Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life

Nancy Sherman

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Volume 47, Issue 4 (Jun., 1987), 589-613.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0031-8205%28198706%2947%3A4%3C589%3AAOFATS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research
Vol. XLVII, No. 4, June 1987

Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life

NANCY SHERMAN
Yale University

In this paper I want to consider the value of friendship from an Aristotelian point of view. The issue is of current interest given recent challenges to impartialist ethics to take more seriously the commitments and attachments of a person.[1] In what follows I want to enter that debate in only a restricted way by strengthening the challenge articulated in Aristotle's systematic defense of friendship and the shared life.

After some introductory remarks, I begin by considering Aristotle's notion that good living or happiness (*eudaimonia*)[2] for an individual necessarily includes the happiness of others. Shared happiness entails the rational capacity for jointly promoting common ends as well as the capacity to identify with and coordinate separate ends. This extended notion of happiness presupposes the extension of self through friends, and next I

---

[1] Recent challenges come from Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality" in *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1-19; John Cottingham, "Ethics and Impartiality," *Philosophical Studies* 43 (1983): 84-99; and Andrew Oldenquist, "Loyalties," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 173-93. The impartialist claims we treat self and those extensions of self as one among others, giving the interests of others the same weight as we give our own. The opponent argues that the commitments and attachments of a person deserve special treatment, and without them life lacks value and meaning. The debate has stirred Kantians and utilitarians alike to find positions within their theories that are friendlier to the goods of friendship. Stephen Darwall explores the utilitarian and Kantian reply in "Impartialist Ethics and Personal Relationship" (unpublished). A more recent version of his paper is "Why Particularists Should be Liberals" (forthcoming). Barbara Herman articulates the Kantian position in "Rules, Motives, and Helping Actions," *Philosophical Studies* 45 (1984): 369-77. Cf. her "Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons," *Ethics* 94 (1984): 577-602 and "Integrity and Impartiality," *The Monist* 66 (1983): 233-50.

[2] *Eudaimonia*, as the final good for humans, is the activity of soul in accordance with virtue and reason (1098a3-18). Aristotle also refers to *eudaimonia* as good living and doing well (1098b21).

consider certain minimal conditions necessary for attachment. Finally, I discuss how Aristotle's notion of a friend as "another self" is compatible both with a conception of the separateness of the individuals and of the distinctive ways in which each individual realizes virtue within a shared life.

Aristotle and Kant

Before setting out Aristotle's view, it is worth anticipating a reply on his part to the Kantian position on friendship as it has been articulated recently by Stephen Darwall and Barbara Herman.[3] The reply will bring into focus aspects of Aristotle's ethical theory that I presuppose in my account. According to Darwall, reasons for an agent to act based on friendly motives are constrained by reasons based on principles of right. This deontological constraint on friendship is developed by Herman. Her claim is that the impartial point of view of the Categorical Imperative is required both to set the conditions of permissibility for acting out of friendly motives as well as to impose obligatory ends which then might best be fulfilled by friendship.[4] Thus, Herman speaks of a double acknowledgment, such that in acting from friendship we recognize that in addition to that motive, our action either satisfies a duty or is within permissible constraints. In this way motives of friendship are constrained by an overall respect for persons as ends in themselves, such that in acting out of friendship we neither overlook the autonomy of a friend, nor disregard our duties to others to whom we are not attached.

Herman's and Darwall's defense of friendship is of a piece with the general Kantian tenet that the pursuit of happiness (of which friendship is a part)[5] is framed by a lexically higher moral value which has its source not in the sentiments, but in principles of practical reason.[6] While friendships

---

[3] Darwall, "Impartialist Ethics"; Herman, "Rules, Motives and Helping Actions."

[4] "What is required is that agents who act from emotion also act permissibly. And where there is an obligation to help, we are required to acknowledge this moral claim, even though we may give help out of compassion, etc." "Rules, Motives and Helping Actions," p. 376.

[5] On Kant's view friendship is a part of happiness in so far as it is based on emotion or inclination. Friendship based on mutual respect, in contrast, will have intrinsic moral worth. Cf. *Doctrine of Virtue*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), pp. 140-45. Neither Herman nor Darwall discuss this case. I raise some difficulties for this case at the end of my paper.

[6] So Kant says: "And since none the less reason has been imparted to us as a practical power — that is, as one which is to have influence on the *will;* its true function must be to produce a *will* which is good . . . Such a will need not on this purpose be the sole and complete good, but it must be the highest good and the condition of all the rest, even of all our demands for happiness. In that case we can easily reconcile with the wisdom of

may be instrumental to acting from a moral motive (in that they provide the supporting conditions for its inculcation and flourishing), in so far as they are based on emotions, they lack intrinsic moral worth of their own.[7]

Now Aristotle's position is quite different on many counts. But one central disagreement is this: For Aristotle, the ethical sphere (literally, that which refers to character (*ēthos*)) does not distinguish between moral and non-moral value, as the Kantian understands that distinction. Thus, excellence of character will include physical strength and good birth not easily assignable to the Kantian sphere of the moral; and attachments and sentiments, while excluded from a Kantian view of the moral, will be among motives for ethical action. Accordingly, the fact that we can be blinded by friendship, or because of it act with too parochial an interest, does not, for Aristotle, thereby remove it from the ethical sphere of valuation.[8] Rather, that fact merely opens it to adjudication with other claims and to judgments about its appropriateness in light of those other considerations that must be given their due. Thus Aristotle includes motives of attachment within the ethical sphere, while still acknowledging constraints on their permissibility. So in general, Aristotle says, friends are to be preferred in the assignment of our help and aid (1155a7-9; 1160a1-8) but not always and not at all costs. For example, it would be wrong to help a friend before returning benefits due others, or to give a loan to friends before repaying a creditor, "except when helping a friend is especially fine or necessary" (1164b25-1165a4). Similarly, partiality is inappropriate in specific contexts, such as in the case of a public official where the fair adjudication of claims is a part of the description of that office (1134a33-35b1).[9] But on Aristotle's view, this is just to say that the

nature our observation that the cultivation of reason which is required for the first and unconditioned purpose may in many ways, at least in this life, restrict the attainment of the second purpose — namely, happiness — which is always conditioned," *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 64.

[7] According to Herman and Darwall, friendships may have intrinsic value though not intrinsic moral value. Note on Kant's own view, there is a restricted way in which certain friendships may have moral worth — see note 5 above. On a Kantian view, friends will also have instrumental value in so far as social relations are needed to sustain and nourish the capacities of a self as a rational chooser. A criticism of friendship as merely instrumental seems to be at the heart of Carol Gilligan's criticisms of Kohlberg. Cf. Carol Gillingan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[8] For the claim that Aristotle nonetheless does have a moral theory, see T. Irwin's "Aristotle's Conception of Morality" and my comments in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. I, ed. John Cleary (New York: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 115-50.

[9] In a similar vein, in IX.9 Aristotle distinguishes between an objectionable and unobjec-

expression of virtue through friendship must be harmonized with other ends in the good life. And this is a consequence of his more general view that particular choices must be attentive to all the ethically relevant particularities of one's situation. Accordingly, a choice is appropriate (or hits the mean) only if it gives due consideration in this holistic way.

Moreover, constraints on the permissibility of an action, in so far as they arise from the expression of other virtues, do not appeal to principles exclusive of sentiments. In making an all considered judgment of what is best in a particular situation, an agent appeals both to the passional dispositions (*hexeis*) and rational judgment (*logos*) of the *phronimos*, or person of practical wisdom. To the extent that the *phronimos* represents a point of view of experience and reflective judgment removed from irrelevant biases (NE II.9 1109b1-9) we might say there is something like an appeal to an impartial point of view in the assessment of action. However, for Aristotle, the point of view is always that of *human* excellence, constituted, as it is, by emotional as well as rational capacities. The considerations of friendship are within, rather than outside, that point of view.

Furthermore, it is the point of view of a specific person concretely reacting to specific circumstances. As such the point of view of the *phronimos* is never really a legislative one, either in the sense of applying general rules from the top down, or in the sense of constructing laws from the bottom up (as I believe the Kantian does in testing maxims). In deliberating between the competing claims of near and far,[10] the virtuous agent will correct for biases that prejudice. But this never requires the abstract deliberative point of view of *anyone* who might face the options. My antecedent history of interests and knowledge of my past are not detachable from my deliberative position. Accordingly, for the Aristotelian, moral reasons for action and the deliberations of a moral agent will appeal to these. They limit the options presented as well as the reasons for action.

As a result of these sorts of assessments, it may turn out that claims of those more distant limit the claims of friendship. But these claims, of wider generosity, justice or the like, do not have a privileged position in

---

tionable partiality toward self. In the first case an individual is partial to himself in the sense that he takes more than his fair share of certain "fought for" or scarce (*perimachata*) goods. We rightly censure this individual for his actions involve a violation of justice; they are a case of *pleonexia*, taking for oneself what others have a legitimate claim to. In the second case an individual is partial in the sense that he desires to make his own character virtuous and to make himself the seat of virtue. This individual is not guilty of a criticizable self-interest, for in wanting that *he* be virtuous, he does not violate others' claims. The implication is that the end of virtue is not a scarce resource divided up by principles of distributive justice. Cf. 1168b15-16,69a32; MM 1212b8-23.

[10] The expression is Thomas Hill's. I owe thanks to him for encouraging me to clarify some issues in this introductory section.

the good life. They do not always trump other virtues, nor are they constituted any less by passional dispositions.[11] Moreover, these passional dispositions are neither blind nor irrational forces, but rationally informed and guided intentional states.

Unlike the Kantian, then, Aristotle does not merely permit attachment within a theory of morality constituted primarily by impartiality. Rather, he makes attachment essential to the expression of virtue and living with friends a structural feature of good living, as I shall be arguing shortly.

These are some broad differences between Kant and Aristotle on the question of friendship. They have to do generally with the sources of value for each, and the method of arbitrating between competing claims. At the conclusion of the paper I shall take up a final difference. But to appreciate this, we must first explore Aristotle's position in some depth.

Friends as External Goods

To begin with, we must set down some definitional points. By friendship (*philia*) Aristotle typically means the mutually acknowledged and reciprocal relation of good will and affection that exists among individuals who share an interest in each other on the basis of virtue, pleasure or utility (NE VIII.2). Also included among friendships are the non-chosen relations of affection and care that exist among family members and fellow citizens (NE VIII.12; VIII.9, IX.6). In this paper I will be most interested in the way in which best sort of friendship, namely, the friendship of virtuous individuals (what I will sometimes call "character friendship") figures in the account of happiness. To a limited extent, I shall also discuss the *philia* of family as it sheds light on my general account. I should also stress from the start that while women, on Aristotle's view, are excluded from the best sorts of friendships (on the ground that they lack the capacities for full virtue), I shall nonetheless try to overlook this historical prejudice, and for the purposes of this paper, allow myself examples which would open the ranks of the virtuous to women.

With this said, let's try to understand the way in which friends figure in Aristotle's general scheme of goods. In NE I.8 Aristotle argues that virtue, as a good, is alone insufficient for happiness, and requires in addition certain external goods. The argument is roughly this: Happiness, conceived of as doing well and living well (1098b21), requires not merely ethical (and intellectual) virtues, but activities which manifest those excel-

---

[11] So Aristotle maintains that appeal to some sort of wide sentiment of attachment would ideally replace the more detached point of view of justice: "For lawgivers urge friendship more than justice . . . for where there is friendship there is no need for justice" (1155a24-8).

lences.[12] With regard to ethical virtue, ends of character must be realized and implemented in action.[13] But for this, the proper resources and opportunities must be at hand. Among these resources or external goods are friends:

> Yet evidently, as we said, happiness requires in addition external goods; for it is impossible or not easy to do excellent deeds without resources. For an individual performs many actions through the use of instruments, through friends, wealth and political office. And the lack of other goods spoils one's happiness, such as fine birth, good children and beauty. For one would hardly be happy if one were thoroughly ugly, or born of low birth or solitary and childless. (1099a31-b4)

In this passage, Aristotle has in mind two classes of external goods (which he recapitulates at 1099b27): those which are instruments of happiness, i.e. — those things which are by nature cooperative and useful as tools (1099b27), and those which are not merely instrumental, but which are necessary for and intrinsic to happiness (i.e., "belong necessarily" *huparchein anagkaion* 1099b27 and the lack of which mars happiness 1099b2).[14] Friends figure in the list of both types of external goods. The first class of goods is somewhat straightforward. Friends may be instruments and tools in the sense in which money and political connection are. They provide us with the means for the promotion of particular ends. Thus we depend upon the aid and support of friends for accomplishing ends we cannot realize on our own.

The way in which friends figure in the second class of goods, however, is more difficult to grasp. For while friendship has intrinsic worth (certainly Aristotle takes the love parents show toward children to be an end in its own right — MM 1211b1-2, and friendship in general, "choiceworthy for its own sake" 1159a25), it does so not in the sense of having some isolated value, like that of an "adventitious" pleasure (cf. 1169b25-7) which might be added to happiness as one more separate constituent.[15] Rather its intrinsic worth is of a much more pervasive sort,

---

[12] I do not subscribe to the interpretation of NE X.6-8 in which intellectual contemplation is a dominant good of happiness. Cf. J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 60 (1975): 339-59. I argue the case also in my review of Anthony Kenny's *The Aristotelian Ethics, Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 100-104.

[13] Accordingly, Aristotle comments that happiness could never be ascribed to a person, however virtuous, who slept away his life or out of inertia failed to realize his capacities (1099a1-6).

[14] My remarks here are indebted to T. Irwin's classification of the two types of external goods in "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon" presented to the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy, January, 1985. Irwin does not explore, as I do, the special way in which friendship is an intrinsic good.

[15] Gauthier-Jolif imply something like the view I criticize in their account of the second class

providing the very form and mode of life within which an agent can best realize her virtue and achieve happiness. To have intimate friends and family is to have interwoven in one's life, in an ubiquitious way, persons toward whom and with whom one can most fully and continuously express one's goodness.

In what follows I want to pursue this notion of friendship as structuring the good life and suggest that it is because of this role that Aristotle calls friends the "greatest" and "most necessary" of external goods (1169b10, 1154a4), without whom we wouldn't choose to live "even if we had all other goods" (1155a5-6, cf. 1169b16-17). As suggested, friendship creates a context or arena for the expression of virtue, and ultimately for happiness. This can be seen in various ways. It provides beneficiaries for virtuous action, as well as opportunities for action and sentiment unavailable to the solitary or childless.[16] However, I want to suggest that it is essential to the good life in a more fundamental way. In particular, it extends and redefines its boundaries, in such a way that my happiness or complete good comes to include the happiness of others. Thus happiness or good living is ascribable to me, not as an isolated individual, but as an extended self with attachments, or friends.

Happiness as Including the Happiness of Others

The kernel of this is in Aristotle's remarks in I.7 regarding the self-sufficiency of good living. Self-sufficiency is a criterion of the good life entailing that a life is "lacking in nothing," there being no other good which when added to it would make that life desirable (1097b15-22). But since friends are among the goods which make a life self-sufficient, self-sufficiency is relational and the good life a life dependent upon and interwoven with others:

> By self-sufficient we don't mean for a solitary individual, for one living a life alone, but for parents, children, and wife, and in general for all friends and fellow citizens since a human being is by nature political and social. (1097b9-11; cf. 1169b18-19)

For human beings the self-sufficient life is a life larger than that of one individual. So the *Magna Moralia* reminds us, "we are not investigating

---

of external goods: *L'Éthique a Nicomaque* (Louvain: Publication Universitaires, 1970), Vol. 2.1, p. 71.

[16] On the notion that friends allow for sustained virtuous activity, cf. IX.9 1170a5-8. John Cooper discusses the second class of goods as providing opportunities in this way in "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune" *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 173-96. Martha Nussbaum takes up a related view of friendship as an external good which provides objects for the exercise of virtue in chapter 12 of *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Rational Self-Sufficiency in Greek Ethical Thought: The Tragic Poets, Plato, and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

the self-sufficiency of a god, but of human beings" (1218a8), and the *Eudemian* explains, "for our well-being is relational (*kath'heteron*), whereas in the case of a god, he is himself his own well-being" (1245b18-19).

It is important to emphasize that the self-sufficiency Aristotle has in mind is self-sufficiency with regard not merely to living, but to living well. Accordingly, the most important sort of friendship does not merely enable us to live, but enables us to flourish. These considerations find expression in NE IX.9 and EE VII.12 where Aristotle again takes up the relation of friendship to self-sufficiency. So in IX.9 he reports the view of some, that the self-sufficient person does not require friends, "for the things that are good belong to him, and being self-sufficient, he requires nothing further" (1169b5-7). Aristotle's disagreement (1169b22-8, and EE 1244b6ff.) centers on the interpretation of self-sufficiency. A person who lacked friends, who perhaps spent his life in solitary contemplation, might have minimal requirements for material goods. He might be more or less self-sufficient in the material conditions of living. But he could never be self-sufficient with regard to good activity. The problem with those who claim otherwise is that they fail to conceive of friendship as based on something more than utility or transient pleasures, and self-sufficiency as something correspondingly broader (1169b23-7).[17] Thus, these later passages sharpen the definition in I.7 of self-sufficiency as relational by specifying more precisely what sort of relationship (or friendship) the self-sufficient life necessarily involves.

The upshot of these passages, then, is that while the self-sufficient solitary may not need others as means or instruments for living (or only minimally so), he will still need others to share ends and design a life together with those ends in mind:

> For when we are not in need of something, then we all seek others to share our enjoyment. And we can judge them better when we are self-sufficient than when in need, and we most need friends who are worthy of living together with us. (EE 1244b18-22)

Thus the best sort of friendship provides us with companions with whom we can share goods and interests in a jointly pursued life. This sort of shared happiness constitutes the truly self-sufficient life.

There is considerable further evidence for the claim that friendship entails a weaving of lives together into some shared conception of happiness. Aristotle pursues these issues with some insight in the *Eudemian*

---

[17] In the EE Aristotle says that the most self-sufficing person will need useful friends and friends that amuse him only minimally, and will not value too highly such relations (1244b5-15). But sufficiency with regard to these means is only one aspect of self-sufficiency, as I have argued above.

Ethics, and I want to consider those texts now.

In the EE Aristotle adds a new dimension to his discussion of friendship as it appears in the NE and MM. At 1236b3-6 he argues that the best sort of friendship among virtuous adults (character friendship) displays not only the acknowledged reciprocation of affection and goodwill, but the acknowledged reciprocation of a choice of one another:

> It is apparent from these things that the primary sort of friendship, that among good persons, requires mutual affection (*antiphilia*) and mutual choice (*antiprohairesis*) with regard to one another . . . This friendship thus only occurs among humans, for they alone are conscious of reasoned choices (*prohaireseis*).

Again, at EE 1237a30ff. he makes a similar point:

> If the activity of friendship is a reciprocal choice, accompanied by pleasure, of the acquaintance of one another, it is clear that friendship of the primary kind is in general a reciprocal choice (*antiprohairesis*) of the things that are without qualification good and pleasant, because they are good and pleasant.

The significance of the claim rests on Aristotle's technical term, *prohairesis*. As I have argued elsewhere, a *prohairesis* is a reasoned choice that is expressive of a character and the overall ends of that character.[18] The choice of a friend exposes this capacity of practical reason in a perspicuous way. For in choosing a character friend, we select "another self" (1170b6-7) who shares a sense of our commitments and ends, and a sense of what we take to be ultimately "good and pleasant" in living. We choose another to be a partner in the joint pursuit of these ends. In so doing, we choose to arrange our lives around a loyalty to another, and around a willingness to choose ends and pursuits within the context of this loyalty.[19]

However, since for Aristotle the real test (*peiran*) of friendship comes in spending time together (*suzesai* 1237b35-37), the choices that are constitutive of the friendship are not so much the initial overtures as those that indicate a capacity to share and coordinate activities over an extended period of time.[20] They are the choices that indicate two lives can be inter-

---

[18] Cf. my "Character, Planning and Choice in Aristotle," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1985).

[19] Cf. EE 1214b7 on *prohairesis* as a capacity to arrange life with regard to certain ends. It is also interesting to note that in the NE Aristotle characterizes *phronēsis* and implicitly the *prohairesis* of the person of wisdom as a right judgment (*orthos logos* 1144b22-8), and as a judgment of what is taken to be best (NE III.3 1112b11ff.). Here too, in the notion of choosing a friend, the terminology is present. The friendship reflects a stable judgment (*to kekrimenon bebaion* 1237b11), and correct decision (*krisin orthēn* 1237b12), as determined not so much in advance, but as borne out by time and trust (1237b13-18).

[20] "Those who become friends without the test of time are not real friends but only wish to be friends" (EE 1237b17-18).

woven together into some coherent pattern of good living.

Significantly, Aristotle does discuss these sorts of choices under the notion of *homonoia*, literally sameness of mind, or more idiomatically, consensus between friends. *Homonoia*, he argues in the EE, is arriving at the same choice about practical matters (*hē autē prohairesis*), as in the case of civic friendship, where fellow citizens agree about who should rule and who should be ruled (1241a31-3; cf. NE IX.6). In the case of intimate friendships, the consensus is not about who should rule, but about how and what sort of life to live together: "Some have thought friendship to be unanimity of feeling and those who have such a consensus to be friends. But friendship is not a consensus concerning everything, but a consensus concerning practical matters for the parties involved and concerning those things that contribute to living together" (*hosa eis to suzēn suntenei* 1241a16-18).

The notion of consensus can be seen as an extension of Aristotle's notion of reciprocal choice *(antiprohairesis)*. In choosing a friend, one chooses to make that person a part of one's life and to arrange one's life with that person's flourishing (as well as one's own) in mind. One takes on, it you like, the project of a shared conception of *eudaimonia*. Through mutual decisions about specific practical matters, friends begin to express that shared commitment.

Consensus between friends can take various forms. So, for example, two friends come to a mutual decision about how to act fairly and honorably toward another who has wronged them, or about how best to assist a fellow citizen who has come upon hard times. Any happiness or disappointment that follows from these actions belongs to both persons, for the decision to so act was joint and the responsibility is thus shared. This notion of joint deliberation provides an important interpretation of Aristotle's more compressed remark that character friends live together, not in the way animals do, by sharing the same pasture, but "by sharing in argument and thought" (*koinōnein logōn kai dianoias* 1170b11-12).

But equally, consensus may express only a more general agreement about ends and pursuits. Two friends may share the conviction that temperance in their personal lives is of utmost importance, yet each realizes that end in a different style and manner. One does it through a scrupulous diet, the other by refusing to take part in frivolous gossip about others. Their commitment is to an end, rather than to particular ways of expressing it.

But there may be a more characteristic sort of consensus in friendship. In this sort of case friends realize shared ends which are constitutive of the

friendship and which do not pre-exist it.[21] Thus specific common interests develop which are a product rather than pre-condition of the relation, so, together, my friend and I develop a love for Georgian houses having had no real interest in them earlier. Aristotle's emphasis on developing friendships through time and through a shared history of mutual activity suggests this notion of the common good. But a qualification is in order here. While specific and shared ways of being virtuous will be among those values peculiar to a specific friendship, the acquisition of virtuous states of character must pre-exist any friendship based on virtue. That is, the agents must choose each other, in part, on the basis of a firm and stable character. Through the particular friendship, the commitments of character will deepen and express themselves in ways peculiar to and conditioned by that friendship. But even so, a well-cultivated sense of virtue must be in place from the start, in a way in which a love of Georgian houses need not be.

Within friendship happiness is shared in other ways too. Individuals come to identify with one another, such that even where activities are not joint, or ends not shared, one individual's happiness affects the happiness of the other. When a friend does well, I feel happy too. Aristotle explains this sort of "singleness of mind" (*mia psuchē* EE 1240b2,b9-10) through the notions of sympathy and empathy, and argues that these sentiments are heightened the more intimate a friendship. So at IX.10, Aristotle says, the more exclusive the attachment to a friend, the better able I am to minister to a friend's needs and to identify with her joys and sorrows (1171a6ff.) It may be because of my intimate knowledge of her, I can imagine how *she* feels in that situation, or knowing how *I* would feel or (have felt) in that sort of situation, and knowing she is similar to me in certain ways, imagine she must feel that way. In the EE Aristotle indicates that friends might express not merely sympathetic identification of some sort (*ou monon sullupeisthai*), but empathy, "feeling the same pain . . . (*alla kai tēn autēn lupēn*) (for example, when he is thirsty, sharing his thirst), if this were possible, and if not, what is closest to it" (EE 1240a36-9). But the qualification suggests that this Humean-like empathy, i.e., coming to feel the same effect, may in the end be neither necessary nor sufficient for practical concern. It might be enough that I be able to imagine from my own point of view, or from what I take to be that of my friend's, what she is experiencing. Thus, in tragedy, Aristotle says, we respond with pity and fear when we imagine what it would be like for us, in our own circumstances, to suffer a similar fate (*peri to homoion*).[22]

---

[21] I am grateful to Gregory Trianosky for urging me to develop this point.

[22] Cf. *Poetics* 1453a4-6, *Rhetoric* 1385b13-14.

To appreciate the character's plight we needn't feel just what the character feels.

There is a further way in which we experience a friend's happiness or sorrow as our own. Accomplishments and failures, which are not explicitly our own, are nonetheless, through an extension of self, sources of pride and shame. So Aristotle says in Rh. II.6: "And individuals feel shame whenever they have acts or deeds which bring some disrespect, either their own, or those of their ancestors, or those of other persons with whom they bear some close relation" (1385a1-3). Thus, when our children do well, we feel pride in their achievements, and when they do poorly, shame, as if we ourselves had fallen short. It is not that we are responsible for their errors (though as parents we may be), but that through the sense of belonging and attachment, we identify with and share their good.

But friendship may involve the interweaving of two lives in quite a different way. This can be seen as follows: Within a given individual's life, choices (*prohaireseis*) articulate the ends of character in some unified and comprehensive way over time. So, deliberation reflects a sense of planning, and an ability to make choices that best promote not a single end, but a coherent system of ends. Choices of action are with regard not merely to the parts of good living, but with regard to the whole, and the unity of ends that entails (1140a26-28, 1145a1-2).

This model of planning is extended to the shared life of friends. Ends are coordinated not merely within lives, but between lives. Thus, just as a particular choice I make is constrained by my wider system of objectives and ends, so too is it constrained by the ends of a friend. So, for example, if a contemplated action of mine precludes a friend from realizing an important goal of hers, then that consideration will figure in my judgment of what is overall best. It may not be an easy matter determining whose interests should prevail, and as with any decision of the mean, deciding what is right will require giving due consideration to all relevant concerns. But whatever the nature of the solution, the point to be stressed is that what is relevant to the decision goes beyond the *eudaimonia* of a single, isolated individual. The ends of my friend must be taken into account, just as mine must, in the overall assessment of what is to be done. Indeed, the survival of the friendship depends upon our willingness to exhibit loyalty in this way.

Attachment and Wider Altruism

I have argued that through friendship an individual's happiness becomes extended to include the happiness of others. This presupposes some notion of an extended self, or a self enlarged through attachments. I want

to explore this momentarily, proposing certain minimal conditions necessary for friendship as attachment. But first I want to contrast attachment with a wider sense of altruism.

Altruistic sentiments such as goodwill (*eunoia*), kindness (*charis*) and pity (*eleos*) are constitutive of various virtues in Aristotle's scheme, e.g. generosity (*eleutheriotēs*) magnificence (*megaloprepeia*), and magnanimity (*megalopsuchia*). The definition of kindness in *Rhetoric* II.7 is useful for our purposes. It is a willingness to give "assistance (*hupourgia*) toward someone in need" (1385a18), and "is great if it is shown toward someone in great need, or in need of what is important or what is difficult to get, or someone who has need in a crisis, or if the helper is the only one or first one or the most important one" (1385a19-21).[23] Accordingly, in acting out of kindness, our sympathy goes out to an individual because of the circumstances he happens to find himself in, and not because of who the specific individual happens to be. There is a kind of anononymity in our response. The situation is different in friendship. We act out of a more specific concern for a *particular* person, and because it is *that* person who is in need (and not another), what we can do and are willing to do, and what others count on us to do, is often greater (cf. NE IX.8 1169a18-34).

These remarks might suggest the following objection: that when we act out of kindness rather than friendship, we somehow *overlook* the person who is the object of our goodwill and consider him merely as an occasion for the exercise of our virtue. We might even seem to care in a priggish way more for our virtue, than for the particular person toward whom it is being expressed.[24] But on Aristotle's view, I act for the sake of the beneficiary, whether or not I have an enduring or prior attachment to him. Even though in wider cases of altruism the beneficiary is in a sense intersubstitutable by others, this doesn't diminish my concern for *this person now*. Aristotle makes the point as follows: To be a friend is to wish another well and desire good things for him, "for his sake and not for your own" (Rh. 1380b37; cf. 1381b37). But equally, kindness outside of friendship depends upon offering assistance "not in return for something, nor for some advantage to the helper himself, but for that of the one

---

[23] Although kindness can be described in general terms, acting from kindness does not come down to following a general rule. To have a reliable disposition, there must be, as a part of that disposition, some cognitive grasp of the general sorts of circumstances in which that disposition would be appropriately exercised. But this involves a flexibility to respond to new and often unfamiliar occasions.

[24] The objection might be answered if we say, not that I act for the sake of my virtue, but for the sake of this person *because* of my virtue. That is, my virtue explains why I am motivated to make this person the object of my concern. Cf. Barbara Herman, "Rules, Motives and Helping Actions," pp. 370-71.

helped" (Rh. 1385a18-19).[25]

Thus, friendship goes beyond goodwill, insofar as it is directed toward a specific person, not easily substituted by others (cf. NE IX.5). So I may have a well cultivated sense of altruism or even be a friendly sort of person and one who tends to treat my friends well, but the exercise of those virtuous states does not itself secure for me the good of friendship. For that, I have to become attached to a particular person, and another person to me, in a way that displays mutual regard and affection (1155b28-56a5) as well as a history of shared activities. Moreover, while virtuous states of character depend upon external conditions for their exercise, the absence of favorable conditions does not necessarily destroy them. But this is not so in the case of friendship. For friendship is more an activity than a state of character, and a virtuous activity, unlike other virtuous activities, that depends upon a specific person as its external condition.[26] In the absence of that person, there is no friendship.

Conditions for Attachment

The notion of attachment is a theme which recurs in Aristotle's discussion of friendship, but most explicitly within the account of natural *philia*, or the relation of affection and caring between parent and child. Though his remarks about the family have been for the most part ignored, they are crucial for an account of the way in which a self becomes extended or attached to particular others. The primary texts here are NE VIII.12 and Pol. II.1.

We can begin to consider the conditions for attachment in rather broad outline by contrasting Aristotle's views with the teachings of Diotima in the *Symposium*. The ascent of *eros*, according to Diotima, requires that the love of a particular individual be transformed into a more noble love of the repeatable and universal qualities of that individual as they are found in other persons as well as in impersonal embodiments, such as institutions and sciences. The claim is that the reinstantiation of those features in other individuals suffices to make those new individuals objects of

---

[25] The difference for Aristotle between the two cases is not that I treat a friend more for his own sake than I do a stranger, but that when I fail to, I commit a deeper wrong and show a greater failing of character. As Aristotle says, "a wrong becomes intensified in being exhibited towards those that are more fully friends, so that it will be a more terrible thing to defraud a friend than fellow citizen, and more terrible not to help a brother than a stranger, and more terrible to wound a father than anyone else" (NE VIII.9 1160a4-6).

[26] Aristotle does not explicitly say this and leaves it open at 1155a4 as to whether friendship is a virtue or something (e.g., activity) accompanied by virtue. It is also noteworthy that at 1105b22 Aristotle lists *philia* as a passion, but here he seems to have in mind friendly feeling as opposed to friendship.

love.

Aristotle's argument, we shall see, implies that a notion of friendship based on Diotima's model violates certain psychological features of attachment. It violates the strong sense of friendship as self-referential, i.e., that a friend is *my* friend and is treated as she is because she stands in a particular relation to *me*. For on Diotima's model, there is no clear sense that the reduplicated objects retain that strong and special relation of "being mine" characteristic, presumably, of the initial attachment. The sense of belonging has been diluted, Aristotle will suggest, by there being just too many individuals with whom I can reasonably expect to develop an intimate relation. The psychological feature of exclusiveness, characteristic of friendship, is absent.

Let's consider these points more closely in the context of Aristotle's remarks in *Politics* II.1.[27] Here Aristotle make these points in arguing against Plato's radical claim in *Republic* V that political harmony and unity require the abolition of the nuclear family. In its place will be the establishment of a communistic family in which the youths of the city become the common children of the older generation. Plato describes it as follows:

> For no matter whom he meets, he will feel that he is meeting a brother, a sister, a father, a mother, a son, a daughter or the offspring or forebearers of each. (Rep. 463c)

> That city, then, is best ordered in which the greatest use the expression "mine" and "not mine" of the same things in the same way . . . (Rep. 462c)

Now Aristotle's view is that a notion of *philia* which requires this extended use of "my mother," "my son," etc., cannot be sustained: For when "mine" is used as in the *Republic* "each of two thousand or ten thousand applying it to the same thing" (1262a8), "the expressions 'my son' or 'my father' become less frequent" (*hēkista legein ton emon ē huion patera ē patera huion* 1262b17). The notion of standing in a special relation to an individual becomes weakened, on the one hand, by common ownership (for a son becomes only fractionally one's own (1262a2-6)), and on the other, by having too many sons with whom to spread one's love.

Aristotle formulates this more precisely in terms of two closely related psychological principles: "There are two things above all that make persons love and care: They are a sense that something is one's very own or

---

[27] The importance of these texts was brought to my attention by M. Nussbaum, in "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato" in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 395-435.

proper to oneself (*to idion*) and a sense that that object is all one has, i.e., it must do" (*to agapēton*) (1262a8). The latter notion is most poignant in the case of natural *philia*, for there is a sense here in which *this* child or *this* parent must, by default, suffice as my own. The relation is fixed or permanent (EE 1260b35), and the attachment thrives on its exclusiveness. When the relation becomes too inclusive, and the objects of attachment too numerous, any given attachment becomes diluted, literally, "watery" (*hudarē* 1262b16).

Both principles express exclusiveness, though in distinct ways. The first suggests that the whole of an object is one's own, i.e., it is not collectively owned or collectively taken care of. The second suggests that there are no other such objects with whom one stands in the same relation; that is, the object of attachment is not substitutable. In the extended family of the *Republic*, Aristotle argues, both principles are violated. He illustrates the violation of the first (*to idion*) by the following analogy: as with a household that is neglected when it is taken care of by too many servants, so too children are neglected when they are the common responsibility of many individuals. For each parent passes responsibility on to someone else, with the result that the children are in the end inadequately cared for (1261b33-8). The children, in turn, lacking a sense that they belong exclusively to a particular individual (*hōs hekastou*) (instead of as they do, to any one of many (*tou tuchontos*)), fail to develop the intensity of feeling characteristic of the parent-child relation (1261b39-62a2). The inability to form attachments is explained by the absence of a sense of *to agapēton* — a sense that a given parent cannot be exchanged for another. The implication, then, is that although parents and children of the *Republic* refer to one another as "mine," the sense of belonging requisite for attachment cannot be sustained in the absense of exclusiveness.

It is worth noting that Aristotle's remarks seem to run counter to the sort of division of labor he himself would advocate for the household (NE 1162a20-29, Pol. I.5). For on his view, each parent, as well as the various slaves, has different roles in the management of the family. The division increases, rather than impedes, efficient care. However, I think Aristotle, even here, does not abandon the system of division of labor. Rather, the crux of his argument is that Plato, in requiring that the many parents of a child all fill the same function, rules out the possibility of an effective system of shared care. Indeed, Aristotle's two psychological principles would be consistent with a notion of division of labor, so long as he stipulates that it is a specific aspect of the care of a child that is primarily one's own (*to idion*), and that the child in turn, depends upon that relation to be consistently filled by one particular individual (*to agapēton*).

Although Aristotle dwells on the case of natural *philia*, his remarks about exclusiveness have more general application, as suggested by the discussion in NE IX.10. There Aristotle argues that the number of intimate friendships any individual can have is highly limited (1171a10-15; cf. EE 1238a9-10). For such friendships require a considerable devotion of energy and time, and preclude not only other such friendships, but other loyalties and commitments. They are cultivated and sustained at the cost of other investments of time and interest. Here it is significant to note that his remarks are relevant not merely to the cultivation of friendships, but to the cultivation of interests in general.

In the discussion of the family in NE VIII.12, Aristotle continues his account of the conditions for attachment.[28] The requirement that a friend be "one's own" or *to idion* is here specified in terms of parents loving children "as in some way belonging to themselves" (*hōs heautōn ti onta*) and children in turn loving parents "as in some degree deriving from them" (*hōs ap ekeinōn ti onta*) (1161b18-19, 1161b27-30). The love between siblings, on Aristotle's view, is initially, at least, a love rooted in this common sense of belonging to parents (1161b30).

Although these remarks make some appeal to biological connections, these by no means exhaust what Aristotle takes to be relevant or most central to attachment. The sense of belonging between parent and child is more generally like that of craftsman to product (*poiēma*): in both cases the makers "are favorably disposed (*eunoi*) to what they themselves make" (MM 1211b35-39). Here, belonging is an attachment which results from creating a product. The sense of one's own requires the sense of *making* something as one's own. This seems to be true, on Aristotle's view, even among adult friends. For he suggests adult friends "mold" each other (*apomattontai* 1172a12), and influence greatly the course of life each follows.

Moreover, in the case of parents, the productive efforts are not merely of bringing children into the world, but of nurturing and raising them: "For parents are the cause of children's existence and nurture, and from their birth onward, of their education" (1162a6-7). The parents' production, thus, is ongoing and constant, "guided by memory and hope" (MM 1211b38). While it is important to note that Aristotle describes a mother's love as greater than a father's, we needn't understand him to be claiming that it is because a mother is more biologically connected with her children. For he goes on to say, "giving birth to children is more laborious" (NE 1168a25-8, 1161b27, EE 1241b5ff.). It is the activity and labor (*to*

---

[28] I discuss these and related issues in my dissertation, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Education*, Harvard University, 1982.

prattein) that makes for the greater attachment. So he generalizes: "Everyone loves more the things they have brought about through effort, for example, those who have worked for their money love it more than those who have inherited it . . . and for these reasons, mothers love their children more than fathers" (1162a22ff.). This reading seems to be confirmed by Aristotle's biological theory, according to which the mother's body is regarded as merely the accidental matter in which the form, carried by the father's sperm, is instantiated.[29] As such, it is the father, and not the mother, who bears the essential biological relation to the child. The idea of a purely gestational mother, who has no genetic relation to the child she bears, would not be a terribly strange notion to Aristotle.

It is also worth speculating that given Aristotle's view of the mother's primary function on the household, her labor will extend to the nurture and early upbringing of children. While she herself will lack education and by nature, the full authority and control of rational powers (Pol. 1260a14), she nevertheless will be capable of executing orders for running a household in which the children's early education is a part.[30] Her love and intimate knowledge of her children will be important elements in that education, and significant counterparts to the less personalized aspects of public education (1180b8-12). Although Aristotle does not develop these points about women, they do not seem in principle inconsistent with his view of women's subordinate virtue and rationality.

The attachment of children to parents, in turn, is not merely or primarily biological, on Aristotle's view, but an intentional response to the affection and nurture displayed toward them as beloved objects. This emerges from several remarks Aristotle makes. For a start, he says "children love their parents only after time has elapsed when they are capable of understanding and discrimination" (1161b24-6). Most fundamental in this process is distinguishing their own parents from other adults. So in *Physics* I. 1, Aristotle explains: "Children at first call all men 'father' and all women 'mother,' and only later distinguish each of them from other

---

[29] There is clearer evidence for biological attachment in Aristotle's claim that mothers love their children more not only because of their labor but because "they know better than fathers that the children are their own" (1168a26). Although the mother's matter is accidental to the child, the mother nonetheless can be certain of her own contribution in a way the father cannot.

[30] On the role of women in ancient society, cf. *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt (London: Croom Helm, Ltd. 1983), esp. Mary Lefkowitz, "Influential Women"; Susan Walker, "Women and Housing in Classical Greece: the Archaeological Evidence" Riet Van Bremen, "Women and Wealth." Cf. also the helpful source book by Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1982).

adults" (1184b12-14). The implication from these passages is that as children become capable of discriminating their own parents from other adults, they come to recognize their parents' special affection for them. They perceive themselves "as" (*hōs* 1168b18) belonging in a special and exclusive way. In addition they perceive parents' love as unfailing and abundant. So Aristotle says, "Of all the kinds of friendship we have discussed, it is in the friendships between kin that love is present in the greatest degree (*malista*), and especially so in the relation of parent to child" (MM 1211b18-20). It is given from the start as soon as a child is born (NE 1161b25), and is given non-instrumentally, for its own sake (MM 1211b27-35), without debts incurred for benefits conferred (MM 1211b22-27, EE 1239a18). The child's attachment is a response to these perceptions of love.

A Friend as Another but Separate Self

The sense of belonging and exclusivity that marks the filial relation is also characteristic of adult friendships. However, in the relation between parent and child, the child is in a significant way not yet separate.[31] For the child, lacking in mature rational capacities (NE 1111b8-9, 1144b8-12, EE 1240b31-33, Pol. 1260a11-14) is dependent upon the parent's reason. A parent makes choices (*prohaiareseis*) for a child and promotes his good in a way that would be inappropriate within adult friendship.

So Aristotle says an adult friend is "another self," but equally, in his own words, "a separate self" (*autos diairetos*) (EE 1245a30, a35; NE 1170b7, MM 1213a13, a24). This entails that such friends promote each other's good in a privileged way (as only another self can), but in a way that is nonetheless mindful of the mature rational agency of each. So, given the similarity of character friends and the exclusivity of the relation, each is in a position to know how best to help the other, and how to help in a way that most reassures and pleases. In those cases where decisions are not joint, intimate knowledge of each other's abiding interests puts each in a position to offer counsel and support for the sort of choices that give real shape to each other's lives. Yet within this extended and interwoven life, the individuals nonetheless retain their separateness.

---

[31] This is explicit in the following remark from the *Magna Moralia*: "For there does not seem to be any justice between a son and his father, or a servant and his master — any more than one can speak of justice between my foot and me, or my hand or any of my other limbs. For a son is, as it were, a part of his father (*hōsper meros ti*), and remains so until he takes the rank of manhood and is separated (*chōristhei*) from him, and becomes then an equal and a peer with his father" (MM 1194b11-17).

Aristotle's notion of self-sacrifice is important in understanding the way in which a self becomes extended yet separate through friendship. In intimate and deep friendships there is a level of practical concern and willingness to help one another that far exceeds the sort of concern shown a lesser friend. One comes to count on an intimate friend in a way one does not upon a stranger or mere acquaintance (NE VIII.9). Aid is given without even having to ask (Rh. 1381b35), and often without a return expected. But it is not clear that this greater willingness to help is in the case of true friendship best thought of as self-sacrifice. For if friendship extends the self, then one is not so much sacrificing oneself, as acting in the interests of this new extended self.

Aristotle is indeed loathe to view such actions as self-sacrifices, but for different, though relevant reasons. In IX.8 of the NE and II.13 of the MM, he suggests that giving a friend material goods, and even the opportunities for action and choice (1169a32-4), does not constitute a sacrifice of self, (indeed it is a case of self-love). For what matters most to the self, namely reason (1168b28-69a3) and the capacity to choose excellent deeds in accordance with reason, is by that very action preserved. So there is no real sacrifice here because the virtuous individual does not forfeit his rational capacity or the desire to use it in making himself the seat of excellence. We might find this deeply unsatisfying. For it fails to distinguish between a right choice which exercises our rational natures, and the outcome of the choice which literally ends in the death of our reason. The latter is of course a sacrifice. The distinction parallels that between the pleasure which follows the excellent exercise of a state and the pleasure which comes from accomplishing the end for which the activity was undertaken. Though failing to accomplish our ends may result in unhappiness, making the right choices and exercising well our abilities brings, on Aristotle's view, its own rewards. Perhaps in this narrow sense, the virtuous agent's sacrifice for a friend is not a loss. For no matter what the external outcome, the agent will have the satisfaction of having exercised well his abilities.[32]

Implicit in this regard for reason is a certain limitation on what a character friend can give another. How one can help, is limited, among other things, by an acknowledgment of the rational agency of each. In so far as a friend is another self, in helping a friend, an individual cannot pre-empt that friend's rational agency, or desire to make choices for himself with regard to virtuous living. For it is just because that other individual values virtue and practical reason that he has been chosen as a friend and someone with whom a life can be spent. They are virtue friends, in part, because

---

[32] This seems to be the combined force of 11698a20 ff. and 1117b1-20.

they are capable of living in relation to one another in a way that does not make one the slave of the other.[33] The result is that such individuals promote each other's interests only in certain ways — not by directly making choices for each other (unless these are jointly deliberated choices or *homonoia*), but by giving each greater opportunities for choice, and greater means for the realization of ends. These means may include scarce (*perimachata*) material resources, as Aristotle suggests here, but they may also include sought for psychological goods, such as support and esteem and confidence in our endeavours. So Aristotle remarks in the *Rhetoric*: It is characteristic of friends, that "they praise the good qualities we possess, and especially those which we fear might not in fact belong to us" (1381a35-b1; cf. 1381b10-14). We give friends support and confidence in these ways, without minimizing their separateness.

There is further evidence for the separateness of selves within character friendship. We can take up the issue by considering the possibility of a diversity of ideals of virtuous characters. On Aristotle's view, having a virtuous character implies having all the virtues, or complete virtue 1145a1-2, 1098a17-18).[34] For the virtues imply one another and are inseparable. However, the pattern of unified virtues might be different in different persons. So one individual might be especially honest, this virtue seeming to gain pre-eminence over others, while another individual is especially generous, her interactions being marked, above all, by a sense of kindness and bounty. Each individual has all the other virtues, and exercises them appropriately, as external conditions allow. But as a result of nature, development and resources, certain virtues have gained greater expression and prominence in each individual's life.[35]

Now individuals that come together as character friends might be similar yet different in the above sense that while they share virtue as an overall end, they express it, at times, in ways that are distinct yet complemen-

---

[33] Here I draw on the implication of Aristotle's remarks at 1124b31 that the magnanimous person "cannot live in relation to another, except a friend. For that would be slavish." See T. Irwin's notes on this passage in his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), p. 327.

[34] Aristotle's remarks can be understood as making either the weaker claim that the virtues are in principle consistent, or the stronger claim that in actual cases of action, they can never contingently conflict. I understand him to be making the first, weaker claim.

[35] There is implicit evidence for something like this in Aristotle's view at *Politics* 1329a9ff. There he argues that different virtues or character traits gain pre-eminence at different times in an individual's life: "Inasmuch as these different functions belong to a different prime of life, and one requires wisdom and the other strength, they are to be assigned to different persons." I owe thanks to T. Irwin for bringing this passage to my attention.

tary. They are not mere look alikes of one another. Aristotle suggests this thought at EE VII.12. In assessing the truth of the claim that a friend is another self, he comments:

> but the characteristics of a particular individual may be scattered, and it is difficult for all to be realized in one individual. For although by nature a friend is what is most similar, one individual may resemble his friend in body, one in character (*psychē*), or one in one part of the body or character, and another in another (1245a30-34).

The notion that another self may not realize all of one's ends or interests leads Aristotle to remark further that while friends desire to promote shared ends, failing this they choose most of all to promote each other's separate good (1245b7-9).

There are several implications in this notion of character friends as complementing one another. First, differences in character trait and point of view, while not precluding a life of consensus and coordination, may nonetheless enable each individual to grow and learn from the other. In Aristotle's concluding remarks on friendship in NE IX he alludes to these differences and their role in adult ethical development:

> The friendship of good persons is good, being increased by their companionship; and they are thought to become better too by their activities and by improving each other; for from each other they take the mold of characteristics they approve. (1172a10-15)

The supposition is that character friends realize to a different degree (and in a different manner) particular virtues. Each is inspired to develop himself more completely as he sees admirable qualities, not fully realized in himself, manifest in another whom he esteems. Remarks Aristotle makes about the notion of emulation in the *Rhetoric* are pertinent here: Emulation, he says, is felt most intensely "before those whose nature is like our own and who have good things that are highly valued and are possible for us to achieve" (1388a31-2). Character friends, as extended yet different selves, are eminently suited as models for emulation.

There are also implications for Aristotle's claim that through character friendships the parties gain in self-knowledge.[36] In NE IX.9 and MM II.15, Aristotle suggests that we learn about ourselves by having another self before us whose similar actions and traits we can study from a more detached and objective point of view: "We can study a neighbor better than ourselves and his actions better than our own" (1169b33-35). For in our own case, passion or favor at times blind our judgment (MM 1213a16-20). Through another just like us, yet numerically different, we

---

[36] Cf. John Cooper's excellent discussion of the way in which friendship facilitates self-knowledge, "Aristotle on Friendship," *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty, pp. 301-40.

can see ourselves from a point of view outside ourselves, and so at a distance.

But if another self need not be exactly similar, then self-knowledge might involve contrasting oneself with another, and considering how another would have acted in the same circumstances given that individual's different point of view. Aristotle's introductory remarks in *Metaphysics* A have application here: "All human beings desire to know by nature . . . and especially delight in discriminating differences" (980a22-28). Self-knowledge, as a sub-species of knowledge, requires, ultimately, the discrimination of what is peculiarly one's own. Another and separate self facilitates that discovery.

I began this paper with the promise to strengthen the Aristotelian challenge against impartialist ethics, and in particular against Kantian theory. With these remarks about self-knowledge, we are now in a position to advance in that direction. It is a feature of Kantian theory that in assessing maxims, part of the assessment will depend on whether the maxims sincerely reflect our motives. Indeed, to be persuaded of the unacceptability of certain motives is not merely posterior to recognizing what one's motives are, but often accomplished by that recognition. The issue is one of transparency.[37] Yet knowing the heart, Kant tells us, is a difficult and seemingly inscrutable matter.[38] We can never be fully sure if we have told ourselves the truth.

However there are ways of knowing the heart explicit in an Aristotelian account of friendship that need to be explored if the issue of transparency is indeed to be taken seriously. These involve, as we have just seen, informal methods of self-reflection that seem possible only within intimate and trusting relations.

Before a friend, Aristotle suggests, we can bare ourselves, and acknowledge the foibles and weaknesses we hide from others (Rh. II.6). Stories we have told ourselves about how we failed to help another because of inadequate means or resources may simply not hold up in the presence of an intimate companion. It may become clear in such a context that the real reason I failed to act was because I undervalued another's needs or did not regard the occasion as sufficiently benefitting me. Where deceit is not the issue, but deeper ambivalences are, the conflicts may only surface before those who seem to know us better than we know ourselves. Thus, through intimate friends, we come to a vision of ourselves that is more resolute and definite than our purely internalized view affords. The issue is not simply that our own eyes are biased, but more generally, that the project of self-

---

[37] See Onora O'Neill, "Kant after Virtue," *Inquiry* 26 (1983): 387-405.

[38] *The Doctrine of Virtue,* pp. 440, 445-46.

knowledge requires external dialogue and audience. We need "to live together with friends and share in argument and thought" in order to be fully conscious of the sorts of lives we are leading (1170b11-12).[39] Without friends, we act in blindness about who we really are, and indeed lack true practical reason.

I want to suggest that this conception of self-knowledge, so deeply tied to friendship, is not adequately accounted for in Kantian theory.

On Kant's view, friendship can be viewed in various ways. As I said earlier in this paper, in so far as acts of friendship are based on emotion and inclination, they can be thought of as a component of our happiness. While we do not have a duty to happiness, happiness (and friendship *a fortiori*) are constrained by moral considerations. Equally, friendship and social relations may figure as the means for promoting other duties, such as benificence, and in general as a means for sustaining and nurturing our capacities as a moral agent. (I believe the point is well illustrated in Rawls' Well Ordered Society in which family and social relations play an essential role in the nurture and maintenance of the moral powers constitutive of free and equal persons.) In both these cases, friendship may be thought to have intrinsic and/or instrumental value, but not moral worth.

But in the *Doctrine of Virtue,* Kant suggests something else. There he argues that friendship itself is a positive duty of end.[40] What he has in mind, more precisely, are friendships in which mutual respect conditions intimacy; such friendships, he says, we have a duty to promote. Yet even here, Kant is deeply skeptical about the practical possibility of such intimacy (how will we know what the other really thinks, how will we know that she will not reveal our confidences or hold us in contempt for our faults), and openly urges a principle of respect "that requires [friends] to keep each other at a proper distance."[41]

It thus seems that the kind of intimacy Aristotle envisions as a permanent feature of the good life will be absent in the Kantian moral scheme. Much more needs to be said about the place of friendship in Kant's general moral theory. But for the time being, the Aristotelian challenge remains — that genuine friendship is a permanent and practical feature of our lives, and that it is the privileged context in which to scrutinize our moral motives. The apparently insufficient weight accorded it in the Kantian theory reveals a limitation on the Kantian account of practical reason,

---

[39] I take this to be the conclusion of the arduous argument at 1170a15-b14, and more precisely, the conclusion of 1170b11-14.

[40] *The Doctrine of Virtue,* pp. 140-45.

[41] *The Doctrine of Virtue,* p. 141.

and more specifically, a limitation on the Categorical Imperative to test successfully our motives.[42]

---

[42] Versions of this paper were read to audiences at Brown University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Wesleyan. In addition to helpful comments from those audiences, I am grateful to Martha Nussbaum, Larry Blum, and R. I. G. Hughes for their criticisms and interest. I also owe thanks to the National Endowment for the Humanities for fellowship support during the period in which I was writing this paper.