Two Good Men in Aristotle's *Ethics*, or Does a Liberal Education Improve One's Character?

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Introduction

Does a St. John's education lead one to become a more virtuous human being? Does it improve one's character? Early in my tenure as a tutor I recall this being discussed by the faculty. I don't recall what prompted the discussion or the details, but I vividly recall two things. First, one tutor drew our attention to the "Statement of the Program"—at the time, the principal document used to inform prospective students about the College—this tutor drew attention to the statement as evidence that we, as a community, professed that a liberal education has moral consequences, that it prepares students to be good citizens. The statement begins:

> St. John's College is a community dedicated to liberal education. Liberally educated human beings, the college believes, acquire a lifelong commitment to the pursuit of fundamental knowledge and to the search for unifying ideas. They are intelligently and critically appreciative of their common heritage and conscious of their social and moral obligations. They are well equipped to master the specific skills of any calling, and they possess the means and the will to become free and responsible citizens.[2]

If our liberal education supplies both "the *means* and the *will*" to free and responsible citizenship, wouldn't this mean that liberal education renders free and responsible citizenship *inevitable*? Would not the attainment of this free and responsible citizenship tacitly presuppose not merely an awareness of social and moral obligations, but a conduct of life based on that awareness?

The second thing I recall is that, when this came up in the faculty meeting, several tutors responded with pronounced skepticism: they were reluctant to assent to the claim that a liberal

[1] This version is the one given in Santa Fe; it briefly expands and clarifies a few arguments from the version given in Annapolis. The need for these clarifications became apparent in the course of the Annapolis question period.
[2] From the 2009-10 statement. The 1993-94 Catalog puts it somewhat differently: "Liberal education should seek to develop free and rational men and women committed to the pursuit of knowledge in its fundamental unity, intelligently appreciative of their common cultural heritage, and conscious of their social and moral obligations. Such men and women are best equipped to master the specific skills of any calling and to become mature, competent and responsible citizens of a free society." The 2009-10 statement appears to make the "pursuit of fundamental ideas" primary, and consciousness of "social and moral obligations" secondary, whereas the 1993 statement appears to put them on the same level, or, at the very least, it introduces them simultaneously. I suspect that our claims to the practical benefits of a liberal education have become slightly weaker over time, but to be sure one would have to undertake a wider study of how the college describes itself.

education prepares one to be a good citizen or a moral human being. This skepticism was not surprising: one can see that the Statement of the Program itself hedges on its claim. The Statement stops short of claiming that the attainment of free and responsible citizenship comes as a consequence of this awareness of moral obligations. And to say that liberally educated persons are "*conscious* of their… moral obligations" is not the same as saying that they will act on them.

This reluctance to claim a moral outcome for liberal education arises partly from an uncertainty about the connection between our primary activity, the intellectual activity of reading and asking questions about what we read, and the practical conduct of our lives. Our founding document, the *Meno*, begins—of course—with Socrates asserting that he does *not* know how virtue is acquired, whether by teaching or learning, by practice or by nature… because he does not know *what virtue is*. If, contrary to this, we were to give the Statement of the St. John's Program an unguarded, robust interpretation, as a tutor I would *appear* to be in the position of saying: unlike Socrates, I know what virtue is, I know how it is acquired, and the "means and the will" to practice virtue and good citizenship are acquired through liberal education as I practice it. I would be laying claim to an expertise that Socrates claimed to lack; I would be implying that Socrates was either naïve or ironically deceitful. And if in seminar I were to ask, "what is virtue?" *I* would be asking questions only for the sake of drawing out answers, and not because I had a real question that I was puzzling over. More troubling still, if we tutors knew what virtue was, and how it is acquired, we might be expected to possess virtue, and to exhibit it in our lives, both professional and private. Or, at the very least, we might be expected to have an argument ready at hand for why—when knowing what virtue is—we preferred the alternative.

Faced with this difficulty, one option would be to disavow any practical consequences for liberal education, and put the emphasis on liberal education *as an intellectual pursuit*. We could ask, "what is virtue?" and "how is it acquired?" we could formulate plausible answers and test them in the crucible of our conversations, with no expectation that anyone should become more virtuous on account of this activity. The questions could have no more import for how we live than answering the question of whether light is a wave or a particle.[3] We could imitate Socrates from the *Apology*, who *denies* that he has the "art" of making those around him better human

[3] Alternatively, if a liberal education does improve one's character, and if asking whether light is a wave or a particle is an integral part of a liberal education, it might be incumbent upon us to say why it is that *asking* whether light is a wave or a particle ultimately contributes to improving one's character (regardless of how one *answers* the question).

beings and better citizens; who calls anyone who has this art, "blessed" (20c). But this would be a little disingenuous, insofar as Socrates denies he provides a service to the youths who follow him, whereas tutors do, I believe, think of themselves as providing a service.

So we navigate awkwardly—although in good faith—between the extremes of making too bold a claim for the practical import of a liberal education, and making none at all. We are wary of professing a fullness of knowledge that would recommend one specific way of life, but neither do we want to confess an ignorance that is utterly impotent. I have framed this problem in terms of where it puts the tutors, as those who offer or who serve a liberal education, but the question stands for all members of our community, students and staff, who devote themselves to this education: what, if any, are the practical and especially the moral consequences of this activity?

To address this question, I would like to turn to Aristotle's *Ethics*. Aristotle, unlike Socrates, says what virtue is, and says how it is acquired. The *Ethics* looks like it may be an easier place to get one's footing. The *Ethics* seemed promising for a second reason as well: a long time ago it was brought to my attention that, if you were to consider what a "good man" is, the English word "good" might translate at least three words in Greek: *agathos*, *spoudaios*, and *epieikês*. A fine translation may distinguish these three words, but the words do sometimes seem synonymous. *Agathos* is the word most frequently and naturally translated as "good." I will not dwell on it because it poses no difficulties on the surface, and if I tried to penetrate that surface in order to give a precise account of the "good," I would never get around to the other two. *Spoudaios* and *epieikês* are more foreign to us and harder to render well. It is possible that *spoudaios* and *epieikês* are two ways of talking about the same human type; the two words often share the same opposite, *phaulos*, meaning "petty" or "base."[4] But I think they point to different ways of being "good," different forms of human goodness. For reasons I will get into soon, *spoudaios* could be translated as "virtuous," whereas *epieikês* might be translated as "decent." My enterprise will be to travel about the *Ethics* probing passages where the "virtuous" and the "decent" appear, with a view to teasing them apart. To put it bluntly, the hunch that I want to explore is: is it possible that a liberal education could never be expected to render you *spoudaios*, or *virtuous*, but it might be expected to render you *epieikês*, or *decent*? So I will draw portraits of

[4] Passages where *spoudaios* and *epieikês* seem to be used synonymously include 1.13.1102b7 and 9.2.12165a7, 9.8.1169a16. For passages in which *spoudaios* and *epieikês* have the same opposite, *phaulos*: compare 3.4.1113a25 with 3.5.1113b14.

these two human types, and then say something about how one becomes either kind, and whether what we do here is conducive to that end. To be honest, I admit now that this will mean committing the sin of evading, or at least skirting, the central question about the relation of knowledge, ignorance, and virtue, but perhaps this diversion will position us to better address that question another time.[5]

The virtuous (*spoudaios*)

The *Ethics* begins by asking what is the good for man (*agathos*); the answer—easily said, but not well understood—is that the good for man is "happiness." In the effort to understand what happiness is, Aristotle's starting point is to assume that we know the difference between someone who does something *passably* well, and someone who does it *very* well: we recognize the difference between a guitarist and a "good" guitarist. The good guitarist is distinguished by his virtue as a guitarist. The word "good" in this passage here translates *spoudaios*: what sets apart the good guitarist, one *serious* about his activity, is his virtue. When this connection between virtue and *spoudaios* is first introduced, neither appears to have a moral connotation. The initially amoral character of the inference is apparent when Aristotle says that it is the virtue of the eye that makes the eye function well and be a good eye, that is, a *spoudaios* eye (2.6 1106a18).[6] If the *spoudaios* guitarist is one who plays the guitar well, then the good man, one who is simply *spoudaios*, does well whatever it is humans beings characteristically do.

This connection between being *spoudaios* and having virtue is sufficiently strong that one might simply translate *spoudaios* as "virtuous." In English, the noun "virtue" has an adjective derived from it, that is, "virtuous": if a man has "virtue," then you would say, he is virtuous. In Greek, surprisingly, there is no corresponding adjective derived from the word for virtue, *arête*: if a man has *arête*, then you would say, he is *spoudaios*.[7]

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[5] I recognize that in many respects my reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not original. I have been much influenced and educated by colleagues and friends over the years, especially in a graduate course taught by Leon Kass, and as a teaching assistant to Amy Kass, both at the University of Chicago between 1989 and 1993. More recently my reading of the *Ethics* was much informed by Eric Salem's *In Pursuit of the Good: Intellect and Action in Aristotle's Ethics* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2010) and Ronna Burger's *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Joe Sachs's translation (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002) has proven useful to me, as my notes show.

6 Interestingly, in this passage as Aristotle switches his object from the eye, to a horse, and then to a human being, he changes from *spoudaios* to *agathos*: a *spoudaios* eye, a *spoudaios* horse, and an *agathos* human (2.6.1106a23).

[7] In Aristotle's *Categories*: "Sometimes, moreover, the quality possesses a well-defined name, but the thing that partakes of its nature does not also take its name from it. For instance, a good man [*ho spoudaios*] is good from

Yet *spoudaios* indicates not only the acquisition of the virtue belonging to a given activity, it also highlights the attitude and the effort that is the precondition for acquiring that virtue. The most immediate translation of *spoudaios* may be "earnest" or "serious"; it is an adjective derived from a noun, *spoudê*, which means "haste, zeal, or effort." *Spoudaia* things are "weighty" and "worth serious attention." How does one become a *good* guitarist? Virtue or skill does not belong to us by nature; practice and application, effort and zeal are the conditions for obtaining it. One becomes a *spoudaios* guitarist by taking the guitar seriously and playing it often. Taking something seriously is itself an action, expressed by the verb *spoudazô*. One can take any number of things seriously; examples mentioned by Aristotle include honor, wealth, and offspring (7.4 1143a30). What you are serious about shapes not only what you do, but insensibly, over time, it shapes who you are: if you take wealth very seriously, *too* seriously, then you will become ungenerous, illiberal, or unfree (4.1 1119b30). The man having all the ethical virtues, the great-souled man, is serious about only few things: he does not take minor setbacks seriously, and he does not "take to heart" things that cannot be avoided (4.3 1125a10-15 ff., Loeb trans.); but his gait and voice show that concerning a few things, he is the most serious of all.[8] The man having all ethical virtues is *ho spoudaios*, the serious one. Sachs translates this as "the man of serious stature" or "serious worth."[9] I will prefer the simple English word "virtuous": so that whenever this lecture refers to the "virtuous" man, I mean very precisely the one Aristotle calls *spoudaios*.

How does one become virtuous? Ethical virtues, like skills, are acquired by practice, you have to work at them.[10] You become just by performing just actions in transactions with others; you acquire courage by acting as a courageous man would in dangerous situations. To a young adult, the vicious action may be pleasurable and the virtuous action may be painful; punishment is generally required to deter us from one and steer us towards the other. How you are raised and habituated from childhood makes all the difference (2.1 1103b25). Correct penalties and rewards

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possessing the quality, virtue [*arête*]. We do not, however, derive the term, 'good' from the other term, 'virtue.' Yet this is seldom the case" (10b6-10, Loeb translation). Passages in the *Ethics* in which to have the virtues is to be *spoudaios*: 6.12 1143b22-30; 6.12 1144a11-18.

[8] From the statement that he takes only a few things seriously, one might have inferred that he is a buffoon, but the statements about his slow gait and low voice suggest that he is uncommonly serious about those few things. Later, Aristotle speaks of the one who strives (*spoudazô*) to acquire the noble for himself (9.8 1168b25): this seems to be the *spoudaios* man in the full sense.

[9] In his translation of the *Poetics*, Benardete and Davis similarly translate *spoudaios* the "man of stature" (*Aristotle: On Poetics*, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002]).

[10] *Ethics* 2.1 1103a32. Sachs's translation points to the root referring to work (*energesantes*).

are meted out first by the parents and later by the laws. It is not enough to be well-cared for and guided in your youth, you have to pursue correct actions in adulthood in order to establish this disposition as part of your character.

All of this you already know. The upshot for the present is that the work of the classroom seems to contribute little to becoming virtuous. Aristotle points this out periodically through the *Ethics*. He says that knowing what the virtues are does not help the virtuous man to act virtuously, since virtuous action arises not from what he knows, but from his character.[11] And Aristotle derides people who, *thinking* that they are philosophizing, expect to become virtuous (*spoudaioi*) merely by making speeches rather than by doing what is right.[12]

Yet Aristotle also says that his inquiry is not merely for the sake of knowing *what virtue is* and thinking about it, but for the sake of becoming good (*agathos*), for the sake of acquiring virtue and exercising it.[13] We seem to be left with a paradox: the inquiry into happiness and virtue aims at making one good, but the completion of this inquiry, knowing what happiness is, and what virtue is, seems insufficient to make one good.

To think about this disjunction between knowing the good and becoming good, we have to go back almost to the beginning of the book. In the early chapters Aristotle considers the opinion, expressed in the *Republic*, that if one knew the good in itself, on the basis of knowing the "universal good," one would also know the particular goods, the things that are good for man, and knowing them, one would also choose them. Against this Aristotle argues that "good" (*agathos*) is meant in several ways, so there is no "common good that is one and universal" (Sachs trans., 1.6 1196a28). Even if there were some one thing good-in-itself, it would not be something that could be possessed and enacted by a human (1.6 1096b30). Aristotle relents somewhat in this critique and admits that there may well be an underlying reason we use the

[11] 6.12 1143b23-25. "We are not rendered any more capable of healthy and vigorous action by knowing the science of medicine or of physical training." This is said to bring into question whether prudence is necessary to be virtuous; it is possible that the statement is retracted or qualified in the subsequent course of the argument. As it turns out, prudence is necessary to being virtuous in the complete sense, but this intellectual virtue still may not require a theoretical understanding of what virtue is.

[12] *Ethics* 2.4.1105b13. Burger, p. 55. Compare 10.9 1179a5, where it is said that speeches are not sufficient to make men decent (*epieikês*), discussed briefly below.

[13] 2.2 1103b26; 10.9 1172b1. The context in 10.9 implies that it is not sufficient to know what virtue is, one must bring it into being, and because this requires a good upbringing and practice into adulthood, bringing virtue into being requires a political science that can prescribe good laws. But this would imply that the one who inquires into and learns what happiness is is himself not made virtuous by it, but only learns how to frame laws that might lead to the happiness of others. The passage in 2.2 seems to indicate that coming to know what virtue is should be good not only for others, but also good for oneself.

word "good" in the related ways that we do, but he still denies that this underlying connection between the different ways of saying "good" could form the basis of how knowledgeable men seek the good in their lives (1.6 1196b26).

In this way Aristotle descends quickly from the good-in-itself to the good-for-man or to happiness. But even asserting that the good is "happiness" does not advance his inquiry very far, because, as we noted, the word "happiness" requires explication. This brings us to where we began: Aristotle explicates happiness by ascertaining the *work* characteristic of a human being, and in this context he observes that the difference between the guitarist simply and the good guitarist, or the *spoudaios* guitarist, is that the good guitarist has the virtue of playing guitar. The movement of the argument is from the good-in-itself, which either does not exist or cannot be known, to the good-for-man, which is our end but whose form is often debated, to the good human being, the *spoudaios* human being, whose goodness is recognizable. The good-in-itself is hidden or obscure, whereas the virtuous man is a form of goodness recognizable to us.

Thus, the virtuous man takes the place of the good-in-itself as a paradigm for recognizing and attaining the human good.[14] Whereas we mostly find virtuous actions painful, the virtuous (*spoudaios*) man finds them pleasurable. What the virtuous man finds pleasant *is* pleasant by nature (1.8.1099a7-24). Whatever *seems* good to the virtuous man *is* good in fact.[15] There is no science of the good-in-itself to distinguish the true good from the merely apparent good, but there exists a human being for whom *what appears* and *what is* are the same. When judging what is pleasurable and what is noble, the virtuous man serves as our measure (*metron*). Aristotle defines virtue, but you cannot become virtuous simply by acting from your comprehension of the definition; you must look toward a virtuous human being and act the way he acts. The fact that the *spoudaios* man is the measure for us is therefore a sign of the limit to which knowing what-virtue-is can be the means for becoming virtuous.[16]

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[14] In the chapter on the good as such (1.6), Aristotle entertains the view that one might have the good simply as a pattern, *paradeigma*, by which one might know the various goods that can be possessed or carried out, but he then observes that those skilled in the arts or sciences (*epistêmai*) do not in fact look to the good in itself in order to produce a good product (1.6 21097a1-13). The *spoudaios* man seems to take the place of the good in itself as the pattern or model by which we know good particulars. To be clear, Aristotle does not say he is a paradigm; that is the inference I have made in connecting 1.6.21097a1-13 with 3.4.1113a25 (below).

[15] 3.4.1113a25; cf. 10.5.1176a17. In the first passage Aristotle uses *spoudaios* three times in short succession, suggesting that this more than anything else characterizes him. Later, Aristotle says, "as has been said, virtue and the virtuous [*spoudaios*] man seem to be the standard in everything" (9.4.1166a13, Loeb trans.).

[16] Perhaps I am simply saying that, according to Aristotle, it is not sufficient to say, "virtue is knowledge," as Socrates often implies in Plato's dialogues. See Ronna Burger on this question.

Given this disjunction between knowledge and practice, if the primary aim of a liberal education is "fundamental knowledge" and "unifying ideas," there seems to be little prospect that it will lead to us to acquire a virtuous character. To acquire virtue requires serious application and repeated practice of noble actions. It is true, to flourish in a liberal education requires an analogous discipline and zeal. Not accidentally, the English word "student" is derived from a Latin word, *studeo*, which means, "to be zealous and diligent," and "to apply oneself" to something; it is a fine translation of *spoudazô*. In fact, in at least one medieval Latin translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, *spoudaios* is translated as *studiosus*: in its origin, a "student" is someone zealous and serious about learning, someone who exemplifies the seriousness of the good man.

And perhaps this is fitting: as a necessary condition of our liberal education, we have to get serious about it and subject ourselves to the rigors of Greek paradigms and Newtonian theorems. We have strange conventions by which we impose an unusual discipline on ourselves: we attend seminars on weekday evenings and lectures on Friday evenings, times usually reserved for recreation. We thereby draw no strict divide between recreation and the serious, if leisured pursuit of knowledge. Because we impose these rigors upon ourselves jointly, they become a kind of law for us: we disapprove in varying degrees of anyone who shirks these responsibilities. This unusual discipline may aid students and tutors in becoming *spoudaios* readers of Greek and *spoudaios* geometricians, and the discipline itself may distract us from a variety of temptations, but the discipline alone does not make us *spoudaios* simply. Subjecting oneself to discipline in these matters does not necessarily lead to virtue as such: the disciplined musician or athlete may become a first-rate guitarist or swimmer and still have a dubious character, and same seems true of the studious.

The decent (*epieikês*)

Let us turn from the virtuous man to the decent one. The broadest translation of *epieikês* might be "fitting" or "suitable," although "reasonable" and "fair" are common. *Epieikês* is derived from a verb, *eioka*; "to seem likely" or "to befit." *Epieikês* thus refers to what is fitting or fair, perhaps especially insofar as what is fitting or fair is apparent.[17] Within the context of the *Ethics*, *epieikês* is most frequently translated "equitable," a translation justified by the discussion of the quality in Book 5. There Aristotle describes the "equitable" man as one who may appear

[17] The related word *eikôn* means "image" or "semblance."

unjust when he chooses something contrary to the law, but who is nevertheless just because he chooses as the lawgiver would have chosen. I will say more about this in a moment. "Equitable" is no doubt the appropriate English word to describe this quality in its legal context; this adjective comes from the noun, "equity," a term in jurisprudence that refers to the practice of considering the "reason and the spirit" of a statute under unusual circumstances.[18] The word *epieikês*, however, appears intermittently and often throughout the *Ethics* with no allusion to its jurisprudential sense. Sachs translates *epieikês* as "decent," on the grounds that it is not primarily a legal term, but a common way to name human goodness.[19] In fact, Aristotle himself points out that the *epieikês* are praised so highly, that the word is sometimes used synonymously with *agathos*, or good.[20] As a translation for *epieikês*, "decent" also has the advantage of being derived from the Latin, *decere*, a word that also means "to be fitting" or "becoming": consider the word "decorous," which comes from the same root. In other words, as a translation of *epieikês*, "decent" has the advantage of being a word whose Latin origin is very similar to the root of the Greek word it is translating.[21] The obvious disadvantage of "decent" is that the word is rather faint praise in English: the *epieikês* man is genuinely good, not merely satisfactory.

Why should we turn from the virtuous man to the decent one? Why should we pry them apart in the first place? One of the sources of this for me was Aristotle's *Poetics*, which I will touch on in passing. Epic and tragedy can have as their subject virtuous (*spoudaios*) men and "things of stature"; Homer is the poet *par excellence* of the virtuous man.[22] In tragedy one sees the protagonist, a man of serious stature, make an error of some kind and pass from good fortune

[18] OED online, "equity, n.," II.3.
[19] Sachs also points out that "equitable" is a poor translation for *epieikês* because "equitable" has as its root, the "equal," whereas Aristotle points out that the *epieikês* man, in making a proper judgment not in accord with the law, goes beyond what is equal ([*to ison*] Sachs translation, p. 203; cf. 1130b13, where the "just" is associated with the *ison*, the "fair" or the "equal"). Bartlett and Collins also choose "decent" and "decency," but they employ "equitable" and "equity" in the chapter that deals with the jurisprudential context (*Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011]). It is useful to note that the English adjective "equitable" is derived from the noun, "equity," whereas, conversely, the Greek noun *epieikeia* is derived from the adjective, *epieikês*. In Greek, the jurisprudential term is derived from the primary phenomenon, the decent man; in English, the reverse seems to be the case.
[20] *Ethics* 5.10 1137b1. More precisely, the comparative of *epieikês* is used in place of the *beltion*, "better." To my knowledge, Aristotle does not say anything analogous about the relation of *spoudaios* to *agathos*: is *epieikês* closer than *spoudaios* to *agathos*?
[21] The kinship between "decent" and "seemly" is more apparent in their negations: "indecent" is clearly "unseemly" or unbefitting.
[22] Ch. 2 1448a1; ch. 3 1448a26; ch. 4 1448b35; ch 5 1449b10. Tragedy is distinguished from comedy by treating what is *spoudaios* rather than *phaulos*. Interestingly enough, Aristotle says that poetry is "more philosophic and more *spoudaios*" than history.

to bad; in viewing this turn of events we experience pity and fear.[23] In contrast with this, Aristotle somewhat surprisingly says, to show the decent man changing from good fortune to bad would be "loathsome."[24] If is appropriate for the decent man to appear in tragedy, he must not be the central figure. This distinction in the *Poetics* provoked me to wonder, what is the difference between being virtuous and being decent? Why is the fall into misfortune loathsome for the decent man, but pitiable for the virtuous one? Is the virtuous man susceptible to error in a way that the decent is not?

Given this distinction between the virtuous man and the decent with respect to tragedy, and returning to the *Ethics*, perhaps it is not a coincidence that the decent man makes two brief appearances in the chapters treating virtues in conversation: truthfulness, wit, and tact.[25] According to Aristotle, whoever is truthful when nothing is at stake seems to be decent, since he seems to be a "lover of truth" (*philalêthês*; 4.7 1127b2). Habitually truthful speech is no guarantee of decency, but it appears to be an important sign of it. The subject comes up again in the immediately following discussion of wit and tact: wit is distinguished from the vices of buffoonery and boorishness, going to excess in trying to make people laugh, and never saying anything funny (4.8 1128a5-17). Superadded to the virtue of wit is *tact*: the tactful person will say to others, and he will allow others to say to him, only things that are fitting for a "decent and liberal" person (1128a19).[26] If we are infer that the decent man is witty no less than tactful, and if wit is understood as somehow opposed to seriousness, then the decent man emerges as somewhat distinct from the virtuous man: escaping the boundaries of the serious, he indulges in playful speech, nevertheless without saying what should not be said. The decent, witty, tactful man is

[23] Ch. 13 1453a7.

[24] Benardette trans., ch. 13 1452b31. It is "loathsome" (*miaros*), that is, repugnant, foul, or unclean. I take loathsome to be opposed more to pitiable than to fearful: an outcome being pitiable is connected with its being undeserved (ch. 13 1453a5); to be loathsome seems similar in this respect. Aristotle says that the subject of the tragedy is neither *epieikês* nor wicked (*poneros*), but "in between"; he is not distinguished in virtue or justice, although he enjoys fame and good fortune (1453a7). In the *Poetics* the *epieikês* appears to be the higher type than the subject of tragedy, the man of serious statue, whereas in the *Ethics* the *spoudaios* man often appears to be the higher type. See Burger 90-91.

[25] On the association of these three virtues as conversational, 4.8 1128b5. So far as I know, these are the first appearances of *epieikes* in the *Ethics*, although I suspect that this only means I have inadvertently passed over earlier instances.

[26] "Wit" translates *eutrapelos*, or "easily turning" (Bartlett/Collins, note, p. 87), and "tact" translates *epidexiotes*, also meaning clever or handy (the word literally means "on the right side," like the English word "dexterous"). Both qualities point to agility of thought.

liberal as well; he has the virtue characteristic of a free man.[27] He is free, if not great; he avoids ironic condescension as well as boasting.

It is in the following book, on justice, in which decency (*epieikeia*) first takes center stage; to understand its appearance, it necessary to remind ourselves of a few things about Aristotle's treatment of justice. He observes that we typically use the word "unjust" ambiguously: we say it, first, about someone who breaks the law and, second, about someone who is unfair (*anisos*) and takes more than his share (5.1 1129a33). "Just," like unjust, has two senses: in the first sense, "to be just" is to be lawful. This is justice inasmuch as it comprehends the ethical virtues, and so stakes a claim to being the comprehensive virtue: when the law is well framed, it prescribes a variety of actions, all in accord with the several virtues (1129b29). To be just in this sense means to practice all the virtues. Now "justice" in its second sense means to be "fair" and not to take more than one's due; even though this second sense is the principal subject of book 5, it is justice in the comprehensive sense that concerns us here.

Since the lawfully just is virtue as a whole, and since the virtuous (*spoudaios*) man is the one who has all the virtues, it is fitting that the lawfully just extends over whatever the virtuous man cares about (5.2 1130b5). This is not to say that the virtuous man is merely lawful; he chooses lawful actions not because the law commands them, but because they are noble (6.12 1144a15-18). But the life of the virtuous man, seeking the noble and its concomitant honors, moves within the ambit of the law. This connection between the virtuous man and the law is echoed in the *Politics*: here Aristotle asks whether the virtue of a "good man" is the same as the virtue of the "good citizen"; more precisely, he asks whether the virtue of an *agathos* man (*anêr*) is the same as the virtue of a *spoudaios* citizen.[28] Goodness simply is associated with being a man simply; what is suitable for a citizen depends on the regime, so that the goodness pertaining to a citizen depends in large measure on the law.[29]

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[27] Liberality more properly corresponds to magnificence, but I have contrasted it with greatness of soul because I have not had the occasion to mention magnificence. The chapter plays on the etymological connections between childish pastimes, jesting, and being educated (all involving the *paid-* root). Although I suppose the truly *spoudaios* man must have all the virtues, it is difficult to imagine the "man of serious worth" as witty. Late in *Ethics* Aristotle points the absurdity of laboring and striving (*spoudazein*) for the sake of amusement (*paidia*; 10.6 1176b27).

[28] *Ethics* 3.1.1276b22, 3.2.1277b32, 1278b1.

[29] What it means to be a virtuous citizen depends on who is a citizen; who is a citizen depends on the type of regime: men who would be citizens in a democracy might be excluded from citizenship in an oligarchy or polity (3.2 1276b32). In these passages Aristotle at least once replaces *agathos* with *spoudaios*, thus comparing the *spoudaios* man with the *spoudaios* citizen (3.2 1276b33): what is a *spoudaios* citizen is regime dependent; *spoudaios* taken

This equation between the just and the lawful supposes that the laws are well framed. Later Aristotle draws a distinction between what is [politically] just according to law and what is [politically] just according to nature (5.7 1134b18). He thereby pries open a space between the lawful and the just; this opening between justice and the law prepares us for the introduction of decency (*epieikeia*). The thematic discussion of decency begins with a problem: it sometimes happens that a good or decent man, whom we are inclined to say is "just," does what is not lawful. This problem turns out to be not especially vexing: Aristotle explains that the law is always a general statement, but in particular circumstances application of the general statement is not just. The decent man does what is outside the law as a correction to the law; he remains congruent with the judgment of the lawgiver. The decent man is therefore more just than he would have been had he simply followed the law. The solution of the problem leads to paradox: the lawfully just concerns whatever the virtuous man cares about; decency sometimes contradicts what is lawfully just; nevertheless, the lawfully just and decency are both "virtuous," they are both *spoudaios* according to Aristotle, and yet decency is better.[30] Decency is virtuous, but it is something more than that as well.

This treatment of decency coming at the end of the discussion of the moral virtues prepares us for the intellectual virtues (*dianoetika*), and especially for the intellectual virtue of prudence. This seems fitting, since we first noted it as associated with the virtues of conversation: truthfulness, wit, and tact. Decency is that by which one chooses not to follow the general or categorical statement of the law, but to make an exception; prudence is that by which one selects the particular action that leads to the correctly desired end. Both qualities involve the correct apprehension of particulars, as distinguished from obedience to general statements. In Book 6 Aristotle says that one judges what is decent by the faculty of "consideration" (*gnome*); by having consideration for others (*suggnome*), the decent man is forgiving.[31] Consideration, this

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simply may not be. Only a few men can be entirely virtuous, but the lawgiver would strive for all citizens to be *spoudaios* as citizens: to be a *spoudaios* citizen is something lower or less accomplished than to be *spoudaios* simply. Still in these chapters of the *Politics*, as in the opening chapters of *Ethics* 5, *spoudaios* seems to be understood as lawful. Another interesting passage on this question appears in book 10: the care that citizens have for one another in common is *epieikês* whenever the underlying laws happen to be *spoudaioi* (1180a35).

[30] *Ethics* 5.10 1137b10. There appears to be a paradox here: if the lawfully just is concerned with *spoudaios* things, and decency, in contradicting the lawfully just, is also *spoudaios*, then it is clear that *spoudaios* takes on different valences.

[31] *Ethics* 6.11.1143a19-24. Sachs points out the etymological connection between what I am calling "consideration" as a faculty (*gnome*) and being considerate or forgiving towards others ([*sun-gnome*], Sachs' note, p. 113). Sachs,

faculty by which we are decent, is closely allied with intellect and astuteness (*sunesis*); all three capacities appear to be natural (1143b8). All three capacities converge with prudence as a perception of a particular choice-worthy action.

Still consideration, this natural faculty that lies at the basis of decency, is not equivalent to prudence. The prudent man is one who deliberates well about what is advantageous for him and about living well as a whole (6.5 1140a24). Knowing how to live well in this way is not separable from knowing the good for one's city and how to attain it (6.8 1142a7-10). From this it is clear that prudent deliberation requires very extensive experience. Prudence must be acquired; consideration appears to be natural.

So decency, grounded in consideration, helps us trace the transition from the ethical virtues to the intellectual virtues.[32] Decency, as a correction to what is lawfully just, is the first suggestion that the moral virtues are incomplete. It thereby points to the perfection of the moral virtues by the intellectual virtue of prudence without presuming for itself possession of prudence. Decency permits one to judge against the law but in agreement with the lawgiver; prudence in the full sense is the wisdom necessary to be a lawgiver.

From what I have said, it would appear that the decent man is a higher type than the virtuous man, but other passages bring this into doubt.[33] First, although we have said that decency points towards the intellectual virtue of prudence, Aristotle later says that having virtue is a condition for being prudent, since it is having virtue that leads one to aim at the right end; without virtue, one is not prudent, but merely clever.[34] Perhaps not all *spoudaioi* men are prudent, but every prudent man is *spoudaios*. A second reason for doubting the superiority of decency is found in the *Politics*: when discussing aristocratic regimes, Aristotle speaks as if decent men

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incidentally, prefers the words "thoughtfulness" and "compassion," respectively. This passage suggests that the exceptions to the law discussed in the chapters on equity were intended to refer above all to cases where punishment under the law is reduced or waived. Having forgiveness or consideration is the most common sense intended by *epieikês* in Plutarch's *Lives*.

[32] The idea that the chapter on wit and tact in book 4 initiates or anticipates the turn toward the intellectual virtues of book 6 was first brought to my attention by Leon Kass.

[33] The passages from the *Poetics* also admit of diverse interpretations on this point: is it loathsome for the decent man to suffer a reversal of fortune because he is somehow a higher type than the virtuous man? Or might it be inappropriate because he is more common, less high?

[34] 6.12.1144a13-23. The word "clever" here is not that same as "astute" above. In the *Politics*, when Aristotle asks whether the virtues of the *agathos anêr* and the *spoudaios* citizen are same, he says they are the same only in the person of one who has prudence and who rules (3.3.1278b1-5; the connection to prudence appears at 3.2.1277b26). At *Ethics* 7.10 1152a8, Aristotle says that whoever has prudence is virtuous, i.e., *spoudaios*.

were more common than wholly virtuous ones.[35] Finally, as I mentioned before, whenever Aristotle notes that the good man is the measure of our desires, our pleasures, and our actions, he refers explicitly to the *spoudaios* man, and never to the decent. If both types of men are good in some sense, the *spoudaios* is the unique measure of the class, while decency admits of degrees.[36] Rather than contriving a relative ranking for the two, I would say that calling someone "decent" points to something different than calling him "virtuous." To call a man "virtuous" points to his character, to his desires and pleasures, to his heart and his gut, to what he takes most seriously. To call him "decent" points to his habits of mind, to his work and leisure activities, and to what he thinks and says in the company of others.[37]

It is in the books on friendship where the decent man stands most often in the foreground, even if the virtuous man is much in evidence here as well. Since the word *epieikês* is sometimes used synonymously with *agathos*, as we noted, it should not be surprising that the good friendship is sometimes referred to as a decent friendship. Men and women who enjoy good friendships are said to be decent.[38] We might expect decency to emerge more fully in the discussion of friendship once we realize that friendship, like decency, is similar to justice but superior to it. Justice demands precision; it demands equality; if equality is not appropriate, it demands proportional compensation. In seeking justice, you ensure that you do not get less than you deserve, and your counterpart does the same. Decency loosens this precision: the decent man waives the strict calculation of the penalty in order to attain the end intended by the lawgiver.

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[35] If the decent men rule the city, many inhabitants will be excluded from having a share in rule, but if the most virtuous man (*spoudaiotatos*) rules, still more inhabitants will be excluded (3.6.1281a29). The use of the superlative in the second case allows for a reading in which "decent" and "virtuous" are synonyms, and Aristotle is distinguishing the rule of many decent-virtuous men from the rule of the single most decent-virtuous man. But the use of *spoudaios* with the superlative may also suggest that being "virtuous" is an extreme in a way that being "decent" is not.

[36] *Ethics* 9.8.1167a33; cf. 9.12.1172a11, discussed below.

[37] Aristotle says that, although the unrestrained man does not do what he ought to and his character is bad, his choice (*prohairesis*) is "decent" (7.10.1152a18). Earlier he says of the restrained man, although he is not good or virtuous, his self-restraint itself is a good disposition (*spoudaia hexis*; 7.8.1151a28, cf. 7.1.1145b9, 7.9.1151b28). Your thoughts and activities may be *epieikês*; the disposition of your character may be *spoudaios*. In the same context, Aristotle speaks of pleasures as being *spoudaios*: these are the pleasures rightly preferred by the *spoudaios* person (7.14.1154b2, cf. 7.4.1143a23).

[38] Aristotle calls the durable friendship of parents and children, under auspicious circumstances, *epieikês* (8.6 1158b23). He also says that the friendship of husband and wife will be not merely one of pleasure or utility, but based on virtue, if they are decent (8.12 1162a26). The equivalence of *epieikês* and *agathos*, at least in reference to friendship, is implied at 8.4 1157a17. "The friendship of decent people is decent" (9.12 1172a10, Sachs trans.). On decent men and women, see the afterword.

Similarly, in a good friendship each wishes for the good of his friend more than for the good for himself. Friendship is a more generous, more liberal arrangement than justice.[39]

Not only does decency share a kinship with friendship, towards the end of the discussion of friendship, decency looks like the ground for the possibility of friendship at all. Aristotle observes that the things we attribute to friendship are also things we observe in the way the decent man behaves towards himself. Aristotle makes four arguments on this point; I will mention only two. First, a friend wishes for and seeks to bring about the good of his friend for the sake of that friend, but the decent man does this same thing for himself, and he does it especially for the part of himself that is most for the sake of itself; this is the thinking part (*dianoetikos*, 9.4 1166a3; 1166a15). The thinking part has this status because no one would wish for all the goods in the world on the condition that he become someone entirely different, so that the thinking part seems to be most of all what each person is. Now for the second argument: friends wish to spend time together, but the decent man wishes to spend time with himself, for his mind is well furnished with things to contemplate, such as memories and hopes.[40] This analogy between being a friend to another and being a friend to oneself underwrites the inference that the capacity of a decent man to be friends with another rests on his capacity to be a friend to himself. It is because he is a friend to himself, and stable in this friendship with himself, that he also serves well as a friend to another. In explaining how decency is the ground of friendship, Aristotle permits us to peer into the soul of the decent man: the good friendship of two persons turns out to be the soul of the decent man writ large. To be a friend to oneself means to be a friend to the thinking part of oneself, since this is authoritative part, the part that seems to be the

[39] A friendship based merely on utility may exhibit the exact calculation appropriate to justice. Aristotle says that the friendship of pleasure is closer to the good friendship than is the friendship of utility, for there is more "liberality" in it (8.6 1158a22). He notes the view, as well, that when men are friends, there is no need of justice (8.1 1155a27; Burger, however, raises important questions about this statement).

[40] (9.4 1166a8, 1166a23. In paraphrasing the arguments, I have exaggerated how often Aristotle specifically names the decent man: he mentions decency at the opening and the closing of this four-part argument, but not in between (9.4 1166a11, 1166a31). In between he does mention the virtuous man once in typical fashion, noting that virtue and the virtuous man is the standard of each (1166a13). Aristotle raises a question about whether one can be a friend to oneself; it may be possible insofar as he is dual or composite (1166a35). Aristotle has said that human nature is not simple (7.14 1154b22).

whole.[41] In viewing friendship as the soul writ large, we find a soul that obeys the intellect, but not in the way that the subjects of a city obey a despot or even a monarch.[42]

By way of contrast, a base man, one lacking decency and subject to strong passions, is at variance with himself. At odds with himself, it is difficult for him to be a reliable friend to others. What passes for friendship depends on the circumstances; when circumstances change, friendship vanishes. Aristotle even goes to far as to say that base men have friendly feelings toward themselves insofar as they presume themselves to be decent and are thus satisfied with themselves (9.4.1166b5). The false presumption of decency looks like the condition for sustaining friendship in those who are not decent at all.

Let me take a step back here for a moment to say something too cursory about the decent man and virtuous man in these chapters: I have emphasized the appearance of the decent man in the chapters on friendship, while the virtuous man also appears woven through the same passages. But in these chapters decent men come in degrees, some are more decent, some less; the virtuous man, by contrast, is an extreme, he is the standard and measure. *Epieikês* is a comparative, *spoudaios* a superlative.[43] As a result Aristotle brings up the virtuous man in limit cases: to take one example, he asks: if the virtuous man is self-sufficient and leads a blessed life, does he need friends at all?[44] Can one be so virtuous that one has no need of other human beings? To take a second example: we find generally that the virtuous and the decent both seek what is noble, but of the *decent*, Aristotle says that he does what is best and obeys the intellect; of the *virtuous*, he says, he will give up wealth, offices, and all the goods that men strive for,

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[41] 9.8 1168b32-1169a4. Above my phrase "thinking part" translates *dianoetikos*; here, it translates *nous*. I have preferred "thinking part" to "intellect" to preserve the etymological connection between the two Greek words, at the price of not distinguishing them in this lecture.

[42] *Ethics* 9.8 1169a16: "for intelligence always chooses for itself what is best, and the good man (*epieikês*) always obeys his intelligence." Cf. 10.9 1180a5-19. I say that this soul is not a monarchy or tyranny because it seems important that the soul is "writ large" in a friendship of two rather than in a city of many (as in the *Republic*): there cannot be friendship where inequality is very great, whereas cities, of course, permit very great inequality. Compare *Politics* 1.2 1254b6: the rule of intellect over the desires is not despotic but "kingly or political". I take the "kingly" rule of the intellect over the desires to refer to the soul of the contemplative; in the soul of the decent I take the rule of the intellect over the desires to be only "political."

[43] *Epieikês* is literally a comparative at 9.3 1165b23. Also consider 10.5 1175b25, although the subject here is activities, not persons. Burger makes an analogous observation about the difference between the decent and the virtuous ("serious") in the context of discussing friendship (p. 172).

[44] 9.9 1169b2ff, see especially 1169b14, 1170a8, 1170a14, 1170b19. This chapter focuses on the *spoudaios*; *epieikeis* is used once to refer to his practices (1170a3), as often happens. Aristotle does seem to use *epieikês* synonymously with *spoudaios* at 1170a28 (both are said to be "blessed" in this chapter). Aristotle's conclusion is that even the *spoudaios* man will have friends, for he will attain his end more readily with them than without them.

even his life, for the sake of what is noble.[45] Recall that the virtuous man, unlike the decent, is a fitting subject for tragedy.

How does one become decent? And what, if anything, would this have to do with a liberal education? At the close of the *Ethics* Aristotle points out a difference between the decent man and most men: the decent may be persuaded by speeches to do what is noble; most men are not susceptible to persuasive speech, but must be threatened with punishments (10.9 1180a8). As Aristotle jokes, if speeches were sufficient for making men decent, "then justly 'would [these speakers] take many large fees.'"[46] From this passage, it would seem that a liberal education could hardly make one decent. Within this context it seems one is made decent the same way one is made virtuous: by the law, that is, by thoughtful speech armed with penalties and rewards.

Rather than draw this conclusion, I would like to try out an alterative: that friendship is another, in fact, superior means to becoming decent. I want to propose briefly the possibility that the connection between decency and friendship that I touched on before operates in both directions: if the decency of an individual is the ground of his being friends with others, conversely friendship with others may be a means of his becoming decent. The upshot of this would be that it is easier to be a friend to another—and to find another to be a friend to you—than for you to be a friend to yourself. As Aristotle says, the company of good men (*agathoi*) may be a kind of training in virtue.[47]

Let's frame the question a little differently: in the multiplicity within oneself, how do the parts come to be in harmony with, and harken to, the thinking part? There does not appear to be any knowledge of the good-in-itself, or even any knowledge of the human-good, that invests the thinking part with sufficient authority over the rest of the self. There does not appear to be any

[45] 9.8 1169a15-25. Aristotle's comment in this passage that the *spoudaios* would give up many years of life to live nobly for one year reminds one of Achilles, which may be appropriate, if Homer, according to the *Poetics*, is the poet of the *spoudaios*.

[46] Sachs trans. Aristotle moves from saying that the "decent" may be persuaded by speeches, to saying that the "free" or "liberal youths" and "the well-born" may be persuaded as well. Does he widen the category? Are there "free youths" who are not yet decent, but nevertheless can be persuaded to pursue the noble?

[47] 9.9 1170a12. Note, however, that this passage does not mention decency, and the context is the *spoudaios* and whether he needs friends. The application of this passage to decency is perhaps legitimated by the conclusion of the books on friendship, where it is said that the friendship of decent men is itself decent, and the decency of this friendship is augmented by the friends being together (9.12 1172a11). Also note that the passage about the company of good men is attributed to Theogonis; also attributed to Theogonis is the observation about the high fees that one could claim if one could make men good by speeches alone (10.9 1179b7). The coincidence connecting these two passages suggests that Aristotle, too, may think of friendship as a means to make men decent, in lieu of speeches simply.

direct way to give the thinking part the "strength" to overcome desires and passions.[48] We noted before that those who think they philosophize and talk about virtue do not become virtuous by doing so. What if the so-called "strength" or "weakness" of the thinking part lies not in the thinking part at all, but in the rest of the soul, in whether and how the other parts harken to the thinking part? On this supposition, the so-called strength of the thinking part would be a function of the soul as a whole. On this supposition, friendship may be a way to prepare desires and passions to harken to the thinking part.

I will say a few words on behalf of this conjecture. The first condition for friendship is thinking-well (*eunoia*) of someone else, thinking him to be decent.[49] Friendship begins with how one frames another human being within one's mind. But simply thinking well of someone else is not friendship: to this goodwill there has to be added affection (*philesis*) and reciprocity (8.2 1156a2). The person you think well of must know you think well of him, and he must think well of you. We seek this respect from others because we seek confirmation from others about what to think about ourselves (8.8 1159a22). It is harder to recognize decency in oneself than to see it in another.[50] Recognizing it in another, and acknowledging that another has seen it in us, seems to be a training for recognizing it in oneself, by oneself. This mutual recognition must include affection as well: because of the connection between internal friendships and external friendships, when you love what you think well of in another, the passionate part of your soul becomes a little more obedient to its own thinking part.

If this conjecture is correct, if friendship is a means to becoming decent, the question remains, what does this have to do with liberal education? On this point, beginning from the *Ethics*, I can say only a little. You might think well of a virtuous stranger by observing his deeds from a distance; you may take him to be the measure of your own actions and emulate him, but this is not friendship. The first stages of friendship, a pleasurable friendship, begin with the

[48] Aristotle implies that spiritedness (*thumos*) does hear reason more than desire does, but that it mishears it (7.6 1149a25). It does not seem sufficient simply to ally spiritedness to reason. Michael Grenke, however, pointed out that in *Politics* 7 Aristotle says friendship has its origin in *thumos*.
[49] *Ethics* 9.5 1166b30, 9.5 1167a19, 9.11 1171b2. Aristotle says goodwill is prompted by "virtue and some kind of decency" (*epieikeia tina*; 9.5 1167a19).
[50] 9.9 1169b34. This would be an appropriate moment to reflect on the etymology of *epieikês*, and its connection with seeming and befitting.

conversational virtues of wit and tact; they presume familiarity.[51] The core of friendship lies in sharing with a friend the awareness of one's existence; this shared awareness is attained most of all by sharing speeches and thoughts.[52] As a friendship becomes closer, as each knows the other as a second self; more and more the characteristic activity of this friendship becomes conversation. I would venture that these friendships are "liberal," and that they make you more liberal—at least in *Aristotle's* sense of the word. We have already seen that friendship, in contradistinction with justice, is concerned with giving freely rather than receiving what is due (cf. 8.13 1162b26). You no longer act under the compulsion of the law; you act for the sake of what is noble as it is made manifest for you in the figure of your friend. Decency, understood as doing what the lawgiver *intended*, rather than what the law *prescribes*, likewise points to this freedom. It may be telling that it is precisely in the chapter on the seemingly trivial conversational virtues of wit and tact that Aristotle says the tactful, liberal man is a "law unto himself" (4.8 1128a33).

At the close of the chapters on friendship, Aristotle emphasizes that friends should live together in order to share whatever activities they take pleasure in, whether it is partying, playing games, athletics, or philosophizing (9.12 1172a3). It is a little disappointing that Aristotle does not distinguish these activities in terms of their worth, although it becomes clear in the end that the last activity is more "serious" than the others (10.6 1176b32). If my starting point is Aristotle's *Ethics* and the differences between *spoudaios* and *epieikês*, this is as far as I can go in arguing that friendship, especially a friendship grounded in truthful, witty, and philosophical conversation, can make one a decent human being.

As a postscript, let me say that, even if the conversation of decent friends touches on philosophy, I do not mean to draw the conclusion that the path to decency requires passing through the contemplative life as Aristotle describes it. The contemplative life is solitary and divine, suitable for a simple being, while we are composite (7.14 1154b21). I admit that, if being friends with another is the finest way to learn to see oneself more clearly, then the self-reflective friendship of the decent does appear to anticipate the continuous activity of the divine intellect, thought thinking itself. Towards the end of the *Ethics*, one suspects that the reflective activity of

[51] 8.4 1157a6, 8.6 1158a30, By "first stages of friendship," I mean the friendship of pleasure, which might become a good friendship with time. If I understand these passages, wit would come into play before tact does.
[52] 9.9 1170b11. Here I only assume what is the conclusion of an elaborate, lengthy argument, analyzed in some detail by Burger (p. 181).

the simple intellect somehow provides the underlying potential for the decent man to be friends with himself and with others. Yet even if the activity of the intellect somehow underwrites the friendship of the decent, it need not follow that one must first achieve and then sustain the contemplative life in order to attain the goodness belonging to the decent. I suggest rather that a friendship *anchored* in conversation, even if not always *occupied* with conversation, may be the surest means for us to attain at least one form of the human good. If our liberal education improves our characters at all, I maintain it is not by enacting the intellect's solitary activity of contemplation, but by means of the friendly conversations with one another that imperceptibly strengthen our friend, the intellect, within us.

An afterword on the gender of spoudaios *and* epieikês.[53] Both words are adjectives; in Greek, adjectives are turned into nouns by adding a definite article; the definite article shows the gender; so far as I can recall in the *Ethics*, the gender is always masculine. So I generally refer to *ho spoudaios* as "the virtuous man" and *epieikês* as the "decent man." Since no noun is present, one might infer that the implied noun is *anêr* (a real man) or *anthropos* (a human being). In the *Politics* Aristotle asks whether the virtue of a good man, *agathos anêr*, is the same as the virtue of the good citizen, *spoudaios politês* (cited above). Using the word *anêr*, Aristotle clearly understands the *spoudaios* citizen to be male; citizens of Greek cities were, of course, uniformly male. Since in some cases *spoudaios* and *epieikês* are used in a manner that suggests they are synonymous and refer to the same person, one might be tempted to think of the *epieikês* as equally masculine. In a few cases, however, *epieikês* is used in contexts that refer to women as well as men. In the discussion of marriage, Aristotle says that the friendship of husband and wife is generally based on pleasure and utility, but the friendship may be one of virtue if they are *epieikês* (8.12.1162a24-26). In a similar passage, Aristotle says that the friendship between children and parents, if conducted well, will be enduring and *epieikês* ([8.6.1158b23] the consequence seems to be that the children and parents in these friendships, male or female, will also be *epieikês*). Based on these considerations, I am inclined to hold that *spoudaios* is implicitly, exclusively predicated of men, while *epieikês* is applied to men and women.

[53] This paragraph was not read in the two lectures, but prepared in anticipation of the subsequent question periods.