

# What constitutes true friendship philosophy essay



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Why, according to Aristotle, is the true friend such a rare area and abiding benefit. What constitutes true friendship and how is it distinguished from other forms. Why is the true friend necessary for the good life? Why is true happiness impossible without the true friend? Evaluate Aristotle's argument: does his ideal of friendship continue a measure, or, if it is an impossible standard, should we toss it out as unrealistic? What then, in your view, constitutes a true friend? How does Aristotelian phillia differ from (and is similar to) Platonic eros?

In his book, Aristotle has conceived an ethical theory which aims towards providing a better and more improved way of life. Like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle too believes that virtues play an essential role in order to achieve the goal of a well-lived life. However, while acknowledging this claim, Aristotle differs from the pre-requisite that of training in the sciences and meta-physics as suggested by both Socrates and Plato. Aristotle instead believes that the virtues are a product of rational, social and emotional skills. He further states that aspects such as friendship, virtue, honour, wealth and pleasure are essential for this purpose. Thus comes into play the factor of a virtuous character, who according to him " aims and seeks for the good" by which he refers to the highest good of happiness. Thus we desire for the best in order to live well. " Living well" and " happiness" are synonymous concepts for him.

For Aristotle, human being is different from all other creatures present on this planet, and is the smartest among them all since he is the only creature that possesses the ability to reason his thoughts and hence is rational in nature. Thus he is compelled to exercise his reason with virtue so as to

achieve the state of happiness. For him to be able to exercise this reason with virtue, Aristotle points out the necessity to discipline eros present within man. This disciplining begins at a young age with the acquisition of good habits. Yet the exercise of virtue in the right amount that is by means of securing the golden mean can only be achieved with the help of a true friend.

Aristotle then undertakes the job of describing and defining the types of friendships that exist. He thus classified them into three categories: (1) friendship of utility: under this form of friendship, the basis is laid down on account of the utility to be derived by each individual. Thus here, the whole relation is based on sort of a precondition where a person is to be used only for the benefit of oneself. Thus one remains friends for just as long as they continue to derive their benefits from engaging in this kind of a relationship. Any individual at any point of time is not capable of managing everything on his own throughout his life. At this point he does feel the need for someone that could help him out in situations which if were to be handled alone, would turn out to be complete dead-ends. If we go to see, most of the relationships in today's world have such kind definitely present at any given point in time. Well in defence of such relationships, I would like to say that not every individual is capable of handling everything by himself. He most certainly is not a perfect individual. He will need the help of some other individual, a person who makes up for the qualities that he lacks and thus is able to fulfil his needs. So obviously at such times, he cannot go up to a stranger to ask him for help. At such points it is absolutely necessary to have some contacts, these contacts usually are more similar to acquaintances, yet

they do stand up for you. And as Aristotle has defined, the longevity of this kind of a friendship is very short as when we finish seeking utility, we no longer have any interest or rather any incentive left that provokes us to continue with this relationship. This to some extent is true because a certain individual is capable of providing only so much utility that after a point he can do nothing more. Also, it is very easy to be replaced by someone else for the same purposes, for the seeker has no real personal attachment to the person who fulfils his utility. Hence the duration of this kind of a friendship is not long since it exists on nothing more than a “ give and take” relationship.

(2) Friendship of pleasure: this kind of friendship as well is not really different from the one that we have discussed above. The differences lie in the factors such as it (friendship) is seen to develop during the young days of any individual’s life span since as we can observe, with the process of aging, one cannot derive the same pleasure that was attained at an earlier date. When we observe old people, their friendships usually have the possibility of changing their nature from that of a friendship of pleasure to friendship of utility as they have nothing to gain at their age. They are concerned about the company and help required with carrying out day to day activities as they cannot perform them the same way as before. When concerned with lovers, their pleasure is usually constrained to the youth of the body, once that has been taken away, there is nothing more that remains. Unless the people involved have grown fond of each other’s company, otherwise, even this kind of friendship does not have a great longevity.

(3) Friendship of character: This is the type of friendship that Aristotle is interested in. While talking about the friends that will help any man achieve

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his golden mean that would in turn lead him towards the acquisition of happiness by means of living well, he refers to the true friends who will help him in this process. He describes them as nothing like what has been described in the above two categories. In fact, the true friends maintain this relationship with each other because they enjoy each other's company in the truest sense. They aim for the well-being of each other. For whatever they intend to do, their actions always aim for the best interests of their friend. He thus describes such a friendship as rare as it is permanent in nature, they are always in close proximity, and there are no selfish purposes included on part of any friend in such a friendship. He also states that there exists this very important feature of reciprocal good will that is very distinct and is specific only to the third category of friendship. In discussing the characteristics that help define this type of friendship, Aristotle does not deny the fact that among the other things that are fulfilled by such friends, it is very much possible that they can derive some utility in such a relationship and that the occurrence of such an event is foreseeable but he further goes on to specify that this event is justifiable only as long as while seeking utility, the friends continue to enjoy each other's company. Thus according to Aristotle, all these aspects of such a friend distinguish them from the other categories.

According to Aristotle, it is this friend that helps you to make the distinction between a lot of things and helps you to reason with virtue and act in accordance with it. It is this friend that helps you to obtain the clarity of thought that is required while making any decisions. Thus as Aristotle has mentioned earlier that in order to lead a "well-lived" life which leads us

towards happiness, man's eros needs to be disciplined. This friend helps in the disciplining after the first task of acquisition of good habits has been achieved. We often find our elders mentioning quotes like "one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel" and advising us on the importance of keeping good friends by our side always. I think that this has a great deal of significance because once we step out of the protected boundaries of our homes, leave the ever caring and nurturing warmth of our loved ones to face the real world, our primary socializing group does not hold the same effect on the way we go on to shape our selves after this point. There is no denying that they do continue to influence us in the way we think but the level of influence begins to diminish with the growth in the amount of exposure that we continually gain with time. As human beings, we can never really run away from the influence of the people around us and hence at such a point, it becomes very crucial to stay in good company. Hence I feel Aristotle emphasises so much on the need to have a true friend in one's life. Because after all, we are constantly being groomed and guided by the people in our company and in a way we allow them to shape us and guide us in our future endeavours. I believe that every person must have noticed the change in himself over a period of time. As with time, a lot of things change around us, the most important factor among which is the situation that we are in. In this process, we do gain and lose the company of the friends that we have around us resulting from which we realise, in the absence of the certain people in our life, we end up reacting differently each time. Thus with this change in the people around us, we constantly allow ourselves to be motivated or affected by somebody's presence and their influence on us.

I assume that as a result of this facet of life, which is a common factor for every human being despite the differences that they are born with, that Aristotle stresses on the need for this one true friend. The true friend in one's life will continue to be the one steady factor that will continue to stay constant despite all the changes and this is something that is essential. The one true friend who loves our company and believes in doing what is best for you. Part of being a part of a friendship that is true is that the two friends involved, are both good people. Thus all that they do together is virtuous in nature this why their friendship is pleasant and beneficial. And since virtue is something that is stable, this friendship can stand strong against the tides of time. For bad company has often lead people down the wrong path and looking at the fact that how easy it is to find friends that belong in the first two categories, the true friend is very much rare and an abiding benefit. Also to add to the reasons why true friendship is rare, it takes time and effort to build a relationship and maintain it at the same time. This is not something which is possible to do with a lot of people. It is only with the selected few that such a bond can be established.

Apart from the characteristics of the types of friendships that have been discussed before, there are a few more things that help distinguish true friendship from that of the other two types. One of the most obvious reasons is that the bad or the evil people cannot participate in a friendship that is long lasting owing to their nature. As according to Aristotle, the necessary component of a true friendship is that it requires the two people involved to be virtuous in nature. These bad individuals are then found to be indulging in a friendship that is based on the utility or pleasure aspect. Whereas true

friends continue to maintain their bond because they are a part of it for the sake of each other and that their friendship is not obligated to any sort of qualifications or pre requisites. True friendship does not subject itself to the inequality among the two friends for it mainly rests on liking the other and not on " being liked". " Being liked" is a pre requisite that is in place for the other types of friendships described by Aristotle as these friendships cannot possibly tolerate any form of inequality between the friends (inequality with regards to wealth, status, virtues, etc.) as such friendships basically concentrate on being liked than liking the other. Hence friendship between such individuals is unlikely to develop or last for that matter. They mainly thrive on being liked by the one who is in the inferior position, as most individuals prefer being flattered by someone and they often regard this flattery as the confirmation of their own opinion about themselves. Thus they enjoy being liked for the sake of themselves and not for that of someone else. True friends, according to Aristotle can never engage in erroneous activities as they have each other. Whereas the bad friends only enjoy each other's company as long as they can benefit from the evil habits of their friends. The friendship between such people is based on the utility of their contrary interests and these are some more aspects that distinguish the true friends from the other types.

The true friends believe in loving unconditionally rather than being loved since it is the virtue that characterizes them and as a result of this very reason that the friendship between two unequal individuals can be successful. The whole aspect of loving unconditionally added with reciprocal desire is what helps eliminate the inequality between them and helps them



to become equal. They indulge in sort of a competition which is healthy in nature. Since true friends always indulge in doing things that result in acts of good will, this competition is certainly healthy in nature also for other reasons such as when friends indulge in such competitions, they do not do so for the sake of winning rather they indulge in it so as to compel their friend to succeed and excel beyond their capacities with a view to perfect themselves. They engage themselves in an act of pushing each other to their respective limits, which is reciprocal in nature, as they desire for the well-being of one another. Thus this resultant perfection gets them closer towards the ultimate goal of happiness and it is only a true friend who helps one proceed towards it. Hence the need for the true friend is advocated by Aristotle in leading a good life.

To conclude, I would like to say that though Aristotle conceptions may be too idealistic in certain aspects, yet they are not completely inapplicable. Even today, in a world that is drastically different from what existed back then, the rules, characteristics and the basic mechanism put forth by him still is righteously applicable to all in some form of the other. Putting in my personal opinion, I think this text has helped me gain certain insights regarding situations in my life and I must admit that I have found answers and peace of mind that none of the other people who tried to counsel me, could provide me with.