

Aristotle's Concept of Nicomachean Ethics: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Friendship in Society

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical role of friendship as portrayed in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, positing it as a fundamental component of individual virtue and communal well-being. Utilizing a socio-cultural framework, the research delves into Aristotle's typology of friendship, which delineates three categories: friendships of utility, pleasure, and virtue. Each category's purposes and moral underpinnings are meticulously analyzed, revealing that the highest form of friendship is anchored in mutual goodness and moral character that serves as a normative benchmark for personal integrity. For Aristotle, while friendship is deeply personal, it also holds important political significance, serving as a key force that nurtures trust and common goals in the community.

In the midst of rising individualism, social disconnection, and moral uncertainty, this study aims to reframe friendship as a lasting foundation for societal advancement. It explores the role of virtuous friendships in building resilient support systems that reinforce communal bonds and promote collective harmony. The research delves into the transformative impact of such friendships in cultivating empathy, collaboration, and a deep sense of belonging. It also considers how these meaningful relationships can help ease social tensions and encourage a culture rooted in mutual respect and understanding. The study argues that virtuous friendship is not only vital to living a purposeful and enriched life but also essential to the formation of a just and flourishing society. By highlighting the relevance of friendship in both individual and civic life, this analysis deepens our understanding of social ethics, active citizenship, and the lasting importance of Aristotle's philosophy.

Keywords: Friendship, Moral Philosophy, Interpersonal connections, Virtue ethics, Nicomachean Ethics

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Introduction

In Aristotle's notion of a friend as a second self, discussed in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, friendship is seen as a deep and mutual relationship in which each person reflects and cares for the other as they would for themselves. The attempt to bring about a full idea or, at the very least, make sense of what it is really that Aristotle meant when he referred to a friend as a second self. Perhaps the most powerful of all the claims made in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book IX), Aristotle describes a friend as a second self, highlighting the deep care and mutual concern in virtuous friendship (Aristotle, 2011, Book IX).

Also, the attitude of a morally good man is the same toward himself as it is toward his friend, since a friend is another self (Aristotle, 1999 p.146-148 in Book IX, Chapter 4).

It may seem, though, that such a claim embarks on the ambiguity of an analysis of Aristotle's treatment of a friend as another self. Referring to a friend as another self, Aristotle seems to treat a friend as uniquely different from oneself, much as x is different from y; but on another level of interpretation, Aristotle seems to open us up to a whole new meaning of otherness as one which involves relations of extension between one person and another. When we refer to a friend as another self, we do not only imply the uniqueness of the identity of the other; beyond this, we assert that the self we refer to in the other is an extension of the self that we are. This gives us a new perspective, shifting from an individual's self to a state of shared experience with others.

We can't have complete knowledge of ourselves by relying on our abilities alone. Other selves can discern and evaluate our characters better than we can, and friends, among other people, can provide us with the degree of intimacy we need to gain valuable and stable insights about ourselves that would otherwise be inaccessible if we only had ourselves to depend on.

The Nature of Nicomachean Ethics

The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy informs us that Aristotle did not write a specific book on ethics. His ideas on ethics were derived from his lectures, which were later compiled into two books: *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. Traditionally, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is accepted to be the later and more developed view of Aristotle's idea on ethics. What is Ethics then, for Aristotle? For Aristotle, Ethics is an enquiry into the true good and realizing it. He is concerned with bringing the good to human beings. He is concerned with the human actions that can be obtained. For him, every good has a character of an end, a final cause, or a purpose. Whenever a human being is trying to do something, their acts are towards a good, so the end of every action or process has the character of a good. All human activities aim at some end that is considered good. The highest good is that good which is an end in itself. So, to ask What is the highest

good for humans, and what is the ultimate purpose of human life? What is our end? What are we aiming for in our lives? According to Aristotle, what human beings are aiming for is happiness. Happiness is the end that we aim for; it is the goal of a lot of processes that we engage in. It is the ultimate goal of all our actions. So, it is not a means to an end; it is the end in itself, which means one wants it for its own sake. Moreover, happiness is not a mere feeling of pleasure. Happiness here is more of a success in human life or human flourishing; in Greek, it is *eudaimonia* (success) as contrasted with *hedone* (pleasure). The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains what *eudaimonia* means:

“Eudaimonia is usually translated as 'happiness'. But some prefer to use notions such as “we-being” or “flourishing” to remove any implications that *eudaimonia* is a matter of contentment or short-term pleasure (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 24-27).

Aristotle defines happiness as the activity of the rational soul by virtue” (Aristotle, 2011, p. 26-28). Happiness depends on living by appropriate virtues. In Aristotle’s understanding of virtues, the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, in its discussion on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, explains that to have a good grasp of the virtues that Aristotle speaks about, one must primarily understand how Aristotle views the soul. It explains:

The soul can be seen as bipartite, with a rational and a non-rational part. The rational part is the source of the intellectual virtues, the most important of which, in connection with ethics, is practical wisdom. We may subdivide the non-rational part; one of its sub-parts is concerned merely with nutrition and so on. The other part has more in common with reason, and is capable both of opposing it and obeying it. The virtues of this second sub-part are the virtues of character: courage, generosity, and so on (Aristotle, 2011, pp.42-45).

According to Aristotle, virtue is the good natural state of the soul in the same sense as health is a good state of the body. In Greek, virtue is *arete* which means excellence (Aristotle, 2011 pp. 42-45). Aristotle defines virtue as the excellence in human actions, developed through practice, and expressed as the habit of doing what is right in the appropriate situation (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 44–46). Virtue requires a person to decide or to choose what is the right decision. It has the element of intelligent judgment, that is, knowing the right decision at the proper place and time. The Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy comments that “the notions of deficiency, plays such an important part in Aristotle’s account of the virtues, are first introduced in connection with the notion

of habituation. Virtue is a mean between two extremes. For example, courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness. Virtue, therefore, is finding the mean between two extremes. Another example is temperance, which is the mean between self-indulgence and insensitiveness. Aside from these two virtues, Aristotle also identifies justice as the key virtue of social and political life. Justice is distributive justice, that is, giving people what is due to them or what they deserve (Gill, 2006). The fourth virtue that Aristotle identifies is practical wisdom, which means the kind of intelligence that one has to know what the right thing to do is and when it should be done. Practical wisdom is essential in all three of the other virtues. For Aristotle, then, virtue is not just about following rules or laws because many laws do apply at the same time, but it is knowing what to do and when to do it in the right situation.

In Aristotle's view, ethics is closely tied to social life, and he emphasizes friendship as a key aspect of how people relate to one another. There are three kinds of friendship: friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on goodness of character (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187-190, Book VIII, Chapter 2). The first two kinds of friendship are based on superficial qualities, so these sorts of friendship are not real friendship. On the contrary, friendship based on goodness of character is the real kind of friendship, because friends love one another for who they are, not for what they stand to gain from one another. Aristotle explains that a virtuous person needs friends (Aristotle, 2011 p.187-190, Book VIII, Chapter 2). A person who is good at being human will seek out a friend because friends do good for each other. True friendship is a relationship between two good people who are not using each other for their own interest but for the good of each other. The friend also helps one understand himself or herself and helps him or her in the task of expressing the virtue of practical wisdom and other virtues; the friend, according to Aristotle's mind, is the "second self" or the "other I".

In his exploration of ethics, Aristotle also addresses the role and purpose of politics. For him, politics is not distinct from ethics. Aristotle explains Aristotle claims that "the end of politics is the best of ends, and its primary concern is to develop a certain character in citizens and make them good and capable of noble deeds" (Aristotle, 1998). And so, the crucial task of politics is to enact laws that will help make people good to each other. Politics, for Aristotle, is essentially the practice of guiding society according to moral principles, shaping laws and institutions to cultivate virtue and the good life among citizens, not in the sense of telling people what to do because this is not how morality works for Aristotle, but in the sense of forming people as virtuous people and helping them become the right sort of person to persons who are good at being human (Aristotle, 2011, pp.7-10). Politics as an ethical work is amplified all the more by Aristotle when he wrote that "the true politician is the person who possesses the real political understanding, who is thought to have put most of his effort into studying virtue" (Aristotle, 1998). For he wants to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. Examples of these were the lawgivers of the Cretans and the Spartans, and many others who may have had the same

concerns. This is what politics is for and what human life is for: an enquiry into the true good and realizing it.

Aristotle's ethics is very much concerned with social life. Thus, much of his discussions on ethics are on the topic of friendship, that is, a person's relationship with another person. There are three kinds of friendship: friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on goodness of character (Aristotle, 2011, pp.187-190, Book VIII, Chapter 2). The first two kinds of friendship are based on superficial qualities, so these sorts of friendship are not real friendship. On the contrary, Friendship based on goodness of character is the real kind of friendship, because friends love one another for who they are, not for what they stand to gain from one another. Aristotle explains that a virtuous person needs friends (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187-190, Book VIII, Chapter 2). The person who is good at being human will seek out a friend because friends do good for each other. True friendship is a relationship between two good people who are not using each other for their own interest but for the good of each other. The friend also helps one understand himself or herself and helps him or her in the task of expressing the virtue of practical wisdom and other virtues; the friend, according to Aristotle's mind, is the "second self" or the "other I".

Thus, Aristotle, in his discussion on ethics, talks about politics. For him, politics is not distinct from ethics. Aristotle explains that "the chief good is the goal of politics; and it devotes most of its concern and effort to making the citizens be of a certain kind, viz., good and capable of fine deed." And so, the crucial task of politics is to enact laws that will help make people good to each other. Politics is all legislating morality, not in the sense of telling people what to do because this is not how morality works for Aristotle, but in the sense of forming people as virtuous people and helping them become the right sort of person to persons who are good at being human (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 7-10). Politics as an ethical work is amplified all the more by Aristotle when he wrote that "the true politician is the person who possesses the real political understanding, who is thought to have put most of his effort into studying virtue. For he wants to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. Examples of these were the lawgivers of the Cretans and the Spartans, and many others who may have had the same concerns. This is what politics is for and what human life is for: an enquiry into the true good and realizing it.

Self-Knowledge as an Essential Ingredient of a Flourishing Life

1. The Concept of Eudaimonia

For Aristotle he said that there is an end to all actions that we perform. This is what he termed eudaimonia, which is desired for its own sake, with all other things being desired on its constant. Considered as a whole, *eudaimonia* or flourishing/happiness is the highest good of human endeavors and that toward which all actions aim (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 17-25, Book I, Chapter 5). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle interpreted *eudaimonia* in its classical sense as happiness. He explains that this form of happiness is not merely a fleeting

feeling but the result of a virtuous and well-lived life. This understanding of happiness applies directly to the context of friendship, as true friends support one another in cultivating virtue, guiding each other toward moral excellence, and ultimately contributing to each other's flourishing.

The discussion of friendship that he mentioned in his book is within society, and the subject of this friendship is the human person. According to him, human life is also shaped by societal factors, in which every individual is responsible for creating a good and harmonious society. The application of Aristotle's good governance in society can be traced to his concept of *eudaimonia* and all aspects of his ethical interpretations about society and the person.

Moreover, Aristotle assumed that any activity, practical or theoretical, aims towards some end or good. He offered the following examples to elucidate his proposition: health for the practice of medicine, ship for shipbuilding, and victory for generalship in war, among others. However, the ends remain provisional goals, and they can lead a person to experience individual things that do not help them see the meaning of their existence.

Happiness above all seems to be of this character, for we always choose it on account of itself and never on account of something else. Yet honor, pleasure, intellect, and every virtue we choose on their own account—for even if nothing resulted from them, we would choose each of them—but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, because we suppose that, through them, we will be happy. But nobody chooses happiness for the sake of these things, or, more generally, on account of anything else (Aristotle, 2011, p. 11)

It is worth noting that realizing one's functional excellence requires that one knows one's natural obligation to achieve and to make something of oneself by pursuing one's true ends and goals in life. For Aristotle, one's life could not be considered flourishing unless one is aware of the kind of life that leads and arranges one's activities to be consistent with this awareness (Aristotle, 1999 p.22-25, Book 1.8, Chapter 7). The virtuous life requires that one know oneself well so that one be able to fully exercise what is expected of oneself as a rational and moral agent. The importance of reflection in human life is emphasized by both Aristotle and Socrates. For Aristotle, a good life (*eudaimonia*) is achieved through living in accordance with reason and virtue, which requires reflecting on one's actions and life as a whole. Likewise, Socrates' claim that "the unexamined life is not worth living" highlights that self-examination is essential for a meaningful and purposeful life. Together, their views show that reflection enables individuals to understand themselves, act rationally, and pursue a life of moral and intellectual fulfillment.

It's all too easy for one to be mistaken about the weather one's life is flourishing, as it is easy to have a mistaken conception of *eudaimonia* (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 12-18, Book

1.8, Chapter 5). For instance, maybe something that one deems practical but irrational. To speak of human flourishing is to embrace the view that self-knowledge is not merely pleasant but is actually indispensable to the good and flourishing (Cooper, 1975, pp. 70-85).

Happiness is an activity and thus involves actions that are themselves geared toward virtue. (Aristotle, 1999 p.18-21, Book 1, Chapter 7). The self-knowledge required for flourishing is knowledge of what actually motivates one's actions and not simply an intellectualized theory of living that one pretends to follow or supposes to be the force around which one's actions revolve.

2. Happiness and Friendship

The notion of human flourishing, for Aristotle, consists in an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue and excellence. While virtue is central to achieving *eudaimonia*, Aristotle also acknowledges the important role of external goods in a flourishing life. In emphasizing this point, he argues that actions guided by moral standards are considered both good and noble (Annas, 1993). However, performing such virtuous actions can be difficult without the necessary resources or conditions to support them (Aristotle, 1999). Since happiness is understood as the practice of virtue, it follows that an individual cannot easily engage in virtuous activity without the means to do so. For this reason, Aristotle highlights the importance of instrumental goods, as they provide the practical support needed to achieve a truly flourishing life.

Among these external goods, friends are regarded as the most important because having them means not having a procession but engaging in an activity. This does not mean, however, that friends are to be treated merely as instrumental goods. When Aristotle discusses the concept of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, one can speculate that he speaks of friends as a necessary component of a flourishing life and not simply as external and contingent goods, which a superficial and literal reading of his work would show (Pangle, 2003, pp. 183-200). This seems to be so since Aristotle considers the actions of a flourishing man to be both good and pleasant, and it is through these that he finds happiness; but since these actions are not easily observed by him on his own, then he will have to observe other people's actions in this case. Why is this so? Other people's actions will reflect the person's own actions, and he will find these pleasant because these are the same qualities that he finds pleasure in (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 214-218).

Other people, such as ordinary acquaintances, may only be aware of superficial aspects of an individual. While they can form judgments based on occasional interactions, they may fail to grasp deeper dimensions of the person's character due to the irregularity and limited nature of these encounters.

3. The Three Forms of Friendship

Aristotle first enumerates three things that are lovable and are worthy of affection in friendship: the good, pleasant, or useful. He proceeds to identify the three types of friendship based on any of the three things worthy of affection — friendship of utility, pleasure, or goodness — each having a condition of reciprocity and well-wishing for the

friend's own sake (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187-190). Friendship's condition of reciprocity is viewed by Aristotle as involving choice, with choice having a characteristic as its source (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187-190). The act of well-wishing for the friend's own sake, on the other hand, is determined not by an emotion but by a characteristic as well (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 191-193). The particular characteristics that make mutual affection and well-wishing for the other person's sake possible are themselves dependent on one's knowledge of one's character as a whole.

These characteristics are grounded in virtue, meaning that true friendship is only possible between individuals who possess moral excellence. Such friendships, based on goodness of character, are enduring because they do not rely on fleeting pleasure or utility, but on a stable appreciation of the other's virtue (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187–190, Book VIII, Ch. 2). In virtuous friendship, each person not only desires the good of the other for the other's own sake but also contributes to the moral development and flourishing of their friend. Aristotle emphasizes that friends in this sense act as “second selves,” providing support, guidance, and mutual encouragement in the practice of virtues, including practical wisdom, courage, and temperance (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 191–193).

Ultimately, Aristotle sees virtuous friendship as essential to human flourishing, as it nurtures both personal and social well-being. Friendships of utility or pleasure may be common and temporary, but only friendships rooted in virtue contribute meaningfully to the realization of *eudaimonia*, the highest good for human life (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 187–190, Book VIII, Ch. 2).

One would have to know one's character and one's friends' character pretty closely for one's own character, or on their knowledge of the motivation of their association, where the connection of the friendship rests. Even when a person is certain of the kind of character he has, the other person, his friend. This leads us to the relevance of knowing one's true desires, choices, and actions to the kind of life one leads, as these define our intentions in forming friendships with others. There are instances, though, when there is a perversion of our reasoning process such that we make the wrong choices because of wrong intentions, which we tend to qualify as correct either by deliberately misrepresenting our desire or by not having the correct judgment for it.

The Overlooked Failures of a “Unified Self”

1. The Epistemic Introspection

There can be cases when self-knowledge is insufficient to account for a complete knowledge of ourselves as a whole. Introspection of mental states may sometimes be mistaken, and may pose a problem in what we actually know and how much we think we know about ourselves (Davidson, 1987, pp. 441-458).

Introspection grants one an epistemic window into one's thoughts, in which case, one is placed in a distinctive position to examine as well as form beliefs and gain knowledge about one's mental states (Davidson, 1987, pp. 441-458). Beliefs one forms

about one's mental states are experienced firsthand and, therefore, more accurate than any belief that can be formed about someone else's thoughts. Donald Davidson supports this privileged access that we have about our own mental states:

It is seldom the case that I need or appeal to evidence or observation to find out what I believe; normally, I know what I think before I speak or act. Even when I have evidence, and so appeal to what can be publicly determined is not irrelevant. But the possibility that one may be mistaken about one's own thought cannot defeat the overriding presumption that a person knows what he or she believes; in general, the belief that one has a thought is enough to justify that belief (Davidson, 1987, pp. 442-443).

Davidson's view is that privileged access to one's mental states holds that, compared to other people's capacity to determine our ongoing mental states, we are an authority in acquiring information about a domain that we alone have immediate access to without having to resort to any kind of evidence whatsoever. Any claim made regarding our present state of mind is not, therefore, subject to great degrees of error. Also, the mere fact that we are automatically acquainted with particulars or sense-data, without them being made sense of through the use of language that may itself alter their real nature and hence misrepresent them as they are, entails that we can't possibly be wrong about them.

Mental states are also said to be self-intimating, such that if one is under a particular mental sense, then it is inconceivable that one is not aware of such a mental state. When one is in a certain mental state and thinks of concepts or forms thoughts at all, one is led to the belief that one has such thoughts or that such thoughts are one's own. Shoemaker claims:

Our minds are so constituted, or our brains are so wired, that, for a wide range of mental states, one's being in a certain mental state produces in one the belief that one is in that mental state. This is what our own introspective access to our mental states consists of. The beliefs thus produced will count as knowledge, not because of the quantity or quality of evidence on which they are based but because of the reliability of the mechanism by which they were produced (Shoemaker, 1994, p. 222).

Self-intimation gives one the capability of determining virtually anything that happens in one's mind (Shoemaker, 1994, pp. 25-49). Any thought that occurs at all — such as the thought that one is imagining a cat on the mat or that there is a problem of evil in the world — will be within one's capacity to know, as it is inconceivable for such a mental state to arise without one's being conscious of it.

2. The Problem of Introspective Awareness

These claims about our privileged access to our mental states have not enjoyed much popularity, though. While some thoughts, such as the thought that something exists or that one has the thought one in fact has, are infallibly true or considered self-intimating whenever they occur, they cannot be considered standard, much less provide a strong claim about the accuracy of introspective judgments in general (Taylor, 1995, pp. 372–378). Even in what is supposed as thoughts' privileged domain of thoughts, our self-knowledge can still possibly be faulty and untrustworthy.

When we are presented with sensations for a significantly short period of time, for instance, mistakes are not just likely but inevitable. Mistaken judgments can arise due to insufficiency of details from which one can get information, leaving more room for several different interpretations, which themselves may not necessarily be correct (Schütrumpf, 2013). Limited exposure to details can make our introspective capacity miss out on areas that are necessary for the formation of an infallible judgment.

Self-intimation likewise faces obvious problems (Sorabji, 2006). Even if mental states are self-intimating, one might still have false introspective beliefs. When one is in a mental state, one will form the belief that one is not in that particular mental state, and then one can falsely form a belief in the same mental state. If one wishes to form a belief about one's thoughts but is currently occupied with another or is forced to push aside such supporting thoughts, perhaps because the mental state one is currently in is of more importance than the other, then one may not readily know of the presence of a particular mental state (Lear, 1988). Similarly, if several confusing thoughts pervade one's mind, then one wouldn't know for sure which thought is being meaningfully manifested (Enomoto, 1999). While such confusing thoughts can manifest their presence and no doubt, they are still one's own, we can wonder if such thoughts are substantial enough to aid in any form of worthwhile introspection.

Going back to Davidson's earlier claim, he recognized the fact that our thoughts may neither be infallible nor incorrigible, and that we may be mistaken about them, which is why he equally recognizes that an appeal to what can be publicly determined, perhaps to what we can see in others, is relevant. This hesitance to accept the full infallibility or incorrigibility of our thoughts is obvious in his claim in *Deception and Division* that, "there are boundaries between parts of the mind which are not discovered by introspection" (Davidson, 1987, p.91). He does not make much issue, however, about the role introspective knowledge plays in gaining information about ourselves, which is why he holds that, "the overriding presumption that a person knows what he or she believes usually defeats the possibility that one may be mistaken about one's own thoughts" (Davidson, 1987, pp. 441-458). 43). But we cannot set aside the fact that a considerable portion of our knowledge of ourselves is acquired through our association with others, who can give us testimonies that allow us to know certain truths about ourselves which may have no other way of knowing (Cassam, 1997, pp. 11-13).

The Duplicitous Self

In addition to the limits of one's capacity for introspection along with its constraints in attaining complete knowledge of oneself, there can be cases when one is made to believe, either deliberately or otherwise, the truth of something that is not necessarily true about oneself. A basic problem that threatens an objective view of ourselves is that when we try to learn what we think are important facets of our lives, given the complexity of the process, we usually indulge in an emotional level of self-assessment, allowing our desires and emotions to cloud our judgment (Irwin, 1999). In such cases, we may engage in a form of assessment that can yield an altered state of who we are or of our true feelings, or even worse, an altered self-knowledge altogether. For instance, when one scans one's thoughts to evaluate or re-evaluate oneself as either generous, gentle, morally upright, or as all these qualities at once, one scans one's thoughts for instances that either verify or falsify one's ascriptions to oneself. Of course, more often than not, one may take credit for one's positive values and deny those that are likely to diminish one's self-worth. The process may itself be unsystematic, as many of us don't have a specific set of criteria for objectivity, and so there is a good reason to suppose that the effects of such scanning will be biased towards confirmation. Nasim Nicholas Taleb regards this as "belief defense" or the protection of self-esteem. He holds:

When we are right or regard our thoughts as right, we attribute it to our own depth of understanding and expertise; when we are wrong, it was either the situation that was to blame, since it was unusual, or worse, we do not recognize that we are wrong and make up stories around it. We find it difficult to accept that the grasp of our knowledge is little short, but this attribute is universal to all our activities: there is something in us designed to protect our self-esteem (Taleb, 2007).

We try to be objective or convince ourselves of how objective we truly are, but bias still creeps in. Even if it's granted that one affirmative concept truly applies to a person, he may not recognize it for lack of confidence or being a mere self-depreciator, and that being the case, the individual is in a state of self-deception just as much.

The Extended Self

1. The link between Oneself and Friends

In what has now become an arduous notion of self-discovery, friendship proves to be an effective way of going beyond the constraints that limited introspection and self-deception pose to one (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 210-232). Even if one fails to fully examine oneself through introspection, by looking at the friend whose character is sufficiently like one's own, one can learn things about oneself (Macintyre, 1981). Cases in which one overlooks qualities, motives, desires, or characteristics, are compensated for especially

when the discernment and evaluation are done by a friend on behalf of one's incapability to fully introspect oneself or in addition to one's initial introspection of oneself: in the latter case, the friend's discernment and evaluation can also serve as a correlative or an affirmation of what one has introspected about oneself.

Friendship, therefore, provides epistemic access not just to self-knowledge but to living well as a whole insofar as friendship allows one to accurately evaluate one's own life through a friend who acts as a kind of mirror of oneself. Amelie Rorty joins Cooper here in emphasizing the importance of the company we keep. Rorty acknowledges:

Since friends need not blindly share one's desires or emotions, they are often in a better position that one recognizes one's self-deception. They can correct morally corrosive self-deception and prevent its wild imperialistic tendencies from becoming entrenched and ramified (Rorty, 1998, pp. 120-140).

Friends are often able to perceive the subtle ways in which a person may deceive themselves, whereas the individual or a mere acquaintance may fail to recognize such self-deception. In this sense, friendship provides a clearer reflection of one's character and actions. And even if it's granted that one knows that one is self-deceived, one may nonetheless fail to escape one's deception, especially when having to accept a proposition is tantamount to facing an inconvenient truth which can otherwise be dealt with through people who embody likely or actual challenges to one's delusion, biased beliefs, and misplaced thoughts of a person in the society.

2. Friendship Beyond Shortcomings

A friend's role as an extended self is not just limited to helping one go beyond one's self-deception and incapacity for full introspection; there are more imaginable cases of friendship that don't necessarily pass through such cases but equally manifest an extension of oneself to the other (Wolf, 2010). Even a supremely happy man, one who probably does not have much reason to deceive himself about or who has a good deal of skill for introspection, would find it strange to live in isolation. Aristotle holds:

The life of a happy man ought to be pleasant. Now, if a happy man lived in isolation, his life would be hard. For it is not easy to be continuously active all by oneself; it is easier in the company of and in relation to others (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 227-230).

The company of, and relation to others, however, is not just with any other person; Aristotle adds:

... even a happy man needs society. Since he possesses what is by nature good, it is obviously better for him to spend his days with friends and

good men than with any stranger who comes along. It follows that a happy man needs friends (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 229).

Thus, beyond the corrective measures that friends can provide, they are also considered priceless in the pursuit of our activities by making these sustainable and worth-pursuing at the same time. The emphasis on the possibility of being more continuously active in the company of one's friends can be held because friends show certain qualities for each other on the basis of their knowledge of one another. One is better able to grasp one's friend's goodness through the intimacy they share. Compared to one's relation to non-friends, one can attend to a friend's need at a much deeper level. Lawrence Blum, in *Friendship as a Moral Phenomenon*, remarks that, "In genuine friendship, one comes to have a close identification with the good of the other person, an occurrence which is generally much rarer and at a much shallower level with other people" (Aristotle, 2011, p.192).

While some people know they are good without others recognizing their quality, their goodness often becomes more meaningful and visible when it is acknowledged within the community and reflected in their relationships with others. Even if this were true, knowing how good an artist one is, for instance, through an abstract knowledge that what one pursues is valuable and worthwhile, is just one view. Being kept active and more interested in one's own affairs is another matter.

3. The Mirroring Function of Friendship

Aristotle expressed that there is a similarity between how we relate to others and how we relate to ourselves. Adopting the good attitude that we have towards ourselves, we can form friendly relations with others (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 218-225). He gives five marks by which people define friendship.

As friend is one who (1) wishes and does good things to a friend for the friend's sake, (2) wishes the friend to exist and live, (3) spends time with his friend, (4) makes the same choices as his friend and, (5) finds same things pleasant and painful as his friend and shares his sorrow and joy with his friend (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 2010-2017).

Aristotle argues that all five marks are to be found in how a person relates to himself as far as the activities he concerns himself with are morally good. These marks are constitutive of exhibiting proper self-love, which happens when one loves one's rational part. Corresponding to these five marks, Aristotle holds that a good person:

(1) wishes and does what is good for himself; (2) wishes for his own life and preservation; (3) delightfully spends time with himself; (4) remains consistent in his judgment; (5) consistent in his judgment of painful and

pleasant things and does not share sorrow and pleasure with himself more than he can bear (Aristotle, 2011, pp. 215-228).

It should be noted that the concern with one's own good that is mirrored in the concern for the friend's good is possible not just with the perfectly virtuous alone but with others "to the extent to which they regard themselves as good" (Aristotle, 2011 p.193-194). A good person will love his friend precisely because the characteristics that the friend possesses are the same characteristics that he loves in himself. A bad person, on the other hand, experiences inner dimensions and will not want to be around equally bad people, for they remind him of the person he hates in himself.

Insofar as friends are extended selves, they improve our basic self-knowledge by sharing, supporting, and adding on to our views and thoughts. They serve as a check on one's rather different way of choosing or thinking. More so, when friends are similar in their ways, then if a friend finds one's undertaking to be of immense value, that undertaking would serve as an affirmation of one's disposition. The resemblance of the friend's actions can also serve to manifest one's desires and thoughts to oneself, which would not be as apparent to oneself if one only had oneself to depend on (Cooper, 1975, pp. 327). A.W. Prince strengthens this claim by saying that, "it is through observing the friend, who is more visible to one than one is to oneself, that one discovers oneself or things in addition to one's knowledge of oneself" (Cooper, 1975, p. 124).

As friends share conscious lives, each friend in some measure experiences life not only from his or her own perspectives but to some extent from taking on the friend's other ways of perceiving, understanding, and effectively responding to the world. Thus, this quotation from *The Diary of Anais Nin* – "Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born. When one meets a friend and shares one's own world with him, one gets confronted with an array of amazing possibilities and experiences that can lead to the birth of a new world.

Conclusion

The examination of friendship in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* ultimately reveals that friendship is not merely a personal affection but a profound ethical and social reality that discloses the very nature of human flourishing. For Aristotle, friendship becomes the space where virtue is both expressed and cultivated, where the self-encounters itself in the other, and where moral life transcends individuality to become a shared human project. His distinction between friendships of utility, pleasure, and virtue points toward a hierarchy of relational depth, culminating in virtuous friendship, the highest form, where individuals are united not by fleeting benefit or emotion, but by a shared commitment to the good. In this sense, friendship is not accidental to the good life; it is constitutive of it. It embodies the realization that human beings are inherently

relational, and that the pursuit of the good is inseparable from the presence of others who mirror and refine one's moral character.

Viewed through a socio-cultural lens, Aristotle's philosophy suggests that the integrity of a community depends upon the quality of its friendships. Bonds grounded in virtue foster trust, solidarity, and genuine participation in the common good, thereby shaping not only ethical individuals but also just and cohesive societies. Friendship, then, becomes the living fabric of communal existence, where belongingness and shared purpose are actualized. Thus, Aristotle's claim that one can only truly befriend another insofar as one is good reveals a deeper philosophical truth: that self-knowledge, moral development, and social belonging are inseparably intertwined. In the end, friendship emerges as both an ethical ideal and a cultural necessity, a dynamic force that sustains the moral architecture of human life. It is through friendship that individuals do not merely coexist but genuinely participate in a shared vision of the good, making it an enduring foundation of both personal fulfillment and societal harmony.

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