

Friendship Paper

According to Aristotle, having meaningful friendships is necessary for living a happy and virtuous life. These close relationships with others help individuals achieve eudaimonia.

Eudaimonia, which is best translated as human flourishing, is the key to a good life in Aristotle's mind. It means operating under a state of continuous improvement upon oneself in order to become the best version possible. He believed that people who could actively accomplish this were living in a way conducive to doing good things. He argues that friends are essential to this process because they are an important and necessary good. It is generally agreed that good is identified as having three characteristics: it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of another good, and all other goods are desirable for its sake (Book I). In other words, it is what everyone seeks to acquire.

To understand his position, it is important to understand virtue ethics and what it means to be a virtuous person. The virtuous person is someone who does not follow specific ethical rules but is someone who has characteristics that allow them to make the right decisions at the right time. Possession of this skill is necessary to do worthwhile activities well; what Aristotle considers a virtuous life. Friendship is tied into this because humans are innately social beings. We organize our social lives in a way that allows us to flourish together. To partake in worthwhile activities, we must be engaged in our surrounding communities.

People love and actively seek the good. Aristotle stated rather eloquently: "Not everything is loved, but [only] the lovable, and this is either good or pleasant or useful" (Book VIII). He means that objects or relationships that are useful generally yield something pleasant or

good, but what is pleasant or good is lovable for that reason. I would interject that these things can overlap, and objects or relationships can yield more than one of these benefits at one time. He describes three main types of friendships: those of utility, those of pleasure and complete friendship; with the latter being the most idealistic. He states that complete friendship is presented when good people wish goods upon each other. This type of friendship is strongest and perseveres so long as virtue does.

In these relationships, the individuals prove themselves advantageous to each other without necessarily providing a specific function or pleasantry (Book VIII). Aristotle asserts that these relationships are beneficial to participating members because they enrich themselves through each other. He goes on to explain that “when a good person becomes a friend, he becomes a good for his friend.” (Book VIII) This is true in complete friendship, because individuals demonstrate reciprocated goodwill from which nothing is explicitly gained. Those who are truly happy and want for nothing desire to be with friends because they enjoy doing activities with people who share a common interest (Book VII).

Part of living the good life concerns putting the larger community above oneself. To accomplish this, we involve ourselves in a variety of different social roles and engage in activities with others. Aristotle said, “What we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife, and in general, for friends and fellow citizens, since a human being is a naturally political [animal]” (Book I). Friends are needed to live a good life because without working to contribute to improvement on the state of a larger whole, one is not pursuing eudaimonia. Friends must share similar worldviews and interests that allow them to encourage participation in activities.

Aristotle believed that as friends moved closer together they become more and more alike as they catapult toward eudaimonia. He went so far as to say that they become reflections of each other. Developing this relationship with another person allows them to grow together and constantly expand and adjust their attitudes and behaviors to live in excellence.

Some might disagree with Aristotle and say that you do not need close friends to have a good life. He mentions, “It is said that blessedly happy and self-sufficient people have no need of friends. For they already have [all] the goods, and hence, being self-sufficient, need nothing added” (VIII). However, Aristotle counters that “having friends seems to be the greatest external good” (Book XI). It is true that friendship is the greatest external good, because close companionship provides a support system on which to lean when facing hardships and a structure to support when excelling on one’s path. The excellent person needs friends to benefit them and vice versa. He also says that proximity and time are essential pillars for forming and maintaining friendships. People who possess long distance relationships might disagree, but for friends to serve their purpose in helping one reach eudaimonia, they must be available to engage in shared activities.

In order to attain the good life, or a successful and fulfilling life doing worthwhile things well, friendships must be a part of the equation. These intimate bonds allow for one to love oneself, do activities to uplift one’s surrounding community and spark continuous upward mobility in the effort to achieve eudaimonia. I am in agreement with Aristotle’s views, because the sense of belonging we gain from these deep connections with other people improve self esteem and motivate us to become better people. Eudaimonia is not possible without the help of like minded people focused on achieving similar goals. To be a virtuous person, you must

surround yourself with virtuous people and emulate their behavior. Then you can hope to live and excellent life.

Works Cited

Aristote, and Harris Rackham. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. W. Heinemann, 1962.