Part III: Companions on the Way: 
The Necessity of Friendship

IN THE BEGINNING WAS FRIENDSHIP

I began by suggesting that happiness, the life of virtue, and friendship were inextricably interrelated. We cannot understand the kind of happiness that we should desire without understanding the life of virtue, but the life of virtue, as we shall see, finally requires an account of friendship. Further, friendship turns out to be essential for illuminating any happiness worth having. Indeed I have argued this interrelation is but an indication of why any adequate account of the moral life inherently entails a sense of the temporal character of our existence. To understand and, more importantly, to live a life of virtue and happiness requires our willingness to undertake a journey that is as interesting as it is demanding. That it is such means friendship is required not only to understand the nature of the journey but to sustain us on the way.

I could as well have begun these articles by undertaking an analysis of friendship rather than happiness. In many ways that might have been preferable. Happiness suggests that the moral life is finally a matter of individual achievement and effort. Even the attempt to construe our desire for happiness in terms of a journey tends to underwrite this assumption, since we tend to associate accounts of journeys with heroic endeavors of an individual.

Thus Aristotle says at the beginning of Book VII,

Continuing in a sequence, the next subject which we shall have to discuss is friendship. For it is some sort of excellence or virtue, or involves virtue, and it is, moreover, most indispensable for life. No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods. Rich men and those who hold office and power are, above all others, regarded as requiring friends. For what good would their prosperity do them if it did not provide them with the opportunity for good works? And the best works done and those which deserve the highest praise are those that are done to one's friends (1155a1-10).

As we shall see, this assertion but scratches the surface of Aristotle's account of friendship. Just as Aristotle led us to see that the life of virtue is not simply a "means" to happiness, neither are friends incidental to the happy life. Rather

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friendship is intrinsic to our ability to live well, an activity crucial to the very meaning and nature of happiness. Thus in a summary passage Aristotle says,

We stated at the beginning that happiness is some kind of activity, and activity clearly is something that comes into being and not something we can take for granted like a piece of property. From the propositions: (1) being happy consists in liking and in being active, and as we stated at the beginning, the activity of a good man is in itself good and pleasant; (2) what is our own is a pleasant thing to us; (3) we are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than our own; and (4) the actions of persons who have a high moral standard are pleasant to those good men who are their friends, in that they possess both qualities which are pleasant by nature (i.e., they are good and they are their own); it follows that a supremely happy man will need friends of this kind. His moral purpose or choice is to observe actions which are good and which are his own, and such are the actions of a good man who is his friend (1169b28-1170a3).

It is no wonder, therefore, that Aristotle spent two books of the Ethics on the subject of friendship. That he did so is in marked contrast with contemporary ethics where the question of friendship and its character is as overlooked as the analysis of the virtues.\(^1\) We may think that happiness has some relation to questions of morality, but we seldom think an account of happiness requires such an extensive analysis of friendship. For Aristotle the exact opposite is the case. As we have seen, he believed a certain kind of self-knowledge, a practical wisdom, is necessary for the happy life. Without friendship, however, such knowledge is impossible. As John Cooper has pointed out, the person of character can come to know his own character only by studying that of his friend.

The presumption is that even an intimate friend remains distinct enough to be studied objectively; yet because one intuitively knows oneself to be fundamentally the same character as he is, one obtains through him an objective view of oneself. One recognizes the quality of one's own character and one's own life by seeing it reflected, as in a mirror, in one's friend.\(^2\)

But to see why this is the case we must look more closely at Aristotle's analysis of "true friendship."

ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

Aristotle begins his account by distinguishing between three different kinds of friendship which correspond to three types of affection--useful, pleasant and perfect friendship.
In each of these the affection can be reciprocated so that the partner is aware of it, and the partners wish for each other’s good in terms of the motive on which their affection is based. Now when the motive of the affection is usefulness, the partners do not feel affection for one another per-se but in terms of the good accruing to each from the other. The same is also true of those whose friendship is based on pleasure: we love witty people, not for what they are, but for the pleasure they give us. (Thus in these kinds of friendships) the friend is loved not because he is a friend, but because he is useful or pleasant. Thus, these two kinds are friendship only incidentally, since the object of affection is not loved for being the kind of person he is, but for providing some good or pleasure. Consequently, such friendships are easily dissolved when the partners do not remain unchanged: the affection ceases as soon as one partner is no longer pleasant or useful to the other (1156a9-20).

In contrast, perfect or true friendship is that “between good men who are like in excellence or virtue. For these friends wish alike for one another’s good because they are good men, and they are good per-se (that is, their goodness is something intrinsic, not incidental)” (1156b5-10). Only this kind of friendship can be called such properly since the friendship is not based on incidental considerations and therefore is lasting. Just as the acts that appear virtuous are such only as they contribute to the life of one who has a firm and unchangeable character, so friendship is possible only to those whose life is not subject to change by good or bad fortune. Only such people are capable of friendship without qualification, “for in this kind of friendship the partners are like one another, and the other objects worthy of affection—the unqualified good and the unqualified pleasant—are also found in it, and these are the highest objects of affection” (1156b23-25).

It is important to note that Aristotle does not suggest that there are three kinds of friendship, for in the “primary and proper sense of the word, we call ‘friendship’ that which exists between good men as good men” (1156b31). Friendships of pleasure and use are called such only by analogy. For while they bear some resemblance to true friendship, they lack the essential characteristics necessary to genuine friendship. Thus it is impossible for bad people to be friends on the basis of pleasure and usefulness, but only good men can be friends based on what they are since only they are capable of finding joy in one another (1157a16-20).

Recently some have suggested that Aristotle has overstated his case insofar as well-wishing is a characteristic common to all forms of friendship. Unless friendship is construed in this larger sense it would seem that ordinary people, with the normal mixture of some good and some bad qualities of character, are not eligible to be friends. Even more disturbing if rigorously pressed, Aristotle’s account of true friendship makes one wonder if true friendship has or can ever exist.
While interesting in itself, the question of how to resolve how friendship of use and pleasure may be related to true friendship is not of immediate interest in terms of the issues before us. However, the issue of whether true friendship is a real possibility cannot be avoided. For unless true friendship is a possibility, Aristotle’s whole account of the moral life risks becoming an idealistic abstraction. Moreover, I think by pressing the issue we will be able to see why Aristotle’s account of the life of virtue entails a sense of journey.

Aristotle certainly never seems to imply that true friendship is an impossibility, though he does not think it common. That such is the case is not simply due to our limitations as virtuous agents, but also because of the very character of friendship. “To be friends with many people, in the sense of perfect friendship, is impossible, just as it is impossible to be in love with many at the same time. For love is like an extreme, and an extreme tends to be unique. It does not easily happen that one man finds many people very pleasing at the same time, nor perhaps does it easily happen that there are many people who are good. Also, one must have some experience of the other person and have come to be familiar with him, and that is the hardest thing of all. But it is possible to please many people on the basis of usefulness and pleasantness, since many have these qualities, and the services they have to offer do not take a long time” (1158a10-18). Thus, if friendship is based on virtue and the character of our friends, it is impossible to be a friend of many people. Rather “we must be content if we find even a few friends of this kind” (1171a17-20).

What then are we to make of Aristotle’s claim that “friendship seems to hold states together” so that lawgivers even devote more attention to it than justice (1155a22). Indeed he goes further and observes that different forms of constitutions enhance different forms of friendships so that perverted forms of constitutions decrease or pervert true friendship (1160a30-1161b10). It would seem that the kind of friendship that holds states together can only be that of use or pleasure.

Yet it may be that such a suggestion is to take Aristotle’s distinction between the three kinds of friendship too seriously; or perhaps put more accurately, Aristotle’s account of true friendship is more complex than his initial distinction between the three kinds of friendship suggests. For, as he says,

it seems that friendship and the just deal with the same objects and involve the same persons. For there seems to be a notion of what is just in every community, and friendship seems to be involved as well. Men address as friends their fellow travelers on a voyage, their fellow soldiers, and similarly also those who are associated with them in other kinds of community. Friendship is present to the extent that men share something in common, for that is also the extent to which they share a view of what is just. And the proverb “friends hold in common what they have” is correct, for friendship consists in community (1159b25-30).

Yet it would be unjust to Aristotle’s account to fasten on the contention that
friendship is present insofar as people share something in common, in the interest of defending him from a far too narrow treatment of friendship. It makes all the difference what it is they share in common. In this respect the issue of the possibility of true friendship is not unlike the question of the kind of constancy necessary for our becoming virtuous. Behind Aristotle's concern to limit true friendship to a few relations is to find a basis for friendship that can insure its stability.

That is why friendship requires equality between the friends. Such equality is not the same kind as that pertaining to matters of justice, that is, proportionate or quantitative equality, but rather is that established by virtue.

Friendship is equality and likeness, and especially the likeness of those who are similar in virtue. Because they are steadfast in themselves, they are also steadfast toward one another; they neither request nor render any service that is base. On the contrary, one might even say that they prevent base services; for what characterizes good men is that they neither go wrong themselves nor let their friends do so. Bad people, on the other hand, do not have the element of constancy, for they do not remain similar even to themselves (1159b4-12).

Thus, contrary to popular impressions, Aristotle does not assume that people must be strictly equal in status, power or position to be friends. Certainly he assumes that friendship between slave and free, man and woman, citizen and ruler are difficult, but they are not impossible since equality is that secured on the basis of virtue. In a sense, therefore, friendship is not determined by the political, but friendship determines the political insofar as it is the purpose of good politics to make the life of virtue possible. Thus Aristotle observes sadly that in most states “each man lives as he pleases, dealing out law to his children and his wife as the Cyclopes do. Now the best thing would be to make the correct care of these matters a common concern. But if the community neglects them, it would seem to be incumbent upon every man to help his children and friends attain virtue. This he will be capable of doing, or at least intend to do” (1180a25-31). Thus friendship becomes for Aristotle his account of a true polity in the absence of any society ordered by a just constitution.

For Aristotle, our task is not to become virtuous, thus establishing the kind of equality necessary for friendship and then to seek out friends. Rather, friendship itself is an activity necessary for us to acquire the kind of steadfastness necessary for our being true friends. True friendship is, therefore, not some ideal that actual friendships never achieve, but rather true friendship is a process that makes possible our becoming virtuous in a manner that transforms ourselves and our friendship. I suspect that is why Aristotle is so tolerant of the lesser forms of friendship. They at least have the potential of putting us on the road to virtue.

Equality is not a means to friendship, but rather friendship makes possible a kind of equality between good people. It is through friendship that we are further initiated into activity befitting virtue as we learn to be faithful to self
through being faithful to another. Social and personal inequalities can be made part of the “incidental” aspects of our existence through friendship as good men are made through participation in a common activity which is worthwhile in and of itself. That is why “when friendship is based on character, it does last, because it is friendship for its own sake, (in which each partner loves his friend for what he is)” (1164a11-13).

By calling friendship an activity, Aristotle means something as concrete as his account of the various virtues. Just as a virtue is not some means to an end, but is a skill necessary for people of character, so friendship is a skill that requires concrete expression if we are to benefit from it. Thus, while it is not impossible for friendships to exist when friends are absent from one another, if the absence lasts for a long time it can be the end of friendship. “For nothing characterizes friends as much as living in each other’s company. Material advantage is desired by those who stand in need, but company is something which is wanted even by men who are supremely happy, for they are the least suited to live in isolation” (1157b19-20).

In order to understand Aristotle’s account of friendship it is crucial to see that he is insisting that friendship is not just based on virtue, it is a virtue. Certainly friends must share something in common, but the problem with many kinds of friendship is that what is held in common is not lasting, so that when the project or trip is over so is the friendship. In contrast, Aristotle is insisting that what friends have in common is a certain kind of friendship that is only possible because of the kind of character they have. Friendship is both a characteristic and activity by which the agents become good through the activity itself (1168a5-7). Thus in loving a friend we also learn to love our own good.

For when a good man becomes a friend he becomes a good to the person whose friend he is. Thus, each partner both loves his own good and makes an equal return in the good he wishes for his partner and in the pleasure he gives him. Now friendship is said to be equality, and both those qualities inhere in the relationship between good men (1157b34-40).

Even though friendship is a relation, Aristotle does not assume that it is only possible in the presence of another. Indeed for us to be people capable of enjoying true friendship, we must be friends with ourselves. For as Aristotle suggests, we count as a friend:

(1) a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend’s sake; or (2) a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend’s sake. We regard as a friend also (3) a person who spends his time in our company and (4) whose desires are the same as ours, or (5) a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. A good man has all these feelings in relation to himself, (1166a1-10)
and thus, it makes perfect sense to suggest that we can be a friend to ourselves.

Indeed the matter must be put more strongly, for we not only can be a friend to ourselves, if we are people of character we must be our “own best friend and should have the greatest affection for himself” (1168b9). If we are not capable of being our own best friend we will lack exactly the constancy necessary to be men of character and thus cannot rightly be friends with others. That is why a wicked man cannot be a friend even of themselves because they have committed many crimes and run away from their lives. They seek the company of others with whom they can spend their days, but they avoid their own company as they are incapable of remembering their past and they fear their future (1166b10-25). In effect, they lack the means to see and have continuity between what they are and what they do. Friendship with ourselves makes constancy possible.

Therefore there can be no tension between our love for others and ourselves. If we love ourselves rightly, that is as people of virtue, then we will rightly love others. As good people we should love ourselves, for such love is not the de-based form of egoism that does everything for its own sake. The good person, therefore, will “wish to spend time with himself, for he does so with pleasure. The memory of his achievements gives him delight, and his hopes for the future are good” (1166a24). By being a friend with another, we are in fact friends with ourselves, since our “friend really is another self” (1166a31).

There is no doubt much wisdom in Aristotle’s account of the necessity that we be friends with ourselves. Yet there are two problems that are not easily resolved. If loving another is but a form of self-love, then can we be said to be genuinely loving another as another? Aristotle is rightly concerned to provide an account of the moral prerequisites for friendship that make friendship endure across time and in the face of fortune. In many ways it is the same kind of problem of the kind of stability of self necessary to be a person of character. To supply such stability he wants to anchor friendship in a similar love of similar virtue--friendship, like virtue, becomes an activity that needs no reason to be. But as a result we miss any sense of what we think crucial to friendship--namely, learning to value another not because they are like us but because they are different from us.

This obviously has much to do with the issue I raised at the beginning concerning the necessity of friendship for self-knowledge that is crucial for our being virtuous. I think the above analysis has supported that contention, but there is still a question whether Aristotle has gone far enough. For if we need friends to know ourselves, how can we know what we are if there are no interesting differences between us and our friends? I suspect this problem relates to Aristotle’s continuing Platonic assumption that there is a unity to the virtues, thus people of character will, insofar as they are moral, be the same. But if the virtues are capable of quite different arrangements within any one life, or if they may even conflict, then it seems that our friend may be quite different than we are. Moreover, such difference is not a sign of moral failure, but necessary if we are to know what we are.

The second problem is but a form of the problem of difference between
friends. Aristotle rightly sees that it is crucial that friends should be able to rely on one another--I can trust you to be what you are. But he requires such a strong account of self-sufficiency in order to sustain trust that he comes close to denying the kind of vulnerability and mutuality we think necessary for friendship. For example, Aristotle says people of virtue need friends because the "function of a friend is to do good rather than to be treated well, if the performance of good deeds is the mark of a good man and of excellence, and if it is nobler to do good to a friend than to a stranger, then a man of high moral standards will need people to whom he can do good" (1169b10-13). Or again he says that "friendship appears to consist in giving rather than in receiving affection" (1159a26).

His insistence on this point extends well beyond the doing of good deeds for our friend, however, as he suggests that a noble man prefers friends present during good, rather than bad, fortune. He does so because it is painful to see our friends "pained by our misfortunes, for everyone tries to avoid being the cause of a friend’s pain. For that reason, manly natures take scrupulous care not to let their friends share their pain" (ll7lb5-6). Whereas in good fortune,

the presence of friends brings with it a pleasant way of passing one’s time and the pleasant thought that they are pleased by the good we are enjoying. This is the reason for thinking that we ought to be eager to invite our friends to share our good fortunes, since it is noble to do good, and to be reluctant to ask our friend to share our misfortune, since one should let others participate as little as possible in what is evil. We should invite our friends to come to our side chiefly when a little trouble on their part will mean great benefit to us (ll7bl4-20).

We, thus, seem to have returned to Aristotle’s "high-minded man" who welcomes great risks because he desires to do good, but is ashamed to accept a good turn. He is so because by doing good he is able to put the other in his debt while providing himself with an added benefit (1124b7-18). There is much to be said for Aristotle’s realism as he is no doubt correct that many of our friendships have such a character. But there seems to be something deeply wrong with such realism as it runs counter to Aristotle’s central contention about the nature of friendship. For if the person of character can only be a friend by being “strong,” he or she seems to lack the means to share in the common activity Aristotle says is essential to friendship.

John Cooper argues, however, that Aristotle’s account of friendship inherently presupposes human vulnerability. Cooper characterizes Aristotle’s contention “that to know the goodness of one’s life, which he reasonably assumes to be a necessary condition of flourishing, one needs to have intimate friends whose lives are similarly good, since one is better able to reach a sound and secure estimate of the quality of life when it is not one’s own.” Thus friendship is required because each of us left to our own devices cannot reach a secure estimate of our own moral character,
nor by ourselves can we find our lives continuously interesting and enjoyable, because the sense of the value of the activities that make them up is not within the individual's power to bestow. The sense of one's own worth is, for human beings, a group accomplishment. Hence we need each other because as individuals we are not sufficient—psychologically sufficient—to sustain our own lives.¹⁰

While I think Cooper is certainly right, he fails to address the main issue. The question is not whether we need friends because we are vulnerable, but whether we should not be the kind of people who will the presence of other people in a manner that makes us vulnerable to their presence. Aristotle wants to protect us and our friendship against the threat of fortune, time and change. He thus searches for the means to insure the stability of friendship by insuring that friends are in a sense "self-contained," but in the process friends lose exactly that which is necessary for friendship—the ability to accept not just gifts from our friend but friendship itself as a gift.

FRIENDSHIP IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to bring all this to a close, as well as to suggest what theological implications all this may have, I want to call your attention to another book on friendship—namely the Gospel of John. I think it is no accident that one of the climactic passages of John consists of Jesus admonishing the disciples in this manner,

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another" (John 15:7-17).

It is interesting that Jesus does not ask the disciples to be friends, but he commands them to be friends. By doing so He does not deny the affective nature of love, but indicates the kind of friendship He has in mind is of a different order than the normal run of things. It is a friendship made possible because through
His life a new order has come into being. An order that makes friendship possible not because we are alike, but because we are different. To learn to follow Jesus is the way we become friends of God. But what an extraordinary idea--for on what basis could it ever be possible for us to be God's friend?

It would seem that such friendship is possible only because God refuses to let our limitations determine His life. Thus we are told,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:16-18).

That is why Jesus speaks of giving us a new commandment even though on the surface it seems anything but new. We have known all along that we should love one another. Something like love, after all, is commended by many cultures and moral codes. But the love that is generally recommended is vastly different than the love that Jesus commands. The love he commands is "as I have loved you," that we can thus "love one another." For by this "all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

But how has Jesus loved us? He has loved us quite simply by making us His friends. He has done this because, unlike servants who do not know what the master is doing, He has made known to us all that the Father has willed. In effect, He has made us capable of friendship because He has made us agents in an ongoing history. He has made us agents because He has patiently forced us to learn to see the truth by transforming us to see a God who would love unremittingly, even to having His son die that His kingdom might be a reality. Such love does not remove the difference between us and God, but rather makes our difference contribute to rather than prevent our friendship.

As we have seen, this is no easy lesson for us to learn. We prefer to be friends with a God who bears a closer resemblance to Aristotle's "high-minded man"--that is, a God who is always ready to help, to comfort, to love, but is never there to be helped, to be loved, or need our friendship. We want a God sufficient to Himself so that He needs no other friends than Himself. But that is not the kind of God we find through Jesus' life and death. Rather we find a God who graciously has provided us a place within His own life--a place that He refuses to revoke.

Thus Jesus unashamedly requires that we not only learn to love one another, but we should learn to love Him and love Him rightly (John 14:28). Learning to love God is the condition for our learning to love one another, for our learning to be friends. To be sure, our friendship with Jesus is not determined on our terms as we did not choose Him but rather He chose us. Nonetheless, we are thus given the privilege of loving God by continuing in the life initiated by Jesus.

Friendship is no less central to the moral life for John than for Aristotle. But
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it is a friendship that is constant because He who has made us His friends is true in a way we can never be. Our constancy is not the result of our will, but rather because we and others find ourselves through participation in a common activity that makes us faithful both to ourselves and the other. That activity is not, as it almost seems to be in Aristotle, mutual enjoyment as an end in itself, but rather it is the activity of a task which we have been given. That task is nothing less than to participate in a new way of life made possible by the life of this man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The constancy necessary for friendship is transformed in the light of this task. It is not necessary to make the self impervious to the threats that accompany our love of another. Because our character is the result of a transformation that has been made possible by a gift, we are able to risk being present to others without feeling the need of protection. The constancy that Aristotle quite rightly sees as necessary for friendship turns out to be possible only if we are able through our lives to point to a source outside our lives that makes it possible. Or, put more directly, the constancy of our character is not finally "ours," but is the result of a relation that would be impossible without the willingness of God to always be there.

That is why, as Christians, we can risk the kind of partiality required by friendship. Friendship is not just an instance of some more universal love, it is the attention and regard for another precisely as they are other, as they are different, from ourselves. We can take the risk of such love because we are called to imitate the partiality of God's love for us as shown through His son. As Helen Oppenheimer has contended,

"Impartiality" is not a divine virtue, but a human expedient to make up for the limits of our concern on the one hand and the corruptibility of our affections on the other. If we find ourselves neglecting, or spoiling, or abusing, we need to be more even-handed and partiality becomes a vice; but the august partiality of God is a taking hold of the special character of each creature as uniquely significant.\(^{11}\)

In short, God is able to love each creature as a friend without His love being diminished for any other creature. It is through our friendships formed by Christ that the Christian learns to participate in that love.

Friendship is not only a possibility but a necessity for Christians because we are eschatological people that live by hope. That life is a journey is something that Aristotle sensed in his account of the life of happiness, virtue and friendship. But for Christians, life is not just a journey, but a journey of a very particular kind in which we are invited to be participants in a community of friends formed by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Such friends do not just love one another as mirror images of their own virtue, but rather they love one another in God. Friendship is a manifestation of hope, therefore, as hope but names the kind of journey to which Christians have been called that makes possible the risks of friendship.
As Aristotle saw clearly, friendship is a fragile business. We often enter into relations with one another before we can have the knowledge that the other is capable of being the kind of person suited to being a friend. This means, as Gilbert Meilaender says, "We may commit ourselves to persons for whom our regard may fade. Yet, in thus committing ourselves to another person, we create in that friend a set of expectations, needs and loyalties which cannot simply be set aside without pain and grief." That is why Aristotle says even if we find that a friend we thought was good is not, we should not break off the friendship quickly if we think there is a chance to reform him (1165b12-20).

But for Christians, friendship, even with the enemy, must at least be offered as we have the basis to hope that such an offer can be used by God to create a new friend. We know that we may be disappointed in our friends, or even worse, we may disappoint a friend; but we also know that we are participants in a journey that can sustain us through our disappointments and hurts. We have been commanded to be friends with one another, that even though we are strangers to one another, friendship is possible. That is the way we bear fruit, for in that way the world can see how a people love one another and, even more, how happy that makes us.13

Notes

1. Interestingly, the subject of friendship is beginning to receive renewed attention by philosophers and theologians. Gilbert Meilaender's book, Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), was a pioneering study of the topic. As we have come to expect, Meilaender's book is gracefully written and filled with his usual insightfulness. I must admit, however, I have never been convinced that Meilaender's account of the tension between agape and philia is correct since I think such accounts of agape finally owe more to Kant than the gospel. Of equal note is Paul Wadell's Friendship and the Moral Life (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). Wadell's book not only has wonderful accounts of Aristotle and Aquinas on friendship but also deals with the question of our friendship with God. Finally Wayne Booth's The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) is an interesting attempt to employ friendship as an integral aspect of learning to read.


3. Ibid., p. 304

4. Aristotle is often criticized for his views on the inferior status of slaves and women, but he does not exclude the possibility of friendship between slaves (who are not by nature slaves) and women. Certainly he manifests his society's views on these matters, but it is also the case that his account is open to radical innovation on these matters through his analysis of friendship. Martha Nussbaum also thinks Aristotle's method in ethics makes him open to radical reconsideration of such issues. See Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University

5. I find the last quote from Aristotle poignant in the light of our own political situation. Modernity involves the attempt to make political community possible between strangers. As a result, our polities are constantly tempted to fascist excesses because the state must supply the community that is missing. In effect, the only political alternative we have is friendship, particularly the friendship we call “church.” The difficulty is that, given our political presuppositions, that form of friendship is not recognized as political but rather is said to be part of the “private” realm. One of the great social challenges for the church today is to discover how we can be a community that provides for the flourishing of friendship in a manner that can challenge the “politics” of our time.

6. The central problem of modern moral theory—that is, how to resolve the tension between egoism and altruism—is simply unknown to Aristotle. What we can now see is the very problem of egoism and altruism is not an eternal dilemma caused by something called the human condition, but rather is the result of changed social presumptions and practices that Aristotle could only see as corrupt. I am, moreover, sure Aristotle would be right to so understand the matter.

7. I suspect part of Aristotle’s difficulty in this respect is related to the absence of any account of moral development. For moral development has to deal with the particularities of our histories as integral to our moral formation. The conceptual resources to give an account of our biographical situation was simply not available to Aristotle. To the extent one can extract from Aristotle an adequate account of moral development, Sherman has certainly done so in her The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 157-199. Of course, as MacIntyre makes clear in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), this issue becomes even more complex as soon as the Christian notion of sin is introduced (pp. 146-159).

8. However, as Amelie Rorty argues, “It has been thought that there is some problem in Aristotle’s making friendship necessary to the well-lived life on the one hand, while at the same time emphasizing the priority of self-sufficient, self-contained energeiai on the other (1169b3-13). Self-sufficiency has of course nothing to do with isolation or even with self-development. A self-sufficient life is one whose activities are intrinsically worthy, have their ends in themselves, are worth choosing regardless of what may come of them. Aristotle is not concerned to justify friendship because it conduces to or promotes self-development but because it is part of a self-contained, fully realized life (1097b1-20). See “The Place of Contemplation” in Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics, p. 389. See also Sherman’s discussion (The Fabric of Character) on pp. 130-131.


10. Ibid., p. 331.


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