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SELFHOOD

To receive enlightenment and instruction from Aristotle's disquisitions on friendship we must first appreciate how striking they are and how deeply they challenge some of our modern notions. This is not so easy as it appears since his pedantic style is apt to scatter a fine, almost imperceptible, dust on such familiar themes. "Down-to-earth"¹ though his treatment of the subject may appear to be, it is in fact both profound and contentious.

Aristotle's most arresting pronouncement on friendship is that, in the friendship of virtue, friends are "other selves" (ἄλλοι αὐτοί) to each other. Our first question should not be "What does Aristotle mean by 'another self'?" but rather "Why does a philosopher so generally sensitive to the workings of ordinary linguistic usage as Aristotle use, and keep using, this—to us—most provocative phrase?"² Such an investigation will detain us for two chapters. In the present chapter it will be argued that Aristotle's concept of selfhood differs significantly from ours. Historical remarks on this contrast will be followed by a detour through some arid landscapes of Aristotelian noetic in order to explore the background of his pronouncement that virtuous friendship involves 'other selfhood'. Chapter 2 will be devoted to unravelling the complexities of the phrase itself.

The statement that a friend, in the full sense of the word, is his friend's other self appears in both *Ethics* and is repeated in the *Magna Moralia*.³ In the *Eudemian* version

Aristotle adapts popular wisdom to his own purposes when he invokes the proverb according to which: “‘friend’ really denotes, in the language of the proverb, ‘another Hercules’—another self.”⁴ Commentators agree that originally this proverb did not apply to friendship but, in Rachkam’s words, meant “as strong as Hercules.”⁵ In the same way as some other person can be as Herculean as Hercules, my friend can be as much myself as I am. Be it noted that in the *Eudemian* passage Aristotle shows himself aware of the paradoxical nature of this claim since he hastens to specify that a friend, though another (ἄλλος or ἕτερος) self, is also a separate (διαίρετος) being: “. . . none the less a friend means, as it were, a separate self.”⁶ In the *Nicomachean* version, on the other hand, Aristotle shows no such reservation. Not only does he there speak in his own name, but, on four occasions, as we shall see, he blithely reiterates, without attempting to substantiate, the contention that “a friend is another self.”⁷

On the face of it, the phrase *allos autos* is a very confusing oxymoron which raises a number of issues. It poses a grammatical problem in so far as lexicographers and grammarians of classical Greek do not appear to have recorded other, similar, cases of the pronoun αὐτός being used substantivally. Since αὐτός in this case is not preceded by the article and cannot therefore mean ‘the same’ (*idem*), it cannot but mean ‘self’ (*ipse*). This would appear to justify the traditional rendering of *allos autos* by ‘another self.’ The possibility that, notwithstanding the exegetical tradition, *allos autos* actually means ‘the other *qua* self’ and thus serves to underline the separate identity of the friend, cannot be seriously entertained. As will soon become apparent, the coherence of several key Aristotelian texts on virtuous or primary friendship depends on the traditional rendering of *allos autos* as ‘another self’ being upheld.

Even by Aristotle’s standards this constitutes marked stylistic insouciance, and the stylistic oddity of the phrase was not lost on subsequent writers and commentators. Though Cicero coined the expression ‘*alter ego*’ in his private correspondence, he displayed greater caution in his aca-

demic writings: “the real friend . . . is, as it were, another self,”⁸ he wrote in the *De Amicitia*. Be it noted both that Cicero writes ‘*alter idem*’ (not ‘*alter ipse*’) and introduces an ‘as it were’ to mitigate the strangeness of the definition of friendship that is being propounded.

Aquinas, on the other hand, has no qualms about using the expression ‘*alter ipse*’ to render the Aristotelian *allos autos*, but, more explicitly than Cicero, he cautions the reader against a literal interpretation of the phrase. Thus, commenting on *N.E.* 1170b5 sqq., where it is stated, in his rendering of Aristotle, that “The virtuous man is related to his friend as he is to himself because the friend is in a certain way another self,” St. Thomas writes: “Therefore in the same way as his own being is choiceworthy and delightful to any virtuous person, so is for him the being of his friend. *And if not the same, yet very nearly so. Indeed, the natural oneness that characterizes the relationship that a person has to himself is closer than the oneness of disposition that prevails towards a friend.*”⁹ This interesting gloss alerts us to the distance that separates medieval concepts of personhood from ancient ones. Not only does Aquinas here take it for granted that the self is “by nature” unitary, but he also deems the presence of the self to itself to be unlike other forms of awareness. As we shall have ample opportunity to note, these assumptions are un-Aristotelian.

Although Cicero’s and Aquinas’ demurrings seem more likely to have been prompted by the philosophical implications of the phrase than by its stylistic clumsiness, the question nevertheless arises as to whether the Aristotelian corpus provides other examples of a similar substantival use of the pronoun *autos*. Bonitz adduces a series of examples as evidence that “Not infrequently αὐτός or αὐτό is used absolutely, without the referring noun that it serves to stress, either because it can be understood from the context or, generally, because a universal notion is implied.”¹⁰ Since *allos autos* is not a “universal notion,” Bonitz presumably intends one to conclude that in Aristotle’s usage the referent of the phrase can be inferred from its context. Unfortunately this explanation leaves one problem unsolved: in the expression

allos autos not only does the pronoun *autos* do duty as a noun but it also functions as itself the referent of the adjective *allos*. In the examples enumerated by Bonitz this is the only case where the substantivization of *autos* has been pushed that far.

On the philosophical front, the view that full friendship involves each friend in becoming his friend's other self is bound to appear almost perverse. Three particular questions will need to be raised, *viz*: (1) What conception of selfhood does Aristotle operate with? (2) Could friendship survive the conflation of the friends' selves? Indeed does not the very concept of friendship presuppose that the friends remain separate individuals? (3) Supposing that the symbiosis implied by the *allos autos* phrase be possible, would it even be morally desirable? To our modern sensibilities at least, appreciation of and respect for the otherness of the partner are vital components of friendship, as they are of love. The more the other is cherished in his/her otherness, it is generally held, the purer the friendship, and attempts to align another's dispositions, values, or tastes to one's own are mostly deemed misguided. Being personal relations, friendship and love, it is generally intimated, should endeavour to accommodate the personalities of individuals who are, by definition, unique. If it turns out that none of these claims fits easily into Aristotle's extensive and detailed analysis of friendship, we need to account for such significant differences in outlook between him and ourselves.

It is important to note that the contention that virtuous friends are other selves to each other mostly appears as a premiss in Aristotle's arguments; it is never itself fully argued for. This would seem to indicate that Aristotle did not consider it to be either obscure or especially contentious. Mentions of this premiss are generally to be found in discussions of the moral ideal of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*). Since Aristotle viewed self-sufficiency as greatly desirable, he needed to argue that the good of friendship, which, *prima facie*, increases the virtuous person's dependence upon others, is in fact compatible with self-sufficiency. Clearly, the

description of virtuous friends as other selves to each other is invoked partly to counteract the conclusion that friendship increases the virtuous person's dependence upon external factors.¹¹ If accepted, the 'other self' premiss would contribute to keeping *eudaimonia* (happiness, well-being) within the virtuous person's reach by internalizing what initially appears to be the irreducible alterity of the friend. To that effect it fulfills a crucial strategic function in Aristotle's argument. This in itself rules out the possibility that the phrase be no more than a pious platitude.

In order to be serviceable as a premiss, though, a statement needs to be correct or, at least, generally acceptable. Clearly Aristotle assumes that his description of virtuous friendship as other selfhood meets this condition. To explain why he could reasonably make this assumption, two brief historical comments need to be made; the first pertains to Homeric and tragic usage, the second pertains to shifting conceptions of selfhood.

Unfortunately, attempts to establish the precise nature of pre-Classical Greek views on such topics as human agency, the will, and the self have mostly come to grief. At present their authors either stand accused of importing unjustified assumptions into the endeavour or of going beyond the evidence.¹² Accordingly, one should be wary of building much on so shaky a foundation. Nevertheless, over the years a considerable body of evidence and analysis has accumulated which points to certain distinct features of Greek conceptions of selfhood and accounts for a number of highly charged and otherwise enigmatic metaphors in the poetry of the time.

Adapting a classification first introduced by Foucault,¹³ Vernant injected much needed conceptual clarity into the matter by distinguishing between the concepts of *individual* (as contradistinguished from the group), *subject* (as source of his/her decisions and actions), and *I* (as object of reflexive awareness).¹⁴ Only in this third sense, Vernant intimates, can it be claimed, not that "the Greeks" lacked a concept of self, but that their experience of the self was "differently organized from our own."¹⁵ More precisely, in their view, he

continues, "The subject does not constitute a closed internal world, which he must enter in order to find or, rather, to discover himself. The subject is turned to the outside. In the same way as the eye does not see itself, the individual looks elsewhere, outwards, before apprehending himself. His consciousness of self is not a reflexive process, a retreat into himself, an internal enclosing, face to face with his own person: it is existential."¹⁶

The hypothesis that pre-Classical Greek selfhood only carries minimal intimations of privacy, uniqueness, and reflexivity would contribute to explaining the relative frequency, in the *Iliad*, of phrases such as '*hena thumon echontes*' (having one spirit) and '*ison thumon echontes*' (having the same spirit)¹⁷ to denote not only the coordinated action, on specific occasions, of comrades at arms but also the trans-subjective planning or resolutions of close friends. The psychological unity that, within the context of the *Iliad*, prevails between Achilles and Patroclus is an example in point. In his lamentations over the death of Patroclus, Achilles proclaims to have regarded his friend *ison emēi kephalēi* ('as myself', literally 'equal to my head').¹⁸ The metonymical value of *kephalē* (head) makes the tribute significant, especially when it is placed in context. In the XVIth *Iliad* Patroclus had dressed for battle in Achilles' own suit of armour and found that it fitted him perfectly. Achilles' spears, too, were well adapted to Patroclus' hand.¹⁹ Since Homer frequently resorts to bodily metaphors to convey mental states, we must take the friends' physical similarity to indicate the psychological state of unison that prevails between them. This view receives further confirmation in the XVIIth *Iliad* when we are told that Hector, though the equal of Achilles in valour, requires a divine intervention to make the armour, wrenched from Patroclus' dead body, fit him. Not only is Patroclus described as physically the same as Achilles, but also, throughout the poem, he appears to represent his friend's gentler, softer side. Indeed it is only after Patroclus' death that Achilles comes to exhibit some of the qualities of mercy and humanity that he had so conspicuously lacked before. So striking is the symbiosis

between the friends that it might be suggested that in the Homeric text Achilles and Patroclus are implicitly presented as 'other selves' to one another.

If, as Arthur Adkins has argued, "the effects of Homeric usage persist to a considerable degree in the moral philosophy of Aristotle,"²⁰ we should at the very least keep in mind Homer's poignant account of the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus when attempting to interpret Aristotle's intricate and sophisticated pronouncements on the subject of friendship. More specifically, we may care to note that Aristotle's reliance on the other self premiss strikes a Homeric echo.

Though the extant intervening literature does not yield a rich crop of similar expressions, it is worth mentioning the enigmatic opening words of Antigone's appeal to Ismene in Sophocles' play: ὦ κοινὸν ἀνταδελφὸν Ἰσμίνης καρᾶ. Since no translation can fully convey the dark potentness of the Greek, it seems best here to rely on a pedantically literal translation, i.e., "O, common, own-sisterly head²¹ of Ismene." In these words, Antigone is in effect claiming that the relationship of blood *philia*, whose claims she is to uphold throughout the play, effectively overrides individual separateness.²² Euripides, too, alludes to this kind of unity when, in the *Orestes*, he has Elektra tell her brother that he has 'one soul' with her²³ and that those who are friends are 'one.'²⁴ Aristotle, who could rely on his audience's familiarity with these passages, even quotes Elektra's first remark in both the *Eudemian*²⁵ and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁶ In pre-Classical times, therefore, rhetorical claims about friendship occasionally included allusions to psychic symbiosis, and a number of writers appear to have assumed that *philia* could transcend the limitations later associated with bodily separateness and individual self-awareness.

These desultory literary allusions do not, of course, of themselves, license any firm conclusion on the vexed matter of archaic and classical Greek conceptions of selfhood. They are offered here merely as pointers, modest additions to recent discussions of the topic.²⁷ In any case, far from it being my intention here to contribute to these investiga-

tions, I only refer to them in so far as they provide useful background for my exegesis of Aristotle's views on friendship. More specifically, I shall now argue that, unlike modern readers, Aristotle's contemporaries were unlikely to be perplexed by his description of virtuous friendship as other selfhood. Indeed if, in their outlook, the self, as Vernant and others have claimed, appears to be "neither delimited nor unified,"²⁸ they could not be expected to appreciate some of the philosophical implications of Aristotle's contention that friendship at its best enlarges what we would call the natural boundaries of the self.

As for Aristotle himself, he did not, as we saw, consider that his views on other selfhood required much philosophical buttressing. Although he devoted much attention to the conditions of individuation of conspecific particulars, he did not investigate the criteria of personal identity. As I shall argue presently, the cluster of philosophical problems which the concept of selfhood generates for post-Cartesians could not even be fully formulated in Aristotle's terminology. This alone would appear to confirm the view that the conception of selfhood then embedded in Greek mentality differed from ours. Aristotle's commitment to the dialectical method, especially in ethics, would in any case make him reluctant to depart from commonly held beliefs (*endoxa*). For these reasons we can assume that his claim that a virtuous person is his friend's other self was meant literally.

As for a *theory* of the self, Aristotle had none that could even remotely be compared with modern ones. Nowhere does he systematically set out to address explicitly formulated and related questions on the issues of self-identity, personhood, and individuality. Nowhere does he attempt to uncover, formulate, and critically examine the structure of his predecessors' or his contemporaries' concepts of selfhood. Further, as we shall see presently, his theory of perception assigns only a minimal role to self-awareness. On the other hand, however, in the ethical treatises, Aristotle repeatedly advises us to nurture the part of our being that can most properly be called "our own." Only in so doing, he intimates, will we be truly at one with ourselves. I shall take these

pronouncements as evidence of the presence in his moral thought of a concept of selfhood of sorts. Although it embodies a moral goal which may well turn out to be the direct ancestor of our ideal of moral integrity, Aristotle's notion of the self differs significantly from later, more purely cognitive and descriptive, concepts of selfhood.

In order to vindicate these contentions, I shall now turn to Aristotle's account of the genesis of reflexive awareness in perception. Since my main interest in the matter lies in the notion of self there presupposed, I shall leave unexamined a great many of the complexities of Aristotle's theory of perception. This excursus will perhaps contribute to justifying the considerations that I shall offer later in this chapter on some differences between ancient and modern views of selfhood.

In the *De Anima* we are told that perception, of which all animals are capable, consists in the apprehension by each sense organ of the corresponding perceptible and individuated forms (as opposed to the matter) of particular objects.²⁹ Perception further includes awareness of its proper object.³⁰ Since such perceptual awareness could not come about through the agency of a sense different from the particular sense organ concerned without generating an infinite regress,³¹ Aristotle concludes that it must be brought about through the agency of the sense organ itself. This leads him to claim that perceiving is not a single thing,³² and that "Each sense, therefore, is concerned with the subject perceived by it, being present in the sense organ, *qua* sense organ, and it judges the varieties of the subject perceived by it, e.g., sight for white and black, and taste for sweet and bitter; and similarly for the other senses too."³³ Let it be noted that this account of perceptual awareness, although it ascribes a discriminatory power to each sense, is conducted without explicit reference to self-awareness. In itself this does not signal a gap in Aristotle's account since, as is evident in the case of infants and animals, unity of perception can obtain in the absence of self-awareness. Perception need not presuppose apperception.

Before long, however, the absence of a unitary faculty guaranteeing the unity of perception will adversely affect

Aristotle's argument. Indeed, since each sense organ generates both sensation and awareness of sensation, Aristotle must account for the agency through which animals can, as they do, discriminate between the data of different senses, e.g., the visual sensation of whiteness and the gustatory sensation of sweetness. He puts the problem succinctly: "Nor indeed is it possible to judge by separate means that sweet is different from white, but both must be evident to *one thing*—for otherwise, even if I perceived one thing and you another, it would be evident that they were different from each other. Rather *one thing* must assert that they are different; for sweet is different from white. *The same thing* then asserts this; hence, as it asserts so it both thinks and perceives. That, therefore, it is not possible to judge separate things by separate means is clear."³⁴

What is this "one thing" (*heis tis*), this faculty, which Aristotle soon proceeds to describe as undivided (*achōriston*)?³⁵ It is generally assumed to be the *koinē aisthēsis* (*sensus communis*)³⁶ or *koinē dunamis* (common power), i.e., the sense whose main function is mostly described as the apprehension of the "common sensibles" (i.e. movement, rest, number, figure, and size),³⁷ as opposed to the "proper objects" of each sense. Amongst the other functions which he ascribes to that sense, Aristotle appears to include the ability to collate and compare the information emanating from the different senses.³⁸ In so far as it judges, the judging element is "both numerically indivisible and undivided";³⁹ in so far as it senses several different objects (e.g., sweet and white), it is several. Indeed if it were not indivisible *qua* judging element, there would be no way of distinguishing between the situation where Smith perceives both sweet and white and the situation where Smith perceives sweet while Jones perceives white.⁴⁰ In other words, Aristotle needs here to postulate a single indivisible judging element to account for the fact that perceptions are organized in different individual series. To that extent the unitary judging element or *sensus communis* is the Aristotelian counterpart of Kant's synthetic unity of apperception. The long and tortuous argument in *De Anima* III,2 represents Aristotle's

attempt to formulate a concept corresponding to the modern notion of unity of consciousness.

In the *De Somno et Vigilia* Aristotle goes one step further in the characterization of the 'common element': ". . . all [senses] are accompanied by a common power, in virtue whereof a person perceives that he sees or hears."⁴¹ Although, as this text indicates, Aristotle extended the role of the *sensus communis* to include second-order perceptual awareness, it should nevertheless be stressed that consciousness of self *qua* self is not explicitly listed as one of its several functions. Multi-faceted as the common power is described to be, it does not, in that treatise, include the apprehension of a unitary subject of consciousness.

Only in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are second-order perceptual awareness and awareness of self *qua* such brought together. Interestingly enough, the context is a discussion of the benefits uniquely brought about by virtue friendship. "If we are perceiving," Aristotle notes, "we perceive that we are perceiving; and if we are understanding, we perceive that we are understanding. Now perceiving that we are perceiving or understanding is the same as perceiving that we are, since we agreed that being is perceiving and understanding."⁴² This passage licenses two inferences. Firstly, Aristotle considers that self-awareness is consequent upon a number of sensory activities; it neither precedes them nor is presupposed by them. The use of a verb of perception (*aisthanometha*) to describe the genesis of self-awareness shows how derivative the latter is. Secondly and more importantly, the seat of perception and cognition, which is both the agent and the object of self-awareness, remains nameless throughout this key passage. Though Aristotle considers that there is a single entity which apprehends itself apprehending the world, he neither has a word for it nor feels the need to coin one. To denote what later philosophers will call the self Aristotle has to resort to a subordinate clause 'that we are' (*hoti esmen*).⁴³ Although correct, remarks such as Hamlyn's that ". . . he [Aristotle] gives little attention to the role of the concepts of a person, the subject of consciousness and personal identity"⁴⁴ nevertheless

strike an anachronistic note. Since the Greek of Aristotle's time did not have concepts for any of these things, the only conclusion that we can draw in the matter is that Aristotle did not coin technical terms for them. Was this because he had no philosophical use for such notions as personhood and self-identity? As we have seen, the evidence from his theory of perception points the other way. We shall return to this question.

Aristotle's inchoate concept of selfhood is in sharp contrast with the Cartesian self as the primary and unshakable datum of experience. Though various Cartesian texts could be invoked, the well-known wax example in the second *Meditation* illustrates the point adequately. Having established the certainty of his own existence, Descartes proceeds to investigate the nature of this 'I' who necessarily is whenever he, Descartes, thinks. His phrasing of the problem is characteristic: "I know that I exist; the question is, what is this 'I' that I know?"⁴⁵ In other words, the entity in question is assumed to be correctly referred to as 'I' prior to being investigated and defined. Together with cognition and will, sense is ultimately characterized with reference to the mind's reflexive awareness. By contrast it is only contingently that the 'I' depends on the occurrence of particular experiences. This is one of the lessons of the wax example. While in Aristotle's reasoning it is sense perception which ultimately leads to a budding concept of self-awareness, in Descartes' scheme of things awareness of self is the first foundation upon which the reliability of sense experience is eventually to be established.⁴⁶ Indeed Descartes goes as far as using sensory experience as contributory support for the view that the mind is better known than the body: "if my perception of the wax seemed more distinct after it was established not just by sight or touch but by many other considerations, it must be admitted that I now know myself even more distinctly. This is because every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the wax, or of any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind."⁴⁷ Not only does Descartes maintain that mind can exist independently of body and be

better known than it, but he sets his whole philosophical quest in terms of an entity which he never feels the need to introduce, let alone justify, i.e., his own directly accessible and transparent self.⁴⁸ The autobiographical tenor of his major works, his rejection of any didacticism, his distrust of the senses, and his reliance on introspection all point to Descartes' fundamental assumption that his irredeemably private mental life constitutes the vantage point from which the world external to it may be reached. For Aristotle, who never doubted the existence of the external world and the general trustworthiness of our senses, on the other hand, the idea that mental operations furnish conscious individuals with an awareness of their own selves is explicitly stated only in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, although it makes a timid appearance in the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*.

The relative paucity of Aristotle's vocabulary in this respect can be traced to his concept of *psychē* (soul). Whichever definition of soul appears to us to fit most of his pronouncements on the topic, it will not be of an entity which can be defined independently of the body. Though the active (*poiētic*) *nous* can survive the death of the body and is therefore capable of separate existence, Aristotle views it as operating in conjunction with the passive (*pathētic*) *nous* during the life of the human individual. For Aristotle *nous*, like *psychē*, is thus not something over and above its operations. While he considers that the operations of *nous*, both active and passive, are activities of which the human subject is conscious, there is no sign that he considers that such consciousness gives humans a direct and private access to the workings of their own mental processes. A sure sign that this is so emerges from the fact that problems raised in connection with 'other minds' seem never to surface in Aristotle's philosophical psychology. Since Aristotle defines *psychē* as the principle of organisation and functioning of a live body, knowledge of it cannot depend upon the private data of introspection. Not possessing a fully articulated concept of self-awareness of the Cartesian kind, Aristotle needs not address the cognitive difficulties that such dualism creates.

Such difficulties have been dogging post-Cartesian philosophy for so long that they circumscribe the very framework within which such fundamental problems as that of personhood are formulated. Even those successors of Descartes who have since professed to debunk the notion of self-identity could not help paying their tribute to him. When Hume, for example, writes that "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other,"⁴⁹ he still resorts to a philosophically potent metaphor, i.e., that of a chamber so dark that, although he enters it deliberately, he cannot but stumble once inside it. Later, having used the similarly loaded "comparison of the theatre," Hume is careful to note that it "must not mislead us."⁵⁰ The point, however, is that Hume failed to come up with an analogy that would further his own cause. In spite of his warning, the metaphor of the theatre cannot but strengthen the very conception that he is at pains to rebut. Gilbert Ryle's later, famous use of the same simile⁵¹ to discredit what he calls the (Cartesian) "Official Doctrine" of the mind (or self) as private and separate from its diverse manifestations, shows just how loaded the simile is. Thus, one of the reasons why Hume's warning was not more generally heeded would seem to be that the concept of self he aimed at debunking had become enshrined in ordinary as well as in philosophical usage.

It is therefore unsurprising that modern readers of Aristotle's books on friendship should be puzzled by the *allos autos* premiss. They bring to its exegesis a host of un-Aristotelian assumptions and notions which, added to the considerable difficulty of the Greek texts, make the problem of ascertaining the meaning of the Aristotelian phrase well-nigh intractable. I am not proposing that we divest ourselves from the Cartesian tradition. That would be impossible. But we should keep in mind that the concept of self, *as we use it*, was not one of Aristotle's basic philosophical tools. As I hope to have shown, his analysis of perception indicates that he was endeavouring to account both for the unity of consciousness and for the genesis of self-awareness without the benefit of what some modern philosophers

would be pleased to call appropriate terminology.

When, leaving historical considerations aside, we turn to Aristotle's moral works, we are confronted with an explicit concept of self that differs significantly from the inchoate concept of the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*: selfhood is now mostly presented as a moral construct. As is well-known, Aristotle held that all living things are ensouled. Human beings owe their place in the hierarchy of living entities neither to their nutritive soul (which they share with plants) nor to their sensitive soul (which they share with all other animals) but to a rational element which they are alone in possessing. It is upon this conception of humans as essentially rational beings that the famous *ergon* argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I rests: ". . . we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be the soul's activity and actions that express reason. The excellent man's function is to do this finely and well. Each function is completed well when its completion expresses the proper virtue. Therefore the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue."⁵² Moral virtue, which consists in habitually acting and feeling as reason directs, is the single most important aspect of the Aristotelian good life. This is the core of Aristotelian ethics and does not here need rehearsing. What is worth pointing out, however, is the conception of selfhood as integrated soul which emerges from the *Ethics*. Though this theme will be developed at some length in chapters IV and VI below, some anticipatory comments may usefully be made here.

Aristotle repeatedly indicates that reason's success in co-ordinating and harmonizing the affects ensures wholeness of soul, while its failure in this respect results in some form or other of psychic imbalance or even disintegration. In *N.E.* IX and X, Aristotle goes further and identifies human beings with their intellect or understanding (*nous*): ". . . someone is called continent or incontinent because his understanding is or is not the master, on the assumption that this is what each person is."⁵³ As the reference to continence indicates, the *nous* with which Aristotle here iden-

tifies the human agent is practical reason, i.e., the element whose role it is to bring about the realization of those ends which it has formulated. Earlier on, we had been told that "the excellent person is of one mind with himself, and desires the same things in his whole soul. Hence he wishes goods and apparent goods to himself, and does them in his actions since it is proper to the good person to achieve the good. He wishes and does them for his own sake, since he does them for the sake of his thinking part, and that is what each person seems to be."⁵⁴

These claims raise a number of issues. Granted that *nous* is the proper object of the good man's regard, who (or what), we need to ask, has regard for it? Aristotle's identification of human beings with their *nous* would seem to lead to the conclusion that, in good men at least, it is *nous* that holds itself in high regard. Contrary to what Aristotle indicates in the above passage, however, such a criterion would only assist us in distinguishing good men from bad ones if we could be sure that self-respect is totally alien to the base. But we cannot rule out the possibility that the bad man's *nous*, puny though it be, nevertheless respects itself, like a just man at the court of a corrupt ruler. Aristotle's claim that the good man agrees with himself, once reformulated in terms of the identification between human beings and their *nous*, yields a similarly disappointing, because platitudinous, conclusion. Furthermore, one cannot help wondering, which is the part of the akratic man's soul that regrets the domination of the appetites over reason?

Such objections need only to be formulated to show that we have gone adrift. They all proceed from the modern, but un-Aristotelian, assumptions that there are as many selves as there are human beings and that the integrity of a self lies beyond the reach of both vice and *akrasia*.

In fact, Aristotle views psychic unity as the result of a slow process of integration which is broadly co-extensive with the acquisition of moral virtue. Practical reason, in his outlook, constitutes the hub around which the self is formed, since it alone can effect the integration of the various psychic elements into a whole. Whenever it fails to do so, either

through *akrasia* or vice, the individual remains unfree, a mere bunch of unstable elements and discordant parts. Aristotle's choice of words reflects this view of the self. Morally weak persons, he writes, "abandon themselves"⁵⁵ to pleasure, they are "overcome"⁵⁶ by it, and even suffer from some kind of "madness."⁵⁷ As for the base, they are described as "at odds with themselves."⁵⁸ Divided from their reason, i.e., the distinctively human part in them, the base are, according to Aristotle, effectively divided from themselves. While good men are those who value, desire, and plan with their "whole soul," bad ones are beleaguered and unsteady, since one part of their soul desires that which will harm, enfeeble, or distress another. In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle expresses this idea by means of the traditional Greek dichotomy of the one and the manifold: ". . . the good is simple, whereas the bad is multiform; and also the good man is always alike and does not change in character, whereas the wicked and the foolish are quite different in the evening from that they were in the morning."⁵⁹

These considerations help us to resolve the difficulties regarding reflexivity that were raised earlier. Rather than, in the strict sense of the term, identifying human beings with their *nous* at the exclusion of anything else in the Soul, which would effectively leave the wicked without central powers of agency, Aristotle assigns to *nous* the exercise of a regulating and predominating influence over the other elements in the human soul. In human beings *nous, qua* such, cannot, therefore, exist independently of the rest of the soul; just as rulers cannot rule in the absence of subjects, *nous* needs irrational or imperfectly rational drives and wants over which to exert its stewardship. Only when *nous* is unimpeded in the discharge of this function can human beings, in Aristotle's outlook, be said to be "at one" with themselves. In this sense *nous* is the *sine qua non* of an integrated personality. But it is also a *sine qua non* in so far as it constitutes the one specifically human element in the soul, upon whose recognition as such moral virtue depends. Good men are those who value most what is most valuable in themselves, i.e., the element that makes them

beings of their kind, and who enable it to exert its natural authority over the appetitive and emotive parts which have long been trained in the habit of ready compliance. Bearing in mind the distinctive aura of Aristotle's concept of selfhood should help us to understand how and why he could, in effect, restrict a full measure of it to those who are morally virtuous and, by implication, hold that selfhood admits of degrees.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* the self-concurrence of *nous* is, unsurprisingly, expressed by means of reflexive personal pronouns. Furthermore, in its four *Nicomachean* occurrences the phrase *allos autos* is itself unambiguously linked to a third person (singular or plural) reflexive pronoun whose referent is clear from the context. How significant is this construction? Might it assist our understanding of the puzzling claim that friends of virtue can be each other's selves? The passages are as follows: (1) γονεῖς μὲν οὖν τέκνα φιλοῦσιν ὡς ἑαυτοῦς (τὰ γὰρ ἐξ αὐτῶν οἶον ἕτεροι αὐτοὶ τῷ κεχωρίσθαι) ("A parent loves his children as he loves himself. For what has come from him is a sort of other himself");⁶⁰ (2) τῷ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἕκαστα τούτων ὑπάρχειν τῷ ἐπιεικεῖ, πρὸς δὲ τὸν φίλον ἔχειν ὡς περὶ πρὸς αὐτόν (ἔστι γὰρ ὁ φίλος ἄλλος αὐτός) ("The decent person, then, has each of these features in relation to himself, and is related to his friend as he is to himself, since the friend is another himself");⁶¹ (3) αὐτάρκεις οὖν ὄντας οὐδενὸς προσδεῖσθαι, τὸν δὲ φίλον, ἕτερον αὐτὸν ὄντα, πορίζειν ἃ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀδυνατεῖ ("... being self-sufficient, they need nothing added. But your friend, since he is another yourself, supplies what your own efforts cannot supply");⁶² (4) ὡς δὲ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔχει ὁ σπουδαῖος, καὶ πρὸς τὸν φίλον (ἕτερος γὰρ αὐτὸς ὁ φίλος ἐστίν) ("The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself").⁶³

Each of the above passages features a noun, viz., οἱ γονεῖς, ὁ ἐπιεικής, οἱ αὐτάρκεις⁶⁴ and ὁ σπουδαῖος, to which a reflexive pronoun, directly, and ἄλλος αὐτός, by extension, refer. We are told that a person can have the same relation to a friend as he has to himself (1, 2, and 4) and that the friend, being another self, extends the range of goods avail-

able to the virtuous (3). The Homeric assumption that friends could be “of one mind” has, in these passages, been refined and provided with some theoretical underpinning. In virtue friendship, Aristotle in effect tells us, the reflexive relation that individuals have to themselves is extended to encompass another individual, i.e., the friend. In order to express this arresting suggestion, Aristotle needs a concept of selfhood which is not only reflexive but also symmetrical. While the reflexive pronoun expresses the first condition, the phrase *allos autos* arguably represents an attempt to embody the second. As for the substantivization of *autos* in the phrase *allos autos*, it points to the emergence, in Aristotle’s thought, of an entity to which such properties can be ascribed.

To resume the argument so far: in Aristotle’s scheme of things the notion of ‘self’ appears to be an achievement word, since it denotes a state of equilibrium between the various parts of the soul and constitutes an ideal towards which we should strive but which we may not reach. According to such a conception akratic and vicious people are not ‘selves’; not only do their passions and appetites pull in different directions, but they rebel against and weaken the part that ought to direct them. Thus to the extent that Aristotelian selfhood is an evaluative, commendatory notion, it differs significantly from modern, purely descriptive conceptions of selfhood.⁶⁵ While a descriptive concept of self, in the modern sense, can at most be argued to emerge in Aristotle’s text, an explicitly normative concept of self plays an important role in his ethics.

Before moving to a consideration of selfhood in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a last point on the morally virtuous self needs to be made. In so far as the mean characteristic of moral virtue is to be determined “with reference to us” (*pros hēmas*)⁶⁶ it would seem that selfhood, as emerging from psychic harmony, is always individual. The proverbial widow’s generosity, for example, which is proportionate to her gender and circumstances, has little in common with a Gulbenkian’s liberality. Practical reason must work on the material at hand, and that material will differ from

individual to individual. The assimilation of the moral agent with his *nous*, for which Aristotle argues in Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is thus compatible with the uniqueness of human agents. To that extent, it does not run counter to, though it does not, of course, prefigure, the modern concept of selfhood.

Unfortunately for the present enquiry, the tenth book of this *Ethics* appears to convey a rather different message. It is now the theoretic intellect which is singled out to constitute the specifically human element in the human soul. The context of this passage is well-known. Not only is the life of theoretical contemplation said to possess incidental advantages (viz., it is eminently pleasurable, self-sufficient, and leisurely), but it is also presented as intrinsically superior, since "If happiness, then, is activity expressing virtue, it is reasonable for it to express the supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing. The best is understanding, or whatever else seems to be the natural ruler and leader, and to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us. Hence complete happiness will be its activity expressing its proper virtue; and we have said that this activity is the activity of study."⁶⁷ Those who, albeit intermittently, lead the theoretic life do so not in so far as they are human but in so far as they succeed in cultivating what is divine in them, i.e., their dianoetic *nous*.⁶⁸ Aristotle expands on this view in an uncharacteristically eloquent passage: "We ought not to follow the proverb-writers, and 'think human, since you are human', or 'think mortal, since you are mortal'. Rather, as far as we can, we ought to make ourselves immortal, and go to all lengths to live a life that expresses our supreme element; for however much this element may lack in bulk, by much more it surpasses everything in power and value."⁶⁹ Why should we do so? Aristotle's answer is intriguing: ". . . each person seems to be his understanding, if he is his controlling and better element; it would be absurd, then, if he were to choose not his own life, but something else's."⁷⁰ While the human (*anthrōpinos*) life, i.e., the life of "the compound" (*to suntheton*) calls for the exercise of the moral

virtues, the god-like life of contemplation has its own specific excellences. While moral virtues have a social aspect and pertain to the emotions, which in turn depend on the body, intellectual virtue (*sophia*) is separate (*kechōris-menē*).⁷¹

The various exegetical difficulties raised by these passages are awesome. Fortunately there is no need to address them all here. Like most commentators, I shall assume that Aristotle uses *to suntheton* to refer to the composite of matter and form that is the live body. As far as selfhood is concerned, *N.E.*, X.8 raises the following problem: if the characteristically human life is that of the compound and if that life is best organized around practical reason, why does Aristotle here recommend his (human) audience to lead the (god-like) life of contemplation, not only on the ground that it is the life of the best element in them, but also on the ground that it is the life that is most their own (*oikeios*)? If his readers are human and therefore compound, why does he advise them that it would be unseemly to lead the life of another entity (in this case the human life) in preference to their very own (i.e., the life of the dianoetic, divine element)?

The context of the argument makes it clear that in *N.E.*, X.8 *oikeios* refers not to what is unique in each individual (as is the case with the modern English idiom 'to do one's own thing') but to what is characteristic of the species concerned. In this case it picks out what distinguishes humankind from all other kinds. The identification of the theoretic element as the essentially human factor, by implication, excludes as peripheral whatever makes each person unique. So, as the *Nicomachean Ethics* draws to a close, Aristotle is increasingly relegating as trivial and unimportant those elements which make each person different from all others, i.e., those very elements for which modern debates on self-identity aim at accounting. Indeed, if humans are their dianoetic element, and if the activity proper to that element is pure contemplation, there is no way that, e.g., Coriscus' contemplation can differ from Callias'. Consisting in an effortless intellectual apprehen-

sion of essences and fully intelligible thoughts, contemplation is beyond both toil and particularity. To the extent that human beings succeed in leading the theoretic life, they transcend the boundaries of their own idiosyncrasies, individual circumstances, and private concerns. Unlike moral virtue, theoretic contemplation cannot be "with reference to us" (*pros hēmas*). As for the object of contemplation, it must not in any way resist full intelligibility, which is a way of saying that it must be abstracted from its individuating features and pared down to its essence. The impersonal conception of selfhood which is put forward in chapters 7 and 8 of book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* thus appears to be seriously at variance with that defended in book IX. This discrepancy is, of course, but one facet of the larger problem posed by the presence, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of two seemingly rival conceptions of the good life, one practical and the other contemplative. Besides raising a great many exegetical problems, the displacement of moral activity from the centre of the good life in favour of contemplation constitutes a source of difficulty for all those who seek to ground their virtue ethics in Aristotle's ethical treatises. This by itself probably accounts for the vast amount of scholarly literature produced in English on this topic over the last twenty years. The cumulative effect of these exegeses appears at the present time to tip the balance in favour of an integrated reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, according to which Aristotle's claims on the nature of the good life are mutually consistent.⁷²

In an attempt to explain this doctrinal discrepancy by the history of Aristotle's texts, Nuyens,⁷³ followed by Gauthier and Jolif,⁷⁴ had earlier famously argued that the composition of *N.E.* X predates that of the other books. These authors rest their case on the doctrinal closeness between *N.E.* X and an early work of Aristotle's, the *Protrepticus*. They claim that the text which now constitutes book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* shows that its author was still under the influence of Plato's mind-body dualism and had yet to work out the conception of the soul as the life principle of the body, or entelechy, which forms

the central argument of the *De Anima*. Thus, while the identification, in book IX, of the self with the practical intellect would tally with the monism of the *De Anima*, the claim, defended in *N.E.* X, that humans 'are' their theoretic intellect would bear witness to Aristotle's youthful dualism. Although this is not the place to proceed to a detailed examination of this, nowadays mostly rejected, interpretation, there appears to be a substantial body of evidence in favour of the argument⁷⁶ that *N.E.* X.8 should be read conjointly with *De Anima*, III.5. The following brief considerations can usefully be brought to bear on the issue.

In *De Anima* III.5, one of the most obscure passages in the Aristotelian corpus, a distinction is drawn between the passive (*pathêtic*) intellect (*nous*) and the active (*poiêtic*) intellect.⁷⁶ The passive intellect, which accounts for most of human cognition, is receptive of the individuated forms provided by perception and imagination. It differs from them insofar as its function is to apprehend essences as opposed to individual things.⁷⁷ Aristotle adds that the passive intellect can think all things, and, in the process, does become whatever it thinks; in that respect it is pure potentiality (*dunamis*). In contrast with the passive intellect, the active intellect is "in essence actuality" (*têi ousiai ôn energieia*).⁷⁸ Aristotle's fundamental doctrines of the complementarity of potentiality and actuality, and of causation, in effect required him to posit something like the active intellect to account for the intermittent actualization of the passive intellect in and through the cognition of essences. But, as the vast amount of scholarly literature devoted to this distinction shows, the concept of the active intellect raises more problems than it solves. Indeed, if it is pure act, it is unaffected and unmixed, and if it is unmixed, it is immortal and eternal.⁷⁹ Not only does this last claim run counter to the *entelecheia* conception of the soul in Aristotle's late psychology, but it raises a host of unwelcome metaphysical problems. Is the active intellect to be identified with the unmoved mover whose activity is described in the *Metaphysics*?⁸⁰ And, since Aristotle cannot mean that each of us has a separate active intellect, must we assume, e.g.,

with Ross, that though the active intellect is "in the soul," it nevertheless "goes beyond the individual"?⁸¹ If that is the case, we should have to conclude, with him, that "it is identical in all individuals."⁸²

The fact that the problems raised by the distinction between passive and active *nous* are very far from being resolved need not, however, detract us from tentatively linking it to Aristotle's two different contentions in the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the nature, either practical or theoretic, of the good life. Indeed, the latter distinction can be viewed as the ethical version of the former. Firstly, while the self that Aristotle identifies with practical reason is, to some extent, individual, the self as theoretic reason cannot but be impersonal. There need be no contradiction here. Indeed, Aristotle's general concept of selfhood as an ideal allows him to urge his audience to make themselves, as it were, into tangents to the divine curve, even though he knows that their humanity will almost always pull them down. Secondly, as the active intellect is said to be "immortal and eternal,"⁸³ the life of contemplation is presented as "god-like."⁸⁴ Thirdly, it is in order to account for human knowledge that Aristotle was led to postulate the presence in humans of a purely active principle or *nous*. We should therefore not be surprised that he came to proffer the moral advice according to which, hard as it will be, we must try and reach out to the thinking actuality of the active *nous* which is in us, but which we arguably share with all other 'knowers'.

On this interpretation, the tension between book X and the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* corresponds fairly closely to the tension between the central doctrine of the *De Anima*, that the soul is the entelechy of the body, and the view expressed in III.5 of that same treatise that the soul comprises a separate and purely active element.⁸⁵ There is thus no need to invoke Plato's influence on Aristotle's earlier work to explain the panegyric of the theoretic life at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Though one can try and explain how Aristotle came to express two different views on the nature of the specifically

human element or self, and related topics, one cannot wholly explain away the discrepancy. The fact remains that at times he locates the human self in the practical intellect, and, at least one other time, he identifies human beings with their dianoetic element. Unsurprisingly the moral implications drawn from these identifications are at variance with each other, although they are not incompatible. What is clear is that Aristotle never wavered in his conviction both that the essential human self is noetic and that the moral life is second best to the life of contemplation. This latter type of life represents an ideal that he did not expect to be achieved by very many or very often. Most of us will not succeed in "immortalizing" ourselves in the way indicated, and the moral life will have to be our chosen way of becoming a 'self'. It is upon success in that endeavour that the formation of virtue friendship depends, since the formation of *other* selves presupposes that selfhood has been achieved.