

# Aristotles view of friendship



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Aristotle's View of Friendship- Nicomachean Ethics When the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote about friendship among people and among s two thousand years ago, it was as true to human nature as it is now, in the twenty first century. In his book on Nicomachean Ethics, the great philosopher dwells extensively on family and friendship. Defining friendship, he elaborates on the kinds of friendship and the advantages of friendship, and tells us how to treat our friends.

Dwelling on the merits of having friends, Aristotle says that everybody needs friends, be he rich or poor. Even the powerful man would need friends. A rich man would need friends to bestow some of his riches on them. According to Aristotle, it is friends who would safeguard his riches. And for the poor man, or the man in trouble, it is only friends who are his refuge. Friendship helps the elderly because friends help them when they are weak and in need. Similarly, young people also benefit by friendship as friends advise them and keep them from following wrong ways. Talking about justice and friendship, Aristotle says that there is no need of justice between friends, and the just need friends too.

Although philosophers differed on where friendship grows- whether between similar people or between opposites, Aristotle is not bothered by it. According to him just feeling goodwill towards another, which is not reciprocated, is not friendship, but goodwill. He categorizes friendship in three different kinds. Friendship blossoms where the other person is lovable. According to Aristotle, everything is not lovable but only the good, pleasant and the useful. Thus, in friendship too, there is love when the person is good, or pleasant or useful. Aristotle argues that since usefulness changes with time, the friendship cultivated for the sake of usefulness would soon

dissolve. Similarly, friendship which grows because it is pleasant is also not permanent.

Aristotle defines perfect friendship as that which exists between men who are both good and have the same virtues. Both love each other without any ulterior motive, wish each other well and both are pleasant to each other. This can happen because of their own qualities of goodness. Such a friendship is a lasting friendship. But Aristotle warns that such a perfect friendship is very rare since such men are rare. Moreover, the friendship takes time to grow. According to Aristotle, friendship can develop even between a good man and a bad man, but it would be one of utility, and not last long.

Writing about flatterers, Aristotle says that most people want to be loved, without loving in return. These people love to listen to flatterers, whom Aristotle calls inferior friends. He gives the example of the complaining lovers as a case of inferior friendship. The philosopher says that the lover loved the beloved for pleasure, while she loved him for utility. This inferior kind of love they bore each other results in a rift.

Aristotle talks about the common problems which arise in family relationships. He addresses the question whether the son or daughter should obey the father unquestionably. He argues that we should give appropriate honor to our parents, elders and kinsmen Aristotle argues that a good man will do good acts for the sake of his friends and his country, even to the extent of sacrificing his wealth and his life itself." Cultured people and men of affairs identify the good with honour" (Aristotle P. 8) Thus the good man needs friends to be happy.

Aristotle says that when we have misfortune, we should not burden our

friends with it, but when we have good fortune, we should invite our friends and share our good fortune with them. Aristotle's message about how to treat friends holds good to this day.

Works cited

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics* Hugh Trendennic (ed) . J. A. K. Thomson (translator) 1976. Penguin Books. London.