "cultivate within themselves the dispositions toward one another that are constitutive of civic friendship," the details of his proposal seem to contradict this stated aim. For, as he says, if our "efforts to cultivate civic friendship must begin from encounters and cooperative activities that do not make salient our political profiles and divisions"¹⁸ then some of those encounters will be face-to-face interactions. This gathering element is implied by his recommendation of doing other things besides politics. Doing things together is not an abstract cultivation endeavor. It occurs through interaction of a shared activity. So, while he is not suggesting that we become best friends with any and everyone to solve our polarization problem, on my reading, he seems to suggest that we recognize and engage with people beyond our civic roles and political activities and affiliations. This entails forming the dispositions to engage in pleasure activities. For these reasons, we can view Talisse's account of civic friendship as an example of both utility and pleasure-friendships. In our civic friendships, we recognize that we all have civic roles. But we also recognize and engage others beyond this role as we take up non-political activities where we enjoy social goods.

As previously stated, this combination of utility and pleasure-friendships is not a strange idea. We have them with our close friends who happen to also be a co-citizen. And if Talisse was only concerned with relationships of this kind, then the recommendation would only address the desaturation issue, and inadequately address the sorting problem. I take Talisse's claim to be that we should cultivate civic friendship with those who aren't already targets along this utility and pleasure dimension. And doing it will not be easy. Therefore, he recommends the capacities of democratic sympathy, persistence, and reasonableness. However, since I've argued that civic friendships are not only utility but also pleasure-friendships, there are other capacities that are needed. More specifically, we need to cultivate the capacities and dispositions that are necessary to have as we do other things beside politics, *and* do them in ways that diminish polarization.

CULTIVATING TASTE

Aristotle notes that pleasure-friendships are unstable and unlikely to last. They often don't last because our pleasures change. Pleasure-friends' temporality is due to our fickleness. You may find pleasure in video games today and have online and in-person friendships based on them. However, next year you may give up gaming and become a cinephile. You are likely then to dedicate your leisure time to watching and discussing films. And your pleasure-friends will change from those you've gamed with, to those you now share a love of cinema.

Although pleasures change, there are some things that you might never take pleasure in. You might live your whole life never enjoying soccer, museums, fishing, dancing, traveling, or sushi. There are some people who will never find pleasure in attending a basketball game because they enjoy baseball. They are some who enjoy American comfort food and frequent Cracker Barrel, but will never go to a Hibachi Grill. What problem might different taste pose to civic friendship?

It may appear that there is a link between what we find pleasure in and our political orientation. Talisse points to the fact that our commercial spaces have "become more socially sorted and hence more politically homogeneous."¹⁹ In Dunkin' Donuts and Chipotle, you are likely to encounter certain clientele given that these companies often target customers based on their political identities (e.g., Dunkin' Donuts target conservative customers, and Starbucks target liberal democrats). Is our political orientation shaping our taste or does taste shape our political orientation? I do not know the answer. However, what I do know—given the aforementioned consumer facts—is that if we want to solve the sorting problem, we will have to do things or enjoy social goods with those whose political commitments *and* taste are different from our own. The question is: What capacities then should we cultivate to achieve this aim?

I believe the answer is taste. We should cultivate our taste to make room to do other things besides politics. Now, this doesn't mean that we should attempt to change all our preferences for the sake of befriending any and everyone we encounter. Nor do I intend to imply that we should cultivate taste with the goal to make friends. Rather, I am suggesting that if the sorting problem arises not just

in social space but out of aesthetic pleasure and preference that is satisfied within social space, then the cultivation of taste is a solution to the problem.

I define taste as Anne Eaton does when she writes, to “have a taste for x,” then, is to have the standing disposition to take pleasure in x based on some of x’s properties, whereas to have a distaste for x is to have the standing disposition to be displeased by (or to have an aversion toward) x based on some of its properties.”²⁰ Taste that I think should be cultivated is not only aesthetic excellence (e.g., art) but—and more importantly—everyday aesthetics (e.g., food, sports, environmental), since these are things we are likely to do together besides politics. Just as restaurants can be politically homogenous, sports are also likely to be too. Basketball may draw in more liberal oriented fans than hockey, and hockey may draw in more conservative fans. If I am a hockey fan—convinced by Talisse’s proposal—I should attempt to cultivate the disposition to take pleasure in basketball based on the proprieties of athleticism, physical competitiveness, etc. This will open—up the possibility to do things with people (with different political orientation) besides politics *and* do them in ways that address the sorting problem.

How do we cultivate everyday aesthetics so that we can tackle the sorting and homogenous problem? Back to Aristotle. To cultivate taste, it’s not enough to tell people to hang out so that they can enjoy other social goods together. Any philosophical argument would be insufficient. This is because reason doesn’t cultivate taste. Therefore, Aristotle called taste “unreasoned.”²¹ No argument can convince a basketball fan to become a fan of a sport they have an aversion to (e.g., hockey or baseball). No argument can convince people who enjoy southern comfort food to now enjoy Asian cuisine. Like all the virtues, Aristotle thinks we train our taste through habituation, repeated exposure, and repetition. To cultivate a taste for a sport will come about by watching or participating in hockey games, attempting to enjoy it with hockey fans in order to gain a greater appreciation. Cultivating taste for a certain kind of cuisine involves giving it a try, and not just once but several times, perhaps at different locations in order to gain an appreciation. But exposure and repetition alone are not enough. Consider Eaton’s explanation concerning acquiring the taste for vegetables.

Craig is disgusted by vegetables, but because he knows that they are good for him, he wants to make them a regular feature of his diet. Further, Craig (a) knows incorporating vegetables into his diet will be easier if he doesn’t merely tolerate vegetables, but if he actually *likes* them, and (b) wants to be the sort of person who enjoys eating healthy things. Repeated exposure to vegetables might get Craig to tolerate them, but he wants something more; he wants actually to acquire the taste for vegetables. Craig tries to alter his feelings about vegetables by acting *as if* they were tasty. He starts with vegetables that are most similar to things he does like, such as meat, and he incorporates them into dishes that he already likes. Finally, it is important that he create *positive associations* with vegetables by initially restricting his consumption of them to times when he is enjoying himself, and performing visualization exercises where he vividly imagines himself eating vegetables with vigor and enthusiasm.²²

For Craig to cultivate a taste for vegetables he must expose himself to them. But he must also act as if he likes them and as if he is a person who eats vegetables—using self-important desires and inclinations as a strategy. Similarly, we can cultivate our taste for sports or food (recall Cracker Barrel vs Hibachi Grill) by doing the same. In addition to exposing ourselves to hockey or Southern comfort food, we can act as if the sport and cuisines are amazing, and that we are fans of them. If hockey is too far outside of our comfort zone, we can start with a sport that is more like basketball but still attracts people who are different from us. Or, we can start with cuisine that is like Southern comfort food, but whose restaurants attract people with different political orientations. When we engage in these activities, we can also create positive associations. For example, we might watch a basketball game at a bar after experiencing the euphoria of watching a hockey game at another bar. Or, we can imagine enjoying different kinds of foods with enthusiasm like Craig. Such cultivation of taste can attend to the sorting problem and help us enjoy the social goods of democracy with others.

Cultivating our everyday aesthetic practices are not irrelevant to our civil practices. Our cultivation of them allows us to expand our boundaries and interests of people who may have political orientations different from our own. Eaton makes a similar moral claim concerning our taste towards bodies. She argues that physical attractiveness impacts how we treat and evaluate others. We perceive those who are attractive as more intelligent and trustworthy. This halo bias²³ impacts our hiring and promotion practices. Those who are not attractive, those considered fat or ugly are discriminated against—not only in hiring but in health care. And so she recommends we cultivate our taste toward fat bodies. I am claiming that what we take pleasure in can affect how we treat and evaluate others. In addition to political polarization, what I am calling *pleasure bias* (the toleration and/or enjoyment of others who share our tastes) can impact how we treat others. Cultivating and thus expanding our pleasures and taste can open another way to be around or enjoy social goods with those whose political orientations are different from ours.

CULTIVATING EQUITY

Recall, Talisse suggests that we do other things than politics. He writes, “try taking up some cooperative project or endeavor that you regard as not having a determinate political valence. . . . It ultimately does not matter very much what you choose to try; the important thing is that you do something that you sincerely take not to be an expression of your particular political identity.”²⁴ He believes that these activities are likely to cultivate civic friendship. I agree. However, it’s not just about *what* we do with each other that cultivates civic friendship. It’s *how* we do it.

In these activities, we need to make sure we are incorporating equality. Allen suggests that in the absence of such equity, friendship doesn’t exist. “Strangers can converse, or even hang out with each other, but if they don’t act equitably towards each other, or are unwilling to share power with one another, they don’t count as friends.”²⁵ Talisse doesn’t ignore equality in his account of civic friendship. He thinks that the mutual respect that is constitutive of civic friendship is grounded in “regarding each other as sharers in a social enterprise, entitled to play an equal

role in shaping and directing that enterprise.”²⁶ Nevertheless, the capacities that he focuses on fall under reasonableness and sympathy. I believe, however, that more can be said about equity and the importance of cultivating it.

Equity, at least according to Allen, is the fair distribution of burdens and benefits. It’s about attending to balances and imbalances. It’s tempting to only think about equity in regards to political endeavors. Accepting political losses, sharing in political governance, and attending to and remedying overburdened communities are examples. However, we should not neglect equity in our non-political engagements. It has an important role to play; for it allows us to fully enjoy the social goods. Therefore, cultivating equity is important if we are to put politics in its place.

I do not think this is as easy as we think it is. Allen seems to disagree. She thinks that equity in leisure and cultural activities come easier than the equity that is required for political friendships. She writes, “Citizens have gotten fairly good at collaborating in musical and athletic exchange, but when it comes to share institutional power across racial lines [for example] our cooperative skills frequently break down.”²⁷ She doesn’t provide an example but we can easily imagine one. It seems easier to share roles, parts, or positions in art and sports in order to accomplish a goal, than it is to share institutional power in governance. The supporting actor accepts his role, responding to the leading actor in kind to produce a beautiful, moving theatrical production. Team members accept their roles, make sacrifices, share the spotlight in order to beat their sport opponents. What’s harder, at least according to Allen, is applying that shared, cooperative tendency to institutional contexts like the movie industry and team ownership. This accounts for why African Americans make up the majority of NBA players, but executives and team owners are predominantly white. It also accounts for the fact that although women are as equally on the movie screen as men, the majority of producers, directors, and heads of studios are men. So perhaps it is easier to collaborate and share as we engage in activities like art and sports than when we engage in other institutional endeavors. However, easier doesn’t mean easy. Easier doesn’t mean that equity is natural, without difficulty, and ubiquitous in activities geared towards enjoying social goods. How should we do other things than politics? We should do them equitably. This requires the cultivation of equity.

Doing the “other things” that Talisse suggests, without equity, is likely to be counterproductive to the aim of putting politics in its place and addressing polarization. This is because unequitable practices are likely to sow seeds of distrust. How can we mend affective polarization when one’s unequitable actions in non-political activities can generate more enmity? Inequity is also likely to cause harm to people’s self-esteem, dignity, and standing thereby creating division when some do not play by the rules. This damage and rule-breaking are likely to generate claims and disagreements that not only halt our collaborative activities, but can invite politics into social space. So we need to cultivate equity in order to guard our collaborative activities against these harms.

Cultivating equity involves the disposition to act fairly, without bias. It also involves the disposition to play by the rules, not expecting to be an exception to them, and tolerating no favoritism. For this to occur, rules and communal expectations should guide our pleasure activities. And we must develop the disposition

to follow rules and hold each other accountable to them. And the rules should be rules of fair play. Acting equitably (in practice), for example, involves creating rules for the book club that all participants agree to, clearly laying out behaviors that prompt exclusion and following through on their enforcement. Its listening to and giving everyone a voice in sharing their ideas and feelings, being careful not to privilege some voices over others, or talking too much ourselves. Acting equitably would involve playing by public park rules. As we go to enjoy the social good of an environmental space—at the same time as or in collaboration with others—we will not treat ourselves as exceptions. If there is a no dogs without a leash policy, we will respect it. And if there are minor disputes that occur in the space, we will try our best not to play favorites.

Acting equitably also involves the disposition to share in power. This can include taking turns sharing in power. In a book club, members may take turns at selecting books or facilitating sessions. If one is part of a park sports team, sharing power may involve limited coaching terms or making sure leadership positions are open to all. We can't act equitably without cultivating equity. So how do we do it?

Just like any habit, it requires habitual action. Acting equitable once, is likely to help us do it twice, and ultimately continually. We can develop a habit of equity by putting ourselves in situations where we can exercise it. Cultivating equity might require we study and emulate historical role models of equity like Martin Luther King, Jr., or literary examples like the Good Samaritan. Our admiration for these role models can influence us to do as they have done. These models can also allow us to see things we hadn't seen before. In this way, according to Christian Miller, these models can reshape our moral imagination in providing us with new ways of seeing equity and fairness.²⁸ Another way that we can cultivate equity is by familiarizing ourselves with our unequitable desires and tendencies. Through self-reflection we might recognize that we are the kind of person who always wants to be in control, have things go our way, or want people in charge that look like us. "Once we recognize [the presence of these desires], we can then be more mindful about whether they are influencing us in a given situation, and do our best to compensate for, correct, or counterbalance them."²⁹

CULTIVATING ETHICAL ATTENTIVENESS

If civic friendship is to help address the overdoing democracy problem, then friends should also cultivate attentiveness. This involves an attunement to relevant facts, and a dismissal of irrelevant ones. In this way, my suggestion is both similar to and different from Talisse's. He thinks we should engage in nonpolitical cooperative activities "with others whose political commitments are not only unknown to us but also beside the point."³⁰ Here, Talisse is claiming that we should not attend to someone's political commitments so as to discover what they are. But if we do discover them, they shouldn't matter anyway. If we know it, we should dismiss this fact. And this is because it's irrelevant. I take Talisse to mean that civic friends should develop a disposition to be attentive to only things that matter. And since political commitments do not matter, friends should not give them any significant social or political attention.

But this can't be fully right. If the point of nonpolitical cooperative projects was to desaturate politics only, I would understand the recommendation. It's plausible to think that if we want to create a space where politics has no place then not knowing people's political commitments would be necessary. However, this is not the only aim of civic friendship. Civic friendship, according to Talisse, also aims to address the homogenous problem. But how can we address this problem without awareness? Some knowledge is relevant and necessary. And a person who cultivates attentiveness focuses on the things that matter, and dismisses the things that do not. For our purposes, they would be interested in the political commitments of those around them, but will resist giving "unfriendly weight" to them.

Attentiveness then, is the disposition to attend to certain objects. It "consists in an agent's receptivity towards a certain kind of object."³¹ Ethical attentiveness involves not just attentiveness to the presence of an object (e.g., a person) but "the formal object of attentiveness is specifically ethical."³² So, it's not just being attuned to a human being but their well-being. In our contexts, ethical attentiveness involves being aware of the presence of a human being and their political commitments. And it also consists in being attuned to their humanity, equality, and inclusion. A person may recognize someone as a democrat. They are attentive to this political fact. But it's not ethical attentiveness if they direct their attention at the person's exclusion. For example, they could direct this salient fact at making sure the person feels out of place, othered. This is not ethical attentiveness. Ethical attentiveness, on the other hand, would involve recognizing when we have encountered a person with political commitments that are different from our own. And considering this information, we become attuned to their inclusion and humanity.

Ethical attentiveness involves not only recognition, but acting out of this recognition. Such attentiveness "give rise to a desire to help or hinder them in the conduct of their lives."³³ Affective ties aid in this endeavor. Attachment as opposed to indifference can elicit a desire to include our political opponents in our pleasure activities. I may be attuned to the fact that my best friend is currently experiencing rough times. And through ethical attentiveness my attention is directed at her well-being. But what motivates me to do something to help her is the attachment we share. It is out of my affections towards her that I respond to the recognition.

Now, what makes civic friendships quite different from the friendships we share with our close friends is that they don't require emotions like love. The attachment which I speak, is not an emotional one. It's one in which we recognize that we are attached as co-citizens. It's affective ties in the sense of James Baldwin's acknowledgement between Blacks and whites that: "Whether I like it or not, or whether you like it or not, we are bound together forever. We are part of each other."³⁴ It's King's sense that love is "recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated."³⁵ Rather than attachment based on emotional feeling, its attitudinal like Martin Luther King's account of love, which he describes as involving "understanding, good—will, respect, and active concern." It's "(an) attitude of respect and active concern, one that seeks a common good in which all are included."³⁶

In sum, we shouldn't want to be completely unaware of people's political commitments. This is not irrelevant in all cases. Such knowledge (even a vague sort) and attentiveness, can let me know if I am in a homogeneous space. It can

also help me know when I have encountered someone whom I've once viewed as a political opponent, and thus challenge and provide me with the opportunity to treat them as a friend.

However, before we get to the act of attending to those with different political commitments than our own, we need to know where they are so that we can engage them. Ethical attentiveness helps.

Ethical attentiveness requires that we be attentive to our civic friends' absence and the locale of their presence. It involves an attunement to the fact that a sporting event has people with certain political commitments, and that is where we may need to go to engage in non-homogenous cooperative projects. Which person has the commitment would be irrelevant. What would matter is that the locale is in fact a place where those who we once saw as our political opponents may be located. And such attentiveness would direct the boundaries we cross in order to engage in these activities.

Allen provides an example of how this works when she writes about expanding her boundaries in the Chicago neighborhood of Hyde Park as an expression and requirement of political friendship.

I must develop contexts in which to interact with the other members of my polis, for these do not exist. Just by drawing a map of it, I have realized that what my neighbors and I typically recognize as our own neighborhood is in fact separated from the other parts of our polis by freeways, major traffic arteries, train tracks, one large cemetery, and empty parks. Soon I learn, too, with a little historical research, that these boundaries were carefully considered by an earlier mayor, Richard J. Daley, to keep Chicago neighborhoods racially segregated. My own university helped construct these boundaries. A commitment to political friendship, even in respect only to the other adults living in my immediate vicinity, requires that I cross geographical, racial, economic boundaries, and challenge the habits of action and mind that my political order and its major institutions have cultivated for nearly half a century; these habits have been fostered since exactly the point when the major institutions of my polis first had a significant opportunity to invent new, integrationist forms of citizenship.³⁷

Martha Nussbaum also talks about this attentiveness when she describes the creation of public parks like Manhattan's Central Park, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, and Chicago's Burham's Plan. Not only were these parks created to allow for equal access to nature and retreat, but they were also places where people from diverse backgrounds could meet. The designs' geography facilitates this goal, for example, with Central Park's north-south extent and Prospect Park's boundaries which touch the immigrant community of Flatbush and the middle-class neighborhood of Lef-ferts Garden. These parks not only allow diverse people to enjoy nature, but they are places for them to bump into each other as they do. These are collaborative spaces. Thus, public space can "supply an escape valve that preserves the possibility of friendship."³⁸

Ethical attentiveness requires an attunement to location, history, and boundaries. It requires recognizing when our own environments are homogeneous, where to go to collaborate with those who are different from us, and then collaborating

with others despite the possibility of difference. Cultivating ethical attentiveness addresses the sorting problem, while also facilitating non-political activities.

THE ULTIMATE GOOD

Talissee is right to conclude that “flourishing, both individually and collectively, also depends on the realization of goods that cannot be won by politics.”³⁹ The over-saturation of politics and affective and belief polarization is getting in the way of us enjoying these goods. Civic friendship is a solution. But it’s not a utopian one. Developing and maintaining friendships, including civic friendships, require constant work. It will not always be done perfectly nor will it be easy. But the recommendation of “cultivation” reminds us that we can always nurture, develop, and improve our civic friendships, even when we falter. I have argued that we should cultivate taste, equity, and ethical attentiveness as ways to do so. These are additions to Talissee’s recommendations of democratic sympathy, persistence, reasonableness, etc., and are in no way replacements. Together, these characteristics and dispositions can help us get closer to enjoying the goods of our democracy. And they do so by helping us jump over obstacles that seek to get in the way of social goods, including the ultimate good of enjoying each other’s humanity as we do other things.

ENDNOTES

1. Talissee 2019, 49.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 136.
4. *Ibid.*, 174.
5. *Ibid.*, 150.
6. *Ibid.*, 151.
7. *Ibid.*, 147.
8. *Ibid.*, 156.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 157.
11. *Ibid.*, 98.
12. *Ibid.*, 124.
13. *Ibid.*, 150.
14. See Allen 2004.
15. Cooper 1999, 333.
16. Talissee, 156.

17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 157.
19. Ibid., 84.
20. Eaton 2016, 41.
21. Miles 1980, 79.
22. Eaton, 51.
23. Eaton, 43.
24. Talisse, 163–164.
25. Allen, 130.
26. Talisse, 150.
27. Allen, 174.
28. Miller 2017, 201.
29. Miller, 210.
30. Talisse, 163.
31. O’Leary 1993, 146.
32. O’Leary, 146.
33. O’Leary, 147.
34. Baldwin 1998, 221.
35. King and West 2015, 51–52.
36. Nussbaum 2016, 222.
37. Allen, 173–174.
38. Nussbaum 2013, 359.
39. Talisse, 174.

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