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What is Friendship?

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Abstract
The paper identifies a distinctive feature of friendship. Friendship, it is argued, is a relationship between two people in which each participant values the other and successfully communicates this fact to the other. This feature of friendship, it is claimed, explains why friendship plays a key role in human happiness, why it is praised by philosophers, poets, and novelists, and why we all seek friends. Although the characterization of friendship proposed here differs from other views in the literature, it is shown that it accommodates key insights of other writers on the topic. Thus, in accordance with the Aristotelian strategy the paper employs, it is shown that the account on offer preserves the received opinions on friendship.

Keywords
Friendship, Aristotle, happiness

1 Introduction

This paper aims to address the question in its title by identifying a distinctive characteristic of the friendship relation. The account proposed seeks to explain why friendship plays a key role in human happiness, why it is praised by philosophers, poets, and novelists, and why we all seek friends. The method employed is, broadly speaking, Aristotelian. In book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes:

> We must, as in all other cases, set the observed facts before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the common opinions about these affections of the mind, or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both refute the objections and leave the common opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently. (1145b2–7; Ross translation)

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The paper, thus, starts by listing the "observed facts" about friendship in order to identify the concept into which we are investigating (§2). Then, an account of the chief characteristic of friendship is proposed—an account that accommodates the "observed facts" (§3). Next, two influential views of friendship are considered. These views, it is argued, face difficulties that the account on offer circumvents. Nevertheless, the proposed account preserves the quintessential insights of these prominent accounts of friendship and thus, in accordance with Aristotle's methodology, it is shown that the view of friendship presented here respects the received opinion (*endoxa*) on the topic (§4). Finally, the paper concludes by clarifying what is hoped to have been established by identifying a 'distinctive characteristic' of friendship as the paper sets out to do (§5).

2 The apparent facts

Friendship is a relation. Paradigmatically, the relata of the friendship relation are persons. The relation of friendship is a symmetric relation: A is not a friend of B unless B is also a friend of A.[1] According to anthropologist Cora Du Bois (1974) it is reasonable to suppose that friendship is a universal human phenomenon that occurs in all societies.[2] Consequently, an account of friendship, she writes, "must be so phrased as to avoid culturally determined aspects [of friendship]." (15) While our account need not *guarantee* that friendship occurs in all societies—it is possible that in some societies the friendship relation is not exemplified—it must not preclude members of certain communities from having friendships by definitional fiat. Hence, our characterization must not identify friendship with any peculiar patterns of behavior that are unique to a specific culture or era. For example, an account of friendship according to which *A* and *B* are

[1] In *Lysis* 212d–e Plato seems to dismiss the claim that friendship is a symmetric relation. However, I concur with Annas (1977) who argues that Plato's dismissal of the symmetric conception of friendship is mistaken and that "a proper analysis of the concept [of friendship] should begin with the 'mutual' sense." (533)

[2] In fact, Du Bois insists that the presupposition that friendship is a universal human phenomenon that occurs in all societies must underlie any comparative study of friendship.

friends only if they are friends on *Facebook* is unacceptable because (among other things) on this account no one could have had friends prior to 2004. While our account need not guarantee that friendships occurred prior to 2004 it must also not rule out this possibility.

Friendship is a non-exclusive relation in the following two senses. First, a person can stand in the friendship relation to more than one person at a time. That is, one can have several friends. Second, although friendship differs from other social relations (e.g., student-teacher, employer-employee, parent-child) two people can occupy the relata of the friendship relation and other social relations at once; the fact that *A* and *B* are siblings, for example, does not by itself prevent them from being friends as well.

A final feature of friendship to highlight is that friendship is extremely valuable to us and that it is a crucial ingredient in a good life. Almost everyone who had written on friendship from antiquity and up to this day recognized these features of friendship. Plato has Socrates announce: "There's no doubt in my mind, by the dog, that I would rather possess a friend than all Darius' gold, or even than Darius himself. That's how much I value friends and companions." (Lysis 211E) Aristotle dedicates two of the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*—a treatise that purports to identify the good for humans—to the study of friendship, and proclaims: "no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had every other good thing." (VIII.1:1155a5) An anonymous poet from the early 6th century writes: "The bond of friendship must be fostered with great piety; The greatest part of life is the bond of friendship."[3] C. S. Lewis (1960) says: "[Friendship] has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." (71) Contemporary philosophers accept these characterizations of the phenomenon of friendship.[4]

3 Characterizing friendship

A good place for us to begin our enquiry into the nature of friendship is to focus on its relation to happiness. Why is it, we might ask, that

[3] Quoted from Stehling 1984: 11.

[4] E.g., Telfer (1970), Thomas (1990), Cocking and Kennett (1998) and (2000).

friendship plays such an important role in a happy life? An account of friendship according to which the contribution of friendship to happiness is due to the very nature of friendship will provide a good answer to this question.

I propose to understand friendship in terms of its contribution to our appreciation of our own life's value (as I explain below), which, in turn, impacts on our happiness. For our purposes, it matters not whether an appreciation of our own life's value is constitutive of happiness or merely a cause of happiness. I take it as obvious that one must regard one's own life as minimally valuable in order to sustain life and that a happy life requires a more robust sense of self-worth. These claims are, indeed, compatible with a wide range of views about happiness.

But how does friendship contribute to our sense of self-worth? We are familiar with the phenomenon that the extent to which we value something is influenced by our awareness of the value others attribute to it.[5] The impact of others' valuation on our own is often sensitive to the extent to which we value those others – the more we value or respect them, the more pronounced our awareness of the value they attribute to something will be on our own valuation of it.

This happens with artifacts (e.g., artworks) and people alike. For example, judgments of art critics may impact on our own valuation of an artwork (and the judgment of art critics we value and respect will likely have a more pronounced effect). Similarly, we may feel one thing when we learn about the death of a person who is a stranger to us and another when we hear this person's friends mourn her loss. This change in feeling, it is suggested, corresponds to a change in the degree to which we value that which is now lost.[6] It is one

[5] This is a psychological observation. Like most psychological observations it is not an exceptionless law-like statement. People *can* value certain things even though others do not and their valuation might not be influenced by the valuations of others. Indeed, people may value something precisely *because* others do not. The point here is to highlight a familiar mechanism that impacts on our valuing – albeit neither exceptionlessly nor exclusively.

[6] It might be tempting to attribute the change in feeling to compassion at the grief of the mourners. This may explain the phenomenon to some extent but, to my mind, not fully. The proposal here is that mourners' grief helps us to appreciate the value of that which they lost.

thing to *believe* that a human life is valuable and another to *value* it.[7] The difference between these two attitudes explains how it is that we can be almost indifferent to a human tragedy involving the deaths of hundreds of people in a place far and remote, while at the same time we find it almost impossible to remain unmoved when we see a person mourning a death of a friend or a loved one. When we are confronted with the value a person's life had for another we sense the loss of something valuable. The change in our valuation of this life need not have been brought about by a change in our belief about the value of the life in question.

That the extent to which we value something can be influenced by our awareness of the value others attribute to it suggests that recognizing that others value our own lives may impact on our sense of self-worth. This, in turn, enables us to link friendship and happiness. Friendship, I propose, is a relationship between two people in which each participant values the other and *successfully communicates* this fact to the other.[8] Because each friend values the other, each friend's awareness that the other values her will have a pronounced impact on each friends' own self-valuation. As Dworkin (2000) remarks (though, admittedly, in a different context): "we value being valued by those we value" (187). And since one's happiness is sensitive to the degree to which one values one's own life, this account of friendship explains the intimate relationship between friendship and happiness.

If, as Aristotle claimed, all humans seek happiness, then our account explains why friendship is a universal human phenomenon; what we receive from a friend and what we give to her—namely, an increased sense of self-worth—contributes to one's own, as well as the other's, happiness. Moreover, this account explains why it is that when we judge that a person is a good friend we seem to be making a positive *moral* assessment of that person—to say of someone that she is a good friend contains moral content in a way that, for example, to say that she is a good runner does not. This is because, as argued

[7] This is not to say that valuing *A* needn't involve a belief that *A* is valuable. The key point for our purposes here is that the degree to which one values *A* can vary even when one's belief that *A* is valuable remains unchanged.

[8] We should add that the communication of value is performed in shared activities. More on this below.

above, in being a good friend to another one makes an important contribution to another's happiness. Furthermore, on this account it is clear why poets, novelists, and philosophers praise friendship. Our account is "culturally neutral," since it does not identify friendship with any culturally determined aspects of friendship, or with patterns of behavior that are peculiar to a specific culture or era. It is reasonable to expect that the process of communication of mutual valuing between friends will take different forms in different cultures (and even within the same culture). Finally, the fact that two people value each other and successfully communicate this fact one to the other does not preclude them from valuing others and successfully communicating this fact to others as well. Likewise, there is no reason why people who occupy various social relations (student-teacher, parent-child, etc.) could not also value each other and successfully communicate this fact to each other—that is, there is no reason why they *cannot also* be friends.

Nevertheless, occupying certain relations may inhibit friendship, especially when one party has authority over the other. Aristotle already observed that friendships between unequals—people of dissimilar social positions (ruler-subject, parent-child or elder-younger)—are uncommon: "it is clear," he writes in VIII.7 (1159a1), "also in the case of kings; for with them, too, men who are much their inferiors do not expect to be friends." On Aristotle's view, friendships typically rely on sufficient similarity between friends and on both friends giving and receiving *the same* from each other. Indeed, Aristotle emphasizes the *endoxa* that "friendship is said to be equality" (1157b35)—a view he then seeks to preserve in his account. A perfect friendship, for Aristotle, is a friendship in which "each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives." (1156b33–34) And yet, Aristotle allowed that unequals *can* be friends: "But there is another kind of friendship, viz. that which involves an inequality between the parties, e.g. that of father to son and in general of elder to younger, that of man to wife and in general that of ruler to subject." (1158b11) Unequals cannot give and receive the same one from the other and this, according to Aristotle, is why such friendships are rare.

I trust that Aristotle's observation—that friendships between unequals are uncommon—is both correct and uncontroversial.

According to the account on offer, though, the explanation of their rarity is different: it lies in the fact that certain types of inequality between friends—and especially cases in which one has authority over the other—make it difficult for the parties involved to successfully communicate to each other that they value the other. That one has authority over the other places one in a difficult epistemic position. E.g., it might be difficult (though, perhaps, not impossible) for a king to know whether one of his subjects chooses him and values him for his own sake, or whether he is chosen due to the unique position he occupies in relation to the other and whether the acts that *seem* to communicate that the other values him are mere flattery so as to ensure that the ruler has good-will towards one over which he has power and authority.

One central component of our account is the notion of valuing another. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a comprehensive theory of the attitude of valuing. Fortunately, it might be sufficient for our purposes here to rely on a pre-theoretic grasp of this notion—albeit an imprecise one—and to highlight several features of this attitude that are crucial to our account.

We can value a thing because it is good or because it is *good for us*. So we can value a friend because she is good *simpliciter,* or good in some respect (e.g., she is a good person or a good artist), or because she is *good for us* (e.g., she makes us laugh or she is there when we need her help). However, not everyone who makes us laugh or anyone who helps us when we need help is someone we value; we may value the goods we obtain without valuing the person who provides them. So not everyone who is instrumental to us is our friend. Nevertheless, "instrumental friendships," or what Aristotle called pleasure- and utility-friendships, are possible. In such friendships, it is important to us that *our friend* rather than someone else is instrumental to us—we value obtaining certain goods *from her.* We may value having a laugh *with her* or getting *her* help when we need it. There are goods that we would rather obtain from her even if we could get the same goods in some other way. Surely not every good is such that we would prefer to obtain it from a friend—perhaps some goods are such that we would like to receive them from specific individuals who are not our friends. Nevertheless, we can value a friend because we value getting certain things *from her*. For example, if Abe asks his

friend Bill to help him move to a new apartment he might want *Bill* to help him move rather than just an extra set of hands. Thus, he might be disappointed if in response to his request Bill offered to hire someone else to do his share of the work. Abe and Bill's friendship could be based on the fact that they are useful to one another, but it won't be a friendship unless there are some benefits such that each of them values obtaining these benefits specifically from the other.

The kind of value each friend has for the other in friendships (like the one described above) is what Zimmerman (**2015**) calls "instrumental final value." He writes:

> If something A is a means to something else B and has instrumental value in virtue of this fact, such value will be nonfinal if it is merely derivative from or reflective of B's value, whereas it will be final if it is nonderivative, that is, if it is a value that A has in its own right (due to the fact that it is a means to B), irrespective of any value that B may or may not have in its own right.

Abe and Bill's friendship is based on the benefits they receive from each other so they value each other instrumentally. However, in order for their relationship to be a *friendship* they must each regard the other as a final value.[9]

An analogy might be helpful. Tara might value swimming because swimming is good for her health. If swimming had not been good for her health she would not have valued swimming. And yet, if she could obtain the same health benefits she gains from swimming in some other way—say, by jogging or even by taking a special pill—she would still prefer to obtain these benefits by swimming. We can properly say of Tara that she values swimming and that her valuing of swimming is not *merely* instrumental. In contrast, Michael swims only because swimming is good for his health. Had there been some other (easier) way to obtain the same health benefits he would have stopped swimming. Michael values swimming only as a means to good health—he values good health and he realizes that swimming is a means to this end. Unlike Tara, Michael values swimming *only* instrumentally.

This distinction between instrumental final value and instrumental

[9] On the possibility of something having intrinsic, non-instrumental value in one context but not in another see, e.g., Mason 2001 and Korsgaard 1996.

non-final value is important to our account of friendship: we should distinguish between one who values another person merely as a means to some goods and one who values obtaining those goods in some particular way—by way of her friend. The latter, but not the former, sees the person who is the means to these goods as a final value. In utility- or pleasure-*friendships*, unlike purely instrumental relationships of mutual benefiting (e.g., a businessman and his client[10]), each friend sees the other as a final value—albeit as a means to her own benefits.

Three clarifications are in order. First, there are cases in which one might ask one's friend for help simply because one needs help and one's friend is the easiest person to contact. For example, Abe might ask for Bill's help simply because he needs help lifting heavy furniture and because Bill *will* help him. However, if Abe and Bill are friends then, it is claimed, they must value each other and successfully communicate this fact to each other. This means that their relationship cannot be based entirely on episodes of this kind. In friendships that are based on valuing the other because each one is good *for* the other, there must be situations in which, if given a choice, each friend would choose to receive a benefit from her friend rather than someone else. In other words, there must be contexts in which the friend is *irreplaceable*.

Second, the claim that we can value a friend because we value getting certain things *from her* does not mean that everything is such that we would value getting it from her, or that there are no benefits that we might prefer to get from someone other than our friend. There are things that we wouldn't want our friends to do for us and, indeed, things such that expecting a friend to do them for us is incompatible with valuing our friend. On occasion, it might be *due* to friendship that one would not ask one's friend for help. To return to our example, Abe might not ask for Bill's help precisely because he values Bill and so he might prefer not to place an onerous burden on him. Furthermore, *not* asking for Bill's help may be a way for Abe to successfully communicate to Bill that he values him.

Third, we can value a friend because she is good *simpliciter* or because she is good for us. But it is possible that one's judgment that one's friend is good, or even good for him, is mistaken, and

[10] This example is due to Cooper (1980).

consequently, that one's valuing of one's friend is, in some sense, mistaken. Can friendship be based on such illusory valuing? Are Abe and Bill *really* friends if each values the other due to false beliefs about the other or if they value each other on account of features that the other has that do not merit valuing?

I think the answer is "yes." As far as friendship is concerned it is the attitude of each friend (and the successful communication of it) rather than its appropriateness that matters. Abe and Bill may value each other despite the fact that neither one of them merits being valued. They may value each other because they have some false beliefs about the other. One might expect that communication of mutual valuing between friends will fail on occasion (or even frequently) when one values the other as a result of false beliefs about the other—for example, if one were to express those false beliefs to his friend who knows that they are false—but it might not. If friendship is based on (some) false beliefs each friend has about the other, then correcting these false beliefs may undermine friendship. To this extent, one might expect that friendships which are based on false beliefs will not be very stable and thus are unlikely to be sustained over a long period of time.

Since on the account we are considering it is one's attitude of valuing one's friend that counts regardless of the appropriateness of the attitude, then unlike some influential accounts of friendship, our account allows that vicious people can have genuine friendships.[11] Our goal is to identify a key characteristic of friendship rather than to identify various requirements (moral or epistemic) that this relation imposes on those who partake in it. The claim that Abe and Bill can be friends even if their valuation one of the other is illusory is compatible with the claim that both Abe and Bill may have various reasons—moral, epistemic, or otherwise—to correct (or, perhaps,

[11] Aristotle claimed that vicious people cannot have genuine friendships. However, pre-theoretically it is all but a platitude about friendship that good and bad people alike can have friends. Hence, like Cocking and Kennett (2000), I take it to be a virtue of the account proposed here that it allows for such friendships. Note, however, that an abusive relation is not a genuine friendship. In an abusive relation one participant takes advantage of the other, which is manifestly incompatible with valuing the other.

to preserve) the relevant illusion.[12]

According to the account of friendship we are considering, not only must each friend value the other, but each friend must also *successfully communicate* this fact to the other. That friendship is a voluntary relation is crucial for this purpose. Since friendship is voluntary, each friend chooses the other and each friend knows that the other chooses her. One might choose a friend because the friend is a kind person, for example, or because the friend is useful or pleasant to her. But as long as it is clear to one that she was specifically and individually chosen then even if she knows that she was chosen because she is useful or pleasant, it seems reasonable to expect that some communication of valuing will have taken place.

There are many ways for friends to communicate to each other that they value the other. I will say more on this in the following section. Here, however, we should note that the communication of valuing between friends is characteristically performed in, and by way of, shared activities. So, for example, even if The President of the US and The Queen of England exchange letters in which they successfully communicate to each other that each one of them values the other, we might be reluctant to describe their relationship as a friendship because they do not engage in shared activities. And even if The President and The Queen were to engage in a shared activity—e.g., an international fundraiser—we might still not feel comfortable describing their relationship as a friendship. The President and The Queen each chooses the other as the occupant of a certain office; they do not regard the other as a final value and they typically would not successfully communicate mutual valuing by way of such shared activities.[13]

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[12] For arguments that requirements of friendship can conflict with epistemic requirements see Keller 2004 and Stroud 2006.

[13] Aristotle's definition of friendship in *NE* VIII.2 is susceptible to a counter-example of this kind. Aristotle begins with the view that friends have goodwill to each other. However, two people can have goodwill to each other without being friends. For example, *A* and *B* might have reciprocal goodwill without having met, and so it is unreasonable to count them as friends. To circumvent this problem Aristotle adds that reciprocal goodwill must be recognized by both friends. However, this modification doesn't solve the problem because *A* and *B* could recognize reciprocal goodwill without having met. For example, they might have a

4 Alternative accounts

In this section, two influential accounts of friendship are considered—one by Laurence Thomas (1990)[14] and the other by Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett (1998). I show that the account proposed here respects the main insights of these authors and that it allows that both accounts are, for the most part, true. I take this to be a virtue of the account on offer. As Aristotle observed: "Now some of these views have been held by many men and men of old, others by a few eminent persons; and it is not probable that either of these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects." (I.8:1098b27–29)

On Thomas' account, the fundamental feature of friendship is that friends confide in one another. "The idea of deep friends not confiding in one another," Thomas writes, "seems almost unthinkable." (49) Thomas' strategy for inquiring into the nature of friendship is to identify features that differentiate friendship from a parent-child relationship. Thomas identifies three salient features. While parents and children do not choose to participate in a parent-child relation, the relationship of friendship is one in which each friend must choose to participate. Friendship, according to Thomas, is a *minimally structured relation*. That is, it is a relation in which "how the parties interact is not primarily a function of social roles, and so where matters of propriety and protocol are least apropos, if at all." (50) Consequently, in order for a friendship to succeed, both friends must be attuned to the way in which the other views and interacts with the world. A second salient feature is that in a friendship, unlike a parent-child relation, neither party has authority over the other.

The final feature of friendship Thomas identifies is mutual trust cemented by self-disclosure. This feature lies at the heart of Thomas' account of friendship. Thomas contends that mutual self-disclosure is the predominant means by which mutual trust is conveyed between friends. "The extent to which a person is willing to reveal to us private information," he writes, "is the most significant measure

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mutual friend, *C*, to whom each informs of his goodwill to the other. *C* could pass this information to both *A* and *B*.

[14] Page numbers refer to the version reprinted in Badhwar 1993.

we can have of that person's willingness to trust us." (55) One who is public about virtually everything about her life has no private information to reveal to a friend and consequently she would be incapable of having deep friendships.

The features Thomas identifies are, indeed, features that we often find in friendships. However, I doubt that these features are essential to friendship. First, many friendships are more structured and sensitive to consideration of propriety and protocol than Thomas seems to think. Thomas might concede that many friendships are fairly structured but insist that *deep* friendships are only minimally unstructured. However, we can easily imagine close friends who enjoy observing a strict protocol together and, indeed, friendships in which observing this protocol is a feature that "cements the friendship". It is not uncommon for friends to form certain traditions—e.g., a weekly drink at the bar or a monthly movie night. These kinds of traditions make relationships more structured, and yet, contrary to what Thomas' account implies, they may well make friendships deeper rather than less deep.

Second, although our paradigmatic image of friendship might be a relation in which neither friend has authority over the other, it seems possible (as mentioned above) for two people to be friends even if one has authority over the other. For example, a teacher and her student can also be friends. As discussed in the previous section, this might not be very common, but it doesn't seem impossible.

Third, while normally friends trust each other and they may often share private information one with the other, these features are not essential to friendships. Consider the following utterance: "He is my dearest friend, but I don't trust him; I would never leave him alone with my wife." Perhaps we would prefer not to have to say this about our closest friend, but this sentence doesn't seem to involve a misuse of the term "close friend" or "trust." Likewise, it is not at all obvious that sharing secrets is essential to friendship. Indeed, C. S. Lewis takes an opposite view on the role of self-disclosure in friendships:

> For of course we do not want to know our Friend's affairs at all. Friendship, unlike Eros, is uninquisitive. You become a man's Friend without knowing or caring whether he is married or single or how he earns a living…no one cares two-pence about anyone else's family, profession,

class, income, race, or previous history. (1960: 70–1)

Lewis believes that friendships are grounded in an interest shared by their participants. On his view, concentrating on one's friend rather than on the friends' shared interest hinders friendship. Although Lewis's conception of friendship is somewhat unusual—surely friends can take an interest in each other's life, and sharing secrets with one's friend need not obstruct a friendship—I think his view on friendship demonstrates that sharing secrets is not essential to friendship. Despite his unorthodox view of friendship, Lewis is clearly trying to give an account of *friendship* and it is implausible to think that he is completely wrong about the nature of this relation.[15]

Finally, to my mind, Thomas' claim that people who are public about their lives cannot have close friendships is implausible. If it were true, then authors who write revealing autobiographical novels, for example, as well as many contemporary "celebrities" whose personal lives are scrutinized in the media in excruciating detail, would be incapable of having close friendships. It is implausible that one's ability to have close friends could depend, for example, on the thoroughness with which the media exposes private information about her life.

Although the features Thomas identifies are not essential features of friendship, I believe we all recognize them as features that are characteristic of many friendships. I believe that the account of friendship offered here explains why this is so. But before we turn to this let us consider, briefly, another account of friendship due to Cocking and Kennett (1998) [henceforth C&K].

Friendship, according to C&K, is a relation of direction and interpretation. "As a close friend of another," they tell us, "one is characteristically and distinctively receptive to being directed and interpreted and so in these ways drawn by the other." (503) One is directed by another if "one's choices are shaped by the other and one's interests and activities become oriented toward those of the

[15] One may insist that that Lewis is giving an account of a different relation. But Lewis specifically distinguishes between *friendship* and other relations so there is no doubt that he intends to give an account of *friendship*. One desiterata of an account of friendship on the Aristotelian method we are employing is to preserves the *endoxa*.

friend." (504) To illustrate the notion of being directed by another, C&K present the following example. A person who has no interest in ballet might gladly go to the ballet if a friend who enjoys ballet invited her. Had someone else extended the invitation she would not have gone. In this case one friend's interests are *directed* by the other. One is *interpreted* by the other if one sees the other's interpretation of oneself, and is responsive to this interpretation. "In friendship," they conclude, "I am distinctively receptive both to the other's interests and to their way of seeing me." (505)

Like Thomas, C&K identify features that we recognize in many friendships. But these features, too, are not essential to friendship. Although it is not uncommon for one friend to direct and be directed by another, it is also not uncommon for each friend to accept the other as he is. Some friends may appreciate an invitation from a friend to partake in an activity in which they have no genuine independent interest. But others might feel more comfortable in a friendship which is based on each friend's recognition of, and respect for, the other's independent interests and tastes. So it might be a mark of *some* good friendships that each friend does *not* invite the other to participate in activities in which the other has no independent interest. Such friendships might be based on mutual acceptance of the other as she is—an acceptance which might manifest itself in the complete absence of direction in C&K's sense of the term.

Responsiveness to a friend's interpretation of oneself can only occur if friends engaged in reflective mutual interpretation. And although this might be common in many friendships, some friendships could be based primarily, and even entirely, on shared activities. Lewis, again, comes to mind. "Lovers," he writes, "are always talking to one another about their love; Friends, hardly ever talk about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest." (61) Friends need not talk about their friendship, and indeed, they need not talk about each other, even if, despite Lewis' claim, they sometime, or even often, do so.

The features that Thomas and C&K identify are common in friendships, it is proposed, because they correspond to familiar ways for friends to communicate to each other that each one values the other. In some friendships, friends communicate to each other that

each one values the other by sharing secrets, while in other friendships friends might do this by taking an interest in whatever interests the other—i.e., by being directed by the other—and by interpreting the other and being sensitive to the other's interpretation of oneself. However, in other friendships, friends might communicate mutual valuing by accepting the other as she is and by *not* trying to direct her, or by maintaining a minimally structured relationship in which each one can do as she pleases with very limited regard to propriety and protocol. Yet others may best communicate value by engaging in joint intellectual pursuits without being concerned about each other's personal lives at all. I suspect that some forms of communicating value between friends may be more prevalent in some communities than in others. But even in the same society there are multiple ways for friends to communicate to each other that the other is valuable to them, and indeed, a single person may use different methods of communicating value with different friends, and even with the same friend at different times.

C&K, like Thomas, I propose, confuse specific ways of communicating mutual valuing between friends with essential features of friendship. Nevertheless, their accounts are "mostly true" in that we do recognize the features they identify as characteristic of many, and perhaps even most friendships. Friendships can take a vast variety of forms and I am doubtful that we will be able to find any specific behavioral pattern that is common to all friendships. I take it to be a virtue of the account on offer here that it allows for a great plurality of friendship-behavioral patterns.

5 Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the aim of this paper is to identify a *distinctive feature* of friendship. It was argued that a distinctive feature of the friendship relation is that it is a relation between two people in which each participant values the other and successfully communicates this fact to the other. Before we conclude, a few clarificatory remarks are in order on the phrase 'distinctive feature'—a phrase used throughout the paper.[16]

[16] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this issue.

The history of Western Philosophy is replete with failed attempts to provide definitions, conceptual analyses, and explications of interesting philosophical concepts by way of necessary and sufficient conditions. Thus, for example, in the early Socratic dialogues, Plato has Socrates ask his interlocutors to answer questions of the form "What is F-ness?" by providing necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be F (where F-ness, in the early Socratic Dialogues, stands for a substantive normative term, such as temperance, courage, friendship, piety, beauty, virtue, or justice).[17] One of the most remarkable features of the early "definitional dialogues" is that they all end in *Aporia*; much to the chagrin of his interlocutors, Socrates leads them to admit that their proposed answers are unsatisfactory because they are susceptible to counterexamples.[18] It is doubtful that we are now any better off than Socrates with respect to having in our possession a successful analysis, by way of necessary and sufficient conditions, of any interesting philosophical concept. Even the classical analysis of knowledge (as Justified True Belief) has been shown to be susceptible to counterexample by Edmond Gettier in his landmark (1963) 3-page *Analysis* paper.

In the face of this "history of failure", as it were, it would be foolhardy to attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for "friendship". For (Plato's) Socrates, one of the driving motivations for his quest for necessary and sufficient conditions for F-ness is Socrates' apparent commitment to "the priority of *definitional knowledge*"—the view that in order to know whether something is F, one must know (and, indeed, be able to articulate) what F-ness is.[19] One way to understand this requirement is that in order to know

[17] The dialogues *Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthyphro, Hippias Major, Meno, and Republic I,* are standardly classified as early definitional dialogues. See, e.g., Wolfsdorf 2003.

[18] For a wonderful discussion of 'the Socratic *elenchus*', and the philosophical insights that might be drawn from Plato's abandonment of this method in the later dialogues, see Matthews 2018.

[19] There are, as can be expected, disagreements over the precise form of the principle of "priority of definitional knowledge" to which Socrates is committed in the early dialogues. See, e.g., Geach 1966 and Wolfsdorf 2004 and various references therein. We can bracket these interesting exegetical debates for our purposes here.

whether a term is applied properly in a particular instance one must already know the *definition* of the term in question. However, our ability to conjure counterexamples to proposed definitions, combined with our inability to formulate adequate definitions, gives us reason to doubt the priority of definitional knowledge. And, indeed, very few (if any) philosophers accept this Socratic thesis. Instead, various forms of "prototype semantics" or Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" accounts are now taken more or less for granted.[20] As Biletzki and Matar (2018) explain, Wittgenstein "points to 'family resemblance' as the more suitable analogy for the means of connecting particular uses of the same word. There is no reason to look, as we have done traditionally—and dogmatically—for one, essential core in which the meaning of a word is located and which is, therefore, common to all uses of that word."

Now some relationships are clear instances of friendships and others are clearly not. But there are also relationships for which it is unclear whether they are instances of friendship—properly so called. Focusing on *prototype* and *resemblance*, rather than necessary and sufficient conditions, enables us to make better sense of *degrees*—that some relationships are more clearly instances of friendship than other. The 'distinctive feature' proposed here is meant to highlight the characteristic features of 'prototype' friendships and the relevant axes of resemblance for assessing relations which are not prototypical friendships.

One might think that the 'distinctive feature' on offer does not pick out a feature distinctive of *friendship* as opposed to other relations. It might be thought that relationships between (e.g.,) partners, siblings, or colleagues may also be such that each participant values the other and successfully communicates this fact to the other. If one is fortunate enough to have such colleagues, for example, one might think that the feature we identified is not a distinctive feature of *friendship*, and consequently, that our title-question has not been properly answered.[21]

When listing the *endoxa* (in §2) we noted that although friendship differs from other social relations (e.g., student-teacher,

[20] See, e.g., Rosch 1975.

[21] Thanks to an anonymous referee for this criticism.

employer-employee, parent-child) two people can occupy the relata of the friendship relation at the same time they occupy the relata of other social relations. If A and B are colleagues (or siblings), for example, they may (or may not) also be friends. According to the view on offer, if they value each other and successfully communicate this fact one to the other, they are friends regardless of other social relations they occupy. The force of the objection, I suspect, comes from the fact that we may tend to introduce a colleague (or a sibling) as "a colleague" (or "a sibling") rather than a "friend" even if there is a successful communication of mutual valuing with this colleague. But I think this tendency is to be explained pragmatically: in some contexts, certain social relations are more salient than others. That we choose to highlight one relation rather than others doesn't mean that we do not stand in other relations as well. According to the view on offer, in the case described A and B are both colleagues *and* friends. And, indeed, I trust that we can quite easily conjure scenarios in which one would introduce one's colleague-friend as "a friend" rather than as "a colleague".

The account proposed in this paper is meant to explain the intimate link between friendship and happiness. The claim was that friendship contributes to each friends' sense of self-worth, which, in turn, impacts on each friend's happiness. Nevertheless, it would be implausible to insist that friendship is the *only* way for one to obtain a sense of self-worth: an artist might obtain a sense of self-worth by gaining recognition from notable critics. A politician might conceive of her life as valuable when her leadership is valued by many. A parent might gain a sense of self-worth by simply observing his child. So even though one's happiness is influenced by the extent to which one regards one's own life as valuable, friendship might not be *necessary* for happiness as long as one can obtain a sufficiently high sense of self-worth through other venues.

This result seems right to me. For instance, it is not uncommon for people to spend less time with their friends, and even to allow friendships to wither away, when they start their own families. I doubt, however, that these people are categorically less happy than those who have more friends but no family. Aristotle's proclamation that no one would choose to live without friends is, therefore, not *literally* true. It is best understood as a hyperbolic statement which is

meant to emphasize the important contribution friendships make to our happiness. What Aristotle should have said is that no one would choose to live without a minimal sense of self-worth. For many of us, friendship is the most natural, accessible, and enjoyable way to obtain an increased sense of self-worth. Moreover, unlike other ways of gaining a sense of self-worth, friendship gives us a unique opportunity to reciprocate a sense of self-worth to those exceptional individuals for whom, we believe, it is truly deserved.

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