

My Other Myself:
Aristotle and the Value of Friendship

Richard Oxenberg

I. The Lonely Island Paradise

I have a proposition to offer you.

I will provide you, free of charge, a beautiful island paradise in the Caribbean. Just imagine it: tall swaying palm trees, white silky sand beaches, crystal blue ocean vistas, baby-blue skies, exotic birds of every variety – everything we are accustomed to imagining when we hear the words 'island paradise.'

On this island I will build for you any sort of house you desire. Create in your mind the most magnificent palace you can envision: indoor and outdoor swimming pools, elegant verandas, luxurious bedrooms, saunas, hot tubs, recreation rooms, gyms. It's all yours.

Beyond this, you may have anything to eat that you like, at any time of the day or night. Pick up the phone and order the finest meals prepared by the finest chefs from the finest restaurants across the world. It will all be delivered to you – by robots – at your merest wish.

Since we are all sexual beings, I will provide for your sexual pleasure as well. Imagine a stunningly beautiful woman (if you prefer women) or a chiseled hunk of a man (if you prefer men) who will be at your sexual beck and call day and night. Pick up the phone, press a button, and this person will immediately appear and provide you with every kind of sensual delight. It's all yours, free of charge, and for the rest of your life.

Pretty good deal?

The only thing I will ask you to give up, in exchange for all of this, is any form of real human contact. Your sexual partner will appear with a blindfold, designed so that he or she can see out but so that you will never be able to look into his or her eyes. This person will never speak to you or smile, will never show any signs of pleasure or amusement, will never respond to you in any manner that might be considered 'personal.' Indeed, you will have no way of knowing whether this is in fact a person or merely a very sophisticated sexual robot. Still, to the extent that this person can provide you with strictly physical pleasure, you may have as much of it as you desire.

Besides this, you will have no further human contact for the remainder of your life. No books, no TV, no radio, no internet, no social media, no texts, no phone conversation, no contact of any sort with another human being.

How many would take me up on the offer?

Have I just described some version of heaven or some version of hell? I would venture to say that, if you do not find the prospect of such a life miserable upon the mere thought of it, you would very shortly find it miserable upon the actual living of it. Indeed, such a life would almost certainly be a desperately lonely life for any human being.

What I am attempting to illustrate with this example is what Aristotle may mean when he writes, at the beginning of his book on friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods" (BVIII.1, 155a.5, p. 214).

The question I would like us to consider today is 'why?' How is it that the absence of human relation can turn heaven into hell? What is it, exactly, that human relation provides that is so important to a satisfactory life, and what sorts of people must *we* be in order to be capable of *true* human relation. That is to be the subject of my talk today.

II. *Philia*

Let us begin by considering the word that gets translated 'friendship' in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Greek word is *Philia*, which is also often translated 'love.' We find the word *philia* used as a prefix in a great many English words of Greek derivation. For instance, 'philosophy' is derived from the word *philia* combined with the Greek word *sophia*, which means wisdom; hence it might be translated 'love of wisdom.' The city Philadelphia gets its name by combining *philia* with *delphus*, brother, hence means 'brotherly love.'

Aristotle uses the word *philia* to refer to the distinctively human relationship. The word 'friendship' into which it is translated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is at once too narrow and too broad a translation.

It is too narrow in that Aristotle uses the word *philia* to refer to any human relationship at all, even those that we would not ordinarily call 'friendships.' Thus the relationship between a mother and a child is, for Aristotle, a species of *philia*. The relationship between a business man and his business partner, a doctor and her patient, a salesman and a customer, are all species of *philia*. So, in its broadest sense, Aristotle considers every form of human relationship, in which there is some mutuality of interest, as falling under the category *philia*.

But the question Aristotle asks in his chapters on friendship is: what constitutes a *true* human relationship? And perhaps we need to consider what the word *true* might mean in this context.

Certainly, we are all almost always in some form of relation to other human beings. In this auditorium, for instance, we are all surrounded by other human beings. But to have a relationship with another human being that might be called a true *human* relationship surely involves a good deal more than being in the physical proximity of another person. Indeed, it is perhaps a distinctive feature of human beings, as compared with other

animals, that we are capable of being *alone* even in a roomful of people. Not all animals, I think, are capable of being alone in the most robust sense of the term. I somehow doubt that an ant, for instance, although it is what we call a social insect, is really capable of feeling what a human being would call 'lonely.' It sometimes seems to me that dogs are capable of feeling something on the order of loneliness – we see this by how they sometimes whimper when they know they will be left alone, and by how joyful they often seem when we return to them. But even dogs, I think, might have a hard time feeling lonely for very long in a crowd of other dogs.

No – although I suppose we'll never really know how other animals feel – I think it is not altogether unreasonable to suggest that human beings are, in some significant sense, the loneliest creatures on the planet; or at least the creatures most capable of feeling lonely. A human being can be lonely right smack in the middle of hundreds of other human beings; indeed sometimes the very proximity of others can accentuate our feeling of loneliness.

If we think of loneliness, then, as a feeling of deprivation with respect to human relationship, it becomes quite apparent that what the lonely person is missing is something more than the mere physical proximity of others. Nor, apparently, does loneliness have to do with our merely physical needs. Some might suggest that we feel lonely in relation to others when we fear that others won't be there to help us secure our physical needs. And although it is true that we depend upon others to help us provide for such needs, it doesn't seem that this quite gets to the core of what we value a human relationship for. The example I gave at the outset today was designed to indicate that even when all our physical needs and desires are tended to, even in the most complete way, we are still capable of feeling desperately lonely.

If, then, we mean by *philia* 'true human relationship' – that is, a relationship that would truly fill the void that we call 'loneliness' – the English word 'friendship' turns out to be too broad for what we mean. Not everything we call a friendship would satisfy the terms of *philia* in the true and complete sense of the word. Not every friendship with another human being is a true relation of *human to human*. For Aristotle, indeed, only virtuous people can achieve *friendship* or *philia* in the truest sense. And such people are themselves relatively rare.

III. Three Types of Friendship

But first, perhaps, we should consider *philia* in its broadest sense. A human relationship of any sort, says Aristotle, is based upon a mutuality of need or interest. People become 'friends,' i.e., enter into relationship with one another, because they have needs or desires that they cannot satisfy by themselves. This will be true of any kind of human relationship, even those that, according to Aristotle, would not qualify as relationships of *philia* in the truest sense.

There are three types of friendship into which all human relationships will fall. Not all, however, are friendships in the truest sense of the word; that is, not all satisfy that particular need or desire that is the need or desire for friendship itself.

1. The Friendship of Utility

The first kind of friendship Aristotle considers is the friendship of utility. This is the “you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours” relationship. You possess the ability to provide me with something that I want, I possess the ability to provide you with something you want, and we make an exchange of services to one another.

An example of a relationship of utility, at its barest, might be the relationship you have with the person behind the counter at McDonald's when you buy a hamburger. That person provides you with a hamburger, you provide that person with money. The basis of your relationship is your desire for a hamburger and his desire for money.

Of course, although this is surely some kind of relationship between human beings we can scarcely call it a *human* relationship. I am not relating to the person behind the counter in his capacity of human being but in his capacity of hamburger provider. If I could get my hamburger as effectively from a machine I'd be equally satisfied. What I want is not a relationship with this person, but a hamburger. The person behind the counter is merely serving as a means to that end for me.

And the same is true for the way the person behind the counter views me. He's not interested in me as a person but as a money-provider. I am merely a means to the end of his making a living, and truth be told, if he could make a living without having any contact with me he'd be just as happy. Our relationship is strictly utilitarian; we each provide for each other's purely material needs, and are merely means to that end for one another. Of course, the moment either one of us ceases to be able to provide what the other needs the relationship will be over. He's not going to give me hamburgers if I don't give him money and I'm not going to give him money if he doesn't give me hamburgers. So the moment one or the other of us can no longer provide the material goods our relationship is based upon the relationship will end. Friendships of utility are the most fragile of 'friendships' (if they can even be called by that word).

So, to say it again, though this is a relationship between human beings it is not, in the truest sense, a *human* relationship. Surely if all we ever had with our fellow human beings were relationships of this sort we would never escape a feeling of loneliness. One of the complaints many social critics have of our current free market culture is its tendency to commodify every relationship. We are, some of them say, a society that is increasingly reducing all relationships to relationships of utility. But perhaps we should leave that discussion for another time.

2. The Friendship of Pleasure

The next type of friendship Aristotle considers is the friendship of pleasure. In the friendship of pleasure two people provide for each other's amusement. Perhaps you are sexy and I am funny. You give me sex and I make you laugh. I enjoy sex and you like to laugh, so there is a mutuality of amusement-giving in the friendship of pleasure. The

friendship of pleasure, Aristotle says, comes a bit closer to being a true human relationship as compared with the friendship of utility, but it still falls rather far from the mark. I know that if I stop making you laugh you may get rid of me; go find someone whose jokes you find more amusing. You know that if I get bored with you sexually, if you should start to get old and wrinkled so that I no longer find you appetizing, I might blow you off, go find someone I feel can better fulfill my sexual appetites. Really, it is not you I love but sex. Really, it is not me you love but laughter. We value each other for the pleasure we provide each other, but not for *each other*.

Aristotle would say that even in this relationship, the relationship of mutual pleasure, we have still not arrived at the fully *human* relationship. The desire we are fulfilling for each other is not our desire for an *other*, but for amusement. In such a relationship one could still feel quite alone. The moment one or the other of us stops providing the pleasure on which the relationship is based – if I should begin to lose my comic timing, if your skin should begin to wrinkle – it will end. In a sense, in both the friendship of utility and the friendship of pleasure we are still only related to *ourselves* – in the first case, to our mere material needs and desires, in the second case, to our desire for amusement – in neither case are we really related to *each other*. So when one or the other of us ceases to serve as means to the other's purely solitary ends the relationship will break off; that is, so long as the relationship hasn't, in the meantime, blossomed into something more.

3. The Friendship of Character

What is this 'something more' that constitutes *true* friendship, according to Aristotle? This is what we wish to understand.

"The perfect form of friendship," writes Aristotle, "is that between good men who are alike in excellence or virtue. For these friends wish alike for one another's good because they are good men, and they are good per se, <that is, their goodness is something intrinsic, not incidental>. Those who wish for their friend's good for their friend's sake are friends in the truest sense, since their attitude is determined by what their friends are, and not by incidental considerations" (BVIII.3, 1156b.5-10, p. 219-220).

Let's take a moment to consider this. "Those who wish for their friends' good for their friend's sake are friends in the truest sense," says Aristotle. And, of course, we can see that this is indeed quite different from the attitude one has toward the other in the friendship of utility and the friendship of pleasure. In the friendship of utility – say the relationship between an employer and an employee – the employer might wish for her employee to remain healthy, but not for the *employee's* sake, but for the sake of her productivity. The employer isn't really concerned with the health of her employee per se, but with her product. The employee's health is merely of incidental concern, as a means to another end having nothing to do with the employee.

Likewise, in the friendship of pleasure I am not concerned with my pleasure-partner's good for *her* sake, but for the sake of the *pleasure* she can bestow. Once she is no longer able to provide that pleasure my interest in her is at an end.

But in the friendship of character, says Aristotle, in the *true* friendship, the friends are concerned with each other's good for the *other's* sake. And, of course, this sounds very nice. Everyone, I think, would prefer to be cared about for his own sake than for the sake of some utility or pleasure he provides. And, of course, if you are cared about for your own sake then you are not going to be abandoned the moment you cease to be able to provide whatever extraneous utility or pleasure you had hitherto provided. Such a friendship, then, is likely to be lasting.

But the question we might ask is: How is it possible? Isn't it Aristotle himself who has told us that the goal, the *telos*, of every human being is happiness? And didn't he also tell us that happiness is something "final and sufficient" such that once we have it we would want for nothing more? And further, didn't he say that everything else we want, we want for the sake of happiness, but happiness we want strictly for its own sake?

Doesn't this mean that the only way I could possibly care about you is for the sake of *my* happiness, and that the only way in which you could possibly matter to me would be as a means to *my* ends? How, then, could I possibly care about you for *your* sake? Doesn't the logic of this ethic of happiness demand that I care about everything whatsoever for *my* sake?

Apparently Aristotle doesn't think so, and I think we can make great strides in understanding Aristotle's overall ethical philosophy by trying to understand why not.

IV. Self-love

Our question then might be phrased as follows: Is it really possible to love another for the other's sake, or is all love a form of self-love? If the latter, do we love others – to the extent that we do – strictly for our own sake? Does that mean that we *cannot* love the other for the other's sake?

1. Selfless love?

Of course, this is a question that takes us beyond a mere concern with Aristotle's philosophy. Indeed, it seems to be a question that goes to the heart of Judeo-Christian ethics as well. In the Christian tradition, Jesus represents the ideal of what is sometimes called 'selfless' love. In a famous line from the Gospel of John, Jesus says "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). And, of course, this is what Jesus himself does.

But, from the standpoint of a *eudaimonistic* ethical system, i.e., an ethical system centered on happiness, might we not say that Jesus has made a mistake, an ethical blunder? Might we say to Jesus: "Excuse me, but, with all due respect, it seems that you are deficient in what Aristotle would call 'practical wisdom.' Don't you know that all human beings act for the sake of their happiness? And that happiness is a final end, that for the sake of which all things are done, but which, itself, is not for the sake of anything

beyond itself? How then could it possibly be wise to sacrifice your own life, through which you have your own happiness, for your friends?"

What would he say in response? Of course he couldn't say "Well, I know I will have my reward in heaven" because then he would be sacrificing his life for the sake of his reward in heaven, not for the sake of his friends.

Can it make any sense to sacrifice your life for the sake of your friends? Is the person who does so noble, or just a chump? Is friendship, in the *true* sense, in the sense of caring for your friend for your friend's sake, even possible?

Interestingly, Aristotle insists that true friendship is not only possible, but that it is, in some sense, *based* in self-love. In chapter 4 of book IX (p.252) Aristotle writes: "The friendly relations which we have with our neighbors and which serve to define the various kinds of friendship seem to be derived from our relations to ourselves" (BIX.4, 1166a.1, p. 252).

2. Five marks of Friendship

We are going to need to look at this passage very carefully if we are going to see how Aristotle resolves the dilemma we've been noting. In this chapter Aristotle provides what might be thought of as five 'marks' of true friendship:

1. A friend wishes for the good of her friend for her friend's sake.
2. A friend desires the prolongation of the friend's existence.
3. A friend enjoys spending time in the company of her friend.
4. Friends share each other's desires; that is, friend's desire for each other what each desires for herself.
5. Friends share in each other's sorrows and joys.

These five marks of friendship, says Aristotle, are also the marks of a virtuous person's relation to *herself*. That is, the virtuous person wishes for her own good for her own sake. Since she delights in her own existence, she desires its prolongation. Since she is happy with herself, she enjoys spending time in her own company. Each part of her shares in the desires of the other parts; i.e., her desires are in concord with one another. Finally, her feelings of sorrow and joy are consistent with themselves; that is, one part of her does not sorrow over that which another part delights in.

These marks of *true* friendship, then, are also the marks of *true* self-love; that is, the self-love of one who is truly happy with herself, the virtuous person.

On the other hand, according to Aristotle, the base person, the unvirtuous person, does not, even cannot, love herself in this manner. Base people, writes Aristotle, "are at variance with themselves and have appetite for one thing and wish for another . . . instead of what seems to be good to them they choose what is pleasant and actually harmful, and

others again, from cowardice or laziness, refrain from doing what they think is best for them" (BIX.4, 1166b.5-10, p254).

So the base person does not really pursue even her *own* good, not to mention anyone else's. Further, "Wicked men seek the company of others with whom to spend their days, but they avoid their own company. For when they are by themselves they remember many events that make them uneasy, and they anticipate similar events for the future" (BIX.4, 1166b.10-5, p254). So base people don't really enjoy spending time with themselves, they seek amusements to divert themselves from their own unhappiness. So, Aristotle concludes, "a bad man's disposition is not friendly even toward himself" (BIX.4, 1166b.25, p254-255).

Base people, in other words, are not only unable to form true friendships with others, but they are not really friends even of themselves.

3. Two kinds of Self-Love

Aristotle concludes, then, that there are actually two very different, even opposing, attitudes, that might be called self-love. There is what is customarily called self-love, which we might call 'egoism.' This is the self-love (or the so-called self-love) of the base person. This person is not so much 'full of himself' as 'empty of himself.' He is so empty of himself that he looks upon everything else in the world merely in terms of how it may serve to fill him up. Such a person, of course, cannot enter into a true friendship with someone else because he is never able to see beyond his own emptiness, and is never able to view anything except insofar as it might serve to fill his emptiness. Everything, thus, is viewed from the standpoint of his neediness. Other people, for such a person, can be nothing but means to the filling of his own emptiness. To the extent that that emptiness is experienced in material terms he will enter into 'friendships of utility' with others. To the extent that he seeks diversion from his own unhappiness he will enter into 'friendships of pleasure' with others. But neither of these are true friendships, nor, indeed, true human relationships. The base person, really, is never able to escape relation to his own neediness, and never able to see the world, or others, as anything more than means that serve the ends of that neediness.

Such a person, says Aristotle, though we may call him a 'self-lover' because he is so involved with trying to gratify himself, really doesn't love himself at all. He is really, deep-down, at odds with himself and miserable with himself. Such a person cannot be a true friend to others *because* he is not really a true friend to himself.

But there is another kind of self-love. The self-love of the person who is truly at peace with himself. This is the self-love of the virtuous person. Only such a person can be a friend to others *because* only such a person is a friend to himself.

What this suggests is that self-love, true self love, is the necessary precondition to love of a friend. Before one can be a friend of another one must be a friend of oneself. Indeed, all of the moral virtues may be said to be concerned with friendship of some sort. Friendship

– at least self-friendship – then, is the very aim or *telos* of the moral virtues. Indeed, we might say that friendship is the 'moral virtue of moral virtues,' since all the other moral virtues are its precondition.

V. Living and Knowing: An Argument for Friendship

But, of course, we have still not resolved our dilemma. How does self-love, even true self-love, even the self-love of the virtuous person, translate into love of the friend? Aristotle provides an elaborate argument in which he attempts to explain this in chapter 9 of Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The argument, I must admit, is rather convoluted and not presented in the most systematic way in the chapter as we now have it. Still, I think it will serve us well to try to reconstruct it. I'm going to try and present it in seven discrete steps:

1. "Life," Aristotle writes, "is in itself good and pleasant. We can see that from the very fact that everyone desires it, especially good and supremely happy men" (BIX.9, 1170a.25, p. 266).

This is an idea that is really at the base of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Life itself is already happiness. One does not require anything but one's own complete *living* in order to be happy. To be happy is nothing but to be fully alive.

But what exactly are we to understand by 'life' in this context? Of course biologists tend to define life in terms of a creature's ability to reproduce, but Aristotle has a rather different understanding of what is distinctive about life.

2. "Life in the true sense is perceiving or thinking" (BIX.9, 1170a.15, p. 265).

Life, in the truest or fullest sense, is some kind of perceiving or thinking; i.e., some kind of awareness or knowing. To be fully alive is to be fully aware – to fully know – that you are fully alive. And, of course, here we see why Aristotle says that the rational soul is the highest part of the soul of the human being, because it is through our rationality that we are able to most fully *know*. Our senses provide us awareness of our immediate environment, but it is only through our minds, our rational minds, that we are able to know *beyond* our immediate environment. If life is some kind of knowing, and if through our rationality we are able to most fully know, it follows that it is through reason that we are able to be most fully alive. It also follows that human beings, as rational animals, are, in some sense, *more fully alive* than other animals. We have more of a share of what life, in its fullness, *is*.

3. "In perceiving, we perceive that we perceive, and in thinking we perceive that we think" (BIX.9, 1170a.30, p. 266).

In other words, perceiving or thinking always involve a self-relation. We are not only aware of the object that we know, but we are aware of being aware of it. We are, in some sense, related to ourselves *through* our relationship to the objects of our awareness. *How*

we are related to those objects, then, plays a part in how we are related to ourselves. You've heard the expression "you are what you eat." Well, that may be true of an irrational animal whose life is defined by its appetites, but Aristotle might say that for a rational being it would be more true to say "you are what you know."

4. "To perceive that we are living is something pleasant in itself, for existence is by nature good, and to perceive that that good thing is inherent in us is pleasant" (BIX.9, 1170b.1, p. 266).

Happiness is precisely the joy that comes with perceiving our own *excellent* existence. Just to the extent that we exist excellently we are able to take joy in our awareness of our existence, hence able to love ourselves.

5. "We are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than ours" (BIX.9, 1169b.20, p. 264).

And here we come to the crux of it. Because of the subject-object structure of human consciousness, because our consciousness is most naturally directed outward, our capacity to know ourselves, and hence fully enjoy ourselves *in* the knowing of ourselves, is limited. We are far better at knowing things that are other than us, things that are out there in the world. But what life delights in is life itself, and life in its true sense is 'perceiving and thinking'; i.e., knowing. So what we will find the greatest delight in is in knowing knowing itself, and the best way we can achieve this is in knowing another knowing being: our friend.

6. "The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since his friend is another himself" (trans. Terence Irwin, BIX.9, 1170b.5, p. 150).

I've used another translation for this last point because I think Terence Irwin's rendering brings out Aristotle's point in the most striking way. I am related to myself in that I am a self-aware being. But my capacity to be so related to myself is limited, because human consciousness is naturally directed outward. I can only experience the true joy of my own self-relation through knowing *another* knowing being *by whom I am known*. In the true friendship the friends know each other's knowing of each other, and it is through this mutuality of knowing that life itself is made most full.

VI. My Other Myself

We need to try and express this as clearly as possible. I don't think Aristotle is saying that friends merely serve as mirrors of one another; no, that would still be a kind of narcissism and my friend would still be only a means to my end. I think he is saying that the friendship itself fulfills the nature of human consciousness, such that what the friends are *together* is something *more complete* than what the friends are apart. The friendship, considered as a unit, is both subject and object of itself. Thus, my friend is 'my other myself' not simply because I am reflected in my friend's consciousness, but because the

friendship itself is reflected by both of us. In the friendship, in other words, I become more than I am as an individual. My friend's being becomes an aspect of my being, as my being becomes an aspect of my friend's being. The *we* that is formed in the true friendship, thus, is something over and above the *me* that either of us is alone. Through my friend I am more complete as a living, self-knowing, being; hence, I have more of a share in what life is and hungers for.

Thus, I care for my friend for my friend's sake just as I care for myself for my own sake; because the friend is 'another myself' and I am related to my friend just as I am related to myself.

This is why, says Aristotle, friends always desire to live together. And by 'living together' he does not refer to the sharing of a domicile, but to a mingling of lives. He writes: The friend "must also include his friend's existence in his consciousness, and that may be accomplished by living together with him and by sharing each other's words and thoughts. For this would seem to be the meaning of living together when said of human beings: it does not mean feeding in the same place as it does in the case of cattle" (BIX.9, 1170b.10, p. 266-267).

VII. Happiness Is Not an Individual Affair

To put it another way, happiness is not an individual affair. Happiness is something that happens, and can only happen, in community with others, not simply because others are needed as means to the ends of providing material sustenance, or even as means to the ends of providing amusing diversions, but because others, themselves, are desirable in themselves, precisely as other knowing beings. Happiness consists, at least on the human plane, in the mutual knowing of beings capable of knowing each other.

This brings us back to something that Aristotle said early in Book I. In describing happiness as something 'final and self-sufficient' he was careful to point out that by 'self-sufficient' he didn't mean that happiness was something that individuals have in isolation from others. On the contrary, the happy person must live in association with others, since, "man is by nature a political or social being" (BI, 1097b.10, p. 15).

If we are by nature social beings, and happiness is the satisfaction of that at which our nature aims, it follows that only through true friendship can we be fully happy. And this, finally, solves the paradox of self-love. It is only through loving my friend, for his own sake, that I myself can fulfill my nature and achieve my happiness. Happiness is had only in community with others. Love of self and love of friend are not in conflict because, in some sense, my self is only fully actualized in community with my friend.

VIII. True Friendship Requires the Moral Virtues

And this, also, allows us to understand all the other moral virtues in a new light. Professor Brian Jorgensen has said that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is structured like

an ascending, expanding, spiral. As we move forward, as we gain in understanding, we achieve more insight into what was said before. This is necessary given the nature of Aristotle's topic. The good life, the happy life, is going to be the life that fulfills human nature. In Book I Aristotle told us that we had a word for that state of fulfillment – we call it happiness or *Eudaimonia* – but we don't yet know very much about it. In a sense, we can only really know what sorts of behavior are conducive to happiness, and, hence, what is virtuous, to the extent that we understand what happiness is.

Now we've come closer. If it is the nature of the human being to be social then it is only in fulfilled social relation that true happiness can be had. Thus:

1. Happiness requires friendship.

("No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods." VIII.1)

To have a true friendship is to care about another as I care about myself. This means that I must be of such a character as not to demand more goods for myself than for my friend. To not demand more than my fair share of good is Aristotle's definition of justice. Thus to be a true friend, one must be a just person:

2. Friendship requires justice.

("Unjust action means to assign to oneself too much of things intrinsically good and too little of things intrinsically evil." V.6)

But what kind of person must I be to be one who will not demand more than my fair share? I must be one who is not carried away by emotion and desire. Thus:

3. Justice requires the other moral virtues.

("A wicked man . . . will harm both himself and his neighbors in following his base emotions." IX.8)

So, it turns out that true friendship does not require selflessness in any literal sense, but what might more truly be called 'self-fullness.' It is as I come into my own fullness of self that I am able to enter into a true friendship with another, and that friendship becomes, itself, a *feature* of my self-fullness. I am full through my friend and with my friend. My friend has become 'another myself,' and, for that very reason, I love my friend *as* myself; my self-love comes to encompass my friend as well.

Of course it may be that this is just what Jesus meant when he spoke of a love that was so full that a person would sacrifice his life for a friend. Perhaps if Jesus had had the time to write a philosophical treatise on friendship we might have gotten something rather like what Aristotle has given us. Indeed, Aristotle also remarks at one point that the true friend would sacrifice his life for his friend if necessary. The reason for this is that the wise person sees that true happiness is not principally concerned with the length of life but with the quality of life. If one has to be sacrificed for the other, then it is better to sacrifice longevity for quality rather than quality for longevity. Indeed, in some sense, the

only time we are ever alive is *right now*. The wise person strives to live well *right now*, whatever that entails. Duration is not in itself a goal.

IX. The Expanding Spiral of Self

As I've said, Brian Jorgensen suggests that the form of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* might be envisioned as an expanding spiral: it keeps circling back on the same subjects – pleasure, happiness, virtue –but each time from a wider, more comprehensive, perspective. I would like to suggest that the image of the expanding spiral might serve as well as an image of Aristotle's view of the development of the human self.

First of all, we can see that the human self does, in a sense, circle back upon itself. That, after all, is what knowing is. To know, as Aristotle says, is always also to know that you know. Knowing is a relation to the world that is always, also, a self-relation. But this self-world-relation is not static, it grows, it expands. If, as Aristotle says a number of times, we are most truly our intelligence, then the more we know the more, in some sense, we are. The circle of self-relation doesn't simply return to the same point, but the more we come into relation with the world, the more we grow, and the more we grow, the more fully we are able to relate to the world and others.

Indeed, although we haven't the time to do it now, it would be interesting to consider each of the moral virtues Aristotle enumerates in Book IV in terms of the extent to which they represent expansions of our ability to relate. As we become generous, for instance, we cease to cling to money. The generous person, in effect, puts money in its place, as opposed to the stingy person and the extravagant person, both of whom are, in their different ways, in thrall to money. Having put money in its place the generous person is able to live beyond a mere concern with money and material goods. The generous person, and only the generous person, is no longer a slave to money and is able, therefore, to concern herself with greater matters.

This is true of the other virtues as well. The courageous person is no longer a slave to fear. The person of self-control is no longer a slave to sensuous appetite. To be liberated from such enslavement is a prerequisite to being a just person. The unjust person, enslaved to emotions and desires, tries to grab more than his fair share so as to satisfy those appetites. The just person *commands* her emotions and desires (rather than being commanded by them) and is, thus, able to truly respect the claims of others.

And, of course, only one who can respect the claims of another can become a true friend. A friend must be able not only to *respect* the claims of another but, indeed, to care about the other's good to the same extent that she cares about her own.

It is only the virtuous person, then, who can get *beyond* herself so as to be able to relate in justice and friendship with another.

X. Cosmic 'Friendship'?

And this leads me to my final point. There is a great deal of controversy among Aristotle scholars as to just what to make of Aristotle's final book. After spending an entire work examining in detail the nature of moral virtue and the moral life, a life that is active and social, suddenly Aristotle seems to tell us that the *supremely* happy life is not the active, social life at all. It is the life of contemplation.

What are we to make of this? Is there any way to integrate this with the rest of what Aristotle has had to say? Well, as I say, there is much debate about this among Aristotle scholars and it would be presumptuous of me to make any definitive claim in this regard. But I will give you my way of looking at it, which you can then consider for yourselves.

First, it is fairly clear that by 'active' Aristotle doesn't merely mean physically active. Intellectual contemplation is clearly a kind of activity for Aristotle. So in saying that the supremely happy life is the contemplative life he is not really contradicting his claim that happiness is an activity.

What is much more questionable is how his claim about the contemplative life can be reconciled with his repeated statements that the human being is *social* by nature. Although one can contemplate with others, contemplation does not seem to be an *essentially* social activity (as is, for instance, friendship and politics). How can a non-social activity, then, provide an essentially social being's 'complete happiness' (NE, X.7, 1177b.20)?

As I say, Aristotle doesn't really give us enough to allow us to answer this question definitively, but I'm going to take my best shot at it. When we look at what true friendship is for Aristotle we see that it involves an extension or expansion of the private, self-involved, self to encompass the self of another. Each friend, in effect, becomes *more* in the friendship than either of them was alone; in relating to the life of their friend each has a greater share of life itself, and it is this expansion of life that makes for the great joy of friendship, since, as Aristotle notes, life is in itself desirable.

What I would like to suggest is that for Aristotle contemplation entails an even further expansion of life, into the realm of what he calls in Book X 'the gods.' In effect, the contemplative participates in a kind of 'Cosmic friendship'; i.e., she enters into a relationship of *philia*, which, for Aristotle, is a relationship of knowing, with that which is supreme in Being itself. Friends participate in each others "words and thoughts," Aristotle tells us. But the contemplative participates in the thought of the Cosmos itself.

The contemplative, Aristotle says, lives a life that is "more than human" (1177b.25), a life that is akin to the divine. Such a person, he says, becomes "beloved by the gods" (1179a.30). The word translated 'beloved' here is a variant of *philia*. We might thus translate it 'becomes a friend of the gods.' This, he says, provides for the happiest life. Of course, Aristotle doesn't mean that such a person will be happiest because the gods, being kindly disposed to her, will supply her material wants. Aristotle has been clear from the

beginning that the mere satisfaction of material wants does not constitute happiness. To become 'beloved by the gods,' then, must mean something like to participate in the expanded life of the gods. For Aristotle, the life of the gods is itself a life of contemplation.

To make sense of this we must recall that for Aristotle the Cosmos is itself supremely alive. There is, he tells us in his *Metaphysics*, a Supreme Life, of which our lives are less complete variants.

This Supreme Life is such as the best life that we can enjoy, for it is ever in that state of supreme self-knowing that we are able to inhabit only sporadically and partially.

Thus, to participate in this Supreme Life through contemplation is the highest activity a human being can engage in. It is, so to speak, to enter upon a friendship with divinity itself. And just as, in friendship, one's friend becomes an extension of oneself, so, through contemplation, the Supreme Life becomes an extension of oneself. In this way the self reaches its fullest actualization.

Indeed, in this way we ourselves are able to participate in that which is immortal, says Aristotle. He writes: "We should try to become immortal as far as that is possible and do our utmost to live in accordance with what is highest in us. For though this is a small portion <of our nature> it far surpasses everything else in power and value. One might even regard it as each man's true self . . ." (1177b.30).

Thank you.