



# FRIENDSHIP

Laurence Thomas  
*Syracuse University*

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that one opens up to the other and makes the other a part of one's life.

**trust** The willingness to be vulnerable to a person and the belief that the individual will not harm one although she or he could do so with impunity. Trust can be reasonable or unreasonable.

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## GLOSSARY

**companion or character friends** Especially close friends whose trust of one another and self-disclosure to one another are exceedingly high.

**Kantian morality** The idea that there are absolute rights and wrongs, and that persons act from the motive of moral duty if and only if they are motivated purely by the rational concern to do what is morally right. One of the cornerstones of Kantian morality is the Categorical Imperative, of which there are three formulations. The most famous formulation says that in our actions we always should treat the humanity in ourselves and others as an end and never as a means only.

**self-disclosure** The act of revealing to a person information about oneself that is of a particularly personal nature. Especially close friends engage in mutual self-disclosure. Self-disclosure between friends often involves the highest level of trust. It is possible to self-disclose information to a person which the individual already knows. The self-disclosure is still significant, because it is only with the self-disclosure

*IN IMPORTANCE, FRIENDSHIP* is rivaled, if at all, only by romantic love. And some would finesse the difference between the two by insisting that romantic love is at its best only when the lovers are also the best of friends. Aristotle observed that a life without friendship was an incomplete life, though a person possessed all the riches in the world. Two thousand years later, Aristotle's observation still strikes a responsive chord in our hearts.

Although there is, these days, a rather loose use of the word friend whereby people who barely know each other might refer to one another as friends (bar scenes come quickly to mind here), absolutely no one is oblivious to the difference between, at one end, friends who are mere acquaintances or who interact socially from time to time—casual friends, let us say—and, at the other end, friends who constitute a deep friendship—that is, individuals who are the best of friends. Aristotle's observation, of course, is about deep friendships, commonly referred to in the philosophical literature as character or companion friendship. No one today would be inclined to think that his observation applies equally well to individuals who are casual friends. In fact, the

term friendship, itself, is generally reserved for individuals who are the best of friends. Thus, while we may use the casual sense of the word friend in ordering another beer for the person whom we have just met and with whom we are enjoying a conversation, it will most likely take more than the animated conversation that is taking place before we think of ourselves as having a friendship with that person. Common wisdom has it that casual friends are easy to come by, whereas companion friendships are rare.

## I. FEATURES OF COMPANION FRIENDSHIP

What are the features of companion or character friendship that so recommends this relationship to our lives? It is illuminating to listen to how people describe their best friend. Let Leslie and Marion, who may be female or male, be companion friends. Here are several commonplace claims: "We always spend lots of time together." "Leslie would do anything for me." "I could tell Leslie anything, for no one understands me like Leslie does." "We often know how one another feels without having to say much of anything." Even if there is some hyperbole here, the fact that people express their feelings in such strong terms is itself significant. These claims speak to four very important things. Respectively, they are delight in one another's company, aid, self-disclosure, and understanding. Let me comment briefly upon each one.

Deep friends take enormous pleasure in one another's company, as is beautifully described by St. Augustine. Sometimes friends want to be in the proximity of one another even as they engage in different activities. Just knowing that the other is near by—within room's reach, say—is often satisfying. Interestingly, in spite of the many obvious differences between the parent-child relationship and friendship, we have with this observation about friendship a striking similarity, for the young child takes enormous comfort in knowing that its parents are nearby even as she or he engages in independent exploration.

Turning to the next consideration, we expect our close friends to be willing to aid us in ways that go significantly beyond what the morally decent person might do. While this includes material aid, such aid is rarely the centerpiece of companion friendship, which is in keeping with Aristotle's observation that a person who has everything still needs friendship. Once material aid is set aside, the primary way in which companion

friends aid one another comes through self-disclosure and understanding. Still, there are obligations of friendship which do not seem to have their source in the demands of morality. Character friends can make demands on one another's time that no casual friend could make, which is very much in keeping with the first observation. Indeed, even if a casual friend were to make an appearance during a person's time of need, the appearance would not have the same comforting results as that of a character friend, although the individual's showing up would be profoundly appreciated. From the other direction, deep friendship pushes the limits of morality without actually encouraging moral slothfulness. It goes without saying that heinous acts of immorality cannot be justified in the name of friendship. But between heinous acts of immorality and complete moral rectitude, there is a lot of moral space. And we might tolerate a deep friend's impropriety, though we would never tolerate a like impropriety from a stranger. I shall say more about this in Section IV. However, the point leads us to the topics of self-disclosure and understanding.

Companion friends know things about one another that others do not know, because companion friends self-disclose personal information about themselves to one another. Now, while telling someone personal information about oneself is obviously a way of self-disclosing, it is not the only way. We may do so indirectly. Companion friend Marion may know enough about Leslie that a piece of behavior on Leslie's part which is of little significance in the eyes of others is quite revealing in the eyes of Marion. And Leslie may so behave in front of Marion and others fully cognizant of the fact that Leslie, and no one else, will draw an inference about his personal life that is very poignant, indeed.

Now, there is a fundamental difference between understanding why a person behaved in a certain way and justifying that behavior. In many cases, we expect our companion friend to understand why we made our mistakes even if our behavior cannot in any way be justified. It is this consideration, I want to say, that explains the willingness of friends to engage in self-disclosure. Suppose that Leslie had an extramarital affair. She may self-disclose this to Marion, not with the thought that Marion will see her as not having done wrong, but with the sense that Marion will understand how she might have succumbed in this way. Two general points about human beings are quite relevant here. One is the ever so obvious but far from trivial truth that no one is infallible. The other is the truth that there can be better and worse explanations for even the wrongs that we do. One kind of explanation—which I

shall call an excoriating one—reveals us to be utterly indifferent to the wrong that we do. Another kind of explanation—which I shall call an ameliorative one—reveals us to be concerned to do what is morally right but momentarily lacking in moral fortitude. One of the important ways in which companion friends exhibit understanding is that they help us to construct sound ameliorative explanations of our mistakes. Thus, in the case of Leslie's affair, if the available facts supported an ameliorative explanation, Leslie could count on Marion to see this or to help her in constructing such an explanation. It is most significant that persons are sometimes in need of help in constructing an ameliorative explanation concerning a moral failure on their part. In some cases, surely, this is because sometimes we are so stunned and overwhelmed by our mistakes that we lose our perspective.

Summing up, then, the deep, deep trust between character friends manifests itself not only in the high level of self-disclosure between character friends, but also in the conviction that each will endeavor to portray the other in the best moral light. Although such portrayals to third parties may come naturally to mind, the fact of the matter is that often enough a character friend does an invaluable task in portraying the other to himself.

While I do not want to enter into a discussion of the difference between ties of friendship and romance, it will be useful to conclude this section with a remark that speaks to the relative importance of self-disclosure vis-à-vis the sexual bonding that we associate with romance.

It is commonplace to say that sexual bonding is the deepest form of bonding that two human beings can experience, and the ultimate form of self-disclosure. But is this really so? Notice that the person who knows the most about us need not be our sexual partner. In fact, we can have ever so meaningful sex with a person and yet be deeply afraid of self-disclosing things about ourselves to that person. Sex at its best invariably involves a certain kind of affirmation and trust. Yet, sex at its best is nothing like the window to our soul that significant self-disclosure is. If a woman should self-disclose to her lover that she was repeatedly raped by her father when she was age 6, she will have displayed a level trust in her lover that has no equal in the sexual realm. Self-disclosure at its best is anchored in a profound trust, and no other form of social interaction seems to be tied to this level of trust. And if trust is rightly thought to constitute a form of bonding, then suffice it to say that the rich bonding that sexual intercourse yields neither equals nor necessarily serves as a

precursor to the bond of trust cemented by self-disclosure.

## II. SELF-DISCLOSURE, CHOICE, AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN FRIENDSHIP

What underlies these three aspects of companion friendship—aid, self-disclosure, and understanding? No doubt an answer that comes readily to mind is that companion friends deeply love one another. While that is certainly true, love cannot be the answer to the question just posed. To be sure, we are generally willing to aid those whom we love. However, self-disclosure and understanding do not follow simply in love's wake, as the parent-child relationship readily reveals. Parents and children often go to great lengths to hide important aspects of their lives from one another, although the love between them is extraordinary. Or, there can be deep, deep failures of understanding between the two.

Nowadays, a classic example would be the child who is gay or dating a member of a different ethnic group. It is common enough for such a child, who has no doubt whatsoever about the enormous love which his parents have for him, to say that it would hurt his parents enormously if they knew that he was gay or dating an X (a member of a different ethnic group). Or, to go in the other direction, adult children who love their parents dearly may nonetheless be unable to understand why their parents are getting a divorce—so much so that the children actually become angry at the parents. By contrast, friends of the parents may understand all too well why the parents are divorcing.

It might seem appropriate to respond here that the love between parent and child is in a category unto itself. So the fact that self-disclosure and understanding do not follow simply in the wake of this love tells us nothing about the character of love outside of that context, the love of friendship in particular. There is a fundamental insight here that needs to be brought into sharper focus.

A significant asymmetry between the love between character friends on the one hand, and the love between parent and child on the other, is choice. We choose a friend because we find her or his character appealing to us, whereas we choose neither our parents nor our children at all. To be sure, we choose to have children, but that is very different from choosing the child itself. And while adopting a child is, indeed, an instance of choosing a child, infant adoptions still represent choosing a substantially unknown entity, in terms of both

physical and, in particular, character development, for it is impossible to extrapolate from an infant child's appearances and behavior what its appearance and character will be when it is a 10-year-old child. However, although we choose neither our parents nor our children, the general thought is that parents should love their children regardless of the children's behavior and children should likewise love their parents. It would almost never be argued that a person's moral character has become so heinous that the person's parents or children are morally blameworthy for maintaining their love for him, although it may be understandable that they cease to love the person.

We may think of the love between child and parent as purely role-based: "X has the role of being child of so-and-so," or "X has the role of parent of so-and-so." By contrast, we may consider the love between character friends as choice-based, where the choice is based upon the person's character. Thus, even if Marion and Leslie represent companion friendship at its very best, they would not have been open to moral criticism merely on account of not having become companion friends. And if both were morally decent individuals when they became companion friends, and Marion, say, changed for the worse, embarking upon a life of crime, we would expect the companion friendship, and so the love, between them to end. More precisely, we would expect Leslie to move on. And if she did not, the explanation, "We are companion friends," would neither seem convincing nor strike us as appropriate, whereas "That is my child" or "That is my parent" would be both convincing and appropriate in a parallel situation.

The only other form of love that also seems to be purely role-based is sibling love, though I suspect that its force, at least socially, is not equal to the love between parent and child. Many ancient texts which speak to the importance of honoring the father and mother and to the importance of caring for children say nothing about sibling relations, save that there should not be sexual intercourse between them. It is hardly accidental, I suspect, that we have role-based love only in the context of biological ties (or their social analogue, as with adoptions and children raised as siblings), for the nature of biological ties (1st or 2nd cousin to X, child/parent of X, and so on) is absolutely unalterable by social conventions and is extinguishable, if that is the word for it, only by death (it being only upon X's death that a person who was the child/parent or cousin of X is no longer that). Religion has often sought to turn marital love into purely role-based love. Yet, it concedes from the outset the relevance of behavior, since religion

has generally regarded infidelity as suitable grounds for divorce.

In any event, one would expect a love that is choice-based, where the choice is based upon the person's character, to be tied to understanding and self-disclosure, whereas one would expect these two features to play a significantly subordinate role in a love that is role-based.

Whenever one makes a choice, one can ask whether it was a good one. This is so even in matters of little or no consequence. Suppose I decide to try a new ice cream flavor and from the list of flavors which I have not yet tasted I request coconut apple. I will consider myself to have made a very good choice if I like it enormously, a bad choice if I really dislike it, and a so-so choice if I find it more or less satisfactory. In terms of significance, clearly, the choice of a companion friend is on a much higher plane. Moreover, one wants to make a good choice from the very start. This requires having some insight into the person's character that goes beyond the person's public self-presentation, which is usually what first catches our attention.

Typically, character friendships have their beginning in a conversation that focuses on something important which is of mutual interest to the individuals involved. They find either that they have similar views or that their disagreements are remarkably constructive. In either case, both find each other quite appreciative of one another's views. After all, people with similar views can learn a lot from one another.

With a companion friendship in-the-making, a conversation will often have what I shall call a distant self-disclosure. On the one hand, a distant self-disclosure is revealing without leaving the speaker particularly vulnerable or requiring supportive behavior on the part of the listener. On the other, a distant self-disclosure often allows ample opportunity to gauge the listener's reaction and understanding of the matter. An example of a distant self-disclosure would be that 20 years ago one smoked marijuana to get through a certain crisis, or that while in the army as a teenager one engaged in a certain form of criminal behavior. With a companion friendship in place, the self-disclosures will invariably cease to be distant.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning another observation by Aristotle, namely that having a companion or character friend is rather like having another self for a friend. What Aristotle most certainly did not mean is that companion friends are mutual sycophants merely parroting one another's sentiments. For the author who observed that a life without friendship was incomplete surely did not think that what made a person's life

incomplete is that he lacked someone who merely parroted his views. The best way to appreciate Aristotle's second observation is to consider the difference between honesty and self-honesty.

A person can be honest in his remarks without telling the entire story. Suppose a student asks me about how well he performed on his essay. I answer honestly if I truthfully tell him that he did not do well and that his paper actually needs enormous work if it is to measure up. I answer honestly, although my considered judgment is that his essay was the worst that I had read in 20 years. Honesty does not require me to add this further assessment. In fact, many would regard my doing so as rather mean-spirited. Most questions have a point to them, and in many cases that point can be spoken to, and so the question can be answered honestly, without offering a full description of things. If you merely ask me was John home last night, I answer honestly if I truthfully tell you that he was not, although I also know that he spent the night at someone's house having an affair. If you are his lover, then the question immediately becomes more complicated. When a lover asks that question, the point is rarely innocuous. Then, an honest answer depends, in part, on the kind of information about John that I realize you correctly take me to have about him. Things can get very complicated here. For I may know that the point of your question is whether John was out having an affair; what is more, it may be that it is entirely by accident that I know that he was (say my cordless phone picked up the conversation as the matter was being discussed). Finally, I may know that you do not really expect me to know the answer, but that you were merely asking me in desperation (I could have been just about anyone). Fortunately, this matter need not be settled here, since offering an account of honest behavior is not the aim of this essay. Yet, this last discussion nicely leads us to the topic of self-honesty.

As a purely conceptual matter, it is not true that a person always knows more about himself than another does. For instance, a person can be infatuated with another or depressed and not realize it, though someone else does. What self-honesty requires, however, is not that a person know more about himself than anyone else, but that he acknowledges to himself his beliefs and feelings such as he understands them to be, regardless of how pleasant or unpleasant they are (where beliefs and feelings are understood to cover intentions, motivations, and emotions). While self-honesty is perhaps easier to achieve than honesty, self-honesty is by no means an inevitable feature of life, as the phenomenon of self-deception makes abundantly clear. And short of out-

right self-deception there are a multitude of ways in which a person can avoid giving full acknowledgment to his beliefs and feelings. Self-honesty, then, is no small accomplishment, often calling for a certain level of courage.

It is in this light that we should understand Aristotle's claim that a character friend is rather like another self. Imagine a person who is masterfully self-honest. If that person has a character friend, then the extent to which that person will be forthcoming in discussions with her character friend will approach the level of self-honesty that she has attained in her life. Bearing in mind that an honest answer often does not require a full description, then the idea here is that with one another character friends are forthcoming about themselves in ways that significantly exceed the demands of honesty alone. What is more, the character friend will play an active role in getting the other to appreciate her own actions or those contemplated; and this, in turn, will be part of the reason why the other is forthcoming.

So, to recall our two companion friends, Marion and Leslie, if the next door neighbor were to ask Leslie about the banquet for her 25th reunion, a perfectly honest answer could be that she had a great time and reacquainted herself with a number of former classmates. Leslie is not being dishonest by failing to add that she ran into an old flame and there were sparks again. Nor is Leslie being dishonest if she fails to add this when Marion asks her about the banquet. All the same, in responding to Marion, not only would it be quite natural for Leslie to add this, Marion would be unpleasantly surprised if she learned of this from someone else other than Leslie. Of course, Leslie need not tell the whole story right at that moment. Or, if the inquiry about the reunion banquet is made in a public setting, a piece of nonverbal behavior or a code word may accompany Leslie's reply that signals to Marion, and no one else, that there is more to the story. But Marion remembers just how painful Leslie's relationship with that old flame was, and when they have a chance to discuss the matter in private, Marion forcefully reminds Leslie of this, which proves to be another instance of why Leslie is so grateful for their friendship.

Thus, insofar as companion friends are mirrors to one another's soul, a gloss is in order. Contrary to what the metaphor of a mirror perhaps unwittingly invites, companion friends are far from passive in the role which they play in one another's life. A mirror reflects, but the verb "to reflect" has two meanings, one of which pertains to the reasoning that is involved in weighing considerations. Character friends, then, are not just

mirrors, but mirrors of insight into one another's soul, thereby helping each other to live up to her or his moral ideals and, at least from time to time, improving upon those ideals. Understanding the mirror metaphor in this way is in keeping with the idea that character friends help one another to see whether an excoriating or ameliorative explanation applies to a serious moral failing. And if an excoriating explanation holds, a character friend will make the case without in any way being self-righteous.

Now, these last remarks speak to the question of what is the gain in having a friend where the level of self-disclosure would invite the idea that the friend is rather like another self? The gain is moral and personal flourishing, an essential ingredient of which is the practical knowledge to interact in the social world in just the right way, given who one is. Consider that a person with all the theoretical knowledge in the world concerning what pregnancy is like does not, thereby, have any practical knowledge about the matter. To have practical knowledge here, there is one, and only one, thing that will do, namely having been pregnant.

To live well is not just to have theoretical knowledge about what is morally right and wrong and personally good or bad for one, but practical knowledge about such matters. And that knowledge is unattainable in the absence of social interaction. But this does not require that one interact with everyone, but only with the right individuals. And no one is better placed for such interaction than a friend who is rather like another self. Let me explain, starting with an illustration.

No matter how well one rehearses a speech that one is going to give, that will never be tantamount to actually giving the speech. A speech that has only been rehearsed can always be revised, whereas a speech that has been given can never be rendered a speech that has not been given. It is only in giving the speech that one can feel, say, either relief (or pleasure) for having gotten that out of the way (for having done a wonderful job) or regret for not having gotten things just right. Quite simply, feelings developed in isolation are characteristically too much infected by our hopes and fears. What is more, no matter how self-aware we are concerning the impact which our behavior has upon others, there is no substitute for the actual reactions of others—their praise, criticism, or even indifference, which in some instances can be more haunting than criticism.

Companion friendship often provides the much needed social space between words rehearsed and words spoken to their intended hearer. To our com-

panion friends, we express our feelings about people and situations in ways that we would never express to others, and often enough it is only in so doing that often we learn or appreciate more fully that, indeed, we should never express our feelings in those ways to others. A remark may prove too hostile or too familiar. Sometimes the friend draws this to our attention; sometimes merely uttering the remark to the friend suffices for us to see this. Expressing our most intimate feelings with our companion friend and matching our feelings with theirs is an indispensable moral exercise. This moral exercise yields insights that cannot be had in any other way, even by self-reflection at its very best. Because, as a result of self-disclosure, companion friends have a commanding perspective of one another's life, they are in the position to offer advice, constructive criticism, and running commentary that is profoundly informed, but yet has distance from the person's life. Even as having a character friend approximates having another self, the fact remains that the friend's feelings and reactions will always be those of another person, and self-knowledge, for all of its importance and significance, is no substitute for the knowledge that is given by another's feelings and reactions.

Of course, the very fact that a deep friend so identifies with us can itself be a reason to seek the reactions of others, since we expect that our friend will readily grasp the proper point of our endeavors, and what may rightly be of concern to us is whether those who take no interest in our endeavors, as such, will readily enough correctly grasp the point of our endeavors. A striking difference between companion friendship and the parent-child relationship comes to mind here. It is that in general companion friends never seek the kind of independence from the opinions of one another that children often seek from their parents. At least part of the explanation for this is that, in the eyes of the child, even an adult child, the opinions of parents never entirely lose their authoritative force, owing to the authority that parents properly have over their child in its youth, whereas from the start friends do not have authority over one another, although they certainly have considerable influence with one another. This points to the subtlety of social interaction. A friend's influence can be utterly considerable, making all the difference in what we do; yet we may find this infinitely preferable to even the mere vestiges of authority that remain with our parents. And this, I suspect, is because moral behavior and related concerns are one of the central aspects of friendship, a topic which I take up next.

### III. FRIENDSHIP AND THE TENSIONS OF MORALITY

We can quickly get at some of the issues that arise concerning friendship and morality by looking at a particular reading of morality that no doubt has its inspiration in Kantian thought. The view is that a person is not entitled to set aside the demands of morality when it comes to his own behavior. What is morally required of others, in a given set of circumstances, is no less required of that person in like circumstances. Thus, if a person finds \$10,000, and morality requires that anyone who finds \$10,000 should report the discovery, then that person is not morally permitted to regard his circumstances as different and not report the loss. While technical maneuvers can be made regarding what counts as similar circumstances, the general insight seems relatively secure.

Now, everyone knows that they commit moral errors, including egregious ones from time to time. Some who make egregious moral errors engage in quite substantial acts of self-flagellation. And as I noted in Section I, it sometimes happens that people fail to construct the veritable ameliorative explanation for their moral failure, thinking much worse of themselves than the circumstances warrant. These situations are common enough, though perhaps most people do not react to their grave moral failures in this way.

In most instances, people feel terribly guilty for a period of time, and then get on with living their lives. Rarely do people subject themselves to any of the excoriating blame to which they subject others who make similar egregious moral errors. This is often the case even among people who are quite demanding of themselves (at least when the moral error does not yield lasting damage). While, in the case of people who are morally demanding of themselves, there are a number of explanations for this that operate in concert, I shall focus upon self-knowledge. Having committed an egregious moral error, a person who is morally demanding of herself may have such a poignant sense of moral failure that, with good reason, she is certain that she will never commit that error again. This person would gain very little from acts of self-flagellation. Self-knowledge enables the person to put the wrong behind him without, in any way, condoning the wrong that he has done. Incidentally, this brings out that, in some though hardly all cases, the value of the institution of punishment may lie more in the role it plays in the public's eye than the good that it does for the person being punished.

At any rate, there is another side to the coin of self-knowledge, perhaps a more slippery side. Suppose that what makes a piece of morally objectionable behavior particularly so is that it is done for ignoble reasons, say, a married person's having an affair to test her or his sexual prowess. But suppose that Johnson recently had an affair because her husband has been completely paralyzed for 10 years. Johnson could say, with some justification, that while having an affair is morally wrong, her reason for doing so is considerably less open to moral criticism than numerous other reasons which people give for having an affair; and let us also suppose that she rightly holds that but for the circumstances of her husband's permanent physical impairment she would have done no such thing, since she dearly loves her husband. Accordingly, she may be able to forgive herself for having deliberately done what she regards and continues to regard as morally wrong, for she thinks that if ever it were understandable that a person had an extramarital affair, it is so in her case. Whether in the end Johnson is open to the same level of moral criticism as is any other person who has an affair is a matter that I shall not discuss. What I mean to be drawing attention to is that as people view their personal lives, a Johnson-like line of reasoning is often deemed efficacious to permit moral self-pardoning: X is morally wrong, but I committed X for reason R, and R is a considerably less morally objectionable reason for X-ing than most other reasons why people X; indeed, doing X for reason R is forgivable.

We should be clear about what has been claimed here. I have not argued that people are naturally inclined to be more forgiving of themselves than of others, although that may be true generally. Instead, the claim is that owing to self-knowledge, a person has access to exculpatory reasons for his morally inappropriate behavior which are not readily available to others, and the problem is that a person might succumb to rationalization, taking something as an exculpatory reason when (reflection would reveal that) it is no such thing. The idea here is that because a person knows himself well, he is aware of the kind of reasons that will work for him, psychically, to get him to assuage his conscience.

No doubt one can immediately see the relevance of the preceding discussion to the issue of friendship and morality. Companion friends have enormous knowledge of one another's lives. The point I wish to make, which surely has been anticipated, is that from the standpoint of moral assessment, the knowledge which friends have of one another functions in roughly the same way as self-knowledge does in the individual case.

Returning to companion friends Leslie and Marion, I offer a two-step example of a moral wrong, speaking first to the case where a person is too self-critical and then to the case where a person perhaps has an exculpatory reason.

Leslie may know that Marion had an affair with a 26-year-old student who had been pursuing him, and that Marion is so devastated over the fact that he did this that nothing good whatsoever would be gained by reporting Marion—a brilliant instructor—to the administration, which Leslie has done in other cases. In tears, Marion tells Leslie that he is so terribly ashamed of himself—that not having ever done such a thing before had been a tremendous source of moral pride. In fact, Marion has written his letter of resignation. To now give this example the flavor of the previous Johnson scenario, Leslie may also know that were it not for Marion having just lost both of his parents, he would never have been so emotionally vulnerable as to succumb to such a thing, for Leslie knows that the opportunity (with others) has forcefully presented itself on numerous occasions. I am supposing that in the first instance Marion has no exculpatory reason for his inappropriate behavior, but that he does in the second one. Without adding the loss of parents, Leslie may know that Marion is profoundly sincere and remorseful for what he has done, and from past experience Leslie may know that when Marion exhibits such profound remorse over some behavior the chances of Marion's engaging in that behavior again are next to zero. To be sure, Leslie could scold Marion for having done this thing and file a report against Marion, but I trust that, as I am telling the story, filing a report would hardly seem to serve any purpose. Moreover, I trust that scolding him would seem pointless as well, for the issue is not one of Marion failing to have the appropriate moral ideal here; nor is it one of his failing to have and show appropriate remorse for his wrongdoing. Accordingly, would it not be far more natural for Leslie to want to comfort Marion, to let him know that this one mistake does not render him morally bankrupt, to point out that many a person would have succumbed much earlier on to the student's advances, and so on. In fact, were Leslie to scold Marion as if Marion were but a lecher we might think that Leslie was being rather harsh.

So without adding the loss of parents to the scenario, Leslie's posture is not that Marion has an excuse for his impropriety, but one of understanding without condoning. If we add the loss of both parents, then Leslie's posture becomes all the more one of understanding without condoning. The difference is that in one case the understanding is tied to the simple truth that even

morally decent human beings are fallible, whereas with the addition of the loss of both parents, the understanding is also tied to the realization that a traumatic emotional loss can render a person extremely vulnerable emotionally. Of course, the tragic loss of parents or not, Leslie could rightly insist that, in having that affair with that 26-year-old, Marion had violated a most important principle of the academy. But, given Marion's character and Leslie's familiarity with it, I trust that, even without this addition, such a stance on Leslie's part reeks of fulsome moral self-righteousness rather than a justified invocation of moral standards, which is not to say that we have self-righteous behavior whenever a friend holds the moral line with a friend. By contrast, were the offender simply another member of the faculty, we would not expect Leslie even to attempt to be as understanding, although this other faculty member could be just like Marion in every way.

Of course, we can be horrified that a friend behaved in a certain way, especially if the person's behavior reflects negatively upon us. In any case, such behavior usually has to be particularly egregious in some way. The very wrongdoing itself goes beyond the pale or, for instance, the act showed a flagrant indifference to the feelings of others. Suppose everyone in a room failed a most important examination, save one's friend. Or suppose that she passed the examination and it is announced that a person's mother just passed away. In either context it would be most inappropriate for her to make much of her success, perhaps saying nothing unless she is directly asked about her performance on the examination, although she is rightly proud of this success. It is important to bear in mind the difference between explaining a friend's behavior and apologizing for it. Others may find our friend's behavior strange, whereas we appreciate and admire it. Here, we do not apologize for how she behaves, since we do not concede any inappropriate behavior on her part; indeed, we may chastise others for being judgmental. We apologize for inappropriate, especially wrongful, behavior, and for reasons that I shall give below in this section, occasions of this sort should be few and far between.

We are now in the position to appreciate more fully the claim made in the introduction that friendship pushes the limits of morality. Limiting ourselves to innocent people who have been wronged, it is natural for morally decent persons to experience, on behalf of the victim, indignation toward the perpetrator of the wrongful behavior. And if the victim is a companion friend, then it is common enough to experience enormous resentment as well toward the perpetrator. But here is the rub. When the perpetrator turns out to be

a companion friend, we do not experience a like level of indignation toward the friend—certainly not immediately and often never—on behalf of the innocent victim. On the contrary, as I have indicated with the example of Leslie and Marion, we seek to understand the friend's behavior, to put his wrongdoing in perspective, with the result being that the innocent victim fails to receive his moral due, if you will, in terms of our moral reaction to his having been wronged. This is of enormous significance because if indignation and resentment motivate us to press for what is right on behalf of those who have been wronged, then friendship can be a substantial barrier in this regard, when the wrongdoer is a deep friend.

Another way of getting at the tension between morality and friendship is by looking at the phenomenon of loyalty in friendship. In moral theory, objectivity and impartiality are highly valorized. A wrong is a wrong whether it is done by a friend or a stranger. But this kind of moral stance can be at odds with the demands of loyalty in friendship. Although as with honesty, kindness, and so on, a person can certainly be loyal to a fault, merely being willing to plant one's feet firmly on the soil of available circumstantial evidence is not generally a sign of loyalty, as one can presumably expect that of anyone. If the loyal soldier is one who, up to a point, continues to stand by his captain even when the evidence on the battlefield would point to her defeat, then a loyal friend, presumably, is one who holds fast to the belief that his friend is of good character, even though strong circumstantial evidence would suggest otherwise. As a result of loyalty, not only does a friend give the benefit of the doubt to a friend when it would be reasonable for a stranger not to, but a friend will often distance her- or himself from reasonable acts of public criticism of a friend. Of course, it is arguable that anyone should be given the benefit of the doubt where this is possible. Perhaps. But the point is that the motivation to do so would seem to be anchored in loyalty rather than morality.

All the same, none of previous discussion should be mistaken for the view that friends are tolerant of moral squalor on one another's part. I have not made any such claim; nor does a claim of this sort follow from what has been said, including the remarks about loyalty, for a quite loyal friend may nonetheless be concerned to get at the very truth of the matter. Without ever engaging in anything like a display of righteous moral indignation toward a friend on account of the wrong that he has done to an innocent person, one can take a very hard moral stance with him on account of the wrong that he has done. One can indicate the pain that

his wrongdoing has caused one, because one has held him in such high moral esteem. One can go on to express how such wrongdoing even jeopardizes the friendship, if only because one does not want to be associated with a person who so behaves. Still, this will be very different from acting on the victim's behalf against the friend. Except incidentally, an argument that a friendship has been jeopardized by wrong done to another leaves unaddressed the harm that the innocent person has suffered.

The reader will notice that I have been careful not to offer an assessment of whether there should be this tension between friendship and morality. There are those who would insist that all personal relations, no matter what level of affection they may attain, are properly subsumable under the principles of morality. All that I want to say here is that this view of the priority of the right cannot, it seems, be squared with the psychological makeup of human beings, where profound ties of affection are involved. Within a rather wide range, a person would have to be capable of extraordinary compartmentalization in order to be capable of responding to a friend's wronging of an innocent third party with the same kind of wrath and resentment with which he would respond to any stranger's wronging of an innocent third-party. And such compartmentalization does not make for a psychologically healthy self nor for wholesome friendship. In the *New Testament*, there is the saying that love hides a multitude of faults. Taken literally, this may be far too strong. But a gloss on this saying would be that love carries in its wake an understanding of the faults of others that is rarely achieved in its absence. And the psychology of understanding a person for whom one has great affection may be such that, up to a point, any rate, it calms the storm of moral indignation that we would otherwise have.

On the other hand, our understanding of the wrongdoing of a friend would seem to hit a most impenetrable wall when we turn out to be the victim of the friend's wrongdoing. This should come as no surprise. This is because if anyone should be fortified with reasons not to harm us, a character friend should. Not only are there the ever-present moral considerations, which should be reason enough, but there is the love of the friendship itself, which one supposes should serve as a fail-safe measure. When we are wronged by a friend, the question is never simply, "How could you have done that?" Rather, it is, "How could you have done that to *me*?" What cries out for an explanation is not as much the wrongdoing as it is the target of the wrongdoing. These considerations indirectly complement our preceding discussion. In friendship, we expect love to reign and

to govern interactions to a degree that far exceeds the demands of morality. This love should serve as a safety net for us against even the very temptation to wrong us, and it should give us understanding in many instances where morality would render a verdict of guilty.

In bringing this section to a close, let me return briefly to the subject of friendship and moral squalor. As I have indicated, the tension that I have spelled out between morality and friendship does not entail that companion friendship is a matter of tolerating moral squalor. On the other hand, companion friends tend to maintain the same level of moral rectitude in their lives, whatever that level might be. Thus, take two companion friends at the same level of moral rectitude. If one became a more morally upright person than the other or, conversely, one became a more ignoble person than the other, then either the friendship would terminate or the other friend would change accordingly. There are two reasons why this is so.

One of these has to do with the importance of self-disclosure between friends. In general, aside from matters involving counseling, we are uneasy self-disclosing to people whom we regard as morally superior to us because it is simply impossible to avoid the feeling that the person is sitting in judgment of us, although the friend may assure us that nothing of the sort is going on. The second reason is related to the first.

While saints and heroes are a wonderful reminder of the potential for goodness that exists in human beings, the fact remains that most of us are neither, nor are we much concerned to be either. Most of us are rather content to be ordinary human beings with, if at all, moments of excellence here and there. More poignantly, most of us are inclined to think that this is all that can be rightly expected of us; hence, it is unreasonable to expect people to realize their full moral potential. If two individuals start at the same level of moral rectitude and one goes on to a much higher level, then this becomes, as it were, a moral challenge to the other friend, which he must either accept or decline—for if one could have made the change for the better than the other could have as well, since they supposedly had the same kind of moral timbre. On the other hand, if one descends to a much lower level of moral rectitude, then in addition to the problem of self-disclosing which the person who has descended will have, the one who has not descended will find the friendship increasingly unsatisfying.

On the one hand, there will be the tensions that come with having a close friend who constantly engages in moral behavior that one finds unacceptable. If the friend does not make a turnaround in his behavior,

then one loses one's moral leverage with that person, since he can rightly point out that his behavior is no different from that which one has been tolerating all along. To be sure, one can talk about limits having been reached, and so on. But to make this move is, in effect, to issue an ultimatum: change or lose a friend. On the other hand, there will be the issue of one's own moral reputation, which will become sullied by association: either one engages in certain immoral behavior or one is tolerant of it in (at least certain) others. Either way, one's reputation has been sullied, though undoubtedly more so in the first instance. But the second instance is hardly trivial; to be known as one who is tolerant of such-and-such immoral behavior when committed by X and Y is invariably to lose one's moral leverage with others. Thus, the one who sustains the level of moral rectitude with which the two parties started their friendship will become disenchanted with the friendship.

I have not addressed the topic of friendship where both individuals are immoral. This case raises special problems insofar as immoral persons can be viewed as egoists. How can two people, each of whom is primarily concerned with promoting only her or his self-interests, have genuine affection for another? And if each claims that the other is an exception, what reason does the other have to place much confidence in this claim. I shall not pursue these issues except to note that if there can be genuine friendship among the immoral, the argument in the preceding two paragraphs concerning the importance of parity of moral rectitude between friends applies equally well to such cases. Just as moral goodness admits of considerable range, so does moral badness. And the absence of parity pertains to there being a significant distance in quality between the moral character of two people, a distance which can be anywhere along the spectrum of moral goodness and badness. So suppose that Leslie and Marion are both immoral friends who engage in the immoral behavior of defrauding the elderly, but that, after awhile, Leslie moves on to murder. If Marion were to protest that Leslie had gone too far, Marion's protest would make sense notwithstanding the fact that Marion's own moral behavior is quite reprehensible.

#### IV. CONCLUSION: FRIENDSHIP AND THE IDEAL SOCIETY

As a most fitting way of bringing this essay to a close, the preceding discussion suggests a very profound way in which friendship can push morality to its limit. If the

account just sketched of the equality of moral rectitude between friends is correct, then a most interesting question arises, bearing in mind just these considerations: Might a person refrain from becoming a morally better person in order to maintain a friendship with a person, where the friends are morally decent to begin with? Could the good that flows from a friendship be preferable to the good that flows from being a morally better person? In *The Politics*, Aristotle observed that those who have no need of others are either gods or beasts. So we can ask whether a person could have a proper understanding of the value of others if she or he were prepared to forsake all ties of human affection in the ascent toward moral perfection. It is difficult to see how such a person could. Alas, it would seem that if a friendship is rich enough then morality's claim to continual moral self-development may, at some point, fall upon deaf ears. None of this may be justified; but, alas, it may all be more understandable than we had been inclined to suppose. And if so, then Aristotle's observation about friendship may be so enduring because it speaks to a deep deep insight concerning what it is like to be a human being: Even with all the riches in the world a life without friendship is incomplete. Why? Because neither morality nor all the riches in the world can take the place of the affirmation, the understanding, and the reflection of ourselves that we all need from time to time in order to flourish and which companion friendship—that is, friendship at its best—affords us. I have not argued that the affection and affirmation of friendship is always preferable to moral betterment. Rather, I have challenged the converse, namely that moral betterment is always preferable to these things. Although there are few, if any, instances when a person might be open to criticism for eschewing friendship in order to achieve moral betterment, I have suggested that in view of the nature of human psychology, it is untenable to hold that in choosing friendship over moral betterment a person is thereby, and always, open to moral criticism. The quality of some friendships may be worth the trade-off. Thus, we may find in friend-

ship a formidable challenge to moral perfectionism, understood as the idea that human beings should have as their sole goal the moral perfection of their lives.

So to conclude with a most speculative remark regarding a society replete with friendship at its best, this society would be an association of individuals for whom each serves as a mirror of insight for another, who in turn serves as a mirror of insight for that person. Accordingly, even if each friendship in and of itself does not represent a life of morality at its best, this association of individuals taken together would nonetheless yield an outcome, among individuals who are neither gods nor beasts, whereby the quality of the whole of moral life in society would nonetheless achieve a moral good that could never be reached by single pairs of friends living in isolation of one another.

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