

Three Kinds of Friendship

The first accounts of friendship were **object-centered**: it is based on some objective quality of the friend in its explanation of the friendly bond. So an object-centered account asks questions like: 'What is it in the friend that you love? What quality of the friend do you love?' Here we look for something inhering in the friend -- specific values or virtues or understandings or assets that draw us to them. In this article I will be particularly interested in a subset of object-centered approaches -- theoretical accounts of friendship that find the same objective understandings or values in both the friend and oneself. Aristotle's account of friendship falls into this subset: in perfect friendship, attraction is to a singular virtue present in both friends. Much contemporary citizenship theory is also in this subset, explaining civic bonds in terms of shared understandings of the public good.

I use Aristotle to exemplify object-centered accounts of friendship because, as suggested above, he gives us a usefully unabashed version of the understanding of solidarity at the heart of such accounts. I suggest that when it comes to civic solidarity, many contemporary theorists implicitly (or explicitly) concur with Aristotle's judgment that it is common features of character that draw us together. In the contemporary literature, these shared features of character are most often cast in terms of shared understandings or common values. What does it mean, though, to share values and to be drawn together by this sharing? Unlike contemporary theorists of shared understandings, Aristotle commits himself to a view on the bond created by objectively share understandings, articulating this first in terms of individual friendships and then extending it to the case of civic friendship.

Aristotle's account of personal and civic friendship is teleological, with the highest form being that between perfectly virtuous men. One loves the true friend for his own sake. All forms of friendship require love of the friend for his own sake; only in perfect friendship, however, does this translate into love of the other for what he essentially is, since virtue is central to a good man's character. True friendship thus is defined by the sameness of friends in their virtue: good men are attracted to one another in friendship because "like is dear to like."

Aristotle sees civic friendship as a subsidiary form of perfect friendship, with both being premised on shared understandings of the good. Difference therefore constitutes a (sometimes manageable) threat to civic as well as personal bonds.

A second type of account of friendship is **capacity-centered**, based on particular orientations or dispositions on your part that enable you to feel friendship for another. A capacity-centered account asks questions like: 'What kind of sympathy or empathy or attentiveness do you direct at one another? What capacities make the friendship possible?' This aspect of friendship is given primacy by feminist theorists of care such as Nel Noddings, Sarah Ruddick, and (to a lesser extent) Carol Gilligan.

The label 'ethic of care' has come loosely to designate a range of feminist philosophy inspired in part by Carol Gilligan's pioneering work on gendered differences in ethical reasoning. While the empirical questions around these gendered differences are complex, versions of an ethic of care have a clear normative intent, criticizing the abstraction of impartialist accounts of moral reasoning and giving pride of place to empathy and a grasp of particulars. Care theorists argue that ethical judgments should be made with reference to

concrete webs of human relationship, and that we judge well when we are aware of these relationships and refuse to abstract from them.

In Nel Noddings' work especially, good ethical judgment is tied to specific capacities, exercised within relationships that provide the context for moral judgments. As a caring person, one exhibits empathy for the other, attentiveness to her distinctive perspective, and an ability to silence one's own perspective in order to learn that of the other. These characteristics are not only a precondition for wise moral judgment, but constitutive of affective bonds. [30] Here there is a decisive move away from an emphasis on sameness as a basis for personal bonds. You have to learn who your friend is as distinct from you, and so there is a place in this account for the friend's objective qualities. But the emphasis, in capacity-centered approaches, is on setting your own evaluative scheme aside and appreciating your friend's good from her point of view. So one's empathetic capacity, and not the specific qualities discovered, does much of the work in explaining affective connection. Rather than saying 'I love my friend because she has the following characteristics', capacity-centered approaches look to qualities of character by which friends understand and value the other from the other's point of view.

While an extended analysis of capacity-oriented approaches to personal and civic friendship is beyond the scope of this article, we can note difficulties in generalizing from capacity-centered accounts of personal friendship to descriptions of affective bonds between citizens. Theorists like Joan Tronto and Margaret Urban Walker have argue persuasively that caring capacities can serve justice by orienting us toward the needs of those different from ourselves, be they proximate or distant.

A third type of account of friendship is **relationship-centered**: it is based on the relationship itself for its value as a formative process extending over time. A relationship-centered account asks questions like: 'What have you experienced together? What common events have shaped each of your lives? What reference points have you come to share?' It is this approach to friendship that I will affirm as most adequate to explaining both personal and civic bonds in diverse societies. Bear in mind, though, that the three approaches to friendship are differentiated by the aspects of the friendly bond that they privilege rather than by those they include: elements of all three approaches will be present in each.

While friends' objective qualities and their capacities both help to constitute the friendly bond, the two approaches outlined above run into serious problems as explanations of civic friendship. In what follows I advance a third, relationship-centered approach, arguing that the bond between friends and between civic friends is best explained by the way friends regard their friendship itself. This third model of friendship and civic friendship connects to more compelling accounts of both identity and relationship than do object- or capacity-centered theories.

One of the least plausible aspects of Aristotle's theory of friendship is the normative centrality it ascribes to the sameness of perfect friends, and this focus on sameness is shared by his account of civic friendship and by many contemporary accounts of civic bonds. Premising solidarity on sameness presupposes untenable pictures of both individual identity and social relations. The untenability of these presuppositions becomes clear once we take on board the

fact of social pluralism, the complexity of individual identities, and the opacity of others to us.

For a relationship-centered account, the best friendships will involve, first of all, awareness of the inevitable epistemic gulf that separates you from your friend's perspective, given mutual opacity. Second, while you of course must try to grasp your friend's perspective, you should be humble about your ability to do so. This means leaving space for your friend to articulate her perspective, without your stepping in too quickly to impose an interpretation. So third, friends will have to strike a balance between projection (filling in the picture of your friend's world from your own perspective in order to have a picture at all) and empathy (hearing your friend's own voice describing her world). Given the lack of a canonically shared good and the epistemic obstacles to fully grasping the good of the other, friendship exists in the midst of some ignorance of the friend's self-conception and her good.

The true friend is another self. A relationship-centered account will concur with Aristotle here as well, though again in a limited sense: an important part of the friendly bond involves taking on the other's fate, woes, and pleasures as significant. Yet this transfer of evaluative allegiance cannot involve the immediacy of understanding central to Aristotle's account, for here too, we confront the sorts of epistemic limits entailed by mutual opacity.

The true friend is a mirror. Aristotle points out, quite rightly, that I gain self-knowledge by observing a friend and seeing myself act within the friendship; this is indeed part of the friendly bond. But here I would suggest -- contra Aristotle -- that the dissonance between friends' perspectives deriving from the fact of pluralism is an asset when it comes to self-knowledge. To the extent that I grasp the otherness of a friend's perspective, I get to see myself, not reflected back in the image of another 'me' as Aristotle would have it, but seen through a different lens. [36] I can view myself in terms of another's perspective, and see my own tendencies as these are played out in interactions across our differences.

True friends make one another good. The fact of social pluralism presupposed by relationship-centered accounts of friendship perforce denies a single telos when it comes to understandings of the good. So on a relationship-centered account, friendship cannot involve moving toward some shared, canonical excellence. Nonetheless, it is central to relationship-centered accounts that friends shape one another through their interaction, and value this mutual formation. Interacting with a friend over time changes us, and helps make us who we are both as moral agents and in other dimensions. For this third account of friendship, a sense of co-determination is a deep source of value in the relationship.

True friends share a history. Seeing oneself mirrored in a friendship and developing in interaction with one's friend together explain the centrality of a shared history to the friendly bond. On a relationship-centered account, the friendly bond derives primarily (though not exclusively) from how friends perceive their relationship as extending over time, shaping them in valued ways, and keeping them in contact with someone in whose fate they're invested. Now it's key (in light of the three features of identity and social relationship outlined above) that friends need not have the same perspective on their shared history. Two friends triangulate, in effect, on a third object -- the friendship itself.

Common experiences, stories, points of reference, pleasures and pains cement the friendship, but this does not require that the stories or events constituting a common history

appear the same way from each person's side. The bond lies in the process of telling and retelling the friendship, in sharing a locus of memory; it doesn't lie in having precisely the same stories or memories. So it's not that our history of interaction has some objective quality that produces friendship, and that we both perceive correctly. It's our separate construals of and valuing of the history that are decisive in enabling and sustaining the friendship.