

Aristotles friendship nicomachean ethics



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Aristotle addresses the topic of friendship in Book 8 and 9 of his Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle makes the argument that friends can be regarded as second selves. Aristotle says that just as virtuous behavior improves an individual, friends have the potential to generate improvements upon each other's lives. The main gist of Aristotle's argument is on the relationship between friendship and justice (102). He asserts that if people stay friends, they do not have any need for justice, but if they maintain justice, they also need friendship in addition. This paper shows that the arguments that Aristotle makes in support of this assertion is convincing. Additionally, the arguments made here explain both the ethical and political importance of friendship for Aristotle.

Aristotle categorizes friendships into three categories: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure, and friendships of the good (107). He asserts that the failure or success of one's friend is just like the one's own failure or success. Friendships of pleasure are based on delight in other people's company alone. People who drink beer together are said to be in this friendship. However, when these people no longer enjoy sharing the activity, the friendship may come to an end.

Friendships of utility are those friendships that are formed with no regard to the other person. When a person is buying merchandise, has to meet the seller, but the relationship that is required is rather shallow. The only reason why such people communicate is for them to transact business. Typically, quarrels may result in this friendship only.

Friendship of the good involves the enjoyment of each other's characters. As long as these friends maintain their similar characters, their relationship endures because its main motive is care for each other. This is friendship at its best, what in modern English may be referred to as true friendship.

In Book 8, Aristotle says that without friends, nobody would choose life. Even those people in possession of all the goods that they need in life, including high office, need friends. They do not perceive the use of all such prosperity without an opportunity of beneficence, which can only be exercised in its most laudable form towards friends. Similarly, it is impossible to guard prosperity without friends.

Aristotle also indicates that friends are the only refuge when misfortunes and poverty strike (108). For the young, friendships are a way of avoiding straying. For older people, it is useful for ministering to their needs as well as supplementing the various activities that could be failing as a result of weakness.

For Aristotle, friendships appear to be holding states together, and lawgivers are more careful about friendships than for justice. Since unanimity seems to be like friendship, they aim at this most of the time, and strive to expel faction as their worst enemy. It is on this basis that he indicates that when men are friends, they need justice. However, when they are just, they require justice as well. The truest form of justice according to Aristotle is thought to be an enduring friendly quality (118). Friendships are considered not only necessary, but also noble, since people always praise those who

show love for their friends. It is also thought to be a great thing to have many friends.

The different kinds of friendships may be cleared if attention was shifted to the object of love, in which case only the lovable objects can be loved.

Lovable objects are those that pleasant, good or useful. For this reason, friends are formed on the basis of the good and pleasure that is produced, which has to be useful. However, a clash emerges in this argument, especially in determining whether men love the good or what they consider good for them. Whatever is good for a man, though, becomes the object of his friendship. The clash arises in that each man loves not just what is good, but that seems good for him. For Aristotle, this makes no difference.

Aristotle poses the question of whether goodwill in itself constitutes friendship. In this case, goodwill amounts to friendship only when the feeling is reciprocated (120). This is because, many people may have goodwill for those they have not necessarily judged to be useful or good. This raises the genuine difficulty of telling who friends really are without their feelings being communicated. To be friends, then, there is a need for feelings to be mutually recognized as wishes of goodwill to each other.

In terms of justice, the friendship of the good is enough proof against slander. This is because it is difficult to trust anyone except a man who has been tested by oneself. When all the things that are demanded in friendship are found, true friendship is said to exist. However, nothing prevents various evils arising, such that the assertion that ‘ he would never wrong’ seems to be inaccurate.

Considering the three forms of friendships, it is true to say that bad men will always be friends for the sake of utility or pleasure, while good men will always be friends for their own sake, that is, for the virtue of their goodness. In the latter case, these are friends without qualifications while others are accidental friends, for whom, the only thing that they share is the resemblance of needs.

In efforts to explain why the truest friendship is the one that one of the good, Aristotle argues that the friendship that is without qualification pleasant or good seems to be desirable or lovable. Here, the impression made is that love is merely a feeling, and friendship a state of character. The mutual love for certain choices springs from the state of character of the friends. Men tend to wish well those they love, not because of a feeling, but as a result of a certain state of character.

In loving friends, men indicate their love for what is good for themselves. Aristotle completes the logical analysis by saying that in becoming a friend, a man ideally becomes good to his friends (129). Each of them, then, both love what is good for himself, while at the same time making an equal return through goodwill and pleasantness. In this sense, friendship is said to be similar to the concept of equality. Incidentally, both the concepts of goodwill and pleasantness are found in the concepts of friendship and equality.

Most people appear to like being loved instead of loving, mainly because of ambition. Aristotle supports this proposition by saying that this is the reason why most men love flattery; since the flatterer takes the position of inferiority in a friendship, or pretends to be such and to more be more loving

than he is being loved. Most people aim at being loved since this is akin to being honored. With friendship, there is love. Therefore, friendship does a lot of justice by making everyone feel honored. If people did not the terms that bind them in various forms of friendships, there would be no need for justice.

From the arguments that Aristotle makes, friendship and justice appear to be concerned with similar objects, and expressed between the same persons. In Aristotle's view, there is thought to be a certain form of justice as well as friendship in every community. Friendship depends on community, and brothers and comrades tend to have many things in common, including, in some cases, property.

Aristotle ventures into what appears like a contradiction when he says that claims of justice tend to differ. However, he makes his argument clear by giving examples of duties of parents to children, as well as those of brothers to each other, which he says are never the same. The same case applies to the duties of comrades and their fellow citizens. The same case applies to all other kinds of friendships that exist.

On the basis of this argument, it is possible for one to draw a parallel between the principles of justice and the principles of friendship. It appears that where one applies, the other cannot apply. Injustice increases when it is exhibited towards people who are considered friends in the fuller sense. For instance, it sounds more offensive to defraud a comrade than to defraud a fellow citizen. It is also more offensive to deny one's brother assistance than to refuse to help a stranger. It is more terrible for one to kill one's mother than to kill any other citizen. The demands of justice, therefore, appear to

increase with the insensitivity of the level of friendship. This implies that there is a limit of friendship to which justice does not apply. It also implies that when there is justice, friendship becomes a necessity, such that when the concept of justice is introduced into a scenario where friendship is at play, both elements tend to have an equal extension.

Aristotle also assesses the position of friendship vis-à-vis that of justice by bringing into perspective the concept of constitution (119). He identifies three kinds of constitutions: monarchy, aristocracy, and timocracy or what many people refer to as polity. The best constitution, according to Aristotle, is monarchy, while the worst is timocracy. Although both monarchy and timocracy are a one-man rule systems, the main difference between them is that the tyrant looks at his own advantage while the king looks to the advantage of his subjects.

Each of these constitutions may involve friendship just as much as it involves justice. The friendship that exists between the king and all his subjects is dependent on the benefits conferred, and Aristotle likens it to the friendship of the father to his son, the only difference being the greatness of all the benefits conferred.

The reason why Aristotle brings into perspective the aspect of constitutionality is to shed light on the concept of friendship as it applies to governments. His arguments make the concept of friendship to predominate that of justice. At the same time, he seems to suggest that justice cannot take place in a vacuum – there has to be a friendly relationship of sorts between all the participants in the legal process within a given jurisdiction.

In the deviation-forms of constitution, justice hardly exists; the same case applies to friendship. In the least, friendship exists in its worst form, such that in a form of government such as tyranny, there is too little or no friendship at all. This is because of the lack of anything to be shared between the ruler and the ruled. Even if justice was to exist in such a type of constitution, people would not appreciate it since the spirit of friendship is lacking.

In Aristotle's view, in every form of friendship, there has to be some form of association. For instance, the friendship that exists between brothers and sisters is born out of a shared parentage and upbringing. Aristotle also carries the association debate even further, noting that friendships form the basis of humankind's very existence. Particularly, he indicates that man has a tendency to form couples and households more readily than even cities. He also notes that unlike animals, man's associations in the form of couples are not for reproduction purposes only, but for many other purposes in life.

To this extent, the tendency to form marriages arise from not just pleasure but also utility. Through such illustrations, Aristotle provides a clear proof of the power of friendship over justice (138). Although friendships of utility are always full of complaints, this does not necessarily mean that an injustice has been committed against the complainant; rather, it is normal for the process of bargaining and haggling to be characterized by tough talk and claims of unfair pricing. No form of justice can be said to have taken place in such engagements, regardless of the outcome of the bargaining process. Everything is left in the hands of the two people who have become friends of convenience in order to transact business.

In Aristotle's view, two types of justices are worth considering for purposes of assessing their applicability to friendships: unwritten and legal justice. The legal type is one where the terms are fixed, while the unwritten one is the one where moral values are conventionally applied. Aristotle's explanation of the applicability of both unwritten laws and legal laws is enlightening on the ways in which friendship takes the place of justice. In the same light, friendship is identified as necessary where the formal rules of justice require to be applied, for instance in the legal laws. In other words, even where legal laws have been put in place for political reasons, friendship is needed in order for the ethical aspects of justice to be put into consideration.

Work Cited

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Translated by Ross, David. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.