

Notes for Aristotle - Nicomachean Ethics - Book VIII, Friendship  
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What is the value of Friendship?

*"without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods"*

*"lawgivers to care more for it than for justice"*

*"when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality."*

Many common sayings pop up in this translation. Does this mean they originated with Aristotle, or existed prior to his time?

- *'birds of a feather flock together'*
- *'parched earth loves the rain'*
- *'it is what opposes that helps'*
- *'from different tones comes the fairest tune'*
- *'all things are produced through strife'*
- *'out of sight, out of mind'*

What is the object of Love?

*"it would seem to be that by which some good or pleasure is produced that is useful, so that it is the good and the useful that are lovable as ends. Do men love, then, the good, or what is good for them?"*

Three kinds of Love

1. Love of an object.
2. Un-reciprocated Love, where one wishes the other goodwill but such is not returned, or is not noticed.
3. Reciprocated Love, where both people wish what is good for the other for their own sake.

Reciprocal love seems implied throughout the rest of his discussion.

*"To be friends, then, they must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other"*

Three kinds of friendship, equal in number to the things that are lovable

1. For Utility - Loving for the sake of some good that the other will bring to you.
2. For Pleasure - Loving what is pleasant in others.
3. Perfect friendship, where men love what is good or virtuous in another.

## Utility

*"those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for themselves, and those who love for the sake of pleasure do so for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the other is the person loved but in so far as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only incidental"*

Old people aim at utility

Young people aim at pleasure

## Perfect Friendship

*"Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good themselves."*

*"their friendship lasts as long as they are good – and goodness is an enduring thing."*

*"that which is good without qualification is also without qualification pleasant"*

Question: What of people who are good and just to everyone alike? Is there something they give only to friends that makes that relationship different, or is simply that it is reciprocated?

## Familiarity

*"friendship requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have 'have eaten salt together' "*

You get what you put into it.

*"[in perfect friendship] each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives"*

Only good men can be true friends.

*"For the sake of pleasure or utility, then, even bad men may be friends of each other, or good men of bad, or one who is neither good nor bad may be a friend to any sort of person, but for their own sake clearly only good men can be friends; for bad men do not delight in each other unless some advantage come of the relation."*

In Masonry it is the expectation that brothers delight in the good of their fellow brothers. In this way they are true friends so long as they remain good, and this should be a comfort to any who see that this means you can count on having good friends while you remain good which is entirely within your own power.

## Incidental Coupling and Unqualified Relationships

*"But these two kinds of friendship are not often united, nor do the same people become friends for the sake of utility and of pleasure; for things that are only incidentally connected are not often coupled together."*

*"good men will be friends for their own sake, i.e. in virtue of their goodness. These, then, are friends without qualification"*

## Good is a state of Character

*"As in regard to the virtues some men are called good in respect of a state of character, others in respect of an activity, so too in the case of friendship"*

This is a bit difficult to follow. I think he is saying here that perfect friendship is both a state and an activity. He uses the example of friends being separated to illustrate that the friendship does not dissolve only the activity is postponed.

## Painful Relationships

*"no one can spend his days with one whose company is painful"*

*"people cannot live together if they are not pleasant and do not enjoy the same things"*

Sums it all up with this:

*"The truest friendship, then, is that of the good, as we have frequently said; for that which is without qualification good or pleasant seems to be lovable and desirable, and for each person that which is good or pleasant to him; and the good man is lovable and desirable to the good man for both these reasons. Now it looks as if love were a feeling, friendship a state of character; for love may be felt just as much towards lifeless things, but mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character; and men wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a result of a state of character. and in loving a friend men love what is good for themselves; for the good man in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friend."*

Authorities

*"People in positions of authority seem to have friends who fall into distinct classes; some people are useful to them and others are pleasant, but the same people are rarely both"*

*"the good man is at the same time pleasant and useful; but such a man does not become the friend of one who surpasses him in station, unless he is surpassed also in virtue"*

Titanium

*"friendship of virtue is proof against slander and permanent"*

## Equality in Merit

*"In all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves, and so should the more useful, and similarly in each of the other cases; for when the love is in proportion to the merit of the parties, then in a sense arises equality, which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship."*

## Inequality in Flattery?

*"Most people seem, owing to ambition, to wish to be loved rather than to love; which is why most men love flattery; for the flatterer is a friend in an inferior position, or pretends to be such and to love more than he is loved; and being loved seems to be akin to being honoured, and this is what most people aim at."*

Aristotle sees flattery as a sign of an unequal relationship. But all flattery need not be so, as in the case when a man knows he is good and worthy of praise.

*"while those who desire honour from good men, and men who know, are aiming at confirming their own opinion of themselves; they delight in honour, therefore, because they believe in their own goodness on the strength of the judgement of those who speak about them."*

Love is better than Honor

*"loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so that it is only those in whom this is found in due measure that are lasting friends, and only their friendship that endures."*

Whisper in the ear....

*"Now equality and likeness are friendship, and especially the likeness of those who are like in virtue; for being steadfast in themselves they hold fast to each other, and neither ask nor give base services, but (one may say) even prevent them; for it is characteristic of good men neither to go wrong themselves nor to let their friends do so."*

Natural for people to seek what they lack.

*"Friendship for utility's sake seems to be that which most easily exists between contraries, e.g. between poor and rich, between ignorant and learned; for what a man actually lacks he aims at"*

*"This is why lovers sometimes seem ridiculous, when they demand to be loved as they love; if they are equally lovable their claim can perhaps be justified, but when they have nothing lovable about them it is ridiculous."*

Remember, Aristotle thinks that people are to be loved for their virtue. So, a person who has "nothing lovable about them" is someone without virtue.

Aristotle launches into a long explanation of Monarchy, Tyranny, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Timocracy and Democracy. How this relates to friendship seems important, but doesn't really gain much traction. It is actually more Platonic in many ways.

Why there can be no friendship between a man and his slave.

*"there is no friendship nor justice towards lifeless things"*

And, to Aristotle, this includes slaves.

*"For there is nothing common to the two parties; the slave is a living tool and the tool a lifeless slave. Qua slave then, one cannot be friends with him. But qua man one can; for there seems to be some justice between any man and any other who can share in a system of law or be a party to an agreement"*

Of Men and their wives

Maybe not by accident, Aristotle follows up the discussion about slaves with marital friendship. Surprisingly, he is quite equitable.

*"so they help each other by throwing their peculiar gifts into the common stock. It is for these reasons that both utility and pleasure seem to be found in this kind of friendship. But this friendship may be based also on virtue, if the parties are good; for each has its own virtue and they will delight in the fact."*

## Complaints in relationships

*"Complaints and reproaches arise either only or chiefly in the friendship of utility, and this is only to be expected. For those who are friends on the ground of virtue are anxious to do well by each other (since that is a mark of virtue and of friendship), and between men who are emulating each other in this there cannot be complaints or quarrels"*

*"friendship of utility is full of complaints; for as they use each other for their own interests they always want to get the better of the bargain, and think they have got less than they should, and blame their partners because they do not get all they 'want and deserve' "*

## Settling Inequities

*"one kind of friendship of utility is moral and the other legal. And so complaints arise most of all when men do not dissolve the relation in the spirit of the same type of friendship in which they contracted it."*

*"if a man is worse off when the relation is dissolved than he was when it was contracted he will complain. This happens because all or most men, while they wish for what is noble, choose what is advantageous"*

*"Therefore if we can we should return the equivalent of what we have received... and we must settle up just as if we had been benefited on fixed terms."*

How do we value what we received such that we can repay in equal amount?

*"It is disputable whether we ought to measure a service by its utility to the receiver and make the return with a view to that, or by the benevolence of the giver."*

*"if the friendship is one that aims at utility, surely the advantage to the receiver is the measure."*

Inequality in virtue or utility leads people to think the terms of settlement should be based on the attribute that they feel they possess. And the same goes for who put in the most effort vs. who is in most need.

Aristotle seems to suggest that gain is required by inferiority.

*"that each should get more out of the friendship than the other – not more of the same thing, however, but the superior more honour and the inferior more gain; for honour is the prize of virtue and of beneficence, while gain is the assistance required by inferiority."*

*"For no one puts up with the smaller share in all things; therefore to the man who loses in wealth they assign honour and to the man who is willing to be paid, wealth"*

*"For friendship asks a man to do what he can, not what is proportional to the merits of the case"*