



## THE ARROW

*A JOURNAL OF WAKEFUL SOCIETY, CULTURE & POLITICS*

*The Arrow* explores the relationship between contemplative practice, politics, and activism. We investigate topics in politics, economics, ecology, conflict transformation, and the social sciences. Inspired by the vision of meditation masters Chögyam Trungpa and Sakyong Mipham for a “union of social life and spiritual wakefulness” in society, *The Arrow* provides a critical and much needed space for investigating the meeting point of contemplative wisdom and pressing issues of climate change, racism, inequality, and conflict.

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## Good-for-Nothing Practice and the Art of Paradox: The Exemplary Citizenship of Ta-Nehisi Coates

by DEAN MATHIOWETZ

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### Abstract

*The work of social justice requires attending to deep divisions and disagreements in a community. This work in a democratic polity demands the ability to hold, rather than foreclose, the tension between those disagreements and the vision of justice by which we hope to harmonize them. This essay explores the potential in meditation, as a “good for nothing practice” (and as a “good for no-thing practice”), to foster a kind of citizenship, understood as people’s active disposition to share in the co-creation of their power and their worlds, that is capable of attending to these divisions in the search for justice. Good for no-thing practice, I argue, mirrors in significant ways the demands of democratic citizenship. This parallel is not accidental, but rather reflects the deep connection between both intimate and collective practices of liberation. Grounding this argument in a vibrant and contested tradition of political theorizing, I develop a theoretical image of citizenship by putting the writings of Aristotle into conversation with the demands and insights offered by meditations’ “good for no-thingness,” especially in how it supports careful attending to the heterogeneity and differences in the polity. I also turn to the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates, a public intellectual whose engagement with questions of social justice (and reparations in particular), exemplifies the practice of democratic citizen deliberation in the face of deep divisions and the demands of justice.*

**Keywords:** meditation, citizenship, Aristotle, mindfulness, justice

THE POLITICS OF mindfulness is an elusive topic. For every psychology paper reporting that meditators are more sensitive to others' suffering and willing to take others' perspectives—and for every sociological study illustrating a strong correlation between mindfulness practice and social involvement and activism—the image of the navel-gazing meditator still conjures an army of doubts about the practice's social relevance. We may be familiar with this image as consumers confronted by the lotus-legged silhouette floating against a sunset in the marketing materials of pop-spirituality, or as practitioners who encounter each other moving serenely about practice centers while the injustices of world rage just outside. These images of mindfulness practice as removed, tucked away, or cloistered from the world suggest the privilege of individualism and isolationism, as well as a withdrawal from the shared work of social justice. We sense there's a problem here; we want to know that meditation is not only not harming, but actually helping where it matters so urgently.

But if we want meditation to be politically helpful, we need a clearer image of what we mean by “politically helpful” and what this looks like in practice. We need an image that is at once both rich enough to compel us and precise enough to offer some clarity about the relationship between politics and mindfulness. This is the sort of thing for which political theory is helpful. With this in mind, in this essay I will engage political theory, especially the writings of Aristotle, to draw an image of democratic citizenship. In so doing, I will explore points where theoretical explorations of democratic citizenship may be placed into fruitful, practical conversation with mindfulness meditation. This, of course, entails understanding not only citizenship, but also mindfulness practice *in a particular way*—one that complicates or even contradicts the superficial images of meditation in pop spirituality, and one that nudges us out of complacency in our practice. Just as theory will inform our image of citizenship, so too a Dharma teaching will inform our image of practice.

My contention in this essay is that Dharma practice, and mindfulness meditation in particular, has something important to contribute to fostering citizen virtue today. This unique contribution derives from a paradox inherent to meditation: that it is a useless practice.<sup>1</sup> By this I mean to highlight the non-gaining aspects of meditation, which play important roles in many Dharma traditions, and which are particularly explicit in Zen traditions of Mahayana Buddhism, at

least as practiced in North America today. The paradoxical nature of this non-gaining practice is nicely encapsulated in Kodo Sawaki Roshi's ambiguous phrase: "meditation doesn't work. It's good for nothing." Both the ambiguity of this phrase and its paradoxical quality (i.e., as a teaching about how to approach practice) speak to ways that mindfulness practice fosters capacities that are essential to citizenship. What's more, the idea that a good-for-nothing practice like meditation might foster democratic citizenship is itself paradoxical—a situation that illuminates crucial aspects and dimensions of democracy. Meditation as paradoxical practice thus connects mindfulness to the political promise of paradoxical thinking. Many political theorists, and democratic theorists in particular, have noted and explored ways that paradoxes open up our thinking to possibilities for imagination and dialog.<sup>2</sup>

I begin this essay by exploring the "good-for-nothing" aspects of meditation, taking care to examine matters that are particularly relevant to justice and democratic citizenship, which I then consider in the context of political theory. Arriving at those matters, the picture I develop unfolds around two apparently divergent and even incongruous figures: Aristotle and Ta-Nehisi Coates. I show how Aristotle's writings offer intensely generative ways of thinking about citizenship and justice, highlighting points of intersection with "good-for-nothing" mindfulness along the way. And Ta-Nehisi Coates's advocacy of reparations exemplifies, in my view, what is most promising in the pathways that Aristotle's writings open to his readers. Coates may or may not be a mindfulness practitioner—I don't know—but what matters is that his engagement with questions of justice in American life follows a pattern that others may develop by integrating mindfulness into our understanding of citizenship. Taken together, these figures help us to understand citizenship and the work of justice as naturally congruent with the fruits of practice. I wish to suggest that the congruence between these matters is not merely fortuitous or even just coincidental, but instead reflects deep parallels between individual and collective practices of liberation.

## The Paradox and Ambiguity of "Good-for-Nothing" Practice

A *koan*-like phrase often shared in the American Zen tradition insists that "meditation is good for nothing." The phrase is most often at-

tributed to Kodo Sawaki Roshi (who gave it this formulation in the 1970s); the underlying idea, however, has a precedent in the *Heart Sutra*—an ancient Buddhist text whose elaboration of *śūnyatā* (emptiness or nothingness) is central to many schools of Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> North American Zen practitioners frequently join Sawaki’s deliberately paradoxical idea that “meditation is good for nothing” with assertions that “meditation doesn’t work” and that “no one should do it.” These remarks are most likely to arise in discussions where commentators begin citing “benefits” of or a duty to practice. Thus the phrase is a reminder to drop impulses to turn practice into a means to some other end. From this vantage point, meditating to gain some benefit is not meditation. Instead, it is *work*: to produce a good, or meet an obligation.

The notion that “meditation is good for nothing” touches on an essential paradox of mindfulness practice: in order for the practice to be fruitful, it must be pursued as an end in itself, and not to achieve another good. I have focused on the non-instrumentality implied by this teaching and its contribution to democratic citizenship elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, I focus instead on the political importance of this teaching’s paradoxical and ambiguous qualities, particularly the way it encourages paradoxical thinking, embeds the practice in the Dharma teachings of emptiness, and fosters connections between paradoxical thinking and practical action.

Just as “meditation is good for nothing” is paradoxical in relation to practice, it also becomes ambiguous when set in the context of Dharma teaching. While the phrase reflects the Zen love of contradiction and humor, it also gestures, as I noted above, to the *Heart Sutra*, a paramount text of Mahayana Buddhist teaching.<sup>5</sup> Central to the *Heart Sutra* itself is a teaching about *śūnyatā*, a Sanskrit term typically translated as “emptiness,” but whose meaning is perhaps closer to “free of independent existence.”<sup>6</sup> The connection I wish to draw between meditation as “good for nothing” and *śūnyatā* is somewhat speculative, but it is illustrative all the same. If we understand a “thing” to be a free-standing entity or phenomenon in the world, the teaching of *śūnyatā* presents us, by contrast, with the no-thingness of the thing: nothing in the world bears a truly independent existence.<sup>7</sup> Everything depends on other things; thus everything is free of independent existence.<sup>8</sup> We may therefore interpret *śūnyatā* as a teaching about the no-thingness of things. For this reason, and to connect the teaching of *śūnyatā* to the good-for-nothingness of meditation, I shall prefer the term “no-thingness” as a translation of *śūnyatā* for the rest of this essay.

The *Heart Sutra* teaches that meditation practice fosters a realization of no-thingness, and in this sense, we may say not only that meditation is good for nothing, but that it is good for no-thing as well.

In this way, good-for-no-thing meditation practice is also helpful for fostering awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, including things political. While the political world is complex and heterogeneous, it is not simply made up of discrete parts, separate “spheres” (like the economy) or realms (like the household). This is true even though we meet, and must necessarily recognize and handle, many things discretely in our everyday lives. In this way, there is truth both in the distinctiveness and the interconnectedness of things. Because distinctiveness is most evident to ordinary experience, the balanced perspective fostered by mindfulness emphasizes interconnectedness, according to Sawaki Roshi. Using the term “interconnectedness” cleaves the connections and the “things” that they are among (“inter-”). Thus, the awareness of interconnectedness fostered by meditation also helps us humans remember our responsibility for the world, in its myriad systems and multifarious events. Meanwhile, as a practice, good-for-no-thing meditation is rooted in the experiential insight that repeated activity shapes and reshapes human responsiveness to the world and the self within it. The question of this activity and responsiveness in relation to the political world is one that political theory has taken up under the rubric of citizenship.

## Citizenship: Tensions and Paradox

For most people who are not academic political theorists, “citizenship” has more to do with legal matters of belonging and inclusion than with the kinds of participation and engagement more typically called ‘activism.’<sup>9</sup> Political theorists in recent decades have sought to expand our thinking about citizenship. In this expanded concept of citizenship, they include not only activism, but also broad patterns of cultural and social participation, in order to make more visible the diversity of ways that people share power in their communities beyond recognition by and involvement in the nation state.<sup>10</sup> Citizenship can be defined as Mary Dietz defines it, in terms of “the collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community, [be it] the neighborhood, the city, the state, the region, or the nation itself.” From such a perspective, a democratic image of citizen-

ship emerges, in which “what counts is that all matters relating to the community are undertaken as ‘the people’s affair.’”<sup>11</sup>

This democratic, participatory sense of citizenship depends, as the above considerations suggest, on social and political support. In order to participate in meaningful ways, citizens need security and stability in their everyday lives. They need some time to devote to connecting with their community, its needs, and its aspirations. They need a sense of equality and of efficacy—a sense that their participation counts and matters. Since the twentieth century, social democracy and the welfare state have been premised, to some degree, on addressing these wider needs of citizenship: not only legal, but also cultural and social participation and belonging. In this way, a broadly participatory image of citizenship implies the necessity of a broad swath of structures and systems that can support citizens in sharing power—as well as many that can get in the way. In the United States and elsewhere, legacies of colonialism and slavery have left their mark on patterns of access to these structures and systems. One attempt to address the problem of restricted citizen participation in the United States is the call for reparations.

Promoting reparations for slavery (whether in the form of cash payments, special education, or job training for Americans whose ancestors were enslaved) as a path to greater citizen participation is a deeply divisive idea in the United States. Only 6% – 19% of white Americans favor such programs, while 59% – 63 % of black Americans do.<sup>12</sup> The ongoing rollback of Affirmative Action programs illustrates that political energies do not merely resist, but in fact assert themselves against even modest programs of these sorts. While many arguments against reparations cite egalitarian concerns about “preferential treatment” for people of color, racism too plays a significant role; the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 stands as undeniable testimony to the ongoing vitality and political power of white nationalism in the United States. Despite the sizeable majorities and powerful forces arrayed against full citizenship for black and other marginalized Americans, many people—activists, journalists, and scholars—continue to see and argue for reparations as crucial and perhaps necessary steps toward the full inclusion of black Americans in citizenship, broadly understood, in the United States.

In June 2014, *The Atlantic* published “The Case for Reparations,” an essay in which Ta-Nehisi Coates explores the material and otherwise social legacies of slavery and Jim Crow in supporting widespread and

systematic social inequality in the United States.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on histories of segregation, post-segregation redlining, and other examples, Coates demonstrated the persistence of the economic harms not only of slavery, but also of post-emancipation race policy. He also laid out a strong moral argument for understanding the responsibility for this harm in systemic terms, rather than in individual ones that foreclose connections between today's living whites and ancestors of Black slaves. (For example, he cites the fact that the United States pays benefits to WWII and Korean War Veterans even though most of today's taxpayers were not alive during those conflicts.) The fight against white supremacy, he argued, cannot be seriously engaged without material redress—reparations—against the legacy of these harms.

Coates's essay on reparations was extensively researched and eloquently argued. It also movingly represented his own change of heart on the topic. The essay flashed across social media and set off a predictably controversial news cycle before making its way onto college syllabi. It cemented Coates's reputation as a first-rate public intellectual in matters of racial politics and justice in the United States. And in my view, it exemplified a call for the public to take responsibility for supporting the kinds of cultural, social, and political participation that are included in the broader notion of citizenship that political theorists have been developing in recent decades.

Material support for citizen activity matters a great deal, but democratic citizenship also depends on citizens' more intimate capacities to engage not only in directing their affairs, but also with each other, as citizens. This capacity turns out to be deeply paradoxical, and its intersection with good-for-no-thing citizenship, illuminating. The paradox of citizenship is this: citizenship requires that people think broadly about the good of the community, and locate their own good within it. To think broadly about the good of the community, they must also be willing and able to engage its complexity, diversity, and the ambiguities that they necessarily entail. Here is where the paradox enters: despite this complexity and ambiguity, citizens need to be able to both take a stand and do something. They need to be able to judge and to act, on the basis of what's good for the whole community. They thus need a paradoxical capacity to hold an ambivalent awareness of complexity while being decisive about what's good. Classical theorists like Aristotle brought complex ensembles of capacities like this under the title "citizen virtue"—a term denoting people's active disposition to share in the co-creation of their power and their worlds. I will pause here to

note, and return to elaborate later on, that I have now construed both mindfulness practice and good citizenship as inherently paradoxical activities—and that the paradox, in the case of citizenship, is parallel with no-thing-ness’s way of holding diversity and connectedness together.

This kind of capacity or virtue may seem far removed from the gritty material questions raised by reparations. It may even seem epiphenomenal or superfluous relative to them. I think, instead, that they are mutually supportive, in that material well-being is helpful for citizens to exercise these capacities, while the robust exercise of the capacities support the (necessarily social) provision of material well-being. Coates’s support of reparations in fact illustrates just this kind of capacity or “citizen virtue”—and in ways that help to flesh out, too, the kind of citizen activity that good-for-nothing meditation practice can support.

To better understand these paradoxical citizen capacities, consider how Coates returned to this issue in the midst of the 2016 Democratic presidential primary. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’s surprise challenge to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s run for the nomination brought long-standing issues of race in the Democratic electorate to the fore. In a change from Clinton’s 2008 nomination contest with Barack Obama, Clinton became known as the favorite of people of color, while the core of Sanders’s support was widely said to come from whites.<sup>14</sup> At an Iowa forum on January 13, 2016, Sanders, who was known for advocating policies that were widely considered improbable, impractical, or impossible (like free college tuition for everyone), was asked about his support for reparations for slavery. Sanders, who at another time had voiced support for a national apology for slavery, demurred on the issues of reparations, saying that “its likelihood of getting through Congress is nil; second of all, I think it would be very divisive.” He called instead for “massive investments in building our cities, creating millions of decent-paying jobs, and making public colleges and universities tuition-free.”<sup>15</sup>

Discussing this interview in the *Atlantic* a week later, Coates argued that Sanders’s pragmatic framing of this issue, by contrast with his radicalism in relation to class, illustrated the blindness of the white left to the legacy and persistence of white supremacy. Noting that “Sanders is many things, many of them good,” he none the less remarked that, “judged by his platform, Sanders should be directly confronted and asked why his political imagination is so active against plutocracy, but so limited against white supremacy. Jim Crow and its legacy were not

merely problems of disproportionate poverty. Why should black voters support a candidate who does not recognize this?”<sup>16</sup> Coates’s analysis of this moment was pointed, coming as it did amid much discussion of Sanders’s and his supporters’ sometimes hostile responses to #BlackLivesMatter protests at his campaign rallies. It was also nuanced, interested in diagnosing the legacies of white supremacy in the (brief) re-emergence of the social-democratic left in the form of Sanders’s remarkably insurgent campaign against Hillary Clinton.

Coates’s article was quickly swept up into mainstream and social media narratives about the racial politics of the Sanders campaign—as further evidence of its inability to connect with people of color and as a further explanation for his low support among black primary voters. In these narratives, the nuance and complexity of Coates’s perspective—“Sanders is many things, many of them good”—was lost to a binary narrative in which Sanders represented the underlying white bias of the progressive American left, and in which Hillary Clinton (whom Coates does not mention, and whose position on reparations was essentially identical to Sanders’s), could somehow represent its opposite. This polarized uptake allowed Coates’s fundamental argument—reprising his argument in “The Case for Reparations” in light of the emergence of reparations as a topic in the nominating contest—to be almost entirely overlooked. Indeed, as Coates’s article was subsumed into debates on social media about the relationship between the Sanders campaign and Black communities, including #BlackLivesMatter, many commentators regretted that Coates had drawn the issue of reparations into the debate, missing that bringing the politics of reparations to the surface was his fundamental aim.<sup>17</sup>

With Coates’s intervention now framed in this way, it came as a surprise to many when, two weeks later, Coates shared his intention to vote for Sanders in a “Democracy Now!” interview with Amy Goodman. For the many who had absorbed Coates’s essay on Sanders as essentially about the choice between Sanders and Clinton, and only incidentally (or even mistakenly!) about reparations, Coates’s intention was a turnaround that inspired exasperation or glee. Anticipating from the coverage of his essay on Sanders’s comments that his position might be viewed as hypocritical, Coates averred “one can be very, very critical of Senator Sanders on this specific issue. One can say Senator Sanders should have more explicit antiracist policy within his racial justice platform, not just more general stuff, and still cast a vote for Senator Sanders and still feel that Senator Sanders is the best option that we

have in the race. But just because that's who you're going to vote for doesn't mean you then have to agree with everything they say."<sup>18</sup>

At one level, Coates's statement—just because a candidate will have one's vote, doesn't mean one agrees with them down the line—is, or ought to be, obvious. Only if we are attentive to the tensions within it can we see the paradox of citizenship at work. More than revealing an understanding of political compromise or strategy, it importantly reveals skill in holding one's understanding of the complexity of the political and social world *alongside* the imperative to make a choice, one about which ambivalence is inevitable. If *that* were so obvious to the way that race was being mobilized around the nomination contest, Coates would hardly have felt the need to articulate it—or even to make a public statement of his support for Sanders. Indeed, he was reluctant to reveal publicly for whom he would vote, as he expressed in a series of tweets shortly after the *Democracy Now!* segment aired: “Quick Clarification: I was asked this morning on @democracynow who I was voting for. / I answered. It seemed weird not to do so, given I make a career asking awkward questions.”<sup>19</sup> Notable here is the subtle pressure coming even from Amy Goodman—a journalist one might ordinarily expect to resist mass media frames of political events—reflecting the widespread distillation of Coates's position into one that was *about* the nomination contest.

This tension in citizen action is not obvious. Because it is undervalued, it is liable to being diverted or suppressed. Yet it is a tension that political theorists have examined at the core, not only of citizenship, but of democracy itself. Consider, for example, Jacques Derrida's formulation of democracy-to-come.<sup>20</sup> In various writings, Derrida expresses the idea that the possibility of democracy—of the people's justly sharing in ruling and being ruled—paradoxically relies on the impossibility of democracy being realized in any given moment. One aspect of this impossibility is that we never really know who, exactly, the people *are*. There is always *some* difference among the people that goes unaccounted for in any such claim. Therefore we always will rely on there being another, perhaps more complete claim forthcoming. In this way, our desire for democracy is always deferred unto the future. Thus, despite all our work to achieve democracy, it is always to come: “*a venir*” as Derrida puts it. Rather than expressing a foreclosure of democratic thinking, democracy-to-come expresses instead the condition for conceiving democracy at all, because (one might even say empirically speaking) we never know who the people are who are said

to rule in a democracy. Politics, on such a view, entails making claims about what's good for all, thus each claim about what's good for all will fail. This paradox turns out to be a strength, not a weakness, of democratic thinking because it validates the importance of contestation about what's best for all, as well as the usefulness of critiques that illuminate gaps and failures in the existing claims. It also validates the importance of being open to what's different and unfamiliar, which is admittedly not how most people engage in democracy and citizenship today, seeing these instead as mainly about their individual perspectives being heard or taken into account. From within the perspective on democracy that Derrida encourages, however, the proliferation of contestation and critique, to the point of allowing the widest imaginable latitude for making these claims, is itself democratic. Meanwhile, this perspective also suggests that a *better* claim about what's best for all can emerge only from such critiques and contestation.<sup>21</sup>

The everyday practical realities of argument and advocacy, as seen in Coates's support of reparations and of Sanders, reveals the deep imbrication of external supports to citizenship and its internal, "citizen virtue" elements. Turning now, more intensively, to Aristotelian thinking about citizenship will enable me to further explore this tension, and the ways that good-for-nothingness mirrors it—and, more important, the way that mindfulness practice can foster it. Given that Aristotle notoriously endorsed slavery, my turn to his work now, in the context of Coates's exemplary citizenship, may seem highly incongruous. In my view, however, they powerfully illuminate each other: Coates exemplifies Aristotelian citizenship. What's more, meditation offers a practice of cultivating citizen virtue of the kind that, I argue, is both consistent with Aristotle's search for everyday activities that foster citizenship, and apparent in Coates's social justice advocacy. Coates's support for reparations reflects the texture of citizen deliberation as Aristotle understands it and as fostered by meditation practice.

## Aristotelian Citizenship and Justice

Aristotle's work has been generative for the vision of citizenship I have been exploring: as less about the status of formal membership in the community, and more about the activity of ruling and being ruled, while sharing in deliberation and taking responsibility.<sup>22</sup> Aristotle is concerned with exploring the conditions that support this kind of citizen activity: ethical habits, and time free from competing duties and

cares.<sup>23</sup> It's notable, particularly for readers interested in mindfulness, that Aristotle's ethical writing extols contemplation—an activity that shares many features with Buddhist meditation—as an especially potent path to ethical happiness.<sup>24</sup> It's also notable, for readers interested in relating Buddhist practice to social justice, that Aristotle dwells only briefly on pure contemplation (which he regards as “divine”) before turning to activities of citizenship as the practical means for ethical achievement.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately Aristotle's ethical writings leave the impression that contemplation is extremely important, but must be practiced in the context of citizen activity in order to foster conditions for living well—an idea consistent with the practice of many engaged “bodhisattva” Buddhists.

Aristotle's exploration of the conditions that support citizen activity—time free from duties and cares, as well as ethical habits—shades quickly into discussions of what types of people are *not* fit to be citizens. For most readers these discussions appear significantly objectionable. After all, Aristotle discusses the inferiority of females in relation to males, and dwells at length on the justification of slavery and, of course, the exclusion of workers and children from political life.<sup>26</sup> In these ways, Aristotle appears to be accepting and endorsing the exclusive dimensions of Greek citizenship of his time. Here is a point at which the reader concerned about social justice is apt to put down Aristotle's texts and look elsewhere for accounts that bring together mindfulness, citizenship, and justice.

But there is significant value in staying with *Politics*, because its complexities and ambiguities—including in his discussions of women and slaves—reveal Aristotle as a thinker concerned with removing barriers to citizen deliberation, rather than with excluding people. For Aristotle, what most crucially sets apart human deliberation—the Greek word here is *kritik*—from communication among other animals is that when people deliberate, they are talking about justice. Thus by bringing *kritik* to the matter of exclusions from citizenship, Aristotle makes them immediately questions of justice.<sup>27</sup> It is a mistake, albeit a common one, to read Aristotle as accepting the denial of citizenship to women and slaves in his society. A substantial body of literature has irrevocably destabilized the misreading that Aristotle endorsed such denial; instead, it is clear that Aristotle construes the exclusion of these figures from citizenship as cutting deeply against the Athenian practices of his day. Moreover, he does so in ways that should open citizen deliberation about the question of justice raised by these very exclusions

from citizenship.<sup>28</sup> This literature interprets Aristotle as de-naturalizing the existing exclusions of slaves and women from citizenship, thus revealing their political nature and implicitly but clearly making these exclusions something whose justice the citizens must deliberate and take responsibility for.<sup>29</sup> To Aristotle's way of thinking, exclusion from citizenship—and assignment to the instrumental tasks of business that are devised by masters and undertaken by slaves—might justly be the fate only of those who refuse to deliberate and share in responsibility when given the opportunity to do so. Such an interpretation helps us to make sense of Aristotle's abiding reason for excluding masters from citizenship on the same basis—association with instrumental concerns—that justifies the exclusion of slaves.<sup>30</sup>

With all of this in mind, how are we to understand these citizen deliberations about justice, including and perhaps most importantly, meta-deliberations about the bases upon which people may be included or excluded from citizen deliberations themselves? This question directly connects Aristotle's fraught investigation of slavery to questions around reparations in the present-day US context. It also connects us to practices like meditation, which capacitate and habituate practitioners to approaching and attending to the complexity and ambiguity entailed by diversity and difference. I have argued elsewhere that good-for-nothing meditation fosters non-instrumental thinking and action, which (as I noted above) provides a crucial context for citizen engagement.<sup>31</sup> Here I am arguing that the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of good-for-nothing meditation supports citizen deliberation in a different way: it habituates citizens to attend to the complexity of their community, that is, to understand both its heterogeneity and its connectedness, and these things together, in a way that supports rather than eliminates this interconnectedness. This is essential to the work of justice.

I have already mentioned that the paradox of good-for-nothing practice aligns with the impossibility of democracy as the condition of its possibility, which itself tells us something about the work of democratic citizenship. Aristotle's conception of citizenship pushes us to more directly develop the possibility of citizenship itself. The political reach of good-for-nothing practice is to embody and enact in everyday life, and therefore make available to citizens, a capacity for the kind of action demanded by good citizenship and democracy.

## Aristotle: Conflict, Justice, Deliberation

Susan Bickford's reading of Aristotle illuminates essential aspects of citizen action that good-for-nothing practice can foster by way of habituating people to sit openly with complexity, ambivalence, connect-edness—paradoxically, doing-nothing. Bickford shows that most interpreters of Aristotle have stressed harmony, concord, and friendship as central to his thinking about democracy.<sup>32</sup> Her reading, by contrast, directs us to the importance of “deep conflict in political interaction” in Aristotle's analysis of deliberation. I think that this way of reading Aristotle, as emphasizing conflict, rather than concord, illustrates the relevance of Buddhist practice to citizenship. This may appear unlikely to many readers who automatically associate Buddhist practice with tranquil agreeableness—and thus harmony, concord, and friendship. As I noted above, a similar misinterpretation has led influential commentators to dismiss Buddhist thought as quietistic or nihilistic.<sup>33</sup> Thus the connection I wish to draw between mindfulness and Bickford's interpretation of Aristotle may also be seen as part of an answer to these critics.

Recognizing that the democratic polity is marked by conflict and disagreement, Bickford argues that “what governs and makes possible such adversarial communicative interaction is not, for Aristotle, friendship or concord, but rather a quality of *attention* inherent in the very practice of deliberation.”<sup>34</sup> With this argument, Bickford aims to displace *friendship* as the usual rubric through which the ethical relationship among citizens is typically understood, turning instead to citizens' “paying attention...to each other” in a way that is “mindful” of their differences, a practice that supports “participating attentively in the practice of deliberation.”<sup>35</sup> For Bickford, this attending-to others involves holding citizens together in the face of conflict, by enabling them to take into account other's perceptions of their own interests.<sup>36</sup> Bickford's focus on attending-to connects directly to mindfulness, which is precisely a practice of attending to what's present, in its intrinsic complexity and ambiguity.

In order to develop a picture of attending-to from within Aristotle's own thinking, Bickford turns away from Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*—the texts most commonly analyzed by political theorists—and instead to his analysis of rhetoric in, yes, *Rhetoric*. This discussion raises a number of new problems for Bickford, which the remainder of her essay is devoted to resolving.<sup>37</sup> I wish to suggest instead that mind-

fulness teachings and practice offer a supplementary and congruent account of how attending to differences and conflict fosters citizenship. I say supplementary, because they are exogenous to Aristotle's writings; congruent, thanks to the ways that these teachings and practices "fit" with Aristotle's own construal of contemplation and leisure in *Ethics* and *Politics*.<sup>38</sup> I have already mentioned the "benefits" of meditation to which researchers attest; among these is "perspective-taking," which is obviously related to what Bickford understands as the importance of mindful attention to others.<sup>39</sup> But instead of citing the "effects" of mindfulness, I wish to bring mindfulness teaching and practice—especially the paradoxical insight that "meditation is good for nothing"—to Aristotle's thinking about the importance of attending to difference and disagreement. In this way, we can draw out the importance of such elements as uncertainty, complexity, and justice, that Bickford's account touches upon but does not develop.

Recall that the teaching of no-thingness highlights the connectedness or interdependence of all things, captured perhaps more aptly in the idea that all things are free of independent existence. This teaching reveals any essential distinction between a thing and its context or totality to be false. At the same time, no-thingness should not be understood as a bland leveler that denies differences, even as it destabilizes distinctions; on the contrary, every thing bears the traces of its distinctive causal relations with all of its conditions—causal relations often characterized as "karmic." Of course, the complexity of these relations weighs heavily against the human drive for perfect knowledge of these things, so there is always, from a karmic standpoint, an element of the unknown, or not-knowing, that precedes the accounts we wish to give of ourselves and the things around us.<sup>40</sup> This is especially so in human relations, which, from an Aristotelian perspective, point to the importance of deliberation (and thus of justice). As Bickford notes, "we deliberate...about uncertain things, and more specifically, uncertain things which are subject in a practical way to our action."<sup>41</sup> Even though we are in a situation of not knowing, "we are deciding what to do."<sup>42</sup> This "what to do," we do know, is a matter of justice. Here Aristotle's writing powerfully supports the image of democratic citizenship as inherently paradoxical, and justice as a practice of knowing what to do with this paradox: no-thing.

It is in our power to do something, yet what to do is, and remains, uncertain. It is not knowable in an important respect, namely that no kind of expertise is available to answer questions of citizenship as

though they are technical problems. Here we have circled back to the paradox that, according to Derrida, is central to democracy. After all, one of the things unknown to democratic citizens is who, exactly, are “the people”, yet a claim about what’s good for “the people” must nonetheless be made, and action must nonetheless be taken.<sup>43</sup> This is also a paradox that, I have argued, bears the same structure as the good-for-nothingness of meditation as a practice, which must be of no benefit in order for it to be beneficial. We can now also see that this paradox binds two essential dimensions of citizen deliberation: the attention to difference that Bickford highlights, and the concern for justice, which is crucial for Aristotle but recedes in Bickford’s account. In *Ethics*, we learn that justice is a practice of harmonizing (not eliminating) differences; an interpretation of citizen deliberation that attends to the paradox of democracy underscores that this harmonization emerges from paying attention to conflict, disagreements, and differences in ways that do not seek to reduce or homogenize them out of existence.<sup>44</sup> Deliberation, unlike persuasion, is the work of encompassing, rather than overcoming, the disagreement, conflict, and the heterogeneity of the political world. In other words, *attention to difference, disagreement and division is justice*. Justice—like mindfulness, and no-thingness—is the paradoxical work of recognizing the existence of this difference together with the connectedness of the things we meet as in-conflict.

This model of democratic citizenship, as informed by Aristotle and mindfulness teachings, and fostered by meditation practice, is a difficult and perhaps even fragile achievement. Yet its exercise is potent for handling matters of social justice, for it is in these areas that the stakes of justice are highest while the conflicts and disagreements are sharpest and most intransigent.

## Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Citizenship of Reparations

I have turned at a few points along the way of this essay to the example of Ta-Nehisi Coates, particularly his support for reparations, his criticism of Bernie Sanders’s negative position on reparations, and his subsequent revelation that he would vote for Sanders in his state’s primary contest. I now return to that episode. Some responses to it highlight Coates’s way of embodying the image that I have been drawing of justice, in the conversation I have staged between mindfulness teachings and Aristotle’s writings. Reparations are emblematic, and perhaps even

the apotheosis, of a tension and a division around a question of justice confronting citizen practice in the United States today.

In the week following Coates's interview with Amy Goodman, the dissident socialist magazine *The Jacobin* followed a path taken by much corporatized social media in at least one way: drawing Coates's exploration of the logic of white supremacy within the progressive left into a contest between progressive class politics and issues of racial justice raised by reparations. In "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals who Love Him," Cedric Johnson excoriated the politics of reparations as unable to attend to "the real needs and interests of black workers."<sup>45</sup> Johnson's impassioned piece projected on to Coates the view that "social democracy and socialism are always and everywhere at odds with racial progress" in order to pronounce this view "simply false." Put in these terms, Johnson's claim is true, but the terms are hyperbolic and tendentious. He rashly reduces Coates's careful dissection of and case for reparations to an argument Johnson says is "repeated with startling unanimity by students, activists, academic colleagues, social media commentators, and career pundits," namely "the Cold War, anti-socialist canard that any attempt to build social democracy on US soil will inevitably be hobbled by racism." Johnson notes rightly, I think, that one kind of call for reparations "rests in an aspiration...to a guarantee of access and participation in the consumer society in a manner comparable to all others of equal class standing," thus "demanding racial parity within a market society, rather than the de commodification of housing, education, health care, and other human needs." Whether this is the most significant thrust of Coates's demand for reparations is a point to which I shall return below. Ultimately, however, the conclusion that Johnson draws—that social democracy is *enough* to undo the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow—is as doubtful (to me, anyway) as the position he (mis)construes as Coates's.

Most important for my argument are positions exemplified by Sanders's and Johnson's shared concern that reparations would be politically divisive—that race would be used to continue dividing the working class. This argument conflates the *historical* argument about the origin of the racial caste system in the US with its *current* dynamics, in a conscious effort to divide the white from the black working class.

Implicit in Sanders's and Johnson's positions is the view that justice is achieved by turning away from or eliminating such a conflict. Aristotle's account of deliberation, as we have come to understand it by way of Bickford's interpretation and Dharma teaching, is meant to

counteract such a view.<sup>46</sup> As we have seen, deliberation is about seeing and *attending to* these conflicts in the search for justice, not turning away from them. This is the sense in which Coates's support for H.R. 40, the Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act introduced by Congressman John Conyers in 1989, is a significant part of his support for reparations. As the name implies, H. R. 40 would create a commission of experts to consider various ways that reparations could be carried out in the United States, noting their costs and effects, and making recommendations to Congress for legislative action. Johnson notes that Coates's support for this measure sets him apart from many whose aim is reparations, but does not reflect on the importance of this difference. I find it to be crucial. The study funded by H.R. 40 would, in effect, bring to the surface the conflicts and disagreements around the ongoing plight of black Americans rather than avoid painful confrontations with white privilege in the name of class or national cohesion. "Won't reparations divide us?" Coates asks, attending directly to the question at hand. "Not any more than we are already divided. The wealth gap merely puts a number on something we feel but cannot say—that American prosperity was ill-gotten and selective in its distribution." This is how we can understand the "national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal" that Coates envisions coming out of the push toward reparations—"an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts."<sup>47</sup> It is not, as Johnson would have it, primarily a program for the transfer of capital from the rich to the black middle class.

The complex and troubling fact that Coates's initial critique of Sanders was meant to bring out—and which I think was lost in the way it was rapidly repackaged by pundits and reactively "shared" on social media—is that democratic socialism and white supremacy are not separable phenomena. The teaching of no-thingness supports this insight: neither is a thing separable from the other, nor are they the same. They are complexly, even causally related in myriad historical and ongoing ways. Wonderfully and horribly, they are both present in this each moment: we must attend to them together. Such attending-together could include, for example, both publicly criticizing and publicly voting for a social democrat running for office.

Coates may be an exemplary citizen; but is he perhaps uniquely able to bring all of this together in so nuanced a way? Or can we, as citizens, simply expect ourselves to rise to challenging occasions in the same way as Coates does, simply (perhaps) by having read Aristotle or

(maybe) this essay? Aristotle's own emphasis throughout his work on habituation—setting patterns for ourselves in everyday activities, so we are ready to respond to the most challenging and unforeseen ones—suggest something else is needed. For this, it would be impractical to suggest Coates's own path to exemplary citizenship, for it is as richly and idiosyncratically textured as the life any of us lives (maybe more so).<sup>48</sup> Aristotle's own endorsement of musical education as apt for habituating Greeks to citizen virtue suggests another path, however—one that turns to practices (apparently) unrelated to citizenship as a means of cultivating, in citizens, the responsiveness needed for them to enact their citizenship well. I have argued that the “good for no-thingness” of mindfulness practice is about habituating the practitioner to working with insights that share an underlying structure with citizenship; thus, it stands to reason that mindfulness practice supports attending to the kinds of conflicts caused by the complex inequalities in our society.

## Conclusion

Good citizenship makes a paradoxical demand of the citizen. It demands attunement to the heterogeneity and complexity of the political world, on the one hand, and a willingness to take a stand and to act, on the other. In order to respect this paradoxical demand, the citizen's action—the work of justice—must be undertaken in a way that supports, rather than seeks to eliminate, the diversity and disagreements in the community. Ta-Nehisi Coates exemplified this image of citizenship, by articulating a nuanced understanding and taking a decisive position-taking in his original defense of reparations, and criticizing Bernie Sanders' campaign while also expressing his support for it. The capacity to act as Aristotle recommends and as Coates illustrates is one that must be fostered, however, in people's everyday activity. Only when their ability to sustain such a paradoxical set of demands becomes habitual might we hope that they can and will fulfill it in the heightened, likely passionate, and perhaps even chaotic moments when justice is most urgent. Thus the importance and ongoing challenge for political theory of reflecting on practices of ethical self-fashioning and their significance for justice and political engagement.

Mindfulness has a place among these practices, not only (perhaps *not at all*) for its lauded benefits of peacefulness and tranquility. Focusing on the non-gaining core of practice—its “good for no-thingness”—I have claimed that mindfulness meditation habituates the

practitioner to a disposition that can be brought to a wider field, such as working for justice in the face of ambiguous and conflictual situations, but without turning away from that ambiguity and conflict. I argue this is so because the paradox of citizenship mirrors the good-for-no-thingness of practice: just as the political world is irreducibly complex, so too practice cannot be instrumentally reduced to an aim or goal. And just as political action must be taken, so too practice (for the practitioner) is a vow. This parallel is not accidental, but rather reflects the deep connection between both intimate and collective practices of liberation.

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## NOTES

1. A flourishing literature explores, in myriad registers, the benefits of mindfulness for politics. Scholars have explored the ways that it contributes to already-engaged social justice movements, for example by “helping activists prepare for direct action, improving self-care/resilience, transforming trauma, embodying liberatory values and habits, and improving organizational effectiveness” [James Rowe, “Micropolitics and Collective Liberation: Mind/Body Practice and Left Social Movements,” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2 (2016): 209]. Others have adumbrated “the framework of subjective, perceptual, and affective capacities” developed in mindful embodiment [Anita Chari, “The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment,” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2 (2016): 237], especially “honing subjects’ capacities for attunement and field consciousness” (237)—understood as “connections to the somatic and affective dimensions of political life that underlie rationality” (234). I am persuaded that mindfulness has potential to foster all of these attributes; less certain for me is whether mindfulness meditation or mindful embodiment practices are uniquely or especially capable of producing these effects.
2. See, for examples, Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Alexander Keller Hirsch, “The Promise of the Unforgiven: Violence, Power, and Paradox in Arendt,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 39, no. 1 (2013): 45-61.

3. Kosho Uchiyama and Shohaku Okumura, eds., *The Zen Teaching of Homeless Kodo* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015); Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax, *The Heart Sutra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahayana Buddhism* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2016). I briefly describe the Buddhist concept of ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothingness’ below, at which point I will prefer the less-common ‘nothingness’ as my translation of *śūnyatā*.
4. Dean Mathiowetz, “‘Meditation is Good for Nothing’: Leisure as a Democratic Practice,” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2 (2016). Open-access link: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3gn282xf>.
5. Tanahashi and Halifax, *The Heart Sutra*.
6. Commentators sometimes use this definition, or another phrase like “empty of own-being,” as a way to better capture the sense of *śūnyatā*, which Westerners—including philosophers like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Žižek—have tended to misinterpret as nihilistic. For a critical account of how Buddhism became associated with nihilism, as well as quietism and apolitical pacifism, see Timothy Morton, “Buddhaphobia: Nothingness and the Fear of Things,” in *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism*, eds. Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
7. A congruent theoretical insight has been taken up in European philosophies such as post-structuralism and phenomenology.
8. This formulation is likely to appear strange to anyone who thinks of freedom primarily *in terms of* independence.
9. Classic definitions of citizenship, like the one proffered by T. H. Marshall, envision citizenship as a kind of community membership marked by civil, political, and social rights. See Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 28–29.
10. Some political theorists have turned beyond the state to articulate cosmopolitan conceptions of citizenship, or to leaven citizenship in relation to multiculturalism or “differentiated universalisms.” See Andrew Linklater, “Cosmopolitan Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies* 2:1 (1998), 23–41; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1995); Ruth Lister, “Citizenship: Towards a Feminist Synthesis,” *Feminist Review* 57 (1997), 28–48. These conceptions are generally located in a broad republican tradition of theorizing citizenship that extends from classical political thought through debates in contemporary political theory, in which Phillip Pettit is a principle luminary. See Adrian Oldfield, *Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1990).
11. Mary Dietz, “Context is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship,” *Daedalus* 116:4 (1987), 14.
12. Peter Moore, “Overwhelming Opposition to Reparations for Slavery and Jim Crow,” *YouGov.com*, June 2, 2014 (<https://today.yougov.com/news/2014/06/02/reparations/>, accessed April 4, 2016).
13. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014.
14. While these differences were broadly borne out in the polling data, media narratives around them tended to reduce the complexity of support for the candidates among people of color, and especially to overlook generational differences between younger and older African Americans.
15. Senator Bernie Sanders, Interview with Fusion.net, January 13, 2016. (<http://fusion.net/video/255113/bernie-sanders-reparations-answer-iowa-forum/>, accessed May 19, 2016)

16. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Why Precisely Is Bernie Sanders Against Reparations?" *The Atlantic*, January 19, 2016 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/bernie-sanders-reparations/424602/>, accessed May 19, 2016.)
17. See, for example, Ryan Cooper, "Ta-Nehisi Coates is Too Quick to Write Off Bernie Sanders," *The Week*, January 21, 2016 (<http://theweek.com/articles/600256/tanehisi-coates-quick-write-bernie-sanders>, accessed May 19, 2016); Bruce A. Dixon, "Ta-Nehisi Coates's Bernie Sanders Brain Fart Isn't Even About Reparations," *Black Agenda Report*, January 21, 2016 (<http://www.blackagendareport.com/tancoates-reparations-bernie-not-hillary>, accessed May 19, 2016).
18. Ta-Nehisi Coates, interview on *Democracy Now!*, February 10, 2016 ([http://www.democracynow.org/2016/2/10/ta\\_nehisi\\_coates\\_is\\_voting\\_for](http://www.democracynow.org/2016/2/10/ta_nehisi_coates_is_voting_for), accessed May 19, 2016).
19. Ta-Nehisi Coates, quoted by Josh Feldman, "Ta-Nehisi Coates Says He's Voting for Sanders Despite Criticizing Him on Reparations," *Mediaite.com*, February 10, 2016 (<http://www.mediaite.com/online/ta-nehisi-coates-says-hes-voting-for-sanders-despite-criticizing-him-on-reparations/>, accessed May 19, 2016).
20. My discussion of Derrida's idea here covers a lot of ground very quickly. For a detailed and critical account of 'democracy to come,' see Mattias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come," *Constellations* 9:4 (2002), 574-597. Along with the democratic theorizing of Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Rancière, Derrida's perspective affirms the absence of foundations for democracy (for example, in natural law, or in rationality), and affirms the unknowability of the present and an openness to the future.
21. Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 22.
22. Aristotle, *Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1275b18-20, 1277a27-28, 1277b15-17. For a thorough account of Aristotelian citizenship congruent with a 'democratic' picture of citizenship, see Susan D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
23. Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1177b1-6, b27-28.
24. In terms of some congruence between Aristotelian contemplation and mindful meditation, Aristotle notes that "reflective activity would seem to be the only kind loved because of itself; for nothing accrues from it besides the act of reflecting, whereas from practical projects we get something" (Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1177b4-6). More generally speaking, Aristotle's image of contemplation draws traces of devotion and philosophical reflection whose congruence with Buddhist meditation may be questionable or variable. Even so, it's worth noting the broad intellectual commerce between Greece and Northern India in Aristotle's time, for they open possibilities for understanding Greek concepts of contemplation or re-incarnation (*metempsychosis*) as likely shaped in conversation with early Buddhist practice. See Thomas C. Mcevilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (CITY: Allworth Press, 2001).
25. Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1179b35-1181b25.
26. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254 b14-15; 1254b20-1255b40 and *passim*. Fewer present-day readers bristle at Aristotle's exclusion of children, than at his exclusion of women and workers, suggesting a seldom-examined gerontocratic bias in many present-day political cultures.
27. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.
28. See, for examples: Thomas K. Lindsay, "Was Aristotle Racist, Sexist, and Anti-Democratic?" *The Review of Politics* 56:1 (Winter 1994), 127-151; Jill Frank, "Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature," *American Political Science Review* 98:1 (2004), 91-104; Dana J. Stauffer, "Aristotle's Account of the Subjection of Women," *The Journal*

- of Politics*, 70:4 (2008), 929-941; Harold L. Levy, "Does Aristotle Exclude Women from Politics?" *The Review of Politics* 52:3 (1990), 397-416; Stephen Salkever, "Whose Prayer? The Best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle's Politics," *Political Theory* 35:1 (2007), 29-46.
29. The reading of Aristotle I have sketched here takes us a long way toward an appealing vision of citizenship, but it falls short, on my view, in that it relies upon existing citizens' deliberations to bring justice to institutions like slavery and gender relations, thereby occluding the potential for slaves and women to liberate themselves as a kind of citizen action. Yet to contextualize the climate in which Aristotle was writing, we might note that in his teacher's master work, Plato's *Republic*, the fictional Socrates tells his friends that he fears being killed if he shares his ideas on the equality of women [Plato, *Republic*, trans. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968) Bk. V]. Plato thus poignantly elevates this topic to the level of the impiety charges that led to the historical Socrates's public execution in 399 BCE.
  30. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a7-9, 1255b34-38.
  31. Mathiowetz, "'Meditation is Good for Nothing'."
  32. See, for examples, John M. Cooper, "Aristotle and Forms of Friendship," *Review of Metaphysics* 30:4 (1977), 619-48; Bernard Yack, "Community and Conflict in Aristotle's Political Philosophy," *Review of Politics*, 47:92-112 (1985).
  33. James Rowe has explored resources in Buddhist thought for sustaining political conflict from a different angle than the one I pursue here. See James Rowe, "Why Buddhists Can Stop Worrying and Learn to Love 'Us vs. Them' Thinking," *The Arrow: A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture & Politics*, September 15, 2015 (<http://arrow-journal.org/why-buddhists-can-stop-worrying-and-learn-to-love-us-vs-them-thinking/>, accessed May 27, 2016)
  34. Susan Bickford, "Beyond Friendship: Aristotle on Conflict, Deliberation, and Attention," *The Journal of Politics* 58:2 (1996), 399.
  35. Bickford, "Beyond Friendship," 411.
  36. Bickford, "Beyond Friendship," 406.
  37. While Bickford's turn to citizens' attention to their differences is, I think, an accurate and important point, I find her own claim that she has grounded this move in *Ethics* and *Politics* unconvincing (411). To the extent that an account of attention in Aristotle can be grounded in contemplation (the complete account of this precise extent is beyond the scope of my work here), Bickford's turn to *Rhetoric* may be an unnecessarily complicating diversion.
  38. See note 23, above.
  39. Britta K Hölzel et al., "How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6:6 (2011), 537-59.
  40. For an account that draws connections between emptiness and karma on the one hand to modern European critical theory on the other, see Marcus Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence: Marxism, Buddhism, and the Politics of Nonalignment," in *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), especially 54-55.
  41. Bickford, "Beyond Friendship," 400.
  42. Bickford, "Beyond Friendship," 402.
  43. This paradox resides in Aristotle's thinking as well, although it is likely to appear to modern readers as circular reasoning. Citizens deliberate justice (*Politics* 1253a14), which is

the highest good of the city and the most authoritative good (1252a5). Yet Aristotle, in his critique of existing Greek practices of defining citizens (1275a3-20) and slaves (1254a17-1255b12), has raised a question about who is justly a citizen—making “just” citizenship dependent on the exercise of deliberative capacities (1275b18-20).

44. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book V.
45. Cedric Johnson, “An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals Who Love Him,” *Jacobin*, February 2016 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/ta-nehisi-coates-case-for-reparations-bernie-sanders-racism/>), accessed May 27, 2016).
46. This is also one sense in which Aristotle’s *Politics* offers a critique of Plato’s *Republic*.
47. Coates, “The Case for Reparations.”
48. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Beautiful Struggle: A Memoir* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009).