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## Aristotle on the Good of Friendship: Why the Beneficiary is Not What Matters

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Graduate Program in Philosophy  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy  
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ARISTOTLE ON THE GOOD OF FRIENDSHIP:  
WHY THE BENEFICIARY IS NOT WHAT MATTERS

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Kristina Biniek

Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

Scholars seeking to understand Aristotle's view of friendship often characterize the relationship in terms of the beneficiary of the virtuous agent's activity. I argue that this is a distortive lens through which to interpret Aristotle. Aristotle's primary and fundamental concern, in his ethics, is to understand what the good is and how to bring it about, not to determine how to distribute goods produced by virtuous activity. Remembering this helps clarify the role of the friendship books and dissolves apparent tensions between Aristotle's eudaimonism and his account of friendship. My first chapter establishes how consistently Aristotle holds to his task, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of understanding the ultimate human good. Chapter two surveys problematic applications of the question of the beneficiary in interpretation of Aristotle. This mistaken focus often results in a view which suggests that friendship compromises the agent's eudaimonia. Chapter three argues that even Aristotle's requirement that we love a friend "for his own sake" should not be understood in terms of the beneficiary. For Aristotle, some things are sought both as ends in themselves and for the sake of some other good, and so we can see how he can insist that human beings love each other as ends, yet think that friends should seek value from each other. Finally, I consider concerns about conflicts of interests between friends. Aristotle's view that interests can only be understood in terms of what eudaimonia requires entails that there are no conflicts of interest, at least between virtuous people.

## Keywords

Aristotle, friendship, ethics, Nicomachean, for his own sake, beneficiary, egoism, altruism, eudaimonia, teleology, self-love, end in itself, mere means, instrumental, the fine

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## Abbreviations

References to Aristotle's works are given by abbreviation, as follows:

*DA = De Anima*

*EE = Eudemian Ethics*

*Met. = Metaphysics*

*NE = Nicomachean Ethics*

*Phy. = Physics*

*Pol. = Politics*

*Rhet. = Rhetoric*

*Top. = Topics*

## Note on Translations Used

In quotations, I use the following translations from Greek except where otherwise indicated: of the *De Anima* by D.W. Hamlyn in *De anima: books II and III (with passages from book I)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), of the *Eudemian Ethics* by Harris Rackham in *The Athenian Constitution. The Eudemian Ethics. Virtues and Vices* (Harvard University Press, 1992), of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by W.D. Ross's in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* volume 2 (Princeton University Press, 1991), of *On Rhetoric* by George A. Kennedy (New Oxford University Press, 1991), of the *Politics* by C. D. C Reeve (Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), and of Plato's *Republic* by G. M. A Grube and C. D. C Reeve (Hackett Publishing Company, 1992)



## 1

## “What is the good?” not “Who gets the goods?”

Aristotle’s ethics are generally regarded as agent-centered<sup>1</sup> and eudaimonistic<sup>2</sup>— in short, as focused on bringing about the rational agent’s own actualization and happiness. This interpretation raises questions about how the apparently other-regarding aspects of his ethics, such as the demands of justice and friendship, fit into his broader ethical system. Ross gives a representative account of this perceived tension when he writes,

The discussion [of friendship] is a valuable corrective to an impression which the rest of the *Ethics* tends to make. For the most part Aristotle’s moral system is decidedly self-centred. It is at his own eudaimonia we are told, that man aims and should aim. In the account of justice there is an implicit recognition of the rights of others. But in the whole of the *Ethics* outside the books on friendship very little is said to suggest that men can and should take a warm personal interest in other people; altruism is almost completely absent.<sup>3</sup>

Ross is not alone in this reading of Aristotle. Many have found a tension between the apparently egoistic focus of Aristotle’s ethics, broadly construed, and his apparently altruistic ideas of friendship.<sup>4</sup> There is some textual basis for such a view: Aristotelian

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘agent-centered’, I mean that he expects important moral consideration be given to the agent, especially to the development and preservation of her character and principles, as opposed to consideration being focused on the consequences of her actions.

<sup>2</sup> By ‘eudaimonistic’, I mean that the agent’s eudaimonia—or flourishing or well-being, properly conceived—is the highest ethical goal and has motivational primacy.

<sup>3</sup> Sir David Ross, *Aristotle*, 6th ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 238. It is particularly interesting that Ross characterizes Aristotle in this way, when Ross had argued that utilitarianism, by modeling all our moral relations on the relations of benefactor and beneficiary, “seems to simplify unduly our relations to our fellows.” As I will argue, Aristotle is not guilty of this kind of utilitarian simplification, but Ross makes him out to be.

<sup>4</sup> See also, e.g. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th Edition, 7th ed. (Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 121–22.; Donald James Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1970),

virtues, for the most part, are not other-focused but instead describe the ways an individual can become morally excellent. Temperance, good temper (concerned with the proper way to feel anger), ambitiousness, and pride are all examples of this focus on making oneself excellent. For example, in his discussion of good temper, Aristotle says that “the man who is angry at the right things and with the right people and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised” (*NE* 4.5.1125b32-34). There is no explicit concern for, say, protecting others’ feelings even when angry. When Aristotle speaks of generosity and magnificence, his focus is often similarly focused on the agent being a certain kind of person. Aristotle writes of the importance of spending wealth well and of giving money only to the right people, at the right time, and in a way that is noble. The magnificent man, Aristotle writes, “is like an artist, for he can see what is fitting and spend large sums tastefully” (*NE* 4.2.1122a34-35). Such concerns reflect no notion of selfless giving; the idea is that one must give in a way that reflects good judgment (and the appropriate emotional response) regarding the proper way to give money. Regarding pride, the crown of the virtues for Aristotle, he writes, “The proud man, since he deserves most, must be good in the highest degree, for the better man always deserves more, and the best man most” (*NE* 4.3.1123b27-30). It is perhaps understandable, in light of such passages, that Ross wrote that Aristotle’s account of pride “betrays somewhat nakedly the self-absorption which is the bad side of Aristotle’s ethics.”<sup>5</sup>

Other virtues, however, especially justice and courage, seem less self-interested. Aristotle, describing courage, writes that “death and wounds will be painful to the brave man and against his will, but he will face them because it is noble to do so or because it is base not to do so” (*NE* 3.9.1117b3-9). Courage, because of such characterizations, is

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189.; and W. F. R. Hardie, “The Final Good in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Philosophy* 40, no. 154 (October 1, 1965): 281.

<sup>5</sup> Ross, Aristotle, 218.

often counted as one of the altruistic or other-regarding virtues.<sup>6</sup> And there is reason to think generosity is not just about self-actualization: Aristotle explains, “It is highly characteristic of a generous man to go to excess in giving, so that he leaves too little for himself; for it is the nature of a generous man not to look to himself” (*NE* 4.1.1120b4-6).<sup>7</sup> What’s more, Aristotle is clear that the good he seeks is not that “which is sufficient for a solitary person, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is naturally political” (*NE* 1.7.1097b9-12).<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis on seeking others’ good is most apparent in Aristotle’s account of friendship, most fundamentally in his requirement that we love a friend “for his own sake” (*NE* 8.2). Textual evidence that seems to lend support to the conventional, altruistic interpretations of Aristotelian friendship includes Aristotle’s arguments that friendship consists more of loving than being loved (*NE* 8.8.1159a26) and his definition of friendliness in the *Rhetoric* as “wanting for someone what one thinks are good things for him, not what one thinks benefits oneself” (2.4.1380b).<sup>9</sup>

In short, Aristotle thinks happiness is the end, and throughout much of the *NE*, there is good reason to think that he means that the agent should treat his *own* good as his final aim, the end which guides and orders all his other pursuits. But the requirements of certain virtues and in particular, of friendship, are commonly taken to be altruistic, which would entail at least sometimes treating someone else’s good as our final aim. Does Aristotle vacillate between two different models of whose good, or whose happiness, is the aim? Many interpretations of his account of friendship imply as much. For example, Cooper maintains that friends come to act for the other person’s good, “independently of

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. David O. Brink, “Self-Love and Altruism,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14, no. 01 (1997): 126., which counts courage, with justice and friendship, as “essentially other-regarding”.

<sup>7</sup> Translation from Ross, with modification.

<sup>8</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Both a comparison of the definitions given in the *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and consideration of the different aims of these two works show that there is reason to be cautious about uncritically using the definitions of the *Rhetoric* as Aristotle’s proper philosophic definitions of terms.

consideration of their *own* welfare or pleasure.”<sup>10</sup> Kraut writes, “At times, we rightly give priority to the well-being of others, and accept less happiness for ourselves than we might have had.”<sup>11</sup> Vlastos argues, “What Aristotle is telling us is that to love another person is to wish for that person’s good for that person’s sake, doing whatever you can to make that wish come true.”<sup>12</sup> Others make a somewhat weaker claim, that treating another person’s happiness as an end in itself means that our self-love becomes “impartial” and that “one should love at least some others *equally* with oneself.”<sup>13</sup>

All of these interpretations attempt to reconcile two different perceived notions of the good by holding that the rational agent should pursue a mix of self-interested and other-focused ends. Jennifer Whiting is perhaps most explicit on this point.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* does not actually specify the agent’s own eudaimonia as the ultimate end of all her actions: it is compatible with what Aristotle says that an agent at least sometimes, perhaps often, takes the eudaimonia of others as the ultimate end for the sake of which she acts in the sense that she aims at their eudaimonia simply as such (and not as parts of her own).<sup>14</sup>

However attractive and commonsensical this view may be, it does not seem possible for Aristotle given the finality requirement of the good. At the start of the *NE*, Aristotle states that “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit is believed to aim at some good” (1.1.1094a1-3). For those who pursue values in a rational way, it is best to determine what this good is, so that “like archers who have a mark to aim at,” they will be “more likely to hit upon what is right” (*NE* 1.2.1094a24-25). This good, he thinks, is characterized first by its finality—by coming at the end of the means-ends chains that characterize all rational activity (*NE* 1.7.1097a35).

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<sup>10</sup> John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 323.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 86.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” in *Platonic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 276–304. Kraut similarly argues “when we look carefully, what we find his him saying is this: happiness is the ultimate end for the sake of which one should always act. That is quite different from the claim that *one’s own* happiness is the ultimate end of one’s actions.” (Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 145.)

<sup>14</sup> Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*,” 277.

If the virtuous agent sometimes pursues his own happiness and sometimes that of various others, this raises questions about whether there is a single final end. And if there is not such an end, this raises even more important questions about the principle or unifying end by which we are to combine our pursuit of these various final ends. Clearly this sort of ambiguity has the potential to undermine the practical value of Aristotle's ethical project. Aristotle holds that knowledge of the proper end is of the utmost importance for guiding one's life, and the rest of the *Ethics* endeavors to make the proper aim clear. If we actually have multiple aims, however, aims that can conflict, and which we are given no guidance on reconciling, Aristotle would have failed to offer the clear "target" at which we should aim, and by which we should guide our lives and pursuits. Given the stakes, why isn't Aristotle clearer on whose happiness is the aim? My goal, in this chapter, is to understand what Aristotle's eudaimonism entails, specifically with regard to whose happiness should be sought.

To avert any misunderstandings about the focus of my argument, I must emphasize at the outset that my focus is Aristotle's ethical theory, not his psychological one. I will only delve into the latter to the extent that it is necessary to clarify Aristotle's ethical views. The problem, the apparent tension with which I am concerned, is one within Aristotle's normative theory. However, what one takes Aristotle to be saying about human nature generally at the start of the *NE* is an important part of the interpretive framework for his ethical claims; e.g. if one takes him to be a psychological egoist in some sense, this would greatly constrain what one could reasonably take his ethical position to be. It is easy to see how such a view might be imputed to him from his statements at the start of the *NE*. After all, he claims both that (1) all human actions and pursuits ultimately aim at some good (*NE* 1.1.1094a1-2) and that (2) this good is happiness (*NE* 1.4.1095a20). Aristotle is also commonly thought to claim that (3) the happiness at which we aim is our own. However, I do not think Aristotle's claims about happiness in these passages amount to an argument for some form of psychological egoism or eudaimonism, but rather an argument about the nature of value pursuit for rational agents.

[Aristotle] begins with an assumption about a rational being's attitude toward his desires and goals, that a rational being compares the values of different actions and acts on the results of his evaluation; and he assumes that someone who acts

and chooses this way has reason to follow Aristotle's advice and work out a clear and detailed conception of his final good.<sup>15</sup>

So when Aristotle claims that all human pursuits aim at some good and this good is happiness, he is not advocating the view that people always naturally aim at their own advantage or inherently care more about benefitting themselves than others; rather he is simply explaining that a rational being pursues values in an integrated way, that he tries to make sense of his "life as a whole," as Annas writes.<sup>16</sup> Aristotle makes this point more explicitly in the *EE*, when he writes, "Everybody able to should set before him some object...on which he will keep his eyes fixed in all his conduct, since clearly it is a mark of much folly not to have one's life organized with regard to some end" (1.2.1214b6-14). A rational agent acts on principle and compares the value of different choices according to some kind of standard or final end.<sup>17</sup> As Irwin explains, "the final good or happiness involves the systematic satisfaction of someone's rational aims as a whole; it does not necessarily imply that everyone will or should care less about other people's interests than about his own."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, I do not think that Aristotle is committed to a form of psychological egoism or eudaimonism. Is he, though, committed to some form of ethical or rational eudaimonism? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider what eudaimonia is for Aristotle. In characterising this highest good, I shall endeavour not to put forth any kind of controversial interpretation. My aim at the outset is just the opposite: to present, in a straightforward way, the aspects of Aristotle's account of eudaimonia and friendship essential to laying the groundwork for the interpretive issues I raise in later chapters.

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<sup>15</sup> Terence Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty, Major Thinkers Series 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1995), 28–29.

<sup>17</sup> This sort of person is to be contrasted with those unable to act on principle because they are not (yet) fully actualized rational beings, e.g. those young in age or character, or more generally those who act on the basis of the passions. See, e.g. *NE* 1.3.1095a3-7.

<sup>18</sup> Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," 48.

I proceed as follows: I begin by looking briefly at *NE* 1, and then at the progression of argument in the *NE* generally to establish that Aristotle's primary and fundamental concern is to understand what the good is and how to produce it, not to determine who should get this good. This, I take it, is not an especially contentious point, though the importance of it, I will try to show, has been overlooked. I will then consider how we should understand the aim of the friendship books, given Aristotle's central concern in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I argue that we should take Aristotle at his word when he begins his discussion of friendship with the observation that friendship "is a virtue or implies virtue" (*NE* 8.1.1155a4). The friendship books help define the good first because they help define friendship and the sort of virtue characteristic of it; this makes the friendship books a fairly straightforward continuation of Aristotle's work to define the human good, since acting as a good friend, and all that this entails, turns out to be a distinctively human excellence we need to develop. These books also define the good by making clear the role of friendship in a flourishing human life.

In light of all of this, I will consider the question of whose life of excellent activity the virtuous agent should take as her final end. Though this is not Aristotle's question, it may seem valuable to attempt to answer it on Aristotle's behalf, if only to get a clearer picture of the good, in his account. Unfortunately, focusing on this question probably obscures the nature of the Aristotelian human good more than the answer to it clarifies things, in part because it is often taken to be equivalent to the question of whose interests should be served, and in part because this focus tends to lead to treating the question of who should benefit as part of Aristotle's moral standard. In short, Aristotle does not raise or answer this question because he does not use the consequences of particular actions as his standard for evaluation of the actions. I argue that treating who benefits from an action as some aspect of Aristotle's standard of moral evaluation is just one way of treating the consequences in a far more fundamental way than Aristotle's account does. The *NE* holds that the virtuous agent should aim at virtuous activity—and primarily, it would seem, at his own virtuous activity—but what defines virtuous activity is aiming at the fine (τὸ καλόν), not whose interest or benefit is sought or achieved.

## 1.1 Why say that the good is Aristotle's concern?

A difficulty in determining whose happiness is the aim, in Aristotle's account, is that Aristotle himself does not explicitly address this point. No direct questions about it arise in *NE* I, where he outlines his account of happiness; the only passage that seems to offer any detailed, explicit discussion of such an issue occurs very late in the *NE*, in 9.8, when Aristotle considers whether the good person should love himself most of all. Insufficient attention has been given to this omission on Aristotle's part; it is revealing and philosophically significant that the question of *whose* happiness is to be sought is not a guiding one for Aristotle. In fact, the question only arises after Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue is more or less complete, in *NE* 9.8. The emphasis and progression of Aristotle's arguments make it clear that we should think the beneficiary question to be relatively insignificant, and derivative, in Aristotle's ethics. Let us now turn to the progression of Aristotle's arguments about happiness in the *NE*.

### 1.1.1 Progression of Argument

The focus of Aristotle's investigation is clear from the start of the *NE*, when he states that "every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit is believed to aim at some good" and that because of this, it is correct to say that the good is "that at which all things aim" (1.1.1094a1-3). For those who pursue values in a rational way, it is best to determine what this good is, so that "like archers who have a mark to aim at," they will be "more likely to hit upon what is right" (*NE* 1.2.1094a24-25). Aristotle notes that most would say this good is eudaimonia (commonly translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing'),<sup>19</sup> and he considers and dismisses certain popular ideas of what exactly constitutes happiness: wealth, pleasure, etc.

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<sup>19</sup> I sometimes use Aristotle's own term, 'eudaimonia', to refer to his final good, and I also interchangeably use the translations 'flourishing', 'living well' and 'happiness'. I think the first two terms capture the active nature of the final good and that 'flourishing' makes it seem (somewhat) less a matter of subjective taste (which it is not for Aristotle). 'Happiness' has the advantage of capturing the natural emotional concomitant of this characteristic activity and sort of life. But it is necessary to keep in mind that Aristotle's flourishing or living well is not a state of mere material success that passes for flourishing in some contemporary contexts and that happiness is not merely a passing emotional state, nor something that can only be said of a person due to his own subjective report on his feelings at the time.



The first two chapters of Book 1 of the *NE* are devoted to establishing criteria that the good must meet, by considering first what kinds of ends are better than others, and then the relationship between means and ends. As I will show, the progression of argument throughout the first book is true to Aristotle's initial stated goal of determining what this good is; no attention is devoted to the question of how this good is to be distributed.

Aristotle makes his first suggestion as to how we are to discover just what this end is when he indicates that whatever the good is, it must be the object of the most authoritative science, politics. One question Aristotle raises, at this point, that seems related to the beneficiary issue, is whether the proper object of politics is the good of the individual or the state; I shall consider this brief passage (as well as Aristotle's comments, in 1.7, on the good being sufficient for a man as well as his friends and family) later. At this point, Aristotle does not concern himself with whose good, in particular, politics seeks, indicating only that "the good for man" (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθόν, 1.2.1094b7) is its object.

After briefly discussing the proper standards of exactness of knowledge for politics in 1.3, Aristotle returns to his inquiry into the good, asking what is "the highest of all goods achievable by action?" (1.4.1095a15). He observes that most people think happiness is this good, but that there are many different ideas of what, exactly, happiness is. This discussion is wholly focused on what the good is, with no attention given, even tacitly, to who should get this good. Even in the case of a good like pleasure, where such questions would seem natural since conflicts naturally arise between individuals who pursue such a good as their final aim, Aristotle is only concerned with evaluating pleasure as a candidate for the highest end, and he derides a life devoted to its pursuit as one "suitable for cattle." His later discussion of the need for external goods, in 1.8, is similar to his discussion of pleasure in that although one can easily envision cases in which being intent on such goods would bring about conflicts between individuals, and thus, we might expect ethics to help us referee between such claims, Aristotle does not inquire into who should receive such goods, or even indicate that this is an important issue to be discussed at some other point. He treats the idea of honour as the highest good in the same way, not raising concerns about what to do when and if men come into conflict pursuing it and

who should get the good in this case. His only concern regards why honour is not fit to be the highest good: that it is too superficial, that it depends more on he who grants it than upon the agent, that it is not proper to its possessor and is too easily taken from him due to no fault of his own, and that virtue is a more final end (1.5.1095b24-29). For each candidate for the highest good considered, Aristotle's concern is its fitness qua final good, not who should be the one to receive it, and not how to adjudicate claims between individuals seeking such goods; neither of these issues receives even passing attention or comment.

Even Aristotle's criticism of Plato's Form of the Good has this structure, with Aristotle detailing reasons that this idea of the good would be lacking, such as that a good predicated of all things is not an appropriate aim, since we are seeking a good that is achievable in action. He does not consider whether, say, non-philosophers could obtain this good, but this would be the sort of inquiry we might expect if Aristotle was focused on who should *receive* the good, rather than on identifying the nature of it.

Aristotle's single-minded focus on defining the good—not with allocating it—is also seen indirectly in his questions about the effects of the fortunes, virtue, and well-being of a person's friends, family and descendents on that person's own happiness. Aristotle's inquiry does not veer into asking what responsibilities one has to others as part of a community, nor what one's friends and family owe, in terms of guaranteeing one's happiness going forward. Rather, he is concerned with answering whether these things really are part of one's own good, and if so, in what way and to what extent.

Finally, Aristotle concludes Book 1 with a brief indication of how he will proceed to fill in the outline of the good he has just presented, and his concluding remarks maintain the focus on identifying the good: since happiness is activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue, he will consider the nature of virtue. And since the virtue with which he is concerned is virtue of the soul, the student of politics must know something about the soul. Virtue is distinguished into types, intellectual and moral, based on the divisions of the soul. Intellectual virtue is possible to the rational part, strictly speaking, and moral virtue to the part that is rational in that it responds to reasons. Even this outline is true to

the *telos* of Aristotle's investigation. Aristotle intends to make our target, the good, clearer to us, by better defining its nature and different aspects. There is no intimation that he is concerned with presenting or developing any kind of argument about who should get the good or whatever beneficial products may result from such activity.

The *NE* proceeds according to this outline, and thus, is true to the aim Aristotle sets out at the start of the book: to determine what the human good is. Briefly, Aristotle begins by describing virtue generally (*NE* 2), establishes the importance of choice and deliberation to virtuous activity and character (*NE* 3.1-3.5), discusses specific virtues (and vices) of character (*NE* 3.6-4.9) including justice (*NE* 5), discusses intellectual virtues (*NE* 6), and gives an account of some common ways we fall short of virtue when he discusses continence, incontinence and vice (*NE* 7). This is, through and through, a discussion of what the good is—a discussion that is faithful to his original outline of his aims and that maintains his focus on defining the good, with no discussion devoted to questions about how the good is to be divided up and distributed.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle proceeds according to his initial outline, filling in details of it, through at least Book 7 of the *NE*.

### 1.1.2 Friendship

How are we to understand Aristotle's turn from this basically straightforward progression of argument, according to the points he outlined at the start of the *NE*, to a lengthy discussion of friendship? Is this the point at which Aristotle realizes the need to discuss

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<sup>20</sup> Justice, like courage, is often taken to be a virtue focused on benefitting others. Aristotle seems, at least at one point, to hold to this view, e.g. "[J]ustice, alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good'" (*NE* 5.1. 1130a3-4). Here Aristotle is alluding to Thrasymachus' claim in Plato, *Republic* 343c—as well as to the view of justice held by the many—that justice is good for other people, but harmful to the just person himself. As Irwin notes, "Aristotle accepts the first part of Thrasymachus' claim, but not the second part (though he does not argue against it here)" (Terence Irwin, "Introduction and Notes," in *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, 2nd ed. (Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 229.) Much of Aristotle's account of justice is devoted to discussing how to ensure that everyone (including the virtuous agent) receives his fair share in different kinds of relationships and in exchanges with others. E.g., at *NE* 5.1.1130a7-9, Aristotle writes, "The worst person, therefore, is the one who exercises his vice toward himself and his friends as well [as toward others]. And the best person is not the one who exercises virtue [only] toward himself, but the one who [also] exercises it in relation to another, since this is a difficult task."

the issue of the proper beneficiary of all this virtuous activity?<sup>21</sup> And is this really the first point at which Aristotle indicates any value of other-concern in his account? I do not think that there is any such divide between the focus of the friendship books and the rest of the *NE*.

How do books 8 and 9, on friendship, fit into Aristotle's project of defining the good? These books, I hold, contribute to this project in two ways: they do so first and primarily by defining friendship and the sort of virtue characteristic of it, and second by showing the importance of friendship to flourishing human life (as well as indicating why it is that only good people are able to enjoy the highest goods of friendship).<sup>22</sup> The former makes the friendship books a fairly straightforward continuation of Aristotle's work to define the human good, since acting as a good friend, and all that this entails, turns out to be a distinctively human excellence we need to develop. The latter gives an account of why we should think that this sort of activity is part of the flourishing life Aristotle has been characterizing.

First, I think we should take Aristotle at his word when he begins his discussion of friendship with the observation that friendship "is a virtue or implies virtue" (*NE* 8.1.1155a4), and when he characterizes friendship as both necessary with a view toward living and fine (*NE* 8.1.1155a29). Aristotle sees being a good friend as a kind of virtue and takes it to be a sign of good character that one has good friendships. He goes so far as to note that, "We think it is the same people that are good men and are friends" (*NE* 8.1.1155a31). This idea of friendship as virtue is borne out by two broad similarities between Aristotle's accounts of virtue and of friendship. Instances of the first sort of

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<sup>21</sup> The idea that Aristotle's division of friendship into types is fundamentally based on who should benefit, self or other, is a variation on this idea. In this interpretation, the lesser two types of friendship are, at best, morally suspect, while virtue-friendship is disinterested and thus, the only real kind of friendship. I will discuss this view in the next chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Schollmeier makes somewhat similar arguments as to why we should think friendship is part of a flourishing life, but instead argues that virtue is involved only in the case of character-friendship, and that the happiness which friendship serves is the friend's happiness and not the agent's. I argue, however, that properly acting as a friend is virtuous in all types of friendship, and that Aristotle is concerned to show how friendship contributes to the agent's own happiness, though he clearly thinks that friendship, especially of the best sort, contributes to both parties being able to live well and pleasantly. See Paul Schollmeier, *Other Selves: Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 48–49.

similarity are found between Aristotle's general remarks about virtue, in *NE* 2, and his views on friendship. The second sort of similarity is found in the striking similarities in the ways that Aristotle discusses particular moral virtues and friendship.

The strong parallels between virtue and friendship are suggested by Aristotle's comments at the start of the friendship books, noted above, and again at the start of Aristotle's own positive account of friendship. At the end of 8.1, Aristotle indicates that he will set aside questions regarding attraction in a physical sense, such as whether like attracts like, and will, from this point on, consider only the questions that "belong to the present inquiry...those which are human and involve character and feeling" (8.1.1155b8-10). With this, Aristotle seems to be indicating that his account of friendship will focus on questions regarding moral virtue. Moral virtues, as contrasted with natural virtues, which we share with the animals, are specific forms of chosen, deliberately cultivated human excellence. Moral virtues, of course, also involve character and have to do with feeling. Aristotle gives the genus of virtues as "states of character" in 2.6. It is telling that Aristotle also holds friendship as akin to a state of character, as contrasted with love, which is a feeling (*NE* 8.5.1157b29). Moral virtue, like friendship, involves feelings, for the excellent person must hit the mean regarding his passions as well as his actions. Virtue requires taking pleasure in the right sort of actions. It seems, then, that Aristotle is indicating that he views his account of friendship as a kind of continuing discussion about virtue—about what human excellence requires in the personal, social realm.<sup>23</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Aristotle mentions, in his general account of virtue, that there are generally "three objects of choice and three of avoidance: the noble, the advantageous and the pleasant and their contraries, the base, the injurious, the painful, and about all these the good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong" (3.3.1104b30-33). These three objects of choice, of course, are also the three objects we pursue in

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle's repeated comparisons between justice and friendship also support this view. See, e.g., 8.11155a27 (where friendship is labeled "the truest form of justice"), 8.7 (where Aristotle notes that equality characterizes both justice and friendship, but different types of equality), 8.11.1161b11 (where Aristotle notes that each constitution involves friendship just in so far as it involves justice, and 8.12.1162a30-34 (where Aristotle says that asking how people should conduct themselves toward friends is "the same as asking how they are to conduct their lives justly").

friendships. Knowing how to seek out these objects of choice is definitive of a good man, and obviously, this entails knowing how to properly pursue these goods in the realm of human relationships, presumably in each type of friendship, as well as in virtue friendship, which provides all three objects of choice.

Finally, Aristotle's comments on how difficult it is to "hit the mark" with regard to virtue point to another similarity between his general discussion of virtue and his account of friendship. In aiming at virtue, Aristotle thinks, "it is possible to fail in many ways, while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult – to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult)" (2.6.1106b28-33). This is a more general statement than Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, and it is because of this difficulty that disambiguating between the virtue and like states that approach it takes up much of Aristotle's accounts of particular virtues. It is important to note that Aristotle does this not only to determine the mean for each virtue and distinguish it from the two extremes or vices, but also to make a number of other kinds of distinctions between virtue and states mistaken for it. Aristotle uses a similar approach in the friendship books. In both cases, much of Aristotle's effort is focused on distinguishing the desired state from states that fall short in some way, and on making clear what the nature of the difference is. By this means, Aristotle both offers practical guidance on how to hit the target sought—the virtue under discussion or friendship—and helps conceptually disambiguate the aim (virtue or friendship) from similar states often mistaken for it. Thus, he helps the would-be *eudaimōn* avoid certain common errors that would prevent him from knowing and aiming at the right mark.

Let us consider a few types of disambiguation that mark both Aristotle's discussions both of particular moral virtues and of friendship. First and most basically, Aristotle takes pains to make the proper range and activities of the virtue clear. He begins his discussion of courage, for example, by stating that courage has to do with feelings of fear and confidence, but qualifying, "Now we fear all evils, e.g. disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death, but the brave man is not thought to be concerned with all these" (*NE* 3.6.1115a10-12), and continuing that the brave man is concerned with the greatest of these, and the noblest (3.6.1115a25-30). "Properly, then, he will be called brave who is

fearless in face of noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death, and the emergencies of war are in the highest degree of this kind” (*NE* 3.6.1115a33-34). Even when he feels some fear, he will face things “as he ought, and as reason directs, for the sake of the fine” (3.6.1115b12-13).<sup>24</sup> In short, he will fear what he ought and as he ought. This basic disambiguation complete, Aristotle makes finer distinctions, considering how the brave man will face even things terrible beyond human strength, and the differences between courage, on the one hand, and rashness, on the other.

The early sections of Aristotle’s own discussion of friendship (particularly 8.2 and 8.3) seem to perform a similar function in setting out the range of things that count as friendship. He begins by considering the objects of love, and then the basic requirements for a relationship to be considered a friendship. Aristotle writes, “The kinds of friendship may perhaps be cleared up if we first come to know the object of love. For not everything seems to be loved, but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant or useful” (*NE* 8.2.1155b16-19). He further clarifies that each person will love the objects that *appear* this way to him. Aristotle then observes that not all instances of the aforementioned kinds of love count as friendship. First, the love must be mutual and involve wishing well for the other; thus, love for inanimate objects is ruled out as such. Aristotle proceeds with finer distinctions, noting that we must wish the friend well for his own sake, not wishing them well as the wine aficionado might equivocally be said to wish well to the wine, wishing it well only in the sense that he hopes it keeps until he may drink it (*NE* 8.2.1155b29-31). Finally, the goodwill and wishing well must be recognized by both parties.

This basic setting out the range of the virtue, then, is one similarity between Aristotle’s accounts of virtue and of friendship. Another noteworthy similarity is in how Aristotle also goes into the detail of different axes along which a person can err. For example, in his discussion of generosity, Aristotle indicates that one can err in either the giving or taking of wealth; prodigality is an error in the former and meanness in the latter (*NE* 4.1.1121a10-15). Similarly, in the case of temper, one can go wrong in terms of how

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<sup>24</sup> Translation by author.

quick he is to anger (whether he is hot-tempered), how long he holds onto his anger and under what conditions (whether he holds a grudge), and what kinds of things anger him (whether he is irritable, *NE* 4.4.1126a14-27).

Aristotle proceeds in a similar way in indicating ways that we can go wrong as friends. Equality is characteristic of friendship, Aristotle notes,<sup>25</sup> and one can go wrong in a variety of ways in failing to achieve this in his friendships. In the case of friendship between equals (*NE* 8.7.1158b20-21), and most commonly in a utility-friendship, one can go wrong in weighing the proper return, typically by being uncertain as to whether the benefit accruing to the recipient or the good done by the benefactor is the proper measure. Similar errors are possible in friendships between unequals, and in these sorts of relationships, one can also go wrong in seeking the same thing he gave the other in return. E.g., it would be ridiculous if a parent expected a child to confer, in return, the same extent and type of benefits he received from his parents (*NE* 8.7.1158b20-21). Often a friendship between unequals is equalized in some way by the greater love and admiration the lesser person has for the better, but such equalization is impossible if one misleads a friend about the basis for the friendship, e.g. if one pretends to admire someone's character when he really loves him for the sake of pleasure or utility.<sup>26</sup> So this is another sort of mistake to avoid. One must both understand the nature of what he is responding to in the other person and not mislead his friend in this regard. In short, one can err both in terms of knowing what he owes his friend and in terms of understanding the proper sort of exchange of goods that characterize the friendship. To be a good friend, then, one must be correct about both the measure and currency of the exchange, so to speak.

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle states this at *NE* 8.7.1158b28, and it is also emphasized repeatedly in Aristotle's discussion of virtue-friendship, which is most perfect in part because it is most equal: Aristotle notes that "each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives, which is what ought to happen between friends" (*NE* 8.4.1156b33-35).

<sup>26</sup> Some examples of this would be pretending romantic love in the case of mere affection and physical attraction, pretending to have a deeper personal connection with someone in order to garner favors from them, etc.



Another way that Aristotle helps to hone in on the nature of different virtues is to consider whether states similar to the virtue are in fact instances of it. He weighs whether states called by the same name are the virtue, compares other similar states to the virtue, and in some cases, he indicates that there are actually a few specific different types or aspects of the virtue. All of these things help make the true limits of the virtue more clear so that his reader is more likely to aim at the right state, and Aristotle does all of these things, for the same reasons, in the case of friendship. In most cases, Aristotle determines that the similar states approximate but fail to achieve the virtue; this is to be expected given the relatively narrow limit of excellence, and the much broader range of ways in which error is possible.

This comparing of relatives is perhaps most evident in Aristotle's discussion of courage, where he ends up with a kind of taxonomy of different states organized by how closely each approximates the virtue. He discusses five states of character commonly confused with courage, all of which fall short in varying degrees: the courage of the citizen-soldier (who acts out of fear of disgrace), experience with regard to particular facts (which makes experienced soldiers stand fast when others panic from simple uncertainty about what is happening), passion (of the sort animals have when defending their young), sanguine temperament, and ignorance of the extent of the danger. All of this serves the purpose of preventing near relatives from being confused with the virtue proper. Aristotle seems to do something similar toward the end of his discussion of friendship, when he mentions a few features of friendship commonly mistaken for friendship itself, such as goodwill (*NE* 9.5) and concord (*NE* 9.6).

In one case there are different varieties of the virtue that Aristotle details, not just near relatives to the virtue. Although Aristotle discusses different aspects of some virtues,<sup>27</sup> justice is the only virtue he divides into types as he does friendship. Aristotle distinguishes between universal and particular justice. The former has to do with virtue

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., his discussion of magnificence in 4.2. The most obvious, paradigmatic examples of this virtue are expenditures on great public works and for anything divine – temples, a chorus, a warship or feat for the city, etc. However, it also requires spending well on things like entertaining foreign guests, and on private expenses (such as weddings) and on a fitting house for oneself.

generally and the later is a specific virtue of character. He further subdivides particular justice into two types, distributional and rectificatory justice.

In the case of friendship, Aristotle discusses three types of friendship, based on the three objects of love: friendship based on utility, pleasure and character. He also explains that there are equal and unequal friendships of each of these three kinds, and discusses different means of attaining some kind of equality of exchange in friendships where the friends are not equals.

In short, there is a great deal of similarity between how Aristotle guides his discussions of the virtues and his discussion of friendship. In addition, it is easier to make sense of the progression of the discussion in the friendship chapters if we recognize these similarities. Aristotle takes up a very diverse and not clearly unified list of questions in his books on friendship. Questions range from the basis and types of friendship to the existence of friendships under different constitutions. However, these inquiries are more of a piece than they seem at first glance if one recognizes that Aristotle is doing something similar here to what he does in his discussions of moral virtues: he is showing different ways we can go wrong in aiming at the virtue—at friendship—and different sorts of friendship that approach, to varying degrees, the complete, perfect form of friendship. What do these similarities add up to? They seem to offer evidence that Aristotle considers being a good friend to be a type of virtue.

Alternately, let us take a weaker reading of the evidence. Perhaps Aristotle sees an analogy between friendship and virtues, without going so far as to classify friendship itself as a proper virtue. Even so, it is clear that Aristotle's account of friendship is directing the would-be *eudaimōn*'s attention to the kinds of considerations he must weigh if he is to have good friendships—from understanding the differences in what friends owe each other in different kinds of relationships<sup>28</sup>, to knowing what is required to build

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<sup>28</sup>See, e.g. *NE* 8.6.1158a10-13, 8.7.1158b20-29, 8.7.1158b32-33, 8.8.1159a33-b2, 8.8.1159b12-19, 8.9.1160a1-9, 8.13.1162b3-4, 8.13.1163a1-23, 8.14.1163b1-4, 8.14.1163b12-17, 9.1.1163b32-1164a1, etc.

a friendship,<sup>29</sup> to knowing when we must let go of a friendship.<sup>30</sup> Aristotle is giving practical guidance on how to achieve something that, as he has emphasized, is both necessary and fine for human beings, so it is clear, even on this weaker interpretation, that Aristotle's friendship books are meant to further fill out his account of what the good is, and not as an aside to correct against whatever one might think the shortcomings of the rest of the *Ethics* to be.

A final indication that the friendship books should be read as a continuation of Aristotle's project of defining the good is his concern with showing the importance of friendship to flourishing human life. Aristotle opens his discussion of friendship by giving an account of why friendship is necessary to people at all stages of life and in all situations and closes by endorsing the common idea that friendship is not only necessary but also fine. For the most part, Aristotle seems to take this as common knowledge and something obvious enough not to require elaborate justification, and he does not often return to this general point after his opening remarks.

Aristotle returns to this point in detail only to give an account of why friendship is valuable to good people in particular. While it is not especially difficult to see why most people find friendship useful and pleasant, Aristotle is concerned with accounting for the value of friendship in an excellent life, for the part friendship plays in eudaimonia. Aristotle takes up this question in *NE* 9.9, after having discussed why it is that self-love is good and praiseworthy only for those people who know what the good is and guide their lives by this correct standard. The reason the question arises at this point is that Aristotle has made it clear that that at which good people aim, in all things, is the fine. However, most people, having the wrong conception of the good, can project only an instrumental value in friendship. "The many think that it is the useful people who are friends," Aristotle explains (*NE* 9.9.1169b24-25),<sup>31</sup> and thus, they do not understand how such a relationship can involve aiming at the fine.

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<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., *NE* 8.3.1156b25-33, 8.5.1157b5-12, 8.8.1159b5-8, and *EE* 1237b13-20

<sup>30</sup> All of *NE* 9.3 is devoted to this question.

<sup>31</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

Aristotle first reminds us again that living with others is a natural good for human beings, given our social nature, and observes that since the good person has all the other natural goods, he should not be alone, and “clearly it is better to spend his days with decent friends than with strangers of just any character” (*NE* 9.9.1169b21-22).<sup>32</sup> Then Aristotle refers back to his definition of happiness to give a richer account of why it is that virtuous people need friends. Happiness is a kind of activity, not a static possession, Aristotle reminds us. Being happy consists in living and being active, and the activity of the good person is excellent. But it is difficult to be continuously active by oneself, Aristotle observes. A friend, as another self, makes continuous activity easier by embodying and reflecting both friends’ shared understanding of virtue and the good life. Being conscious of oneself as good makes existence desirable, but it is difficult to stand back, observe, and be objectively conscious of oneself as good in the way that one can readily be conscious of a friend’s virtue or that a friend can be conscious of and reflect his. Because the friend both knows his friend well and embodies the same virtues, he is “another self,” but because the friend is another, he allows his friend to experience himself. For the virtuous man, such an experience is an experience of himself as good, and it is this experience that makes life and existence itself desirable. The virtuous person sees in his friend someone who knows him well and is a shining example of the kind of person he is and wants to continue to be. That such a person as his friend chooses to spend much of his life with the virtuous person gives this person a certain experience of himself and because he is good, this experience of self is pleasurable. Similarly, the virtuous person sees how his friend responds to him, and generally, how his friend’s admiration reflects the pride he feels in himself. In this way, the friendship of good people who are alike in virtue is a friendship that aims at the fine—at honouring, rewarding and delighting in the fine, as it is particularly embodied in each person.

It seems that good people not only need friends, but also are able to gain something much richer from friendship than those who, due to not being morally excellent people, are unable to have complete friendships. Aristotle emphasizes this idea at length at two

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<sup>32</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

points in *NE* 9. After describing why he thinks that the features of friendship are in some sense derived from our “friendship” with ourselves, Aristotle compares the friendship of good people and base people at length.

The many, base though they are, also appear to have those features [of friendship in relation to themselves]. But perhaps they share in them only insofar as they approve of themselves and suppose they are decent. For no one who is utterly base and unscrupulous either has these features or appears to have them... They are at odds with themselves... For they do not choose things that seem to be good for them, but instead choose pleasant things that are actually harmful; and cowardice or laziness cause others to shrink from doing what they think best for themselves. And those who have done many terrible actions hate and shun life because of their vice, and destroy themselves... These people have nothing lovable about them, and so have no friendly feelings toward themselves. Hence such a person[’s]...soul is in conflict...and so each part pulls in a different direction, as though they were tearing him apart... Hence the base person appears not to have a friendly attitude even toward himself, because he has nothing lovable about him. If this state is utterly miserable, everyone should earnestly shun vice and try to be decent, for that is how someone will have a friendly relation to himself and will become a friend to another. (*NE* 9.4.1166b3-29)<sup>33</sup>

Aristotle not only goes into this point at length here, he also concludes his discussion of friendship with similar remarks, explaining why the friendship of base people ends up being vicious and self-destructive, as such people spend time together and come to reflect and emulate each other. He contrasts the friendship of good people, writing, “But the friendship of decent people is decent, and increases the more often they meet. And they seem to become still better from their activities and their mutual correction. For each molds the other in what they approve of, whence the saying, '[You will learn] Noble deeds from noble men.’” (*NE* 9.12.1172a11-14)<sup>34</sup>

To sum up, Aristotle’s goal, in the friendship books no less than in the previous books of the *Ethics*, is to give an account of the nature of the good and an excellently-lived human life. Aristotle’s discussion of friendship is of a piece with this endeavor in part simply because knowing how to be a good friend is a virtue, or akin to a virtue. Just as we can make mistakes about what the highest good is, we can also mistake lesser types of

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<sup>33</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

friendship for the best, or not understand what the proper aim is in the best sorts of relationships. It is for these sorts of reasons that Aristotle spends so much time comparing the different kinds of friendship and disambiguating things similar to friendship from friendship itself. When Aristotle is not offering advice on how to hit the target, so to speak, in the case of friendship, he is giving an account of how friendship fits into and is part of a complete, flourishing life. Friendship is a natural pleasure for human beings, as we are inherently social creatures, but to the extent that we are not virtuous people, and do not know how to treat others, we miss out on this essential part of human life, and thus, fall short of *eudaimonia*. We fall short of human excellence because we miss out on the moral training and inspiration that can only be gained from spending time with friends, and we lose one of the richest rewards for being good human beings. If explaining friendship as a virtue and showing its importance in a rich, well-lived human life are the ends toward which Aristotle's discussion of friendship is directed, it is clear that the friendship books, no less than the books on moral virtue, are aimed at defining the human good.

There is no sharp divide between the friendship books and the previous books of the *NE*, then. The books on moral and intellectual virtue advise us on cultivating excellences that enable us to excel at our particular endeavors, to have a good relationship with ourselves, and at the same time, to become the kinds of people who are best able to participate in excellent and pleasant human relationships. The friendship books simply delve more into the specifics of what is required for a good person to act as a good friend. Although other-concern is not the focus of the earlier books, cultivating our own character is necessary to have a warm personal regard for others: the person who is ungenerous, boorish in his humor, obsequious, self-abnegating, etc., will find all of these things serious impediments to caring for and having good relationships with others. And although relationships with others is the focus of the friendship books, Aristotle is also clearly advising the would-be *eudaimōn* on how to act excellently in this particular social context. In short, for Aristotle, becoming an excellent person serves one well in his own pursuits, narrowly construed, as well as in his relationships with others. The focus on the *NE* is on characterizing this good, so that the serious student of ethics can aim at it, in all the endeavours important to human life.

## 1.2 Whose Good Life?

I have argued that the *NE* does not seriously raise the question of who should benefit from virtuous actions. However, if we are to have a clear picture of the target at which we are to aim, according to Aristotle's account, it would seem helpful to know whose happiness—whose life of virtuous activity—our actions should be directed toward. Vaguely concluding that Aristotle means “that ultimately we are and should be aiming at *someone's* happiness, whether our own or another's”,<sup>35</sup> hardly seems clear enough to serve as an integrating principle for all our actions, even if combined with the account of human virtue Aristotle offers.

I agree that it is necessary to know whose life the virtuous agent should be acting to guide, and below I shall briefly indicate a few reasons to think that Aristotle assumes each should aim first and most fundamentally at his own virtuous activity. I will then distinguish this claim from one with which it is commonly conflated: the idea that one should aim for his own benefit as such. The consequences of our virtuous activity, such as whose interests are served, are just that: consequences and not the standard by which the moral worth of our actions should be evaluated. The standard is the fine (τὸ καλόν). I will conclude by taking up a few passages commonly but erroneously taken to show Aristotle as either self-centered or altruist, and will present what I think is a better interpretation of these passages is, an interpretation consistent with Aristotle's actual standard for moral evaluation.

Before weighing the question of whose happiness is the aim, in Aristotle's account, I would like to dismiss one kind of answer out of hand: that the happiness of the community, considered as single entity, is the aim. As Broadie points out, “the good, so far as ethics is concerned, is happiness, and [aside from God] happiness can be ascribed only to human individuals.”<sup>36</sup> Broadie notes that the closest Aristotle comes to allowing that the polis can be reckoned happy is at *Pol.* 1264b15-21, but even here, it can only be

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<sup>35</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 145.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Broadie, *Ethics With Aristotle* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), 16.

(loosely speaking) considered happy if its citizens are. If happiness cannot belong to a community as an entity, whose happiness is sought?

Aristotle's idea that the highest good is something that, as much as possible, is up to us is one reason to think that the happiness, the life of virtuous activity, at which the virtuous agent aims should be his own. Another is that throughout the *NE*, the sphere of activity is dictated by the agent's own (properly held) values, and by the natural limits of his life and on the scope of his virtuous activity.

The first book of the *Ethics*, at least, is commonly thought to be concerned with the agent's own eudaimonia,<sup>37</sup> and it is not difficult to see why. It is clear that the agent's eudaimonia is what should regulate his practical reasoning,<sup>38</sup> and Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes that the good is the sort of thing that, as much as possible, is up to us.<sup>39</sup> Aristotle's introduction to the self-sufficiency criterion in 1.7 indicates that he had been talking about the agent's own happiness all along (though his happiness requires family and friends, and the well-being thereof).<sup>40</sup> Aristotle specifies that the good must be achievable in life, such that the fate of friends or family after one's death does not substantially alter it (1.10 and 1.11). And he adds "in a complete life" to his definition of eudaimonia (*NE* 1.7.1098a18), which would seem to imply that each person is aiming at his *own* complete life of excellent activity.

In my view, Aristotle implicitly but consistently takes the rational agent's own happiness to be the final aim, throughout the *Ethics* and not just in the first book. First, Aristotle never rejects the idea, implicit in his outline of the final good, that each is aiming first to guide and live his own life properly. Second, the agent's own values, including the people with whom he shares his life, both set the limits of what is to be included in his

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<sup>37</sup> See, e.g. Ross, 238; Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 125.; Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 144.

<sup>38</sup> Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 125.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 1.5 and 1.9.

<sup>40</sup> Of course, Aristotle also adds, at this point, that the good must suffice not merely to ensure a solitary existence for a person, but must suffice for the sort of being he is – a social being – and thus, must be enough to allow for him to have a flourishing life with family, friends, etc. But even here, he sets a limit on this based on what the agent himself needs for a good life.



own eudaimonia, and determine the proper application and scope of his virtuous activity.<sup>41</sup> For example, when Aristotle discusses whether others' fates should be said to affect a person's happiness even after he is dead, he only entertains the idea of whether the fortunes of descendants and friends (*NE* 1.11.1101a19) might affect his the final word on his happiness; the fuller extent of intimates' value and ties to us are what make it plausible, on the face of it, that their fate might affect our own happiness, even after death.<sup>42</sup>

The discussions of both courage and mild-temperedness also show that the agent's own eudaimonia is the aim, and reference to each person's values helps determine what actions are fitting. For example, Aristotle seems to think courage is most valuable, and most fine, in defending one's own city (*NE* 3.8.1116b15-20). He explains,

It is quite true that, as they say, the excellent person labors for his friends and for his native country, and will die for them if he must... [The excellent person] will choose intense pleasure for a short time over slight pleasure for a long time; a year of living finely over many years of undistinguished life; and a single fine and great action over many small actions. This is presumably true of one who dies for others; he does indeed choose something great and fine for himself. (*NE* 9.8.1169a19-28)<sup>43</sup>

What is noteworthy for my position is that the fine, in regards to courage, is properly given in the service of what is most valuable to the agent, and most central to his life: to his friends and his country. This seems a good indication that it is the agent's own life he is guiding; he is not seeking universal justice, or aimed at preventing slights against anyone and everyone, but against his own family and friends, associates, and

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<sup>41</sup> This claim is to be distinguished from the idea that the agent's values or desires set the standard for virtue, however; I will set out this distinction more clearly below.

<sup>42</sup> My point here is similar to the one Kraut makes when he observes, "But I am not taking Aristotle to be saying that the mere fact that an action would benefit some person or other (no matter whom) provides a reason for action. He thinks that the individuals whose well-being one should promote for their sake must have some special connection with oneself (parents, siblings, fellow citizens, and so on); or they must have something special to offer oneself (they are virtuous individuals whom one needs for one's own happiness)." (Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 139.)

<sup>43</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

countrymen.<sup>44</sup> Of course, he aims at their well-being in doing so; he does so to the extent that they share in his life, and their well-being is part of his own.

The same seems to be true in the case of anger, which Aristotle thinks should properly be felt in response to slights to oneself, and to friends and family. Aristotle writes that a deficiency in feeling anger seems to indicate a kind of insensibility, and the problem with this is that such a person “does not seem to be the sort to defend himself” (*NE* 4.5.1126a7), and that “to endure being insulted and overlook insult to one’s family and friends is slavish” (*NE* 4.5.1126a8). Aristotle’s criteria for anger, that we be “angry at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way and at the right time, and for the right length of time” (*NE* 4.5.1126a32-34), also seem to imply that greater anger on behalf of intimates who have been wronged is called for; the value of anger is to defend oneself and one’s honour, and that of friends and family, presumably to the extent of our intimacy and association with them. As Aristotle later notes, “It is not fitting to have the same care for intimates and for strangers” (4.6.1126b27).

That one’s own eudaimonia is the aim and purpose of the virtuous agent does not mean that he aims for his own benefit as such, however. One natural consequence of excellent human activity, especially since we naturally live in society with others, is that such activity tends to be beneficial to human beings—to ourselves, or others, or both. However, this consequence is just that: a consequence and neither the aim of our actions nor the standard by which the moral worth of our actions should be evaluated. To treat whose interest is served as focal point of Aristotle’s investigation and part of his standard of virtue is a mistake. It does not follow, from Aristotle’s idea that each person should aim at a flourishing life for himself, that self-interest is the integrating principle and *telos*

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<sup>44</sup> This is not because the virtuous agent would be unable to make moral judgments about the remotest Mysian, or against, say, cultural practices of other societies. The latter, in particular, Aristotle clearly does not hesitate to do. The aim of ethics for Aristotle is the practical, however, and what is achievable in action, and judgments about such things are only of indirect value in the realm of actions possible to the virtuous person. E.g. a statesman would do well, as Aristotle did, to study the laws and constitutions of other cities in order to know how to better arrange things in his own, but he would not study them with an eye to making a more just society for these other cities, for example.

of Aristotelian ethics; whose interests are served is not part of the standard by which virtuous activity is evaluated, in Aristotle's account.

The standard, of course, is the fine (τὸ καλόν). It is true that Aristotle thinks that aiming at the fine does, on principle, tend to lead to what's best for the agent. But it is beneficial because it is καλόν, not vice versa. We do not determine what is to be called καλόν by what benefits us (or by what benefits others, as a few commentators have argued<sup>45</sup>), but by what is fitting.

Kelly Rogers gives what I regard as a definitive response to the idea that καλόν should be understood in terms of benefit, either to oneself or to others.<sup>46</sup> As Rogers observes, while the *Rhetoric* 1.9 seems to offer reason to think we should understand καλόν as serving other's interests, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* at times seems to offer reason to understand it as serving one's own, either interpretation of καλόν in terms of whose interests are served leaves great portions of the text unexplained.<sup>47</sup> Many things that Aristotle characterizes as fine and praiseworthy, even in the same chapter of the *Rhetoric* where he seems to equate the fine with sacrificing for others, have nothing to do with others' benefit, e.g. the distinctive characters of particular peoples and having been the only or the first to have done something significant (*Rhet.* 1368a10-11). Both the *EE* and the *NE* similarly offer examples of the actions that are fine but have no connection to other people or their welfare: enduring great personal misfortune with dignity (*NE* 1.10.1100b30-33), bravely facing dangerous situations and emergencies that may involve death (*NE* 3.6.1115a29-34), and contemplating god (*EE* 1249b16-19).

There are also examples that make it clear that not all fine actions, – not all actions aiming at the agent's own eudaimonia, – will necessarily benefit him, at least in any conventional sense. Describing courage, Aristotle writes,

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<sup>45</sup> See, e.g. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight* (Oxford University Press, 1983). and Arthur Madigan, "Eth. Nic. 9.8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism?," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. J.P. Anton and A. Preus (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 73–94.

<sup>46</sup> Kelly Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν," *Ancient Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (1993): 355–371.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

Death and wounds will be painful to the brave man and against his will, but he will face them because it is noble to do so or because it is base not to do so. And the more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest goods, and this is painful. (NE 3.9.1117b3-14)

Finally, the fact that fine actions, according to Aristotle, commonly benefit self and others is another indication that we cannot make sense of the fine in terms of who benefits. “When everyone strains to achieve what is fine and concentrates on the finest actions,” Aristotle writes, “everything that is right will be done for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue” (NE 9.8.1169a8-12).<sup>48</sup> As Rogers notes,

To appeal to this type of remark for information about the nature of the *καλόν*... is to confuse the consequences of *καλόν* action with both its prerequisites and object. The fact that *καλά* benefit others, as Aristotle explicitly thinks they do, is a question of their outcome. To say that an action has consequence x, however, is neither to give an account of the action (i.e., it is not to say that what makes the action *καλόν* is its promotion of the common good) nor is to say that x is the action’s object (i.e., that in choosing to perform it, the agent is concerned with the common good).<sup>49</sup>

Treating who benefits from an action as some aspect of Aristotle’s standard of moral evaluation is just one way of treating the consequences in a far more fundamental way than Aristotle’s account does. Analogously, though it is courageous to stand firm in battle, and not to flee, standing firm is not what it is to be courageous. This is a manifestation or result of courage, which is “a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence” (NE 3.6.1115a7).<sup>50</sup> We should similarly understand Aristotle’s association of self-regarding virtue with beneficial results to others. Such benefits are a common outcome or result of virtue, but virtue does not consist in this result. This is not to say that Aristotle is heedless of the consequences, or that he does not consult them in any way.

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<sup>48</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 364–365.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 367.

But he does not consult them in any direct way, and they are not the standard for judging right actions.

This mistaken conflation of a consequence or manifestation of virtue with its essence is seen in the interpretation of many passages commonly cited in support of the claim either that Aristotle's ethics are self-interested or that they are altruistic. A closer examination of such passages reveals that they cannot properly be understood in this way. Aristotle's comments on pride are often taken to show that serving one's own self-interest is the aim of the Aristotelian moral agent. E.g. Aristotle writes, "The proud man, since he deserves most, must be good in the highest degree, for the better man always deserves more, and the best man most" (*NE* 4.3.1123b27-30). Aristotle continues, after this remark, to explain not why the proud man must get the most for himself, but to emphasize why he must be good, and have "greatness in every virtue." It is clear, from the remarks that come before and after this passage, that the proud man should receive the most in terms of honour, for it is "the prize appointed for virtue" (*NE* 4.3.1123b35). Aristotle is not characterizing the virtue in terms of seeking the greatest benefits for himself, but he does think receiving the most honour from others is the fitting response to a person of complete virtue.

Assuming that to be virtuous is to aim at others' benefit is just another variation on the same mistake. An example commonly used to make this argument is Aristotle's statement that loving is more characteristic of friendship than being loved (8.8.1159a26-27). If we examine the points preceding this, it is clear that Aristotle is focused on the active nature of virtue and eudaimonia, and thinks that loving is more characteristic than (passively) being loved. The issue is not who is benefitted. This is seen even more clearly in Aristotle's comments about the nature of the relationship between benefactor and those they have benefitted (*NE* 9.7). The many think that it is paradoxical that the benefactor often loves the person benefitted more than he is loved in return, Aristotle notes (*NE* 9.7.1167b16-18), but the paradox dissolves if we observe that to the benefactor, the person he has helped is, in a way, his own handiwork and thus, part of himself. "The cause of this [the benefactor loving more than he is loved] is that existence is to all men a thing to be chosen and loved, and that we exist by virtue of activity, and

that the handiwork is, in a sense, the benefactor in activity; he loves his handiwork, therefore, because he loves existence” (*NE* 9.7.1168a5-8). What makes benefitting others fine or noble, in Aristotle’s estimate, is not that others’ interests are served, but what “is noble depends on his action” (*NE* 9.7.1168a9-10).

It is interesting to note that we sometimes benefit self, sometimes others, and sometimes self and others through virtuous action, but there is no basis for treating whose benefit is served as some essential aspect of the proper aim. Although good people will naturally benefit those around them, this is not their final end, nor is benefitting others definitive of virtue. And although the aim of the virtuous agent is to live a flourishing life, the standard of virtue is not tied to whatever the agent may happen to want in his life; the standard is the fine.

In sum, Aristotle does not raise or answer the question of whose interests are paramount, in a virtuous life, because he does not use the consequences of particular actions as his standard for evaluation of them. The *NE* holds that the virtuous agent should aim at virtuous activity—and primarily, it would seem, at his own virtuous activity—but what defines virtuous activity is aiming at the fine (τὸ καλόν), not whose benefit is sought or achieved.

### 1.3 Conclusions

One question that might be raised by my interpretation is whether it is possible to make any general statements about whose interests are served by a person living well. I think it is possible, and Aristotle gives some indication of the general context of benefit of virtuous activity. We are social animals and therefore thrive in and take pleasure in having good relationships with others, in “living together and sharing in discussion and thought, for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of human beings and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place” (*NE* 9.9.1170b12-14). Given this, it is clear that the virtuous person’s life of excellent activity will consist of actions that richly benefit her and all those who share in her life, from comrades to fellow citizens. The objective nature of human excellence also ensures that the kinds of actions a person takes toward having a flourishing life tend to result in benefits to both herself and

her friends, kinsmen, and fellow citizens. As Aristotle observes, the same personal characteristics that enable a good person to respect and love himself, have few regrets, and have hopeful expectations for the future, also make him the kind of person who can be a good friend (*NE* 9.4.1166a24-29). However, this context of benefit, whether one chooses to emphasize the value to self or others, is not the standard of virtue, nor Aristotle's focus of investigation.

In sum, I have been contrasting Aristotle's views with two opposed views that make the same essential error: treating the question of whose interests are served as fundamental to Aristotle's ethics. One version of this mistake is seen in both Ross's and Allan's interpretation of Aristotle. Ross argues that *only* the agent's own eudaimonia counts for Aristotle, not just that it is the final end, and he holds that outside the friendship chapters, there is little room, in Aristotle's *Ethics*, for "a warm personal interest in other people".<sup>51</sup> Allan writes, "Nowhere in the first part of the *Ethics* does Aristotle even hint that a man, instead of pursuing his own good or happiness, may prefer to choose or act with a view to the happiness of another."<sup>52</sup> Absent any evidence of duty to others, and given Aristotle's focus on the agent improving the state of his own soul and character, perhaps it seems that the only reasonable conclusion to draw is that Aristotle thinks each person should focus on his own interests. Another version of the same mistake concludes that even if Aristotle starts out in this vein, the value he places on friendship shows that others' interests can trump our own.

Aristotle's comments about the good man not needing to seek friends for the sake of pleasure may be of use in accounting for his failure to take up the question of whose good should be sought. Aristotle holds that a good person has a life that is naturally pleasant—the best sort of life for human beings – so he "has no need of adventitious pleasure [or "of pleasure as kind of imported charm"] (*NE* 9.9.1169b27). Such a person, as a social being who is such a good person as to be able to partake in the best, most complete and most

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<sup>51</sup> Ross, *Aristotle*, 238.

<sup>52</sup> Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, 138.

rewarding kinds of human relationships, similarly has no need of adventitious moral duties to prompt him to take a warm personal interest in others.

I disagree, then, with both halves of Ross's characterization, and with two common threads of interpretation of Aristotle: the idea that there is nothing elsewhere in the *Ethics* to suggest we should take a warm personal interest in others, and the idea that the friendship books are primarily or fundamentally concerned with an altruistic, self-effacing sort of other-concern, not with the agent knowing how to live and do well. These sorts of interpretations would only make sense if Aristotle was focused on the issue of who should receive the benefits of virtuous activity. As I have endeavoured to show, this is simply not a fundamental question in his ethics.



## 2

## The Distortive Focus on the Beneficiary

This focus on who is to benefit from the morally excellent agent's activity is, as I have been arguing, inconsistent with Aristotle's approach, and interpreting his ethical views and his account of friendship in terms of it is misleading, at best. For Aristotle, the beneficiary of an agent's actions, while not irrelevant, is not fundamental to the moral evaluation of actions or of the agent. In deliberating about how to achieve the final end, eudaimonia, the right question to ask is what kinds of activities are inherently worthwhile for human beings—which activities contribute to or are constituents of a fully actualized, excellent human life.<sup>1</sup> This question can be answered without recourse to considerations about who benefits, although Aristotle holds that a person living an active, actualized human life will richly benefit from doing so, and that association with such a person is also a good to his friends and associates.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the nature of the final end becomes unclear when it is analyzed in terms of whose interests are served. There are two aspects of this problem. The first is that it is not apparent whose interests should be the aim in different contexts. In those cases where questions of benefit do arise, Aristotle thinks that the question of who should benefit must be answered differently in different circumstances. Sometimes it is appropriate, indeed required, that we aim at our own benefit, while at other times we should aim to

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle explicitly indicates that this is the question upon which he will focus, explaining, "Since happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with complete virtue, we must consider the nature of virtue, for perhaps we shall thus see better the nature of happiness" (*NE* 1.13.1102a5-8). As I argued in the previous chapter, the fact that after making this declaration, Aristotle spends the next eight books of the *NE* discussing virtue only underscores how consistently he takes this to be the important question.

<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the best sort of friendship in which, Aristotle writes, "In loving a friend, people love what is good for themselves; for the good person in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friend. Each, then, both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness; for friendship is said to be equality, and both of these are found most of all in the friendship of the good" (*NE* 8.5.1157b32-37).

benefit others. E.g., Aristotle holds that special injustice requires taking the right share of divisible goods such as wealth or honours (*NE* 5.2.1130b30-32), so that in some cases I can go wrong by not securing a benefit for myself, by suffering injustice. Aristotle notes that both doing and suffering injustice are bad (although doing injustice is worse, *NE* 5.11.1138b30-33). At other times, aiming to benefit others is appropriate, even if that means there is less honour or wealth left for me.

A second reason the final end is obscured by focusing on the beneficiary is that if we begin with this question, it appears that there are frequent conflicts of interests, even between good people, and it is not clear what the virtuous person should do in such situations. In cases where my interest appears to conflict with someone else's, Aristotle does not provide any decision-making mechanism to solve dilemmas by reference to any kind of consequentialist calculation.<sup>3</sup>

In short, focusing on the beneficiary to characterize the final end is too consequentialist and what is worse, focused on a consequence that is not of primary or fundamental importance to Aristotle. Interpretations of Aristotle's account of friendship that focus on the question of the beneficiary end up departing from Aristotle's account of friendship in a variety of ways due to this mischaracterization of the end.

While most commentators on Aristotle's account of friendship recognize that discussing Aristotle's account "in terms of egoism and altruism . . . introduces the risk of anachronistic assumptions and associations,"<sup>4</sup> many nonetheless employ the very criterion definitive of these terms by treating the question of the beneficiary as a fundamental criterion of moral worth. I will begin by briefly indicating what is typically meant 'ethical egoism' and 'ethical altruism' and show how central the question of the

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Aristotle's discussion of conflicts of duties at *NE* 9.2. Such conflicts include whether a person should repay his debts or ransom his father, whether he must make a loan to someone who lent money to him, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Kahn, "Aristotle and Altruism," *Mind* 90, no. 357, New Series (January 1, 1981): 20. Annas and Rogers, for example, similarly state their concern to avoid anachronism, with Annas preferring not to even use the terms "egoism" and "altruism".

beneficiary is to these concepts. I will then contrast this with what is central to Aristotle's ethical thought: aiming at the fine.

I argue that it is because the question of the beneficiary is treated as fundamental—even as the terms 'egoism' and 'altruism' are dispensed with—that several common problematic threads of interpretation arise, especially in Aristotle's account of friendship: (1) the assumption that self-love essentially means seeking benefits for oneself and thus, can be threatening to friendship and to proper human interaction generally; (2) the idea that Aristotle counsels self-sacrifice as moral; (3) the view that the actions required of an agent in friendship and in proper human interaction generally can lead to less happiness for him than he might otherwise have had; and (4) the assumption that one's dealings with his friends are morally evaluated according to who benefits rather than (as elsewhere in Aristotle's ethics) according to whether the friend is acting for the sake of what is good or noble. One ubiquitous example of this last view is found in the idea that character-friendship and other types of friendship are distinguished by means of the beneficiary, with each person entering the friendship seeking to benefit himself in the case of utility- and pleasure-friendship but disinterestedly seeking to benefit the friend in the case of character-friendship.

These problems in interpretation arise from importing the beneficiary focus characteristic of egoism and altruism into Aristotle's ethics, and result in significant departures from Aristotle's own views. The solutions to these perceived problems or questions in Aristotle's ethics often represent even greater departures from Aristotle's own views. I will briefly indicate how solutions such as Kahn's interest-objective distinction and various attempts to make others' interests identical to our own (as, e.g., Green, Brink and Whiting all do in various ways) are inconsistent with Aristotle's broader ethical views.

## 2.1 What are Egoism and Altruism?

I shall endeavour to show that the essential concerns of the contemporary egoist-altruist conceptual framework all too often shape interpretation of Aristotle's normative views, even among those who eschew terms like 'egoism' and 'altruism' as anachronistic, or who exercise caution in using them. It will be helpful to first get clear on the basic

meanings of ‘egoism’ and ‘altruism’, insofar as they are used to denote moral principles. I will begin with a few commonly-accepted definitions, and from this set out what seems, fairly straightforwardly, to be essential to this interpretive framework

Kraut holds that what all the forms of egoism have in common is the idea that we should maximize our own good.<sup>5</sup> Another definition similarly offers, “Ethical egoism claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right that it maximize one’s self-interest.”<sup>6</sup> I shall omit the maximization criterion, as it is not essential to egoism whether the agent maximizes her self-interest, treats it at the ultimate aim or *telos* of her actions, or aims at her self-interest in some other way. The basic point is that the agent chooses actions, or determines them to be moral, based on their consistency with his or her own interest or welfare. I also do not think it essential to egoism that it apply specifically to judging actions: an egoist theory could as easily be used to judge character or rules as acts.<sup>7</sup> More simply, ethical egoism can be understood as “the theory that one’s self, [one’s ‘own interests and desires’] . . . should be . . . the goal of one’s own action.”<sup>8</sup>

‘Altruism’ is used in a greater variety of ways than ‘egoism’. Annas offers two meanings of the term: 1) “the disposition to put the interests of others *before* one’s own, to be self-sacrificing,” or (more weakly) 2) “that one gives the interests of others some weight for their own sake and not instrumentally.”<sup>9</sup> I begin by considering the first definition.

To state the first definition in terms similar to the one I have given of ethical egoism, altruism is the theory that others’ interests or desires should be the goal of one’s own actions. It is fairly obvious, from this definition, why the traditional usage of ‘altruism’ carries a connotation of self-sacrifice or self-neglect. In any theory that admits of the

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<sup>5</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 86.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Shaver, “Egoism,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2010, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/egoism/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Moseley, “Egoism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/egoism/>.

<sup>9</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 225.

possibility of conflicts of interests, setting the interests of others as one's primary aim will necessarily result, sometimes at least, in neglecting or even acting against one's own interests.

As for the second, weaker definition of altruism, it does not, in itself, put undue emphasis on the beneficiary. In practice, however, when this definition is employed, it tends to direct attention to whose interests are being served, and specifically, to the question of whether others' interests are. I.e. in use, it tends to function as the stronger meaning, directing attention to whose benefit is sought and treating that, albeit implicitly, as the standard of moral evaluation.<sup>10</sup>

The issue central to the concepts of egoism and altruism is whose good, welfare or interests one aims to serve: those of the agent or those of someone other than the agent. In other words, the beneficiary of one's actions is what is most definitive of these categories. Generally, acting altruistically is thought to be good just because others are the beneficiary. And egoism is commonly thought to be indefensible as an ethical theory (unless, perhaps, it is heavily qualified) since one aims at one's own benefit. In both cases, moral worth is estimated by whose interests are to be served.

Both principles, it is important to emphasize, not only specify the proper aim for the moral agent, but also establish a moral standard for evaluating the agent's actions. What makes the right actions right, in both cases, is that they aim at the proper beneficiary. It is not enough to count as egoism or altruism that one merely have concern for the right person's welfare, or even less so, that one coincidentally, or on some occasions, pursues what is best for the intended beneficiary; egoism and altruism both involve holding that one ought to aim for a certain person's benefit (however it may be construed), and that doing so is what makes an action right. What makes actions and subordinate aims right is that they tend to contribute to the proper final end: that they result in, or are meant to result in, what is best for the appropriate beneficiary.

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<sup>10</sup> I will address another concern I have with this definition in the third chapter, when I take up the question of what it is to love others for their own sake.

As we shall see, this theoretical framework, with its characteristic focus on the consequences of the moral agent's actions, specifically on the beneficiary of them, is evident even in interpretations of Aristotle's ethics that eschew using concepts like egoism and altruism. This framework is not characteristic of Aristotle's ethics, however. We aim not at benefitting a particular person, but at the fine. In the next section, I briefly discuss what this means and contrast it with both aiming at one's own self-interest and aiming at others' good.

## 2.2 Aristotle's Focus: The Fine

Aristotle assumes each should aim first and most fundamentally at his own virtuous activity. As I argued in the previous chapter, there are several reasons for thinking this to be the case: Aristotle's idea that the highest good is something that, as much as possible, is up to us; that the first book of the *Ethics*, at least, is commonly thought to be concerned with the agent's own eudaimonia;<sup>11</sup> that Aristotle never rejects the idea, implicit in his outline of the final good, that each is aiming primarily to guide and live his own life properly; and that the agent's proper sphere of virtuous activity is dictated by his own (properly held) values.

This claim that the agent should treat his own activity as his final end, however, must be distinguished from a claim with which it is commonly conflated: that the agent should aim for his own benefit as such. The consequences of our virtuous activity, such as whose interests are served, are just that—consequences, and not the standard by which the moral worth of our actions should be evaluated. The standard is the fine (τὸ καλόν).

I shall briefly consider what aiming at the fine means, with the goal of showing that it does not reduce to egoism, altruism, or to any other form of focusing on who benefits, and that the question of who benefits is not of central importance in understanding the nature of the fine. I shall consider three aspects of the fine frequently offered by

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 125.; Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 144.

Aristotle—order, fittingness and praiseworthiness—and will show that none of these can essentially be understood in terms of who benefits.

For Aristotle, the fine has much to do with order (τάξις), and with related properties such as symmetry (συμμετρία), definiteness (ὠρισμένον), not occurring by chance (μὴ τυχόντως), and equilibrium (ἡρεμία).<sup>12</sup> How does virtue manifest order, for Aristotle? Aristotle, like Plato, holds the idea that virtue has to do with the proper arrangement or ordering of the parts of his soul, with reason in control.<sup>13</sup> Virtue is fine in part because it is orderly and rational.

The fine is also closely tied to notions of fittingness (πρέπον). As Rogers points out, Aristotle writes, in the *Topics*, that the fitting is definitory (ὀρικόν) of the fine, since the two are in fact the same (135a13-14); this idea recurs in the ethical works as well.<sup>14</sup>

Rogers explains that virtue manifests the fine both in terms of order (specifically equilibrium) and fittingness.

Second, virtue displays equilibrium by its association with the mean. The mean, quite straightforwardly, is a condition of equilibrium (*NE* 1106a29-32), in which one's feelings and actions are in every respect fitting or appropriate, i.e., occurring 'at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way' (b21-22). The overall fittingness of virtuous action is also, therefore, relevant to its being καλόν.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the fine is praiseworthy, and in Aristotle's account, it seems that virtuous actions are praiseworthy because they are fine, not fine because they are praised.<sup>16</sup> Aristotle explains, "Everything that is praised because it is of a certain kind . . . for we praise the

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<sup>12</sup> Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν," 355. Rogers, in this article, offers an excellent and very thorough reconstruction of Aristotle's use of this term, taken not only from his ethical works, but also from the *Rhetoric* (with some qualifications) and his logical works. I shall draw heavily from it here.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., *NE* 1.71098a4-17 and 9.8.1168b33-1169a6, as well as *Republic* 430e and 443d.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν," 356.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 1.5.1095b26-29 and 1.12.1101b17-18. For further discussion of this issue, see Donald James Allan, "The Fine and the Good in the Eudemian Ethics," in *Untersuchungen Zur Eudemischen Ethik*, ed. Paul Moraux and Dieter Harlfinger, Peripatoi 1 (Berlin, 1971), 70–71., as well as Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν," 361–364.

just or brave man and in general both the good man and virtue itself because of the actions and functions involved,” for praise “involves a reference to something else,” a reference to some broad standard or ideal (*NE* 1.12.1101b12-20).

In sum, virtue is fine or noble because it requires a proper ordering of the soul, where the person is governed by his best element, reason. Virtuous actions are fine because they are fitting, which requires hitting the mean and generally, being careful not to confuse virtue with superficially similar states. We praise the agent for the fittingness of her actions, and also in part because such actions are often difficult to achieve.

It seems fairly clear that the order and fittingness that are definitive of the fine cannot be understood in terms of benefit. Obviously, it is good for the agent to have a well-ordered soul, i.e. one governed by reason,<sup>17</sup> but Aristotle does not define order in terms of benefit, and it cannot properly be understood in such terms. Benefit to self is a mere consequence of order, not what defines it; otherwise the person who sought benefits such as pleasure for himself would be counted as having a well-ordered soul and life by Aristotle. Instead, Aristotle disparages such individuals as “slavish” and living a “life suitable for beasts” (*NE* 1.1.1095b20). The defining question with regard to order is not who benefits but whether the reasoning element of the agent is governing.

As for fittingness, the essential question regards whether a person has really hit the mean with regard to the relevant passions and judgment that define the particular moral virtues: e.g. whether, in the case of courage, he has felt fear and confidence in a way appropriate to the situation, and acted as it demanded, given what was at stake. Aristotle holds that performing fitting actions generally yields benefits to self and others,<sup>18</sup> but we do not judge an action fitting either in terms of the agent’s self-interest or in terms of whether he has benefitted others. Thus, we do not judge an action courageous because the man is later honoured and rewarded for his actions; such benefits to the agent are simply a common result of courageous actions. And Aristotle does not judge an action courageous

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 9.4.1166b5-11 and 1166b19-24, as well as 9.8.1168b30-1169a12.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 9.8.1169a6-11



just because the agent might have risked his life to save others or his city. The rash person, the person ignorant of the danger, and the person afraid of the shame or punishment he would suffer from ignominiously fleeing might all do the same thing.<sup>19</sup> Benefitting self and others, standing firm in battle, and not fleeing from dangerous situations are all common consequences and manifestations of courage, but none of these name what it is to be courageous, or what makes such a state fitting; courage is “a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence” (*NE* 3.6.1115a7).<sup>20</sup>

The fine is characterized by order, fittingness and praiseworthiness, and neither order nor fittingness is essentially concerned with the beneficiary. The only aspect of Aristotle’s conception of the fine that it might be possible to grasp in terms of benefit is what makes an action praiseworthy. If we think that taking action to benefit others is inherently praiseworthy and in fact essential to what we mean by ‘praiseworthy,’ then the fine (τὸ καλόν) and (derivatively) virtue would be defined, in part at least, by who benefits.

Some commentators have suggested just this—that Aristotle’s standard for nobility (τὸ καλόν) has to do with benefit, specifically with benefitting others.<sup>21</sup> I shall briefly indicate the apparent evidence for this argument, and why I think it is untenable.

The main pieces of textual evidence used to support the idea that the praiseworthy and thus, the noble or fine, should be understood in terms of benefitting others are *Rhet.* 1.9 and a few passages in the *NE* where Aristotle gives examples of apparently self-sacrificial actions that are praiseworthy. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle lists all of the following as examples of fine things that are praised: doing something for one’s own country while overlooking one’s own good, deeds undertaken for the sake of others and less directed at one’s own benefit, and successes which benefit others and not self

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<sup>19</sup> All of *NE* 3.8 is devoted to a discussion of states commonly confused with courage, and which can produce similar outward results in certain situations.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, “Aristotle’s Conception of Τὸ Καλόν,” 367.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g. Engberg-Pedersen, *Aristotle’s Theory of Moral Insight.*, Madigan, “*Eth. Nic.* 9.8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism?”, and Brink, “Self-Love and Altruism,” 129.

(1.9.1366b37-a6).<sup>22</sup> He also holds that the fine benefits the community, not just the agent himself (8.8.1169a8-10). All of this seems to emphasize benefitting others as something that makes an action praiseworthy.

Kelly Rogers gives what I regard as a definitive response to the idea that praiseworthiness and thus, the fine, should be understood in terms of benefit, either to oneself or to others.<sup>23</sup> As Rogers observes, while the *Rhetoric* 1.9 seems to offer reason to think that what is praiseworthy are difficult actions that serve other's interests, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* alternately seems to offer reason to understand it as serving others' and one's own, either interpretation in terms of whose interests are served leaves great portions of the text unexplained.<sup>24</sup> Many things that Aristotle characterizes as praiseworthy, even in the same chapter of the *Rhetoric* where he seems to equate the fine with sacrificing for others, have nothing to do with others' benefit, e.g. the distinctive characters of particular peoples and having been the only or the first to have done something significant (*Rhet.* 1368a10-11). Both the *EE* and the *NE* similarly offer examples of actions that are fine but have no connection to other people or their welfare: enduring great personal misfortune with dignity (*NE* 1.10.1100b30-33), bravely facing dangerous situations and emergencies that may involve death (*NE* 3.6.1115a29-34), and contemplating god (*EE* 1249b16-19).

There are also examples that make it clear that not all fine actions—not all actions aiming at the agent's own eudaimonia—will necessarily benefit him (at least in any conventional sense): describing courage, Aristotle writes,

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<sup>22</sup> There is good reason to be cautious about uncritically using the definitions of the *Rhetoric* as Aristotle's considered philosophic definitions. Both the audience toward whom the examples of the *Rhetoric* are directed and the aim of this work as a manual for public speaking should give pause in using the definitions in this way, as should Aristotle's statement that when addressing the public, it is necessary to start from ideas possessed by everyone, i.e. presumably not from potentially altered and controversial philosophic re-examined versions of these ideas. A comparison of the definitions given in the *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics* also gives reason to be wary of assuming the *Rhetoric*'s definitions to be Aristotle's own. Even basic concepts are defined differently between the two works. E.g. virtue is characterized as ability in the *Rhetoric* but as a state of character in the *NE*.

<sup>23</sup> Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

Death and wounds will be painful to the brave man and against his will, but he will face them because it is noble to do so or because it is base not to do so. And the more he is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest goods, and this is painful. (*NE* 3.9.1117b3-14)

Finally, the fact that fine actions, according to Aristotle, commonly benefit self and others is another indication that we cannot make sense of the praiseworthy or the fine in terms of who benefits. “When everyone strains to achieve what is fine and concentrates on the finest actions,” Aristotle writes, “everything that is right will be done for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue” (*NE* 9.8.1169a8-12).<sup>25</sup> As Rogers notes,

To appeal to this type of remark for information about the nature of the *καλόν* . . . is to confuse the consequences of *καλόν* action with both its prerequisites and object. The fact that *καλά* benefit others, as Aristotle explicitly thinks they do, is a question of their outcome. To say that an action has consequence *x*, however, is neither to give an account of the action (i.e., it is not to say that what makes the action *καλόν* is its promotion of the common good) nor is to say that *x* is the action’s *object* (i.e., that in choosing to perform it, the agent is concerned with the common good).<sup>26</sup>

Treating who benefits from an action as some aspect of Aristotle’s standard of moral evaluation is just one way of treating the consequences in a far more fundamental way than Aristotle’s account does. It is true that Aristotle thinks that aiming at the fine does, on principle, tend to lead to what’s best for the agent and to be beneficial to those with whom he interacts. But it is beneficial because it is fine, not vice versa. And although the aim of the virtuous agent is having a flourishing life, the standard of virtue is not tied to whatever the agent may happen to want in his life, or whatever will make his life better in any sense; the standard is the fine.

I should add one clarification here, lest I be misunderstood as giving an essentially Kantian reading of Aristotle’s view of moral motivation. I have been arguing that the

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<sup>25</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 364–365.

Aristotelian virtuous agent must aim at the fine, not essentially at benefitting himself or others. On the face of it, this might give the impression that I think that according to Aristotle, a good person acts for the sake of the fine as a matter of duty, without thought about what impact this will have on his own happiness. As Kraut has persuasively argued, however, “there is no incompatibility, in Aristotle’s ethics, between choosing virtuous acts for themselves and choosing them only on condition that they are principal ingredients of happiness.”<sup>27</sup> I agree with Kraut that in Aristotle’s account, *one* of the essential characteristics and attractions of virtuous activity, which requires aiming at the fine, is that such activity is a principal component of a flourishing life.<sup>28, 29</sup> “For Aristotle, but not for Kant, we must ask what happiness is before we can know whether to lead a moral or an immoral life,”<sup>30</sup> and the “close connection between virtuous activity and happiness should not blind us to the latter’s priority,”<sup>31</sup> but nonetheless, aiming at happiness cannot be understood as aiming at benefit.

In sum, the question of the beneficiary is given a more central role than it deserves in interpretations of Aristotle’s account of friendship, often at the expense of remembering how central aiming at the fine is for Aristotle, and what this entails. Let us now consider how this misplaced emphasis distorts understanding of Aristotle’s ethics, particularly his account of friendship.

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Kraut, “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself,” *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 58 (1976): 238.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Several other characteristics are also essential to virtue, according to Kraut: that it is activity not state, activity of soul not body, in accordance with reason, something we can master through our own efforts, once mastered can be enjoyed, not easily lost, and also that it is a principal component of a happy life.

<sup>29</sup> I have used something like Kraut’s language here and referred to virtuous activity as a ‘component’ of happiness. Though I do not think much in my arguments here turns on this, I do not mean to endorse an inclusivist view of eudaimonia. I shall not discuss the vexed questions of whether the final end, eudaimonia, should be understood according to a monistic or inclusivist interpretation, or whether lower ends should be understood as instrumental to, constitutive of, or approximations of higher ends, although I think there is much to recommend the monistic approach developed in Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics”* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Kraut, “Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself,” 225.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

## 2.3 Where We See the Focus on the Beneficiary

Julia Annas notes that egoism “is standardly used of theories whose content is self-centered or self-interested, as well as being formally agent-centered.”<sup>32</sup> Annas dispenses with using the term ‘egoism’ in part because she thinks that although ancient ethical theories are formally agent-centered,<sup>33</sup> they are not necessarily self-interested in terms of content and thus not truly egoistic. For this reason she holds that the use of such concepts would be confusing and anachronistic. For similar reasons, John Cooper prefers to speak about “self-interested” and “un-self-interested” concern;<sup>34</sup> and Charles Kahn uses the terms but offers “a precautionary word,” spanning two pages, about how to understand them in his account.<sup>35</sup> I will show that in spite of this conscientiousness about the use of these anachronistic terms and ideas, the key question of the egoist-altruist conceptual framework—the question of who benefits, and the anachronistic assumptions that go along with it—commonly remains an essential tool for analysis. I shall offer several examples, taken from disparate interpretations of Aristotle’s account of friendship, where this focus on whose interests are served plays a central and distortive role.

As I noted in the previous chapter, instances of this misdirected emphasis are evident in accounts of Aristotle’s ethics generally. E.g. Ross characterizes Aristotle’s ethics as “decidedly self-centred,” and by this he seems to mean “narrowly focused on benefitting oneself in some sense.” Hence he thinks that Aristotle leaves little room for taking a warm personal interest in others.<sup>36</sup> This sort of mistake is an example of assuming that Aristotle is focused on benefit and then determining that the agent’s own benefit is the aim. The other sort of mistake is to assume that Aristotle is focused on benefit, and hold that benefitting others is what matters. Irwin evinces this error, e.g., when he reasons that

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<sup>32</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 225.

<sup>33</sup> By ‘agent-centered’, I mean that he expects important moral consideration be given to the agent, especially to the development and preservation of her character and principles, as opposed to consideration being focused on the consequences of her actions.

<sup>34</sup> Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 314, note 7.

<sup>35</sup> Kahn, “Aristotle and Altruism,” 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, *Aristotle*, 238.

“Aristotelian virtues of character are moral virtues, in so far as they are all concerned with the fine, and therefore with the good of others.”<sup>37</sup>

This mischaracterization of the aim of Aristotle’s ethics, and thus of eudaimonia, is particularly evident in contemporary commentary on Aristotle’s account of friendship. It results in mischaracterization of the nature of self-love, views of Aristotelian friendship in which having friends brings us less happiness than we might otherwise have had, and the common assumption that a good person must approach friendship disinterestedly, not seeking value from friendship, at least in the most perfect sort of friendship. Below I will give examples of each of these problems in interpretations of Aristotle’s account of friendship.

### 2.3.1 Self-love Confused with Benefitting Self

To understand what self-love is, for Aristotle, it is useful to first understand what the self is, in his account. In 9.8, Aristotle writes that the things a people do “according to a rational principle are thought most properly their own acts” (1169a1). Aristotle continues, “That [the reasoning element] is the man himself—or at least is so more than anything else—is plain.” Similarly, Aristotle comments in 9.4, that “the thinking part in man . . . is thought to be the man himself” (1166a17 and again 1166a23-24).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, it should not be surprising to find Aristotle explaining that actual self-love, the self-love of a virtuous person, involves assigning to oneself “the things that are noblest and best, and gratif[ying] the most authoritative element in oneself and in all things obey[ing] this” (*NE* 9.8.1168b29-30). Because the true lover of self is governed by his reasoning element and gratifies it in all things, such a person “is anxious that he himself, above all things, should act justly, temperately, or in accordance with any other of the virtues, and in general . . . always tries to gain for himself what is fine” (*NE* 9.8.1168b25-28).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), 389.

<sup>38</sup> I shall not take up the question of whether Aristotle thinks the person should be identified most with practical or theoretical reason, as I do not think much turns on this particular point in my account.

<sup>39</sup> Translation from Ross, with modification.

It is true that Aristotle thinks that aiming at the fine and having a proper sort of self-love will, barring extremes of misfortune or other exigencies, bring about the agent's own welfare as well as the most pleasant sort of life. However, this does not mean that eudaimonia, virtue, or the self-love that results from virtuous activity is *essentially* characterized by pursuing one's own interests, as such. In fact, Aristotle explicitly dismisses a view similar to this mistaken view when he writes, "Those who use the term ['lover of self'] as one of reproach ascribe self-love to people who assign to themselves the greater share of wealth, honours, and pleasures, for these are what most people desire and busy themselves about as though they were the best of all things" (*NE* 9.8.1168b15-19). Such people, Aristotle explains, are the reason that 'self-love' or 'selfish' ( $\phi\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ )<sup>40</sup> has come to be used as a term of reproach, for self-love has come to take its meaning from the example set by people who think self-love is being grasping and "giving themselves preference in regard to objects of this sort" (*NE* 9.8.1168b24). But this is not really self-love, Aristotle holds.

By contrast, recall how Aristotle characterizes self-love: "When everyone strains to achieve what is fine and concentrates on the finest actions, everything that is right will be done for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue" (*NE* 9.8.1169a8-12).<sup>41</sup> What is characteristic of self-love is not aiming at one's own interests, even properly conceived, but aiming at the fine.

Let us now examine some apparent conflicts that arise if we substitute a different conception of self-love for Aristotle's, one in which seeking benefit of some sort is central. The tension Charles Kahn finds in Aristotle's account of friendship is based on a

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<sup>40</sup> Note that both the more benign 'self-love' and 'selfish' are translations of the same Greek word,  $\phi\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ , which carried with it many of the same negative connotations as the English 'selfish' does. As Salmieri points out, Aristotle seems, in the arguments of *NE* 9.8, to be using this term in a deliberately provocative way, in part to underscore the differences between his view of what is valuable and conventional views, in order to "challenge deep seated assumptions about what is valuable and what one's self is". (Gregory Salmieri, "Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8" (October 2011): 2, [http://www.unc.edu/~salmieri/Salmieri -- Aristotle on Selfishness.pdf](http://www.unc.edu/~salmieri/Salmieri--Aristotle%20on%20Selfishness.pdf).)

<sup>41</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

concept of self-love as benefitting self. Here is how Kahn introduces the tension he perceives in Aristotle's account of friendship: "If by altruism we mean a concern for the interests of others for their sake, then for Aristotle, friendship is by definition altruistic."<sup>42</sup> So it comes as something of a surprise to find him saying, and repeating, that all our feelings or attributes of friendship are derived from attitudes toward ourselves and somehow transferred to others."<sup>43</sup> The focus of his investigation, Kahn states, to give an account of how egoism and altruism can somehow coexist in Aristotle's account of friendship.<sup>44</sup>

It may not be immediately apparent how Kahn's starting point is problematic, since he uses very general definitions of egoism and altruism, ones which (unlike the conventional definitions I offer above) allow for egoism and altruism to overlap and coexist, as Kahn intends.<sup>45</sup> Fundamentally, however, Kahn is still mired in the conventional framework. Because he mischaracterizes the nature of self-love for the rational agent, understanding it in terms of benefit to self, Kahn takes for granted that it is inherently problematic to find room for both concern for others and concern for self. After some discussion of *NE* 9.4 and 9.8, Kahn asks, "How do we return from self-love, now conceived as rational egoism or the enlightened pursuit of one's own best interests, to friendship understood as the love of other people for their own sake? It is the task of chapter 9 to carry out this derivation in the optimal case, for the man who is perfectly good and hence perfectly happy."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> As for the altruistic meaning Kahn imputes to the "for his own sake" requirement, I regard this as a mistake, albeit a common one. I take up the meaning of this requirement in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Kahn, "Aristotle and Altruism," 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> For Kahn, egoism is "a catch-all reference to any concern for one's own interests or welfare", and altruism is "concern for the welfare of friends, relations, and personal associates, not good will towards all and sundry". Such definitions (unlike the conventional definitions I offer above) allow for egoism and altruism to overlap and coexist, as Kahn intends, and since Aristotle clearly allows for the possibility of benefitting both self and other as the natural consequences of the same actions, such a modification might seem more consistent with the Aristotelian context than traditional understandings of egoism and altruism.

<sup>46</sup> Kahn, "Aristotle and Altruism," 30.



While it is true that Aristotle thinks self-love *results* in a person pursuing his own best interests in a long-term enlightened way, it is not correct to essentially *conceive* of self-love in this way: the pursuit of what is actually in one's self-interest seems merely a natural *effect* of proper self-love, which is, as we have seen above, characterized by living according to the guidance of the most authoritative element in ourselves, reason (9.8.1168b31-33). In 9.4, 9.8 and 9.9, Aristotle presents one's self-interest being served as a material consequence of aiming at the fine and living well, and he presents psychological unity, and the resulting estimate of oneself as good and worthwhile, as the psychological/emotional consequence of aiming at the fine; these consequences themselves are not the aim, however. Aristotle's purpose in these discussions, as he presents it, is to address confusion about the practical value of the good and about whether self-love is to be lauded or condemned, and to do so, he shows that being a good person allows one to love oneself and love life. Kahn, by shifting the focus of Aristotle's argument, makes it seem as though aiming at one's own enlightened self-interest is central, and thus that love for others must be derived from this apparently fundamental starting point.

Aristotle's arguments later in 9.8 make it clear that Kahn has got things the wrong way round. Aristotle emphasizes that when everyone concentrates on taking the finest actions, it will result in everyone achieving the greatest of goods. What is characteristic of self-love is not aiming at one's own interests, properly conceived, but aiming at the fine. Kahn's characterization of self-love is akin to holding that because Aristotle thinks that true self-love yields a life that is naturally most pleasant for human beings, self-love is aiming at the pleasant. Achieving one's own enlightened self-interest and a pleasant life are both benefits that, barring certain exigencies, naturally come from aiming at the fine, but we love our selves most by aiming at the fine, not by aiming at our own benefit.

If we would phrase the arguments about self-love in more Aristotelian terms, I suggest, the tension Kahn perceives would dissipate. Kahn's question of how we return from self-love, if asked in a way consistent with Aristotle's presentation of self-love, would be something like, "How do we return from self-love, which is conceived as 'strain[ing] to achieve what is fine and concentrat[ing] on the finest actions,' to loving others in a non-

instrumental way?” It is not clear, if we phrase the question in Aristotle’s terms, whence we would need to return. More specifically, here is how Aristotle characterizes the way that good people, in the context of friendship, strain to achieve the fine: “Friends for virtue are eager to do well by each other, since this is proper to virtue and to friendship; and if this is what they strain to achieve, there are no accusations or fights. For no one objects if the other loves and does well by him; if he is gracious, he ‘retaliates’ by doing well by the other” (NE 8.13.1162b6-11).<sup>47</sup>

Other interpretations of Aristotle’s arguments in *NE* 9 fall into similar errors. For example, Madigan’s interpretation of 9.8, for all its virtues, errs in a similar way when he considers Aristotle’s arguments in the last half of *NE* 9.8. Madigan’s account is consistent with Aristotle’s at the outset, as he emphasizes that self-love entails aiming at the fine and following *nous*, and that *nous* is nearly identical to the self. On the question of whether some action is fine because praiseworthy or praised because it is fine, Madigan correctly observes that Aristotle takes the latter position: that he does not define the fine subjectively, according to whatever people may happen to praise. From this point, strangely, Madigan infers that, “The fine is guaranteed to satisfy,”<sup>48</sup> and with this, Madigan’s account begins to depart from Aristotle’s own view. Madigan’s account evinces a focus on the beneficiary both in virtue of his focus on the agent’s satisfaction, and because it seems clear that this satisfaction is understood partially in terms of external goods and pleasure regarding the consequences in the moment of choosing and acting. It is not understood, as it should be, as the natural response of the excellent person who having aimed at what is fine and noble for human beings, has achieved it.

It is odd that Madigan insists that the fine is guaranteed to satisfy, when the kinds of examples of pursuing the fine Aristotle gives in the second half of 9.8 hardly seem guaranteed to satisfy in any kind of usual sense of what tends to satisfy people. In fact, they seem to be deliberately chosen to show that aiming at satisfaction in any kind of facile way, based on pre-theoretical notions of what a good human life is, will cause one

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<sup>47</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>48</sup> Madigan, “Eth. Nic. 9.8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism?,” 79.

to miss the targets of virtue and eudaimonia. For example, Aristotle notes that the good person will “throw away both wealth and honours” to gain for himself nobility, and will even die for his friends or country, if necessary” (*NE* 9.8.1169a19-21). Based on his view that self-love is guaranteed to satisfy, apparently in a way that would be obvious even to one with no particular view of what sort of desires are to be privileged and satisfied, Madigan holds that 1169a18-1169b1 “is *not* concerned with the justification of self-love as such, but with the reconciliation of self-love with self-sacrifice.”<sup>49</sup>

The inference Madigan makes, in concluding that the fine is “guaranteed to satisfy,” is analogous to arguing, from the fact that there is some standard for what constitutes a proper, nutritious diet, that following a proper diet is guaranteed to produce health, without consideration of other factors that may affect a person’s health, e.g. disease, aging, or injuries. Such an inference does not make sense on the face of it unless one has first established that no other factors can play a role, whether in maintaining health or in achieving the characteristic results of fine actions.<sup>50</sup> Aristotle makes it clear repeatedly, in his discussion in *NE* I, and in all of his discussions of external goods, that even for a morally excellent person, other factors can affect whether he lives in the sort of blessed state living well usually produces. Aristotle consistently argues that both a lack of external goods and extremes of fortune can mar a good person’s blessedness.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle tells us that principles in ethics hold true for the most part. (See, e.g., *NE* 1.3.1094b13-28, 3.3.1112b7-12, and 6.5.1140a32-b7.) His idea of what it means for a principle to hold “for the most part” seems the same in ethics as in the sciences that involve matter: the principles hold unless there is some interference in the causal process. This seems to be the case as far as the usual results of virtuous activity: such results obtain unless extremes of bad fortune intervene. So ‘satisfaction’, even if this is just taken to mean the usual deserts of acting well, is *not* guaranteed by aiming at the fine. (On the question of what Aristotle means by a principle holding “for the most part, see Devin Henry, “For-the-most-part Claims,” in *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle’s Science and Ethics*, ed. Devin Henry and Karen M. Nielsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).)

<sup>51</sup> E.g. “The person living well can never become miserable, but he will not reach blessedness if he meet with fortunes like those of Priam” (1.10.1101a5-7). Here is one example of Aristotle’s views on the necessity of some modest amount of external goods for an enjoyable life: “There are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends, or had lost good children or friends by death. As we have said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition” (1.8.1099b2-7).

The fact that the fine has some objective basis, in Aristotle's view, is certainly relevant to how likely one's own efforts are to bring about the natural consequences of having an excellent character. But it seems that Madigan has confused the typical *result* of aiming at the fine and being governed by *nous* with the aim of the good person—he assumes that to aim at the fine must really be to aim at one's own benefit or satisfaction. As I have argued, however, it must be borne in mind that these kinds of consequences are not the agent's proper aim, for Aristotle.

Because of these errors, Madigan comes to think that *NE* 9.8 is focused on how to defend the value of self-sacrifice within the context of seeking benefit for oneself. Aristotle does defend, as moral, actions conventionally regarded as self-sacrificing. But his very point in doing so is not to show that convention is correct but that how fundamentally wrong it is: the idea that these actions are not self-loving but self-sacrificing is based on a wrong view of self and thus, on a wrong conception of the nature of self-love. Aristotle seems to choose these difficult cases—such as giving up wealth, or even dying for friends or country<sup>52</sup>—deliberately in order to show how just how far the views of the many are from a proper understanding of self-love. As Aristotle explains, "[A person who lives by reason] is most truly a lover of self, of another type than that which is a matter of reproach, and as different from that as living according to rational principle is from living as passion dictates, and desiring what is noble from what seems advantageous" (*NE* 9.8.1169a3-6).

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<sup>52</sup> It is much easier to accept Aristotle's view that giving up honour or wealth can be instances of self-love than to accept that giving up one's life can be. As to the former, these things are not *the* good for Aristotle, and have no value if obtained by ignoble means, so it is no sacrifice of what is important to give these up for noble reasons. As to the latter, as Nancy Sherman argues, this seems to "fail to distinguish between a right choice which exercises our rational natures, and the outcome of the choice which literally ends in the death in our reason." (Nancy Sherman, "Aristotle on Friendship and the Shared Life," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47 (1987): 608.) Presumably, such a choice would only be proper, in Aristotle's view, when a person was choosing between dying nobly or living ignobly, e.g. if one could only live by betraying one's country, failing to protect friends and family, living as a slave, etc. In such cases, one can only act excellently by risking or giving up one's life: continuing to live as a slave, or as someone who sold out his city out of fear would preclude a person from living well, no matter how much longer he should live. If circumstances had been different, of course, it would be better that the virtuous person be able to enjoy a longer life of excellent activity, but given the choices available to him in such cases, it would be better to live a shorter life, where his character was not compromised than a longer one where it was.

Annas does not make this kind of mistake about self-love: she explicitly recognizes that self-love is not synonymous with aiming at one's own benefit. She observes that Aristotle's notion that a good person should be a lover of self must not be seen as "a thesis about what our aims should be."<sup>53</sup> We should not, Annas argues, see Aristotle's defence of self-love as an argument that the virtuous agent should aim at his own benefit.

However, I believe that Annas, like Kahn and Madigan, tacitly accepts the idea that who is to benefit from the virtuous agent's actions is central; she differs only in which party she thinks is to benefit. Annas goes wrong in this way when presenting what she thinks is the correct understanding of the virtuous person's motivation. "The agent who dies for others is in fact assigning himself the greater good," Annas writes, "but he does not have this thought; his thought is simply that he should sacrifice himself for others."<sup>54</sup> This way of understanding the agent's motivation, she thinks, is better than understanding the agent as aiming at his own good

Clearly, however, this cannot be the agent's thought, or at least it cannot be the full extent of his moral reasoning or response. Many self-sacrificial actions that would benefit a friend in some way should not be taken by the virtuous agent: we should not steal for a friend, or lie to help him achieve something dishonest, or any other number of things that might offer some value to a friend but which would be ignoble. It would also seem to be a mistake, in Aristotle's view, to impoverish oneself (and thus to threaten one's own means to take virtuous actions) in order to help a friend live in greater comfort. This kind of action would miss the mean with regards to generosity.<sup>55</sup> Self-sacrifice in this case would miss the mean and would not be fine or virtuous. In short, it seems that in the sort of cases discussed in 9.8, the good person should be motivated both by a love for a friend and a love for the fine, and it is not clear how his motivations can be understood without

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<sup>53</sup> Julia Annas, "Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism," *Mind* 86, no. 344, New Series (October 1, 1977): 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 4.2.1120a1-4, where Aristotle argues that 'wastefulness' or 'prodigality' with regards to the spending of wealth is a vice and "has the single vicious feature of wasting one's property...and the wasting of property is thought to be a sort of ruining of oneself, our living being assumed to depend on our property." (Translation by author.)

taking into account both considerations. And neither aspect of this motivation is properly understood in terms of sacrifice for others, in terms of aiming fundamentally to benefit others.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps Annas would think this complex motivation, arising both from love for a friend and love for the fine, problematic. After all, she argues that “the agent cannot give as his end in doing something *both* that he is helping his friends for their sake *and* that he is assigning himself the greater good of acting virtuously,” though we can see from the outside that the agent is in fact doing both of these things.<sup>57</sup> As Salmieri, argues, however,

A conscientious man, when benefitting his friend, does what he does both for the friend’s sake and because acting in this way to benefit his friend on this occasion is proper. If this is intelligible, then it is intelligible how the Aristotelian virtuous agent can (self-consciously) act a certain way both out of love for his friend and because the action is noble and, therefore, better for himself than anything he might be forgoing for his friend’s sake.<sup>58</sup>

Any theory that admits of moral concerns in determining when it is proper to act for a friend’s sake must determine how to take into account both considerations. Clearly, Aristotle is focused on such moral concerns, and for Aristotle, the fine is not determined in terms of benefit, or more narrowly in terms of benefitting others, so it will not do to argue that the virtuous agent is thinking simply of sacrificing himself for others.

In sum, neither characterizing self-love in terms of benefit to oneself or (paradoxically) in terms of benefit to others is consistent with Aristotle’s view of the nature of self-love as having to do with honouring and living by the best element in oneself. And if we do not see self-love in terms of the beneficiary, the perceived tension between Aristotle’s eudaimonism and his account of friendship should be lessened, at least. Let us turn now

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<sup>56</sup> For a different approach to resolving this issue, see Terence Irwin’s discussion of ‘metaphysical altruism’ in Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, 390–391. Irwin argues that Aristotle’s metaphysical principles are employed to tell us what a person really is. His point is interesting and seems true, but I do not think that this contributes to some form of ‘metaphysical altruism’, or that such a complex solution is needed to establish that a person can both aim at the fine and act out of love for a friend.

<sup>57</sup> Annas, “Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,” 12.

<sup>58</sup> Salmieri, “Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8,” 22.

to a related but more general idea, derived from the same focus on the beneficiary: the idea that friendship and other-concern compromises the would-be *eudaimōn*'s happiness, or results in less happiness than he would have had without such relationships.

### 2.3.2 Friendship Thought to Compromise Our Happiness

Richard Kraut gives an example of the idea that friendship somehow entails a compromise of one's own happiness when he writes,

On my reading, Aristotle thinks that human beings, under certain conditions, develop a desire to promote the happiness of certain other human beings. In doing so, we do not treat the well-being of others as a mere means to our own; rather, we seek their happiness for their sake. At times, we rightly give priority to the well-being of others, and accept less happiness for ourselves than we might have had.<sup>59</sup>

According to Kraut's reading, we may end up with less happiness by having friends.

Brink similarly remarks, "When I expend intellectual, emotional, and financial resources on meeting the legitimate claims of others, this contributes to my overall good in distinctive ways; but it also consumes resources that might have been spent on my education, my vocation, or my avocations."<sup>60</sup>

Whiting's interpretation is even starker, as she seems to think that in virtue friendship at least, we not only might have less happiness from friendship, but that it would be wrong to seek any value whatsoever from the relationship. Whiting thinks that Aristotle requires "that the character-friend loves and seeks to benefit his friend for *her* sake and *not*, as in the case of friendships for pleasure and utility, for the sake of some benefit *to himself*."<sup>61</sup>

It would be strange if Aristotle had devoted such effort to showing the value of friendship in a well-lived life, as he does in *NE* 8 and 9—and to human association generally, as he does at the start of the *Politics*—only to conclude that friendship results in less happiness,

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<sup>59</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 86.

<sup>60</sup> Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 154.

<sup>61</sup> Jennifer Whiting, "Impersonal Friends," *Monist* 74, no. 1 (January 1991): 18.

or even (as I will discuss in the next section) that it requires that we not seek any value from such relationships. What contributes to this mistaken impression? I shall argue that one contributor is the tendency to view happiness or eudaimonia narrowly in terms of benefits to self, either by implicitly understanding it in terms of extrinsic benefits of some sort, or by focusing on some kind of short-term cost-benefit analysis. One common consequence of falling back into mistaken, consequentialist views of happiness is to see friendship in the same sort of short-term instrumental way. This causes a failure to see the activity of friendship as virtuous activity, i.e. as the exact sort of activity at which we should be aiming, and instead brings about a focus on the relative benefits and costs of friendship, in terms of short-term pleasures or other benefits disconnected from our final end.

Let us look at Aristotle's views on these points, particularly as they are relevant to his account of friendship, and then, in light of these, analyze the view about friendship sometimes diminishing one's happiness indicated above.

Aristotle is clear that the human good does not consist in external or bodily goods, though he recognizes that a limited quantity of such goods is necessary for a good life.<sup>62</sup> He notes that wealth is not happiness but is "merely useful and for the sake of something else" (*NE* 1.5.1096a6-7), that happiness is an "activity of the soul" (*NE* 1.7.1098a7), and that it is a good of the soul (*NE* 1.8.1098b12-15), as opposed to a good of the body or an external good. What's more, the value of goods like wealth, power and reputation, is dependent on virtue, such that only good people can make good use of them.<sup>63</sup> I shall not offer any extended defence of these points, as they are uncontroversial in the literature on

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<sup>62</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 1.8.1098b31-1099a7 for an argument as to why external goods are needed and *Pol.* 1.7.1323a40-1323b10 for an argument about the fact that only some limited quantity of such is necessary, and why an excess may even be harmful.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 4.3.1124a30-13, where Aristotle argues that "Without virtue, it is not easy to bear gracefully the goods of fortune," and *Pol* 7.1.1323a39-1323b5, where he argues that external goods are acquired and preserved by means of virtue, not vice versa. As Salmieri eloquently summarizes, for both Plato and Aristotle "it is virtue that makes an agent into the sort of unity that he needs to be in order for the sorts of goods recognized by the many to in fact benefit him." (Salmieri, "Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8," 16.)



Aristotle's views.<sup>64</sup> I state them here only to bring these points to mind before we consider concerns that friendship might reduce one's happiness.

Second, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Aristotle holds that friendship "is a virtue or implies virtue" (*NE* 8.1.1155a4), and he characterizes it as both necessary with a view toward living and fine (*NE* 8.1.1155a29). Most people, having the wrong conception of the good, have a similarly wrong conception of friendship and can project only an instrumental value in friendship. "The many think that it is the useful people who are friends," Aristotle explains (*NE* 9.9.1169b24-25),<sup>65</sup> and thus, they do not understand how such a relationship can involve aiming at the fine.

So the value of friendship is not to be understood in terms of some sort of cost-benefit analysis but in terms of how the activity of friendship is, like the activity of moral virtues, a kind of excellent activity in which good people flourish and take pleasure. What can we say about why friendship is necessary to living well? At the most basic and obvious level, friendship is choiceworthy in itself, for "no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone" (*NE* 9.9.1169b18). Aristotle refers back to his definition of happiness to further explain the value of friendship: happiness is a kind of activity, not a static possession, Aristotle reminds us, but it is difficult to be continuously active by oneself (*NE* 9.9.1169b28-1170a7).

The friend makes activity easier in part by engaging in cooperative activity and projects, as many have pointed out, but there is more to Aristotle's continuous action claim than this. A friend, as another self, makes continuous activity easier by embodying and reflecting both friends' shared understanding of virtue and the good life. Being conscious of oneself as good makes existence desirable (*NE* 9.9.1170b9-10), but it is difficult to

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<sup>64</sup> Of course there are interesting and important questions we can ask about the exact extent to which such goods are needed, what we minimally require of these for a good life, and of how we should understand our need of such goods and their role in virtuous activity: are they just instruments, do they provide opportunity for virtuous activity, etc. I shall not take up these questions here as they do not bear directly on my point, which is simply that these goods are neither *the* good nor good in themselves, according to Aristotle, and that we need only a certain limited amount of these goods to live well.

<sup>65</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

stand back, observe, and be objectively conscious of oneself as good in the way that one can readily be conscious of a friend's virtue or that a friend can be conscious of and reflect his (*NE* 9.9.1169b30-11170a5). Because the friend both knows his friend well and embodies the same virtues, he is "another self," but because the friend is another, he allows his friend to experience himself. For the virtuous man, such an experience is an experience of himself as good, and it is this experience that makes life and existence itself desirable (*NE* 9.9.1170b4-6). In this way, friendship of good people who are alike in virtue is a friendship that aims at the fine: the friends aim at the fine both in the sense of wanting to experience themselves as good and in responding to the same in their friends. They also aim at the fine in honouring and delighting in the best in each other. Aristotle concludes his discussion of the friendship of good people, writing, "But the friendship of decent people is decent, and increases the more often they meet. And they seem to become still better from their activities and their mutual correction. For each molds the other in what they approve of, whence the saying, '[You will learn] Noble deeds from noble men'" (*NE* 9.12.1172a11-14).<sup>66</sup> The activity of friendship, then, creates a good of lasting value between the two friends and both arises from and helps bring about a pleasant, well-lived life.

I have touched on Aristotle's views on the limited and dependent value of external goods, as well as on the nature of the good that friendship offers, and I think there is a tendency to lose sight of both when one focuses on the question of which person should benefit from the relationship. Let us return, then, to the question of whether Aristotle views friendship as detracting from the virtuous person's happiness.

Brink explicitly draws from Platonic and Aristotelian eudaimonism to understand the value of interpersonal relationships, yet worries that relationships with others may somewhat reduce the agent's overall good because of the "opportunity costs to every commitment."<sup>67</sup> It is striking that Brink's concern in part arises over worry about the loss of external goods, goods that one could be devoting fully to one's own particular hobbies,

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<sup>66</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 154.

education, and career. Aristotle is clear that these goods are neither *the* good nor valuable in themselves, and that much of the value of having these goods is in being able to spend them well on self and others. In 8.1, Aristotle asks, “What is the use of prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends” (1155a7-9), and he closes his discussion on friendship with similar remarks, observing that that we naturally find it enjoyable to have friends to share in our pleasure and prosperity (9.11.1171b13-16). It is true that we tend to spend material resources on friends that we might otherwise spend on ourselves, but this is not necessarily any kind of loss or a threat to eudaimonia; in Aristotle’s view, sharing wealth and other similar goods can increase the well-being of both friends. It seems fairly straightforward in Aristotle’s account that spending wealth on oneself is not the only way that wealth might contribute to the agent living well. The sharing of at least some portion of our own external goods with friends might only be problematic if it puts one in dire straits, financially (not a condition that Brink stipulates, as he seems to think such sharing to be a threat to happiness as such) or if one assumes that maximizing benefits to oneself—and benefits of the sort that Aristotle thinks are least important—should be our aim.

Perhaps Brink’s concern is not so much with money but with the time devoted to friends that could have been devoted to one’s own pursuits, narrowly construed. It is true that maintaining friendship takes time, and that the time we spend in discussion and leisure with friends might also have been spent on our own particular endeavours. What is not clear is that spending time in such a way represents a loss to the agent. If a person devoted so much time to friends that he neglected his other values, perhaps this would represent a compromise of the person’s own happiness. But it is necessary to keep in mind that generally speaking, time spent with friends in this way is not an unfortunate cost to be borne to gain some other benefits, but the central value of friendship! In explaining the value of friends in reflecting each other, Aristotle explains that the virtuous person “needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friend as well, and this will be realized in their living together and sharing in discussion and thought; for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place” (NE 8.9.1170b10-14). It would be strange to see time

spent in discussion and contemplation with a friend as an opportunity cost when being able to engage in such activities with others is the very value human beings need and seek from friendship.

What about cases where we are not engaging in discussion with friends, but just doing something useful for a friend that is not, in itself, useful or even pleasant to us, e.g. driving a friend to the airport, picking her up when her car breaks down, or consoling her over some loss? Does friendship, because it sometimes necessitates such uses of our time, prevent us from living as well as we might otherwise? This only seems to be the case if one is too focused on a day-to-day cost-benefit analysis to see the value of friendship in a life well-lived. It is odd, at best, and un-Aristotelian, to think that aiming at a good life involves being willing to drop a friendship (or any other long-term pursuit, for that matter) in the first instant we don't experience a net gain from it. It is also difficult to see how maintaining a kind of running tab of costs and benefits with all of our friends is consistent with pursuing values in an integrated way, with trying to "make sense of one's life as a whole,"<sup>68</sup> as Aristotle thinks necessary.

Kraut claims that we sometimes give priority to the well-being of others, and in so doing, accept less happiness for ourselves than we might have had. Since Aristotle does not claim that virtue sometimes demands giving up what is best for oneself, Kraut makes his case by arguing that some actions Aristotle thinks are mandated by virtue involve an agent's giving up things that Aristotle generally recognizes as essential to eudaimonia. Some of Kraut's examples of such actions include the sharing of political power, accepting ostracism, moral competition, and comforting a friend suffering a misfortune. As to the idea that certain compromises in the political sphere entail a loss of happiness, I offer the same kind of argument in response to Kraut as I have to Brink: exercising political power is neither an end in itself, nor our final end. Let us grant the idea that individuals who are unable to engage in the ideal, contemplative life must aim at eudaimonia primarily through political activity. Even for such individuals, political office only contributes to the agent's eudaimonia when he exercises his responsibilities

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<sup>68</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 28–29.

excellently, acting as the virtues of justice and statesmanship require. Any old exercise of political power will not yield a life well-lived. Salmieri, who argues (against Kraut) that neither sharing political power nor accepting ostracism entails a sacrifice of one's own well-being, writes,

No use [a statesman] might make of powers that he was clinging to in violation of certain virtues could be exercises of those virtues. The only exercise of statesmanship open to him is to resign, and it is this action that is both virtuous and best for him. This is the case, even if he would have been better off if circumstances had differed so as to enable him to justly retain the office indefinitely.<sup>69</sup>

Kraut uses such examples to establish the general principle that in Aristotle's account, living with others sometimes requires giving up some part of what is best for oneself. He thinks this requirement is also evident in Aristotle's discussion of friendship in particular, when Aristotle discusses seeking comfort from friends when one has suffered misfortune. Aristotle observes that friends are pained to see each other suffering, yet he nonetheless thinks that it is sometimes proper to seek comfort from friends when suffering ill fortune, and that it is appropriate "to go eagerly, without having to be called, to friends in their misfortune, since it is a friend's role to do good, and especially for those in need, and those who have not made demands, since this is nobler and more pleasant for both parties" (*NE* 9.11.1171b20-23).<sup>70</sup>

Aristotle does not fully develop his views here, but what can we say, with clarity, from his thoughts about comforting a friend in misfortune? First, he surely recognizes that in these cases, friendship requires suffering some pain in order to do right by one's friend and offer comfort. However, Aristotle is clear that the exercise of other virtues can also sometimes cause pain, but he does not argue or imply that this pain represents a loss of happiness. E.g. discussing bravery, Aristotle writes that "It is for facing what is painful, then, that men are called brave. Hence also courage involves pain, and is justly praised; for it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant." Yet

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<sup>69</sup> Salmieri, "Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8," 18.

<sup>70</sup> Translation by author.

Aristotle nowhere implies that being courageous, though it involves pain, results in less happiness than one might have had if he had been less courageous. To feel this way in the moment is understandable, but to think that this is truly the nature of courage, Aristotle argues, is to lose sight of the end:

The end which courage sets before it would seem to be pleasant, but to be concealed by the attending circumstances, as happens also in athletic contests; for the end at which boxers aim is pleasant—the crown and the honours—but the blows they take are distressing to flesh and painful, and so is their whole exertion; and because the blows and the exertions are many, the end, which is but small, appears to have nothing pleasant in it. And so, if the case of courage is similar, death and wounds will be painful to the brave man . . . but he will face them because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to. And the more he is possessed of virtue, in its entirety, and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the thought of death, for life is best worth living for such a man. (*NE* 3.9.1117a35-1117b11)

Aristotle holds that courage is noble and thus, essential to eudaimonia. Yet as Ross summarizes, in Aristotle's view, courage "is essentially the facing of what is painful."<sup>71</sup> While they are being done, courageous actions tend to be painful, even though the end of courage is not. Given this, if we take pain to indicate loss of happiness, we would have to conclude that courageous virtuous activity is both essential to eudaimonia and necessarily a loss thereof. The better interpretation would recognize that just as not all pleasures contribute to eudaimonia, not all pains detract from it; if the end to be achieved is both pleasant and noble, acting toward this end will contribute to our happiness, even if taking the proper actions to achieve this end are sometimes painful.<sup>72</sup> Hence, comforting

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<sup>71</sup> Ross, *Aristotle*, 214.

<sup>72</sup> Of course my point is *not* that pain (and pleasure), in Aristotle's account, has nothing to do with eudaimonia. For Aristotle, one indication of a virtuous character, and thus, of being able to engage in the sort of activity living well requires, is that the agent generally takes pleasure in virtuous activity. For this reason, a good person, e.g. at the funeral of a family friend, or when helping care for a friend's sick relative, might also feel glad to be able to come to a friend's side, even though the situation is sad and even as he is greatly pained at his friend's suffering. But a different sort of pain—pain the agent experiences because not having fully internalized the standards of virtue, he feels conflicted about what to do—would indicate that neither the action nor the agent was fully virtuous and thus, was falling short of eudaimonia in some way. Nonetheless, in Aristotle's account, the agent's pleasure or pain, in a given moment, cannot be taken as a gauge of the extent to which some action contributes to, or detracts from, his happiness or living well. This is especially the case when, as in courageous actions, the pain is brought about by the nature of the conditions in which the agent finds himself, not as a result of some defect in his character. Virtue does not make one immune from the pain of battlefield wounds, or of the pain of seeing a friend suffer, after all.

a grieving friend, though it is painful, does not necessarily entail accepting less happiness for oneself. The end at which the good person aims, being a good friend and having a good friendship, is noble, choiceworthy, and pleasant by its nature, and so will contribute to his happiness, although some actions required by friendship may cause us pain.

Aristotle's requirement that we go, eagerly and unmasked, to offer comfort to a suffering friend, then, cannot essentially be understood in terms of benefitting a friend instead of oneself, nor can the requirement that we not call a friend to us when we are suffering and in need of comfort. Just the opposite, as Pakaluk insightfully argues: the reason Aristotle thinks we should hesitate to call a friend to us, in our misfortune, is that to be too eager to seek a friend's comfort runs the risk of seeming, instead of testifying to "the choiceworthiness in its own right of living life with a friend, . . . to signify . . . valuing it simply as a means to, or occasion for, some benefit."<sup>73</sup> The point is not that we are aiming to show our friend how we are concerned only for his benefit, at our own expense, but that we are concerned to show that we cherish the relationship itself, and do not want to give the impression that we see it merely as some impersonal exchange of benefits.

Especially when we use terms like 'happiness', with its connotations of a passing, subjective, emotional state, in place of 'eudaimonia', it may seem obvious and uncontroversial to say that comforting a suffering friend involves a reduction in one's own happiness. It certainly causes pain and affects one's emotional state negatively. But it must be borne in mind that for Aristotle, although a pleasant sort of emotional state and general experience of life are the natural concomitants of living well, experiencing such a pleasant emotional response is not itself eudaimonia. It is only if we think of happiness in this way—which also entails focusing on in-the-moment benefits or losses, narrowly construed—that we would think it necessarily true that we give up some of our own happiness by acting as a friend should in this kind of painful situation.

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Pakaluk, "Commentary," in *Nicomachean Ethics: Books VIII and IX*, by Aristotle, ed. J.L. Ackrill and Lindsay Judson (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 224.

### 2.3.3 Seeking Value from Friendship Seems Troubling

Many of the same kind of conceptual mistakes are at work in interpretations that find it troubling and morally questionable, at best, to seek benefit or value from friendship. Aristotelian friendship is characterized as “disinterested” or in similar terms by many commentators.<sup>74</sup> It is difficult to reconcile this characterization with Aristotle’s concern to make clear, to the would-be *eudaimōn*, the value of friendships to a life well-lived. As Kraut aptly summarizes Aristotle’s arguments on this point in 9.9, “Aristotle’s argument is not that by having friends, you are better able to do good to other people, and so it is for their sake that you should become their friend. Rather, it is that *you* are better off if you have friendships with others, and this is why you should develop these relationships rather than isolate yourself.”<sup>75</sup> This is not to say that one’s friend will be worse off for the relationship, or that the virtuous person does not act out of concern for his friends’ good; it is simply to say that Aristotelian friendship is not properly characterized as a disinterested relationship.

The most common reason given for the view that virtuous people must not seek anything for themselves from friendship (or at least from character friendships) is that doing so seems incompatible with Aristotle’s requirement that we love a friend “for his own sake.” This requirement, in turn, is understood as requiring that we benefit the friend non-instrumentally, and in some sense of ‘benefit’ that is often left unclear. In short, the “for his own sake” requirement is thought to require a focus on the friend’s interests and not on one’s own, which is why many think that Aristotle thinks the best sort of friendship, at least, is disinterested. Fully addressing this view requires a careful analysis of what Aristotle means by “for his own sake,” which I take up in the next chapter. Here I shall limit myself to considering the nature of the value or benefit friends offer each other, in Aristotle’s view, and contrasting this with how the goods of friendship are commonly understood, in interpretations of Aristotle’s account of friendship. I shall begin by

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<sup>74</sup> See, e.g. Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” 6.; A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), 105.; and Whiting, “Impersonal Friends,” 14.

<sup>75</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 135.



discussing the paradigm case, perfect or virtue friendship, and then briefly consider other types of friendship.

Aristotle holds that friends are goods for each other. Speaking of perfect friendship, Aristotle writes, “Each is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful to each other. So too they are pleasant” (*NE* 8.3.1156b13-16). And “all friendship,” Aristotle notes, “is for the sake of good or of pleasure” (*NE* 8.3.1156b19-20). Aristotle argues that virtue friendship is most perfect because in it, “each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives; which is what ought to happen between friends,” and that this is also common in pleasure friendship (*NE* 8.4.1156b34-35 and 1157a5-6). He later emphasizes that in the best kind of friendship, each “both loves what is good for himself and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness” (*NE* 8.5.1157b34-36).

Even more interestingly, Aristotle does not seem to think that the good of friendship consists solely or primarily in the exchange of certain goods, such as pleasure and shared discussion, but that the relationship itself is the good, something that friends create by a long period of living together and coming to know each other. As Aristotle explains,

Such friendship [virtue friendship] requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other until they have ‘eaten salt together’; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends until each has been found lovable and been trusted by each. Those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they are both lovable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not. (*NE* 8.3.1156b25-32)

This is also why Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes, throughout *NE* 8 and 9, that friends must live together and share in each other’s lives.<sup>76</sup> Aristotle concludes his discussion of friendship with remarks about the importance of living together:

Does it not follow, then, that as for lovers the sight of the beloved is the thing they love most . . . because on it love depends most for its being and for its origin, so for friends the most desirable thing is living together? For friendship is a

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<sup>76</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 8.3.1156b25-27, 8.5.1157b6-10 and b19-20, 8.9.1159b30-32, 8.12.1161b34-35, 9.3.1165b28-30, and 9.9.1169b18-22.

partnership<sup>77</sup>, and as a man is to himself, so he is to his friend; so therefore is the consciousness of his friend's being, and the activity of this consciousness is produced when they live together, so that it is natural that they aim at this. (*NE* 9.12.1171b29-1172a2)

Friends, by spending time together, create and sustain the good that is their relationship. This relationship makes possible the most profound goods of friendship, for it is what allows friends to be other selves, to reflect each other and allow each to experience himself through the friend. In this way, each is able to see his own life and experience himself as good, which in turn makes possible greater self-knowledge and continuous virtuous activity that makes up a life well-lived.

If we understand the goods of friendship in this way, it is clear that both friends should be focused on their relationship with each other: on creating, nurturing and enjoying this relationship. None of the most important goods of friendship are possible without this relationship, and the relationship only retains its character if both parties are sustaining the relationship and benefitting from it. If this is the case, it is not clear how it is even possible for an Aristotelian character friend to do as Whiting thinks Aristotle demands and seek to benefit her friend without seeking benefit to herself.<sup>78</sup>

If we observe that the relationship itself is the good of friendship, even Kraut's more modest concern might appear misplaced. Kraut writes, "Your own good can of course provide a reason for benefitting another person—but it cannot provide a reason for benefitting that person *for his sake*."<sup>79</sup> Of course it if we are looking at a means-ends chain of benefitting, in which external goods of some kind extrinsic to the relationship are being passed down the line, one does ultimately have to determine where the means-

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<sup>77</sup> It is striking that Aristotle also uses this term, *κοινωνία*, to refer to a marriage relationship (*Pol.* 1252a7), and that he makes this comparison between friendship and a love relationship here; both emphasize that a relationship is created, and that this relationship and association, and the activity characteristic of it, is central to the value of friendship.

<sup>78</sup> Whiting, "Impersonal Friends," 18.

<sup>79</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 137. Cooper similarly assumes that it is incoherent to wish someone well for that person's sake in order to get one's *own* enjoyment, writing "To wish for someone else's good for his own sake entails (perhaps means) wishing for his good *not* as a means to one's own (or anyone else's) good." (Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 322.)

end chain stops, i.e. who gets the goods. But if the goods arise from the relationship itself, it does not make sense to focus on the question of who shall benefit. Consider a person looking forward to visiting a close friend who has moved to another city. It seems odd to think it is especially important, or that it even makes sense to ask, “Whose benefit is this person ultimately aiming at by her visit: her own or that of her friend?” Perhaps the more general question of why she is visiting her friend would lend some clarity. She is visiting to maintain and enjoy the friendship, to enjoy spending time together and catching up. It does not make sense to try to understand the aim here in terms of determining which party benefits or who aims to benefit whom. Clearly, both benefit, and in like ways, by the kinds of interactions the visit will make possible. Given that both parties thrive and do well simultaneously, to the extent that the two are close and have a good relationship, it is not clear why it would be troubling or immoral to seek value for oneself through a friendship in this way.

If I am correct about this, then it is not the case, as e.g. Kraut and Cooper have argued, that friends may enter a relationship expecting some kind of context of benefit, but that friends do not continue to expect such value once the relationship is established. Kraut writes, “We can meet the needs of our friends for their sake, even though when we began to develop these relationships, we were acting only for our own sake.”<sup>80</sup> Cooper contrasts the past-oriented and future-oriented meanings of “because” (διά) and holds that when Aristotle writes that we are friends with each other because of utility, pleasure, or virtue, he is making the psychological claim that “those who have enjoyed one another’s company or have been mutually benefitted through their association, will, as a result of the benefits or pleasures they receive, tend to wish for and be willing to act in the interest of the other person’s good, independently of consideration of their *own* welfare or pleasure.”<sup>81</sup>

I do not think these two come apart as Cooper does. The same facts about our friends and our own aims in pursuing the friendship are the causal impetus giving rise to *both* the

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<sup>80</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 138.

<sup>81</sup> Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 323.

friend's having been useful, pleasant or good, and our expectation that she will *continue* to be so. Aristotle's discussions of the proper conditions for ending a friendship, e.g. in 9.3, make it clear that these considerations do not fall away after the start of the relationship. However, I do not think it is troubling, in the Aristotelian context, if an expectation about what the relationship will bring with it is an important part of why we pursue the friendship. In virtue friendship, at least, it is clear that these expectations are based on having a certain type of relationship with a certain type of person, and that both parties to the relationship benefit in like ways from the relationship. Neither can benefit in the ways characteristic of virtue friendship outside of the context of this sort of mutually rewarding and mutually cherished relationship. It is not troubling to seek some value for oneself through this relationship given that the relationship is the sort of good that is naturally and inherently of value to both people.

What about in the less perfect sorts of friendship, utility friendship and pleasure friendship? To the extent that friends exchange the same kinds of goods, at least, it seems that the same dynamic applies. As Aristotle explains, "Friendships are most permanent when the friends get the same thing from each other (e.g. pleasure), and not only that but also from the same source, as happens between ready-witted people" (*NE* 8.4.1157a4-6). Later he elaborates, "Nor do complaints arise much even in friendships of pleasure; for both get at the same time what they desire, if they enjoy spending their time together; and even a man who complained of another for *not* affording him pleasure would seem ridiculous, since it is in his power not to spend his days with him" (*NE* 8.13.1162bb13-17). In this sort of pleasure friendship, it seems neither can enjoy the time spent with the friend unless both parties do, so aiming to get value from the relationship for oneself entails both seeking pleasure and seeking to please.

I believe a similar dynamic is at play in utility friendships, at least in those characterized by both friends getting the same good, and from the same source—for example, the kind of friendship that roommates might have. It is hard to imagine the living situation remaining tolerable, let alone any affection between the two roommates persisting, if both did not aim primarily to have a good relationship with each other, to the extent that the typically limited intimacy of such a relationship tends to make possible. Conversely, if

both aimed at the relationship, both would get the usefulness sought from the relationship: a nicer home than each could otherwise afford, some insurance against the loneliness that living on one's own can often bring, and a welcoming home life.

In all of the above sorts of relationships I have discussed, it is not particularly useful to ask whose benefit is the aim, as the friends seek value through the relationship, through having a shared life with another person, which by its nature is something that is equally of value to both parties.

If this is the case, it is misleading to attempt to understand the differences between the three different types of friendship in terms of who benefits. Even Cooper, who argues for certain deeper similarities between the three types of friendship than conventional interpretations recognize, accepts the common view that who benefits is what distinguishes the types, writing that “the admixture of self-seeking in character-friendships is significantly less than in pleasure- and advantage-friendships.”<sup>82</sup> But in all of the types of friendship, a person seeks to build a relationship which he thinks will offer him value; the difference is not in the extent to which a person seeks value for himself, but in the nature of the value the relationship offers him.

What makes utility and pleasure friendship less complete is not some flaw that arises out of an excess of self-seeking, but that these friendships do not arise out of a response to what is essential in the other person and thus, friends in this sort of relationship seek and gain a more limited value. Sometimes a person seeks a more limited value from friendship because he is mistaken about what is most valuable, in general. A person who thinks pleasure is the highest good for human beings, for example, does not aim at the proper end for himself in any of his pursuits, and the way in which he pursues friendship is no different: the best friendships he can have are pleasure friendships. In other cases, a person may have a clear view of the highest good, but pursue utility or pleasure friendship for other reasons: perhaps he does not have the time to devote to another, more intimate friendship, does not yet know the person well enough to be virtue friends, or

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 328.

does not find the other person an equal, in terms of excellence of character. Virtue friendship is perfect and complete not because neither party seeks any value for himself, but because, by building a mutually beneficial relationship rooted in each other's goodness and shared lives and interests, both seek and offer each other the richest kinds of values we can experience from relationships with others. But in all types of friendship, the friends are aiming at a relationship that each supposes will be of value in helping him live well.

## 2.4 Further Problems that Arise from this Focus

A variety of problems and tensions arise when, as in the examples above, the question of the beneficiary is treated as fundamental (even if the terms 'egoism' and 'altruism' are dispensed with). The responses to these apparent problems typically lead to solutions that move further from Aristotle's own approach to ethics and view of friendship. I will take up a few of these proposed solutions below, and give a brief indication of how each departs from Aristotle's broader views. I will consider Kahn's interest-objection distinction, Annas' motive-content distinction, and various theories that resolve the "problems" in Aristotle's account of friendship by, in effect, making others' interests completely identical with our own. The latter approach is found, in different ways, in the writings on Aristotle by T.H. Green, David Brink, and Jennifer Whiting.

### 2.4.1 The Interest-Objective and Motive-Content Distinctions

As I noted above, Kahn characterizes self-love in terms of pursuing one's own interests, as "rational egoism or the enlightened pursuit of one's own best interests."<sup>83</sup> This, I argued, is to confuse a result with essence; Aristotle thinks self-love *results* in a person pursuing his own best interests in a long-term enlightened way, but it is not correct to essentially conceive of self-love in this way. So Kahn's starting point is un-Aristotelian in this important way, which brings about the appearance of a tension between self-love and friendship. Kahn's attempt to address this apparent tension, I believe, represents an additional departure from Aristotle's views.

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<sup>83</sup> Kahn, "Aristotle and Altruism," 30.

Kahn thinks that Aristotle's account fails to provide a framework that shows how one can both pursue one's interests and also benefit others, and he introduces a distinction between interest and objective to resolve this problem. Kahn notes that his distinction is one "which Aristotle does not make, but which seems to be called for by the phenomena he describes. The point of the terminological distinction will be to separate out the altruistic element in such a way as to leave room for non-altruistic concerns bearing on the act or attitude."<sup>84</sup>

Kahn explains what he means by 'interest' and 'objective': "I distinguish the interest as that element in desire or motivation which involves a concern for the agent's own advantage, gratification, or welfare," and "In the context of such a personal relationship I call the objective that goal of desire or intention that is concerned exclusively with the welfare of the other person 'for the other's sake'."<sup>85</sup> Kahn later summarizes, "This distinction between objective and interest is between the goal at which one aims and the impulse or reason for so aiming."<sup>86</sup>

This is a reasonable conceptual distinction to make. It becomes a problem, however, when Kahn assigns moral weight to this distinction in a way that is inconsistent with Aristotle's views of the proper motivation for virtuous actions and the proper objective of such actions.

Kahn characterizes the virtuous agent's motivation or interest as egoistic, and egoism, for Kahn, is "a catch-all reference to any concern for one's own interests or welfare."<sup>87</sup> Kahn, then, is essentially characterizing the virtuous agent's motivation in terms of whose welfare is the agent's reason for acting. As I have been arguing, this kind of benefit-driven account is inconsistent with Aristotle's views on the nature of the proper motivation for virtuous action. Kahn gives no account of how his idea, that the virtuous

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 20.

agent acts with an eye to his own interests or welfare, is to be related to Aristotle's requirement that the virtuous person act for the sake of the fine. This aspect of Aristotle's account seems to largely be absent from Kahn's view of moral motivation for the good person.

Perhaps more troublingly, Kahn's distinction represents a departure from Aristotle's views in that it seems to put all the moral weight on the consequences, specifically on whose benefit is to be the result. What Kahn sees as the laudable altruism of virtue friendship is rooted in the agent's objective, in the consequence sought. The egoism of one's interest or motivations is just a brute fact about how human beings pursue relationships, and no aspect of motivation, thus regarded, is anything upon which moral estimates of the friendship should be based.

Kahn's departure from Aristotle's own view is evident, for example, in how awkwardly the interest-objective distinction applies to Aristotle's conclusions in 9.8. Because Kahn is focused on the question of *whose* benefit or interest is the goal, his account fails to note or give due importance to the fact that Aristotle is, in some ways, giving a radically unconventional view of what is truly in one's interest; this, more than the question of who gets the goods, is the focus of Aristotle's discussion in 9.8. What is a result of this particular oversight? Aristotle makes clear, in 9.8, that everyone, the agent included, benefits from a person striving toward the fine. While the fact of who benefits is not of fundamental importance in Aristotle's account, it is in Kahn's, and if we apply Kahn's distinction to what Aristotle says, in 9.8, about who benefits from fine actions, it would seem fine actions should be labeled both egoistic and altruistic with regard to the agent's objective. But admitting egoism into the goals of the virtuous person is exactly the sort of result Kahn meant to avoid with his interest-objective distinction.

A similar tension arises in Annas's attempt to characterize Aristotle's arguments in 9.8. She writes, "The agent acts out of self-concern, but where this is concern for oneself as a rational agent aiming at the fine, this will take the form of other-directed and moral action. Thus, we remove the conflict, by understanding self-concern not to be the agent's



immediate aim.”<sup>88</sup> Whether or not self-concern is the agent’s immediate aim, it is one aspect of her aim, properly construed. Thus, it is not clear how even the examples of 9.8 should be seen as essentially other-concerned, rather than as both self-concerned (as regards the agent’s long term considerations about the quality of her life as a whole) and other-concerned (in that she is focused on her love for her friend in the moment), in different respects. In this case, the content of the agent’s actions would be both self-concerned and other-concerned, which does not seem to be the result at which Annas is aiming. Jarringly, she later characterizes actions such as giving money to a friend as “self-sacrificial.” It is significant that the agent is motivated out of love for his friend, but to treat benefitting the friend (let alone benefitting her with mere external goods) as a sacrifice of self is to lose sight of what counts as the self, for Aristotle.

In sum, in Kahn’s account, motivation is understood narrowly in terms of the beneficiary, without any mention of aiming at the fine, and motivation has also been rendered irrelevant to moral judgment. What is morally significant, in Kahn’s account, is the goal or objective, and this is understood not in terms of the agent’s *telos* or view of happiness, but in terms of the consequences: whose interests are served. Both Annas and Kahn, because of their focus on the content or result of the agent’s action, sometimes slip into treating the beneficiary of one’s actions—specifically, benefitting others—as fundamental to virtue. This sits uneasily with several of Aristotle’s views: that both the agent and those around him benefit from virtue; that acting nobly, whether to one’s own benefit and/or to others, and though it may be difficult, is not a sacrifice of self but an expression of real self-love; and generally, that acting for the sake of the fine is the proper motivation, not acting for the benefit of some particular person or persons.

#### 2.4.2 Attempts to Make Others’ Interests Identical to Our Own

Another common approach to addressing perceived tensions between self and other in Aristotle’s account of friendship is to look for a way to make the interests of others identical to the agent’s. Whiting effects this result by making both friendship and the

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<sup>88</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 260.

agent's relationship with himself based on an impersonal response to virtue. Another way to collapse others' interests into our own is to make the agent's concern for others' good identical with his concern for himself—such that he has as deep and personal an interest in the good of his friends as in his own good. Brink pursues this strategy, and T.H. Green pursued it even more consistently with his “extreme harmony” view of human beings' interests. I will briefly take up each of these tacks, and indicate how these solutions lead to significant departures from Aristotle's established views on friendship.

Gregory Vlastos understands Aristotle to require a “disinterested” love for one's friend.<sup>89</sup> Jennifer Whiting, drawing in part from Vlastos, holds that Aristotle idealizes disinterested, impersonal friendship, not only with others but also in one's relationship with oneself.<sup>90</sup> In her view,

The requirement that the virtuous person choose and value virtuous action for its own sake . . . commits her to valuing virtuous actions *as such*, and so to valuing virtuous action in any and every one in whom it occurs. . . . So a person's appreciation of her own virtues—provided she appreciates them as such and not simply as instruments for her own benefit—commits her to appreciating these virtues in the same way in any and every one in whom they occur.<sup>91</sup>

Whiting thinks (and I agree) that her approach offers an advantage over the sorts of views that collapse others' interests into our own, because it “makes it *possible* for her to take an attitude to the characters and ends of others the same in kind with the attitude she takes toward her own *without* having to regard their respective goods as *parts* of her own.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Gregory Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” in *Platonic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1981), 33.

<sup>90</sup> Whiting, “Impersonal Friends.” Note that Whiting is not attempting to provide a strict interpretation of Aristotle. Instead Whiting is self-consciously using Aristotle in service of her own end, of showing that there can be reasons for promoting others' good that are the same in kind as the reason one promotes his own good. Nonetheless, I think it sheds light on Aristotle's views to consider how Whiting's account departs from them as a result of mischaracterizing his starting points.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Whiting concedes that the virtuous person might *also* have a “special sort of appreciation”<sup>93</sup> of those virtues as they occur in significant others. But this is largely a function of historical and psychological accident,<sup>94</sup> and thus, she concludes, “We should not make virtues out of pragmatic necessities.”<sup>95</sup>

I think it is true that Aristotle’s account commits him to thinking that there is *some* sense in which the virtuous person should, to the extent her knowledge permits, appreciate virtues equally in everyone in whom they occur. Certainly, e.g., upon hearing of how bravely some hoplite acted in defending the city, a virtuous person should recognize him as courageous even without having met him. Or after seeing one of Aristophanes’ plays performed, one might appreciate his wit as even greater than that of a particularly funny friend. We might also think, after reading the biography of someone long-deceased, that she was a virtuous person, perhaps even a greater person than anyone we have met personally. It is right to evaluate virtuous strangers according to the same standard of excellence as we apply to our friends.

But this does not entail that anything other than virtue that contributes to friendship is mere historical or psychological accident with no moral significance; there is also a respect in which it would be wrong to equally value all virtuous individuals. We are not just valuing disembodied virtue, but virtue as embodied in a particular person who has come to share in our lives. Although some aspects regarding how we become friends are accidental in the way Whiting describes, our reasons for maintaining the friendship and doing well by our friends are not. Aristotle thinks that we owe more to those who have shared in our lives, and it is virtuous, in Aristotle’s account, to give priority to them. The agent’s own eudaimonia is the aim, and reference to each person’s values helps determine what actions are fitting—how to act virtuously in particular situations. For example, Aristotle seems to think courage is most valuable, and most fine, in defending one’s own

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

friends and city.<sup>96</sup> It seems that noble, courageous actions are properly given in the service of what is most central to the agent's life: his friends and his country. The same seems to be true in the case of anger, which Aristotle thinks should properly be felt in response to slights to oneself, and to friends and family. Aristotle writes that a deficiency in feeling anger seems to indicate a kind of insensibility, and the problem with this is that such a person does not seem to be the sort to defend himself (*NE* 4.5.1126a7), and that "to endure being insulted and overlook insult to one's family and friends is slavish" (*NE* 4.5.1126a8). Aristotle's criteria for anger—that we be "angry at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way and at the right time, and for the right length of time" (*NE* 4.5.1126a32-34)—also seem to imply that greater anger on behalf of intimates who have been wronged is called for; the value of anger is to defend oneself and one's honour, and that of friends and family, presumably to the extent of our intimacy and association with them. As Aristotle later notes, "It is not fitting to have the same care for intimates and for strangers" (4.6.1126b27).

Focusing one's virtuous energy in this way, on one's friends and associates, is not "belittling others" of equal virtue, as Whiting claims.<sup>97</sup> In Aristotle's view, giving priority to friends is to justly recognize the value others have had in one's life, which is itself virtuous. So, for example, it is true that other parents might have been just as virtuous as one's own, in being loving and in providing training in the virtues to their children, and it is only right to recognize this. Nonetheless, a person owes more concern and attention to her own parents, in Aristotle's view, because they were the ones who gave her being and helped her, in particular, to become a good person.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, it can be somewhat a matter of chance which virtuous people one happens to meet. But only those good people with whom a person has become friend, who share in her life, can act

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<sup>96</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 3.8.1116b15-20 and 9.8.1169a19-28, both of which I discuss in the previous chapter, section 1.2.

<sup>97</sup> Whiting, "Impersonal Friends," 24.

<sup>98</sup> See, e.g., *NE* 8.14.1163b13-17, where Aristotle notes that "the man who is benefitted in respect of wealth or virtue must give honour in return, repaying what he can. For friendship asks a man to do what he can, not what is proportional to the merits of the case, since that cannot always be done, e.g. honours paid to the gods or parents; for no one could ever repay to them the equivalent of what he gets."

as other selves; only such intimates can share in and enhance each other's virtuous activity in the way that virtue friends do. Such friends offer each other something that virtuous strangers could not, and thus, it is only right that they devote most of their time to each other, and not to lesser relationships. It is in some ways beside the point of providing practical guidance for living, as Aristotle aims to do, to focus on the point that other people are as virtuous as one's own close friends; one nonetheless properly owes more to one's friends.

In sum, Whiting's point that the virtuous person should respond in an appropriate way to excellence in all people is true, but this is not the only morally significant principle dictating how we should respond to our friends, for Aristotle. Whiting, in her concern to make room for self-love, offers an account that is inconsistent with what both justice and friendship require, for Aristotle.

Both David Brink and T.H. Green start from similar worries as those that spur Whiting's impersonal friends thesis: they worry that Aristotle fails to make room for both self and other. Recall that Brink raised questions about how the would-be *eudaimōn* could make room for other-concern, given that the resources we spend on friends can detract from our own pursuits. As a result, Brink is concerned to give an account of how other-regarding traits such as courage, friendship and justice are genuine virtues. Aristotle, unlike Plato, does not explicitly confront eudaimonist doubts about other-regarding virtues, Brink notes, but he cannot avoid such doubts if we are to see why such activities should count as virtue.<sup>99</sup>

Brink and Green attempt to address this perceived problem with interpretations of Aristotle in which people's interests are metaphysically not just causally interdependent. If the kind of metaphysical connection of interests both posit holds true, then acting on other-regarding requirements of virtue and friendship promotes the agent's own interests even when such actions provide no instrumental value to us.

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<sup>99</sup> Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," 126.

Brink argues for continuity between individuals akin to the continuity between a person's current and future self. If this is the case, Brink argues, "the separateness or diversity of persons is not so fundamental. Insofar as distinct individuals are psychologically connected and continuous, each can and should view the other as one who extends her own interests in the same sort of way that her own future self extends her interests."<sup>100</sup>

Green differs from Brink in that he thinks that this dependence goes deeper, such that when interests are properly construed, no conflicts of interest are possible between people. Green's "extreme harmony" view of the interests of agent and friends would make others' interests as important as and in a sense, identical to, our own. Both thinkers hold that something like their view is found in the Greek eudaimonist tradition.<sup>101</sup>

Brink's and Green's arguments both rely on treating the parent-child relationship as the paradigm friendship. On the face of it, this is a strained interpretation at best, given that Aristotle clearly indicates that the parent-child relationship is basis for all kin friendships (*NE* 8.12.1161b16-17) not of friendship in general. Brink acknowledges that there are important differences between virtue friendship and the parent-child friendship, but he holds that this account of familial friendship nonetheless clearly brings out Aristotle's claim of a friend as "another self." According to Aristotle, Brink notes, the parent loves a child in part as a product of himself, and thus it is natural that he would come to regard his child's overall good "in just the way the well-being of [his] future self is part of [his] overall good."<sup>102,103</sup>

However, this way of being 'another self' is importantly different from the way that virtue friends are another self to each other. Most obviously, the parent-child

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>102</sup> David O. Brink, "Introduction," in *Prolegomena to Ethics*, by T. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004), xlv.

<sup>103</sup> Or at least it is clear how this could be the case when the child is still a child. As Aristotle indicates at *NE* 5.6.1134b10-11, a person's child is his in this sense only "until it reaches a certain age and sets up for itself."

relationship, in Aristotle's view, is not a relationship between equals,<sup>104</sup> whereas equality is most characteristic of virtue friendship (*NE* 8.5.1157b36-37).

The equality characteristic of virtue friendship means that such friends reflect each other in different ways than a child reflects a parent. A virtue friend is not another self *qua* one's product but *qua* in sharing and reflecting one's virtues and values. A young child cannot yet share her parents' virtues and values and may or may not come to as she grows up, but a parent will commonly love a child regardless of such differences, and even if they grow apart to a large extent in terms of their values, lifestyle, and shared activities; the child is always his child and still reflects him at least by virtue of the long parts of their lives they have shared and how the child's upbringing is reflected in his adult character. In virtue friendship, however, the relationship is a chosen one in a fuller and more reciprocal way; each has chosen the other for who she is as a basically actualized human being. Virtue friendship only obtains to the extent that the other person is equally virtuous, and an embodiment of the kind of person one is and would like to be.<sup>105</sup>

This solution, then, is a significant departure from Aristotle's account of friendship, in that Brink and Green have fundamentally changed the paradigm of friendship. Green departs more fundamentally than Brink. While Green does not go as far, say, as Plato does in the *Republic*, in trying to make all human beings part of one family, his conceptual framework seems akin to Plato's in that he wants to make *all* other human beings interests', to some extent, constitutive of our own. For this sort of endeavour, Aristotle's model friendship, virtue friendship, will not suffice: it is possible to too few human beings, it is an intense personal relationship possible with only a few, and very few people can aid in one's self-actualization in the rich way Green seems to want others in a political community to do. In Green's view, friendship, or at least the sharing of ends that Aristotle associates with it, seems far less closely tied to virtue or to acquaintance.

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<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., *NE* 8.7 and 8.14. At 8.14.1163b17, Aristotle compares the inequality between parent and child to that between god and man and notes that no one could ever repay to his parents what is owed.

<sup>105</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 8.3.1156b7-9 and 9.9.1170b6-11.

In short, while I think there is much of value in Green's attempt to show that there is no necessary opposition between self-interest and benevolence, in Aristotle's account, Green goes too far in the opposite direction, in effect establishing others' interests, even the interests of the remotest Mysian, *as our own*. There seems to be no meaningful distinction, in his account, between benevolence and friendship. I think one could make the case, and I shall attempt to do so in the final chapter, that for the Aristotelian *eudaimōn*, benevolence, justice, and justified concern towards such a stranger flow naturally from the exalted view of himself and of human potential that his virtue and virtue friendships have made possible. However, the view that a stranger's good can become one's own in the way Green seems to think possible is a much stronger argument. A friend is another self, in Green's view, in a much more abstracted way than in Aristotle's account.

While both Brink and Green raise important questions about how the different interests of friends are to be reconciled, the solutions they offer come at too great a cost in terms of fidelity to central aspects of Aristotle's own view of friendship. I shall take up their questions again in the final chapter, and offer a way of answering them that I believe is more consistent with Aristotle's ethics and specifically, with his account of friendship.

## 2.5 Conclusions

As I argued in the first chapter, Aristotle is focused, in his ethical works, on the question of what the good is, not on the question of who gets the goods. In Aristotle's view, we cannot make sense of what counts as good for a person without reference to our proper end, the good at which we should aim. Identifying this good is the proper starting point.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to show that although conscientious scholars avoid the use of terms such as 'egoism' and 'altruism' in their accounts of Aristotle, or use such terms with care, many interpreters of Aristotle nonetheless employ the very criterion definitive of these terms by focusing on the question of the beneficiary. This is neither a proper starting point nor a fundamental criterion of moral evaluation, for Aristotle.



This focus on the beneficiary, I have shown, is evident in myriad concerns regarding how one can make room for other-concern in a life well-lived: in the question of how self-love can coexist with benevolence and friendship, in the idea that being conscientious about what friendship requires tends to bring less happiness to a person, and in the assumption that friendships are morally evaluated according to who benefits rather than (as elsewhere in Aristotle's ethics) according to whether the friend is acting for the sake of what is good or noble.

Because the question of who benefits is implicitly taken as a proper starting point, the fact that benefit is determined by reference to the final end is often forgotten. Instead, what is beneficial tends to be evaluated by reference to pre-theoretical emotional or conventional views of what kinds of things count as benefits or costs. This is apparent in how often external goods are given more importance than Aristotle's account allows, and more importance than things that Aristotle thinks are more central to happiness, e.g. in the way that Brink worries about friendship costing resources a person might otherwise have spent on himself, or when Annas treats giving money to a friend as an act of self-sacrifice. It is also shown in how often any sort of pain or difficulty brought about by acting as a good friend should be treated, *prima facie*, as a loss of happiness, as, e.g., when Kraut assumes the pain of comforting a grieving friend necessarily represents a loss of happiness for the person doing the comforting.

One question to which my interpretation gives rise is, if, as I have been arguing, there is not a deep tension involved in making room for both self-concern and other-concern, why does Aristotle insist that true friendship requires loving a friend "for his own sake"? Clearly, if my account is to be consistent with Aristotle's account of friendship as a whole, it is essential to make sense of this central requirement of friendship in terms that depart somewhat from conventional interpretations. I take up this task in the next chapter. For now and in light of the discussion of the current chapter, I will simply say that understanding this requirement as saying we must disinterestedly and altruistically pursue the friend's benefit is also a result of being unduly focused on the beneficiary, is inconsistent with Aristotle's own account of the requirement, and risks losing sight of the value of friendship to a life well-lived.

In sum, there is nothing inherently problematic in asking about who benefits from virtuous activity, or from observing, as Aristotle does, that such activity naturally tends to benefit both the agent and her associates. The problem is in treating this question as a starting point. In doing so, we lose sight of how Aristotle's answer to the question of what the good is both determines what is beneficial and renders the issue of who benefits far less fundamental than it is in contemporary ethics. The objective nature of human excellence, in Aristotle's account, ensures that the kinds of actions a person takes toward having a flourishing life tend to result in benefits to both herself and her associates. In part because of this, the context of benefit, whether one chooses to emphasize the value to self or others, cannot serve as a standard of virtue.

In light of this, let us briefly consider a question that recurs in the literature: the extent to which and ways in which Aristotle is and is not an egoist or altruist. Aristotle's eudaimonism can properly be understood as egoistic, but certainly not in any contemporary sense of the term. His ethics are egoist only in the sense that Richard Kraut uses when he describes the very different ancient form of egoism, which "does not accept the formal principle that whatever the good is, we should seek only our own good, or prefer it to the good of others."<sup>106</sup>

Egoism, in the contemporary sense, starts with the idea that each person should seek his own good, and similarly, altruism starts with the idea that we should seek others' good—i.e., both start by specifying the beneficiary—and only later does the question (perhaps) arise of what the good is, as a kind of afterthought. Aristotle, in sharp contrast, begins with the question of what the good is, and then states (in *NE* 9.4, for example), that only those who *really* know what is good for them should pursue it.<sup>107</sup> To the extent that he thinks the virtuous, at least, should pursue what they take to be their own good—their

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Kraut, "Egoism and Altruism," ed. E. Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge), accessed September 30, 2011, <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/L126>.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. at 9.8, Aristotle writes that the good man should be a lover of self and always try to secure the fine for himself (1168b27), but the wicked man should not follow his "evil passions" (1169a14) based in his wrong idea of what the best things are (1168b17), for "he will hurt both himself and his neighbors" (1169a12-15).

own eudaimonia—it seems plausible to call Aristotle an egoist, but if we do so, we must keep in mind both that Aristotle does not start with the claim that a person should seek his own good and that Aristotle has very different views than many contemporary ethicists of what actually constitutes a person's good.

## 3

## Loving a Friend “For His Own Sake”

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that friendship is “something most necessary with a view to living” (8.1.1155a5), that all human beings need it, and that it is necessary at all times of life: in youth, when friends keep one from error; in the prime of life, when they help motivate noble actions; and in old age, when friends minister to one’s needs (8.1.1155a6-14). Friendship is useful, providing opportunities to exercise beneficence and other virtues (8.1.1155a9), and it is fine, inspiring friends to virtuous actions, “For with friends men are more able both to think and to act” (8.1.1155a15-16). In all friendships, love should be “in proportion to the merit of the parties” (8.7.1158b27), and in the best sort of friendship, “each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives, which is what ought to happen between friends” (8.4.1156b34-35). Claims like these are made throughout books 8 and 9 of the *NE*, and they seem to add up to the idea of Aristotelian friendship as grounded in each person’s own needs and values.

However, Aristotle also argues that loving is more characteristic of friendship than being loved (8.8.1159a26-27), that we must wish well to the person we love, and that “we ought to wish what is good for his own sake” (“τῷ δὲ φίλῳ...δεῖν βούλεσθαι τὰγαθὰ ἐκείνου ἔνεκα”, 8.3.1155b30-32). “Those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends,” (8.3.1156b10) he emphasizes. What does Aristotle mean when he says that we must love a friend “for his own sake” (ἐκείνου ἔνεκα), and how are we to reconcile this with the idea of friendship as serving one’s own interests and making one’s own life better? More broadly, how is this requirement consistent with Aristotle’s eudaimonism?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When I say that Aristotle’s ethics are “eudaimonist”, I mean that in his ethics, the agent’s eudaimonia—or flourishing or well-being, properly conceived—is the highest ethical goal, and has motivational primacy.

The “for his own sake” requirement is commonly thought to counsel a kind of self-effacement that tempers the egoism or agent-centeredness<sup>2</sup> of Aristotle’s ethics; it is assumed to be altruistic in nature, requiring that we benefit our friend in a non-instrumental way, possibly at our own expense, and that we not seek benefit from friendships. Julia Annas, for example, sees Aristotle as “struggling to resolve Plato’s problems [from the *Lysis*] about the altruistic nature of friendship.”<sup>3</sup> Gregory Vlastos understands Aristotle to require a “disinterested” love for one’s friend.<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Whiting holds that Aristotle is drawing a distinction between for the friend’s benefit and for one’s own benefit, and writes, “the more [one’s] relationships with her so-called friends are grounded in her needs, the less (it seems) her relationships with them qualify as true friendship.”<sup>5</sup>

If this characterization is correct, it should be clear why some find a tension between this requirement and Aristotle’s broader eudaimonist approach to ethics. On the one hand, Aristotle seems to think that the relative few who know what human happiness really is are *right* to seek their own happiness and to treat this as their final end—9.8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, makes this argument at some length.<sup>6</sup> On the other

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<sup>2</sup> When I say that Aristotle’s ethics are ‘agent-centered’, I mean that he expects important moral consideration be given to the agent, especially to the development and preservation of her character and principles, as opposed to his consideration being focused on her actions, or on the consequences thereof.

<sup>3</sup> Annas, “Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,” 537.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” in *Platonic Studies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1981), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Whiting, “The Nicomachean Account of *Philia*,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 278.

<sup>6</sup> In *NE* 9.8, Aristotle raises the question of whether a person should love himself most of all, or someone else, and answers that the virtuous person is right to love himself most. Aristotle points out that ‘self-love’ is used as a term of reproach only by those mistaken about the highest good; e.g. those who think that the good is wealth or honours or pleasure, and thus, who think that to love the self is to seize a disproportionate amount of whichever of these is thought the highest good. By doing so, they are worthy of reproach for not knowing what the good is and for continually bringing themselves into conflict with those who covet similar things (9.8.1168b15-17). However, Aristotle continues, “If a man were always anxious that he himself, above all things, should act justly, temperately, or in accordance with any of the other virtues, and in general were always to try to secure for himself the honorable course, no one will call such a man a lover of self or blame him. But such a man would seem more than the other a lover of self; at all events, he assigns to himself the things that are noblest and best” (9.8.1168b25-29). He concludes this section, “Therefore the good man should be a lover of self (for by doing noble acts he will both profit himself and

hand, Aristotle's idea that friendship (or at least the best sort of friendship) is characterized by each friend loving the other "for his own sake" would seem to entail treating *someone else's good* as one's final end.

This tension is most pronounced, and of greatest concern, in the case of the best or paradigmatic sort of friendship, that between virtuous people. Such excellent people, in the Aristotelian model, would be most consistent about properly pursuing their own happiness. As Aristotle explains in *NE* 9.4,<sup>7</sup> they are not conflicted in their aims or within themselves, they know what happiness is, and they explicitly seek a properly human flourishing life for themselves. Yet the friendship between such people, more so than utility- or pleasure-friendship, requires that each love the friend "for his own sake" (8.3.1156b9-11). If a virtue-friend most truly loves a friend "for his own sake" and if we accept the altruistic interpretation of the "for his own sake" requirement, it seems that those most devoted to actualizing themselves and to their own flourishing are also those who are most apt to treat their friends' happiness as the aim of their relationships.

Given the standard interpretation of the "for his own sake" requirement, this tension arises not only between Aristotle's account of friendship and his ethical principles more broadly, but also, as A.W. Price notes, within Aristotle's account of friendship itself. It seems that by requiring that we love our friend "for his own sake", Aristotle is positing an essentially altruistic requirement for perfect friendship, yet he also uses the phrase to mean that we must love a virtue-friend for the excellences he instantiates, and such a love, Price rightly observes, could be egoistic. "Is [Aristotle] just confused," Price asks, "or does he provide the materials for articulating the bridge between the two notions?"<sup>8</sup>

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his fellows)," (9.8.1169a11-15) and at the end of the chapter he adds, "In all the actions, therefore, that men are praised for, the good man is seen to assign to himself the greater share in what is noble. In this sense... a man should be a lover of self."

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., 1166a10-16 and 1166a24-28. Contrast this with what Aristotle presents as the natural results of the bad person pursuing his own happiness at 1166b6-26.

<sup>8</sup> A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), 105.

Viewing the “for his own sake” requirement as demanding a kind of self-effacement is tempting in the contemporary context because we think of ethics as being primarily about our duties to others. However, I shall argue that no such “bridge” as Price and others demand is needed to close the supposed gap between the “for his own sake” requirement and the idea that we love a friend for his character, or the apparent gap between this requirement and Aristotle’s eudaimonism generally. Aristotle is not, by requiring that we love a friend for his own sake, putting forth any requirement that perfect friendship be altruistic. His account of friendship is neither altruistic nor egoistic in any standard sense of these terms.<sup>9</sup>

Conscientious scholars, including many quoted above, recognize that the ideas of egoism and altruism are anachronistic to Aristotle’s context. Nonetheless, a focus characteristic of the altruist- egoist framework all too often guides contemporary work on Aristotle’s account of friendship: a focus on the beneficiary.<sup>10</sup> Egoism generally refers to an ethical approach that treats the self, or one’s own interests, as the motivation and goal of morality.<sup>11</sup> Altruism involves treating others’ interests as the fundamental motive or aim, and as important for themselves and not instrumentally.<sup>12</sup> Altruism may or may not involve some connotation of self-sacrifice; whether it does is not important at this point in my argument. What is at issue is the ultimate moral justification for action, and in any version of these definitions, what is central to both concepts is the issue of whom one aims to benefit.

Thus we see, in contemporary accounts, a concern to determine who should benefit from one’s actions in Aristotelian friendships. But for Aristotle, I shall show, the beneficiary of an agent’s actions, while not irrelevant, is not fundamental to the moral evaluation of

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<sup>9</sup> Again, when I speak of egoism, altruism, eudaimonism, etc., in this thesis, I refer to ethical or rational egoism, altruism or eudaimonism; I do not think Aristotle espouses a form of psychological egoism, and in any case, that is not my focus here; Aristotle’s normative account is.

<sup>10</sup> The beneficiary focus is also found in some interpretations of Aristotle’s teleology. See, e.g., Monte Johnson’s *Aristotle’s Teleology*. As I will explain below, in 3.1, I think that such an interpretation is also mistaken.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Egoism,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 225.

actions or of the agent, so interpreting his ethical views and his account of friendship in terms of it—e.g. by holding that the different kinds of friendship are differentiated in large part by who benefits—is misleading, at best.

A context of mutual benefit is characteristic of friendship, as Aristotle repeatedly makes clear, but the purpose of the “for his own sake” requirement is not to specify which party benefits in which kind of friendship but to make clear what it is to love and respond to another person as an end, i.e. as a person. Certainly, understanding something about the nature of human beings and what it is to love another person has implications for the benefits of friendship and for many other aspects of friendship: why there *must* be this context of mutual benefit in any friendship, as well as, for example, why Aristotle thinks friends must share their lives, and that people can participate in rewarding relationships with others only to the extent that they are virtuous. However, what is fundamental to Aristotle’s account of friendship is how he understands loving another person as an end: this is what Aristotle emphasizes with the “for his own sake” requirement, and this is what accounts for many of the other characteristics he thinks are necessary for friendship. Neither friendship nor types of friendship are defined according to which person benefits. Yet questions about who benefits are ubiquitous in attempts to understand the “for his own sake” requirement, and unfortunately, the answers to such questions have defined this requirement of friendship in contemporary interpretation.

If Aristotle, when he insists that we must love a friend “for his own sake”, is not saying that we must not seek value from a friendship, what does this requirement mean? To understand this requirement, it is crucial to note that the language of this requirement of friendship is teleological; thus, I will begin my account of the “for his own sake” requirement by considering what Aristotle says elsewhere about teleology and the nature of final causation.

With this general teleological framework in place, I shall proceed as follows: first, I consider the different ways Aristotle specifically uses “for his own sake” in his account of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, considering the direct textual support for my interpretation, and showing that Aristotle himself does not indicate or imply that



friendship should be disinterested or otherwise independent of one's own needs and interests. I will argue that Aristotle uses "for his own sake" with at least two different meanings in the *Nicomachean* account of friendship, with one meaning applicable to friendship generally and one specific to virtue-friendship.<sup>13</sup> He initially presents this requirement at 8.2.1155b31-32, after his discussion of the things commonly said and believed about friendship, and at the start of his own positive account. Aristotle has not yet discussed the three types of friendship (he does so in 8.3), and at this point he is presenting other very general requirements of friendship: that friends must know each other, be aware of each other's goodwill, etc. Given the context of the discussion in which Aristotle's first mention of this requirement arises, I argue, Aristotle is here presenting loving a friend for his own sake as a requirement of friendship in general. He contrasts loving a friend for his own sake with how we might be said to love wine; he offers a different, analogous meaning when he discusses virtue-friendship in particular, e.g. at 8.3.1156b10-12. In neither case, I believe, does Aristotle argue that one should love a friend for his own sake as *opposed* to loving him because of the value one derives from the relationship; these two are at odds only for those who are very mistaken about what constitutes the good for human beings.

In the first case, where Aristotle speaks of friendship generally, I shall show that Aristotle is emphasizing that a human being, unlike an inanimate object, is not the sort of being that is mere means to an end. To have worthwhile eudaimonistic human relationships we must treat human beings as individuals pursuing their own goals and chosen end, as ends in themselves, as we might say, not as mere means. In the second case, when Aristotle says that in virtue friendship we love our friend "for his own sake", he is not giving an account according to which we efface our own values and needs in virtue friendship but exploit our "friends" in other sorts of relationships; the distinction is that we love our friend for who he essentially is in the case of virtue friendship, but not in the case of

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<sup>13</sup> Price and Nehamas also note this unacknowledged shift of meaning of "for his own sake" when Aristotle goes from speaking of friendship generally to discussing virtue-friendship specifically, though we have different interpretations of the shift in meaning. (See Price's *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, 105 and Nehamas' "Aristotelian Philia, Modern Friendship?", 219)

lesser relationships, where we love some accidental quality of the person. In both cases, the requirement has to do with treating one's friend as an end, but doing so does not entail that a person seek no personal values and benefits in friendship.

I conclude my account of this requirement of friendship by indicating how Aristotle's comments on the equality of exchange in friendship and on the dissolution of friendships support my thesis.

To avert any confusion, I should emphasize at the outset that I am presenting an interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although there are more similarities than significant philosophical differences between the accounts of friendship presented in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, there are substantive philosophical disagreements between the two accounts, from broad, basic points such as the nature of eudaimonia to specific details, such as how Aristotle presents the "for his own sake" requirement. I will note some similarities and substantial differences in passing, but I do not present a systematic analysis of the *Eudemian Ethics*, or an in-depth comparison of the two works' accounts of friendship.

### 3.1 Teleology and Friendship

Aristotle writes that we must love a friend "for his own sake" and this requirement is presented in explicitly teleological language: Aristotle writes, "And to a friend it is said necessary to wish the good for his sake," (ἐκείνου ἕνεκα, 8.2.1155b33), and "that for the sake of which" (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα) is how Aristotle most commonly refers to the final cause. Thus, considering how Aristotle generally conceives of final causality casts some light on what Aristotle means by this requirement.

Two passages from *De Anima* 2.4, 415b2-3 and 415b20-21, are commonly cited in interpretations of Aristotle's teleology. Here Aristotle distinguishes between two senses of "for the sake of": aim and beneficiary. If both meanings were important to Aristotle's considered view, this would threaten my position that the focus on the question of the beneficiary obscures the real meaning of the "for his own sake" requirement of friendship. I will argue that the 'beneficiary' sense turns out to be peripheral in

Aristotle's discussion of teleology. Thus, presupposing the 'beneficiary' meaning, without argument, in Aristotle's account of friendship, amounts to importing a colloquial sense of "that for the sake of which" (τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα) that Aristotle elsewhere takes care to distinguish from his own.

There are several reasons for thinking the beneficiary meaning to be peripheral to Aristotle's teleology. First, it is significant how infrequently Aristotle mentions the beneficiary meaning throughout the corpus and, as Allan Gotthelf observes<sup>14</sup>, that he does not mention it at all in the two longest continuous passages on final causality in his works, in *Parts of Animals* 1.1 and *Physics* 2.8.<sup>15</sup> Hicks and more recently, Gotthelf and Hamlyn, hold that only the 'aim' meaning is operative in Aristotle's account, with Hicks indicating that the distinction at *DA* 415b2 and at *Met* 1072b1-3 "is of the nature of a footnote,"<sup>16</sup> and Hamlyn calling the *De Anima* passage "a characteristic parenthesis."<sup>17</sup>

Although Aristotle mentions the two meanings in a handful of places, even more telling than how infrequently he refers to the 'beneficiary' sense is that Aristotle simply does not *apply* this meaning, in his discussion, even after explicitly mentioning it. For example, before the *DA* 415b2-3 passage where Aristotle mentions the two meanings, he explains that it is natural for plants and animals to reproduce, for partaking of the divine is the goal toward which all things strive. Clearly, this is not an example of the 'beneficiary' meaning. Living things try to achieve an ersatz immortality by producing another like

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<sup>14</sup> Allan Gotthelf, "Aristotle's Conception of Final Causality," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 204.

<sup>15</sup> In *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle uses examples of final causes in nature and (derivatively) art: the final end of the wood carver is to develop a piece of wood into a specific shape (641a13); the final end of an animal's development is stated in terms of "the definitive characteristics are that distinguish the animal as a whole" (641a15); and the final end of celestial objects is whatever end toward which their natural motion tends, if nothing stands in the way (641b25). In the *Physics* 2.8, he speaks of final end as the completion of a series of steps (199a9). Examples of organisms' acting for a final end include spiders building webs, birds building nests, and plants sending down roots for the sake of nutrition. Note that Aristotle does not describe the plant as also sending down roots for the sake of the plant; in short, the beneficiary meaning is neither mentioned nor applied in these passages.

<sup>16</sup> R.D. Hicks, "Notes," in *De Anima* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 340.

<sup>17</sup> D.W. Hamlyn, "Notes," in *De Anima: Books II and III (with Passages from Book I)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 95.

themselves; although living things are said to aim at or emulate the divine, there is no implication that they also attempt to benefit the divine.

Perhaps Aristotle mentions both meanings because he intends to imply that since reproducing is partaking of the divine, it is also beneficial to the living thing to approach the divine by reproducing. Or more precisely, it is beneficial to “something like itself”, the offspring that it creates. However, Aristotle does not explicitly draw out this point, and he does not use teleological language for anything except to explain the divine aim of reproduction.

In the later *De Anima* passage, Aristotle writes that the soul is also cause “as that for the sake of which”, and continues, “For just as the intellect acts for the sake of something, in the same way also does nature, and this something is its end.” Aristotle continues, “Of this sort is the soul in animals in accordance with nature; for all natural bodies are organs of soul...showing that they exist for the sake of the soul.” If this passage is read assuming a dualist meaning of soul,<sup>18</sup> it might seem to mean that the body serves the soul, possibly as its vehicle, and this would be an instance of the beneficiary meaning;<sup>19</sup> Aristotle would be saying that the body exists to serve and benefit a soul that is a separate entity residing therein. For Aristotle, however, the soul is not a separable, transcendent entity, but the form of the body or more specifically, “the first actuality of a natural body which has life potentially” in it (ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος. ἢ δ’ οὐσία ἐντελέχεια, *DA* 2.1.412a25-27) or

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<sup>18</sup> Some, e.g., Menn, have argued that Aristotle is a dualist in certain senses, or at least that he was not arguing primarily *against* dualism. (See Stephen Menn, “Aristotle’s Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De Anima*,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy Volume XXII: Volume XXII: Summer 2002*, ed. David Sedley (Oxford University Press, 2002).) Even this kind of unconventional interpretation of Aristotle would not lend support to the idea that Aristotle held a view of the physical body existing for the benefit of the soul, as opposed to it existing for its own benefit or for the benefit of the organism. In short, even reading Aristotle according to something like Menn’s interpretation, it is clear that the passage does not aim to set out who or what is the beneficiary of the nature of body and soul and of their characteristic relationship.

<sup>19</sup> In making his case for the importance of the beneficiary meaning, Monte Johnson, for example, draws heavily on the writings of 6<sup>th</sup>-century Christian commentator Philoponus, who argues that in the case of reproduction, “the soul is the beneficiary of the body’s work to create another, and the aim is eternity.” If this were Aristotle’s view, it would present a plausible case for the importance of the beneficiary meaning of “for his own sake”, but such a view clearly relies on a different idea of soul than that held by Aristotle.

“the first actuality of a naturally organized body” (ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ, 412b5-6).<sup>20</sup> The soul comes to be as the body organizes itself into a particular kind of organism, so it is clear the soul is an end, an actualization, of the body. Interpreting the passage using the Aristotelian conception of soul, it is difficult to see how the beneficiary meaning would be applicable. If anything would be the beneficiary of the ensouled body’s organization and characteristic functioning, presumably it would be the living organism, not the soul in isolation, i.e. not the organization of that body in isolation. Aristotle does not speak of the body as benefitting soul, let alone of it somehow doing so at its own expense; instead Aristotle is using this teleological language to indicate aim or end, not beneficiary.

Monte Johnson, however, holds that this beneficiary meaning is central and draws attention to the four places<sup>21</sup> in the Aristotelian corpus, in addition to the *De Anima* passages, where Aristotle refers to a double meaning for “that for the sake of which”. If, as I have argued, the beneficiary meaning is not significant in Aristotle’s teleology, why does Aristotle mention this meaning at all? Allan Gotthelf suggests that the few passages where Aristotle mentions the two meanings of “for the sake of” are intended to distinguish Aristotle’s own technical meaning of “for the sake of”, the ‘aim’ meaning, from common usage of the phrase, the ‘beneficiary’ meaning.<sup>22,23</sup> Johnson points out that Aristotle is most terminologically consistent, in his account of the causes, when discussing final cause,<sup>24</sup> and I hold that Aristotle is just as consistent regarding the

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<sup>20</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>21</sup> In *Physics* 2.2, Aristotle says simply that “As we said in *On Philosophy*, that for the sake of which has two senses.” Aristotle also makes reference to the two meanings in these works and locations: *Met* 12.7.1072b1-3, *EE* 8.3.1249b15 and in the *DA* passages just mentioned.

<sup>22</sup> Gotthelf, “Aristotle’s Conception of Final Causality,” 210.

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel Richardson Lear also thinks that Aristotle “introduces a new (or at least new to us), mode of acting for the sake of an end” and thus a new meaning of “for his own sake”; however she thinks the new meaning is the idea of acting to approximate something. In her account both the beneficiary meaning and the end meaning (which she terms the “instrumentalism” and “constitution”, respectively) are also employed at times by Aristotle, along with the new approximation meaning. In her account, the aim meaning is nonetheless more central, and the “approximation” is derived from this: it is a weaker, “second-best way of actualizing a form”. See, e.g. Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, 79–80.

<sup>24</sup> Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

meaning he assigns to final cause language such as “for the sake of”: he consistently uses it to mean ‘aim’. If the ‘beneficiary’ meaning were as important as Johnson suggests—and not just a common usage from which Aristotle intended to distinguish his own use of the phrase—it is difficult to account for the fact that Aristotle simply does not detail the application of this meaning when he discusses the four causes of various kinds of things, not even when he has just mentioned the ‘beneficiary’ meaning typical in common usage.

In summary, the ‘beneficiary’ meaning is mentioned only a handful of times in Aristotle’s teleology, and not at all in his most in-depth discussions of final causality; the beneficiary meaning is not employed in Aristotle’s discussion of final cause, even where he has just mentioned the two meanings of ‘for the sake of’; and there is good reason to think that Aristotle mentions this more common meaning of ‘for the sake of’ primarily to disambiguate it from his own use of such language. Thus, I think it is a mistake to apply this meaning to the “for his own sake” requirement of friendship, at least not without also providing grounds for thinking that the phrase takes on a different meaning when Aristotle uses it in this context.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the account of Aristotle’s teleology I have presented does not claim or imply that the aim of an organism’s development is unrelated to what is beneficial to that organism—or that final cause is generally unrelated to a context of benefit. In general, the idea of something being beneficial only arises in a context where some goal or end exists, and reference to such a goal is required to give content to the beneficial.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Johnson also discusses states of being that Aristotle contrasts with “for the sake of” or οὐ ἕνεκα, as well as other teleological language, and this discussion only lends support to the idea that the ‘aim’ meaning of such language is the only one operative for Aristotle, though he mentions the ‘benefit’ meaning a handful of times, in passing, in various works. For example, in *Met* 5.16, Aristotle contrasts οὐ ἕνεκα with things that are unlimited, not final, or not complete, and argues that completeness is relative to the sort of excellence native to the thing; these contrasts make sense only if we assume the ‘aim’ meaning. Similarly teleological language detailed by Johnson, such as μηθὲν μᾶτην and ἐντελέχεια, make sense only by reference to the ‘aim’ meaning.

<sup>26</sup> It is only by reference to an animal’s natural ends, for example, that we can understand what is good for it. E.g., if we understand that an animal is social, and the end or actualization of its natural course of development is a kind of pack life that involves living and properly interacting with others of its kind, it is clear (assuming the particulars of its social behavior are learned) that it is beneficial to the animal to be

In Aristotle's teleology, the natural end of an organism's process of development indicates many things about the nature of that organism, *including* what is good for it; e.g. knowing what sort of bird into which a fledgling is developing tells us much about what will benefit it, both by telling us what capacities it will need to develop and by giving some indication of what might be an impediment to its natural course of development, among other things. Analogously, understanding what it is to love a person as an end in himself has important implications for understanding the way friendship properly benefits both parties; it is only by reference to the aim of friendship that we can understand the nature of the specific value offered by such a relationship and what things are required (such as familiarity, intimacy, shared pursuits) for this value to obtain. However, both in general accounts of aim or final cause and, specifically, in the way we love a friend "for his own sake", the beneficiary implications, when present, are derivative and secondary.

If I am correct about the specific teleological meaning with which Aristotle uses "for his own sake", and that this requirement is not focused on the question of who benefits whom, what exactly does it mean to love another person in this kind of teleological sense, loving the friend, or wishing him well, as our aim? I turn now to this requirement.

### 3.2 Loving a Friend "For His Own Sake": the General Meaning

When Aristotle presents the "for his own sake" requirement, both initially and in the case of virtue-friendship, he first clarifies its meaning by contrasting it in some way with what it would mean not to love a friend for his own sake. In his first mention of the requirement, he contrasts it with how we might be said to love an inanimate thing such as

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raised by its kind and harmful to it if its parents die before it has absorbed the proper sorts of social interaction from them. For animals whose end or actualization is a solitary sort of life, this sort of extended interaction wouldn't be of particular benefit to it; what is beneficial is derived from and determined by the aim or end. Once this natural end is no longer given—for example, when the animal dies—it makes little sense to speak of what would or would not be beneficial to the corpse, and to the extent that we could, what might "benefit" it in some sense would be utterly different from what was beneficial to the living organism. In short, we cannot even make sense of the idea of the beneficial absent any natural or chosen ends.

wine: “Now love for an inanimate thing is not called friendship, since there is no return of affection, and no wishing of good to it. For it would presumably be ridiculous to wish good things to wine; the most one wishes is its preservation so that one can have it oneself. Whereas it is said that we should wish goods to a friend for his own sake.” (*NE* 8.2.1155b28-32)

This contrast with how we might (equivocally) be said to wish an inanimate good well clearly indicates that a person should seek his friend’s good, or, i.e. should want to benefit the friend. This lends plausibility to the idea that Aristotle, with the “for his own sake” requirement, is focused on the beneficiary in human relationships and is asserting that real friendship must be altruistic in nature. However, as we unpack the passage above, it will become clear that this point about the beneficiary is derivative and incidental; the central, more fundamental point being made regards the differences between the nature of our love for inanimate objects and for human beings.

There are two points Aristotle explicitly makes when contrasting the love of an inanimate object with the love friends have for each other. First, there is no return of our affection from inanimate objects; all friendships require a context of mutual affection. Both the affection characteristic of friendship<sup>27</sup> and the mutuality are emphasized throughout Aristotle’s writings on friendship, as I will discuss later, and neither lends itself to defining friendship or ranking it according to which party benefits; clearly, both do.

Second, Aristotle explains why it would be “ridiculous” or “laughable” (γέλοιοις) to say that we wish well for wine: we wish it well and act to preserve wine *only* in ways useful to our later consumption of the wine. Obviously, Aristotle is not criticizing us for not having a deeper sort of love for our wine; he is explaining why wine *cannot* be the object of this sort of love. This chapter (*NE* 8.2) begins with and focuses on the question of what kinds of things are lovable or can be the objects of love; though wine and other

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<sup>27</sup> Cooper notes that Aristotle often uses ‘στέργειν’, the term he typically uses for a mother’s love for her child, to describe the love and affection between friends. He thinks it unfortunate, as do I, that “the centrality of this emotional bond in Aristotle’s analysis is sometimes overlooked.” (Cooper, “Forms of Friendship” 320).



inanimate objects can be useful to us, and the useful is one sort of thing that we find lovable, friendship requires more than just love in any sense. What is lacking in the way we might be said to love inanimate things? We do not cherish the thought of the wine's well-being, which, as Aristotle observes, would clearly be ridiculous, but instead we keep wine out of the sun and at the right temperature, etc., only to keep it in good condition for our use. This equivocal sense in which we wish wine well in turn indicates something important about the nature of wine's value to us: we want it solely in order to use it up. We love the wine not as an end, but as means to our own use of it; we must use up the wine to get enjoyment from it. Both the way in which we might be said to wish the wine well and thus, the nature of the value we seek from it, underscore that inanimate objects are loved as mere means or as mere instruments and both indicate the contrast with loving someone for his own sake that Aristotle means to draw by means of this example.

This contrast emphasizes that in friendship, we truly wish for and aim at the friend's well-being, and cherish the thought of friends doing well; we treat a friend as an end in some sense. Given that we truly aim at the friend's but not the wine's well-being, the second part of this passage indicates something about the beneficiary of friendships: namely that acting to benefit one's friend is characteristic of such a relationship. However, in the same passage, Aristotle emphasizes that we also expect our love (and thus, the benefit of friendship) to be reciprocal, so Aristotle is not including the "for his own sake" requirement to indicate who should benefit (and indirectly, who should not); rather the context of mutual benefit and that we must act to benefit our friend is just one fact that falls out of the more fundamental point that Aristotle is making about the difference between how we love inanimate things and the sort of relationships we have with human beings. This difference in kind also accounts for all the other differences Aristotle mentions in this passage: the mutuality of love and affection, the wishing well or goodwill for one of the reasons Aristotle lists, and the recognition of this goodwill on the part of both parties.

When Aristotle first says that we love a friend for his own sake, then, he is explaining something that is distinctive of our relationships with other human beings: that they are not characterized by a mere-means kind of well-wishing. This is the same kind of

explanation of the “for his own sake” requirement offered, e.g., by Richard Kraut and Neera Badhwar. Kraut writes that “when one acts for the sake of another, one is not benefiting him *merely* as a means to some further goal. Instead, one is taking the good of that person as something that by itself provides a reason for action.”<sup>28</sup> This is consistent with both how Aristotle himself explains the requirement, and with how Aristotle uses such teleological language more generally; given the context of the friendship, we wish the friend well for his own sake, i.e., the good of a friend is the aim or final cause of one’s actions, and thus motivates one to act. Similarly, Badhwar contrasts loving a friend for his own sake with loving the friend instrumentally.<sup>29</sup>

But it is important to be clear about what this non-instrumental love requirement does, and does not, entail for Aristotle. Note that Aristotle, unlike many contemporary interpreters, does not draw a contrast between loving other human beings for some benefit or not, but in loving them as an end in themselves or as *mere* means; he seems to allow the possibility of loving a friend as means in *some* sense *and* as an end in himself. Thus, he does not indicate or imply that the problem with classifying the wine-lover’s well-wishing as friendship is that the well-wisher *enjoys* the wine; the problem, instead, it is in the *way* that he enjoys it, that he wishes that it may keep so that he can use it up; i.e., he uses the wine as *mere* means.

Another indication that Aristotle does not intend, with this requirement, to indicate that there is any problem in seeking benefit or value from friendship is found in the passage immediately after the wine example. Aristotle adds that friendship requires mutual goodwill *that is recognized*, and he gives an example of two people having goodwill toward each other because they judge each other useful, even though they have not yet met. What disqualifies this state of affairs as friendship is *not* that both are expecting the other to be useful—that both are expecting to gain some value from the other—but that neither is aware of the other’s goodwill. The contrast is not between loving a friend

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 79. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> Neera K. Badhwar, “Friendship,” *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Routledge, 1998).

without benefit to oneself and loving a friend for the sake of some personal value, but between different *ways* one might seek values from others.

To see how a person might love a friend as means in some sense, but not in a troubling sense analogous to the way we love wine, it is necessary to consider the different ways something might be said to be a means; I will take up that in the next section. Then I will turn to the question of in what sense we love other human beings as ends, and what is unique about this and about the kinds of relationships we have with each other as a result.

### 3.2.1 Not Mere Means

In her “Friendship and Commercial Societies” Badhwar rightly observes that instrumentality is not “an all-or-nothing affair”; rather it is present in varying degrees in different kinds of relationships, including friendship.<sup>30</sup> The different levels of instrumentality are helpful to keep in mind when considering this requirement of friendship. Tara Smith, in comparing different sorts of instrumentality, argues not only for differences in degree of instrumentality but differences in kind. Smith notes that instrumental value, “typically denotes a circumscribed, often short-term, means-end relationship,” carrying “the connotation of disposable tools, items to be used and then discarded with little further thought”; this common usage “suggests indifference to the things themselves, as if they are valued solely for their consequences and are completely interchangeable with other things that could serve their utilitarian function equally well.”<sup>31</sup> Four related characteristics are central to this crude, utilitarian form of instrumental value: short-term duration, fungibility, disposability, and indifference to the thing itself. Any of these could be troubling as characteristic of human relationships, especially of friendship, but something or someone can be instrumentally valued without any of these traits being part of the relationship. As I shall show, by reference to these traits, instrumental valuing is not limited to this crude, utilitarian form.

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<sup>30</sup> Neera K. Badhwar, “Friendship and Commercial Societies,” *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 7, no. 3 (August 2008): 22.

<sup>31</sup> Tara Smith, “Egoistic Friendship,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 272.

For a clearer sense of the possible range of instrumental valuing, compare two examples of instrumental relationships: how a farmer wishes well for his livestock and how a pet owner wishes well for his companion animal. In the first case, as with the wine, the person preserves the animal only so that he can use it up, but in the other case, the person preserves the animal because he enjoys its companionship. The first is treating the animal fundamentally as a means (to a tasty meal), and to the extent the animal is given good care, it is in order to preserve it in good enough physical condition to provide the desired milk, meat, etc. This is no different, in principle, from keeping the wine at a certain temperature to preserve it: the fundamental motivation is not the good or the natural aims of the animal as such, for these things are only means, and are considered only insofar as they will cause it to produce a better quality final product. The second example, the pet owner, cares for his animal as a means in some respect (a means to his own enjoyment, relaxation, and companionship), but in this case, enjoyment of the animal is inseparable from its own well-being. What is definitive of the second sort of relationship, and of any human relationship that can broadly be construed as a friendship, is that treating the other as an end, and thus as the sort of thing that can be spoken of as having a “sake”, is necessary for the relationship to retain any value. Thus, it is not troubling in any sort of exploitative way that someone would say that he has a pet because he enjoys the companionship. Such enjoyment does not entail, but rather forbids, using the animal in the way that we would enjoy wine.

The farmer’s relationship with his herd exemplifies the crude sense of instrumental value.<sup>32</sup> The farmer does not love the animal for its own sake, but the pet owner does; note that his love for his pet is not fungible, disposable, short-term, or indifferent as the farmer’s care for his animals is. Most pet owners would not find any pet animal, or even

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<sup>32</sup> Or at least the farmer’s relationship with his animals as I am portraying it here, for the sake of drawing a certain contrast, does. While I think that this a relationship of crude instrumentality applies in some farmer-animal relationships, it seems more likely to apply in larger scale farming operations, and not in all such relationships, in any case; in many cases where the farmer knows and spends some time with each individual animal, some kind of instrumentality that is a mix between the crude sort and that of the pet owner might obtain. If this is true, it serves to underscore the point that there are different senses of instrumental valuing. This is also consistent with the point I make below, about familiarity making possible a kind of context of valuing and affection not otherwise possible.

any animal of the same species, breed, general appearance and temperament, an interchangeable substitute for their beloved pet. There simply is no substitute. So the value one finds in his pet is neither fungible nor disposable. The relationship is not short-term either; as in the case of human interactions, having a relationship with an animal is part of what makes the interactions with the animal enjoyable and valuable, and accounts for why we tend to enjoy interactions with our own pets more than those with others' pets. Through an ongoing relationship, we enjoy watching the animal learn and develop, we learn to be affectionate with and play with the animal in a way to which it responds in kind, and the animal learns to trust and be affectionate. In this way, the animal comes to be part of the pet owner's life, such that he delights in its well-being for its own sake, enjoying seeing it play, eat well, laze around comfortably, and simply knowing that it is healthy and content; i.e. he delights in simply seeing the animal flourish and helping bring this state about. Most of the value of interactions between pet and person require this context of familiarity, affection, and an ongoing relationship, so this is not a short-term value. Clearly, once a pet has become a part of one's life in this way, the loss of the relationship is not something to which one would be indifferent either.

In this case, we can see how a person can value his pet instrumentally yet in a very different way than the farmer values his livestock. It is also worth noting that this is not a disinterested relationship—we are responding to and gaining value from specific characteristics of the animal, such as its ability to be affectionate, and to relate to us in some delimited way that an inanimate object or a less intelligent animal could not. We can also see how this valuing entails loving the animal for its own sake, respecting and valuing its own (naturally given) ends. This sort of instrumental value, then, allows for the possibility of loving something instrumentally—for enjoyment and companionship—and for its own sake—respecting and furthering the ends of the animal, simply for the pleasure of seeing it flourish.

To summarize the point in a different way, considered within the context of the pet owner's life as a whole, the pet is valuable in this instrumental way, yet within the context of his relationship with the animal, he loves it for its own sake. I shall argue that a similar claim holds true of friendships. Within the context of each person's life,

friendship is valuable in a (not crudely) instrumental way to each person pursuing or maintaining a friendship, yet within the context of the friendship, he loves the friend for his own sake. This point bears some similarities to Cooper's distinction between efficient cause and final cause in friendship, and more generally, to the distinction between the initial grounds of friendship and its nature, once established.<sup>33</sup> Failure to make, or to consistently recognize, this distinction is the source of much confusion about the "for his own sake" requirement in particular, and about the nature and value of friendship in general. Clearly, we make and maintain friendships because it makes our lives better to do so. Highlighting this point is to focus on the grounds of friendship, and on its value in the life of each friend. Just as clearly, we often commit our time and assistance to our friends without anticipating any kind of quid pro quo benefit. This observation focuses on something about the nature of friendship. That both of these are true of friendship presents no paradox or tension, so long as the conceptual distinction between grounds and nature is borne in mind.

Though this distinction is important, however, it does not imply that these two contexts are unrelated, for as I shall discuss below, when I consider the unique nature of virtue-friendship, the content of the friendship is largely determined, and must be consistent with, one's aims in friendship. The same facts about our friends and about our own aims in pursuing the friendship are the causal impetus giving rise to *both* the friend having been useful, pleasant or good, and our expectation that a relationship with such a person will make our life richer and more enjoyable.

To return to the point about the possible range of instrumental value, and to the context of the grounds of friendship and one's life as a whole, given the different ways we can value someone or something instrumentally, there is no reason, in friendships as in the relationship between pet and owner, that one could not love a friend for his own sake as well as for the sake of the benefit or value gained from the friend. In human relationships, in fact, there is room for an even greater variety of untroubling ways we might love or value each other instrumentally.

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<sup>33</sup> See, e.g. Cooper's "Forms of Friendship", 321-322.

Aristotle clearly does not think it right to treat other human beings as *mere* means, as instrumentally valuable in the short-term means-end kind of way that characterizes the farmer's relationship with livestock. This requirement rules out a troubling sort of instrumentality in friendship but does not entail that seeking personal value from a friendship in *any* way is troubling; in fact it is characteristic of friendship to do so.

Aristotle's discussion of the finality requirement of eudaimonia in *NE* 1.7 supports this interpretation, for Aristotle clearly indicates that there are things that are both ends in themselves and also sought for the sake of something else. As Richard Kraut points out, for Aristotle virtue and virtuous activity are sought both for themselves and for the sake of happiness.<sup>34</sup> Ackrill makes a similar point about things that are both means and ends in themselves in talking about Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia, writing,

Now the idea that some things are done for their own sake and may yet be done for the sake of something else is precisely the idea Aristotle will need and use in talking of good actions and eudaimonia. For eudaimonia, what all men want, is not, he insists, the result or outcome of a lifetime's effort; it is not something to look forward to (like a contented retirement), it is a life, enjoyable and worthwhile through and through.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, a person can love a friend both for his own sake and yet for the sake of something else: for the way the friendship makes her life more enjoyable, her successes richer and more pleasant, and her other values even more enjoyable to her, etc.<sup>36</sup> Within the context of the friendship, a person acts for the sake of his friend, and he loves the friend for his own sake, and within the context of his own life, friendship is valued since it makes his own life better. The fact that some things are sought both as ends in themselves and for the sake of some other good is the key to understanding how it is that Aristotle can both insist that human beings not love each other as *mere* means, yet think that we have goodwill toward others and come to have friendship on the basis of finding

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<sup>34</sup> Kraut, "Aristotle on Choosing Virtue for Itself," 231.

<sup>35</sup> J.L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty, Major Thinkers Series 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 19.

<sup>36</sup> This possibility raises questions of whether friendship is an intrinsic good. Given that Aristotle seems to think that virtue is, and that he claims at the start of the *NE* 8 that friendship is a kind of virtue, perhaps it qualifies as such a good.

the other person valuable to us in some way, on the basis of them enriching our lives and enhancing our own happiness.<sup>37</sup> In short, it is possible for someone to be valuable or of some use to his friend without being a *mere* means in the way that wine is (or in the way that livestock is to the farmer); it is possible to treat another person both as an end in himself and as an irreplaceable aspect of one's own happiness.

This idea that we must not love a friend as mere means tends to bring to mind Kantian moral philosophy,<sup>38</sup> and to give the impression that I am presenting an essentially Kantian interpretation of Aristotle. Thus, I must caution that this apparent similarity is merely superficial; Aristotle's view of human nature, of course, is very different, and there is nothing like the Kantian moral law in his philosophy. To note one obvious difference generated by such dissimilar foundations, the sense in which I have spoken of loving a pet "for its own sake" and not as mere means would not make sense in the Kantian view, for animals do not have the moral law within. It is not entirely clear what it would mean to love a person (or rather, the humanity within a person) as end in himself in the Kantian view, but in any case, it is different from what I take Aristotle to require of friendship. I hold that in the Aristotelian account of friendship, loving something, whether animal or person, as an end in itself (and not as mere means) is rooted in familiarity, affection and being able to relate to and reflect the other; however, the Kantian ideal of treating each human being as end in himself is, to a significant extent, divorced from these sorts of empirical, psychologically-rooted characteristics we ordinarily think are essential to friendship. This difference should become even more apparent in my discussion, below, of what it means to love a person as an end in the Aristotelian sense.

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<sup>37</sup> One other characteristic of more crudely instrumental relationships mentioned by Smith that is important to this discussion is their circumscribed nature. Non-character-friendships, though they are not as circumscribed as purely utilitarian instrumental relationships, are certainly circumscribed in a way that character-friendships are not. This is exactly the distinction Aristotle intends to make when he speaks of the second meaning of the "for his own sake" requirement, the way in which virtue friends uniquely love each other for their own sake.

<sup>38</sup> Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, in chapter 2 of his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, states that we must "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."



### 3.2.2 Loving a Person as an End

In properly valuing a human being, we must not regard or treat the other person as mere means, and above I have indicated how a friend might *properly* be said to be a means. If, however, a friend is, in different respects, both a means and an end, it remains to consider in what sense he is properly treated as an end. A general indication is given by both Terence Irwin's and Michael Pakaluk's commentaries on the *NE* 8.2 "for his own sake" passage. As Irwin observes, the point being made here is first that wine *has* no sake, i.e. unlike human beings, "it has no choices, desires or ends of its own."<sup>39</sup> Pakaluk similarly understands Aristotle to mean it would be "ridiculous" to wish good things to an inanimate object for its own sake because qua inanimate object, "it does not even have a good."<sup>40</sup> What does the fact that human beings are different from inanimate objects in this way tell us about how to properly love or value them? As Aristotle points out at the start of the *NE*, human activity is end-directed. A human being is, on Aristotle's account, a rational being that chooses and pursues values in an integrated way, such that he tries to make sense of his "life as a whole", in Annas' terms,<sup>41</sup> shaping his life according to the final end he has chosen.<sup>42</sup>

One piece of evidence for how definitive this end-seeking activity is of human nature in Aristotle's account, and consequently, how much this idea of human nature informs his account of friendship, is found in his comments on so-called natural slaves; this is the only place where Aristotle ever speaks of properly treating other human beings as mere instruments. What is definitive of being a natural slave, in Aristotle's account, is that such individuals cannot foresee and project consequences by the exercise of their minds, i.e. they cannot choose and pursue their own final ends (*Pol.* 1.2.1252a32-34). It is just for this reason, it seems, that Aristotle thinks that slaves can rightly be treated as mere means and that, "There is neither friendship towards a horse or an ox, nor to a slave *qua*

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<sup>39</sup> Irwin, "Introduction and Notes," 274–275.

<sup>40</sup> Pakaluk, "Commentary," 60.

<sup>41</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 28–29.

<sup>42</sup> Øyvind Rabbås, "Eudaimonia and Normativity" (presented at the Colloquium on Friendship in the Aristotelian Tradition, University of Western Ontario, October 20, 2011).

slave. For there is nothing common to the two parties; the slave is a living tool and the tool a lifeless slave. *Qua* slave then, one cannot be friends with him” (*NE* 8.11.1161b2-5). Of course, my point here is not to defend the idea that other individuals or groups of people possesses such an inherent lack, or the idea of natural slaves, both of which are now rightly found abhorrent. My point is simply that this line of reasoning shows, by contrast with how Aristotle regards natural slaves and why, that being the sort of thing that can make sense of one’s life a whole is defining both of human nature and, consequently, of proper human interactions for Aristotle, and it demands of us a certain respect for others’ chosen ends, especially to the extent we have any kind of relationship with them.<sup>43</sup>

Loving a friend for his own sake, then, involves respecting the fact that our friends are individuals pursuing their own goals and chosen end,<sup>44</sup> i.e., as I will argue, treating our friends as ends in themselves. What does this mean, and how is it effected? Within the context of our friendships, it requires that we treat the ends of our friends as ends in themselves. Aristotle does not explicitly detail how to do this, but we can see what doing so entails in some of the central characteristics of friendship he emphasizes throughout *NE* 8 and 9. In short, it requires that we come to know our friends’ ends, and to the extent and the importance of the friendship, we offer our support and assistance in their efforts toward those ends.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle continues that although we cannot be friends with slaves *qua* slaves, we can be friends with them “*qua* man, for there seems to be some justice between any man and any other who can share in a system of law or be party to an agreement; therefore there can also be friendship with him insofar as he is a man” (*NE* 8.11.1161b6-8)

<sup>44</sup> The fullest sense of loving another for his own sake, then, requires that we respect the other person as someone pursuing his own *chosen* ends. For this reason, the love a person has for a pet necessarily falls short of friendship in the Aristotelian framework, as animals have only natural ends, not chosen ones. Though we can further an animal’s well-being and its natural ends, there is nothing analogous to what we do in friendship, by coming to know and encourage another person’s pursuit of his chosen values and ends. And of course animals are unable to grasp, let alone support, our own pursuit of our chosen ends.

<sup>45</sup> Note that this sense of treating friends as ends in themselves, which requires us to take special interest in and give special attention to the values and pursuits of our friends, is not of particular moral value to Kant. This sort of personal, partial interest in others would, at best, be outside of the province of morality in the Kantian view, as it does not have to do with what we owe all individuals, as rational agents. What concerns Kant, in his moral philosophy, is more akin to what Stephen Darwall termed “respect”; what is of concern

It is not surprising, then, that Aristotle repeatedly insists that friends must share in each other's lives<sup>46</sup>; this is true even of pleasure-friendships<sup>47</sup> and, albeit to a much lesser extent, utility-friendships<sup>48</sup>. Why is this necessary? An obvious practical reason is simply that only in this way can we confer and receive the goods of friendship. It is hard to converse with, let alone benefit or delight in, a friend we never see. More interestingly and more fundamentally, we must spend time with a friend to know him and his likes, dislikes, pleasures and goals, as it is only by doing so that we can be a friend to him: to comfort him when he is grieving (9.11.1171b3-5), to know how to help him (9.11.1171a23), to know in what kinds of things he delights (9.10.1171a6), to enjoy that such a person exists (9.12.1171b35-36), and simply to enjoy life with him (9.12). All of these things make friendship pleasant and a value to our own lives; they are also how we treat a friend as an end in himself, in coming to first know, and then treat as important, our friend's own ends.

Other activities of friendship Aristotle discusses that give some indication of how to treat friends as ends in themselves include assisting our friends in pursuing their ends (whether through cooperative activity or some form of beneficence), simply taking pleasure in

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in this aspect of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship, is more akin to "care", but not of an impersonal nature. (Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 14–16.)

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 8.3.115625-27, 8.5.1157b6-10 and b19-20, 8.9.1159b30-32, 8.12.1161b34-35 (on why those who grow up together are likely to be friends), 9.3.1165b28-30, and 9.9.1169b18-22.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 8.3.1156b4-5 and 8.13.1162b14-16

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 8.5.1157b15-18 and 8.6.1158a1-9. In the first passage, Aristotle writes that older people and sour people "appear not to be prone to friendship, for there is little pleasure to be found in them, and no one can spend his days with what is painful and not pleasant." In the latter, Aristotle writes that sour-tempered and older people tend to enjoy companionship less and be worse-tempered than younger people, but says that these people can still bear each other goodwill, wish each other well, and aid each other; nonetheless, if their relationship consists solely of such niceties, "they are hardly friends because they do not spend their days together." Aristotle repeatedly states that older people and sour people are more likely to engage in utility friendships, but these passages seem to imply that relationships where one merely wishes another person well and is willing to help him out do not qualify even as utility-friendship if the people are unwilling to share their lives to *any* extent.

See also 8.5.1156a27, where Aristotle says that older people, in utility friendships, tend not to live together very much; they must live together to some extent, it seems, but only to the extent they expect some good from each other.

seeing them achieve their ends<sup>49</sup>, and supporting their pursuits through conversation or other kinds of encouragement<sup>50</sup>. Presumably, at minimum a friend must not undermine his friend's pursuits of the friend's own ends.

Finally, a central way that friends treat each other as ends is in helping them become more able to properly choose, pursue and achieve proper human ends, i.e. by inspiring and encouraging them to become more excellent and thus flourishing individuals. This value of friendship is apparent from the start of Aristotle's discussion of friendship, where he says (speaking of friendship in general) that "with friends men are better able both to think and to act" (*NE* 8.1.1155a15-16) through his concluding remarks regarding virtue friendship:

But the friendship of good people is good, and increases the more they spend time together. And they seem to become still better from their activities and their mutual correction. For each molds the other in what they approve of - whence the saying, '[We learn] noble deeds from noble men' (*NE* 9.12.1172a11-14).

This can take the form of actively coaching a person in virtue, in the case of a friendship of unequals of the sort Aristotle discusses in *NE* 8.7, of inspiring each other in the case of a friendship of equals, or of taking pleasure in a friend's excellence. Perhaps the most important way that friends make each other better people is by being another self to each other. Friends' interactions with each other allow them to see, experience, and know themselves better, which makes virtuous activity easier. Friends, by embodying and reflecting each others' shared understanding of virtue and the good life, make a life well-lived more likely for each other.

This last aspect of friendship, friends helping mold each other into better people, is only characteristic of the friendships of good people, and most especially characteristic of virtue friendship, which is part of why Aristotle insists that the friendship of good people who are friends for the sake of virtue is most truly a friendship in which each friend values the other for his own sake. The other aspects of friendship, though—that friends

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<sup>49</sup> See, e.g. 9.4 and 9.11.1171b13-15

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g. 9.9.1170b9-14.

share in each other's lives, know something about each other's ends, and help each other achieve them—apply to friendship in general. The value of human relationships lies in the friend *continuing* to be as he is or in him becoming better, for it is only in this way that the person continues to be useful, pleasurable or virtuous. Our enjoyment of our friends is thus inseparable from their own well-being.

With a clearer sense of how it is that friends properly treat each other as ends, it should be more apparent how this requirement is teleological in nature, and why the 'aim' meaning allows for a much richer characterization of friendship, and one more true to Aristotle's own account, than the 'beneficiary' meaning would. Of course friends do benefit each other by treating each other as ends, but the latter is more fundamental, as it establishes and defines the context of benefit and the ways in which friends act to benefit each other, and it also gives rise to all the other characteristics of friendship just discussed. If, with the "for his own sake" requirement, Aristotle had merely making an observation about friends benefitting each other, and setting down some rules for who acts to benefit whom in which kinds of friendship, this would be relatively uninteresting, and would also be a dead end for understanding other aspects of friendship. Knowing that friends benefit each other, in some way, gives little or no indication of why friendship is also characterized by living together, knowing what brings pain and pleasure to each other, taking pleasure in each other's triumphs, etc. Knowing that friendship is properly characterized by treating the friend as an end explains these characteristics of friendship and also gives content to the nature of the benefits and activity of friendship.

### 3.3 What is Different about Virtue Friendship?

Above I have considered one meaning of the "for his own sake" requirement. I hold that there is also a special meaning of this requirement that Aristotle presents in his account of virtue friendship; I give an account of this meaning below. I shall proceed as follows: first, I will consider evidence that seems to show that this requirement applies only to virtue friendship and show how these passages are better understood as Aristotle presenting a second meaning of the requirement, one only applicable to virtue friendship. Then, to get a clearer idea of this second meaning, I will analyze two other ideas that come up repeatedly in Aristotle's comparisons between different types of friendship: 1)

the idea of loving someone because of (διὰ) utility, pleasure and virtue, and 2) the idea that we wish a friend well in the respect that, or insofar as we love them (ταύτη ἢ φιλοῦσιν). Finally, I will consider how Aristotle directly characterizes this second meaning, and what it means concretely, in terms of the scope and nature of virtue friendship, as compared to the two less complete sorts of friendship.

I have argued that the “for his own sake requirement”, in the sense I have described above, applies to all three types of friendship (and to proper human relationships in general). However, many interpreters have held that for Aristotle, this requirement applies only to virtue friendship, and on the face of it, there is some textual basis for thinking so. As Nehamas has observed,<sup>51</sup> a chapter after Aristotle introduces the idea that friendship requires loving a friend for his own sake he appears to qualify this claim when he writes,

Those who love each other wish each other good things in that respect in which they love one another. Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but insofar as they gain something good from each other. So too with those who love for pleasure; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people but because they find them pleasant. Therefore those who love for utility or pleasure are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, and not insofar as the beloved is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only coincidental, for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved.

οἱ δὲ φιλοῦντες ἀλλήλους βούλονται τὰγαθὰ ἀλλήλοις ταύτη ἢ φιλοῦσιν. οἱ μὲν οὖν διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον φιλοῦντες ἀλλήλους οὐ καθ' αὐτοὺς φιλοῦσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ γίνεται τι αὐτοῖς παρ' ἀλλήλων ἀγαθόν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ οἱ δι' ἡδονήν: οὐ γὰρ τῶ ποιούς τινες εἶναι ἀγαπῶσι τοὺς εὐτραπέλους, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἡδεῖς αὐτοῖς. οἱ τε δὲ διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον φιλοῦντες διὰ τὸ αὐτοῖς ἀγαθὸν στέργουσι, καὶ οἱ δι' ἡδονήν διὰ τὸ αὐτοῖς ἡδύ, καὶ οὐχ ἢ ὁ φιλούμενός ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἢ χρήσιμος ἢ ἡδύς. κατὰ συμβεβηκός τε δὲ αἱ φιλίαι αὐταῖ εἰσιν: οὐ γὰρ ἢ ἐστὶν ὅσπερ ἐστὶν ὁ φιλούμενος, ταύτη φιλεῖται. (NE 8.3.1156a9-19)

Aristotle continues in this vein a little later when he further develops his comparisons between types of friendship; comparing utility and pleasure friendship, he writes, “Those who are friends for utility dissolve the friendship as soon as the advantage is removed;

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander Nehamas, “Aristotelian Philia, Modern Friendship?,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Brad Inwood (Oxford University Press, 2010), 219.

for they were never friends of each other, but of what they got from each other” (*NE* 8.4.1157a15-16).<sup>52</sup>

Given these arguments, what reasons are there for thinking Aristotle means to apply the “for his own sake” requirement to all types of friendship, not just to virtue friendship? And how can what Aristotle says in these passages be understood in a way that is consistent with applying this requirement to all forms of friendship? I shall take up these questions in turn.

In “Forms of Friendship,” John Cooper presents persuasive grounds for thinking Aristotle means to apply this requirement broadly, namely that the context in which it first arises indicates that Aristotle is presenting loving a friend for his own sake as characteristic of friendship in general.<sup>53</sup> Aristotle first mentions this requirement after his discussion of the things commonly said and believed about friendship, and at the start of his own positive account. At this point, Aristotle has not yet discussed the three types of friendship—he presents the requirement in 8.2 but does not mention the types of friendship until 8.3—so it makes sense to think that Aristotle is discussing general characteristics of friendship at this point and that thus, that “for his own sake” is just such a general, broadly applicable requirement. Also, Aristotle presents this requirement as part of a discussion of other very basic, almost obvious requirements of friendship: friends must know each other, each person must wish the other well, each must be aware of the other’s goodwill, etc. All of these clearly apply to friendship as such, so it makes sense to think that loving a friend for his own sake, in the sense we have been discussing, does as well.

So far I have been focused on the first meaning of the “for his own sake” requirement and its scope. However, I believe that when Aristotle introduces the different types of friendship at the start of 8.3, he presents a new, second meaning of loving a friend for his own sake, one that applies only to virtue friendship:

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<sup>52</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>53</sup> Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 316–317.

Complete friendship is that between good people similar in virtue. For these friends wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in their own right; but it is those who wish the good of their friends for their friends' sake who are friends in the fullest sense, since they love each other by reason of their own nature and not accidentally.

τελεία δ' ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων: οὔτοι γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὁμοίως βούλονται ἀλλήλοις ἢ ἀγαθοί, ἀγαθοὶ δ' εἰσὶ καθ' αὐτούς. οἱ δὲ βουλόμενοι τὰγαθὰ τοῖς φίλοις ἐκείνων ἔνεκα μάλιστα φίλοι: δι' αὐτούς γὰρ οὕτως ἔχουσι, καὶ οὐ κατὰ συμβεβηκός (*NE* 8.3.1156b6-12).<sup>54</sup>

In the most perfect form of friendship, then, friends are similar in virtue, and wish each other well in the same way. In these kinds of friendship, loving a friend for his own sake is synonymous with loving him for his own nature (as opposed to for some accidental or coincidental quality), or at least these two conditions generally coincide. Whatever we take to be Aristotle's meaning when he first introduced the idea of loving a friend for his own sake, it has nothing to do with whether the friend is loved for accidental or essential qualities; Aristotle makes no mention of these in his earlier presentation of this requirement. So it is reasonable to assume that Aristotle is introducing a new meaning of "for his own sake" at this point.<sup>55</sup>

One other thing that makes it evident that Aristotle is making a different point, regarding loving a friend for his own sake, in 8.3 than he did in 8.2 is that the contrast being drawn here is not the same as that being drawn in the wine example. Aristotle's characterizations of utility and pleasure friendship here in no way suggest friends going wrong in loving each other as a good to be used up. There is nothing here to indicate that the lesser types are characterized by some kind of exploitativeness that mars all but the most perfect friendship. As I will show, however, the friends in less perfect friendships do nonetheless fail to respond to each other qua person in a certain way, as it is only a *delimited* aspect of his friend, a coincidental quality and not something essential, to which each responds.

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<sup>54</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>55</sup> Others, e.g. Price and Nehamas, have also observed that Aristotle uses "for his own sake" with different meanings.



Let us turn now to the second meaning of this requirement. To better understand what it means to love a friend according to his nature, or for who he essentially is, it is helpful to understand two other ideas that Aristotle uses repeatedly in his comparisons between different types of friendship: first, the idea of loving someone because of (διὰ) utility, pleasure and virtue, and second, the idea that we wish a friend well in the respect that, or insofar as we love them (ταύτη ἢ φιλοῦσιν). In 8.2, Aristotle lists what kinds of things are lovable or can be the objects of love, and in 8.3 he builds on these reasons for love and discusses the different ways we love friends based on these different causes: we love the person because of utility (διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον), because of pleasure (δι' ἡδονήν), and because of virtue (δι' ἀρετήν) or, synonymously, because of who he is (καθ' αὐτοῦς).<sup>56</sup>

These causes indicate what value draws a person to the friendship; Aristotle's comments about wishing well to friends in the respect that we love them show that these causes also determine the nature of the ongoing value the friendship offers both parties. We wish well to our friends in the respect that, or insofar as, we love them (ταύτη ἢ φιλοῦσιν); utility friends, pleasure friends, and virtue friends, then, wish well to each other in different respects and to different extents. How should we understand loving “insofar as”? The passage from the start of 8.3 explains that loving a friend insofar as he is pleasant means that we love him not for his character but for his wit: it means to love in response to some quality, in relative isolation, and not to person's complete character. Thus, it means not to love him as a response to who he essentially is. We respond to and love something different, and more essential to who we are as individuals, in the case of virtue friendship. That is, we love the friend insofar as he is virtuous, or insofar as he is who he is.

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<sup>56</sup> I find it significant that Aristotle far more often refers to virtue friendship as friendship based on who the person [essentially] is (“καθ' αὐτοῦς”) than as virtue friendship (“δι' ἀρετήν”); this is especially interesting given that, by contrast, Aristotle very consistently refers to the lesser types of friendship with διὰ phrases: διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον and δι' ἡδονήν. This is one piece of evidence that although virtue is essential to who the person is, for Aristotle, it is not the only thing that he thinks essential. Perhaps essence also comprises things like personal values and interests; Aristotle's comments at *NE* 9.12.1172a2-7 at least suggest something like this, which counsels against the idea of virtuous people as interchangeable with each other, qua friends, or of the best sort of friendship being impersonal or detached. Perhaps “virtue-friendship” is a somewhat misleading label for the best sort of friendship.

The respect in which we love our friend fundamentally determines the character of the friendship. We can see this effect, of that to which we are responding in the other person, in the expectations we have for different kinds of friendship in our own lives: for example, no one would fault someone for not knowing whether a utility friend (such as a roommate) wanted children, what he admired in (or hated) about his parents, or what his dream job would be, but we would think that someone was lacking as a friend to his companion or virtue-friend if he did not have at least some of this kind of deeper knowledge about the other person. When we respond to who the person essentially is, it results in a relationship that is deeper, endures longer, and is more central to our lives, as virtue friendship is.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, we give less time and effort to friendships of utility and pleasures, as our love, in these friendships, is a response to something fairly delimited. Given that the love between such friends is not based on what is essential to each person, it should not be surprising that these relationships can be more fleeting, ending when the friends are no longer useful or pleasant to each other.

With this conceptual framework in mind, let us consider the second kind of explanation Aristotle gives of the “for his own sake” requirement, in which he contrasts loving someone for his own sake with loving him for some accidental quality, as one does in less complete friendships. After Aristotle first mentions the different types of friendship, he concludes,

Those who love for utility or pleasure are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, and not insofar as the other person is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only coincidental, for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but insofar as he provides some good or pleasure. (*NE* 8.3.1156a15-18)<sup>58</sup>

However, in the case of complete friendship, friendship of those similar in virtue, Aristotle writes, “Good men will be friends for their own sake, in virtue of their goodness” (“οἱ δ’ ἀγαθοὶ δι’ αὐτοῦς φίλοι: ἢ γὰρ ἀγαθοί”, *NE* 8.4.1157b3). He also observes, “For the sake of pleasure or utility, then, even bad men may be friends of each

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<sup>57</sup> See, e.g. 8.3.1156b6-12, 8.3.1156b19-20, 8.4.1157a20-25 and 9.9.

<sup>58</sup> Translation by author.

other, or good men of bad, or one who is neither good nor bad may be a friend to any sort of person, but for their own sake clearly only good men can be friends, for bad men do not delight in each other” (*NE* 8.3.1157a16-19). The contrast being drawn here, and what makes character-friends “friends most of all”, is that they love each other because of who the other is—“because of the friend himself” (καθ’ αὐτοῦς)—and this is why Aristotle thinks they, more than other types of friends, wish goods to their friend for his own sake.

What does this mean, concretely? To love a person as an end, as the first sense of the “for his own sake” requirement dictates, entails treating their ends as ends in themselves. In utility- and pleasure-friendship, we love the friend as an end, but in a limited way due to the fact that we are responding to some coincidental trait of the friend. In responding to only an aspect of the friend, we do not come to know the friend as well as we would in virtue friendship, so we simply are not aware of the full context of the friend’s ends and values, and the limited nature of these relationships rather precludes this. So, for example, as long as a roommate is only a roommate, I can be useful to her: I can help her to do well on an upcoming exam by making sure there is a quiet atmosphere for study in the apartment, offering to bring her some takeout for dinner if I go out, etc., and I would naturally be happy for her if she did well on the exam. But by the nature of the relationship, I am aware primarily of these more delimited ends of my roommate; less complete friendships do not provide a context for us to know the other person in a deeper way—we know and love the other person insofar as our relationship based on usefulness or pleasure allows.<sup>59</sup> And of course these kinds of friendship do not offer the fuller opportunities for the friends to mold each other into better, more excellent people by their example, by what they approve of, and by their conversation and encouragement.

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<sup>59</sup> Aristotle holds that pleasure-friends, at least, can come to love each other for their character; the time we spend with such friends provides good opportunities for the friends’ learning more about each other and thus, for the friendship to develop into a more perfect sort of friendship. If this happened, over time, of course the scope of each friend’s knowledge of the other’s ends would expand into something more characteristic of complete friendship, and their response to each other and their mutual affection would change in the same way. However, so long as the friendship is just one of utility or pleasure, and that is all that either person expects from the relationship, the scope of each friend’s knowledge would remain limited in this way.

In the case of complete friendships, we respond to the friend as a person having chosen a certain kind of life and final end; we know how his lesser goals fit into a bigger picture. We know the person's character and essence and respond to this. It is in this way that friends more truly love a friend "for his *own* sake" when they respond to each other's goodness.

These concrete differences among types of friendship should help make it clearer how the grounds of friendship circumscribe the nature and content of the relationship. As I indicated above, in the discussion of different kinds of instrumental value, it is worthwhile to note the distinction between grounds and content of friendship; this prevents us from thinking that a friendship grounded in pleasure, for example, is also one where each person expects to find each and every interaction they have with the other person pleasant. However, we must also guard against the opposite error of supposing that the grounds and content can come apart completely. The grounds of a friendship inform and shape each person's ongoing expectations about the value of the relationship to him or her. The fact that I take pleasure in the wit and good humor of my friend does not mean that I will only spend time with her if she is in a mirthful mood—to think this is to collapse content into grounds—but it also does not mean that once I have become friends with someone because I enjoy this aspect of her character and personality, that I have made a commitment to a relationship that will endure even if my friend should become an unpleasant, humorless sort of person—to suppose this is to divorce grounds and content entirely.<sup>60</sup> Having a friendship of usefulness, pleasure or character does not mean that we aim at each friendship's respective good in every single interaction of the friendship; it means simply that the overall context of the relationship must be such that it

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<sup>60</sup> Here I disagree with Cooper's "Forms of Friendship", which holds that the "past-orientation" (original basis for the friendship) and the "future orientation" (purpose in maintaining the friendship) are in principle generally distinct. I do not think these two are as separable as Cooper does, for the same facts about our friends and our own aims in pursuing the friendship give rise to *both* the friend having been useful, pleasant or good, and our expectation that she will *continue* to be so. If friends did not continue to hold these sorts of expectations about the good of their particular friendship, it would be difficult to explain why the loss of that good necessarily brings about the end of the friendship—in all three types of friendship, including virtue-friendship; I discuss this in my conclusions, below. However, I do not think it is troubling, in general or in the Aristotelian context, if some expectation about what the relationship will bring with it is part of why we pursue the friendship.

provides this sort of value to each person.<sup>61</sup> The activities we pursue together are based on the grounds of the friendship, e.g. I would not likely turn to a pleasure-friend for advice about a moral question, or seek her admiration for something virtuous I had done, and the depth and extent of a friendship are limited by the grounds or reason for the relationship.<sup>62</sup>

In the account I have given, we can love someone for his own sake (ἐκείνου ἔνεκα) and at the same time, not for himself (οὐ καθ' αὐτοῦς); we can love someone for his own sake in the first sense of the requirement—as an end and not as mere means—without having a relationship based on who the person essentially is. I suggest that these two meanings of the “for his own sake” requirement are analogous in the way that Aristotle suggests the less perfect sorts of friendship and complete or virtue friendship are:

For men apply the name of friends even to those whose motive is utility, just as states are said to be friendly (for the alliances of states seem to aim at advantage), and to those who love each other for the sake of pleasure, in which sense children are called friends. Therefore, we too ought perhaps to call such people friends, and say that there are several kinds of friendship—first and in the proper sense that of good men *qua* good, and by analogy the other kinds. (*NE* 8.4.1157a25-32)

The meanings of “for his own sake” are analogous in just this same way. The primary and proper sense of the meaning is loving the friend for who he essentially is, responding

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<sup>61</sup> One confusion that comes about both as a result of conflating the grounds and content of friendship, and because of the focus on the question of who should benefit in human relationships, is the idea that the expectation of a context of benefit from a relationship means that each friend will assume a *quid pro quo* attitude toward the other, refusing to do anything for the other if there is not some benefit to be gained from his actions. A certain sort of benefit or value can be the end sought in some pursuit or activity though one does not expect it to obtain in each and every instance of that pursuit or activity. E.g. when I say that I enjoy my work, I mean that I find the overall activity and aim of my work enjoyable, not that each and every moment I spend at my work is unadulterated bliss; similarly, pleasure can be the grounds and aim of a friendship though I do not find every moment with the friend pleasurable. That one does not tabulate the net usefulness, pleasure or good of each interaction does not mean that one does not generally find the friend useful, pleasant or good. It merely shows that one realizes he is involved in a relationship, in a specific kind of long-term value-pursuit, and that it would be futile and wrong, in this context, to guide his actions with an eye to some kind of ridiculous moment-by-moment cost-benefit analysis divorced from the overall value of the relationship. For an excellent analysis of what it is to act for the sake of some end, see Richard Kraut’s discussion of this point in 2.2 of *Aristotle on the Human Good*.

<sup>62</sup> That this is Aristotle’s view is evident in his repeated classification of the activities of friendship according to the ends each person seeks in the friendship; e.g. all of *NE* 8.6 is devoted to discussing the activities characteristic of different types of friendship, and these types are, of course, divided by the ends sought in the friendship.

to him as a person in the fullest, richest sense possible. Less complete friendships fall short of this; though the friends in such relationships manage to respond to each other in a way proper to human relationships, seeing each other as individuals pursuing their own ends,<sup>63</sup> it is only a very limited aspect of the friend's ends, and thus a limited part of the friend himself, to which we respond in such relationships.<sup>64</sup>

None of what characterizes loving a friend for who he essentially is evinces a focus on who benefits in the friendship; instead this requirement establishes the aims of different types of friendship, the consequent context of mutual benefit, and what this means for the character and depth of the relationship. There is nothing here to indicate that we love a friend exploitatively or as mere means in the less complete kinds of friendship; the fact that we have friendships of less depth, loving the person insofar as he is useful or pleasant, does not imply that we fail to love the friend for his own sake, in the first sense of this requirement, in these kinds of friendship. In his discussion of the second meaning of this requirement, Aristotle says nothing to indicate that virtue-friendship differs from

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<sup>63</sup> If there is an exception to this idea that friends love each other as human beings must, it would be in friendships between bad or vicious people; it is not clear whether Aristotle thinks that their friendships truly count as friendships even of the less complete sort. Generally speaking, Aristotle indicates that loving someone as an end requires being able to delight in the other person as such; thus bad or vicious men cannot be loved for their own sake, since it is not possible to delight in such men (8.4.1157a18-19). What is fundamentally problematic in the case of this kind of person seems to be that loving someone as an end requires being able to respect the ends of that person at least to *some* meaningful extent; given Aristotle's view of the practical value of morality, this is not possible of someone vicious, for it would soon become apparent that his ends are self-destructive and dangerous to others around him as well.

<sup>64</sup> It should be clear, at this point, that I do not think that Aristotelian friendship is "impersonal" or "disinterested", as, e.g. Jennifer Whiting and Gregory Vlastos have argued. (See, e.g. Whiting, "Impersonal Friends," 12–14. and Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," 33.) Such characterizations do not apply to any form of Aristotelian friendship, and least of all to virtue friendship. If anything, virtue friendships are more personal than the less complete sorts of friendship, for they are a response to something more central and essential in the friend. Virtue is part of each person's essence, but by the account I have given above, the specific sorts of virtuous activity in which he engages, his own personal values and pursuits, are also essential. From all of Aristotle's emphasis on the need for friends to know each other well and spend their lives together, it is clear that friendship requires that each person be familiar with the particular values of his friend, for a central activity of friendship is understanding, sharing and supporting such pursuits in each other. In Aristotelian unlike in Stoic friendship, we don't respond to a particular *type* of person, but to virtue as embodied in a particular person, with whom we have shared our lives, values, and pursuits. Thus it is not surprising that Aristotle concludes his discussion of friendship with the comments, "Whatever each regards as his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue with his friend... spending their days together in whatever they love most in life" (NE 9.12.1172a2-6).

other types of friendship by virtue of friends not seeking their own benefit. In fact, the discussion of *NE* 9.8 seems to indicate exactly the opposite—that good people both bring more value to and enjoy more benefit from their friendships with each other.

It is also worth noting that none of this indicates that character and values play no role in lesser friendships. In fact, wit, which Aristotle often mentions as a ground of pleasure friendship, is a virtue in Aristotle's ethics. The friends' character and values, though, are not the focus of the friendship, and do not determine the activity of the friendship to the same extent, in these less perfect kinds of friendship.

The idea that Aristotle is drawing a contrast between seeking one's own good and seeking his friend's good assumes a kind of conflict of interest between friends that Aristotle does not seem to think possible, especially not between virtuous people. He writes of virtue friends,

Moreover, in loving their friend, they love what is good for themselves; for when a good person becomes a friend, he becomes a good for his friend. Each of them loves what is good for himself, and repays in equal measure the wish and the pleasantness of his friend (*NE* 8.5.1157b34-37).<sup>65</sup>

The nature of such a friendship—and of practical, eudaimonistic virtue—is that by seeking what is *really* good for himself, a person benefits both himself and his friends, as well as all with whom he associates:

Those who are unusually eager to do fine actions are welcomed and praised by everyone. And when everyone strains to achieve what is fine and concentrates on the finest actions, everything that is right will be done for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue. (*NE* 9.8.1169a8-12)<sup>66</sup>

In short, Aristotle does not see a necessary conflict or dichotomy between benefiting oneself and benefitting one's friend. The distinction he is drawing, in saying that in virtue friendship we love our friend "for his own sake" is not that one effaces oneself and one's own needs in virtue friendship but tries exploit one's "friends" in other sorts of

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<sup>65</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>66</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

relationships; the distinction is that we love our friend for who he essentially is in the case of virtue friendship, but not in the case of lesser relationships, where we love some accidental quality of the person.

### 3.4 Conclusions

Several other points central to Aristotle's account of friendship support my interpretation of the "for his own sake" requirement as not being fundamentally about the beneficiary in the relationship; I will briefly touch on a few of them.

Aristotle assumes that a context of mutual benefit is characteristic of friendship and emphasizes the need for not only mutuality but even a kind of *equality* of spiritual exchange in friendship. He speaks of the need for a mutually recognized goodwill between friends (*NE* 8.2.1156a4-5), and at the start of his discussion of virtue friendship, he writes that "each friend is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful . . . to each other. So too are they pleasant . . . for all friendship is for the sake of good or of pleasure" (*NE* 8.3.1156b12-15). Not only is friendship beneficial to both parties, but there needs to be some kind of equality in what each friend offers and receives from the other. Part of what makes virtue friendship perfect is that "each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives, which is what ought to happen between friends" (8.4.1156b33-35). Similarly pleasant men are pleasant to each other, and thus, pleasure friendship resembles virtue friendship in the equality of the exchange.<sup>67</sup> When Aristotle discusses friendship between unequals, he goes into great detail about how to bring about this equality of exchange in spite of the inequality between friends.<sup>68</sup>

Second, Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes that perfect friendship is similar to utility and pleasure friendship in that it provides these goods to both friends, but different in that

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<sup>67</sup> See also, e.g. *NE* 8.5.1157b34-46, 8.7.1158b24-28, 8.8.1159a34-b2, 8.11.1161a21-24, 8.13.1162a34-1162b4, 8.14.1163b12-17, as well as *EE* 7.4.1239a9, 7.4.1239a20, and 7.9.1241b12-14.

<sup>68</sup> All of the following chapters of the *NE* have substantial discussions about how to effect equality of exchange between friends, so that both get what they seek from the relationship: 8.6, 8.7, 8.8, 8.11 (deals with establishing equality between citizens), 8.13, 8.14, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, and 9.7.



these goods are a result of the goodness of both friends, not of their coincidental properties. The fact that good people are naturally useful and pleasant to each other is one reason (among others) that character-friendship is the most lasting kind of friendship.

Both of these points show that the contrast among types of friendship is not about who benefits, with the lover benefitting in the lesser types of friendship and the beloved in virtue friendship. All friendships are characterized by a context of mutual benefit, and utility and pleasure are among the proper goods of perfect friendship. The difference is in the specific way the friend is valued and becomes part of the good life of his friend. If both people are good in character and love each other on account of this, each values the other for his own sake in the more complete sense of this requirement, but otherwise the friend is valued for some coincidental property, which is for his sake but not, as Nehamas notes, for his *own* sake.<sup>69</sup> It is the fact that he is valued for something coincidental that makes such friendships less lasting and more prone to quick dissolution.

In addition, the conditions Aristotle thinks bring about the end of a friendship make it possible to rule out certain interpretations of the “for his own sake” requirement. Even virtue friendship, though it is far less likely to come to an end, must come to an end if one party becomes vicious, for as Aristotle explains, “it is not one’s duty to be a lover of evil” and “it was not to a man of this sort that he was a friend; when his friend has changed, therefore, and he is unable to save him, he gives up” (*NE* 9.3.1165b15-23). And it is not just in such dire circumstances that a virtue friendship might end: other situations that Aristotle thinks might bring about the end of virtue friendships include one friend coming to far outstrip the other in virtue (*NE* 8.7.1158b33-35), or the friends simply no longer being able to spend time together—in this case they might be said to still have a friendship in potentiality, but not in actuality (*NE* 8.5.10-12). Clearly, even virtue

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<sup>69</sup> Nehamas, “Aristotelian Philia, Modern Friendship?,” 224.

friendship must end if either friend no longer receives the good he expected from the relationship.<sup>70</sup>

In short, there is no demand, in any of the types of friendship, for setting aside one's interests, and there is a consistent expectation that the friendship will be valuable to each person in a specific way. As Nehamas writes,

It seems to us essential that if I wish you well for your own sake, as friendship requires, I will be willing to sacrifice my own interest for your sake if that becomes necessary—and the extent of my sacrifice is often a measure of the depth of our friendship. But no such sacrifice is possible in Aristotle's scheme. If our *philia* is based on pleasure or benefit, I will end it as soon as I realize that your good is incompatible with mine. And if it is based on virtue, there is never anything to sacrifice: as we have seen, every good thing I might wish for you promotes your virtue and nothing that happens as a result of your becoming a better person can be either painful or harmful to me.<sup>71</sup>

I need to add a few clarifications to my earlier point about conditions of dissolution of friendship, however, as it is perhaps easy to go too far with what Aristotle says here and think that he envisions friends as ready to end their friendship the moment anything in the nature of their relationship changes or there is some interaction with the friend in which they do not receive anything useful or pleasant. Aristotle's remarks about how one should fight to help his friend who is becoming a less admirable person should caution against this mistake in the case of virtue friendship. While utility and pleasure friendships are more subject to quick dissolution, the fact that such friends expect each other to be useful or pleasant does not require that they have a quid pro quo attitude about the goods they get from the friendship and should keep a running tally of how useful or pleasant the other has been. Such an attitude would be consistent with treating friends as mere means, which is not characteristic of even the lesser types of friendship, and it would be both counter to the goodwill required of friendship and an insurmountable practical obstacle to maintaining a friendship. Just as I might say that a particular class I

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<sup>70</sup> Aristotle's comments on what brings about the dissolution of different kinds of friendship, then, provide more reason to think that the grounds and nature of Aristotelian friendship are more closely related than some commentators have argued.

<sup>71</sup> Nehamas, "Aristotelian Philia, Modern Friendship?," 229.

teach is pleasant without in any way implying that every moment in the classroom is (in the same way, in every context), I might find a friend pleasant even though he has annoying habits, or even though every interaction with him is not pleasant. My point is only that Aristotle thinks we expect a certain context of value from a friendship, and from virtue friendship no less than the other types of friendship.

It should be clear, at this point, that Aristotle was not “confused”, in his account of virtue friendship, as Price worried, and why he did not provide any “bridge” to unite the notions that in virtue friendship, we love our friend for his own sake, and that we respond to the excellences a virtue friend instantiates. In short, the “for his own sake” requirement is not altruistic, and love for our friends, though a response to their excellences, is not egoistic, at least not in any contemporary sense of the term. Aristotle does not define or classify friendships through the lens of the beneficiary, and for him friendship is neither disinterested and self-sacrificial, nor exploitative and crudely instrumental. Friendship is and should be a rich source of value in human life, and one of the greatest rewards for a life well-lived. The question, “But who *really* benefits?” does not frame Aristotle’s discussion of friendship. Rather, he is concerned to understand what the good is and, in the case of friendship, to understand how it is that human beings, especially virtuous human beings, are goods for each other.

In sum, I have given an interpretation of the “for his own sake” requirement that can account for many of the central features of friendship that Aristotle emphasizes throughout the *NE*, and that also casts light on the context of mutual benefit characteristic of friendship. In neither meaning of this requirement does Aristotle contrast loving a friend for his own sake with loving a friend because he brings value and joy to the lover’s life. Aristotle does not distinguish the types of friendship according to which party benefits and at the expense of whom, and does not require disinterested friendship. Most of the problems contemporary interpreters see between this requirement and Aristotle’s account of friendship, and between this requirement and Aristotle’s eudaimonism generally, arise because we tend to think that who benefits in human relationships is of fundamental importance in assigning moral worth to friends’ responses to each other.

The fundamentality of the beneficiary issue is seen in the fact that both egoism and altruism start with an answer to the question of whose good should be sought, i.e., both start by specifying the beneficiary, and only later does either (perhaps) raise the question of what the good is, as a kind of afterthought. Aristotle, in sharp contrast, begins with the question of what the good is, and then states (in *NE* 9.4, for example), that only those who *really* know what is good for themselves should pursue it. To the extent that Aristotle thinks the virtuous, at least, should pursue their own good, I understand why some would want to label him an egoist, and to the extent that he thinks we must not treat friends as mere means, I understand why some would want to say he is an altruist. But what makes both concepts, as they are currently used, inapplicable to Aristotle is that he does not start with some claim about whose good should be pursued, but rather with a question about what the good is. Kelly Rogers has argued, and I agree, that,

Altruism, like egoism, is grounded in a conflict model of ethics, which would have been quite alien to most Greeks. On this model, the self-interest of different people is in conflict, which morality must resolve. The altruist places greater moral value on others' good, so that in cases of conflict, he feels morally obligated to forgo his own. The egoist takes self-good as the standard, and rather gives himself preference. Both theories as traditionally conceived agree that ethics is a zero-sum game.<sup>72</sup>

This idea of ethics—and worse, of friendship—as a zero-sum game is not Aristotle's. In Aristotle's view, excellent people bring about the good both for themselves and others, and they derive the most value from and bring the most value to their relationships with others. Aristotle's "for his own sake" requirement, as I have presented it here, illustrates this different way of understanding human relationships.

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<sup>72</sup> Kelly Rogers, "Aristotle on Loving Another for His Own Sake," *Phronesis* 39, no. 3 (January 1, 1994): 293–294.

## 4

## No Conflicts of Interest between Virtuous Agents

I have been arguing that Aristotle's concern is not primarily with distributing goods but with defining the good, for human beings. There is a tendency to lose sight of this and view Aristotle through the lens of contemporary ethics, with its predisposition to treat who benefits from an action as fundamental to the action's moral value. Aristotle does not give the question of the beneficiary particular importance, and even in his account of friendship, it is of derivative, secondary importance, at best. In Aristotle's ethics, the final end is not understood, fundamentally, either in terms of pursuing one's own or others' interests, and whose interests are served is also not the standard for action.

Nonetheless, by the nature of excellent activity and the sort of character required to engage in it, it is clear that Aristotle thinks that the person living a life of virtuous activity will live in a way consistent with what his own interests require, and thus, will tend to achieve what is in his own best interests, even if we cannot construe him as essentially aiming to serve his interests. My view is consistent with the (relatively standard) interpretation according to which Aristotle holds that the actions an agent ought to take and those that most benefit him are the same. So the virtuous person will end up serving his own interests, and if we assume that people's interests necessarily conflict, it might be objected that something is missing from Aristotle's ethics, or at least from my interpretation thus far: either an account of how to handle conflicts of interest between people (or at least between virtuous people) or some defense of the idea that the interests of virtuous people, at least, will not generally conflict. I shall offer the latter. In Aristotle's view, and in particular, because of the way he understands the nature of happiness, there are no necessarily conflicts of interest between virtuous people, or at least there are none with any particular ethical significance.

I will begin by considering how Aristotle's view of eudaimonia shapes his judgment of what kinds of things are actually to a person's benefit and in his interest. One important example of this is found in Aristotle's view that a proper respect for self, and the consequent experience of self, are only possible to the virtuous person and are central to him being able to get value from other pursuits. Another important effect of Aristotle's view of eudaimonia on his conception of what is in a person's interest is that in his account, many goods simply do not have value outside of the context of a well-lived life—or at best, have only a hint or shadow of their value outside of that context as they would within a good life. I will consider why, in Aristotle's view, only a virtuous person can really serve his own interest (and that of his friends and associates) by the possession and use of external goods.

I will then apply this different standard for what constitutes one's interests to examine the kinds of examples conventionally regarded as sources of conflicts of interest, cases in which it is taken for granted that a person must choose between his own eudaimonia and someone else's. I will show why, in Aristotle's view, such a choice generally does not arise.

Overall, because of Aristotle's view of the nature of human beings and human flourishing, conflicts of interests between virtuous agents are infrequent and insignificant enough that they do not warrant particular attention or special guidance in resolving, in Aristotle's ethics.

#### 4.1 Interests Arise Within the Context of a Well-Lived Life

Many commentators have correctly observed the importance, for the Aristotelian moral agent, of taking account of his life as a whole. Annas explains that for Aristotle, one must pursue values in an integrated way, and try to make sense of "life as a whole".<sup>1</sup> Irwin similarly notes that "the final good or happiness involves the systematic satisfaction of

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<sup>1</sup> Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 28–29.

someone's rational aims as a whole."<sup>2</sup> This is similar to the claim Aristotle makes in the *EE*, that "Everybody able to should set before him some object...on which he will keep his eyes fixed in all his conduct, since clearly it is a mark of much folly not to have one's life organized with regard to some end" (1.2.1214b6-14), and to the claim he makes in the parallel passage in *NE* 1.2, where he emphasizes the importance of having some end that serves to integrate and order our pursuits (1094a22-24).

Taking stock of all one's pursuits and pursuing them in an integrated way, though essential, is not all that is required, for Aristotle. After all, presumably an ethical hedonist has a clear end in mind, which serves as an integrating principle for his pursuits, but clearly Aristotle thinks that such a person would fall short of living well. If we get the end wrong, or do not successfully take action toward the right one, we do not live well. Aristotle explains,

In all cases, well-being consists in two things: setting up the aim and end of action correctly and discovering the actions that bear on it. These factors can be in harmony with one another or in disharmony. For people sometimes set up the end well but fail to achieve it in action, and sometimes they achieve everything that promotes the end but the end they set up is a bad one. And sometimes they make both mistakes. (*Pol.* 7.13.1331b25-33)

So it is also important that one have the right kind of integrating principle. Kraut's initial characterization of the sort of integrating principle needed is closer to the mark. He writes, "What we need, in order to live well, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, pleasure, virtue, honour and wealth fit together as a whole."<sup>3</sup>

For Aristotle, however, the proper integrating principle does not tell us merely how to combine the pursuit of various independently valuable goods. Rather, living by such a principle is what makes it possible for us to benefit from natural goods such as pleasure, honour, wealth, and friendship. Living well is what makes any of these goods valuable for an individual. As Aristotle explains, "According to the definition established in our

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<sup>2</sup> Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," 48.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2012, 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/aristotle-ethics/>.

ethical works, an excellent man is the sort whose virtue makes unqualifiedly good things good for him” (*Pol.* 7.13.1332a21-23). Conversely, such goods can be positively harmful to a person lacking virtue. Aristotle holds that “The things men fight about and think the greatest, honour and wealth and bodily excellences and pieces of good fortune and powers, are good by nature but may be harmful to some men owing to their characters” (*EE* 1248b28-31). Absent eudaimonia—outside a well-lived life—even things that are good by nature are not good for an individual.<sup>4</sup> For Aristotle as for Plato, “it is virtue that makes an agent into the sort of unity that he needs to be in order for the sorts of goods recognized by the many to in fact benefit him.”<sup>5</sup>

In what follows, I will consider how living well allows the virtuous person to both recognize and achieve goods of the sort to which the many are insensible, and how eudaimonia also allows a good person to benefit from commonly recognized goods in a way that the many cannot, even from the very goods that they think best to pursue and possess.

#### 4.1.1 The Value of Seeing Oneself as Good

Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes that a person’s character and consequent estimate of self are among the things most valuable in a well-lived life. These determine much about how a person experiences himself and his life. This is not the sort of good over which people are thought to dispute, or over which it even seems possible to dispute, but nonetheless, recognizing the importance of this good is of great value for resolving some apparent conflicts of interest. Because this good is of such central importance, in Aristotle’s view, and because ignoble actions compromise it, it must be borne in mind that seeking other goods, either lesser goods or apparent goods, through such actions does not truly benefit the agent, in Aristotle’s view.

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<sup>4</sup> See, also, e.g. *NE* 4.3.1124a30-13, where Aristotle observes that “Without virtue, it is not easy to bear gracefully the goods of fortune,” and *Pol.* 7.1.1323a40-1323b10, where Aristotle argues that such goods are either of no benefit or even harmful, if they are sought to excess instead of used properly, as a tool in the service of a proper type of human happiness.

<sup>5</sup> Salmieri, “Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8,” 16.



In his emphasis on the importance of a person's character to his relationship with himself, Aristotle's debt to Plato is particularly evident. For both Plato and Aristotle, a person's character determines how he evaluates himself, how he views the world, and even whether he sees life as worth living. Plato, in his psychological portrait of the tyrant in the *Republic*, observes that in a person governed by the appetites, "the whole soul will be least likely to do what it wants and, forcibly driven by the stings of a dronish gadfly, will be full of disorder and regret... [It] must always be poor and unsatisfiable."<sup>6</sup> The tyrant is "wretched... and full of fear, convulsions, and pains throughout his life."<sup>7</sup> The vicious person, in Aristotle's estimate, fares similarly to Plato's tyrant: Aristotle writes that such a person is not "amicably disposed even to himself, because there is nothing in him to love" (*NE* 9.4.1166b25-26). Vicious people "have no feeling of love to themselves" and their souls are "rent by faction" (*NE* 9.4.1166b17-19). Those who have done many hateful deeds "shrink from life and destroy themselves" (*NE* 9.4.1166b13). By contrast, the virtuous person, "desires the same things with all his soul; and therefore, he wishes for himself what is good and what seems good, and does it" (*NE* 9.4.1166a14-15). For such a person, existence is good (*NE* 9.4.1166a19) and his life is particularly desirable (*NE* 9.9.1170b3).

How does having good character and a good life create self-respect, in Aristotle's view? First, as Kelly Rogers highlights, consistently aiming at the fine gives the agent an awareness of himself as someone who repudiates a slavish attachment to the sort of short term advantage on which the many focus and thus, of someone whose well-being is, as much as possible, up to him.

This is brought out by Aristotle's distinction between noble goods (*καλά*) and goods that are merely 'useful or necessary' (1116b2-3; cf. 1116b2-3, 1120b1, 1155a28-29, 1165a4, 1171a24-26). Whereas the virtuous agent willingly abandons ordinary 'contested' goods in order to acquire the *καλόν* (1169a18-31), the many choose the *καλόν* 'only when they have plenty of everything else' (*EE* 1243a38). In valuing useful and necessary goods above virtue, the many render

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A Grube and C. D. C Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 9, 577d–578a.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 579d–e.

themselves slavish (*EN* 1095b 19-20) and dependent: their continued material success is at the mercy of fortune (1100b22), and the spiritual good they value most, honour, can be acquired only through other people (1095b23-26).<sup>8</sup>

Aiming at the fine and more fundamentally, being governed by reason, also makes a person into a unity, which makes him into the sort of person with few regrets and with a wealth of good things to which he can look forward. This unity cannot be achieved by fundamentally guiding one's life according to what appetites, desire for fame or honour, or other such considerations might counsel, for their counsel is capricious. Unity of soul is achieved by being governed by reason, and this unity is essential to self-respect.

Aristotle explains that the good person's opinions are harmonious, that he desires the same things with all his soul (*NE* 9.4.1166a13-14), and that he is able to grieve and rejoice with himself, since he always finds the same things pleasant and painful (*NE* 9.4.1166a26-27). This consistency in what pleases and pains the good man is presumably because he acts according to principle, and also because his principle is consistent with the sort of life that is actually good and pleasant for human beings.

By contrast, the incontinent person chooses things that are "pleasant but hurtful" rather than the things he knows to be good (*NE* 9.4.1166b8-10). He does so because he does not have the sort of developed virtuous character that would enable him to choose what is good: the incontinent person takes pleasure and pain in the wrong kinds of things, and thus the desires for pleasure and to avoid pain steer him away from what reason guides him to do. Such individuals have appetites for one thing and rational desires for another (*NE* 9.4.1166b8). The vicious man, as we have seen above, are worse off, because he is governed by his lower desires, which pull him in different directions, making him divided against himself. The continent person chooses good things, but is still a person divided, for his passions pull him away from what reason directs, making it painful to follow his choices.

Owing in part to the fact that a good person is of one mind and a consistent character, he has nothing to repent of (*NE* 9.4.1166a29). And because he is guided by reason and is a

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<sup>8</sup> Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of *Tò Kalón*," 359.

person of intellectual virtue, his future is bright as well, for his mind is “well-supplied with objects of contemplation” (*NE* 9.4.1166a26). In short, because such a person is a unity governed by reason, he “wishes to live with himself, and he does so with pleasure, since the memories of his past acts are delightful and his hopes for the future are good, and therefore pleasant (*NE* 9.4.1166a23-5). By contrast, to the extent people are wicked, they “do not rejoice or grieve with themselves, for their soul is rent by faction, and one element in it by reason of its viciousness grieves when it abstains from certain acts, while the other part is pleased, and one draws them this way and the other that” (*NE* 9.4.1166b19-22). Though a person cannot be pleased and pained in the same ways, at the same time, nonetheless, the bad person, “after a short time, is pained *because* he was pleased, and wishes that these things had not been pleasant to him, for bad people are laden with repentance” (*NE* 9.4.1166b23-24). So those who are not virtuous are at odds with themselves to varying degrees, often regretting what they have done, either because their deeds or passions are not consistent with what their considered judgment would have counseled, or because of the natural consequences of their actions. Both the fact that he is divided against himself and that he often regrets what he has done and loathes himself as a result, gives such a person little upon which to base self-respect: such people, Aristotle thinks, “having nothing lovable in them, they have no feeling of love to themselves” (*NE* 9.4.1166b17).

Some have objected that there is an empirical inadequacy to Aristotle’s view that self-love is dependent on a sense of worth; it seems, on the face of it, that flawed people, and even those who have committed terrible deeds, love themselves no less than good people. I am focused primarily on presenting Aristotle’s account in his own terms, not on addressing various objections as to the empirical and psychological adequacy of different aspects of his views. However, I find it necessary to offer at least a brief reply to this concern in particular, as I think that its perceived inadequacy is why this aspect of Aristotle’s view of the value of being virtuous tends to be rejected out of hand. E.g. Julia Annas writes that Aristotle’s emphasis on the constancy of the good man “sounds like a

glorification of monotony.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Aristotle’s argument that living well gives the *eudaimōn* a certain vaunted relationship with himself, one that is valuable in itself and for his continued virtuous activity, tends to be set aside when commentators consider what kinds of things are in the Aristotelian moral agent’s interests and why.

It is true that people do *seem* to care for themselves, even when their ethical shortcomings are clear enough, and perhaps even clear to them, in some sense. But there is good reason to think this appearance is misleading. As Jennifer Whiting has insightfully pointed out, this appearance often results from “what might be called ‘ethical selection, a process allowing people to maintain positive self-images”, since to view oneself as seriously flawed can be crippling.<sup>10</sup> People who commit actions with negative outcomes tend to either change their behavior or employ certain self-deceptive psychological mechanisms to rewrite their own history or recast their actions in a less negative light—various kinds of excuse-making, assigning blame to others, and repression are all forms of self-deception used for such ends.<sup>11</sup> As Whiting points out, “The very existence of these mechanisms betrays the important role beliefs in our own positive qualities play in determining our attitudes toward ourselves.”<sup>12</sup> The sometimes paralyzing guilt and depression felt by those whose methods of “ethical selection” are less developed is also testament to the importance of having, to some extent at least, a positive self-image.<sup>13</sup>

The above is a brief indication of why Aristotle holds that living well creates self-respect and a certain estimate of oneself as good. Why is this good so important to the virtuous person? What I have said already about the nature of this kind of view of self gives some clear indication of this; a positive estimate of self allows a person to live a life where he

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<sup>9</sup> Annas, “Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,” 540.

<sup>10</sup> Whiting, “Impersonal Friends,” 17.

<sup>11</sup> In such cases people also, of course, use similar tacks to deceive others, as is necessary to also fool other as to the nature of the agent’s character if the agent is to effectively maintain his deception of himself.

<sup>12</sup> Whiting, “Impersonal Friends,” 17.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent and more fully developed account of why we should take seriously Aristotle’s claim that self-love relies on a person having a basically positive estimate of self, and why it is crippling not to have such a self-evaluation, see the discussion in sections 8 and 9 of Whiting, “Impersonal Friends.”

is not racked with regret, and where his confidence in himself and in the kinds of pursuits of which he is capable give him a warranted optimism that he will continue to have a good, pleasant existence. Living an actualized excellent human life is pleasant in itself and naturally choiceworthy. No one would hope to live a life characterized by regret and self-loathing.

Importantly, having, and being able to maintain, such a self-estimate also makes a person feel worthy to continue to undertake virtuous actions and enjoy certain goods of life, and makes him able to do so. Aristotle, in comparing the proud person to the unduly humble, writes, “Each type of person pursues the things that accord with his worth, and these people [those who are unduly humble] refrain even from noble actions and practices, and equally from external goods, because they consider themselves unworthy of them” (*NE* 4.3.1125a25-27).<sup>14</sup> Similarly those who have good reason for negative self-estimates, base people “do not choose things that seem to be good for them, but instead choose pleasant things that are actually harmful, and cowardice or laziness causes others to shrink from doing what they think best for themselves” (*NE* 9.4.1166b8-11). Ultimately, from having done many terrible deeds, such people may come to “hate and shun life” (*NE* 9.4.1166b12). “The virtuous person, by contrast, is properly proud (e.g., 1125b19-21), and his realistic sense of his own worth enables him to pursue the appropriate measure of success in both goods and activities.”<sup>15</sup>

Aiming at the fine and living well gives a virtuous person a particular understanding—the correct understanding, in Aristotle’s estimate—of what is in his interest. This is apparent in that for the virtuous person, his own estimate of himself (and what this makes possible) comprises an important aspect of his interests, whereas this does not seem to be something that even occurs to people of lesser character as being in their interest, never having had this sort of experience of themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Rogers, “Aristotle’s Conception of *Tò Kalón*,” 360.

The virtuous person's different understanding of what is in his interest is also apparent in the way that things commonly regarded as goods play a different role in the good life than supposed by the many, who tend to give these goods a priority far above their actual worth in human life and who also end up enjoying such goods less than the virtuous do. Below I consider the ways in which goods such as pleasure, satisfying one's desires, and external goods contribute to a life well-lived, in Aristotle's view, and why to a significant extent, only the virtuous person is able to truly benefit from these.

#### 4.1.2 Pleasure and Pain

In Aristotle's view, there are important differences in what kinds of things appear pleasant to different people and in the quality of various pleasures. Due to both factors, pleasures play a different role in the life of the virtuous and the non-virtuous. First, a virtuous person tends to take pleasure in things that are actually, unqualifiedly pleasant; for Aristotle, this is not something which everyone can equally judge. Second, their pleasures are of a different quality, such that they are consistent with what virtue and happiness require. Someone who is not virtuous tends to be misled by what pleases him, and to take pleasure in things that are not truly pleasant, that do not contribute to living well and thus, that are not in his interest.

According to Aristotle, "Each state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and measure of them" (*NE* 3.4.1113a30-33). Not all pleasures are worth seeking, and it is of great value to learn to discern which are and to come to feel pleasure and pain appropriately. As Aristotle explains, "In most things the error seems to be due to pleasure, for it appears good when it's not" (*NE* 3.4.1113a35-1113b1). The fact that some things are pleasant to those with a vicious character does not mean that they are also pleasant to others, or that they are pleasant by nature, any more than we need assume that something bitter to a sick person is truly bitter (*NE* 10.3.1173b20-24). Because the many are mistaken about what is pleasant, they also miss the mark with regard to the good.

This difference in what counts as pleasure is not just due to the different subjective experiences of virtuous people; it is a result of something about the nature of the particular pleasures themselves. Aristotle argues, “For most men, their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is fine find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant” (*NE* 1.8.1099a11-14). Aristotle gives an indication of one basis for the difference in quality of different pleasures in his response to those who speak out against pleasures, in general, on the basis that some pleasures are disgraceful.

One might answer thus—that the pleasures are desirable, but not from these sources, as wealth is desirable, but not as the reward of betrayal, and health, but not at the cost of eating anything and everything. Or perhaps pleasures differ in kind; for those derived from noble sources are different from those derived from base sources, and one cannot get the pleasure of the just man without being just, nor that of the musical man without being musical, and so on. (*NE* 10.3.1173b25-31)

What does Aristotle mean by the claim that pleasures derived from different sources are different in quality? Aristotle characterizes pleasure as the natural accompaniment or completion of activities (*NE* 10.4.1174b24 and 1174b33). Since we characterize some activities as good and some as bad, Aristotle reasons, the pleasures tied to such activities should be similarly characterized. So, for example, the pleasure one might take in helping a good friend who has fallen onto hard times repay a debt is a good pleasure. However, the sort of pleasure a less virtuous person might take, say, in helping a friend fund a debauched party he cannot afford to host, while the friend persists in refusing to repay his debtors, would be an ignoble pleasure.

By the same reasoning, individuals doing the same things, but for different reasons, would also experience different kinds of pleasures, for it is not just the act itself but also the agent’s state when performing it that contributes to the quality of the activity. The agent’s understanding of what he is doing, his motivation, and his own character (including his emotional response toward the act) are essential to characterizing the activity (*NE* 2.4.1105a29-34). This is apparent when Aristotle compares how virtuous and non-virtuous people experience the same actions. E.g., the pleasure the continent person might take in forcing himself stand firm in battle out of fear of punishment for

retreating is not the same as the pleasure the truly brave man takes in standing firm out of a consistent, cultivated desire to take for excellent and noble actions (*NE* 3.8.1116a15-32). The pleasure one takes in giving money to a friend in the hopes of gaining admiration from others for being a generous person is different from the pleasure one takes in doing so out of love for a friend and desire to put his wealth to good use.<sup>16</sup> Both the flatterer and the friend seem to take pleasure in spending time with a person, but as Aristotle observes, we condemn the flatterer and praise the friend, because the pleasure they take is different: the flatterer aims to please us whereas the friend aims at our good (*NE* 10.3.1173b31-1174a1).

The pleasure a virtuous person takes in excellent activities, moreover, contributes to a well-lived life in way that the pleasures of others do not. By giving money from the right sort of character and motivations, for example, a person takes pleasure in actions that reaffirm the importance of and strengthen his relationship with his friend. He also, by taking pleasure in sharing his wealth, reaffirms his proper understanding of the relative value of wealth: that wealth is worthwhile in that it allows him and those he cares about to live well and exercise virtue. These ways the pleasures of the virtuous differ from others' pleasures lend support to Aristotle's claim that those who are not virtuous cannot experience the kinds of pleasures characteristic of a virtuous life. Those who are not fully virtuous, though they may do what the virtuous person does, do not do it as he would do it: they do not do so from the same established character and motives, and thus their activities, their experience thereof, and their pleasures or pains at their activities are not the same.

In short, not all pleasures are constitutive of or otherwise lead toward happiness, and not all pains are indications that one is deviating from what virtue requires. The things that bring about pleasure and pain for non-virtuous people clearly show this. Pleasures differ in quality, and the pleasures of good people are more likely to be of a whole with

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. *NE* 4.1120a24-30, where Aristotle writes that "the generous person will aim at the fine in his giving," but that someone "who gives to the wrong people, or does not aim at the fine but gives for some other reason...will not be called generous."



happiness. As Aristotle explains, “It seems to be clear, then, that neither is pleasure the good nor is all pleasure desirable, and that some pleasures are desirable in kind or in their sources from the others” (*NE* 10.3.1174a8-11). So pleasure simpliciter cannot be taken as a sign that someone is taking the right action or one that will benefit him.

Just as pleasure cannot be taken, unreflectively, as the spur to virtuous action, pain cannot always be taken as the goad against vicious action or a sign that we have not acted well. Pain sometimes accompanies or follows upon virtuous activity, not due to the nature of such activity, but due to external contingencies. As I discussed in chapter 2, section 3.2, Aristotle thinks that courageous actions tend to be painful, even though the end of courage is not. Similarly, comforting a friend who is grieving is painful. Seeing a loved one in pain could not engender a different response in the virtuous person, even if the virtuous person is also happy to act well by offering such comfort and glad to be able to support his friend and make the situation more bearable for him. And of course, a good person who has suffered great misfortune, e.g. Priam, by the end of the Trojan War, will not find such a fate pleasant,<sup>17</sup> though he will never become miserable, as a lesser person would under such circumstances, but this lack of pleasure is no indication of a shortcoming in his character. It is an indication that the normal consequences of virtuous activity have not come about in this case, as a result of external circumstances beyond the control of the agent interfering.

As we shall see, keeping in mind Aristotle’s views of pleasure and pain eliminates the appearance that certain scenarios involve a conflict of interests, for it is not the case that any time someone does not take pleasure in some action, or the action results in some pain for him, he is acting against his interests. It may be the case that a person has not internalized the standards of virtue and thus, would take pleasure in the wrong things, even in things he would ultimately regret or that would harm him. Conversely, a person might have acted nobly, and in the ways that typically bring about eudaimonia and blessedness, but might suffer misfortune and painful results. This should not be taken as an indication that sometimes acting according to what virtue requires goes against our

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., *NE* 1.9.1100a6-8 and 1.10.1101a5-7.

interests, but that sometimes the external conditions are such that even taking all the best actions cannot bring about blessedness.

### 4.1.3 Desires

The same points I have made about pleasure and pain also apply to how Aristotle views the role of appetite or desire in a good life, for desires and aversions are tied to good and bad activities and objects just as pleasures and pains are. Aristotle explains the relationship between good and bad activities, on the one hand, and both pleasures and pains and desires, on the other, in his discussion of pleasure in *NE* 10:

Now since activities differ in respect of goodness and badness, and some are worthy to be chosen, others to be avoided, and others neutral, so, too, are the pleasures; for to each activity there is a proper pleasure. The pleasure proper to a worthy activity is good and that proper to an unworthy activity bad; just as the desires for noble objects are laudable, those for base objects blameworthy. (10.5.1175b24-30)

Pleasures are more closely tied to activities than desires, for unlike desires, they are not separated “in time and in nature” (*NE* 10.5.1175b31-32), but desires are similar in that we can evaluate them according to the objects to which they are tied.

When we consider the role different kinds of pleasures can play in a person’s activities and character, it is clear that similarly, the mere fact that a person may experience a desire for something does not mean that this desire is a good desire, should be followed, or will serve his happiness or interests to fulfill the desire. Aristotle uses the term ‘*orexis*’ for desire generally, and in his account there are three species of desire: *epithumia* (appetite), *thumos* (spirit, passion or emotion), and *boulêsis* (rational wish or desire). Both continence and incontinence, in Aristotle’s view, result from having desires (whether from appetites, emotions, or passions) that go against one’s considered decision. Viciousness, though it is a result of choice, comes about when a person’s lower desires (for wealth, power, pleasure, etc.) have taken over a person’s soul such that he no longer cares about acting ethically. For Aristotle, it is of the greatest importance whether a person’s desires are in accordance with reason; whether or not it is to a person’s benefit to fulfill his desires depends primarily on this. As Aristotle notes, at the start of the *NE*,

those who are young or immature in character “pursue each successive object as passion directs” (*NE* 1.3.1095a8); what they desire is determined by passions. Better people “desire and act in accordance with a rational principle” (*NE* 1.3.1095a10-11). For these people, knowledge can “be of great benefit” for it will help bring a person’s desires and actions into accord with what living well requires.

Not even rational desire always directs a person rightly, however. Aristotle’s arguments in *NE* 3.4 make it clear that both the virtuous and vicious people have this kind of desire. Recall that Aristotle holds that each state of character has its own ideas of both “the noble and the pleasant” (1113a31). Rational desire seems linked “to the agent’s conception of eudaimonia, whatever that may be.”<sup>18</sup> As Pearson explains, “Boulêsis will be for the good, on this account, because, in every case, an agent’s boulêsis will be tied to his or her conception of eudaimonia or overall good.”<sup>19</sup> It is clear why studying political science would be valuable to “those who accord with reason in forming their desires” (*NE* 1.3.1095a10-11),<sup>20</sup> for in this way, an agent might correct his conception of eudaimonia and as a result, desire properly. Thus, rational desire and the agent himself will be able to “aim at, and to hit the right mark” (*NE* 1.2.1094a25).

In short, the same is true of desires as of pleasures: satisfying desires is not the good, and not all desires are to be indulged. It is not the case that the satisfaction of any desires will be beneficial; to the extent that what pleases a person is inconsistent with eudaimonia, his desires will veer from the mark as well.

#### 4.1.4 External Goods

I shall touch on two essential points for understanding the relationship between external goods and eudaimonia, in Aristotle’s view. First, virtue is required to use the goods of life well. To the extent a person lacks virtue, these goods may not benefit him, and can

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<sup>18</sup> Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 141.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

even be harmful to him. And even for the person who knows how to use such goods well, it is not true that the more such goods a person amasses, the better off he is.

Aristotle clearly and consistently argues that to the extent a person lacks virtue, he gains no benefit from having or using most sorts of external goods. In the *Politics*, Aristotle judges it “shameful in men not to be able to use the goods of life”, and “particularly shameful not to be able to use them in time of leisure—to show excellent qualities in action and war, and when they have peace and leisure, to be no better than slaves” (7.15.1334a36-40).<sup>21</sup> What accounts for people sometimes making poor use of such goods? It is that “without virtue, it is not easy to bear gracefully the goods of fortune” (*NE* 4.3.1124a30-13).

Aristotle observes, “For the things men fight about and think the greatest, honour and wealth and bodily excellences and pieces of good fortune and powers, are good by nature but may be harmful to some men owing to their characters. If a man is foolish or unjust or profligate he would gain no profit by employing them” (*EE* 8.3.1248b27-33). Here Aristotle is noting that external goods are useful as tools, and that a person needs to know how to use these tools to benefit from them. Whereas the person of good character would use wealth in a way that strengthened his character and his good habits, using the wealth for appropriate and noble ends, the person with debauched tastes would do just the opposite. The intemperate person, for example, would presumably take advantage of the opportunities wealth afforded him to glut himself on food and drink. Of course, engaging more often and more lavishly in his favored activities would lead to greater damage to his character. As Aristotle notes, in a discussion of how a person’s character comes to be ruined, “the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent,” for temperance (like other virtues) is destroyed by excess or defect (*NE* 2.2.1104a23-36).

External goods are not only used as tools, but also, as it were, add lustre to the happiness that naturally accompanies living well. The deprivation of these goods, Aristotle notes,

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<sup>21</sup> Translation from Reeve, with modification.

“mars our blessedness. For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive, or are ill-born, solitary or childless” (*NE* 1.8.1099b3-5). Note, though, that Aristotle believes that such goods would tend to be misused, to his detriment, by a non-virtuous person. Such goods, by themselves, cannot confer blessedness, but rather, to the extent a person lacks virtue, they would tend to do just the opposite.

Interestingly, Aristotle also states or implies, at a few points, that we cannot get or keep external goods without virtue. In the *Politics*, for example, Aristotle argues that external goods are acquired and preserved by means of virtue, not vice versa (7.1.1323a39-1323b5). It also seems clear that people can enjoy friendship, which Aristotle sometimes characterizes as an external good, largely to the extent that they are virtuous. The most complete sort of friendship is only open to virtuous people, and virtue is required to maintain all types of friendship. Those who are unjust, overreaching, or who do not keep in mind what kind of return they need to make their friends to establish the necessary equality between them, bring about the end of their friendships. Aristotle does not consistently make this point, and to my knowledge, he does not fully develop it anywhere in his ethical writings. However, if it was Aristotle’s considered view that virtue is required not only to use external goods well, but also to gain and keep them, this would further undermine any claim external goods had to being valuable independent of virtue and a life well-lived.

The fact that external goods are (in part, at least) worthwhile as tools also implies something else about them: that we do not benefit by attempting to maximize our possession of such goods. As Kraut explains, “To determine how many external goods we need, we must ask what we need them *for*, and so if we abstract from the use to which an external good is put and simply consider it in isolation, there is no saying how much of it would be worth having.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 266.

In sum, external goods are only of value to the extent a person is virtuous, and even then, it is not the case that any additional quality of such goods will bring additional value or benefit. To the extent a person is not virtuous, such goods may even be harmful. Bearing this in mind helps eliminate the appearance that any time such goods are contested, there is a real conflict of interests. There may be a conflict, but it is often the case that not all of the parties vying for contested external goods would truly benefit or serve their own interests by getting the contested goods. The possession of such goods is not always in one's interest. In Kraut's terms, eudaimonia is "the controlling good"<sup>23</sup>, and the pursuit of all subordinate goods— such as pleasure, fulfilling one's desires, and external goods— is regulated by it. Generally speaking, having these goods is in the agent's interest to the extent that it helps him to aim at and reach the proper final end, a life of activity in accordance with virtue. Let us turn, now, to see how this understanding of such goods makes it apparent that true conflicts are not as common as they seem.

## 4.2 Sources of Apparent Conflicts of Interest

A well-lived life includes pleasure, satisfaction of desires, and achieving things, such as wealth or honour, conventionally regarded as the best goods. However, these goods are not *the* goods, so it is not part of the good life to seek such goods uncritically, without thought for how or whether such things contribute to a life well-lived. Many pleasures do not contribute to eudaimonia, some pains are not antithetical to it, some desires should not be indulged but instead are an indication that a person has not yet internalized a proper standard of behaviour, and external goods may or may not contribute to a well-lived life. And self-love, a result of virtuous activity, is a greater good than any of these things taken in isolation.

Below I will begin by considering how mischaracterization of the role such goods play in eudaimonia leads to the appearance of conflicts of interests, even between virtuous people, and show how the correct understanding of the value of these goods largely eliminates this apparent problem. I will then consider a problem in interpretation that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 262.

seems related both to the fact that pleasures and external goods are often taken to be the good, and to the contemporary prevalence of consequentialist approaches to ethics. The problem lies in thinking of ethics as aiming to show us which good is the best, so that we can maximize our possession of that good, or our opportunities to enjoy it. It results in the view that Aristotelian eudaimonia consists of maximizing one's opportunities for virtuous activity. This maximization view, I shall argue, is mistaken, and also opens up the possibility for conflicts of interest between virtuous agents, conflicts of a sort that Aristotle's account does not raise or even allude to. Finally, I will briefly note how we might distinguish between differences in interests and conflicts of interest, and why this is important.

#### 4.2.1 Conflicts over Goods Desired

Recall that the things Aristotle thinks people most often come into conflict about are "honour and wealth. . . and pieces of good fortune and powers" (*EE* 1248b28-31). They come into conflict because many desire these goods, but not everyone who wants them can have them. Such conflicts arise over material goods as well as over honour and offices. In friendships, conflicts tend to arise over things friends want from each other, with one friend feeling he is owed some service or favor from his friend, and the other disagreeing. These general conflicts and conflicts between friends arise out of both people desiring or feeling entitled to the same goods. Such conflicts, I shall argue, are generally not conflicts of interest. Instead, they arise out of fundamental misunderstandings of what is in the agent's interest. Thus they are rare and generally insignificant between virtuous people.

It should be clear from Aristotle's views of external goods and desires, discussed above, that many conflicts that come about simply because two people desire the same good are not actually conflicts of interest. Some of these kinds of conflicts, at least, are obviously over goods that it would not actually serve the agent's interests to have.

The myriad conflicts people have about wealth, for example, are often like this. E.g., the adult children who would squabble over their parents' estate, each seeking a greater share for himself, are often the kind of people who are both wasteful with their own money and

wont to spend excessively. In these cases, having a new source of funds often runs counter to their interests: it prevents them from reconsidering the priority they place on wealth and consumption and it allows them to act in ways that reinforce their bad habits in this area. The fact that overreaching and taking more than one's share is also unjust is another way in the character of those involved in such a dispute is damaged by it. The dispute over wealth, in such cases, often destroys the greater good that was the siblings' relationship with each other and compromises their relationships with other family members. Especially if neither party is lacking wealth sufficient for virtuous activities, it is not clear how possessing an extra share of the inherited wealth would necessarily serve their interests, properly conceived, at all, and even less so when it comes at a cost of other things that would truly benefit them. The mere fact both parties desire the wealth tells us nothing about what would serve their interests.

One way to get to the conclusion that this kind of overreaching for wealth is not in one's interest is to highlight the limited and instrumental value of external goods and how they can be harmful to those of less-than-virtuous character. But other facts about the kinds of things that are actually in a person's interest also lead to the same conclusion: this kind of example also sheds light on how it is valuable to recognize the importance of having respect for oneself as a good person. A virtuous person who is happy with the kind of person he is and who values this sense of self would be unlikely to weigh this good against getting a greater inheritance and think that the latter would be to his interest at all, let alone that it would be more to his interest than the former.

Other disputes which arise over people desiring the same good revolve around honours or positions that many desire but only few can receive: political office, fame and honour of the sort that the best athletes have, being invited to certain social events, etc. As with wealth, the mere fact that someone wants a particular honor does not establish that it would be in his interest to have it. To the extent that it would not be, the conflict between people over such goods is not a conflict of interests.

Political activity is essential to virtuous life, in Aristotle's view, since human beings are political animals. So political office is a good worth having. By the political



arrangements in Athens in classical Greece, those with wealth and sufficient leisure to participate in politics often held offices for limited terms, with each person stepping down when his term ended. Why is it not a conflict of interests, that no one gets to hold office as long or as often as he might like? Political office, like wealth, only contributes to an agent's eudaimonia when he obtains it nobly and exercises his responsibilities excellently. As I argued in chapter 2, this entails acting as the virtues of justice and statesmanship require. Justice requires that such awards should be "according to merit" (*NE* 5.3.1131a24-26), and statesmanship requires respecting the constitution and just arrangements for sharing of power. Salmieri, discussing why it is in a person's interest to step down from office according to the agreed-upon arrangements, observes,

No use [a statesman] might make of powers that he was clinging to in violation of certain virtues could be exercises of those virtues. The only exercise of statesmanship open to him is to resign, and it is this action that is both virtuous and best for him. This is the case, even if he would have been better off if circumstances had differed so as to enable him to justly retain the office indefinitely.<sup>24</sup>

As in the wealth example, misusing political office and being grasping about opportunities for it precludes the virtuous use of such a good. To the extent a person is not acting virtuously, he is aiming away from happiness, and thus, not acting according to what his interests require. No matter how ardently a person may desire to hold onto his position, this desire does not constitute an interest in doing so. And thus, conflicts over desiring such a good cannot be properly construed as conflicts of interest. They are mere conflicting desires.

Conflicts between friends tend to arise from similar fundamental misunderstandings about what is truly in one's interests: what one desires, and particularly with regard to goods of lesser importance, is mistaken for what is good and beneficial. For this reason, conflicts are far more likely in friendships of utility. Aristotle notes, "Complaints and reproaches arise either only or chiefly in the friendship of utility" (*NE* 8.13.1162b5-6),

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<sup>24</sup> Salmieri, "Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8," 18.

typically over whether each has rendered the other equal benefit or has given him his due, as friend.

When non-virtuous people participate in such relationships, the errors they make regarding what is in their interests in particular interactions with the friend are often less fundamental than the kind of error they make about what the good of friendship is generally. Most people, having the wrong conception of the good, have a similarly wrong conception of friendship and can project only an instrumental value in friendship. “The many think that it is the useful people who are friends,” Aristotle explains (*NE* 9.9.1169b24-25).<sup>25</sup> This is another case in which recognizing the value of having a certain relationship with oneself is important to seeing what is truly in one’s interest. Someone who values his relationship with himself, and thus realizes that being a good person and enjoying his own company is more in his interest than grasping for external goods and honours, will be in a position to recognize that the value he can get from others is more of this kind as well. The value is more in the spiritual exchange, the shared life, and in the relationship than in particular goods that the relationship might produce.

When we recognize this good of friendship as more essential to eudaimonia than the external goods or services friends might render each other, much of the give-and-take of friendship no longer seems to involve choosing between one’s own interest and the friend’s. The best kinds of friendship definitely do not involve such a choice or weighing of interests. David Brink implicitly seems to hold that there is this kind of weighing of interest in our relationships generally when he expresses concern about the “intellectual, emotional, and financial resources” we spend on friends, and how we might have otherwise spent these resources on ourselves.<sup>26</sup>

I discussed this kind of concern at some length in chapter 2 (2.3.2), so I will not do so again here. I will highlight a few points from this discussion that show how sharing such resources with a friend does not constitute a sacrifice of one’s own interests. First, to the

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<sup>25</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Brink, “Self-Love and Altruism,” 154.

extent this concern is based on worry about sharing external goods, it evinces a misunderstanding of the extent to which possession of these goods brings about happiness and thus, of the ways in which these goods do and do not serve our interests. Aristotle is clear that these goods are neither *the* good nor valuable in themselves, and that much of the value of having these goods is in being able to spend them well on self and others. We often spend material resources on friends that we might otherwise spend on ourselves, but this is not necessarily any kind of loss or a threat to eudaimonia or to our interests. Second, though we spend time on friends that we might have devoted to our own pursuits, the good of friendship, as I noted above, arises primarily from sharing one's life with another, so this also is no loss. Generally speaking, time spent with friends in this way is not an unfortunate cost to be borne to gain some other benefits, but the central value of friendship! It would be strange to see time spent in discussion and contemplation with a friend as an opportunity cost when being able to engage in such activities with others is the very value human beings need and seek from friendship. It is in virtue of such activities that friendship helps complete a good life, and thus, it does not represent a compromise of either person's interests. Finally, even the favors that we do for a friend, though they cause us some inconvenience, do not compromise our interests. Just as with external goods and objects of pleasure and desire, the value of the small goods lost to do such favors must be evaluated by reference to eudaimonia. The wealth we might share with friends is not lost, but well spent, when we properly grasp the value of external goods. Similarly, the time and resources we spend on friends, even on the favors we do for a friend that are not of particular value to us, are well spent given how important friendship is to living well. To view these exchanges otherwise is to engage in a kind of moment-by-moment cost-benefit analysis that is antithetical both to having any kind of long-term integrated aims and to happiness. We would think it strange if the soldier bewailed the time he spent oiling and repairing his armor as undermining his aim of serving nobly on the battlefield. Such tasks are choiceworthy as means to a noble end. It is no less misguided to bewail the fact that friendship and sharing a life with someone requires actually sharing in the variety of activities that make up a life, including the mundane ones.

At this point, it should be clear that many conflicts between people that are taken to be conflicts of interest are really no more than conflicts of desire. These conflicts tend to arise because as a result of being mistaken about the good or not of a constant enough character to be able to pursue it, many people come to desire things that are not in their interest. They seek wealth or honours even when the possession of them, or the means by which they are obtained, moves them further from a life of virtuous activity. Clearly, in Aristotle's view, neither the desires nor their satisfaction serves their interests: both erode their good feelings toward themselves, make it harder to adjust the trajectory of their lives (*NE* 3.5.1114a3-18), and make even the very goods they seek worthless to them or positively harmful, as they do not have the characters required to use such tools well.

Aristotle's view of the relationship between desires and interests, then, differs markedly from a common view in contemporary ethics, in which satisfying one's desires is crucial to one's interests. Often, the nature and extent of this difference in the importance of desires is not fully recognized. E.g. Anthony Kenny thinks that if we understand Aristotelian happiness as an inclusive end (the interpretation he prefers), "then the desire for happiness is the desire for the orderly and harmonious gratification of a number of independent desires."<sup>27</sup> While an inclusivist interpretation of eudaimonia can be reasonably defended as consistent with Aristotle's own views, the idea that it is our *desires*, simpliciter, that need to be harmoniously integrated cannot be, in my view. What is fundamental to happiness is not having a coherent set of desires, but cultivating a character such that one comes to desire, choose, and act *rightly*, according to what human excellence requires. To the extent a person achieves this, the coherence of his desires will naturally follow, but it is not the primary aim, and it is not how we should essentially characterize happiness. This mistaken emphasis on desire satisfaction, without evaluating desires by reference to what living well requires, gives the impression that many more things are in an agent's interests than would count as such for Aristotle. Because Aristotle does not privilege desire satisfaction in this way, many things that we tend to think of as being in an agent's interest are not in his interest, in Aristotle's view. Thus,

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<sup>27</sup> Anthony Kenny, "Happiness," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 66 (1965): 98.

the disputes based on such mistaken notions of interest are not conflicts of interest, but just the conflicts that are inevitable to those who are fundamentally mistaken about the good and what is in their interest.

#### 4.2.2 Conflicts over Opportunities for Virtuous Activity

I shall now turn briefly to something that I do not think Aristotle views as a source of conflicts between virtuous people, but which some of his contemporary interpreters do: opportunities for virtuous activity. Aristotle takes pains to explain why the goods sought by the many are not *the* good. A mistake that tends to arise from focus on these goods—as well as from the contemporary prevalence of consequentialist approaches to ethics—is the idea that living well is all about finding out what the best kind of goods are and then maximizing the amount of such goods one enjoys or possesses.

This maximizing mindset, in turn, tends to be applied back to the kinds of goods Aristotle thinks central to the good life. It is apparent in interpretations that take Aristotle to be arguing that eudaimonia consists of maximizing one's opportunities for virtuous activity. While there is something right about the idea that the *eudaimōn* or would-be *eudaimōn* will want to engage in as much virtuous activity possible, the truth of this lies in that the virtuous person should be focused on endeavouring to make his every choice and action a good one, not in that he should be trying to seize for himself the maximum number of opportunities to be virtuous. If we can expunge this maximizing mindset, there is also less cause to worry about conflicts of interest, particularly the sort sought to arise because Aristotle thinks that the virtuous agent always aims at the fine for himself.

The main piece of apparent textual support for this maximizing view is *NE* 9.8. Here Aristotle begins by defending the view that the self-love of the virtuous person is good, and he explains that self-love, for such a person means that “at all events...[he] assigns to himself the things that are noblest and best” (9.8.1168b11-12). So far, there is no problem, and as Annas notes, the way that Aristotle redefines what it is to love the self seems to preclude many kinds of typical conflicts between people.

True self-love has thus been considerably reinterpreted, and turns out, consistently to be different from what most people think self-love is. As a result, competition

among true self-lovers is also reinterpreted, and turns out, consistently, to be different from what most people think competition is. Normally, competition is for a limited good and hence at the others' expense; if I get more, you get less. But when people compete to be virtuous, what they do is not at the others' expense, since each person gets the greatest good, and this is because "virtue is that kind of thing".<sup>28</sup>

However, Aristotle's arguments seem to bring about the possibility for conflict between the virtuous over opportunities to act well when Aristotle claims that even when a person does noble acts for his friends and country—giving up wealth and honours and even dying for them—he gains for himself nobility (9.8.1169a18-22). The good person "will throw away wealth, too, on condition that their friends will gain more; for while a man's friend gains wealth he himself gains nobility; he is therefore assigning the greater good to himself" (9.8.1169a27-30). The claim with which Aristotle introduces these arguments suggests that Aristotle does not think this kind of striving for the noble brings about conflicts of interest between people, for he defends the idea that a good man should be a self-lover with the claim such a person will "both himself profit himself by doing noble acts, and will benefit his fellows" (9.8.1169a11-12). How do we reconcile these statements? It seems like Aristotle has both dismissed the possibility of certain types of conflict between virtuous people, by showing how they do not compete over the sorts of goods most people do, and introduced a new and troubling way that even good people can come into conflict with each other: they try to manipulate their interactions with others to make sure that they, the virtuous people, can act more nobly than the people they are ostensibly helping.

What reasons are there for not taking such a reading? First, as Kraut points out,

We do not have to take him to be saying, in this passage, that whenever opportunities for courageous activity present themselves, the virtuous person sees to it that they fall to him, rather than to his friends. Instead, he may be thinking of situations in which only one person is presented with a chance to exercise courage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Julia Annas, "Self-love in Aristotle," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. Supplement (1989): 8.

<sup>29</sup> Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 121.

Annas finds this response unsatisfying because such a restriction seems externally imposed; Aristotle does not indicate he is restricting the scenarios in this way.<sup>30</sup> Neither does he indicate that he is envisioning the more manipulative scenario, however. Moreover, it is not even clear how such manipulation could usually take place. Would the virtuous person stage banquets featuring innumerable delicacies just so he could have more opportunities to seize the fine for himself, temperately abstaining and being generous to his friends, while they got only external goods? Would he deliberately seek the most dangerous positions on the line in battle in order to seize greater opportunities for courageous action for himself? Aristotle nowhere suggests that this is how a person should seek *eudaimonia*, or that friendship, let alone character friendship, is characterized by this sort of striving. For this reason, I think that the reading Kraut offers is more likely to be consistent with Aristotle's intent.

Both the language Aristotle uses to describe striving in this passage and what he says elsewhere about the innocuous kind of competition in which virtue friends engage also offer some support for a more benign reading. "When everyone strains to achieve what is fine and concentrates on the finest actions, everything that is right will be done for the common good, and each person individually will receive the greatest of goods, since that is the character of virtue" (*NE* 9.8.1169a8-12).<sup>31</sup> The word translated as 'strains' in this passage is ἀμιλλάομαι, which is typically used in a way that does not imply competition or agonistic strife but simply eagerly striving to achieve something. As to the kind of competition proper to virtue friends, Aristotle writes, "Friends for virtue are eager to do well by each other, since this is proper to virtue and to friendship; and if this is what they strain to achieve, there are no accusations or fights. For no one objects if the other loves and does well by him; if he is gracious, he 'retaliates' by doing well by the other" (*NE* 8.13.1162b6-11).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Annas, "Self-love in Aristotle," 10.

<sup>31</sup> Translation from Irwin 1999

<sup>32</sup> Translation by author.

Kraut argues that in Aristotle's view, "one does not assign oneself the greater number of opportunities to excel, if doing so unfairly diminishes the number of similar opportunities for others."<sup>33</sup> I think this is correct, but Kraut errs in thinking that not seeking to maximize opportunities for virtue in this way represents a compromise of one's interests. The arguments I have made against the troubling reading of the 9.8 passages also support the view that Aristotle does not think that eudaimonia consists of maximizing opportunities for virtuous activity. One does not become virtuous by constantly casting about for banquets in which he can partake moderately, new situations in which he can be generous, opportunities to demonstrate his wit, etc. He does so by endeavouring to make his every choice and action a good one, for it is the choices that a person makes every day, and the activities in which he engages as a result, that his "corresponding character" is made (*NE* 3.5.1114a7-8). So it is not correct to understand the good as maximizing opportunities for virtuous activity, or to think that the virtuous person who does not do this is somehow sacrificing his interests. The good is simply a life of activity in accordance with virtue, and living furnishes all the opportunities one needs to exercise virtue.

#### 4.2.3 Different Interests

Even when two people are virtuous, and have desires that accord with a good life, it is clear that they may have different desires. Aristotle acknowledges as much when he talks about the different pursuits with which different virtuous people occupy their time, e.g. hunting, athletic exercise, the study of philosophy (*NE* 9.11.1172a2-6). So even if we rule out conflicts between people that arise due to them having ignoble desires, it will still be the case, of course, that different people (even good people) will have different interests and desires. Different agents necessarily have their own individual pursuits, preferences and interests. Do such differences constitute conflicts of interest, or will they necessarily give rise to them?

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Kraut, "Comments on 'Self-love in Aristotle' by Julia Annas," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. Supplement (1989): 24.



I think that a fear of this is why so many are tempted to find a solution in which a friend's interests become completely identical to one's own. Brink worries, "Even if the good of others is part of an agent's overall good...it must interact and may complete with more self-confined aspects"; after all, the money, thought, emotional resources, and time spent on others cannot be spent on one's own pursuits.<sup>34</sup> I do not think this presents a problem, for the need to choose between possible uses of one's time and resources does not by itself constitute a *conflict* of interest.

First, this sort of need to choose between possible uses of one's time and resources arises even with respect to more self-confined pursuits: a scholar might be divided over which project deserves her focus at a given time, people have to think carefully about how to divide time between family and work, we weigh which hobbies to take up, or whether we have time for certain hobbies and pastimes when other pursuits demand more of our time. We do not typically understand the need to order and choose between our own interests as a *conflict* of interests, and rightly so. There is not so much a conflict as a need to have a hierarchy of values and pursuits.

The same is true in our need to give our relationships with others their proper due. Thus, there is no necessary conflict of interests involved, for example, when the medical school student stays home to study for an important exam instead of going out for dinner with friends – would a true friend expect her to spend her time in that situation otherwise? The friends may feel a little disappointed in spite of their understanding, but disappointment does not a conflict of interests make. The medical school student does have to choose between uses of her time – on the one hand, her friends are eager to see her but on the other hand, more "self-confined aspects" like exams intrude, and the student must study. This competition between different possibilities is only a conflict, however, if both parties disagree on what it is *right* for the student to do in this situation. To the extent that friends share virtue and values, and to the extent that each values the relationship, such a conflict seems unlikely.

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<sup>34</sup> Brink, "Introduction," lv.

### 4.3 Why treat strangers well

I have endeavoured to show why strife with others over external goods and ignoble objects of desire does not arise for virtuous people, and how recognizing that one's estimate of oneself is a good also prevents certain kinds of strife with others. It seems plausible to argue, though I do not have the space to make a complete case for this view here, that a proper estimate of self not only prevents injustices against others, but also brings about benevolence and justified concern towards strangers. The vicious person, who is always striving to get more than his fair share of goods and who will mistreat others in order to do so, would likely quite naturally, from his experience of himself, come to have a similar estimate of other human beings in general. The fact that he could only form short-lived and tumultuous relationships with other bad people would also tend to bring about and confirm such a judgment. However, someone with a good view of himself, and who was able to experience intimate, loving and sincere relationships with others, would likely have a more exalted view human potential as a result of his experiences, and this would seem more likely to cause him to act benevolently toward strangers and respond kindly to them, in the manner in which he is accustomed to dealing with himself and others.

In addition, given that what is good for human beings, at the level of broad ethical principles, is the same for *all* human beings, it is not surprising that in ancient ethical views, as Annas points out, "Achieving my final good, happiness, whatever that turns out to be, will involve respecting and perhaps furthering the good of others."<sup>35</sup>

### 4.4 Conclusions

The end is a certain kind of life, a life of virtuous activity. Given the nature of human excellence, this means a life in which the agent is governed by reason, which entails having certain virtues of character and intellect – the latter so that reason will be fit to govern and the former to ensure that the person will be able to want the right kind of life, follow reason's guidance and take pleasure in the right kinds of activity. So anything

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<sup>35</sup> Annas 223.

inconsistent with this end, and with the character that makes it possible, is a threat to the very context required in order for anything to truly benefit and be of value to the agent.

Salmieri writes,

If Plato and Aristotle are correct, then one can only make sense of an agent's having *an interest* at all (as opposed to a motley set of incompatible and competing drives) insofar as the agent is virtuous and thereby unitary. But even if their arguments fail, the debate they initiated makes it clear that the very notion of "one's interest" (as distinct from what one happens to want in a given moment) or of acting on one's interests (as opposed to on this or that appetite) is vexed and laden with philosophical presuppositions. Thus it is a mistake, especially when discussing these philosophers, to help oneself to a particular (if widespread) notion of an agent's interests and to make assumptions about which actions involve sacrifices.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, reference to the final end, eudaimonia, is always necessary to understand whether something is or is not a good for us. Some pleasures, such as the sort the glutton takes in eating a great quantity of food, are not noble pleasures. While some kinds of pains, such as the continent person's pain in doing what virtue requires (such as refraining from sleeping with a friend's wife), are reliable indicators that a person has fallen short of virtue, others, such as the pain that arises not out of a defect of character but as an external consequence of actions, can be part of a well-lived life. Similarly, many desires, can guide us toward living well, but others will lead us in the opposite direction; choosing the proper end and exercising practical reason is required to help us to determine which is which. In general, reference to the kind of life at which we are aiming and the kinds of activity that makes up such a life is necessary to determine whether or not something is a good, and value is made possible to the agent to the extent that he lives well. The final goal determines our aim and thus, sets the standard for what kinds of things actually count as good for us. Given that what is good for human beings, at the level of broad ethical principles, is the same for *all* human beings, it is not surprising that in Aristotle's view, there are no conflicts of interest – or at least such conflict is likely to be infrequent and of minimal importance – among virtuous people.

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<sup>36</sup> Salmieri, "Aristotle on Selfishness: Understanding the Iconoclasm of *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8," 19.

## 5

## Why the Beneficiary is not What Matters: Conclusions

I have argued that the aim of Aristotle's ethical project is properly understood as inquiry into the nature of the good, not into distributing goods. In some ways, this is not a particularly controversial point, but it is often forgotten, or the implications of it lost, as we focus on particular parts of the *Ethics*. Recognizing that defining the good is Aristotle's starting point helps make clear the role of the friendship books within the *Ethics* and also dissipates certain apparent tensions between Aristotle's eudaimonism and his account of friendship. Aristotle is not focusing on the kinds of things that benefit the agent in the first seven books of the *NE*, and then turning to the question of the ways in which we should benefit others in the friendship books. The same things that make someone a good person and benefit him in his own pursuits, make him a good friend and someone able to partake in the best, most complete and most rewarding kinds of human relationships. The virtuous agent has no need of adventitious moral duties to prompt him to take a warm personal interest in others.

To determine how to achieve the final end, eudaimonia, the right question to ask is what kinds of activities make up an excellent human life. The beneficiary of an agent's actions, while not irrelevant, is not fundamental to moral evaluation.

I have shown certain common troubling ways that the tendency to interpret Aristotle's ethical views in terms of the beneficiary tend to distort his ethics and in particular, his account of friendship. While Aristotle thinks that friendship is one of the greatest pleasures of life, and one of the richest rewards for virtue, interpretations centered on the question of the beneficiary view friendship—even the friendship of good people—as sometimes compromising the agent's happiness. If friendship is seen through the lens of moral duty, or of disinterested pursuit of others' happiness, it can come to seem a

tiresome obligation and not, as it is, a cherished relationship with loved one. Such relationships are, in Aristotle's view, a source of inspiration, self-knowledge and joy.

The fact that both parties seek value from their friendship as they do in Aristotle's account tends to raise concerns about conflicts of interests between friends. However, these concerns are misplaced given how Aristotle understands what is in a person's interest. Living well is what makes any other goods we might pursue valuable, and nothing that is truly in our interest is at odds with what eudaimonia requires.

I hope that this project has given some indication both of how common a beneficiary-focused approach to ethics is and of the limitations of approaching ethics in this way. If we view Aristotle without this distortive filter, the nature of his project seems rather different, and more unlike what we commonly do in contemporary ethics. If it is only in seeking our own well-being that we can be good people and good friends, whether the agent or others benefit is the wrong question to ask, or at least not a question of fundamental import. Further, absent a basic divide between what is good for an agent and what makes possible good human relationships, metaethical questions about the source of morality's motivational force have less weight. The kind of person who can have a good life and be happy with oneself is also the sort of person who will be a good friend and good for others. Thus, it is important to talk about what one can do to be a good friend, which seems more interesting—and conducive to living a good life—than focusing on our duties to others or on what we can do to maximize everyone's good.

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