ARISTOTLE’S SELF

Part One: Modern Selves

The preoccupation with the self or with subjectivity would seem to be one of the distinctive features of modern philosophy. By modern philosophy I mean, for present purposes, philosophy since Descartes and philosophy in the tradition that goes back to Descartes (not all philosophy in modern times is in that tradition or shares its concerns). For certainly the turn to the self is massively present in Descartes, since the self or the ego is the very fons et origo of his philosophical system. Everything else is ultimately to be traced back to the self and its immediate conscious states. This self is more or less identified with presence to self: the self is self-consciousness. Animals are thus not selves because not self-conscious. Indeed animals are not even alive, properly speaking. Life does not, contrary to what Aristotle supposed, come with self-movement but rather with self-consciousness. Accordingly there is a splitting off or a separating of self from body, at least at the level of the meanings of terms, since consciousness does not, or need not, include any reference to body. This remains true still of modern materialists in the philosophy of mind, for while they are keen to reduce the being of consciousness to body they are not as keen to reduce the meaning of consciousness to body (as in the case of functionalists). Self-motion, by contrast, does very much include reference to body, for self-movers are paradigmatically bodies.

The separating of self and body, initiated if not fully intended by Descartes, brings with it a separating of the self from the public and observable and its retreat into the radically private. For just as the public world of bodies is cut off from the self

behind the screen of the self’s ideas, so is the self cut off from the public world of bodies by its merely instrumental and non-constitutive relationship to bodily motion. Bodily motion can be the effect of the self, but it need not be. Bodily motion is fully intelligible in its own right as a mechanical process. It is only subjectively, or in our own self-consciousness, that we can speak of effects of self on bodily motion. There is nothing in the idea of the body’s motion as such that requires the presence of the choosing, active self. Descartes famously reduced animals to machines but exempted men from the same reduction because of the fact of speech. Among publicly perceptible phenomena it is speech that tells us that behind the phenomena there is another self like our own.

Many contemporary authors, of course, whether in the Analytic or Continental traditions, do not like this Cartesian idea of a self hidden behind the speaking. They do not want to posit, either in themselves or others, such private, unobservable entities. But they curiously hang on to the idea that such a self is the only individual self that there could in theory be. For when, in their flight from the private, they make publicly perceptible language the primary and distinctive phenomenon in human life, they identify the human with such public language and hence also with the social and historical. Thus there are only individuals, on this view, to the extent that individuals are socially and historically embodied, or in short to the extent that they are not individuals but social constructs. What is lost on this view, and what, by its absence, makes an individual self impossible to conceptualize, is the self as a self-mover. For

while speech is a public and social phenomenon, the act of speaking is an individual one. So there could be a place for genuine individuals and genuine individual selves in the context of public language if individuals could be conceived as the centers of action from which acts of speaking (and indeed all acts generally) self-consciously proceed. But acts of speaking are the movings of bodies (of mouths in particular) and, as Descartes taught us, and as we moderns still want to believe, there is no self to a moving body as such. Moving bodies are explicable in purely mechanical terms. It is only the symbolic aspects of speech (the structure and the meaning), not its material production in the noise-makings of speakers, that mechanics fails to explain. Hence these symbolic features of language are that to which the distinctively human retreats, and these features are socially, not individually, constructed.

There are thus two reductions of the human that we have inherited from Cartesianism: the reduction that Descartes himself gave us, which is to the absolutely private self, and the reduction that the reaction to Descartes gave us, which is to the absolutely social self. The first gives us individual selves, or rather one individual self, namely one's own self (for other selves are known indirectly, by analogy and extrapolation and by an analogy and extrapolation that always remain doubtful). The second gives us only one self too, but not the individual and ineradicably private self. Rather this private self is denied and all that is allowed as real is the one social self into which the individual is to be wholly absorbed. The first also gives us individuals that are understood to be complete as selves all at once and on their own; the second gives us individuals that are not selves at all and that are never selves as individuals, but only as constructed into the existing social whole.

These reductions at the metaphysical and epistemological levels are repeated at the moral and political levels. Here both theory and practice tend to split into the rival
camps of individualism and socialism, and our conflicts, physical and verbal, concern
whether and how far we are to take our bearings by the atomic individual, for whom
society is a means, or by the social community, for whom the individual is a means. The
former leads to capitalism and the stress on the individual's rights against the
community; the latter leads to communism and the stress on the community's rights
against the individual.

There are problems with both reductions and at each of the levels mentioned.
The first, with which we in the West are more familiar, has the drastic effect of closing
the self up within itself. This is true to begin with at the level of being and knowledge,
for there is no being that we know save our own subjective states. Whether there is
some being beyond these states which they represent is impossible to answer. For we
never have the access to such being to know whether there is any such being and, if so,
whether it is like our conscious subjective states or not.

At the level of morals and politics, the self is identified with the individualized
subject of certain self-regarding rights, and the political state is a sort of guarantor of
these rights against infringement by others. The self is the center and the world of
morals and politics is constructed from the self outwards. Perhaps the classic expression
of this idea is the theory of the social contract as derived from Descartes' contemporary,
Hobbes. Society and the state are, according to Hobbes, constructed by an agreement
between what I shall call "solipsistic selves." By solipsistic selves here I mean self-
seeking selves, or selves that are motivated only by the desire to achieve the subjective
satisfaction of whatever passions they happen to have at any given time. The pursuit by
everyone of their own passions naturally leads to conflict of self with self, and the social
contract is a way of removing or minimizing the conflict. Each self agrees to demand for
itself no greater freedom to pursue its own passions than it is prepared to grant to
others to pursue theirs; each self also agrees to set up a public force or coercive power to enforce and guarantee this agreement. The agreement is the social contract, the terms of the contract and obedience to it are morality, and the coercive force is the state.

The features particularly distinctive of this understanding of ethics and politics are rational choice and rights. Rational choice refers to the mechanics, as it were, of making the contract, and rights to the principles and results of the contract. Self-interested individuals are understood to be rational only to the extent that they make agreements that serve their self-interest better than any alternative agreements would. Rational choice theory is the study of what such an agreement should look like. Rights are essentially the self-interested desires of the parties to the contract taken as normative for the contract, that is as motivating the contract and as being guaranteed by the contract.

Self-interest is what, on this account, gives content to rational choice and rights and hence also to the political association that is produced. Such an association is essentially an alliance of mutual convenience and not a community. I mean that what each pursues as his good is not some good common to all but rather a private good peculiar to each. The good of others is viewed as merely instrumental to one's own individual good, and one makes room for or cares about the good of others only to the extent that this is necessary to secure one's own private good. In a genuine community, by contrast, there is a genuinely common good, I mean a good that is the joint good of each and which is essentially constitutive of the good of each.

There is, however, no place for such a good in the theory of rational choice and self-interested rights. Indeed that theory rules out such a good from the start and proceeds on the supposition that whatever goods there are are always private to the individual. It thus also rules out, or gives no importance or systematic attention to,
goods that are increased, as opposed to decreased, when shared, or, in short, to the internal goods of character (the virtues) as opposed to the external and bodily goods (wealth, fame, and the like). The doctrine of rational choice and rights proceed on the idea that we want to take to ourselves as much as possible and to give up to others as little as possible. But this doctrine would have no place if the goods at issue were goods that existed precisely in giving and were necessarily perfected by giving. Love, for instance, which is such a good, plays no role in this doctrine. Yet if we consider the family and its role in our lives (in the way that Aristotle does, for instance, but Hobbes and Rawls do not), if we recall that the family is where we all begin and develop and is fundamentally a giving and a sharing, we would see how vital to our lives genuine community and the goods of community really are.

The self, however, from which rights doctrines start is predominantly the self of passions and feelings. The self seeks to satisfy itself, and rights are the means for guaranteeing its satisfactions against threats from others. The self is happy when its passions and feelings are thus indulged and gratified. The self is therefore happy by virtue of its passivity or its capacity to be affected by things that happen to it. For feelings and the satisfaction of feelings are essentially things that we undergo. They are not things that we do, though admittedly they may happen to us because of things that we do. There is no or little sense in this theory of the self that is happy, not because of what happens to it or how it feels, but because of what it does and how it gives. Passion and passivity take the precedence, not action and activity. But this should not be surprising. The solipsistic self, from which this whole theory begins, is precisely the self turned in on itself, the self absorbed by its own inner states, not the self turned out of itself and absorbed in acting and being for others.

The self that suffers or undergoes and that, so to speak, finds itself in what it
suffers and undergoes also has the feature, at the metaphysical level, of lacking a robust or substantial coherence and unity. It exists or is a self only insofar as it undergoes or feels or is conscious of something, and the things it undergoes or feels or is conscious of can be as various and as disconnected as you wish. The self thus tends to get dissolved into the succession of its feelings. It collapses, to follow Hume, into the bundle of its impressions. But provided the impressions or feelings are pleasant, nothing else much matters, not even that it is the same self—if indeed any sense can be given, in this context, to the concept of the same self that is different, say, from the concept of a replicated self.

So much may be said about the first modern reduction of the human, the reduction of the self to the absolutely private self. As regards the second modern reduction of the human, the reduction of the self to the absolutely social self, the following may be noted. To begin with, on the ethical and political level, it is in conflict with the facts. We are clearly existing beings with a full range of powers and abilities quite independently of and prior to society and the structures of the state. Indeed it is these powers and abilities that make society and the state, for these latter are, if nothing else, human productions. We, by contrast, are produced by nature. Admittedly we are produced by nature to live in community with each other (the fact we are produced in and by families proves that). But we are not produced to be instruments of the community, let alone the state. We are produced rather to flourish and reach perfection

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in communities; hence the structures of community and state must be for us rather than we for them.

Socialism, to tell the truth, hypostatizes and makes a fetish of community. It attributes a being to community over and above the being of the individuals who, as a matter of observable fact, make it up. For otherwise one could not speak of individuals as being for the community in the sense of being for something that exists independently of them and to which they are to be subordinated. In reality, of course, this fetishism of the social is just a deceit to hide the all too brutal truth that socialism is tyranny over the many by the few, the few who constitute the ruling party. The few of this party are the independent community and it is to this group (or rather gang) of individuals that everyone is to be subordinated or rather enslaved--everyone, that is, who is not part of the inner circle of the party.

Liberal individualism and socialism are in fact flip sides of the same bad coin. The first subordinates community to individuals and the second subordinates individuals to community. Neither sees, let alone allows room for, the possibility that the two are really on the same level and do not need to be subordinated. Community, true community, is just the individuals who make it up understood as pursuing common goods together, the goods that only exist in, and are necessarily increased by, acts of sharing. Admittedly, to be able to engage in such acts of sharing, individuals cannot be taken in their raw or initial state as bundles of desires and passions, or, to use my earlier phrase, as solipsistic selves. After all that is the condition of children and the childish, from which we have to be weaned by education.

Such weaning comes, of course, from the community or society (or at least the family). But it is nature that gives us the powers to be weaned, and not community or society. Nature also gives us the goal or point of these powers. Our capacity to speak,
for instance, which we have by nature, is precisely that: a capacity to speak. And speaking is by nature a naming and judging of the being of things. Our capacity is therefore to be weaned or educated in the direction of such naming and judging. The sounds used for this purpose and their syntactical ordering can vary infinitely, and it is of course true that the particular sounds and ordering we come to use are determined for us by our society. But society and society's language do not determine the beings we name and judge. Nature determines those as she also determines our capacity to speak. People who would limit our grasp of being by the limits of our language are no less despotic, and no less to be resisted, than those who would limit our pursuit of good by the limits of our rulers' decrees. If being outstrips the language, let the language be made to catch up; and if our pursuit of good outstrips the decrees of our rulers, let the decrees and the rulers be made to catch up. Neither in our moral and political life nor in our speaking and thinking are we mere creatures of a fetishised society or state, totally absorbed in and instrumental to its alienating, despotic goals.

**Part Two: Aristotle's Self**

The characterization I have given of the modern self is perhaps a little too schematic. If one descended more into the details one would doubtless find that things were not so simple or clear-cut and that other views of the self can be found. Still, my schematic characterization does, I think, pick out the main features, and the main deficiencies, of the modern self. Any other views of the self that can be found are only going to constitute an interesting alternative if they avoid these deficiencies. In fact they are only going to constitute an interesting alternative if they include elements of an understanding of the self that is of a decidedly Aristotelian cast. I say Aristotelian not because these elements are found only in Aristotle (on the contrary, they are at least
implicit in Plato and can be found in many ancient, as well as medieval, thinkers), but because they receive a particularly compelling presentation in his writings. Certainly one can put together from passages of the *Metaphysics*, the *De Anima*, and the *Ethics* in particular an account of the self that is superior in all the decisive respects to the modern accounts just discussed.

To begin with, one has in Aristotle (and for the first time) a fully articulated account of substance as the ontological or metaphysical reality of each particular thing. What makes a thing to be in the first place, what makes it stand out, as it were, from bare nothingness, is its substantial being. A thing does exist, of course, in a variety of ways or with a variety of properties (as in having a certain size, or shape, or color and so on), but it is not reducible to these properties; rather these properties are reducible to it. Sizes and shapes and colors do not exist by themselves; they exist as the size or shape or color of something and that something can exist, and perdure as the same something, even if it changes its size or its shape or its color. Its being, therefore, is conceptually separable from its properties while they are not conceptually separable from it.

Empiricists are, of course, going to reject such a distinction. For them the thing is just the bundle of its perceptual properties and nothing else. But empiricists assert this


6. This is the teaching of *Metaphysics* 7(Z).1.
on the basis of an irrealist theory of perception. What we directly perceive, they declare, is sensations in the sense of mental contents, not in the sense of really existing things external to us. For if such be the case then, indeed, a thing will be reducible to its sensations; its substance, if one may so speak, or that of which these sensations will be modifications, will be consciousness itself, not some external reality. The opposite will be true, however, if what we perceive is externally existing things. For then a thing will be its own self-subsistent reality and its properties will be properties of this reality, conceptually but not really separable from it. At any rate this sort of idea, where the substance of a thing is a real given of experience (and not where it is a mere posit after the fashion of Locke), is central to the Aristotelian doctrine.

The substance of a thing is also primarily its form or its structuring principle. In the case of material things, the structuring principle is combined with matter which it structures so that the whole is an enduring sensible entity. The particular form or principle of a thing will be sufficient, not only to individuate the thing as what it is, but also to make it the same individual thing throughout all changes (including changes in

the material particles that we nowadays suppose make it up, for these will be particles of the whole only to the extent that their being is the being of the form that is structuring the whole).

The doctrine of substantial form is what explains, for Aristotle, the identity over time of individual material things. It is, if you will, the first and principal part of his answer to the problem of personal identity. We tend to wonder if personal identity is to be explained by reference to bodily or psychological continuity or both. Aristotle would say it was neither. Personal identity is identity of form or identity of the structuring principle that keeps the body the same despite changes and that is the enduring source of all a person's powers and acts.

This structuring principle, that constitutes personal identity over time, is the soul or, as Aristotle describes it, the first actuality of the organic body. It is what sets the body in act as a body and as a living body. Without it the body would not be a body. For whether or not soul, or some soul, can survive without the body, it is certain, for Aristotle, that the body cannot survive without the soul. For the body, the living body, is essentially something that moves and grows and acts in various ways, and this it could not do without soul. A dead body is no longer a body, but the decaying remains

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10. The agent intellect of *De Anima* 3.5, if this is supposed to be a part of the soul and not something separate (a matter of much and longstanding scholarly dispute).
of a body.\textsuperscript{11} The soul is thus both the source of being for the body and the ground of all the acts of the body: growing, moving, sensing, desiring, thinking. These acts are the second actualities of the living body, the actualities in which the powers of the living thing come to exercise. The body is of course not always exercising these powers, as in sleep for instance. But it is always exercising its first actuality, for without that it would not be a living body at all.

From all this it follows that the principle of personal identity is not identical with acts of self-consciousness, or even with what is immediately known in acts of self-consciousness. For acts of self-consciousness are intermittent but the actuality of the soul is not. Moreover what is known in self-consciousness is the various acts being performed at the time, the acts of perceiving or thinking, and not the actuality of the soul as such; or what is known is second actualities and not first actuality.\textsuperscript{12} Of course this first actuality of the soul does come to view in a way, since our conscious acts are acts of \emph{us} sensing, thinking, and so on, and hence must involve some reflexive awareness of the substantial unity from which those acts spring. But the acts need not, perhaps, have any further unity among themselves; they could, depending on our psychological state at the time, be episodic or haphazard or disorganized. Perhaps in extreme cases it might even be unclear, at least from inside consciousness, if the acts all belong to the same soul. Self-consciousness might, in other words, be Humean: a mere

\textsuperscript{11} Aristotle's position on the body is the reverse of Descartes'. The body is not an independently subsisting machine. It has no being of itself but exists with the being of the soul, which is its structuring and energizing principle, \textit{De Anima} 2.1.412b20-27.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{De Anima} 3.2.425b12-17.
bundle of otherwise independent states. From outside consciousness, however, or outside the given individual's consciousness, there will be no doubt that all the acts belong to one soul, since the substantial entity that is this living body will always be one and the same and will always be publicly observable as such.

Our awareness of ourselves as one and the same may thus owe as much, or more, to our external awareness of our body as to our internal awareness of our own acts. Perhaps indeed there is no awareness of the unity of the self apart from awareness of the body and the unity of the body. Aristotle would reject the Cartesian ego, which is supposed to be a unitary given even in the absence of reference to the body. He would, as far as self-consciousness goes, sympathize more with the bundle theory of Hume. Of course, since he would reject Hume's empiricism (Aristotle did not reduce experience to states of sensation and imagination as empiricists do), he also has the external reality and hence the substance of perceived things. He still has the substantial unity of the externally existing, and publicly observable, animate body.

We may say, then, that the primary self for Aristotle, the enduring entity that is the person, is the ontological reality of the body/soul composite. This reality, which can, to be sure, become an object of self-consciousness, has a being independent of self-consciousness and acts of self-consciousness. Consequently it is not the self of Descartes' cogito (for that self is pure self-consciousness), nor the self of Hume's bundle of perceptions (for that self is a collection of particular conscious acts), nor the self of Kant's transcendental apperception (for that is a theoretical posit), nor indeed the self of any theory that seeks to ground the self in and through self-consciousness. Aristotle's primary self functions rather at the level of natural philosophy and biology. It is the self that comes to view, and to public view, as this particular animate body. The self is the animal, the rational animal: precisely what Descartes rejected as a possible understanding
of the self.\textsuperscript{13}

It does not follow from this, however, that this biological or ontological self, as we may call it, is all there is to Aristotle's self. In fact we might say that for Aristotle this biological self is the lowest level of selfhood. For beyond the unity of the animal's substance, which is an immediate given, there is also the unity of the animal's powers and acts, which is not an immediate given and does not automatically follow the former unity. The body, for instance, can, in its powers, be estranged and divided from itself, as by disease, deformity, paralysis and so on, when the parts of the body do not act in coordination or do not follow the commands of reason and wish. Similar disease and paralysis can strike the psychic powers too, when passion conflicts with passion or with reason, and one is driven now this way and now that.\textsuperscript{14} A man may be one self in his substance, in other words, but many and conflicting selves in his acts.

These considerations bring us, however, directly into Aristotle's moral and political thought. For unity of actions, or what we may call the moral self, is not, unlike the ontological or biological self, a given of nature; it is an achievement of practice and habituation, or in short it is the result of virtue.\textsuperscript{15} Without virtue both individual and community are torn and divided. Aristotle presents a vivid picture of such a state in his description of the bad man:

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\textbf{13. Second Meditation, p. 81, in Selected Philosophical Writings, and vol. VII, p. 25, in Oeuvres.}
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\textbf{14. Nicomachean Ethics 1.13.1102b16-28.}
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\textbf{15. See Stern-Gillet, Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship, p. 25-29.}
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The base are divided against themselves and, as in the incontinent, their appetites are other than their wishes. For they choose, in place of what they think good, things pleasant but harmful. Some shun doing what they think best for themselves through cowardice or sloth...For their soul is riven by faction, and one part, because of depravity, grieves to be kept from certain things while another is pleased, and one part pulls them in this direction and another in that as if splitting them asunder.\textsuperscript{16}

To be contrasted with this is the description of the good man:

The decent man is of one mind with himself, and he desires with his entire soul the same things. He wills for himself what is and appears to be good, and does it...He shares the same griefs and pleasures as himself, for at all times the same thing is painful or pleasant to him and not one thing at one time and another at another.\textsuperscript{17}

The bad man, then, is not really a unity while the good man is. The bad man is in fact a many, and a many that are in conflict with each other. As Aristotle says again:

That which is good is simple but what is bad is multiform. And while the good man is always alike and does not change in character, the base and the senseless

\textsuperscript{16} Nikomachean Ethics 9.4.1166b7-22.

\textsuperscript{17} Nikomachean Ethics 9.4.1166a13-29.
man is one thing in the morning and another at night.

In the wicked man there is dissonance, and it is for this reason that it seems possible for a self (autos) to be an enemy of itself (haut_ι). But qua one and undivided a self (autos) is desirable to itself (haut_ι), and such the good man is...since the depraved man is not one but many and within the same day is a different self (heteros)...\(^{18}\)

I have translated this latter passage somewhat unusually (though not, I think, inaccurately) in order to bring out expressly in the English how much the idea of self is present in the Greek. Aristotle's message here is that the bad man is not a self but many selves, and selves that have no intrinsic connection but are hostile to each other. The bad man is a sort of schizophrenic. The only unity his many selves have is that they are all states or moods or acts, or what you will, of one and the same body/soul composite. The bad man may thus be ontologically one self (for he is one animal body), but he is not existentially one self. On the contrary, his lived experience is a bundle of conflicting acts and emotions. "The depraved do not have any fixity in them, for not even to themselves do they persist in being alike."\(^ {19}\)

The reason for all this is plain. For the vices, which are what disfigure the bad and depraved, do not have any principle of unity to them. To begin with they form pairs of conflicting opposites: rashness opposes cowardice, prodigality opposes

\(^{18}\) Eudemian Ethics 7.5.1239b11-14, 7.6.1240b12-17.

\(^{19}\) Nicomachean Ethics 8.8.1159b7-9.
meanness, irascibility opposes passivity, and so on. It is likely that the bad man will share something of both pairs of vices. He will run rashly into needless danger at one moment and then at the next, when he realizes his mistake, run out of it again like a coward. He will give his money prodigally at one moment but then at the next, when he sees it dissipating too quickly, seek to increase it like a miser. The very nature of the vices, therefore, will deprive the bad man of unity.

Secondly the vices oppose reason and nature. They oppose reason because vices are by definition failures to keep to the mean marked out by reason. They oppose nature because our nature is directed to a life of virtue as to its proper end and function. Moreover, our nature is ultimately one with reason for reason is its principle. The soul is the principle of our nature (it is our form and substance), and the principle of our soul is reason. Indeed Aristotle says on several occasions that reason or intellect is what we truly are (or is our true self). It is not surprising, therefore, that to be vicious is to be driven against oneself and to experience a perpetual state of opposition within oneself— an opposition between what one is, reason, and what one does, vice. As

20. *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.7.


22. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.1097b22-8a20.

23. *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4.1166a16-17, 9.8.1168b34-69a3, 10.7.1178a2-3. It will be for this sort of reason too that there is something of the good and decent in all of us, including the base, *Eudemian Ethics* 7.3.1238b12-14, and cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1.1103a24-25. See also Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, pp. 25-26.
remarked in the *Magna Moralia*: 24 "then only will the soul be one, when the reason and the passions are in accord with one another," that is, when one lives a life of virtue.

The object of our search is this, that things simply good be good to the self. For what one should choose is what is simply good, but what one should choose for oneself is what is good for one's self. These must harmonize together, and that is what virtue does. This is also what political science is for, so that those who do not yet have this harmony may come to have it. 25

Virtue is what brings the soul to unity and makes us into single as opposed to multiple selves. For no virtue opposes any other but all are united in and through the virtue of prudence which, as right reason, falls into the definition of each of them. 26 Moreover, as just remarked, the virtues accord with reason and nature, or are indeed the perfection of reason and nature. Thus they integrate the soul with itself and with its acts, and integrate the acts with each other too.

Virtue is for the sake of acts and the good man is good in action, not merely in having the power and disposition to act. 27 It is in activity that the self that the good man is must come fully into being as a self, and action is itself complete in and through the

24. *Magna Moralia* 2.11.1211a34-35. This work is Aristotelian if not by Aristotle himself.


27. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8.1098b31-9a7.
body. Thus it is in the self-moving body that the self most comes to view—precisely the opposite of what Descartes wished. Our self-motion, however, unlike that of plants and animals, is self-conscious motion. For our self-motion is deliberate and chosen, and choice is impossible without self-awareness, since without such awareness we could not know our acts as our own and so could not, as choice requires, direct ourselves to and in these acts. We would instead be being directed or moved by something else, and so we would be acted on rather than acting. Besides, the very idea of a self denotes reflexivity, the returning of awareness back on the self as source of that awareness. A self that had no awareness of itself would not be a self. It would not know itself as "I" or "myself" nor have any awareness of anything as being "mine". Self-awareness and self-possession are integral to being a self and an agent of acts.

In one sense self-awareness is easy and automatic. As soon as we are awake we are aware of ourselves and of our existence and activity. We do not have to put any effort into being aware of ourselves; it comes at once with each of our waking acts. We perceive a tree, for instance, and in that very perceiving we perceive that we perceive. We know a mathematical equation and in that very knowing we know that we know. We walk and talk and in that very walking and talking know that we walk and talk. The same is true of all our activity, including our deliberating and choosing. But such immediate self-awareness, while enough for awareness of self, is not enough for knowledge of self. It does not give us to ourselves in a full and direct way. The "I" of immediate self-awareness is always given to us alongside something else and, as it

28. Second Meditation.

were, in its shadow or on its margin. What we directly know and perceive is the other (the tree, the equation, the walking); the self we only know and perceive reflexively.

We can, to be sure, bring ourselves into direct awareness in another way, when in one act of ours we make another act of ours the object. So we recall in memory something we did and, focusing on it, try to see why we did it and in what state of mind or feeling. Or while performing some act now that we can do easily and without much concentration, we distance ourselves from it in thought, as it were, and watch ourselves doing it. But this kind of awareness, while able to provide us with the source of a deeper knowledge of ourselves, is always performed at one remove from ourselves. It is ourself as somehow other, as belonging to another time or another act, that we focus on. It is not the present "I", the "I" given immediately in the act we are now absorbed in, that comes to us like this. Self-knowledge is not the same as immediate self-awareness, and it is harder to achieve.

We can study our neighbors more than we can study ourselves and their deeds more than our own.

It is a most difficult thing, as some of the sages have said, to attain a knowledge of oneself...we are not able to see what we are from ourselves, and that we cannot do so is plain from the way in which we blame others without being aware that we do the same thing ourselves...³⁰

Aristotle's stance is anti-Cartesian. The self is not, as Descartes argued, what we first and most know, but what, in a way, we know last and least.\(^{31}\) Even our immediate self-awareness, which accompanies each one of our conscious acts, is not first though it be contemporaneous. To be aware that one is seeing or hearing or walking presupposes as logically, though not temporally, prior that one is seeing or hearing or walking.\(^{32}\)

These remarks of Aristotle's about the difficulty, yet necessity, of self-knowledge (as opposed to immediate self-awareness) come in the middle of his discussion of friendship and the need the good man has of friends. They form part of complex arguments to the effect that we can know ourselves best and easiest in our friend, and that by contemplating and knowing him and his acts we can thereby contemplate and know ourselves and our acts. But such contemplation of oneself in one's friend will, of course, only be possible if one's friend is like oneself, for otherwise what one contemplates in him will not manifest what is in oneself. The only friend, therefore, who can play this role must be a friend who is another self and who is, as it were, a mirror in whom we can see ourselves reflected.\(^{33}\) Only virtuous friends are other selves and mirrors to each other, for only their friendship is founded on love of what the friend essentially as opposed to accidentally is.\(^{34}\)

\(^{31}. Second Meditation. See also Stern-Gillet, Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship, pp. 22-23.\(^{32}. Nicomachean Ethics 9.9.1170a29-32.\(^{33}. Nicomachean Ethics 9.9.1170a1-4, Magna Moralia 2.15.1213a20-24.\(^{34}. The other two kinds of friendship, those of pleasure and utility, are based on accidental qualities of the friend, Nicomachean Ethics 8.3. For a nice discussion of this
If self-knowledge, therefore, comes to its full completion in such virtuous friendship, and if self-knowledge is necessary to being fully a self, then it follows that the self only comes to full completion in being a virtuous friend to a virtuous friend. It will be in virtuous friendship, and in virtuous friendship alone, that selves come to their perfect realization as selves. In the virtuous friend the self is given to the self in direct focus, as it were, and in a direct act, so that in seeing him directly I see myself directly. For he is the faithful mirror of my own self. Likewise he too in seeing me directly sees himself directly. We each reflect the self back to the other, and the self-knowing that we could not do, or not do well, on our own, we do easily together.

This is, I take it, what Aristotle ultimately has in mind by the striking phrase he uses on several occasions about the friend, that the friend is *heteros or allos autos* and even *heteros ego*. This phrasing is normally translated as meaning that the friend is "another self" or "another I", and this is undoubtedly right. But the phrasing has a greater grammatical richness and there is no reason not to translate it also as meaning that the friend is "the self or I as other" or even "the other as self or I." All three translations only serve to highlight, in their different ways, the same and decisive fact about virtuous friendship: that the friend makes the self, as it were, stand opposite itself

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and thus, by bringing the self into direct view for itself, brings the self to fuller knowledge of itself and so also to fuller being as a self.\textsuperscript{37}

However, as was already mentioned and as is obvious in itself, the friend cannot do this service for his friend without his friend doing the same service for him at the same time. Virtuous friends necessarily complete each other mutually in their acts of friendship. As I become fully aware of myself and my life and being in him, so he becomes fully aware of himself and his life and being in me. In a real sense we each give ourselves to the other in our acts towards each other. Moreover we thus give ourselves fully to each other, for there is no more that we can give to each other than our very selves. Each act of the friends thus becomes another act of self-giving, and each act of self-giving intensifies the being of the self that gives and receives. For, if we are to follow out the implications of Aristotle's remarks, we must note that the giving and receiving must not only be mutual or reciprocal but also immediate to each other. In giving myself to him I receive the gift of himself to me. At least this must be so in the most complete acts of virtuous friendship, when both friends are active towards each other together. For then my act of giving myself to him is immediate with his act of giving himself to me. This remains so even if the act in question is the friend doing me a benefit and my thanking him for it. For an act of gratitude is a giving too (we ourselves call it a "giving of thanks"). Of course, there can be an interval between the act of beneficence and the act of gratitude, say if my friend saves my life by taking me to hospital when I am wounded or ill and unconscious. But when I have recovered enough to know what my friend did and to thank him for it expressly and personally, then at once the activity of mutual giving and receiving is restored. For I give myself to him

\textsuperscript{37} See especially \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 9.9.1170a32-b7.
again in giving thanks and he to me in receiving thanks.

The sort of acts, of course, which virtuous friends do together as friends are virtuous acts, and virtue and virtuous acts are goods that are *par excellence* communal goods, I mean goods that, as remarked earlier, are realized in two or more acting together and that are increased, rather than diminished, in being shared.³⁸ Money is a material good that is diminished in being shared, but the generous use of money is a good of virtue that is increased in being shared. For if all share in being generous to each other according to their means, generosity is necessarily increased. The same holds also of the acts of the intellectual virtues, for contemplation and study can often be done better and more intensely and continuously if done by several together than by one alone.

Of course, even bad men can cooperate for particular purposes and even the lower grades of friendship, the friendships of mere utility or pleasure, necessarily involve some cooperation and some doing together of one and the same action. There is doubtless even some degree of self-giving in these friendships. But such self-giving is necessarily going to be imperfect and flawed because the selves who are giving and receiving are imperfect and flawed selves. Besides it is not the friend's self that they love but some feature attaching to the friend which they currently have need of or currently find pleasure in. Their friend likewise loves them in the same way. Hence there is no mutual giving and receiving of selves. The friendship of the virtuous, of course, is not like this. Not only are the virtuous, because of their virtue, complete selves, but their love is for the self of their friend. They give their selves and the selves they give are gifts worthy of their friend, for they are, as it were, giving the friend back to himself in the

mirror of their own souls.

**The Selves Compared**

So much at any rate must, I think, be implied by Aristotle's teaching on friendship, even if Aristotle himself does not spell it all out in so many words. The self we thus get from him stands in marked contrast to the modern selves discussed in the first part of this essay. For, to begin with, this self has substantial reality as an individual self. One might say that Descartes' self is something substantial but Descartes' way of understanding this leads too easily to the loss of substantiality. For he identifies this substantiality with consciousness, and consciousness in us is, first, an act or a series of acts and not a substance, and, second, passive rather than active. It expresses the self in its mode of experiencing itself and not in its mode of moving itself. The very separating of the body from the self, which is the chief legacy of Cartesianism, or the very loss of the *embodied animality* of the self is what leads also to the loss of substance and action. It is what leads, indeed, to the Humean self, which though at some distance from the Cartesian self is nevertheless a natural development from the Cartesian self. A bundle of feelings or impressions is what consciousness, understood as identical with conscious acts, must always threaten to become.

Aristotle's insistence on the reality of the objects of immediate perception, including especially the reality of our own bodies, is what enables him to keep the substantial reality of the self as the abiding source and ultimate object of consciousness. It is also what enables him to keep the substantial reality of individual selves as the source and perfection of the social. He loses real individuals neither into bundles of perceptions nor into social constructs.

For Aristotle has as many individual selves as he has rational animals and these
individuals, because each is real and a substance, can genuinely communicate and share with each other. Neither the self-absorbed or solipsistic self of liberal individualism nor the socially constructed self of socialism are his starting point. His starting point is rather the embodied rational animal. This animal stands out, even as an animal, because of its capacity for sharing genuinely communal as opposed to private goods, or goods of the soul over and above goods of the body. It is in such sharing that this animal comes fully to itself and indeed becomes fully a self. There can be here no conflict between the good of others and the good of the self, or between altruism and selfishness.\textsuperscript{39} Communal goods are precisely that: communal goods. They are goods that satisfy each as much as all, and indeed that satisfy each in satisfying all and that satisfy all in satisfying each. It is as much an error here to raise, with the liberal, the idea of a conflict between self and other as it is to raise, with the socialist, the idea of the self losing itself in the other or in society. On the contrary, in the pursuit of communal goods, each self is perfected as a self and finds itself again and again in other selves.

Such at any rate is what one must say if one speaks about selves who are selves not merely in their substantial being as animals but also in their activity as rational. The communal goods are the rational goods of the virtues, and the virtues have the effect, not only of enabling self genuinely to share with self, but also and especially of bringing the self to the fullness of selfhood. The unity that the self already is by its substantial reality as body and soul is, as already explained, not automatically carried over into the activities of the self. There is need in addition of the virtues which alone can make the self one in this way. Without the virtues the self is dissipated and ceases, in its lived experience, to be a self. The self that is unified by the virtues not only completes itself by

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, pp. 120-22.
becoming, in its acts, one self as opposed to many selves, it also completes itself by becoming the only sort of self that, through union with other selves like itself, can fully come to itself and fully grasp and possess itself. The perfect self is, as it were, the unimpeded flow of existence from substance to powers to acts. This perfection is achieved finally and fully in virtuous friendship, wherein the friends, while different in their being, are united in their living and are to each a true other self. In such a case the difference between substance and acts, and between the substantial and the moral self, may remain ontologically, but it has little importance existentially. In the experience of their lived being, friends are one in their joint act of self-gift.40

Such friendship marks the highpoint of Aristotle’s self and also, of course, of the good life and of happiness. Only the good man is properly speaking a self. The bad man is many and conflicting selves. Only the good man is truly happy. The bad man is torn and tortured by the war between his selves. Only the good man truly acts and, in acting, realizes himself. The bad man does not so much act as is acted upon as he is seized by now one and now another of his warring selves. Happiness for him, if we may call it happiness, is not what he does but what he undergoes because of what he does, namely the pleasures or satisfactions, however temporary, that his conflicting actions bring. Consequently he measures his relations with others, not according to the mutual self-gift of virtuous friends, but according to how these relations may bring him satisfaction, that is, according to the principles of rational choice. He demands from others his self-focused rights; he does not expand into others through self-perfecting love. The virtuous, by contrast, not only achieve genuine community with others through their friendship, but this community completes their selfhood. They are not lost in some

Aristotle's self is evidently neither solipsistic nor a social construct. Instead it keeps to the mean between these two modern extremes, and by so doing it achieves a higher degree of selfhood and of community than either. Aristotle furnishes us, therefore, with a better basis, not only for the ontology of the self and consciousness, but also for a morals and a politics that give genuine and equal worth to individuals and community instead of subordinating one to the other. Doubtless there is more to be said on this matter, and further developments that one could explore—for there are insights about the self in modern philosophy that go beyond what one can find in, or tease out of, Aristotelian texts. Nevertheless these texts already represent, if I am right, a remarkable and a remarkably balanced achievement.