

Friends and Foes
Volume I

Friends and Foes Volume I:
Friendship and Conflict
in Philosophy and the Arts

Edited by

Graeme Watson, Barbara Gabriella Renzi,
Elisabetta Viggiani and Máiréad Collins

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P U B L I S H I N G

Friends and Foes Volume I: Friendship and Conflict in Philosophy and the Arts,
Edited by Graeme Watson, Barbara Gabriella Renzi, Elisabetta Viggiani and Máiréad Collins

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PREFACE

The papers in this volume are mostly drawn from the Friends and Foes conference, jointly organised by research students from the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy and the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University, Belfast on the 16th and 17th November 2007.

The issue of Friends and Foes is one that has immediate relevance to the political situation of Northern Irish society as it traverses the long interregnum between conflict and peace; there have been foes in this society, though the precise basis of that enmity is still debatable, and the question as to whether we need to be friends to produce a workable civil society is still moot. Malachi O'Doherty's provocative contention at the conference was that those who were apparent friends were in fact trapped within a limiting camaraderie, whereas previous foes may ultimately form more profound friendships precisely because they must communicate at a level beyond that of enforced solidarity. To understand such limitations we might think of camaraderie as friendship with a practical purpose and, as Aristotle noted, friendship based on utility is fickle since it may not outlast its usefulness. Thinking through the issue of friends and foes, then, quickly unsettles some of our assumptions about Northern Ireland and other post-conflict societies and moves us quickly from the immediate circumstances of the North's troubled past into the long history of friendships and foemen.

As a classic binary Friends and Foes sets out what initially appears to be a clear distinction and an order of value, but like all binaries it necessarily collapses once any pressure is applied to it. Which is, after all, more valuable, a friend or a foe? The answer may seem straightforward, but who can tell us more about ourselves? In turn, while we know what to expect from our enemies, are our friends as predictable? Hold your friends close and your enemies closer, as the folk wisdom has it, suggests that issues of intimacy may not be as straightforwardly aligned with each of the terms of the binary as we might think.

Even broader questions remain to be asked: Why do we have friends and foes? Do we have to have friends and foes? Do either friends or foes define us? Should we be judged by our friends (in either sense of the question) or by our foes? How intimate can someone be before they cease

to be a friend and become a lover; contrariwise how attenuated must a relationship be before friendship ceases? Do both friends and foes require mutuality – can you be my friend, if I am not yours; can I be your enemy if you are not mine? What is the force of the possessive pronouns here: do either friends or foes have proprietorial rights over us?

Even as scant a survey of Friends and Foes as this leads us into moral philosophy, political philosophy, history, psychology, literary and cultural studies, each of which is represented in this volume. The organisers of the original conference and the editors of this volume are to be congratulated on bringing together such a wide-ranging and thought-provoking set of speakers and writers, and for giving them such a rich theme on which to focus.

Eamonn Hughes
Nov. 2008

INTRODUCTION

Friendship and conflict are an intimate part of life; people have countless stories inspired by both. The experience of life itself, perhaps, can be characterised as the result of the actions of these two opposite forces: on the one hand friendship, companionship, love, amity, comradeship, alliance; and on the other, conflict, disagreement, clash, divergence and argument. But despite the central role friendship and conflict play in our lives, the relationship between them has often been overlooked as a topic of academic study outside of scholastic philosophy, where reflection on the nature of friendship has traditionally been nurtured.

To help rectify this, the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy and the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast held a two day multidisciplinary conference on the topic in November 2007, entitled *Friends and Foes*. Open to scholars, academics and postgraduate researchers, it attracted over fifty participants from Canada, the United States, Taiwan, Ireland, Scandinavia and continental Europe. The keynote speakers included the *Guardian* contributor and writer on friendship, Dr. Mark Vernon; the distinguished Professor of Scholastic Philosophy at Queen's University Belfast, James McEvoy; and the Belfast-based author, journalist and broadcaster Malachi O'Doherty, well-known for his writings on the Northern Irish Troubles.

A brief outline of the book will be followed by a more detailed introduction to each chapter.

'Friendship and Conflict in Philosophy and the Arts' opens with an essay by Dr. Mark Vernon, a regular *Guardian* contributor and author of *The Philosophy of Friendship* (Palgrave, 2006), *After Atheism: Science, Religion, and the Meaning of Life* (Palgrave, 2007) and *Wellbeing* (Acumen Publishing, 2008). The remaining eight chapters gather together the work of established and emerging scholars in both philosophy and the arts, and are significant contributions to their respective fields, from Svetlana Beggs' philosophical exploration of whether we should follow Plutarch's advice that we have a duty to point to our friend's moral failings, to Roslyn Ko's Lacanian analysis of the theme of friendship and conflict in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. While the study of friendship is not uncommon in literary and cultural studies, the original

works presented here are not only of value to students of literature, film, and theatre in their own right, but are also of value to philosophers and social scientists, who may find them illuminating and illustrative of the themes that animate their own work. Likewise, it is hoped that students of literature and the arts will benefit from exposure to perspectives from philosophy and the human sciences.

1. Mark Vernon

The Ambiguity of Friendship: Is the Western Tradition Friend or Foe to Amity?

A shadow hangs over friendship in the Western tradition.

Friends may be celebrated as a great delight, and even thought necessary for a happy life. But there also exists an ambivalence towards it. Augustine concluded that for all the joys they bring, friends, it seems, will forsake you. Kierkegaard went so far as to call friendship idolatrous. A slightly different strand reaches back through Aquinas who thought that friendship as a 'school of love', if not perfect. Theologians are not alone in this: philosophers writing on friendship exhibit a similar ambivalence – in the sense of simultaneously recognising friendship's worth and, in a sense, impossibility. Montaigne asserted that soul friendship occurs in the human population only about once every three centuries. Kant speculated that in a morally perfect world friendship would cease to exist. When Derrida wrote on friendship, he addressed the problem head on: the book can be read as an extended meditation on the paradoxical phrase attributed to Aristotle, 'O friend, there are no friends'. This chapter will explore whether friendship's ambiguity can be transformed from being a liability into an advantage. Is it possible to go a step further and move beyond a pragmatic idea of friendship as calling people into love, to introduce an argument that invokes the very ambiguity of friendship as already indicative of a full, even god-like humanity? A clue comes from Plato, for whom the practice of friendship is close to the practice of philosophy: both are limited, and it is the very embrace of limitations that makes for its best instantiations. Another thought comes from Giorgio Agamben who re-reads Aristotle to connect the non-predicative nature of friendship with an ontology of friendship and in so doing linking its ambiguity to a positive possibility.

2. Jonathan Watson

Friendship and Objectivity with reference to Arendt's Philosophy

Drawing on Hannah Arendt's study of the Greek polis, this chapter argues that our beliefs and preferences are endowed with objectivity when they are confirmed by friends in the public sphere. Family members tend to occupy the same perspective, but when we leave the home and encounter people from different backgrounds and with different experiences who have arrived at the same conclusions our hold on them is strengthened immeasurably. It begins with a brief account of Arendt's political philosophy as set out in her most important work, *The Human Condition*, with especial reference to the distinction between labour, work and action. Through his labour the person addresses the recurrent needs of biological life, providing for nourishment, clothing and cleanliness. Through his work he erects a world of things, of edifices and artworks, which by resisting nature's seasonal rhythms of growth and decay represent and sustain the continuity of political life, preceding the appearance and surviving the departure of individual men. Through his action, his efforts to excel in word and deed, he communicates and thereby constitutes his essence in a public arena, eliciting the responses of a circle of peers whose combined verdict confers objectivity and exceptionally immortality. In the second section of the chapter, Arendt's failure to address the role of friendship in the political sphere is criticized. Even in comparatively homogeneous societies the good life is open to a range of interpretations, with significant variations in emphasis and content. One's achievements and utterances will not meet with universal approval, since the principles that inform them are always contested. Arendt was right to identify objectivity with the judgment of one's fellow citizens, but she does not acknowledge the divisions and tensions that will generally preclude unanimity. The objectivity of the public realm is usually mediated by a circle of friends, who share our enthusiasms and convince us that our deeds and thoughts meet independent standards of excellence and truth.

3. Svetlana Beggs

Must We Point to Our Friends' Moral Blemishes?

Do the bonds of friendship require us to address moral failings of our friends and pass judgments on their moral characters? Must we be candid

with our friends about their moral performances even if our confrontation will destroy the bond? Aristotle famously singled out three types of friendship: based on utility, pleasure and virtue. Utility and pleasure-based friendships are inherently fickle. Only the virtuous kind is genuine and stable. As Aristotle puts it, “those who wish for their friend’s good for their friend’s sake are friends in the truest sense, since their attitude is determined by what their friends are and not by incidental considerations.”

Plutarch adopts the Aristotelian virtuous friendship model and argues that candor (or Greek *parrhêsia*) about moral failings of one’s friend is imperative in virtuous friendship. A friend is the natural enemy of our vices, someone who always speaks on behalf of one’s better, rational self. For Plutarch being a good friend is inseparable from the activity of guiding our friend toward the goal of becoming a good person. Thus, candor about moral failings is analogous to medicine for the sick. But simply “speaking one’s mind” is not what Plutarch has in mind. Candor must be mediated by wisdom, a sense of good timing and should be absolutely devoid of self-love.

But, this chapter asks, is Plutarch’s counsel sound? How can we be sure that we are in the right about our criticism? Is moral policing of our friends not a repugnant idea? After all, must we not accept our friends as they are, forgiving their moral flaws? Also, is Plutarch’s quality of candor good enough only for a moral saint? In the absence of wisdom, complete lack of self-love and pitch-perfect timing, most of us will not be able to deliver our criticisms effectively, as Plutarch envisions it.

4. Katrin Berndt

Friend or Foe? Traps of Loyalty and Friendship in Maria Edgeworth’s “Helen” (1834)

Friendship is indeed one of the central building blocks of human relations. It has also always been an influential theme in literature, though it has rarely been adequately studied as such. This chapter discusses a remarkable literary account of friendship set amidst the conventions of English high society in the early nineteenth century. Maria Edgeworth’s novel *Helen*, first published in 1834, explores the ambivalent blessings of loyalty in friendship against the background of a society which purports to value truth and good reputation, but rejoices in the downfall of both. The eponymous protagonist of the novel and her friend Cecilia are both introduced as motivated by a “desire of pleasing” others, but while Helen would never resort to any falsehood, Cecilia deliberately invents ‘white

lies' in order to make the people in her surrounding feel more comfortable. When Cecilia withholds the truth of her premarital affair from her husband, and persuades Helen to accept the credit for this attachment, her manipulation almost destroys Helen's own prospects for a happy marriage. Helen finds herself trapped between her loyalty toward her friend, and her natural integrity, which makes her despise prevarications and cowardice. Unable to solve this moral conflict, she keeps Cecilia's secret under the pretence of being a loyal friend, but eventually comes to realize that it was her silence which betrayed their friendship, since it inevitably promoted Cecilia's moral corruption.

This chapter interprets Helen's moral conflict as a challenge to static conceptions of loyalty and friendship. Taking her initial statement that "whoever makes truth disagreeable commits high treason against virtue" (43) as a blueprint, it argues that Helen's conflict allegorically suggests the conclusion that whatever makes loyalty disagreeable commits high treason against friendship. Therefore, Helen's unwavering support of Cecilia's lie threatens their relationship much more than Cecilia's selfish evasion. Helen's dogmatic notion of 'loyalty' falls short of fulfilling her true responsibility toward Cecilia, which would have included protecting Cecilia's generosity and her true affection rather than acting in accord with her self-conscious manipulations. The chapter concludes that Helen's moral conflict eventually instigates a reassessment of the essential meaning of loyalty in the two women's friendship.

5. Barbara Gabriella Renzi

Friendship, Death and Conflict: Branches of One and the Same Tree? Film and Philosophy: Friends or Foes?

In this chapter cinematic portrayals of women's sacrifice and of their friendship in grief are used to show that films have the ability to provide audio-visual evidence of what cannot otherwise be portrayed. Constructing new worlds of abstract philosophy, where concepts are exposed, explored and *felt*; films are spaces of philosophical discourse, where pathos and emotional understanding play a key role. The chapter is divided in two parts: the first section is focused on *Kapò* by Gillo Pontecorvo, and on the idea of conflict, sacrifice and closeness. It analyses one woman's struggle for life, only to sacrifice it for others. The second section explores *Limbo*, written and directed by Anne Crilly. This film is a post-conflict drama shot in Ireland which discusses the experience of two grieving women. Through the representation of their individual and social experiences,

Limbo does not accommodate social practices of silence and isolation around death and grief.

6. Roslyn Ko

Can We Really Love Our Neighbors? Transgression and J(eal)ouissance in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories

Can we really love our neighbors as we love ourselves? Can we truly *not* covet what our neighbors possess? The Commandments decree that we *shall*, yet French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-81) tells a different story. Such commandments, according to Lacan, constitute human ethicality yet cruelly violate human nature. Living in and bound to society, we are told and demanded to desire *according to the law*. Nevertheless, as Lacan postulates, what we really desire is *jouissance*—the ultimate and maximal satisfaction and enjoyment that goes beyond the pleasure principle and transgresses its well-regulated, non-excessive, hence safely pleasurable bounds. Being transgressive in nature, *jouissance* is pleasure-in-pain; it entails maximal enjoyment in suffering. In his *Encore* seminar, Lacan further pinpoints that *jouissance* is in essence *jealousie* (or *Lebensneid*), and *jealousie* results from one's conviction that the other (*Nebenmensch*) possesses what one has irrevocably lost at the onset of the human condition. The other, not oneself, enjoys because this other possesses one's primal lost object; hence, one always covets what the other has. Given Lacan's argument, we can almost declare that there is no such thing as "natural" friendship between man and his fellow being. The relationship between self and other is rivalrous at heart.

Edgar Allan Poe's grotesque and arabesque stories manifest that we *do not*, *cannot*, and *shall not* love our neighbors. We murder them instead precisely because of this Lacanian notion of *jouissance* as *jealousie*, or, in Poe's own words, human "perverseness." This chapter briefly introduces the notion and nature of *j(eal)ouissance* and uses Poe's stories as exemplars of the envious, antagonistic, and all too often violent relationship between one and one's "neighbor" as foe in possession of the locus of *jouissance* which one aggressively reclaims for one's own, to reach a conclusion about Poe's poetics of *j(eal)ouissance*.

7. Sheila McCormick

"And You Dinnay Want tay Join the Army?": Friendship, Conflict and Kinship as Seen in Gregory Burke's Black Watch.

The National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch* by Gregory Burke is not the first verbatim theatre play to tackle issues relating to political engagements. The medium, which uses documentary methods to relate transcribed material to a live audience, has long been linked to issues relating to conflict. Indeed, well known examples of the form which address these themes include Richard Norton Taylor's *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry*, David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, and Robin Sloan's *Talking to Terrorists*. The play's uniqueness however, lies in its interaction between themes of conflict and kinship. *Black Watch* addresses the interaction between politics, kinship, and patriotism while exposing the many different relationships, including friendships, which occur in conflict situations. Written in 2004 the play, using both realism and postmodernism, relates a series of 'true' stories from the memories of members of the Black Watch regiment. The regiment, a military unit with a unique historical significance, continues to recruit high numbers of young Scottish men, a fact proliferated by its reputation as one of the oldest Highland regiments. This chapter examines themes of kinship, friendship, and conflict, specifically exploring how the play's 'real' stories have been artistically related through the medium of verbatim theatre. By examining the play in relation to these themes the chapter exposes the struggles faced by those who, following exposure to conflict, attempt to reintegrate into society and explore how friendship has the potential to lessen the psychological damage of such exposure. The production is examined aesthetically, examining the play's use of movement, song, and memory to explore the relationship between friendship and conflict. Finally, it examines how friendship and kinship are employed politically by institutions of authority as a means of providing the workforce for conflict situations.

8. Nóra de Buiteléir

Roundheads and Pointed-Heads in the Alto Adige: How a Bilingual Brecht Rattled South Tyrol's Cultural Politics

This chapter takes as its starting point a controversial production of Brecht's *The Roundheads and the Pointed Heads* in the northern Italian province of Südtirol/Alto Adige in 1980. The early 1980s marked a turbulent period in the cultural and ethnic politics of this multilingual region, brought to a head by the divisive Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung clause of the 1981 census. This clause required each individual South Tyrolean citizen to officially declare as either German-, Italian- or Ladin-

speaking, thus 'fixing' themselves permanently within a designated ethnic category. Both the German and Italian political mainstream welcomed this 'either/or' declaration of identity as an essential prerequisite for ensuring proportional equality in the distribution of public sector jobs and housing, thus promoting the peaceful, if separate, co-existence of these previously hostile linguistic communities. To many on the left, however, the declaration was seen as an unacceptable act of apartheid, an articulation of an outmoded need for cultural protectionism and a stout obstacle to future integration. The pointed decision of director Götz Fritsch to stage Brecht's 1935 anti-Nazi parable bilingually was an expression of this spirit of protest, challenging mainstream cultural politics both in its sensitive subject matter and in its defiant championing of multilingualism. Reading the performance in this political context opens up a number of questions relating to the twin themes of friendship and conflict. Are conflict and friendship necessarily antonymous? On a political level, is the promotion of interethnic/intercultural 'friendship' the only true solution to conflict - or is it an unreasonably idealistic one? Can the promotion of friendship on a cultural level (e.g. a multilingual theatre performance) exercise influence on the broader pursuit of conflict resolution on a policy-making level? This chapter examines Fritsch's 1980 production from the perspectives of both right- and leftwing political interest groups in the South Tyrol. It discusses the remarkably hostile reaction of the South Tyrolean provincial government to the performance, illustrating the power and the potential political threat posed by multicultural theatre in an immediately post-conflict society.

9. Maeve Egan

The Fool: From Friend to Foe in Italian Grotesque Theatre

Fools, clowns, buffoons, and madmen are found in the theatre of virtually every culture, but there is little doubt that these iconic figures found their most expressive home on the Italian stage. When Luigi Chiarelli and Enrico Cavacchioli, confronted Italian society in their anti-bourgeois theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Fool is once again revisited in their united battle against the constraints of a society they believed to be based upon whimsical values and superficial conventions. At the core of Italian grotesque theatre – exemplified by Chiarelli and Cavacchioli - we find a tortured character who is forced to confront the conflict between his social mask and his private self. By his side, stands the Fool, the *raisonneur* character, who is instrumental in his

friend's journey towards personal freedom. However, the Fool undergoes a peculiar transformation in Italian grotesque theatre. In Chiarelli's *The Mask and the Face* (1916), the Fool's friendship is unwavering as he counsels and guides his friend Paolo towards liberation. In the other four of Chiarelli's grotesque plays, however, the fool becomes increasingly detached from his former friend until he is distilled into the fearful puppeteer by Cavacchioli in *Bird of Paradise* (1919). The Fool is reduced from a human character, capable of feeling, empathising and supporting his friend to the anti-rational foe who is ultimately responsible for the downfall of his former friend. Nonetheless, friend or foe, the fool remains to be the hero of the playwright's anti-bourgeois theatre. This chapter aims to explore the Fool's transition from friend to foe in Italian grotesque theatre exemplified by Chiarelli and Cavacchioli. It also addresses the origins of the grotesque fool within the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* and how the "verbal joke" of the *commedia dell'arte* becomes the "verbal weapon" through Chiarelli and Cavacchioli's appropriation of the *commedia*-inspired fool.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AMBIGUITY OF FRIENDSHIP: IS THE WESTERN TRADITION FRIEND OR FOE TO AMITY?

MARK VERNON

In 376, when he was barely out of his teens, Augustine of Hippo's friend died.¹ It was a devastating blow that deeply unsettled him. Their friendship had been to him more "than all the joys of life as I lived it then". They had become that rare thing, one soul in two bodies. Augustine was lost and living in his home town became a "grim ordeal". So he left. As if that was not enough, Augustine's grief tormented him for another reason. He realised that to hope for much in friendship is to risk much too. For all the joys they bring, friends, it seemed, will forsake you – sometimes in parting, sometimes in malice, sometimes because they are simply not up to it. "What madness, to love a man as something more than human!", he exclaims in his *Confessions*.

This "silent tragedy",² as Peter Brown calls Augustine's search for friendship in his biography of the saint, is one manifestation of a long shadow that hangs over friendship in the Christian tradition, and more generally over Western thought on the subject. The shadow forms because whilst friends may be celebrated as a great delight, and even thought necessary for a happy life, there is also a persistent ambivalence towards friendship. As the Anglican House of Bishops recognised in a discussion document,³ modern society has failed to be a community of friendship, in

¹ An earlier version of this essay appeared as "The Ambiguity of Friendship," in *Theology* CIX, no. 852 (November/December 2006): 403-411. Other parts are taken from my book *The Philosophy of Friendship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

² Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber and Faber: 1969), 202.

³ *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*, (London: Church House

the sense of being a place in which friends are explicitly and publicly nurtured and celebrated. There is no equivalent institution to the family for friendship. The bishops argue that the church must consider how “it can give public recognition to the importance of friendship”. Though the very suggestion somehow reveals the difficulty of doing so: how, one wants to know, might this be done?

The bishops are not alone in this, for philosophers writing on friendship exhibit a similar ambivalence – in the sense of simultaneously recognizing friendship’s worth and ambiguity. In the *Lysis*, the Platonic dialogue which is the first extended discussion of the subject in the West, Socrates both confesses that he values friendship more than anything else, ‘even all the gold of Darius’, whilst at the same time admitting to the individuals with whom he talks that although they suppose they are friends, what friendship is, they have not been able to say.

The *aporia* that haunts friendship has appeared in various guises in the intervening centuries, including Montaigne’s assertion that soul friendship occurs in the human population only about once every three centuries,⁴ and Kant’s speculation that in a morally perfect world friendship would cease to exist:⁵ ‘Friendship develops the minor virtues of life,’ he luke-warmly concludes in a lecture he wrote on the subject, having already said: ‘Friendship is not of heaven but of the earth; the complete moral perfection of heaven must be universal; but friendship is not universal; it is a peculiar association of specific persons; it is man’s refuge in this world from his distrust of his fellows, in which he can reveal his dispositions to another and enter into communion with him.’

When Derrida wrote on friendship, he addressed the problem head on: the book can be read as an extended meditation on the paradoxical phrase attributed to Aristotle, “O friend, there are no friends” – probably a wrong attribution, though for that reason reflecting no less the modern ambivalences about friendship.

Staying with the philosophers, the ambiguity of friendship can be put down to a number of factors. Following Aristotle, Montaigne’s point is that good friendship requires exceptional people: close friends need to be at peace with themselves, virtuous in their habits, attitudes and passions, and honestly conscious of their own self-worth. Only then will they be able to befriend themselves, and then another. (That he thought he’d been

Publishing. 2003).

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, “On affectionate relationships,” in *The Complete Essays*, Book I, 28, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), 205-219.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Lecture on Friendship,” in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (London: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 208-217.

lucky enough to enjoy one such friendship is certainly grounds to doubt his long odds but not the principle behind them. Aristotle put it well: “The desire for friendship comes quickly. Friendship does not”. There is also the matter of contingency to factor into the rarity of soulmates: not only were he and his friend, Etienne La Boétie, exceptional people, but they lived in exceptional times. In other words, tricky circumstances can draw out the best in people which in turn provides them, as it were, with the opportunity to make much of friendship.

For Derrida, one of the issues is that friendship presumes friendship to be friendship. Friendship is non-predicative, that is it is not possible ahead of time to say conclusively to what group of people or things the predicate (in this case friendship) applies. Calling someone a friend makes them a friend. Plato’s *aporia* in the *Lysis* is, in part, related to this ‘transcendent’ quality of friendship: they have called each other friend but can’t definitively say much more than that. Even Aristotle, who defines friendship in abstract as a relationship of goodwill between individuals who reciprocate that goodwill, immediately realises its limits. (For example, goodwill hardly seems adequate to describe soul friendship. Reflecting on the same difficulty, Montaigne said: “If you press me to say why I love him, I feel it cannot be expressed except by replying: ‘Because it was him; because it was me.’”).

For Kant, the problem with friendship shows itself in its resistance to the categorical imperative. First, friendship offends his conviction that a good moral law is one that can be applied equally to everyone: friends do precisely the opposite, and act in preference for one another, not the masses. Second, friendship could only be thought morally good if friends loved solely for the sake of the other’s happiness, and not their own: Kant simply thought that this attitude was impossible to realise in practice since human individuals cannot give up on wanting their own happiness.

The theological reasons for the ambivalence towards amity are related to these concerns. Ever since Augustine realised that human friendship is frail, theologians have felt compelled to draw a contrast between the love of God, which is universal and selfless, and the love of friends, which is particular and selfish. This critique of friendship no doubt carries great moral force. It is explicit in the traditional monastic imperative to avoid so-called ‘particular friendships’. Kierkegaard went so far as to call friendship idolatrous, arguing that as friendship deepens, so too does its love of the particular over the universal and the selfish over the selfless.⁶

⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, “You Shall Love Your Neighbour,” from *Works of Love*, reproduced in Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 233-247.

But even if we think that he was overstating the case, and human friendship is not a travesty of divine love, it is not hard to think of friendship as, for the most part, managing to carry only limited traces of it (true soul friendship is rarer than we might like to think). Therefore, in the league table of Christian virtues, *agapē* scores more highly than *philia*, and it is easy for the best to become the enemy of the good.

So, I think that we can see now how the Western secular tradition, in broadest outline, has picked up on the Christian one in terms of its attitudes towards friendship. What Kant achieves is a reinvention of the reactionary attitude to friendship that originates in Augustinian Christianity, reinvigorated for the modern, secular world. For a full-blown belief in heaven he substitutes an ideal of perfection; for sinfulness, selfishness; for unconditional love, universal obligation. This new 'religious' language of universal duty and categorical imperatives simply does not know what to do with friendship, and tends to think that it is suspect and better done away with. "It is no wonder that friendship has been relegated to private life and thereby weakened in comparison to what it once was", reflects Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.⁷

So, contemporary discourses can adopt an attitude towards friendship that is as detrimental to it as any Christian one. For example, why is it that if someone promotes a friend to work alongside them, it is branded as nepotism with little thought given to whether they are up to the job or not? Similarly, I think that modern society has no public means of recognising friends is in part because friendship is treated as a selfish concern: unlike the family which gives something to society, friends are thought to be mostly interested in themselves, so society is hesitant in supporting it?

If the suspicion of anything that even smacks of selfishness is still detrimental to friendship, then the priority given to unconditionality in modernity marginalizes it even more. Consider the impact on friendship of the value assigned to egalitarianism – the idea that everyone should be treated the same. It lies at the heart of modern democracy; in theory at least, everyone has equality before the law and the right to one, and only one, vote. The power of the rhetoric of human rights rests on its claim to be unconditional too: either rights are universal or they are nothing at all. "This equality absolutely every man has, and he has it absolutely" (that quote is not from the convention on human rights but from Kierkegaard on neighbour-love but it significantly works equally well in both places).

Of course, this kind of unconditionality can be hugely valuable and

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 156.

underpins many great goods. However, the trouble for friendship is that it is not unconditional, but conditional – one would do something for a friend and not others. Thus, within this moral frame, friendship is routinely treated as if it were questionable. The contrast with the family again provides a ready case in point. It is not just that friendship is not recognised in society, whereas family is, but the particularity of friendship can often be regarded as a threat to the unconditional love that is supposed to reign within the family too. For example, why do individuals somehow feel they should renegotiate a long-term friendship just because their friend gets married? Or, to put it another way: is there not a steely strand in the ethic of modern marriage which repels anything that compromises the unconditional commitment of husband and wife; “forsaking all others”, the service says? Particular friendship can count as infidelity within a marriage quite as much as a fling or affair.

For friends of friendship, the situation may seem dire. But the tradition does not simply dismiss friendship, or always sideline it. Stick with some thoughts from a theological point of view and, first, probably the most famous comment on friendship in the New Testament: “A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15.13). This saying has been co-opted to express the sacrifice made by soldiers in war but in John’s gospel it is a comment on the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples: he does not call them servants but friends. Why? “I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father” (John 15.15). In other words, the friends of Jesus both understand who he is and are prepared to pay the price of living by that conviction – even to the point of death. In fact, research shows that ‘friend’ was almost a synonym for ‘Christian’ in the early church. However, and if only for this reason, it is perhaps surprising that few have since sought to defend friendship against the “tyranny of *agapē*”.

One who did was John Henry Newman. In a sermon preached on “the disciple whom Jesus loved” and whom Newman takes to be his “private and intimate friend” in marked contrast to the other disciples, he attacked any downgrading of friendship:

There have been men before now, who have supposed Christian love was so diffusive as not to admit of concentration upon individuals; so that we ought to love all men equally... Now I shall maintain here, in opposition to such notions of Christian love, and with our Saviour’s pattern before me, that the best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards

those who are immediately about us.⁸

His theme is friendship as a school of love: friendship allows Christians to practice love, by loving someone in particular whom they know. They will then be in a better position to act with love towards anyone else who is in Christ, not because they know them, because for the most part they will not, but because their actual friendships allow them to extend love to others in faith. Moreover, this way into universal divine love has the benefit of not only allowing people to practice love, which according to Newman is the only way to love, but in safeguarding against the dangers of trying to exercise an abstracted universal love.

Newman's sermon was not a one off. It had a powerful source in the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas.⁹ Here, Thomas takes on, as it were, the Augustinian concerns directly. Though he did not use the modern terms, he thought that friendship could be altruistic or egoistic: the former is primarily (though not exclusively) directed towards the other; the latter is primarily (though, again, not exclusively) concerned with the self.¹⁰ The proof of the pudding is in the eating. For example, in an altruistic friendship, when one person is hurt the friend feels it as if they were hurt themselves; Thomas calls this "indwelling". But in an egoistic friendship, the friend feels the hurt only if it threatens him directly too. Thomas provides several other cases in which the difference can be discerned, but the important point is that because both are nonetheless types of friendship, the poor cousin – egoistic friendship – may lead someone to its more virtuous relative – altruistic friendship – which is, in turn, closer to divine love. Hence, friendship is a school of godly love, not a distraction from it (as Kierkegaard certainly thought and Augustine arguably suspected, at least from time to time).

In other words, the mixed motives of friendship are not reason to disqualify it. Rather, since most human beings exist in such a compromised state, nurturing its altruistic elements – making love an 'overarching principle' in life as Thomas put it – means that friendship provides a very good way of overcoming human selfishness. The particularity of human relationships can be similarly overcome too. After all, Thomas reasons, it is only natural that people are closer to some more

⁸ John Henry Newman, *Parochial Sermons: Vol II* (London: 1836), 58.

⁹ The relevant sections of his *Summa Theologiae* are in Pakaluk, *Other Selves*, 146-184.

¹⁰ His phrases were "love of friendship" and "love of concupiscence"; scholars see this distinction as a precursor to the modern expressions of altruistic and egoistic love.

than others; and are they not closest to themselves? However, even that introverted love can be altruistic if it directs one to the best (selfless) parts and nurtures them.

I think Thomas is right about this and Newman's charge against friendship's accusers is a powerful one too. However, friendship is still ambiguous; that is not just a persistent but a correct insight. Thus, Thomas' lessons in love only work with right discernment, no mean requirement; any search through the philosophical literature shows that altruism and egoism resist clear demarcation in theory, let alone in the vicissitudes of practice. Alternatively, although there is much to Newman's argument that love learnt in friendship does not risk the inhumanities of love learnt in abstract, he perhaps minimizes the risks of friendship itself: did not Judas betray Jesus with a kiss of friendship – an intimacy that Jesus shares with no-one else in the gospels, even “the beloved disciple”; or, to make the general point, amity often runs alongside enmity – either because to call one person a friend may be to identify another as not, or because it is the closest friends who may become the bitterest enemies.

So the question must be asked again: can friendship's ambiguity be transformed from being a liability into being an advantage? Is it possible to go a step further and move beyond a pragmatic idea of friendship as calling people into love, to introduce an argument that invokes the very ambiguity of friendship as already indicative of a full humanity, even god-like humanity?

The Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, has recently drawn attention to a move in Aristotle that may be useful in this respect.¹¹ It comes in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, [1170a28-1171b35]. This is a dense passage but in it, Aristotle appears to connect the non-predicative nature of friendship with an ontology of friendship and in so doing links its ambiguity to a positive essence. In short, the argument goes, first, that being and living are the same thing (to experience being is to live). Second, for humans the perception of living also has another concurrent perception, namely that of appreciating others' existence, supremely so in the case of a close friend. So, third, if friendship is concurrent with living then this introduces a division, or rather a sharing, into the perception of existence. Agamben argues that in Aristotle this is different from saying that friendship is an inter-subjective experience, as a modern philosophy of relationship might suppose, because that presupposes a prior autonomous subject alien to Aristotle. Rather, the awareness of one's own

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, “Friendship,” *Contretemps* 5 (December 2004): 2-7.

existence and the awareness of the close friend's existence are one and the same thing: Aristotle says, "the friend is another self [*heteros autos*]"; Agamben explains, "The friend is not another I, but an otherness immanent in self-ness, a becoming other of the self." Or to put it another way, if, as Aristotle believes, the existence of good people must also be pleasant, it is in the perception of a good friend's existence that the very joy of existing is perceived.

What happens in this argument is that the ambiguity of friendship – the inability to say what it is – comes to be seen as a reflection of the decentred nature of being. Though at some risk of doing the ontology a violence, this can be put more colloquially by considering the key expression, "another self", again. On the one hand, the friend as another self suggests that he or she is that exceptional person with whom the sense of otherness, which otherwise exists between human beings, has collapsed until it is vanishingly small. But on the other hand, the friend is still other, 'an other self'. So the ambivalence is that the very closest of friends may say, à la Montaigne, that they are one soul in two bodies; but they will also simultaneously be able to say, à la Nietzsche, that the I and Thou are not confounded. Using another Agamben formula, human community is therefore not like that of the animals, that is merely participating in a common substance, but is a "purely existential condision and, so to speak, one without an object: friendship, as concurrent perception of the pure fact of existence".

Now, this is only the briefest sketch of Aristotle's ontology of friendship and it is one that would be contested by scholars not least because Aristotle's own exploration of this "first philosophy" is itself so condensed. However, I think, it is pregnant with possibility, and could conceivably form the basis of an ideal of friendship to underpin a celebration and public recognition of friendship. It puts friendship at the heart of community – *koinonia* is Aristotle's word – "for as a person is disposed towards himself, so he is towards his friend too" [1171b30], and such shared living offers the friends the fullest perception of existence [1172a1].

There is evidence that such an ideal was put into practice in the past. The key thinker here is the 12th century abbot, Aelred of Rievaulx. His theology of friendship represents a pinnacle in the medieval discussion of the subject, or as Alan Bray describes it,¹² it is the completion of a process

¹² Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Another collection of essays exploring the general milieu is Laura Gowing, Miri Rubin and Michael Hunter, eds., *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe 1300-1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

in which “friendship, the family, and religion fell in love”. Bray suggests that it was quite possible for friends who were particularly committed to formalise their commitment in a ritual setting that included the mass. Friendship had a semi-institutional form, liturgically expressed in the sharing of the peace and the receiving of communion, in what Bray calls “sworn brotherhood”: “...in the Churches of Catholic Europe from at least the end of the twelfth century until the beginning of the fifteenth, the mass provided a familiar culmination for the creation of ritual ‘brothers’, a ritual completed in their taking Holy Communion together. Such a liturgical practice should not surprise us.”¹³ The practice died out in the modern era when the medieval models of committed friendship were eclipsed by the secular foundations of new civil institutions, notably that of modern marriage.

Aelred’s theology of friendship can again be used to question the perception that the ambiguity of friendship is a weakness. For example, remember again the Augustinian problem over the death of a friend. For Aelred, the loss is not a tragedy that reveals friendship’s fragility. Rather, the love of the deepest friendships lives on in the heart of the surviving friend, which means that for all the agony of mourning, the death of a friend can also be an experience of eternity in the present. As Cicero put it, “Even when he is dead, he is still alive”.¹⁴ Friendship’s ambiguity can, in fact, become its advantage.

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CHAPTER TWO

FRIENDSHIP AND OBJECTIVITY
WITH REFERENCE TO ARENDT'S PHILOSOPHY

JONATHAN WATSON

Introduction

Objectivity is popularly interpreted as the conformity of the human judgment to reality as it is in itself, unclouded by individual preferences or current notions. This conformity lends the judgment a quality of obviousness to all who understand its terms. For example, the theory of evolution is held to be objective because we believe species did indeed emerge through competition for scarce resources, and it compels the assent of those who approach the matter without preconceptions because they need only open their eyes to see the proof. Hannah Arendt offers a very different understanding of objectivity. In *The Human Condition* she declares that objectivity is attained in the public sphere, where utterances and actions are evaluated from diverse perspectives. The agreement of family members is worth very little, because their characters have been formed by a common history and biological inheritance. The agreement of fellow citizens, who bring to bear on our contributions widely varying sets of experiences and beliefs, conveys an infinitely higher level of plausibility. This account of objectivity has major implications for the privatization of ethics, but Arendt's remarks on the subject in *The Human Condition* are scattered and unsatisfying. While she concedes that her beloved Ancient Greeks observed moral laws like any other civilized people, she insists that goodness cannot appear in the public realm, since publicity corrupts beneficence, and beneficence undermines the competitive dynamic of politics. The public realm is for action, the communication of one's unique identity through beautiful words and deeds, and to turn it over to the satisfaction of the needs of the body is to absorb it into the private sphere. We wish to urge a correction against

Arendt's understanding of politics. Drawing on the philosophy of H.L.A. Hart and others, we show that morality consists of both laws and ideals, and that it is the ideals that structure action in the public sphere. By acknowledging the role of these ideals in political life we can explain their objectivity in line with Arendt's central insight on the reality conferring power of agreement in difference. Under modern conditions, however, society is often divided in its judgments, which would seem to preclude the attainment of moral objectivity where it is most necessary. We argue that networks of friends, who have arrived at the same judgments from different starting points, can compensate for the effects of increasing pluralism to a limited extent.

The Location of Objectivity in 'The Human Condition'

In order to understand Arendt's innovative analysis of objectivity it is necessary to approach it through the tripartite model of human activity it presupposes. She looks to the practice and writings of the Greek polis to establish a clear distinction between labour, work and action. Labour is concerned with the production of the materials and conditions necessary for life, whether one's own or the others' to whom one is responsible. Its typical forms—cleaning, cooking, the tending of livestock and crops—are cyclical because the needs they address make themselves felt at regular intervals. They cannot be satisfied once for all, like the need for shelter, as any objects produced by labour will be consumed or decay almost immediately. This gives it an air of futility, since all the effort it absorbs is neither rewarded with a permanent artefact nor brings more than temporary relief. It has also been thought to be less than fully human, given that similar repetitive activities are enforced upon many animals. In the classical world it was located in the seclusion of the home along with bodily functions, all of which demonstrated man's subjection to the necessities of a biological existence. Through the ministrations of his women and slaves the paterfamilias was set free to devote himself to the good life in the company of his fellow citizens. For only by laying on to others the burden of one's own needs could one enjoy sufficient leisure to cultivate and achieve the beautiful. Only by confining animal necessities within the walls of the home could one open up a realm of freedom beyond it.

Work culminates in lasting objects—furniture, tools, artworks, buildings—that stand against the seasonal transformations of nature and thus come to embody the shared meanings and history of the people who made them. They may be used in labour, but unlike a meal or bed they do