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XENOPHON'S SOCRATES ON CONCERN FOR FRIENDS: *MEMORABILIA* II 6

Most people would recognize two broad sources of motivation: concern for one's own welfare and concern for that of others. Xenophon's Socrates is typically considered a psychological egoist – someone who accepts the former as a genuine source of motivation while rejecting the latter. In recent work, we challenge that reading.[1] Specifically, we reject the egoistic reading of *Mem.* III 9, 4, the one passage of Xenophon's Socratic writings widely seen as an explicit statement of egoism. Absent such a statement, we argue, there is no compelling reason to construe other passages egoistically – to demand, for instance, that Socrates' description of the care a mother takes for her infant (II 2, 5) be understood in terms of the mother's concern for *herself*; or that his position that being a good leader amounts to making one's followers happy (III 2, 4) be interpreted in terms of the leader's concern for *himself*. One should instead take the apparent emphasis of those passages at face value and acknowledge a genuine concern for others in Xenophon.

For anyone willing to go that far with us, we offer a further piece of confirming evidence. When Socrates discusses friendship, he does so in a way that makes the welfare of both parties central to one's understanding of the value of friendship. That is especially prominent in the extended discussion of *Mem.* II 6, to which we now turn.[2]

[1] Jones & Sharma 2018.

[2] Compare van Berkel 2010, which argues that good people who are friends focus on long-term mutual benefit rather than short-term (especially zero-sum) transactions. Van Berkel briefly discusses our focal passage, *Mem.* II 6, rightly emphasizing the importance of self-control (*enkràteia*) as underwriting the possibility of genuinely good friendships.

The narrator's purpose in II 6 is to show how Socrates advised others as to what sorts of friends are worth acquiring. In conversing with Critobulus,[3] Socrates' opening move (II 6, 1-5) is to consider broadly the qualities desirable in a friend. His point is commonsensical: someone who is undisciplined, money-grubbing, self-centered, or quarrelsome will not do what ought to be done. Instead, the opposite qualities are to be sought.

But how does one attract friends who are thus worthwhile? We can judge the quality of a prospective friend by seeing how she has treated past and current friends (II 6, 6-7). And when we find someone whose friendship we want to acquire, we can best do so by praising her good qualities and doing some good for her (II 6, 8 ff.). The implication here is that one must oneself become good (II 6, 14).

Critobulus had assumed that bad people might attract good friends: after all, he has seen poor orators befriend excellent speakers and those without tactical knowledge befriend great generals (II 6, 15). Socrates responds by pointing out that Critobulus knows of no case of a useless person making useful friends (II 6, 16; 20). Presumably, friends needn't benefit one another *in the same ways* – the friends of an orator needn't benefit him in the assembly, nor the friends of a general on the battlefield; but no one would willingly befriend someone who wasn't useful *at all*.[4] Yet what benefit do estimable people (the *kalòi k'agathòi*[5]) confer on

[3] Dorion points out that Xenophon chooses as interlocutor the close companion of Socrates who is most deprived of self-control and thus most in need of genuine friends. See Bandini & Dorion 2011a, 193-194, note 4, and, for the evidence concerning Critobulus, 194-195, note 6.

[4] According to Tamiolaki (2018, 434), Socrates' insistence that friends be useful gets him in trouble. She writes (citing II 2, 52 in support): «One of the accusations raised against Socrates was that he put too much emphasis on the utility of friends». This, though, is a misdescription of the charge, which is rather that Socrates alienated the affections of young men from their closest relations by leading them to think that he had more to offer them than their kin. It is rather easy to imagine that deemphasizing family relations would cause a stir, but difficult to envision the Athenians getting upset by the idea that friends should be useful to one another.

[5] Bevilacqua 2018 takes this to refer to the socio-economic *élite*, and reads II 6, 22-26 as a proposal for an oligarchic constitution (or, minimally, *de facto* oligarchic control within a democratic system). The phrase '*kalòi k'agathòi*' can of course refer to an *élite* class, but we do not think it usually does so in Xenophon's Socratic writings. In this chapter, for example, when the term is introduced in II 6, 16, its sense is prepared

one another? Critobulus is ready to concede that those lacking in virtue cannot be friends with anyone, either with each other or with the good. But he sees good people often vie with one another and treat one another quite roughly – a phenomenon replicated at the level of cities. What good people are vying for is political prominence, and their envy of one another produces hatred and leaves no room for good will and confidence in one another (II 6, 20). If even the good are at odds with one another, then perhaps Critobulus should despair of making friends (II 6, 19).

Rather than grant Critobulus' observation,[6] Socrates articulates a conception of virtue which implies that good people don't act in the way Critobulus describes. The implication is of course that Critobulus confuses prominent and respected citizens for genuinely good ones. After identifying the forces in human nature that make for fellow-feeling (pity, desire for help from others, the impulse to cooperate for mutual benefit, and the gratitude that naturally follows from these) as well as those that make for enmity (the strife, anger, love of gain, and envy that come from competition for limited goods like civic distinction and material enjoyments (II 6, 21),[7] Socrates makes the crucial point.

Among the people whom Socrates deems estimable friendship «slips through» (II 6, 22), precisely because they recognize that their

for by the primarily ethical discussion that precedes. While II 6, 22-26 is clearly political in nature, we read it as offering political reasons for cultivating individual goodness – reasons that would be relevant under most political constitutions – rather than as a specifically political proposal (oligarchic or otherwise).

[6] It is crucial to recognize that the foregoing is *Critobulus'* observation. Tamiolaki ascribes it to Socrates (2018, 436): «Socrates makes the astonishing claim that not only do moral men often quarrel with each other, but also 'moral' *poleis*». That distorts the mechanics of the conversation and, in consequence, its philosophical upshot, since the corrective nature of Socrates' reply is thereby obscured.

[7] With Marchant and other translators, we read the description of conflict in II 6, 21 to describe a single development, whereby a common judgment as to what is fine and pleasurable produces conflict that eventually leads to strife, anger, enmity, and jealousy. Dorion (following Talbot) takes several processes to be at issue: at times people think the same about the fine and pleasant, and they compete with one another for it; while at times they oppose one another because they have different views. See Bandini & Dorion 2011a, 212, note 4. On the tendencies that lead to enmity, compare the scathing judgment of Pericles (son of the famous Pericles) against the Athenian citizenry at III 5, 16-17.

well-being is not served by the unrestricted pursuit of honors and pleasures. They choose moderation in all things, which results in less pain, more pleasure, the ability to meet their friends' needs,[8] and the capacity to have their own needs met by their friends.[9] Because of these effects, virtue also makes it possible for the good to work in partnership on a larger scale in political activities, their trust and mutual concern leading to effectiveness. Note that their motives will be a mix of self-regarding and other-regarding ones, though the latter are emphasized. Good people will seek rule for the purpose of (*a*) avoiding suffering injustice,

[8] Observing that Socrates considers the good to be useful to one another, rather than to others generally, Dorion (Bandini & Dorion 2011a, 216, note 1; cf. 217, note 4) suggests as the underlying reason that Xenophon accepts a doctrine of helping friends and harming enemies, with this being the 'helping friends' part. Of the three goals of those who participate in politics (II 6, 25), protecting oneself from injustice and benefitting one's friends are thus primary; and it is only once one is in power that one considers doing good for one's country. Against that reading, we find no indication in the passage that the good are useful *only* to one another. The reason Socrates speaks solely of their being useful to one another is that Critobulus has called into question the very possibility of cooperation among the good. Socrates is directly responding to that point, but nothing he says should be taken to rule out the possibility that their political motives extend *from the outset* beyond themselves and their friends to their fellow citizens generally. And if that is so, nothing in this passage supports anything like the traditional doctrine of helping friends and harming enemies (a doctrine, we argue in Jones & Sharma 2019, Xenophon's Socrates rejects).

[9] This is true at the level of cities, too. Note Socrates' not-so-subtle dig at Athenian imperial policy (II 6, 22: good people «choose moderate possessions without toil rather than control over everything through war»; and compare Pericles at Thuc. II, 35-46, especially II 36, 2, where he praises the previous generation for acquiring the empire «not without toil», and then implies throughout that the current generation should likewise be eager to undertake any labor or sacrifice to maintain it. See also the similar but negative judgment of the Corinthians about Athens at Thuc. I 70, 8). Tamiolaki (2018, 455-456) rightly highlights this political point (citing Thuc. I 70, 8) and thinks it solves a riddle: why does Xenophon, «who continually valorizes toil», here praise moderate possessions without toil? Her answer is that Xenophon's real target is Athenian imperialism, not private conduct. While we would not dispute that Xenophon at times criticizes Athenian imperialism, we *would* dispute that he praises without qualification toil (whether private or public). He praises it only when it leads to genuinely good ends. So, in II 1, 18-20, Socrates contrasts the paltry material gains that result from hunters' toil and the truly worthwhile outcome of working hard to gain a good friend.

(*b*) assisting their friends in just endeavors, and (*c*) doing some good for their country (II 6, 25). Given their purposes, they will try to include in their coalition as many like-minded and capable people as possible, so as to maximize their capacity for success.

Contrast their inclusive attitude with that of those who seek power in order to steal, to compel others as they wish, and to revel in luxury (II 6, 24). Those bad aspirants have an incentive to be *exclusive*, relying on as few allies as they can get away with, so as to minimize sharing and maximize for themselves the material gain that comes from power. Better to be a tyrant than one of many members of a ruling party. At the level of political action, then, we get another portrait of how virtue affects motivation and action. By shaping one's ends, virtue opens up the possibility of sustained action that is primarily aimed at the good of others. Of course, that doesn't require such action ultimately to be self-sacrificing. The agent, too, benefits by living in a well-ordered city, by justly aiding his friends, and by avoiding suffering injustice himself. Despite some emphasis here on other-regarding aims, the interests of the just politician and the interests of his fellow citizens are promoted by the same courses of action.

We see two ways of understanding the mechanism by which virtue thus opens up the possibility of friendship among the good. On one, Socrates is arguing that virtue entails moderation (cf. II 6, 22: «Because of their virtue they choose moderate possessions without toil»). By limiting the competition over scarce resources, moderation tempers the passions that lead to conflict and, in their stead, liberates the elements of human nature that Socrates deems productive of friendly feeling. For that reading, Socrates' conception of virtue need not be an intellectualist one: virtue consists essentially in self-control (*enkràteia*), which is valuable insofar as it restrains some aspects of human nature while nurturing others.

On the other interpretation, virtue still fosters moderation, but there is a more complex connection between moderation and right action. Moderation liberates us from acquisitiveness and frees our cooperative impulses; but those impulses need to be refined through a further process of development, one involving some form of intellectual engagement – presumably one that can be understood on the model of dialectical discussion. On such a reading, Socrates is an intellectualist to the

core, and his comment that human beings possess «by nature» certain friendly tendencies (II 6, 21) is to be understood only as a declaration that the behaviors Socrates will recommend as expressive of virtue are not antithetical to all the basic human drives.

Nothing direct is said to suggest the latter interpretation, but we favor it on several grounds. First, it fits with the strongly intellectualist tendencies of other passages in the *Memorabilia* (see for instance III 9, 5, and I 2, 19-23.) The fact that Socrates does not mention intellectualism here is hardly surprising: his focus is on the attitudes needed to promote and maintain the right sort of friendship, not on the kind of training needed to cultivate those attitudes. Second, his discussion of civic life in §§ 25-27 makes clear that even estimable people will encounter strife and competition in their political activities, as they vie with other groups in the city intent on their own advancement. Even a life organized around tendencies that are productive of friendly feeling will therefore threaten to be swamped by those that produce enmity: civic strife, anger, resentment at the success of one's opponents, and perhaps a desire to deny others the resources they need to succeed. Were Socrates pressing a conception of virtue that turns on the selective expression of certain natural passions over others – as the first reading has it – his own discussion would expose the naiveté of his position. By viewing Socrates as instead committed to a more complex conception of virtue, firmly rooted in a refined understanding of what really does conduce to human welfare, one can see why he might think estimable people will retain their cooperative spirit even through periods of intense civic conflict.

In II 6, 28 the focus shifts: Socrates exhorts Critobulus to work toward goodness and, thereby, candidacy for friendship with estimable people. As a self-professed expert in love, Socrates offers to talk to prospective friends on Critobulus' behalf; and after an exchange that amusingly reveals the long way Critobulus has yet to go in mastering erotic pleasure, Socrates reveals what he will say. He is careful to emphasize (II 6, 36-39) that he will say those things about Critobulus only on condition that they are true. Coupled with his encouragement to become good, Socrates' appeal to prospective friends thus serves as a list of the qualities Critobulus should try to cultivate. In particular, Socrates wants to be able to say of Critobulus (II 6, 35):

a) He takes an active concern for his friends and takes pleasure in nothing more than in good friends.
b) He takes pride in the achievements of his friends just as much as in his own.
c) He is as pleased when good things come to his friends as he is when they come to himself.
d) He never stops devising ways to aid his friends in achieving and acquiring them.[10]
e) He takes a man's virtue to consist in giving more aid to his friends than they give to him, and in giving more trouble to his enemies than they give to him.

Note that what Socrates proposes to say about Critobulus strongly suggests that when he has become good, Critobulus will be concerned with his friends for their own sakes, and will strive to promote their good. Three of the five points emphasize the effort Critobulus will gladly expend to promote the welfare of his friends: it will be continuous, rigorous and comprehensive. He is actively concerned for friends, never flags in devising ways to benefit them, and seeks to give them more than he gets from them and to defend them against hostile action.[11] The other two points emphasize the attitude he will take toward his friends' achievements and goods, and the attitude is particularly striking: the achievements and goods of his friends should please him as if they were his own.[12] It is difficult, absent a clear statement of self-sacrifice, to imagine a stronger description of an other-regarding friend. Again, this does not mean that all self-interest is cast aside. Socrates' appeal as-

[10] Strictly speaking, what Socrates will say is that Critobulus never stops devising ways to aid his friends in acquiring good things. But taking as much pleasure in friends' fine achievements as in one's own implies that one will bend as much effort to fostering their achievements as one does in fostering one's own.
[11] We take defense against hostile action to be the point of the phrase: «and in giving more trouble to his enemies than they give to him». This is a clever extension of the idea of competitive spirit among friends who attempt to keep up in rendering aid to one another (compare II 6, 5), and it is closely connected to the desire not to suffer injustice (II 6, 25). See the discussion in our Jones & Sharma 2019, 261.
[12] Indeed, this attitude may remind us of Aristotle's famous conception of the friend as «another self».

sumes that Critobulus' potential friends will be attracted to him at least in part because he will strive to benefit them. Moreover, part of the reason Critobulus is attracted to these potential friends in the first place is that he expects them to adopt a similar attitude toward him. Still, what is highlighted is Critobulus' concern for his friends' well-being. As in the case of political action, concern for others is foregrounded without there being a clean separation from self-interest: what is good for one party in the relationship proves good for the other as well, and one's promotion of the other's good tends to redound to one's own benefit, too.

Regarding the emphasis on *mutual* benefit, we propose that Socrates' discussions of friendship fit into a larger pattern. Socrates recognizes two broad sources of motivation: concern for one's own welfare, and concern for the welfare of others. If he can demonstrate that those motivations align in a particular domain, he can guarantee that our deliberations will support a particular kind of result. Friendship is one of those cases. Our other-regarding and self-regarding motivations align, and if we recognize our true interests (and the true interests of our prospective friends), we will conclude that we ought to seek out friends who have developed and continue to cultivate virtue. Such a strategy is good for them and good for us.

Another way of expressing the point is to reflect on a theoretical puzzle that arises for Socrates. Socrates is a virtue intellectualist: he thinks that virtue is in some sense a matter of knowledge. If virtue is a matter of knowledge, then it seems that virtuous people could act against their knowledge. After all, people act against their domain-specific knowledge often enough, when some other motivation leads them in a different direction. For example, a physician might ignore her knowledge of medicine, or might even use it in order to harm, when the opportunity arises to undermine a hated rival who comes under her care. But the possibility of acting against one's knowledge opens the door to having virtuous people who regularly and intentionally act contrary to virtue, especially when it comes to the seemingly other-regarding virtues like justice (where what seems to be required is that one prioritize the well-being of others over one's own). If virtue is a matter of knowledge, but knowledge doesn't guarantee particular patterns of behavior, then a virtuous (because knowledgeable) person might consistently act in

ways typically thought characteristic of vice. That paradoxical result is not something Socrates wants in his theory.

The most elegant (if counterintuitive) solution to this problem is to erase the gap between the interests of others and one's own. That, on a grand scale, is the move Plato's Socrates makes in the *Republic*: acting justly is good not only for others but also for oneself; why, once one sees that, would one be tempted to do otherwise? In Xenophon, we see it on perhaps a less grand, but more pervasive, scale. In particular, we see Socrates repeatedly emphasizing how various people's interests in fact come together. This is especially prominent in his discussions of the way we ought to acquire and treat our friends. One person's welfare is not identical to her friend's, but there is no difference in the courses of action that promote them. Both require one to cultivate virtue.

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Abstract

In Xenophon's Socratic literature, there is repeated emphasis on the utility that friends provide one another. One extended passage, *Memorabilia* II 6, shows that Socrates takes a good person to care about a friend both for the benefits to be gained for oneself and for the other's welfare. Genuine friendship, for Socrates, is not transactional or self-interested but rather rooted in the mutual benefit that only good people can supply.

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