

Friendship by ralph
waldo emerson
philosophy essay



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Emerson's essay on friendship is one of the most remembered and highly respected essays dating back to the 19th century. The information given in the essay is extremely valuable and has helped to explain the universal truth that is friendship. Emerson's essay on friendship is his way of delineating the paths of coherence. These paths fall into two distinct kinds. The first is the consistent enunciation of a view which is the master-tone that Emerson uses from essay to essay while the second is the internal linkage of the views in the essay. Some scholars have argued that Emerson's views on friendship are strange and radical while others feel that his logic is sound and valid. This argument can only be settled by finding the deeper meaning in Emerson's criticisms and praise of friendships. We find that there is a critical connection between friendship and other earthly phenomena which Emerson shows through the use of metaphors to create the assimilation of tangible and intangible things in life.

Emerson begins by describing how friendships begin. He states that they have nothing to do with putting in effort, worldly accomplishments or physical beauty. They have more to do with attraction or affinity. He asserts that this is what really matters in a friendship. Emerson states that when all is done, friendship makes us feel worthy in life. He states that as the best things in life, Emerson sees friendships as being spontaneous and unforced.

Emerson states is that there are two distinct elements which " go to the composition of friendship," . The first is sincerity and the second is tenderness. He says that " we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love." Here, Emerson refers to the tender anxiety that we feel when we are with another person to whom we are

drawn. Emerson then undercuts tenderness by saying that “ I tender myself least to him to whom I am most devoted,” (64). This means that he gives devotion more value than tenderness. He goes ahead and states that each of the two elements is so sovereign that there is none that is superior to the other. He states that there is no reason why either of the two elements should be named before the other. Through his use of the word sovereign, Emerson creates an aura of superiority. It creates a perception in the reader that what Emerson is writing about is to be respected to the highest level possible and that it is completely true and holds a lot of power. He goes ahead to state that though each of these elements should be highly appreciated and respected they hold the same weight and that each bears the same importance and has the same level of authority. Here he means that each of the elements is independent and has its own power. He states that no element can be compared to the other.

Emerson then states that “ One is Truth,” . By making this sentence short, Emerson gives it absolute power. It can be argued that by making this sentence longer, it would lose meaning and effect therefore Emerson was on point by making it short and straight to the point. It also leaves a mark for the readers to ponder as they read the essay. The following statement states that a friend is that person with whom “ I may be sincere,” (64). He states that a friend allows him to think aloud before him and that he can remove the “ undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought,” (64). Emerson uses the words “ undermost garments” (64) as a metaphor to mean a mask. He states that with a true friend, a person can take off the mask that they wear for other members of the society. He then goes on to

state that with a true friend he can deal with “ him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another,” (64). Here, Emerson uses the word atom which is the simplest chemical form as a metaphor to mean the simplicity of nature that is the result of having a true friend. He refers to the process of an atom bonding with another where it does not think or discriminate when bonding rather it just goes about the bonding process.

Emerson uses metaphors throughout his essay to represent different things. He states that “ sincerity is the luxury allowed,” . He uses the word “ luxury” (64) to arouse a feeling in the reader that friendship is a privilege and not a right. Emerson states that true friendship is when a person is privileged to have another with who they can be sincere and not have to watch what they say or do that it may hurt their feelings or offend them. He continues by saying that “ like diadems and authority, only to the highest rank, that being permitted to speak truth, as having none above it to court or conform unto,” (64). Here, he uses the word “ diadems” (64) to represent some sort of royal crown or power. The word “ authority” (64) refers to the ability to give an even better “ privileged” (64) feeling. Emerson concludes this thought by tying all metaphors together and stating that when a person is able to tell a person the truth without worrying that it may hurt or offend them is a huge luxury.

Emerson states that friendship is a great achievement in life. In his essay, Emerson gives the value of friendship is extremely high, he also gives the true definition of having a true friend and differentiates between true

friendship and simple friendship with human beings. In Emerson’s essay, he <https://assignbuster.com/friendship-by-ralph-waldo-emerson-philosophy-essay/>

has sound logic and understanding of the concept of friendship since he says that in friendship there are “ emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others,” . This can also be seen in Emerson’s words when he moves away from the abstract and generalized remarks on his experience with friendship. He states that a person seeks the company of a stranger when they believe that the stranger will give or inspire something that we currently lack.

Though from the essay it turns out that Emerson does not have much to say about friendship, he states that the stranger who Emerson refers to as a friend awakens a desire for “ throbbing of the heart and the communications of the soul,” . Emerson goes on to say that despite of this, sometimes friends disappoint us. He also states that friendship brings about doubt which is only justified by the course of our experience.

Emerson’s logic is also seen in his discussion of the pleasures and advantages that come about as a result of having a friend. He says that friendship is “ an encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling,” . This however, is simply an image of friendship and perhaps just a simple admiration at a distance. Emerson continues to say that “ A new person is to me a great event and hinders me from sleep,” . Here, he shows appreciation of the friend who brings him the best moments in life. However, the essay also shows Emerson’s skepticism about his friend. He says that though he feels proud when his friend accomplishes something, he overestimates the conscience of his friend. This statement means that we somewhat idolize our friends and they in turn also idolize us which makes friends unable to read each other’s reality and promise accurately.

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Emerson goes ahead to speak of the surprises and joy that comes from friendship. He, however, surprises us by saying that our friend is more limited than we actually thought and that though we idolize and judge them, there is an “infinite remoteness” (62) between persons that makes the friendship limited. Emerson, however, says that friends are for us to grow with and to use to make a stable and unchanging relationship. Emerson’s logic is that as people grow, the souls of friends also grow making this a sound and valid logic.

Emerson also gives a logical argument regarding the “law of one to one” (65) in friendship. Here he states that the common practice in friendship is to have two people and that a friendship between more than two people may not be feasible. This logic is lacking since what is required for a friendship is “affinity that determines which two shall converse” (65) and not will. His essay concludes that what is commonly referred to as friendship is not really friendship “Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables,” (67). This logic is sound and valid since we often paint an image of friendship that gives it much more credit than it deserves.

Emerson’s essay on friendship is a mediation or a set of variations on the themes of hope and disappointment that we suffer in life as a result of others. Emerson’s essay on friendship progresses from a diffuse friendship which begins at a distance to the disappointment that comes from having friends to the reality of having friends in our lives and the promise of something better anything we have ever achieved.