

Confucius and Aristotle on the Goods of Friendship

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Published online: 22 October 2010
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Abstract This essay discusses the goods of friendship as they are articulated by Confucius, Mencius, and Aristotle. It is argued that since Confucius and Mencius tend to conceive personal relationships in hierarchical terms, they do not directly address the goods of symmetrical friendships. Using Aristotle's account of friendship, I argue that friendship is necessary for the cultivation of virtue outside the family. This is supported by discussing the virtues of generosity, trust, and wisdom as they develop within family life and then are refined in friendships. Lastly, as Confucius, Mencius, and Aristotle agree that the good friendship is necessarily a virtuous one, I consider what value aesthetic friendships have.

Keywords Friendship · Confucian ethics · Virtue ethics

One person wants to get possession of horses, another dogs, another money, and another distinctions; of these things I reckon little, but for the possession of friends I have quite a passionate longing, and would rather obtain a good friend than the best quail or cock in the world.

Lysis 211e

In *Thinking from the Han* Hall and Ames discuss the question of whether or not Confucius and Socrates could have been friends. Their discussion is intriguing as it brings to light key differences between Socrates's and Confucius' understanding of friendship and, more generally, differences in the ways of life they advocated. The discussion is programmatic, however, for Hall and Ames draw primarily from Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* but do not discuss the *Lysis*, an early dialogue that focuses specifically on friendship.¹ Further, it can be argued that Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* replies

¹For an excellent discussion of the *Lysis* see Penner and Rowe 2005. Also see Bolotin 1989 and Badwar 1993.

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to questions raised in the *Lysis* about friendship and should also be taken into account when one takes up such a comparative enterprise (See Pangle 2003: 20-36). In this essay then, I will discuss the Confucian and the Mencian understanding of friendship in light of Aristotle's articulation of the goods of friendship. It will be argued that Confucius and Mencius, because of their emphasis on familial relationships—and hierarchical relationships more generally—downplay the importance of symmetrical friendships. I will then argue, along with Aristotle, that the moral and aesthetic goods of symmetrical friendships are essential for one's self-cultivation since such friendships give one the opportunity to extend virtues such as generosity, trust, and wisdom beyond the family. Lastly, since both Confucius and Aristotle emphasize that good friendships are necessarily rooted in moral goodness, I will consider what standing friendships rooted purely in aesthetic goods have.

1

In this context I cannot hope to address all Confucian thought on friendship but will focus on the relevant passages that appear in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*.² These passages articulate an account of friendship that considers the role played by the friend in one's moral development and considers the relationship between friendships and familial relationships.

With regard to the *Analects*, it is well known that the very first passage brings to light the relationship between study and friendship. "Having studied (*xue* 學), to then repeatedly apply what you have learned—is this not a source of pleasure? To have friends (*peng* 朋) come from distant quarters—is this not a source of enjoyment?" Confucius here links the joys of study with the joys of friendship and the connection is strengthened when the meaning of *peng* is kept in mind. Hall and Ames note that *Peng* here means *men xia* 門下, students of the same master, and would probably refer to the many followers of Confucius who came from afar to study with him (Hall and Ames 1998: 260-261).³ If this is true, then Confucius finds joy in studying and in associating with the students of his school. Further, *peng* is distinct from *you* 友 in that the latter connotes a relationship with a mentor or teacher. Confucius' students are his *peng* but cannot be his *you* for only those that exceeded his status and/or his abilities could be designated as such.

Hall and Ames discuss friendship and the Confucian tendency to frame relationships hierarchically since it is widely held that friendships should be characterized by a certain degree of symmetry (Hall and Ames 1998: 260-262). This leads them to the perhaps extreme conclusion that "Confucius, as he is portrayed in the *Analects* is peerless, and hence, friendless. To assert that Confucius had friends would diminish him" (Hall and Ames 1998: 266). I think that it is debatable that Confucius was peerless. However, Hall and Ames are correct in claiming that the *Analects* does not present symmetrical relationships. Emphasis is placed on asymmetrical relationships (such as those between father and son, ruler and subject) and the friendships that are described in the *Analects* are construed in terms of the unequal moral standing of the friends in question.

² For the *Analects*, I will refer to Ames and Rosemont Jr. 1998, and for the *Mencius* I will refer to Lau 2003. I should say that this essay will focus on friendship as it is presented and discussed in philosophical works. I leave the task of considering the relationship between friendship as portrayed in such work and friendships as lived in either ancient China or ancient Greece to the historian.

³ Also see *Analects* 12.23 where Confucius describes how to best treat friends, that is, to "Do your utmost to exhort them, and lead them adeptly along the way."

In keeping with his emphasis on moral enrichment, Confucius emphasizes that one should associate with friends (*you*) who are better than oneself in achieving moral goodness (*Analects* 1.8). One should find friends who will aid in one's self-cultivation, friends that are true (*youzhen* 友真), who make good on their word (*youliang* 友諒), and who are broadly informed (*youduoxian* 友多聞) (*Analects* 16.4). Again, this grows out of Confucius' tendency to conceive relationships hierarchically, but it is also rooted in the belief that one stands to be improved by associating with morally exemplary individuals. Indeed, drawing on Mencius, Hall and Ames suggest that Confucius can only be friends with deceased individuals who lived lives of virtue (such as the Duke of Zhou, GUAN Zhong, Kings Wen and Wu, and possibly his deceased student YAN Hui) (Hall and Ames 1998: 266).⁴

Before turning to Aristotle I would like to briefly examine what Mencius adds to the position outlined in the *Analects*. It can be argued that Mencius develops the insights on friendship presented in the *Analects* in the sense that he discusses the relationship between friendship and the cultivation of moral virtue in more detail.⁵ In 5b3, he suggests that in making friends one should not rely on advantage (whether it grows out of the age, position, or power of the other) but should consider his or her virtue or moral goodness. There are two interesting consequences of this position. The first is that virtue trumps rank in the sense that two individuals who are moral equals may become friends even though they occupy different positions in a social hierarchy. Hence, a person of superior virtue may deny the friendship of morally suspect dukes and kings. This is consistent with Confucius' criticism of morally questionable rulers (See *Analects* 3.1, 3.2, and 3.6. Also see *Mencius* 5b7) and, more important for our purposes, it shows that Mencius considers the value of reciprocal friendships among moral equals. Presumably, the mutual benefit that two good individuals engage is itself a good that trumps the distinctions between social roles.

However, Mencius goes on to suggest that it is appropriate for friends to "demand goodness from each other" in the sense that the friend can justifiably point out one's moral shortcomings and encourage one to do better. In contrast, fathers and sons should not demand goodness of one another for doing so will " estrange them from one another" and "undermine the love between them" (*Mencius* 4b30). Mencius does not elaborate, but one can infer that the biological link that connects father and son produces a particular moral relationship that will be undermined if the father or the son begins to treat the other as a friend. As we will see in a moment, friendships tend to be characterized by a certain degree of social distance that renders them amenable to the cultivation of virtue outside of the familial context. Hence, for Mencius, virtue is seen as having the capacity to trump social rank. Two individuals may be friends if they are both morally good regardless of their respective social positions. At the same time, virtue does not trump familial bonds, at least in the sense that doing so entails "demanding goodness" of one's family members in the manner that a friend would.

⁴ I believe that this conclusion is extreme. However, as mentioned earlier, it is based on the correct observation that the *Analects* presents a Confucius who is either morally superior or inferior to those around him. The reader is hard-pressed to find a symmetrical friendship in the *Analects*. The *Mencius* does present a more egalitarian understanding of friendship in that it discusses friendships among moral equals who hold differing social positions (*Mencius* 5b3). However, little is specifically said about such friendships and the passage, I believe, is used to support the point that moral standing trumps social standing.

⁵ I should say that I follow Hall and Ames in holding that "virtue" and *de* 德 synonymously express a "particular focus that orients an item in a field of significances such that it achieves its own intrinsic excellence" (Hall and Ames 1998: 61). That is, virtue and *de* are akin in that they both capture the notion of an individual whose excellence extends into the social and physical environment. Also see Hall and Ames 1987: 216-226.

With this said, on the classical Confucian account, to what extent are friendships necessary?⁶ Confucius emphasizes that studying with friends is enjoyable and that one stands to be improved by morally good friends. Mencius suggests that friendships among the morally good are themselves good in that the friends can demand goodness of one another in a manner that one's family members cannot. However, since it is often emphasized that moral dispositions grow out of family life, one wonders what role friendships play in one's moral development, and if friendships do in fact play an important role, one wonders why Confucius and Mencius do not discuss them in more detail. With these questions in mind, we turn to Aristotle's discussion of the cultivation of virtue both within the context of the family and in the context of symmetrical friendships.

2

In this section I briefly discuss key components of Aristotle's account of friendship, use that account to resolve the problem concerning the instrumental use of friends, and consider the necessary conditions for friendship—shared goodness and reciprocity.

As is well known, Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship—the pleasant, the useful, and the good. Friendships of utility are first explored in Plato's *Lysis* as Socrates discusses the root of friendship with two young friends.⁷ There, it is suggested that friendship begins in need, that is, that friends act as remedies for personal defects much in the same way that medicine remedies the defects of the body (Lamb 1967: 55-61). Personal shortcomings set us looking about for those who will balance out our deficiencies and thereby render our lives more pleasant. For example, someone who lacks aesthetic sensibility may seek out a friend who is knowledgeable about the arts, while someone who is intemperate may seek to cultivate a relationship with someone who is temperate. In either case, a personal deficiency is met by drawing on the character and experience of another.

Aristotle observes that friendships such as these are derivative since they do not entail loving the friend for who they are (Aristotle 1968: 1156a10-20). My friendship with the art buff is superficial in the sense that I value him not for his character but for his ability to balance out my deficiency. Such friendships tend to be short-lived since what one will find useful will change in time and, as Pangle observes, "because one cannot count upon being able to be useful to another at the time when one needs something from him, friendships of utility are especially subject to disappointments, complaints and ruptures" (Pangle 2003: 40). There is no solid foundation for the friendship to be built upon since the needs of both parties are continually subject to change.

Aristotle moves beyond instrumental friendships by suggesting that there are also friendships that are rooted in pleasure and that, more specifically, entail appreciation of the other's company (Aristotle 1968: 1156a23-36). These are distinct from friendships of utility since the friends cherish each other's company, that is, they appreciate one another as people and do not see each other as instrumental to personal ends. Further, Aristotle suggests that friendships of pleasure are erotic in the sense that they often are characterized by strong emotional attachments. Consequently, they often occur in young adulthood as the

⁶ It should be noted that Plato and Aristotle agree that friendships are essential for the good life, and this leads C.S. Lewis to suggest that the western philosophers favored friendships because they are characteristically "un-natural" (see Badwar 1993: 39-47).

⁷ That is, Socrates characteristically goads Lysis and Menexenus into considering the origin and nature of their friendship.

young tend to be easily swayed by their emotions (Aristotle 1968: 1156a31-1156b6).⁸ Such relationships are warm and heartfelt, but ultimately do not last since the emotions that they are grounded upon are ultimately unstable. Aristotle consequently criticizes them, and doing so allows him to set up his discussion and praise of friendships that rest on a more solid (that is, rational) foundation, friendships that are rooted in a higher good than pleasure, namely virtue.

Perfect friendships are those that revolve not around material advantage or pleasures of the body, but around the character of the friend. It is important to point out that such friendships remain useful to and provide pleasure for the friends. Friends are good because they will be of assistance in times of need and give one the opportunity to provide benefaction in times of surplus (Aristotle 1968: 1167b-1168a27). At the same time, friends are pleasant since good individuals naturally delight in contemplating other strong souls in action. It is enjoyable to delight in the moral goodness of the friend (Aristotle 1968: 1156b15-18). Finally, perfect friendships are rooted in shared virtues. Aristotle writes

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of their own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good—and goodness is an enduring thing. (Aristotle 1968: 1156b7-11).

The hierarchy of goods found in perfect friendships solves the problem of instrumental friendships discussed earlier. Not all friendships are primarily rooted in need, for some relationships go beyond a narrow instrumentalism in that they entail mutual goodwill and shared joy in the practice and cultivation of moral goodness. This is not to say that utility is irrelevant for perfect friendships, but it is to say that such friendships move beyond a pure instrumentalism as the friends cultivate concern for and appreciation of one another.

Moving on, we find Aristotle arguing that perfect friendship is rooted in shared goodness but a question arises concerning what conditions must be met if such friendships are to develop. The first was intimated above, that is, true friends have common interests and a wealth of shared experience to draw upon. They delight in the same things and find that their delight increases as they enjoy them together. Again, this is what is expressed in *Analects* 1.1 when Confucius expresses delight in learning as well as delight when his “young friends” (*xiaozhi* 小子) come from far away to study with him.⁹ Confucius and his young friends share a way of life, and this sets the foundation for fulfilling shared experience.

The second condition of friendship is reciprocity, and we find Aristotle continually returning to the matter as his discussion of friendship unfolds. Reciprocity is necessary for relationships other than friendships; however, since friendships are freely entered into and are not as stringently governed by rules of social propriety (as are familial relationships), it becomes of paramount importance. Reciprocity begins as friends mutually recognize each other as bearing good will and as wishing well of one another. It continues as they enter in a

⁸ Even though this kind of friendship is not explicitly discussed in the *Lysis*, it can be pointed out that the friendship between Hippothales and Lysis is of this sort as it is characterized by strong feelings (see Plato 1989: 204a-207a).

⁹ I should say that I am taking the “students from distant quarters” to be students of the broader Confucian school that come to enrich their studies by studying with Confucius. As such, they will have studied Confucian texts and be versed in Confucian rites (*li*). Of course, if one took such students to be new students, then my point about shared experience (in the sense of a shared way of life) will not apply to this particular passage.

process of mutual benefaction in which they benefit from each other's company as well as from the gifts that they bestow on one another. For Aristotle, friendship must be characterized by mutual good will, consciousness that good will is reciprocated, and that the individuals mutually desire the good for the other (Aristotle 1968: 115b31-1156a5).¹⁰ If these conditions are not met, then the friendship will become that of the instrumental or pleasurable sort or will, in the worst case, dissolve altogether.

For this reason, Aristotle in several places discusses asymmetrical friendships—such as those between ruler and subject as well as between father and son—in which enacting reciprocity becomes difficult. The difficulty concerns the benefits that can be offered and received, for superiors and inferiors are distinct in that they have different abilities, perform different social functions, and have different grounds of affection for one another. For example, Aristotle argues that friendships between ruler and subject are always strained since the subject can rarely—if ever—benefit the ruler in any substantial way (Aristotle 1968: 1158b12-28). Interestingly, Aristotle and Mencius agree that a balance can be struck if two individuals remain alike in virtue even if they occupy different social stations. Proportionality can be achieved and social status can be trumped if two individuals remain steadfast in their commitment to moral goodness.¹¹

There are two difficulties with trying to strike a balance in this manner. The first is that proportionality will be thwarted if the superior does not acknowledge the benefits offered by the inferior. Indeed, both Confucius and Mencius faced this problem as many of the rulers that they counseled and taught did not listen, that is, the political figures that they advised were often not “fellow travelers on the Way.” The second difficulty concerns the prevalence of flattery that often characterizes relationships between rulers and subjects. The superior can be benefited by an excess of affection on the part of the inferior but it is clear that this kind of friendship is one of utility, for the ruler will value the subject only because of the flattery that he or she provides. To put it bluntly, *any* flatterer will do. On the other hand, the flatterer will stand to gain if the flattery is successful, for the ruler will more than likely want to reward the flatterer for his or her efforts.

I bring up these issues in order to justify that both Aristotle and Mencius conceive of friendships in terms of moral reciprocity and to further argue that the give and take that characterizes all relationships is essential for friendships since they are voluntarily entered into and are not characterized by the obligations that characterize familial relationships. The difficulties just mentioned show that true reciprocity is necessary for perfect friendship and friendships are strongest when they are symmetrical, that is, when the friends are alike in terms of abilities, social standing, and moral goodness. Indeed, those involved in asymmetrical relationships can be friends, but as the example of ruler and subject illustrates, it will be difficult to navigate such waters since much effort is needed to avoid the degradation of the relationship. As discussed, this occurs when the superior ignores the benefits provided by the inferior or when flattery abounds.

Before considering the relationship between virtue and friendship in more detail I would like to consider why Confucius does not place much emphasis on symmetrical friendships

¹⁰ The *Lysis* also discusses the relationship between friendship and reciprocity (Plato 1989: 211a-213d); however, since Plato does not distinguish between *philia* as a loving human relationship and *philia* as the pursuit of a loved object, the discussion is confused. Aristotle's account avoids the difficulties presented in the *Lysis* as he limits his discussion to *philia* as a relationship between human beings.

¹¹ As Tu Wei-Ming notes, fully informed by a “sense of dignity, independence, and autonomy, Mencius conducted himself as a senior friend, a teacher to the kings he encountered ... [and] ... a trusted friend, in this sense, is a critic, a teacher, and a fellow traveler on the Way” (Tu 1998: 129). For Aristotle on striking such a balance see Aristotle 1968: 1159b1-8.

and tends to view friendships asymmetrically in terms of superiors and inferiors.¹² Whereas Aristotle characterizes friendships in terms of shared goodness and sees the relationship as playing an important role in one's moral development, Confucius emphasizes familial relationships and familial virtues such as filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and consequently relegates friendship to a relatively minor role. The friend may help in one's moral cultivation, but this will rarely, if ever, trump the relationship between parents and children. Of course, this is because parents play a pivotal role in determining the moral rectitude of their children, and the biological basis of the relationship establishes bonds the strength of which even the most beneficial friendship will not, in most circumstances, be able to attain. *Xiao*, on this account, will always be more important than the virtue that, on the Confucian account, characterizes friendship—trust or *xin* 信—not only because it is rooted in the family but because the moral status of the family is seen as foundational for the moral status of the state. One may advance other arguments in order to explain the difference between the Socratic and the Confucian schools on this issue,¹³ but it is sufficient to point out that relationships with friends are downplayed when familial relationships—and hierarchical relationships more generally—are understood to function as the foundation of moral and civic virtue.¹⁴

3

If the Confucian account is correct, then the burden of proof falls on Aristotle to demonstrate why symmetrical friendships are necessary for one's moral cultivation. One way to do so is to question the role that familial relationships play in one's moral cultivation, while the other is to show how friendships can substantially contribute to a good life by overcoming the limitations of the family. We will consider these in turn.

What is striking about the family is the unconditional bonds that characterize the relationships that develop therein. Familial relationships make deep claims on the heart because they are often rooted in biology, since members of a family share experiences, and because family members often make significant sacrifices to support one another. For example, the love of a parent tends to be unselfish and unqualified to the extent that it does not require reciprocation. Aristotle believes that this is so because the child is loved as “another self,” that is, because he or she is similar to and formed by the parent (Aristotle 1968: 1161b18–28). At the same time, the child can never discharge the debt that accrues through being benefited by the parent's gift of life, nurture, and education. For Aristotle,

¹² As FAN Ruiping notes, “All five basic human relations, except for the friend-friend relation, require asymmetrical virtues on each part to promote the relation.... Only friendship involves a symmetrical virtue on both sides: fidelity. True friends should be loyal to each other” (Fan 2002: 356). YU Jiyuan briefly discusses Aristotle's account of friendship but moves on to the Confucian account of filial relationships without sufficiently developing a comparison (Yu 1998: 323–347). For a more balanced comparison see Sim 2007: 194–212.

¹³ For example, Kutcher argues that friendships, because they were not hierarchical, were seen as potentially subversive to Confucian ideology (Kutcher 2000). As I am not convinced by the argument, I will uphold the weaker conclusion that because emphasis was placed on familial bonds such as those between father and son, husband and wife, and older and younger brother, Confucius and Mencius simply did not stress the goods of symmetrical friendships.

¹⁴ Although Confucius tends to view friendships hierarchically and stresses how one can be improved by associating with the right friends, there are passages (*Analects* 5.17 and 8.2) in which Confucius stresses respect and concern for “old friends.” These passages do not tell us much about who these friends are, but they may suggest that his concern goes beyond a narrow instrumentalism. I would like to thank an anonymous referee of this journal for pointing this out to me.

parents experience unconditional love for their children, and children are unconditionally committed to the welfare of their parents. It is the unconditional nature of bonds rooted in kinship and biological necessity that he sees as both admirable and troubling.¹⁵

The difficulty concerns the relationship between the family and justice. The closeness of the family is clearly good in that it establishes strong bonds between family members and, in its ideal state, no questions concerning justice will arise since “[t]here is no injustice in the unqualified sense toward what is one’s own, toward one’s property or one’s child, until he reaches a certain age and becomes separate; they are like part of oneself and no one would choose to harm himself” (Aristotle 1968: 1134b9-12). Parental authority here is necessarily benevolent since parents view children as their own and do not expect compensation for the gifts that they bestow on them.

Aristotle and Confucius agree that the family is the first and most influential provider of moral education. However, a difficulty arises since virtue becomes something of an add-on to familial bonds that are ultimately rooted in the un-conditional love of one’s own.¹⁶ Parents love their children first and foremost because they are their own, and the virtues that the children develop are seen as supplementing such goodness. A further worry is that the family may not provide the environment necessary for the development of moral goodness or, even worse, will provide one that is quite conducive to the development of vice. This leads Aristotle to conclude that moral education must go beyond the family. One way to do so is to find non-familial moral exemplars to emulate, and another is the cultivation of friendships that are rooted in the cultivation of virtue.¹⁷

The family’s relationship to virtue having been articulated, the next task is to discuss what particular virtues friendships allow one to cultivate. Before doing so, it must again be reiterated that friendships provide a suitable context for the cultivation of virtue since friendships themselves are freely entered into. That is, the bond of friendship is distinct from familial bonds in that the latter are most often conditional in nature. One has much more freedom when it comes to choosing and maintaining friendships, and this opens up space for the voluntary cultivation of virtue. More specifically, friendships give one the opportunity to develop virtuous dispositions such as benevolence, sympathetic understanding, trust, generosity, and wisdom, among others. A full treatment of these is beyond the scope of this essay, but I will focus on generosity, trust, and wisdom in order to support my claim that friendships are essential for the cultivation and extension of virtuous dispositions that are established in family life.

As discussed, generosity naturally arises in the family as parents desire to give to their children without a thought of return. Parental generosity is unconditional because children are dependent on their parents and because they are seen as part and parcel of the parental self. It is anathema for a parent to expect returns for his efforts not only because the child is incapable of making returns but, further, because the child cannot freely enter into social

¹⁵ It should be noted that the unconditional nature of familial bonds seems reasonable to Aristotle. It is not until the *Politics* that he will call the priority of the family over the *polis* into question. For his comments on parental benefaction and the debts of the child, see Aristotle 1968: 116b18-21.

¹⁶ Hence, Pangle observes that when present, virtue “is a supplement to family love, but the true bedrock of the family is the uncalculating, unwavering love of one’s own” (Pangle 2003: 98).

¹⁷ It should be noted that, for Aristotle, friendship is not a virtue but is an external good that creates a context for the expression of virtue. However, it remains distinct from other external goods (such as money) since the true friend, because she is good, is intrinsically valuable. It should also be said that, in this context, I will not consider Aristotle’s comments on civic friendships since such friendships are relatively anonymous and do not presuppose the intimate shared experience of close friendships that concern us here. For more on civic friendships see Cooper 1993.

exchange as can an autonomous moral agent. Of course as the child grows, develops the requisite faculties, and becomes independent, the relationship changes, and parents may develop the belief that their efforts should be repaid.¹⁸

With regard to the child, the desire to reciprocate can be enacted as she begins to appreciate the debts that the parents have accrued in caring for her. I suggest that such reciprocity constitutes an element of *xiao* or filial piety since the virtue is often framed in terms of the benefits and debts that are accrued by children. As children mature they become aware of parental generosity (especially if they have children of their own) and develop the desire to reciprocate such generosity. With this said, I should also emphasize that such reciprocal generosity is only sufficient for the virtue as *xiao* also includes the enactment of specific rituals (*li* 禮) and sentiments such as love (*ai* 愛) and respect (*zun* 尊). Hence, a child who begrudgingly reciprocated his parent's efforts in adult life would be lacking moral virtue since he does not experience gratitude for the benefits that have been accrued (see *Mencius* 4a19).

It needs to be emphasized that symmetrical friendships are ritually underdetermined in the sense that social conventions do not clearly articulate the norms of action for friendships as they do for other social roles (See Thomas 1993: 50-52 and Cocking and Kennet 2003: 61-73). Hence, ritual propriety may dictate that parents be generous with their children and that children reciprocate such generosity. However, since friendships are symmetrical and conditional, ritual propriety tends not to provide clear guidelines as to how friendly generosity should be enacted.¹⁹ The generosity of the parent is distinct from that of the friend in that the benefaction that unfolds in friendship is rooted in the freedom to give. Generosity takes on more significance as one develops the desire to benevolently give to someone to whom one is not overtly indebted to. In doing so, one develops the ability to extend virtuous dispositions to those who lie outside of one's family. Perhaps then, Aristotle is right in seeing friendship as the relationship that connects familial virtue with civic virtue. I will return to this in a moment.

The second virtue that I would like to consider is *xin* 信 or "living up to one's word" (see Hall and Ames 1987: 56-62). *Xin* is mentioned some forty times in the *Analects* and is often brought up in discussions of friendship (see *Analects* 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, and 5.26). Hall and Ames note that "living up to one's word is an essential factor in establishing interpersonal credibility which, for Confucius, is a precondition for realizing oneself as a person" (Hall and Ames 1987: 61). The passages that link friends and living up to one's word do not explicitly justify the connection, but it seems clear that *xin* is essential for friendships because the bond of friendship is, as we have discussed, not as strong as the social bonds that characterize family life. Since this is the case, mutual trust becomes essential for maintaining the relationship. Further, it is commonly held that good friendships are characterized by a certain degree of intimacy and that such intimacy cannot be achieved if the friends do not trust one another. One desires a friend who lives up to her word to the

¹⁸ It is easy here, in a cynical fashion, to accuse parents of enacting a base instrumentalism, that is, to see them as acting on their own interests as they have children only in order to guarantee that there is someone to support them in their old age. However, the solution given earlier to this problem can also be applied here. That is, a narrow instrumentalism can be avoided if the parent cares for the good of the child and develops the corresponding sentiments.

¹⁹ Aristotle's comments on benefaction reveal that a tension will develop as friends in a symmetrical relationship give to and consequently indebted one another. This is aggravated by the fact that Aristotle insists that doing good is better than having good done to oneself or, to put it another way, that the benefactor is better than the benefactee in the sense that the former has actively done good while the latter has passively accepted the benefit (Aristotle 1968: 1167b16-1168a27). I discuss these issues in Mullis 2008.

extent that she consistently demonstrates that one need not doubt her words or intentions. Once trust has been established, one will likely be more willing to confide in and disclose oneself to the friend.

Xin is essential for family life and can be developed further in friendship. Living up to one's word is essential for family life as it is intimately linked with fulfilling one's role as a father, mother, child, or sibling. That is, part of fulfilling one's role is to fulfill the duties or obligations that characterize the role but further, one must give others the sense that one will, through both word and action, reliably do so. This is essential for friendships not only because quality friendships are characterized by trust and a sense of intimacy but also because friendships are always in some sense chosen. Friendships are not generally characterized by the obligations that characterize familial relationships and consequently must be solidified by the development of trust and a sense of reliability. Without this foundation, the friendship remains tentative; however, freely entered into relationships provide the context for the development of trust outside the context of the family. As with generosity, *xin* is grounded in familial relationships and can be developed and articulated in friendship.

The last point that I would like to consider in this section returns us to the first entry in the *Analects* that considers the relationship between friendship and learning, or wisdom. We found Confucius expressing the joys of learning and then expressing the joy of having students come from afar to visit him. Again, these are not friends proper since, on the Confucian account, the relationship between teacher and student is symmetrical, but the passage raises a point for consideration, namely, the relationship between symmetrical friendships and the cultivation of wisdom or *zhi* 智. Confucius stresses that one stands to learn most from one's moral superiors and this leads one to ask whether one can cultivate wisdom with one's equals, that is, with one's peers.²⁰

In this context a concern arises that pertains to the family's ability to inculcate wisdom. On one hand, familial bonds play an important role in the cultivation of wisdom as one stands to learn from the experience of one's elders. On the other, familial bonds are problematic in that their strength can justify the exertion of questionable moral claims on family members. With regard to wisdom, the parent-child relationship cannot function as a teacher-student relationship since biological bonds do not allow for the distance necessary for successful teaching. As we have seen, Mencius is wary about the prospect of fathers formally instructing their sons, and similarly in the beginning of the *Republic* Socrates waits until the father (Cephalus) leaves before he begins to discuss justice with the sons (Polemarchus, Lysias, and Euthydemus).

A related worry is that the parent's position of authority itself may justify belief in their infallibility. As the lives of Socrates, Confucius, and Mencius demonstrate, wisdom often trumps social position in the sense that those who are social or political superiors are not necessarily wiser. In a worst-case scenario, a child may inherit parents who are not wise and, even worse, think that parental demands are justified simply because they are issued by their parents. Hence, it seems that there would be agreement that one must find a teacher who will aid in the pursuit of wisdom and further, that such a teacher lie outside of one's

²⁰ I follow Hall and Ames in understanding wisdom as more than the accumulation of knowledge as it entails "realizing" or "making real" one's abilities. Since this understanding of wisdom entails a performative component, it is closer to Aristotle's notion of "practical wisdom" (*phronesis*) than it is to theoretical wisdom. For a discussion of the distinction between *phronesis* and *theoria* in the context of moral practice see Rorty 1978: 343-358. For Hall and Ames's discussion of wisdom, see Hall and Ames 1987: 50-56.

family. With this said, what then of friendship? What role, if any, does friendship play in the cultivation of wisdom?

Aristotle discusses the relationship between friendship and happiness, and he draws an apt analogy between the practice of an art and the practice of virtue. He writes: “A good man *qua* good delights in virtuous actions and is vexed at vicious ones, as a musical man enjoys beautiful tunes but is pained at bad ones. A certain training in virtue arises also from the company of the good, as Theognis has said before us” (Aristotle 1968: 1170a9-13). To flesh out the analogy a bit, it can be said that the music student will greatly appreciate the grace of an excellent performance and, further, the significance of the performance will be magnified when she shares it with fellow music students who also appreciate its grace. Hence, students stand to benefit from their teacher’s instruction and example but will also benefit from the sense of solidarity that develops among them as they share experiences and cultivate a sense of goodwill for one another. Friendships support the pursuit of wisdom since one naturally draws strength from the knowledge that there are others who have similar experiences whether they are experiences of success, struggle, or failure. In this sense, friendship supports the pursuit of wisdom not by providing the insights that a master can provide, but by providing the supportive context that sustains one in that often difficult pursuit.²¹

Further, the analogy demonstrates that friendship plays a role in the cultivation of wisdom as it entails shared interests and, more generally, the desire to realize shared ends. Music students appreciate the performer’s grace because they have decided to give music a pivotal role in their lives and value the goods that it provides. The students share the conviction that music is essential for their happiness. Likewise, individuals who are dedicated to the cultivation of virtue will have common ground for their friendship and will consequently find value in jointly deliberating about the difficulties of cultivating virtuous action. As Aristotle notes and as the *Analects* intimates, friends live together and discuss difficult issues (See Aristotle 1968: 1170b11-12).²² Friendship is essential for the cultivation of wisdom not only because it provides a needed sense of solidarity, but also because it provides the context necessary for mutual deliberation about practical matters that concern the deliberators (see Sherman 1993: 91-107). Hence, the place to find

²¹ It has been pointed out to me that Aristotle’s analogy concerning the virtuous and the musical man takes place within the context of a discussion on perfect friendships, that is, friendships in which the friends are perfectly virtuous. This would seem to raise a difficulty for my account as the shared developmental struggle that I am considering here could only take place amongst less than perfect individuals. Of course, friendships can be characterized in light of the moral qualities of the friends but I am skeptical about the notion of perfect friendship. More specifically, there are two problems that the notion raises. In the *Lysis*, Socrates points out that the perfectly good man will not need friends as he will be completely self-sufficient and will not need their aid (Plato 1989: 214a-215c). Aristotle responds to this kind of argument by pointing out that the good man will need people to do well by (Aristotle 1968: 1169b14) and will delight in virtuous actions performed by others (Aristotle 1968: 1170a5-10). I have to imagine that Socrates would not find these points convincing as they do not sufficiently counter his point regarding goodness and self-sufficiency. Regardless, the second problem can be formulated as a question, namely, why should emphasis be placed on perfect friendships in the first place? Cooper suggests that this follows from Aristotle’s “teleological bias” which leads him to “search out the best and most fully realized instance when attempting to define a kind of thing” (Cooper 1980: 308). Indeed, I believe that Cooper is right to emphasize that a friendship can be based in virtue but need not be perfectly virtuous. Friendships can be characterized by the recognition and appreciation of moral qualities but need not entail that the friends are unrealistic moral heroes. If this is the case, then my analysis of Aristotle’s analogy concerning musical and virtuous individuals comes much closer to friendships as they unfold in everyday life, that is, friendships that are imperfect but nevertheless good (see Cooper 1980: 305-308).

²² With regard to Confucius, I am thinking of instances in which his disciples ask the Master about a question that they have been discussing amongst themselves. For example, see *Analects* 11.22 and 12.22.

friendship in the *Analects* is not among Confucius and his historical exemplars but among his students who decide to take up the Confucian way of life, to learn from one another, and share in experiences of success and failure, happiness and sorrow.

It has been shown that friendships can expand concern for others as they provide the opportunity for the extension of goodwill beyond the family. Friendships give one the opportunity to further cultivate the virtues that are developed in family life including generosity, trust, and wisdom. For this reason, I would argue that consideration of friendship is essential for those who take up the task of reconciling the Confucian emphasis on family life with the goods of civil society and democracy. Successful friendships demonstrate how one can extend virtuous action into the public realm as one enters into reciprocal relationships with non-family members. To return to the virtue of generosity, the individual who learns from and develops appreciation of parental generosity and then goes on to learn about the joys of friendly benefaction may very well develop a more generalized sense of altruism for the stranger. That is, the goods of acting generously are procured in the family, then nurtured in friendships, and finally extended to relationships that are not characterized by any degree of intimacy. Friendship plays a pivotal role in this process as it provides a connecting link between public and private for, in friendship, one develops an intimate relationship with one who was once a stranger (see Schwarzenbach 1996: 97-128).

4

Drawing on Aristotle, I have shown that friendship is essential for the extension of virtuous action beyond the family. Friendships give individuals the opportunity to develop virtues such as generosity, trust, and wisdom that are originally fostered in the family. Before concluding I would like to consider a possible criticism of the account outlined above.

In "Friendship and Moral Danger" Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett argue that friendship has traditionally been construed as an overtly moral relationship (see Cocking and Kennett 2000: 278-296). Clearly, Aristotle and Confucius locate the goods of friendship within the framework of moral virtue in that they suggest that lasting friendship must be rooted in the shared pursuit of moral excellence. However, Cocking and Kennett write, "In everyday experience...friendship surely plays a less exalted role. The inspiration toward moral improvement is not exactly at the heart of our interest in a regular card game or dinner date with friends" (Cocking and Kennett 2000: 278). Reflecting on day-to-day friendships, Cocking and Kennett suggest that, if we reflect not on ideals but on actual states of affairs, we find that friendships are more often than not morally neutral. That is, in everyday experience, friendships tend to play a less exalted role because the goods of moral improvement often do not weigh heavily upon the mind when one interacts with friends. I take this to be a viable criticism since Confucius, Mencius, and Aristotle view friendships as being intertwined with the cultivation of virtue and if Cocking and Kennett are correct, then this classical association of friendship and virtue obscures the nature of friendship since good friendships procure aesthetic (and not moral) value.²³

Of course, this criticism harkens back to Aristotle's division of friendship, for the everyday friendships discussed by Cocking and Kennett are those that are rooted in pleasure. I enjoy the company of the fellows that I play cards with every Thursday night,

²³ Indeed, Cocking and Kennett argue that friendship is in fact characterized by a process of "mutual drawing" in which friends remain mutually responsive to each other's interests, desires, and conceptions of self. For more on this, see Cocking and Kennett 1998: 502-527.

and the pleasure is reciprocal since they too enjoy my company. The same can be said for the friends that my wife and I join for an evening at the theatre or a dinner at a favorite restaurant. Again, these friendships are not purely instrumental as I do care for the welfare of these friends. Indeed, playing cards, going to the theatre, and having a meal are much more enjoyable when friends are present. However, it does not seem that there is anything overtly moral in these relationships in the sense that they do not involve the performance of overtly virtuous (or vicious) actions. They are distant from the perfect friendships that Aristotle advocates as they are morally neutral.

Cocking and Kennett's criticism demonstrates that Aristotle and, to some extent, Confucius give rather short shrift to friendships that are rich in *aesthetic* value. One could argue that friendships rooted in pleasure are characterized by shared interests and mutual concern and consequently make possible the experience of aesthetic harmony or *he* 和. Even though they lack an overt moral direction, such friendships are valuable as they provide shared experience in which our interests, desires, and feelings are brought into accord with those of our friends. A shared meal with friends magnifies the meal's value as we enjoy its tastes together, tell stories and jokes, discuss politics, and so on. Further, as Aristotle suggests, one will naturally develop concern for the friends who share in these activities as one will begin to appreciate what they—as individuals—bring to the table, so to speak.

In terms of moral value, such friendships appear trivial since, at best, they are perhaps enjoyable diversions from the difficulties of self-cultivation and, at worst, they can be mildly vicious (perhaps one tends to gossip and/or drink too much with such friends). Of course, one can reply that friendships rooted in virtue are rich in both aesthetic and moral value since one will naturally enjoy the company of good people but will also stand to be improved by associating with them. Further, one can remind the critic that virtuous friendships will last longer than those dominated by aesthetic value since virtue is rooted in habit while pleasure is notoriously capricious. The first reply begs the question since the criticism suggests that friendships need not be moral in nature, and suggesting that only true friendships are morally and aesthetically valuable does not address the question, namely, whether or not true friendships *must* be moral. Indeed, the ancients did not make hard and fast distinctions between moral and aesthetic goodness (harmony, for example, is both an aesthetic and a moral property). However, it is easy to imagine friendships that are aesthetically valuable but need not be morally valuable.²⁴ A second reply is based in Aristotle's comment that friendships based on shared virtues tend to last longer since virtue is ultimately rooted in habit. To put it another way, it may be objected that only friendships that are rooted in moral goodness are long-lasting since virtue is enduring. Aesthetic friendships rooted in pleasure, on the other hand, are in some sense coincidental and are easily dissoluble since interests can change.²⁵

I do not find this convincing. My fellow card players, theatre goers, and I enjoy these practices since we share certain dispositions and since we have developed the skills and capacities that allow us to enjoy them. We share an interest in friendly competition and theatre appreciation. We also share in our ability to play a good game of cards and to extract meaning from a play. Since these dispositions and skills are rooted in habit, they are not readily subject to change. Of course, habits can change but do not readily do so as they are

²⁴ For a discussion of the manner in which an "aesthetic order" implies moral and political goodness see Hall and Ames 1987: 131-138. For a discussion concerning the relationship between moral and aesthetic value in calligraphy practice and criticism see Mullis 2007: 99-107.

²⁵ I would like to thank an anonymous referee of this journal for bringing this to my attention.

inherently conservative in nature.²⁶ Indeed, since virtue is rooted in habit and since dispositions and skills are affairs of habit as well, it is difficult to see why the latter would be any less stable than the former.

If one still believes that aesthetic friendships are inherently unstable, it can be pointed out that they often entail a history of shared experience. Indeed, Aristotle's example of music students and students of virtue illustrates this well as music students enjoy a performance because the understanding of music that they share is grounded in shared skills and abilities that have been acquired through diligent practice. I may very well keep playing cards and going to the theatre with the same friends for many years and this will render the next card game and the next play more meaningful. We will draw on shared experience in order to interpret new experiences. This often takes the form of story-telling as a new experience casts our memory back to a memorable event. Perhaps the rendition of *The Glass Menagerie* that we will see tonight will cast our minds back to a superb production that we saw five years ago. After the show we will likely compare the productions and will jointly remember what made the earlier production superb.

Since aesthetic friendships are grounded in habit and since they often entail shared experience, I believe that Cocking and Kennett's criticism is just. Good friendships need not be based on shared virtues as they can be based in shared interests and capacities. Indeed, I would suggest that aesthetic friendships are essential for one's overall happiness as the harmony that arises out of mutual enjoyment gives one the sense that life is enjoyable. This does not lead me, however, to the conclusion that friendships rooted in vice can be aesthetically valuable friendships. Aristotle is adamant that only friendships based in utility are possible for the vicious as they characteristically look for relationships that will bring about their own advantage (Aristotle 1968: 1157a-1157b4).²⁷ In cases like this, concern for the other will not develop since one will continually act out of self-interest and consequently, the experience of aesthetic value will be precluded as one will be unable to appreciate the other as another. His or her interests will only be relevant if they are instrumental to bringing about one's ends. An analogy can be drawn in order to illustrate this point, namely, between the appreciation of a work of art and the aesthetic appreciation of a friend. That is, if a viewer narrowly interprets a painting along ideological lines, then he or she will be unable to appreciate anything presented by the painting that falls outside the bounds of the ideology in question. The viewer consequently remains closed-off to a full experience of value. Likewise, the friendships of the vicious will be constricted as they construe their relationship in terms of an agreed upon end. Beyond that end, the character, interests, or tastes of the other will remain unimportant. Friendships based solely in utility, then, remain closed both to the experience of aesthetic and moral value.

5

I have discussed Aristotle and Confucius on friendship and have argued that symmetrical friendships are essential for the cultivation of virtues such as generosity, trust, and wisdom, not only because they remedy the problems associated with familial bonds, but also because

²⁶ I should say that I am advocating the understanding of habit advanced by John Dewey (see Dewey 2002: 14-57).

²⁷ Also see *Analects* 12.23 where Confucius advises Zigong to desist exhorting unwilling friends, for not doing so entails self-disgrace.

they provide one with the opportunity to extend the practice of virtue beyond the family and consequently play an important role in developing concern for others more generally. An objection concerning the classical emphasis on virtuous friendships was then discussed, the conclusion being drawn that good friendships do not necessarily need to be moral but remain valuable when they allow for the cultivation of aesthetic value.

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