

Free friendship: the long stemmed rose creative writing sample

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“ Therefore, since each of these characteristics belongs to the good man in relation to himself, and he is related to his friend as to himself (for his friend is another self), friendship too is thought to be one of these attributes, and those who have these attributes to be friends. Whether there is or is not friendship between a man and himself is a question we may dismiss for the present; there would seem to be friendship in so far as he is two or more, to judge from the afore-mentioned attributes of friendship, and from the fact that the extreme of friendship is likened to one's love for oneself. []

Therefore the bad man does not seem to be amicably disposed even to himself, because there is nothing in him to love; so that if to be thus is the height of wretchedness, we should strain every nerve to avoid wickedness and should endeavor to be good; for so and only so can one be either friendly to oneself or a friend to another” (Book VIII, Chapter 4).

What moves us to seek another's company and devote our time and energy into sustaining a live and dynamic connection? What makes it of vital importance to find a partner and join with them in this journey of life? If happiness is the means by which to achieve the very existence of happiness—in other words, if happiness is the way—then how does this pertain to the role of relationships in our lives? Is loving another ultimately the same as loving oneself?

These questions arise in Aristotle's discourse on the ethics and purpose behind friendship. Aristotle praises friendship as the supreme coalescing of all goodness and virtue. Friendship is the way in which an individual uses the virtues he has adopted—such as courage, magnificence and temperance—and exercises them in a spontaneous manner with another dynamic, always-

changing individual.. The highest good can be defined as the ongoing contemplation of truth, like the marveling of infinite facets on the single diamond of truth. All facets reflect the same beauty, which is eternal and universal truth. Great friendship based on the mutual respect and desire of two good people expresses this goodness and truth beyond abstract concepts and into the very fabric of life; friendship, therefore, is the highest level of virtue.

Aristotle writes, “ Love is ideally a sort of excess of friendship, and that can only be felt towards one person; therefore great friendship too can only be felt towards a few people” (Book IV, Chapter 9). He infers that love is birthed out of friendship, while friendship does not always blossom out of carnal love. He also adds that this kind of love that comes out as an outburst of friendship can only be felt towards one person. He then states that great friendship can only be felt towards a few people. This suggests that love with friendship is the ultimate form of connection, since it is something that can only occur once at a time and within the realm of an already limited number of great friendships. Aristotle continues: “ Now if he were a solitary, life would be hard for him; for by oneself it is not easy to be continuously active; but with others and towards others it is easier” (Book IV, Chapter 9) In our highly individualized society—combined with our in-born desire to leave a print on this world and achieve immortality through either our offspring or our actions—we have lost sight of this missing piece. Aristotle recognized the universal nature of friendship and its irreplaceable role in our lives if we are to be truly happy. This is where self-motivation can falter, for what is the joy of learning without someone to share it with? What is the thrill of

achievement without others to celebrate with when the fruition of our long-sought dreams finally comes to pass? In fact, without the other, it can be presumed that we do not even really have ourselves. Without another, life's greatest successes and possessions dissolve into dust, and the soul is left unhappy even in spite of all other source of good. Therefore, to cultivate the good virtues discussed by Aristotle within, the ultimate goal should be to cultivate such traits and express them in a handful of great friendships. Moreover, to translate these relationships and extend them outward to all of society is the zenith of true success not only as an individual but as a community.

Aristotle writes, " For friendship is a partnership, and as a man is to himself, so is he to his friend" (Book IV, Chapter 12). This oneness of connection within a friendship lends reason to the idea that friendships are vital to achieve complete self-actualization. The value of a partnership is the mutual commitment to moving through their individual lives alongside each other. The value of being able to see one self through the mirror of another whom he respects and delights in is incomparable to any other source of fulfillment or pleasure. Aristotle states, " The friendship of good men is good, being augmented 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 the characteristics they approve" (Book IV, Chapter 12). The inanimate nature of contemplation of even the most beautiful truth is countered by the live activity within a friendship. People who seek to reach their highest selves are always evolving, and therefore never do they wade in a stale pool of sameness. In addition, unlike bad people who treat both

themselves and those around them poorly, the good man treats both himself and his friend according to the advancement of traits he respects. The feelings we have towards our friend are the feelings we have towards ourselves. The idea that people are inherently selfish—though not necessarily bad for such inclination—and seek to fulfill their own needs above others, is transformed into an experience where the individual can feel the same desire for himself for another. The experience of fulfillment is therefore amplified, since it is experienced and shared by two beings rather than just one.

Cumbersome paradoxes surrounding self-love and friendship arise in light of Aristotle's earlier discourse on happiness and virtue. If admiration for friends comes from admiration for those same qualities within ourselves, it would suggest that self-love is supreme above all. Aristotle purports the importance of self-love, for without love for one self, he is unable to truly love another. If self-love is of highest importance, and if a happy person is self-reliant in all respects, then it should be concluded that a happy individual has no true need for friends because he can sustain himself. Paradoxes, however, do not necessarily nullify truths. In fact, they can serve to sustain truth. Aristotle believes that it is ideal to love a friend for his good character, just as it is the best reason to love oneself. The person who pursues true personal virtue will aim at a good life that consists of not only wealth and wellness for himself, but also of magnanimity and congeniality to others. Therefore, to love others is to ultimately love one's self, both as a means and an end. On the other hand, self-love, if in the pursuit of utility or pleasure, is a baser form of self-love. Aristotle writes, " we should strain every nerve to avoid wickedness and

should endeavor to be good; for so and only so can one be either friendly to oneself or a friend to another" (Book VIII, Chapter 9). Therefore the pursuit of goodness has its aim in being able to love others rightly. Just as truth applies to every circumstance—and part of the truth is that loving one self is loving others—the man who loves only for his sake is not treating himself well because there is nothing within him to do so for. As a result, he is incapable of treating others well. In conclusion, the paradoxes that arise in the face of Aristotle's argument actually, when reexamined, serve to bolster his belief that self and other are one.

Moreover, Aristotle supports the idea that self-love would naturally facilitate a better functioning society without the overt demand for selflessness.

However, one may argue that praising self-love is a faulty concept. Self-love can be charged with purely self-serving motives and no consideration for others. This would perpetuate a society where only the self is nurtured, and those around him are ignored—and further separation and fragmentation would continue. Furthermore, the good person can presumably do good for others not because of the genuine desire to invest in others, but because of concern for self. Though this behavior cannot necessarily be objected, there is a level of inauthenticity that arises in a person who is good to others only to serve the self, not because of what good can actually come to other people as a result. Understanding the communal nature of ancient Greek society, however, is vital to framing Aristotle's argument in the proper light. During that time, there was not such a strong distinction between public and private matters. Happiness was an communal enterprise. Cooperation emerged from a sense of friendship, love and intrinsic duty, rather than

because of implemented laws. In this kind of environment, individual success was measured by the amount of success that was added to the community. Selfishness, therefore, did not exist in the way that it does in our highly fragmented society. Friendship has since lost its immense spiritual significance. While most would offer goodwill and not wish harm to others, we are raised to believe that we each have an individual journey to take, with personal aspirations and values that separate us from others. Friendship is less a necessity and more a source of comfort and support. So what seems to be a flaw in Aristotle's argument—that self-love, rather than selflessness, is most valuable—is actually evidence of our contemporary failure to consider the utmost significance of friendship, as well as the cooperative nature of a successful pursuit to happiness.

Aristotle also fails to include individuals who may not desire the kind of friendship that moves beyond utility and pleasure. Whether this is denial on the part of individual out of self-protection or self-rejection, or merely a result of intense narcissism, Aristotle fails to acknowledge the varying degrees of socialization as well as different personality types. Perhaps he does so because he assumes the inherent social nature of human beings and the biological need for community in order to survive. This basic need demands some kind of nourishment, even if the sustenance comes from the result of merely circumstantial bonds or from misguided attempts at solely personal gain. Another weakness in his argument is that he does not distinguish between love and friendship. He merely states that love is an outpouring of friendship, and that it can only be done with one person. The question arises as to whether we can live without intimate—physical and

emotional—love. Can an individual live without the romantic love with one person, as long as he maintains great friendship with a few? In response, romantic love can be thought of as friendship that has taken on an enchanted quality. What makes love extraordinary is the foundation of friendship that allows the relationship, apart from passion and romance, to be long-lasting. The carnal pleasures of physical intimacy are amplified in the arena of friendship, whereas romance that is between two hollow individuals devoid of virtue can be highly unsustainable. Though one could survive happily without this unique type of friendship mixed with romantic love, the individual would be without an experience that has the potential to add an otherworldly quality to his temporal everyday existence—and therefore more happiness in the form of experiential virtue, happiness that cannot be obtained by the mere obedience of law and virtue.

In conclusion, though a person can theoretically be self-sufficient, great friendship is what a necessary ingredient for a truly fulfilling life. Though he chooses not to discuss “whether there is or is not friendship between a man and himself,” it is implied that to have a nurturing relationship with one self is to pathway to truly loving others (Book VIII, Chapter 9). Love is only complete when there is another to express it to and to share with. When two people both recognize the other’s unique worth, mutual respect and devotion is ignited. To be able to love another as you love yourself is the greatest completion of virtue. In order to reach this level, however, self-love must be cultivated. Self-love consists of the continual augmentation of qualities such as wisdom, efficacy, and refinement. This involves exercising his awareness to further experience truth, beauty and goodness. Once

friendship moves beyond utility and pleasure, it transcends the mundane affairs of everyday life and gives adds immeasurable value to one's life in the form of eternal significance. Therefore, as the culmination of all the aforementioned virtues that constitute a good life, friendship remains the greatest achievement of any noble, idealized man.