Vices of Friendship

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Friendship, most will agree, is a Good Thing. Few would choose a life without friends, and most of us treasure our friendships as essential to a thriving life. But as Aristotle famously argued, excess of a good thing can be as bad as deficiency: virtue lies in the "mean". In this paper, we argue that the neo-Aristotelian conception of friendship elaborated in leading contemporary discussions, while highlighting many of friendship's virtues, fails to note some of those virtues' dark sides. It is easy to see that for the sake of a friendship, outsiders are sometimes treated unfairly. If impartiality is essential to morality, friendship seems to motivate some instances of immorality. But we touch only incidentally on the issue of partiality. We will be focusing instead on some more subtle ways in which friendship, on a neo-Aristotelian construal currently widely endorsed, imposes moralistic demands that are in tension with the core values of friendship. We will also be noting that certain intrinsic features of friendship may even undermine the friends' overall well-being.

A central contention of the neo-Aristotelian accounts of friendship is the idea that a "true" friendship has a teleology – the mutual fostering of improvement of character.[1] On this sort of account, true friends are drawn to one another in the first place because of their virtues of character, and it is also an essential function of friendship that it should contribute to the growth and development of the friends' virtuous character. In this paper, we have two aims. The first is to reject this teleological view of friendship; the second is to survey what might be called vices of friendship – ways in which even a deep and intimate friendship can be bad from a moral point of view. In particular, we will argue that true friendship does not require friends to be each other's moral critics and models. To be sure, friends do influence one another in a variety of

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[1] We use "true" as a modifier, not to indicate that friends must be morally good, but rather as a tool for disambiguating "friend" and "friendship", therefore leaving out the shallower senses of "friend" and "friendship" (e.g., "Facebook friend"). We take modifiers like "good", "genuine", and "real" to serve the same end. Thanks to Alan Soble for pressing us on this.

ways, including moral ones. However, it is an open question whether this results in their characters' improvement or corruption. The latter outcome is not necessarily incompatible with true friendship.

We begin in section 1 by sketching the core features of the neo-Aristotelian account of friendship. In section 2, we put pressure on the robust concern aspect of the neo-Aristotelian accounts by arguing that the requirements of disinterestedness and selflessness on true friendship are unwarranted. Section 3 argues against the moralistic provision that friends act to improve one another's character. Retracting or refining these requirements leads us to construct a minimal account of "true" friendship in section 4. This minimal account outlines the normative space of friendship. Within that space, four affective and motivational features – or "virtues of friendship" – determine the good of true friendships. We call these virtues of friendship *closeness, emotional intimacy, trust,* and *friendship identity.* Armed with that minimal conception of true friendship, in section 5 we sketch some ways in which a true friendship that possesses the good-making features of true friendship can nonetheless still be bad.

1. The Neo-Aristotelian Account of Friendship

Aristotle's account of character friendship has been a strong source of inspiration for prominent contemporary accounts of true friendship. For Aristotle, character friendship is necessary for a fully satisfying life. It helps us to cultivate good character traits and realize our full potential as persons capable of growth and development, both morally and intellectually. On this conception, true friendship involves motivational and affective features such as mutual admiration of character, mutual love, and a life to some extent shared; moreover, friends are expected to serve both as role models and as moral critics for one another.

Before we discuss these features of character friendships, it is important to indicate how virtues fit into the conception of the good life more generally, and how they relate to morality as we now tend to conceive of it. According to Aristotelian virtue ethics, cultivating virtue is necessary for a life of flourishing. But what is virtue? Aristotle's own word for what is commonly rendered as "virtue" – *aretê* – might better be translated as "excellence". This is broader than "morality" as we now commonly understand it. It allows for a distinction between

intellectual virtues and virtues of character (*EE* 1221b28-31).[2] The former pertains to theoretical and scientific inquiry: theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*), intuitive understanding (*noûs*), practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), and technical expertise (*technê*) (e.g., *NE* 1112a31-1112b10; *APo.* I.2, 71b9-23; *Met.* 981a5–15). Virtues of character, by contrast, are traits that predispose one to think, feel, and behave in a virtuous way. They include courage, temperance, generosity, honesty, humility, justice, wit, among others. Some of these, such as justice, might be called "moral" virtues as they seem to pertain to the domain of the moral as we construe it today; others, such as wit, seem distinctly non-moral in nature. Aristotle, however, did not distinguish between moral and non-moral virtues of character. Instead, all virtues of character for him are excellences that ought to be cultivated in a good life. They include industriousness, humor, confidence, and flexibility. Therefore, when Aristotle said that in a friendship of virtue, friends help each other become better people, he meant it in this broader sense, and not in the narrow moral sense in which some modern thinkers understand virtue (see e.g., Sherman 1993; Badhwar and Jones 2017; Helm 2017a).

Let us now turn to the motivational and affective features that neo-Aristotelians commonly associate with true friendship. These are mutual admiration for character, mutual love, shared life, role modeling, and mutual criticism. We consider each of these in turn.

Mutual Admiration of Character: True friends admire and respect one another on account of their virtuous character traits (Telfer 1970–71; Whiting 1991; Dawson 2012; Zagzebski 2015; Hoyos-Valdés 2018). The relevant sense of "respect" here is what Stephen Darwall has called "appraisal respect". This contrasts with "recognition respect", which is the kind of unconditional Kantian respect owed to all persons, regarded as autonomous rational agents possessing inherent worth or "dignity" (Darwall 1977).

Appraisal respect is so called because it involves a positive appraisal of a person for her excellence of character; typical examples are courage, honesty, temperance, fairness, kindness, and generosity, among many others; but they can also consist in excellence in what we would regard as non-moral qualities and skills such as musical talent, teaching, parenting, or cooking.

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[2] *EE = Eudemian Ethics*; *NE = Nicomachean Ethics*; *Met. = Metaphysics*; *APo. = Posterior Analytics*; *MM = Magna Moralia*; *Rh = Rhetoric*. All Aristotle references are based on the English translation of his complete works in Barnes (1984).

Even when a person excels in a particular pursuit, however, a person's engagement in that pursuit is not worthy of appraisal respect if they do so in a way that manifests a bad character: "If a player constantly heckles his opponent, disputes every close call to throw off his opponent's concentration, or laughs when his opponent misses shots, then even if his skill is such that he would be capable of beating everyone else without such tactics, he is not likely to be respected as a tennis player" (Darwall 1977, 42).

Similarly, on Aristotle's account of character friendship, the respect good friends have for each other is not typically inspired by the intellectual or athletic prowess of a person whose attitudes and behavior are otherwise despicable. The kind of positive appraisal each friend bestows is not typically inspired by their excellence in a narrowly specific pursuit, unless it is accompanied by excellence of character on the whole.

This characteristic of friendship seems to be broadly accepted in the contemporary philosophical literature on friendship. It would seem to imply (though we are not taking a position on this point) that a superior artist, athlete, or scientist who is also dishonest, mean-spirited, and malicious can have only sycophants but not true friends.

Disinterested mutual love. A second mark of true friendship found in neo-Aristotelian accounts is the unselfish, non-utilitarian love that grounds it (Annas 1977, 1988; Annis 1987; Badhwar 1987; Sherman 1987; Thomas 1987, 1989, 1990/1993; Whiting 1991; White 1999). Transactional relationships (e.g., with your hair stylist) are motivated by the expected utility of an agreed upon exchange of services or goods;[3] freely chosen acquaintanceships are motivated by the joy each person derives from the other's (perhaps fleeting) company or by the other person's utility toward a goal. True character friendship, by contrast, is sustained by mutual love for the other person for their own sake (Aristotle *NE* 1155b31, 1156b9-10).

But what exactly does it mean to love someone for their own sake? As A.W. Price (1990: ch. 4) notes, offering a satisfactory answer to this question is probably one of the most elusive tasks faced by philosophical theory. In a much-discussed article, Michael Stocker (1976) offers

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[3] *Philia* and its verb form *philein* refer to love in a generic sense that includes not only friendship love but also familial and parental love. Aristotle uses "*philia*" even more broadly, to refer to kinds of human relationships for which we would not now use the word 'friendship', such as that between a carpenter and a customer or that between a father and his newborn baby.

some insight into this question. He invites us to imagine a case in which you are in the hospital when your friend, Alma, stops by to visit. You initially think she stopped by because she genuinely cares about you. But when you ask why she came, she replies: "I always try to fulfill my moral duties, and it's my moral duty as a friend to visit you". You are unlikely to be happy with this answer because Alma was motivated to visit you in the hospital by a commitment to fulfilling her moral duties, not by her concern about you for your own sake.

Stocker's overarching aim in his paper is to provide a knock-down objection to ethical theories across the board. Regardless of whether we agree with that conclusion, however, his argument is suggestive for what it tells us about caring about, or loving, another person for their own sake. If you love someone for their own sake, you have a desire to promote their interests. But the desire must not be instrumental, a mere means to some advantage—including the moral credit earned by fulfilling your duty.

Shared Lives. The third characteristic concerns the way that character friends get involved in one another's lives. Most contemporary philosophers of friendship agree with Aristotle that true friends have a shared life (Telfer 1970–71; Thomas 1987; Annas 1988; Sherman 1993; Vallor 2012; Elder 2014; Alfano 2016; Hoyos-Valdés 2018). Having a shared life goes beyond simply spending time together. True friendship requires a pattern of interaction that reflects a "capacity to share and co-ordinate activities over an extended period of time" (Sherman 1993, 97). By sharing feelings, thoughts, and arguments with each other, true friends develop a shared conception of what constitutes a good life, which is manifested in a mutual commitment to specific virtuous ends rather than a joint conception of how to realize those ends. Friends who do not arrive at such a shared conception over time fail to become true friends. The convergence of virtuous ends over time is thus a test of true friendship (Aristotle *MM* 1237b17-18).

True friends continue to confirm their shared conception of what constitutes a good life by engaging in joint deliberation and decision-making about practical matters. When making joint decisions about what to do, friends are jointly responsible for those decisions. Say you have been the target of workplace bullying and engage in joint deliberation with your best friend about how best to respond to the bully. If you and your friend jointly decide that you should report the person to the human resources department, then you and your friend are jointly responsible for this action, even though your friend didn't actually carry out the action (Sherman 1993, 98).

Another way that true friends enjoy a shared life is by taking part in each other's joys and sorrows, accomplishments and failures, as their own, even when they are not acting jointly. Thus, we feel pride when our friends act virtuously and shame when they act viciously, as if their actions were our own (Aristotle *Rh* 2.6 1385a1-3). Say your friend fails to manifest a good temper, for example, by acting with excessive anger in response to a minor slight. In that case, you are disposed to feel as ashamed as you would have been, if you had acted in this way, even though you are not responsible for their fit of anger.

Character improvement. While character friends possess good character traits, they are not perfect. Your friend may fail to pursue ends that are valuable in your eyes. Or she may have valuable ends but give in too frequently to temptation. True friends, however, are motivated by their mutual love for each to encourage each other to change unworthy goals and resist weakness of will. Loving another person for their own sake thus requires having a robust desire to promote their moral flourishing.

A true friend seeks to help her friend overcome weakness of will, remain "steadfast in virtue", and improve their moral disposition. This idea goes back to Plato's *Symposium*, where Phaedrus notes (admittedly in praise of erotic love rather than simple friendship) that a man "is especially ashamed before his lover when he is caught doing something shameful. If only there were a way to start a city or an army made up of lovers and the boys they love! Theirs would be the best possible system of society, for they would hold back from all that is shameful, and seek honor in each other's eyes" (Plato 1997, 178e-179a). True friends can help each other in at least two ways. One is by seeking to set a good example; the other is by serving as a critic. (Volbrecht 1990; Sherman 1991, 1993, 1999; Jacquette 2001; Zagzebski 2017)

Emulation. True friends are, as Nancy Sherman puts it, "eminently suited as models to be emulated" (Sherman 1993, 105-06). This is not because true friends are necessarily of equal character. Since true friends need not be perfectly excellent, they are bound to have different strengths and weaknesses. They are models to be emulated only when performing acts that draw on their best character traits. While true friends need not be equal in character to serve as role models for each other, they must not be significantly unequal in power. If they are, the "modeling" risks being grounded in intimidation or constraint.

True friends should furthermore roughly be in agreement about what constitutes a good life. This does not mean that they must be committed to pursuing the same life goals; one can

imagine a friendship between a scholar and an athlete, or between a businessman and an artist. But only on the condition that each respects the other's ambitions even when they do not share them. Many virtues of character cut across vastly different domains of activity. Think of perseverance, for example, sound judgment, or integrity. Or even honor, which can reign, so it is said, even among thieves. Once again, then, the virtues of character that matter most to friendship are of a sort that are not specific to any single activity or pursuit. They can, therefore, provide models for emulation even among friends whose life goals and central preoccupations might remain widely different.

Moral Criticism. A second way that true friends can help each other remain "steadfast in virtue" in the face of temptation and improve each other's moral judgment and character is by serving as diligent moral critics, shaming, persuading, or physically preventing each other from giving into weakness of will or pursuing unworthy goals (Whiting 2001; Hoyos-Valdés 2018; Kristjánsson 2000). Thus, contrary to common wisdom, friends should not uncritically accept their friends' flaws or enable their flawed ways the way a person in a codependent relationship enables the other person's shortcomings. As Kristján Kristjánsson puts it:

> The notion of a "critical friend" is paramount here – with the friend being not only a supporter but also a challenger ... [A]ny constructive dialogue between equal character friends about how to deal with life's exigencies will involve critical engagement with the friend's point of view... To accept, unquestioningly, the friend's character flaws, without trying to correct them, is not a sign of true character friendship but rather its opposite: an attitude that in today's academic parlance would probably best be referred to as unhealthy "codependency" (Kristjánsson 2020, 358-359).

True friends are thus expected to encourage each other to act virtuously by means of criticism. Aristotle notes that "it is both a most difficult thing … to attain a knowledge of oneself"; hence, just as "when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second self" (Aristotle *MM* 1213a26). Friends hold a mirror to one another to reveal each other's virtues and vices. This is the way in which they can serve as moral critics for one another, as well as admirers of each other's virtue. It is negative as well as positive feedback that helps facilitate personal growth.

2. Aristotle's Friendship Love is Too Disinterested

In this and the subsequent sections, we delve into some problems that arise from two of the neo-Aristotelian marks of friendship we have outlined, viz. the characterization of friendship love and the moralistic demand for character improvement. We begin by voicing our skepticism about the idea of a disinterested form of friendship love – a kind of love whose central aim is to benefit the beloved.

In loving a friend, Aristotle argues, "we say we ought to wish what is good for his sake", rather than for what it can bring to oneself (Aristotle *NE* 1155b31; 1156b9-10). Hence, loving someone may require you to sacrifice your own interests for the sake of the beloved. Corinne Gartner (2017) mentions Aristotle's example of a mother who gives away her child, because doing so is in the child's best interest. By doing so, she is sacrificing her own deep interest in being part of the child's life. But she acts as she does because she is moved by her love of her child, not her own interests.

This conception of love as selfless and disinterested runs thick in the veins of contemporary philosophy (LaFollette 1996; Frankfurt 1999, 2004; White 2001). Also known as the "robust concern view" (Helm 2010, 2017b),[4] the contemporary version of Aristotle's view holds that loving someone requires being sufficiently motivated to promote the other's interests for her own sake (Lafollette 1996; Frankfurt 1999, 2004; Badhwar 2003; Abramson & Leite 2011, 2018; Rorty 2016). As Harry Frankfurt puts it:

> What is essential to the lover's concern for his beloved is not only that it must be free of any self-regarding motive but that it must have no ulterior aim whatsoever. To characterize love as merely selfless, then, is not enough. Although the term "disinterested" is — from the point of view of rhetoric — a bit misleading in its tone and associations, it has the virtue of conveying the irrelevance to love not just of considerations that are self-regarding but of all considerations that are distinct from the interests of the beloved. (Frankfurt, 1999, 167-168)

By construing the goal of love as the promotion of the beloved's interests for her sake, the robust concern view forestalls the objection that the beloved plays a merely instrumental role in the lover's pursuit of their own interest. But the robust concern view is still open to the complaint

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[4] We have adopted this handy term which Helm seems to have coined to refer to views of a number of authors, none of which actually use it. Thanks to Alan Soble for pointing this out.

that it is excessively goal-oriented, and thus distorts the nature of love's concern. David Velleman has been especially forceful in pressing this objection. He has suggested that "love is essentially an attitude toward the beloved himself but not toward any result at all" (Velleman 1999, 354). Indeed, he quips that a lover excessively preoccupied with promoting his beloved's interests "would be an interfering, ingratiating nightmare" (353).

Without going quite so far, we agree that a lover's adoption of the beloved's goals and interests must be limited, lest it gives rise to an "altruists' dilemma": if each friend wants only to benefit the other, they are as likely to hit an impasse as if they are both perfectly selfish (de Sousa 2015, 42). Concern for the friend's intrinsic good is only a consequence of love rather than its defining feature. We can at least agree with Velleman that it is no betrayal of love if, "[a]t the thought of a close friend, my heart doesn't fill with an urge to do something for him, though it may indeed fill with love" (Velleman 1999, 353). The first limitation of the "robust concern" view, then, is that it exaggerates the importance of a friend's adoption of their friend's interests and goals.

There is a further objection to the robust concern view that cuts deeper. Unlike parental love of a child (Ferracioli 2014), friendship love tends to elicit desires for reciprocity and emotional intimacy (Wallace 2012; Wonderly 2017; McKeever 2019; Pismenny 2021). In this respect, it is similar to romantic love. As Natasha McKeever observes, "the romantic lover is not usually content to love her beloved from afar; she wants to be loved back and she wants to be near her beloved" (McKeever 2019, 213). This is no less true of friendship love, and it is part of what it means to say that friends have a shared life. While we do not tend to treat our friends as *mere* means to the satisfaction of our own ends, our true friends normally play a role in fulfilling our desire for love. That benefits us, and so in some obvious sense friendship love plays an instrumental role, even though the value of the friend exceeds her instrumental value. In fact, one reason we strive for the kinds of friendships that nurture friendship love is that they help advance our overall flourishing. If so, then friendship love is not, after all, selfless and disinterested in the sense envisioned by some advocates of the robust concern view. That view's insistence that love be disinterested and selfless is an unwarranted constraint on true friendship.

In short, loving a friend for their own sake is a necessary condition for enjoying the goods of the friendship. But this is true whether or not the friends also have instrumental value. There is no need to renounce friendship's instrumental role. In the next section, we explore some

of the reasons to reject the neo-Aristotelian teleological and moralistic approach to true friendship.

3. The Notion of Character Friendship is Too Moralistic

A second issue with neo-Aristotelian accounts of true friendship is that they take on board the idea that the goal of friendship is to facilitate the development of virtues and personal growth (Sherman 1987; Badhwar & Jones 2017). As noted earlier, this goal is supposed to be filled by friends' mutual endeavor to be each other's role models and critics. The initial attraction and appreciation of each other's virtues is supposed to lie at the core of this joint project. For although Aristotle's character friends are not perfectly virtuous, the foundation of their friendship and the focus on each friend's positive character traits uniquely situate them to help each other become more virtuous individuals.

This functional view envisages three benefits of Aristotle's character friendships: first, they enrich an individual's life by providing the possibility for deep and meaningful connections (Annis 1987); second, they promote the development of a virtuous character, which is regarded as an integral part of a good life; and third, valuing and pursuing friendship for its own sake manifests the kinds of values that a virtuous person would have (Cooper 1977).

But why should we regard promoting virtuous character development as a necessary feature of true friendship? Aristotle's own answer follows from his teleological conception of friendship as a constituent of a good life, construed as a pursuit of perfect virtue. However, there are good reasons to resist his view. As we will see, true friendship does not require friends to be each other's moral critics or models. No doubt, friends influence one another in a number of ways including moral ones. Yet, as will be clear, this influence can be for the worse as well as for the better. True friendship, we argue, is not necessarily negated by such corruption. Furthermore, although true friends admire one another in some respects, they do not necessarily do so for the reasons that Aristotle had in mind, viz. the truly virtuous character traits. Instead, friends might admire, or even idealize, one another due to the partiality of their relationship.

One problem with the teleological approach is that it paints an overly moralistic picture of true friendship, lacking any grounding in reality. For starters, it is clearly unrealistic to expect that true friendships must begin with mutual admiration of each other's virtuous character. Even if mutual esteem for character were always to characterize true friendships, they could surely arise in less high-minded ways. Friendships often develop between colleagues, or as a gradual

elaboration of what begins in what Aristotle calls (somewhat pejoratively) "friendships of pleasure" or "friendships of interest" (Aristotle *NE* 1209b30). But even the deepest of ordinary friendships rarely aim at mutual character improvement, despite making significant contributions to the value of each friend's life.

This point may seem too obvious to mention. But it in fact goes against the grain of much of the philosophical literature on love and friendship, which rarely aim at defining what they are, but rather concentrate on what they ought to be (e.g., Velleman 1999; Kolodny 2003). We deem it more useful to look at the reality of actual true friendships and explore the negative as well as the positive that derive from their nature. But our concern here is not primarily methodological; so we shall not dwell on the moralism of philosophers' attempts to define "friendship". Rather we now want to focus on the moralistic attitude such accounts prescribe for the friends themselves.

One obvious observation that springs to mind is that the attempt one friend makes to improve the other friend's moral character might be resented. This point was noted by Immanuel Kant, according to a discussion of his views on friendship by H.J. Paton. While Kant generally endorses the mutual improvement view of friendship's function, Paton writes, he is also aware of its perils:

> Morally speaking it is the duty of a friend to call attention to the other's faults; for this is in his best interests and so is a duty of love. Unfortunately the friend thus favoured may take a different view. He may think he is being treated with a lack of respect; that this scrutiny and criticism may mean he has already lost the esteem of his friend or is about to lose it; or even that to be thus scrutinized and admonished is an insult in itself. Kant leaves the problem at that. (Paton 1993 141).

Individuals may differ in how touchy they are when receiving criticism from a friend. The available space where a balance between support and criticism can be sustained will differ from case to case. Moreover, the very capacity to accept and benefit from the friend's criticism may itself be one of the character traits that will help cement a true friendship. Nevertheless, this is a fine line that is easily crossed: When a friend claims to identify some moral defect or impropriety of their friend's behavior, the targeted friend may be equally likely, whether on the basis self-deception or on the contrary of equally sound insight, to blame the critical friend's standards as

inappropriate. This could often be plausibly adduced on the basis of the fact that – even on a neo-Aristotelian model of friendship – even the most worthy friends are not perfectly virtuous. A priori, between any two inevitably imperfect friends, either might be in the wrong, and a resulting disagreement could undermine the quality of the very friendship itself.

Once we admit that even the nicest friends are flawed, a graver problem looms for the neo-Aristotelian position. This stems from the fact that if each emulates the other, friends are as likely to lead each other astray as to straighten each other out. Or at the very least, only slightly less likely. For we can admit that in some cases, improvement is more likely than corruption. These would be cases where both friends are of fundamentally good character (which the neo-Aristotelian view we have been surveying seems to assume is in any case a precondition of friendship), *and* where, in addition, both agree comprehensively on both core values and current priorities. Under those conditions, mutual influence may be called upon only to minimize each other's episodes of weakness of will or *akrasia* – cases where we succumb to desires against our better judgment. When in the grip of weakness of will, we often prioritize purely selfish pleasure over promoting other people's interests; and friends who share, or at least know and respect, one another's core values, are in a good position to help one another overcome *akrasia*. But cases that satisfy these conditions are unlikely to be the most common.

If we do not assume that friends influence one another only in the direction of moral improvement, we can see how both of the mechanisms that were supposed to be enlisted for such moral growth – emulation and criticism – could work against it. Consider an example from a recent television serial. In an episode of *Ginny and Georgia,* a young girl, eager for acceptance at the school she has just enrolled in is taken shopping by members of the clique she hopes to join. She sees her new friends discreetly pocketing various items, and one of them gestures to her to do the same. When she alone is caught, she explains her action by saying: "I wanted them to like me". In this vignette, both emulation and (all but explicit) potential criticism ("Surely you don't want to be a chicken!") are mechanisms of influence that result in the corruption of a friend.

It may be objected that in this story the girls involved are not yet friends. Ginny wants to be regarded as a friend, so her compliance is instrumental. But as a friendship solidifies, the increasing bond of commitment will increase rather than diminish the strength of the friends' influence on one another. We have agreed that the good of friendship lies, in part, in its capacity to motivate a relatively selfless concern for the other's goals and needs, even while we have

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rejected the unrealistically moralistic idea that such motivation must inevitably be in a morally commendable direction. But given that amendment, this obviously provides for the possibility that your concern for your friend may move you to do things you would otherwise deem to be wrong. To the extent that friendship fosters a certain selflessness, it affords opportunities for motivating immoral behavior.

To further illustrate this, consider the case from the 1990 film *Death in Brunswick* discussed extensively by Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett (2000). In that movie, Dave helps Carl, who accidentally killed Mustapha, hide the body. "As the joke has it, a friend will help you move house, a good friend will help you move a body" (Cocking and Kennett 2000, 278).

As Cocking and Kennett recognize, this might simply be viewed as a moral dilemma resulting from the plurality of values. Standard, public morality demands that Dave encourage Carl to turn himself in; but friendship's demand is also a moral one: "Dave's helping action may have realized one kind of moral good but failed to realize some other values that might also justifiably have guided his choice" (282). They argue, however, that "a large part of the moral good of friendship need not be expressive of any particular *moral* interest at all" (284).[5]

They stress, in particular, that among the goods of friendship is the special way that friends *direct* and *interpret* one another.[6] In doing so they do not merely influence the friend's behavior but have a part in the constitution of their identity. That is, at least in part, what it means for a friendship to be a true friendship. As a friend, I will be more inclined to follow your advice, based as it is likely to be on your knowledge of my preferences. On the same basis, I will be more likely to take your interpretations of my behavior seriously. Both of these functions, however, are only contingently related to morality. When they conflict with morality, the fact that my decision may have been determined by my friend's guidance and interpretation does not carry any moral weight of its own. "Indeed, a good friendship might well include a focus on certain vices … I am just as likely to be directed by your interest in gambling at the casino as by your interest in ballet" (286).

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[5] Cocking and Kennett (2000) thus deny that all special relationship duties and values are *moral* duties and values as opposed to, say, *sui generis* duties grounded in the relationship itself (cf., Wallace 2012; Pismenny 2021; Brogaard 2021).

[6] See also Brunning (this volume) on what he calls "fashioning".

The central point illustrated by the Carl and Dave story is that some of the features of true friendship that define both what is essential and what is good about it are the very features that threaten morality – in both its broad and narrow senses.

4. A Minimal Account of True Friendship

We thus reject the neo-Aristotelian conception of true friendship as a kind of character friendship. As we have seen, this construal of true friendship is too moralistic and involves a notion of robust concern that is unsustainable.

In this section, we propose an alternative minimal account of true friendship as a friendship that satisfies four constraints, or virtues of friendship, which we will call closeness, emotional intimacy, trust, and friendship identity. Let's consider each in turn, starting with closeness.

Closeness. True friendships do seem to involve something like a mutual desire to promote the other's interests. To distinguish this pro-attitude from a robust concern in Frankfurt's disinterested sense, let's call it "closeness" (Brogaard 2020, ch. 2, 2021).

Assuming that we can make sense of an objective notion of interest, we therefore need to understand a friend's concern as pertaining to a person's objective interests and overall prosperity, rather than reflecting their experienced desires. This is not merely because promoting your overall well-being sometimes requires you to endure or perform something unpleasant. It is also because we commonly lack insight into what our own interests are, let alone those of our friends: although objective interests will be closely associated with our well-being, they cannot be assumed to coincide with what we experience subjectively as such.

Since we are operating with an objective notion of interest, we may not know what our own interests are, let alone our friends'. We should therefore understand closeness as requiring one to try and ascertain what one's friends' objective interests are in order to promote whatever these turn out to be. Of course, in the context of true friendship, closeness is reciprocal, so for Tyrone and Cosmo to have a close friendship, they must possess mutual desires to ascertain and promote each other's interests. This provides a preliminary characterization of (one crucial element of) a notion of "closeness" that is compatible with our general ignorance of our friends' interests and even (to some extent) our own.

Despite our reservations about the centrality of "robust concern" in Frankfurt's disinterested sense, we have not followed Velleman in denying that true friends need to care

about one another's interests. It is important to acknowledge, however, that caring about each other's interests cannot simply be a matter of being guided by either friend's desires. First, as just noted, the beneficiary may be mistaken about their own interests. Second, very weak desires to promote each other's interests are too easily overridden by stronger desires to do something else. As very weak desires too rarely result in any actual attempts to promote the other's interests, they do not suffice for closeness. Third, we sometimes have desires owing to coercion. For example, you and your enemy could harbor a mutual desire to promote each other's interests as a result of coercion by a third party who is holding a gun to your head. As you do not want to die, you both have a strong desire to promote each other's interests. In the envisaged case, your desires to promote each other's interests are wholly induced by your desires to stay alive. Absent this coercive element, you may well desire to thwart each other's interests. So, your desires clearly don't suffice for closeness.

Our proposal is that the convergence of two people's desires can count as manifesting friendship only if the desires spring from values that determine each person's identity (Brogaard 2021). To account for these kinds of values, we will adopt a valuational account of a person's (real) self, or identity (Doris 2015). Valuational (or attributional) accounts of agency (as opposed to identity) hold that an action manifests your agency just in case you value that action (Watson 1996).[7] Agency, however, should be kept apart from identity. If you choose sweet potato fries over potato wedges, because you value sweet potato fries more than potato wedges, then your choice expresses your agency. But sweet potato fries presumably are not something you really identify with.

To eliminate trivial values that are unimportant to our identity, we propose to exploit the notion of a core value (for the notion of a core value, see Brogaard 2020, ch. 2). Our core values are those values that matter to who we are. Our core values are partly constitutive of our selves. You assert your self when you perform an action that is an expression of your core values.

John Doris (2015) proposes *irreplaceability* as a criterion for picking out the kinds of values that matter to our selves as opposed to those that matter to our agency but not our selves:

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[7] A distinction should here be drawn between causal agency and valuational agency. An agent S exercises causal agency with respect to E just in case S forms a belief/desire pair, or an intention, that is the non-deviant cause of E. Here, "agency" refers to valuational agency.

"if the object of desiring can be replaced without loss – if life can go on pretty much as it did—then that object is not an object of value" (Doris 2015, 38). Although Doris does not deploy the notion of a core value, the non-fungibility requirement seems well adapted to set such values apart from anything that is merely hard to resist or a convenient way of satisfying some general need. Accordingly, we propose that the desires constitutive of closeness are grounded in matching core values.

Our rendition of closeness allows for the occasional bout of weakness of will (*akrasia*). Weakness of will are cases where we succumb to desires against our better judgment. When in the grip of weakness of will, we often prioritize purely selfish pleasure over promoting other people's interests. The occasional bout of weakness of will does not compromise closeness, because a friendship can be close without being perfectly close. Unlike pregnancies and electoral wins, closeness is not an on-or-off matter. It comes in degrees. This is witnessed by expressions such as "You are closer with Cosmo than Tyrone", "They are my closest friend", "Our friendship is closer now than it ever was". "Close" is thus a gradable adjective, as are "kind", "pretty", "generous", and "trustworthy".

But what exactly does it mean for one friendship to be closer than another? To say that you are closer with Cosmo than Tyrone is not to say that you desire to promote a higher quantity of Cosmo's interests than Tyrone's interests, because even though you are closer with Cosmo than with Tyrone, your closeness with Tyrone entails that you want to promote his interests. Nor does it mean that you desire to promote Cosmo's interests with more fervor than Tyrone's interests, because the felt intensity of desires can vary for reasons that have no bearing on closeness, and standing desires (as opposed to occurrent desires, which may sometimes be mere whims) do not have any felt intensity at all. Rather, to say that you are closer with Cosmo than with Tyrone is to say that your desire to promote Cosmo's interests ranks higher in your hierarchy of desires than your desire to promote Tyrone's interests.

Emotional Intimacy. Another constraint on true friendship is emotional intimacy. It is widely agreed among relationship researchers that emotional intimacy requires sharing sensitive (or "private") information – information of the kind that can make us vulnerable to betrayal, denigration, belligerence, or exploitation by the person we confide in or by people they entrust with the information (Nussbaum 1986: 165-199; Thomas 1987, 1989, 1990/1993, 2013; Flynn

2007; Helm 2017a; Velleman 1999; Brogaard 2020, ch. 2).[8] But it is hard to nail down precisely what counts as the sharing of sensitive information—the kind of information that can make you vulnerable. It is clearly not just about revealing information about your past that you are ashamed of. Nor is it even just verbally conveyed information. It could also be what you look like naked, what you smell like the morning after you went on a crazy booze-filled bender, or what you sound like when singing "I'm a barbie girl in a barbie world" in the shower.

To be sure, there are limits to what sorts of information we are willing to share with friends. Empirical data have shown that we sometimes avoid sharing information with friends because we think our friends would consider it "taboo" or start seeing us in a different light (Afifi and Guerrero 1998). We sometimes avoid disclosing private information to close friends because we have a strong need for psychological privacy and autonomy. We also sometimes fear that information disclosed to friends might reach a broader audience. Even when the risk is minuscule, it may not always be one we are willing to take. Nonetheless, Laurence Thomas is surely correct when he observes that a complete unwillingness to share private information is incompatible with true friendship: "The bond of trust between deep friends is cemented by the equal self-disclosure of intimate information" (Thomas 1987, 223).

"Intimate", like "close", is a gradable adjective, which means that some true friendships are more intimate than others, and that one and the same friendship can fluctuate in intimacy. But friendships need not be perfectly intimate to count as intimate as long as they surpass a contextually determined threshold. Gradable concepts of this kind often do not admit of a concrete, specifiable maximum.

Trust. Sharing deeply personal information with each other is the primary means by which true friends convey that they trust each other. But trust of a friend also involves being open to that friend's direction and interpretation. Trust involves both epistemic and emotional aspects: we trust our friends to tell us the truth, and we trust them to do well by us.

There is a sense in which all trust is restricted. This is because trust has a dual focus: one is the trustee's goodwill and truthfulness toward the truster. The other is the trustee's competence as engaged in the specific pursuit (Brogaard, 2020: ch. 2). You may fail to trust a friend on

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[8] Velleman (1999) argues for the key role of emotional intimacy in love rather than friendship per se.

certain occasions, owing to their lack of competence as engaged in a specific pursuit. For example, you may trust your plumber friend in matters regarding plumbing but not in matters regarding babysitting. But this needn't be because you think your plumber friend doesn't have your and your child's best interests in mind; you may simply distrust your plumber friend as a babysitter because you don't regard her as a competent babysitter.

Like closeness and intimacy, trust is a matter of degree. Trust thus accommodates betrayals of the trustee that are both infrequent and minute. In other words, your trust in a friend's goodwill toward you needn't be unconditional; it only needs to surpass a certain contextually determined threshold.

Friendship Identity: When friends share ideas, feelings, and thoughts, including private information, they shape each other's self, or identity. True friendship thus leads to a partially shared, or joint, identity – a special friendship identity (Schoeman 1985; Helm 2008, 2010). That special identity entails changes in each friend, insofar as each of their lives is affected by the friend's specific moral character as well as by the nature of the friends' interaction. But it also results in the constitution of an identity for the friendship itself. One of your friendships might be different from all your other friendships in that you and A are each other's favorite skiing companions; with B, what is special is that you play music together.

True friendships promote collaborative constructions of an identity in each of the friends individually and the friendship that unites them. These are especially due to the ways in which friends are expected to guide and interpret one another; in effect, we might call these secularized diversions of the expectation of emulation and criticism, shorn of their moralistic dimension.

However, friendship that results in one friend becoming a mirror of the other is not a true friendship, because it fails to respect each friend's separate identity and autonomous agency. The convergence of two friend's identities to form a unique friendship identity must respect the core values that determine each person's independent identity.

5. Vices of Friendship

Closeness, emotional intimacy, trust, and friendship identity are paramount to true friendships. They nonetheless each have a dark side. Or so we will argue. What follows does not attempt to pin the faults we find too finely on each of these specific aspects of friendship, though we focus primarily on the perils of trust and closeness.

One of the problems most often noted about trust is that it is exceedingly difficult to determine exactly when it is warranted, and that to trust is to be vulnerable. "Trust is important, but it is also dangerous" (McLeod 2020). The greater your trust, the greater is the harm you are likely to suffer if the trust is betrayed. Trust is an essential precondition of friends' ability for sharing intimate information; and as we noted above the hesitation one might feel before trusting a friend with such information reflects the risks involved. But the riskiness of trust and the difficulty of justifying it are not problems that specifically pertain to friendship. What lurks in the very benefit that trust brings to friends is the potential for undermining autonomy.

One version of this problem was already embodied in the story of Carl and Dave: one way in which Dave might be motivated to deceive himself into thinking that there could be nothing wrong with Carl's request is for him to rely on his previous assumption that Carl is a man of good judgment and sound principles, someone who could not be asking him to do something seriously immoral. A more trivial story is told of one spouse upgrading another when crossing the street: "You never look before crossing the street! What happens when I'm not there to look out for you?" And the answer comes: "When you're not there, I look". Fair enough when it is about crossing the street. But one can well imagine cases where the trust accorded to a friend amounts to a sort of permanent delegation of authority over a more complex domain of deliberation resulting in a certain dereliction of responsible agency. One notorious example that might be cited is a relationship between Bertrand Russell and Ralph Schoenman. In that relationship one seems to see that the trust Russell had in Schoenman gradually led to a certain uncertainty in Russell's own mind about where his own positions lay; although in that case the discrepancy in their ages clearly contributed to the widening rift that Russell appears to have taken far too long to notice.

Conflicts may also arise between closeness and the autonomy constraint on friendship identity. Recall that the convergence of two people's values can count as manifesting a friendship identity only if those values are tied to the core values that determine each person's identity. This is so even when those core values are stripped of the requirement that they count only if they are morally sound. Yet closeness requires being motivated to act in the friend's best interest. So, a true friendship can commit a friend to be motivated to act in ways that run counter to their own core values. It might well be (though we will not undertake to defend this point here) that it is in Carl's best interest that Dave helps him get rid of the body. In that case, the

closeness of their friendship obligates Dave to help Carl get rid of Mustapha's body, even if Dave thinks doing so is morally unjustified, because of the harm inflicted on Mustapha's wife and son. Closeness can thus compel us to jettison our true selves, which runs counter to the demands of the identity constraint.

Further issues arise with regard to the core values that ground the closeness constraint. Owing to self-ignorance, we are not always aware of our own core values. But if we do not know whether it is a core value of ours to promote another person's interests, then we lack knowledge of whether our true friendship with them demands that we act on our desire to promote their interests. Doris argues that collaborative deliberation may help us better identify our values (Doris 2015). But collaborative deliberation involves moral dangers of its own. Suppose Dave and Carl embark on collaborative deliberation about whether Dave's desire to help Carl move the body is grounded in Dave's core values. Given how much hinges on Dave helping Carl, they may well reason that because Carl is Dave's close friend, Dave's desire to help Carl must be anchored in Dave's core values. Reflecting on *Death in Brunswick*, Daniel Koltonski (2016) goes as far as to argue that if, after collaboratively deliberating on what to do, Dave and Carl reach an impasse, respect for Carl's autonomous agency requires Dave to defer to Carl's judgment. Rather than unearthing our most important values, collaborative deliberation can thus result in our valuing, and identifying with, actions we originally rejected as immoral.

Additionally, the very assumption that there are such things as core values could be problematic because given the criterion of non-fungibility, it might inhibit a significant, positive change that people might otherwise be capable of making in their own lives. One indication of this might be the finding that people who lose the love of their life are surprisingly resilient; widows (but not so much widowers, for reasons that are interesting but beyond the scope of this paper) often recover from their initial grief to the point that they report feeling that they are getting a new lease on life (Moller 2007). A widow may have a desire to find a new life partner. But she may suppress this desire because she believes – however irrationally – that doing so would show that her deceased life partner was replaceable by a new life partner and hence that her closeness to her late partner was not a core value after all. So, the widow's belief that her core values concern her deceased partner and not a potential new love could end up inhibiting her overall flourishing. On the broad Aristotelian notion of morality, suppressing her desire to find a new life partner and find happiness again would not be a moral or virtuous thing to do.

There are other moral dangers as well. When two people are close, they can attain an understanding of their identity only in the context of a kind of collaborative mutual discovery. But this presents a further danger, as there is no guarantee that this discovery will not be something more like a *folie à deux*, "enabling", or codependency. Many ordinary romantic relationships and friendships are plagued by codependency. But as an extreme example, consider Charles Manson and his California quasi-commune, formed in 1967. Regardless of the precise details of the real case, we can grant, for argument's sake, that Manson's friendships and love relationships with his followers were characterized by mutual closeness, emotional intimacy, trust, and friendship identity; yet Manson's mesmerizing, almost hypnotic, personality and the codependency of the friendships he maintained with the people in his quasi-commune undermined, rather than clarified, each friend's attempt to elaborate and understand their own identity.

More generally, the closeness, intimacy, trust, and identity constraints on true friendship must necessarily contrast with the distance that separates the cluster of true friends from those that are outside it. And that may lead to the cluster becoming a clique and undermining each true friend's capacity to evaluate the qualities and opinions of those who are less close – but might be no less wise. Thus, the very benefit of true friendship that consists in closeness, intimacy, trust, and identity may insulate us from certain experiences that might enlarge our core values and enrich our experience of life. Therein lie the vices of true friendship.

6. Conclusion

We have explored in this paper some important ways in which the neo-Aristotelian conception of "friendships of character" might be misrepresenting the essential nature of true friendship. We first expounded some reasons to qualify the widely held requirement that friendship entail love of the friend "for their own sake". We then showed that the effort to represent friendship as an inherently moral good, while uncontroversial in itself, has led many thinkers wrongly to suppose that "true" friendship must inevitably strive for moral improvement, through both mutual emulation and mutual admonition. We have argued that on the contrary, there are some inherent potential conflicts between the requirements of morality as generally understood and the duties and expectations of friendship. These conflicts, we suggested, – following Cocking and Kennett (2000) – cannot be mitigated by pretending that we can harmonize the demands of friendship with morality overall. In addition, we have suggested that in some other, more subtle ways, the

very good of friendship relies on certain characteristics which have their own dark side. The trust, closeness, identity, and emotional intimacy that are constitutive of true friendship sometimes tend to undermine not only morality in general, but even the very benefits for which true friendship itself is rightly prized.

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