

On Aristotle's Views on Friendship in Relation to other Seminal Philosophers

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ABSTRACT

Before and after Aristotle, some philosophers have written on friendship and their themes appear to have a suitable place with their respective philosophical systems. We shall examine some of them in this article in order to enable us understand Aristotle's notion of friendship and what he meant when he says that 'friendship is an externalization of self-love'. This article is an avenue towards a better understanding of the notion of friendship and its implication in our society today and among nation of the world.

Keywords: Aristotle, Friendship and self-love.

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle considers friendship as a necessity to life which cuts across every human race because no one would choose to live without friends, even when the person has all the necessary materials he needs.

Friendship is the greatest external good which is deeply rooted in love (*philia*) such that rich, poor, young, old and happy men need friends around because it is ridiculous not to have the greatest element of happiness which is friendship. It is also worthy to note that like all virtues, friendship has to be nourished for it to grow. "For the longer you remain friends the greater your investment in maintaining the friendship."¹

Aristotle emphasizes the importance of friends, as he opines, "For in poverty and in other misfortunes, men cling to friends as their only refuge, friends help the young to keep from error. It helps the older people by ministering to their needs and supplementing their activities in the moment of weakness. For those in prime life, it stimulates and encourages them to noble action."² The scripture affirms that "a faithful friend is a sure shelter, whoever finds one has found a rare

treasure. A faithful friend is something beyond price, there is no measuring his worth."³

Aristotle groups friends into different categories, viz. pleasure, utility and perfect friendship. When one chooses to see friendship as a means to an end, one is entering into inferior or imperfect friendship. This category of friendship does not last long because of its imperfect, selfish nature and the intention behind it. But when one sees and conceives friendship as an end itself and rooted in genuine love, one is entering into perfect and superior friendship which is the best form of friendship. "A moment with friends lasts forever"⁴. Therefore, pleasure and utility are inferior and imperfect type of friendship. Perfect friendship is based on goodness, goodwill, affection, and genuine love. It is this type of friendship that Aristotle advocates should exist among human beings so that there can be happiness and mutual co-existence.

Quite a number of things both material and immaterial are fanciful to human beings; wealth, power, prestige, good health, good houses and a host of others. However, these things can only make more meaning when they are shared with

¹ YAGER, J.: *When Friendship Hurts*; Mumbai ; Better yourself Publication, 2006, p.28 and 29

² ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics* viiii; 10, 1155a.

³ Cf. *New Jerusalem Bible*, Standard Edition, London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. (Sirach 6:14-15.) other will be from the same version of the Bible.

⁴ MICHEAL, Benneth: *Friendship and Love*, Nairobi Publisher. Africa, 2005; p.28,29

others. It is evident that human beings are inherently social animals just as Aristotle rightly pointed out. A tree cannot make a forest. To this view, he who cannot associate with others according to Aristotle is 'either a beast or a god'. The ability to associate with others is a very essential and existential quality of human life because human nature needs social help in order to grow and to be happy. For whoever isolates him or herself, and lives a life devoid of friendship and love cannot possibly lead a successful life. Thus, the most precious gift of man is man. And this precious gift of man all over the world is his immediate family members and friends for without them, life will be empty, miserable and meaningless.

The problematic aspect of this term '*friendship*' is that people often misinterpret it as sexual relation most especially among young men and women. In our society today, it seems that the general understanding of friendship has been deviated from its original meaning. People now engage in friendship mainly because of material gain and benefits. But Aristotle takes us to the metaphysical, anthropological, ethical, political, social and cultural dimensions of friendship.

The perception of friendship and love as stipulated in the friendship theory of Aristotle is what every person ought to learn in order to be relevant in our new democratic dispensation. One cannot but be thrilled by Aristotle's insights into the structure of human friendship. Friendship for Aristotle is the noblest activity of man and should be cherished and virtuously cultivated. Because of the general misconception of friendship and the negative connotation it has acquired today, the unresolved question becomes: what is the essence and purpose of friendship? Can there be genuine love in practise of friendship with social and spiritual benefits? Is there need to externalize our love in friendship? These and many more have been the major preoccupation of philosophers through the ages.

PLATO (427-347BC)

Plato, the most intimate friend and devoted disciple of Socrates, was born around 247 B.C, to a wealthy family in Athens. He admired Socrates who was his mentor and became his pupil at the age of twenty. His life's ambition was to become a politician but he later changed his mind from becoming a politician to a philosopher because of the crime the Athenian government committed by killing his mentor, Socrates. Plato devoted a whole book *Lysis* on the discussion of friendship.

Plato discussed the idea of friendship in a more comprehensive manner in his philosophical inquiry. In this dialogue, *Lysis*, he underlined the need and importance of friendship to a certain level. For him, "a good friend is more important than wealth, money or any precious ornament."⁵ He maintained, however, that the practice of friendship should solely depend on love. It should never be allowed to scuttle one's love for the state. More still, Plato conceived friendship as shared wisdom of love because there is no friendship in the absence of love. Arguing further, he maintained that there are some virtues in friendship which, when cultivated in the life of philosophers, will bring about welfare and good of others. His emphasis on the love of the state is such that, it is a criterion for all who would belong to the ruling class. This accentuation of love of the state over friendship manifests, when he says that the function of the guardian is to ensure that "friendship at home shall not will, nor foes abroad be able, to harm our state"⁶. There is no contradiction in Plato's philosophical system for he set the limit in the practice of friendship within the state. He argued further that in friendship there should be absence of dispute and quarrel. They should live together in communion of love. As a result, he opines: "And friends have all things in common so that one of you can be no richer than the other, if you say truly that you are friends"⁷. This implies that private properties or material possessions should not be an object of dispute and quarrel among friends, and if there is equitable distribution of these possessions, then all disputes will be abrogated.

Plato also maintains that it is always good for one to be good to his friend because through it, both desire to achieve a goal –happiness. He says, ".....that desire is the cause of friendship, for that which is desired is dear to that which is desired at the time of desiring it."⁸ Plato equally establishes the fact that friendship does exist between likes. Thus, he opines that "likes must

⁵ PLATO, *Lysis*, , in the *Great Book of the Western world*, Vol.7, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Encyclopedia Britannica 1982,p. 16.

⁶ PLATO, *The Republic, the complete and unabridged Jowtt translation*. Vintage Classic Publication. New York. III 414b.p.123

⁷ PLATO, *Lysis*, op cit. P.17

⁸ Ibid. P.24

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of necessity be ever friendly with like"⁹. Such friends who are alike especially in thought and in behaviour, at least to a greater extent, do not hurt one another. This becomes the reason why he asserts that wicked men cannot be friends. He writes: "... it applies to us, the nearer wicked men come to each other... the greater enemies they become, For they injure each other."¹⁰ Above all, Plato concludes his discussion on friendship by saying that friendship is still unable to be discovered. He writes: "and as yet we have not been able to discover what a friend is."¹¹ Perhaps, he was alluding to perfect friendship and its rarity.

AUGUSTINE (354-430AD)

Augustine, one of the great Fathers of the Church, was born in North Africa in A.D. 354 in Tagaste which was then a town in that part of North Africa now known as Algeria. He died around 430 AD. Although he was brought up as a Christian by his mother, Augustine gradually drifted away from Christianity in his early stage of life during his studies when he was away from home. He was a man who lived an immoral life but later was converted and became a saint. His thoughts on friendship were very dynamic. His life was anchored on evolving friendship and his deepened understanding of it. He experienced various kinds of friendships, but as he came closer to God his thoughts and practice of friendship became much more profound.

Even though, he had a remarkable gift for making friends, he underscores the inherent benefits of friendship as well as the dangers therein. According to him "friendship among men is a delightful bond, uniting many souls in one. All these things and their like can be occasion of sin because, good though they are, they are of the lowest order of good, and if we are too tempted by them, we abandon those higher and better things, your truth, your law and you yourself oh Lord our God"¹².

⁹ PLATO, *Lysis in The Collected Dialogue of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Carire, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 153.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 157.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 25

¹² AUGUSTINE, *The Confession of St Augustine*, translated by Hal M. Helms, St Paul's Mumbai: Paraclete Publication. Brewster, USA. 2008, p. 33

Through his writings, one could see his conception of friendship in two ways. One was during his rough youthful stage of life, the other after his conversion. His first encounter with his beloved friend formed the foundation of his initial notion of friendship. His experience of friendship was basically based on pleasure and utility. They remained friend as long as both were useful to each other. Thus, his conception was how friends were to please each other and make each other happy, but this was only a momentary pleasure. At last, he noticed that this type of friendship was not a genuine friendship because it did not depend on genuine love. As a result, he says that, "the measure of true friendship is not temporal advantage, but unselfish love"¹³. This emphasizes that a perfect friendship is always deep rooted in genuine and unselfish love. "For no friendship can be true unless you are the bond that holds it together, binding it to yourself by that love that is shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit who is given to us".¹⁴

After the death of his friend, Augustine tried to find another and higher perfect form of friendship, which he found in God. For him, "friendship is faithful in Christ, in whom alone it can become eternal, attaining happiness"¹⁵. Augustine's notion of perfect friendship is quite different from Aristotelian conception of perfect friendship. For Aristotle, perfect friendship lasts as long as the person remains good, but for Augustine, perfect friendship remains forever because it is a friendship with God.

Finally, friends, for Augustine are so important in the life of every individual because no person is self-sufficient, either physically, emotionally or spiritually. But with the help of friendship, there will be a complementarity of one another.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274AD)

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval philosopher was born at Roccasecca in 1224. His contribution to the discussion of friendship can be seen in his treatise on justice and law.

¹³ AUGUSTINE, In his Epistle, (155, 1.1) as quoted in *The Quotation of St. Augustine: An Anthology for Preachers and Teachers* by Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Enugu: EL'DEMAK (Publishers) 2011, p.80

¹⁴ AUGUSTINE, *The Confession of St Augustine*, op. cit. p. 62

¹⁵ Anthony Kanu, *Quotations of St Augustine: An Anthology for Preachers and Teachers*; op cit., p. 81.

For him, justice simply means “giving each one what is his or hers by right or equality in relation in which everyone ought to render to the other what his or hers due is”¹⁶. It is an important factor that regulates the interpersonal relationships. A friendly or affable person behaves in a pleasant manner towards others both in word and in actions.

Aquinas identifies charity with friendship of men and women for God. Friendship between two people is characterised by mutual benevolence. This simply implies that each friend wishes good things to the other. He further argued that friendship springs up between two persons who have something in common, something that can bring about their welfare and happiness. This can commonly be found among the members of the family, students, workers, artists and so on.

In addition, Aquinas argues that a human being becomes friend with God and neighbour as a result of charity, because charity is a perfect form of virtues by which the love of God and man can be made manifest in us. Therefore, by so doing we are externalizing our love to others which can enhance happiness and mutual co-existence among friends. Even though our charity seeks of us to love our neighbour and our enemies, but it is meritorious to show a particular favour and goodwill to our friends. He further classified friendship into two different types; “love of friendship and love of concupiscence”¹⁷. According to him, the love of concupiscence is the love of a person or object for the good which they can bring to the one who loves. It simply consists of utility and pleasure friendship. It lacks the qualities of perfect and true friendship. The love of friendship on the other hand, is the true and perfect friendship because it loves another simply because it finds in him or her, another self. This kind of love exists between God and human being, among members of family, neighbours, etc. This love of friendship can only exist in the will, And with the absence of flattery and quarrelling, there can be a mutually friendly relation between friends.

Finally, Aquinas argued that love and charity are the basic foundations on which friendship

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, An Introduction and Interpretation*. trans. By Edward J. Gratsch, Bangalore Theological Publication.1985. Ila-IIae, Q58,p.171.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.93

can be built: “It is more proper to charity, to love than to be loved, since a virtue inclines a person to act. Out of charity we love God for himself, just as we love our parents for themselves.”¹⁸

FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626AD)

The philosophy of Francis Bacon is a typical product of the spirit of the renaissance movement in Europe in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. He was born in 1561 in London, into a wealthy family of Sir Nicolas Bacon. He studied at Cambridge and later practised law. He died at the age of sixty-five because of cold.

On his essay on friendship, Francis Bacon introduced a very important concept and a principal fruit in friendship, not only its social relevance but also its psychological significance which is communication. He argued that when a heart is filled with emotions and sorrow and have no place to import such emotion, it can prevent the heart from its normal functioning, but when communicated to a friend, it is averted. As a result He writes “..... But no receipt openeth the heart, but a true friend; to whom you may import griefs, joys, fears, hope, sorrows, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession”¹⁹.

Bacon went further to argue, saying that, this communicating of man's self to his friend has many benefits and effects; for it redoubles the joys and then, reduces the grief and sorrow in halves among friends. There is an increase in happiness, when friends impart their joys in themselves. Likewise, there is decrease in grief when they share their sorrows together. Supporting this, Francis Perier writes that, “a friend is someone whom we can always count on to count on us”²⁰.

The second fruits of friendship as stipulated by Bacon are understanding and dialogue. Both are very important in any friendship. For him; “... The light that a man receiveth by counsel from another; is drier and purer than that which cometh from his own understanding and judgment which is ever infused, and drenched,

¹⁸ Ibid., p.158.

¹⁹ Francis Bacon; *Of Friendship in the Harvard Classics*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, New York: P.F Collier & Sons corporation, 1937.p. 66

²⁰ Francis, Perier: *Speakers Quote Book*; trans. by Roy B. ZUCK. Bangalore Asian Trading Corporation,1997. p.206.

in his affections and customs"²¹. From this assertion, one can conclude that two heads are better than one especially when it comes to the area of decision-making. For with friends, one comfortably arrives at a faster and better decision. This is because there is a much difference between the counsel that a friend gave and the one given by man to himself.

Another fruit of friendship is that friends are necessary in the time of need, for a saying goes, "a friend in need is a friend indeed." It is through the support of friends that a man is sure that the care of the things he has will continue after him. There should also be an existence of peace in affection between friends. Because of the social nature of man, he cannot all alone play his own part if he had no friends. Finally, according to Bacon, friendship encompasses many good things especially when it involves perfect friendship. As a result of this, friendship becomes very necessary and fundamental.

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

Kant a great German philosopher was born at Konigsberg in 1724. After his university studies, he was for a while a family tutor before he eventually became a professor in his home town university. Although Kant's personal life contained no remarkable events, He was nevertheless, immensely successful as a lecturer. He later died on February 12, 1804.

In his lectures on Ethics, which he delivered between 1775 and 1780 at the University of Konigsberg, he included the topic on friendship as part of the lecture. In the treatment of friendship, Kant makes a distinction between self-love and love of humanity (altruistic love). For him there are two motives of action in man. These motives influence man's behavioural pattern. In the case of self-love, the individual is specifically concerned about his own personal welfare or happiness, disregarding the happiness of others. But this type of love according to Kant has no moral merit but it has the sanction of the moral law. But altruistic love, on the other hand, is love of others; its motive is simply to promote the happiness for human race. In altruistic love, self-love is disregarded, but altruistic love is morally meritorious.

For Kant, even though, self love is natural, and it is sanctioned by moral law, it is more praiseworthy to engage on altruistic love because it could restore the love of the self if

²¹ Francis Bacon; op. Cit. P 70

everyone could relate to another altruistically. To support this, he says that,

*...if we felt that others would care for our happiness as we for theirs, there would be no reason to fear that we should be left behind. The happiness I gave to another would be returned to me. There would be an exchange of welfare and no one would suffer, for another would look after my happiness as well as I looked after his.*²²

The practise of friendship is an attempt to restore the love of self through the love of others. Moreover, Kant believes that in friendship, there is existence of mutuality and reciprocity of love. He also believes that friendship is an idea because it is the measure by which we can determine reciprocal love. It is not derived from an experience. It has its seat in the understanding. Cletus Umezina Supporting this, avers that "this type of friendship is valid and possible at the level of conception, but in practical life it seems impossible"²³. This means that it is not all that possible to find friends who receives back from their friends an exact amount of love they give them because the degree and proportions in which men distribute their love as between themselves and their fellows vary greatly.

Kant believes that friendship is very important and necessary in human existence because man by nature is a social animal. He asserts: "Friendship is a natural impulse"²⁴. He classified friendship into three types namely; friendship of need, taste and disposition or sentiments. Friendship of need is commonly found among the primitive societies. It comes about when friends can trust one another in the mutual provision of the needs of life. The friendship of taste consists in pleasure we derived from each other's company and not from each other's happiness. It can also be called *pseudo-friendship* because it can only exist among people who are not similar in the same capacities, stations or occupations of life. In other words, says Kant, "variety and not

²² Kant Immanuel.; *Lecture on Friendship*, in *The Other Selves; Philosophers on Friendship*, Pakaluk, M.(ed.) Indianapolis Hackelt Publishing Company, 1991, p. 210

²³ Cletus Umezina; *The Place of Friendship in Kantian Ethics*, In *Philosophical Writings*. ed. By. Cletus Umezina, Nsukka: Afro-orbis Publication, 2011, p. 211

²⁴ Kant, Immanuel. op.cit. p. 217

uniform is the source of the friendship of taste²⁵. The third type of friendship is the friendship of disposition or sentiments, which Kant regards as "friendship in the absolute sense."²⁶ It is a pure and a genuine type of friendship. It does not require any service or any sort of demand. For him, friendship of disposition is very much necessary because of man's distrust of the society. Because of this distrust, man often refrains from exposing his feelings, emotions, and sorrows to the public; rather he chooses to reveal them to one or two persons whom he trusts so well. He thereby achieves a communion when there is a mutual disclosure of self. This type of friendship can only exist between two or three friends; it also brings comfort and consolation to those who engage on it. Emerson comments on this type of friendship when he says:

*You shall have very useful and cheering disclosure at several times with two men, but let all three of you come together and you shall not have one new and hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort.*²⁷

This simply means that when there is a limited number in practice of friendship, one can naturally feel comfortable to express his emotions, feelings and problems. Finally, Kant believes that friendship of disposition also help one to correct one's judgement because a sincere friend will assist his friend to assess his problems and to arrive at a better conclusion, for a saying goes 'two heads are better than one'. Kant equally stated categorically that "each of us needs a friend, to whom we can confide unreservedly, whom we can disclose completely all our dispositions and judgements."²⁸ A disclosure is "a human necessity for the correction of judgment"²⁹. Kant however added, while disclosing oneself that there are "certain natural frailties which ought to be concealed for the sake of decency, lest humanity be outraged."³⁰ He finally believes that a man without a friend is isolated.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 214

²⁶ Loc. Cit. p. 214

²⁷ Emerson, R.W., "Friendship" in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. By Pakaluk, M. Indian Publication Company, 1991, p. 228

²⁸ KANT, Immanuel., "Lecture on Friendship", op. cit. p.215

²⁹ Ibid. P. 213

³⁰ Loc.cit.p.213

ARISTOTLE VERSUS OTHERS

Having reflected on the views of some philosophers, what can be gleaned from the above is that friendship is a hobbyhorse among many philosophers. But they handle it with utmost care such that its practise does not contradict their respective philosophical systems. There seems to be a point of convergence and divergence among other philosophers with Aristotle's view. We shall now clarify them under the following sub- headings

AWARENESS AND RECIPROCITY

One who wishes to establish a friendly relation must create awareness to the person whom he/she wishes to become friend with. And this person whom you are wishing well must be aware of it. Supporting this, Aristotle opined: "To be friends, two people need to be well-disposed toward one another and wish each other's good, and they must know that this is the case."³¹ Plato however, refers awareness as knowledge acquisition of whom we call friend. For Bacon, it is through communication that we get acquainted to our friends.

Friendship also requires 'Reciprocity' because it enhances its continuity and firmness. Supporting this, Aristotle writes: "To be friends, then, they must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other."³² This implies that there can only be friendship when people recognise or are aware of each other's feelings and reciprocate their feelings and affections. On the other hand, some philosophers argued that, a friend is the second self and as such through this understanding, reciprocity ought to be maintained in friendship. Cicero adds that, "everyone loves himself not that he may require any recompense from himself for his own affection, but because each man is in himself dear to himself and unless this same principle is applied to friendship, a true friendship will never be found for he, indeed is as it were a second self."³³

For Kant, in friendship, there is always a mutual and reciprocated love. "The maximum reciprocity of love is friendship, and friendship is an idea because it is the measure by which we can determine reciprocal love, for the greatest love I

³¹ ARISTOTLE, NE Viii; 2, 1156a.

³² NE viii, 1155b, 2

³³ CICERO. *Cicero's Essay on Old Age and Friendship*. p. 100

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can have for another is to love him as myself".³⁴ The love that a friend has given out is given back to him by his friends. However, this understanding of friendship for Kant is only valid and possible at the level of conception. But in practical life, it is impossible to find a friend who receives back from their friends the exact amount of love they gave out.

LOVE AND HAPPINESS

Friendship is deep rooted in genuine love, for without love; there will be no perfect friendship. To throw more light on this, Aristotle says: "...each loves what is good for himself, and that the good is without qualification lovable."³⁵ Love is the magnetic field that holds friends together because the ability to share and listen to one's friend without complaining is proof of an authentic love. For Aristotle, friendship depends more on loving than being loved.

Thus, loving is a virtue of a friend and it is those who have the disposition to love according to merit who are enduring friends. It is this disposition of love that can make unequals to be friends, for through it they can be equalized. Consequently, the act of loving in friendship can influence many things. It esteems and affirms the unconditional and unique value of the one loved. Love also acknowledges and tries to fulfil the need of the beloved. We can however affirm that love exists between people when the genuine satisfaction, security and development of another person become as significant to you as your own satisfaction, security and development and when also it is reciprocated by the beloved. Happiness however, is the aim by which men engage in friendship because according to Aristotle, no one can choose to live without friends. Friendship is the noblest of eternal aid to happiness, and it is multiplied when it is being shared by friends.

In essence, people need friends who will be seen as another self in order to make available what they do not have and also to be happy in life.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Aristotle maintains that friends must have something in common and that is goodwill for each other. Goodwill for him seems to be the beginning of friendship; and so one might by extension of the term friendship, say that goodwill is 'inactive friendship'. Goodwill however, does not base on utility or pleasure friendship. For him, wishing a friend good for his own sake is the highest degree of friendship and by so doing, one is simply doing what is just. Friendship for Aristotle can only exist when goodwill is on the reciprocal basis and affection mutually recognised by the two parties. He writes that, "goodwill is a friendly sort of relation but it is not identical with friendship, for one may have goodwill both towards people whom one does not know and without their knowing it, but not friendship."³⁶ Supporting this, Plato opined that "friends have all things in common, so that one of you can be no richer than the other, if you say that you are truly friends"³⁷. St Augustine on his own views, sees goodwill as an important factor in friendship, even though, he directed his own view towards the Holy Spirit through whom one gets all he wants. Thus he writes, "For no friendship can be true unless you are the bond that holds it together, bringing it to yourself by that love that is shed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us"³⁸. Also, St Thomas Aquinas affirms that friendship exists between two people who have something in common, in the absence of that, friendship does not exist. The point therefore, is that, to be friends, people must have goodwill and affection for each other. Thus, it is a mutual benevolence among friends.

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³⁴ KANT, Immanuel: *Lectures on Friendship* op.cit. p 211

³⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Viii, 1055a; 10

³⁶ Ibid, viii, 1166b, 30

³⁷ PLATO, *Lysis*, op. Cit. P. 16

³⁸ AUGUSTINE, *The Confessions*, op. Cit. P. 62