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WHY BAD PEOPLE CAN'T BE GOOD FRIENDS

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Abstract
Must the best friends necessarily be good people? On the one hand, as Aristotle puts it, 'people think that the same people are good and also friends'. But on the other hand, friendship sometimes seems to require that one behave badly. For example, a normally honest person might lie to corroborate a friend's story. What I will call closeness, which I take to include sensitivity to friends' subjective values and concerns as well as an inclination to take their subjective interests as reasons for action, is characteristic of friendship. But this seems to require that good friends should be morally flexible, more so than is compatible with a virtuous character. This would imply tension between ideals of friendship and ideals of character. But there is an important connection between virtue and friendship which arises precisely from friends' closeness, when concern for wellbeing, another important feature of friendship, is also taken into account. This helps mitigate the tension and shows how friendship and virtue are interconnected. The connection in turn provides friendship-based reason to think the best friends must be good people, even though concerns of friendship may occasionally clash with other moral concerns.

Introduction

Must the best friends necessarily be good people? On the one hand, as Aristotle puts it, 'people think that the same people are good and also friends'.[1] But on the other hand, friendship sometimes seems to require that one behave badly. For example, a normally honest person might lie to corroborate a friend's story. What I will call closeness, which I take to include sensitivity to friends' subjective values and concerns as well as an inclination to take their subjective interests as reasons for action, is characteristic of friendship. But this seems to require that good friends should be morally flexible, more so than is compatible with a

[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Terence Irwin, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1155a, p. 119.

virtuous character. This would imply tension between ideals of friendship and ideals of character. But there is an important connection between virtue and friendship which arises precisely from friends' closeness, when concern for wellbeing, another important feature of friendship, is also taken into account. This helps mitigate the tension and shows how friendship and virtue are interconnected. The connection in turn provides friendship-based reason to think the best friends must be good people, even though concerns of friendship may occasionally clash with other moral concerns.

Although the importance of character to friendship is sometimes defended by arguing that virtuous people tend to treat each other better, and/or that vicious people are likely to mistreat each other in ways incompatible with friendship (for example, to cheat, steal from, and lie to each other), on its own this seems insufficient for a robust defense of the role of virtue in friendship. Friends may need to treat each other well, but this is seems to be compatible with their being otherwise dishonest, cruel, thoughtless, and so forth, to other people. In such cases, then, virtue seems like merely one possible route to a good friendship, and not itself necessary for the friendship to be good. In what follows, I will focus on another line of argument, one which does not rely on empirical questions about whether people who are generally bad to others are capable of making exceptions when it comes to their friends.

Some accounts of friendship, especially those that portray friendship as opposed or at least unconnected to morality,[2] assume that friendship is about closeness, openness to each other's perspectives, and friends' coordination of values and activities. On these accounts, friendship is a distinct but non-moral good, whose norms can conflict with those of morality. But this is to sell friendship short. Closeness is partly constitutive of friendship, but only partly, and while closeness on its own may pose a threat to a person's moral motivations, other features of friendship, including concern for friends' wellbeing and desire to promote their good, are also partly constitutive of friendship.

[2] See Dean Cocking and Jeannette Kennett, 'Friendship and Moral Danger', *Journal of Philosophy* 97 (2000), pp. 278–296; Alexander Nehamas, 'The Good of Friendship', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110 (2010), pp. 267–294; Richard White, 'Friendship and Commitment', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 33 (1999), pp. 79–88, the modern version of friendship sketched by David O'Connor in 'Two Ideals of Friendship', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990) pp. 109–122.

These other features on their own, however, are not sufficient for good friendship without closeness, because in the absence of closeness, paternalism in excess of the ideal of friendship would be licensed. Both closeness and concern for wellbeing, then, are necessary for the best friendships, and closeness and concern for wellbeing together generate a connection between the character of friends and the quality of their friendship. Friends may be very close without expressing proper concern for wellbeing, or show concern for wellbeing without being very close, but neither arrangement represents an ideal of friendship. Those who take friendship to be independent of considerations about moral character thus sell friendship short as a good, by portraying it as being primarily about closeness, and miss an important connection between ideals of friendship and ideals of character. Even if one does not take friendship to be a moral good properly speaking (in the way that one might take fairness, for example, to be a moral good), one should still believe that friendship is closely intertwined with virtuous character, that good friendship requires good (though maybe not perfect) character.

Friendship, I argue, is like an organism: its parts (the friends) must be closely aligned, inter-responsive, and coordinated with respect to some important interests and values. But this closeness, though necessary for friendship, is not sufficient for its wellbeing, which is partly dependent upon the wellbeing of its parts. An unwell part (or vicious friend) necessarily means an unwell organism. Being friends with a vicious person results in an unhealthy friendship, one in which the closeness of friends negatively affects the friends' wellbeing and thus fails to fulfill the ideals of friendship in at least one important way.

Virtue and Good Friendship as Necessarily Connected

To begin, I review Aristotle's account of friendship, which entails a connection between virtuous character and friendship (and which most later accounts of friendship draw on for inspiration or opposition). Aristotle argues that there are three kinds of friendship: friendships based on mutual usefulness (which he calls friendships of utility), friendships based on pleasure taken in each other's company (friendships of pleasure) and friendships in which friends value each other as good in themselves, which he calls friendships of virtue. These last, he says, 'are likely to be rare,

since such [virtuous] people are few'.[3] If virtuous people are relatively rare, then combinations of virtuous people are limited by the number of potential virtuous friends, and will, correspondingly, also be rare. Nonetheless, despite their scarcity, friendships of virtue are the best and fullest form of friendship.[4]

Perfect friendships then require fully virtuous participants, who seem vanishingly rare in real life. But John Cooper argues that a more moderate version of the idea is available: virtue friendships are characterized by the goodness of the friendship's being predicated on the (moral) goodness of its participants. Middling good people have middling good friendships, mediocre people have mediocre friendships, and very good people have very good friendships. In the limit case, morally perfect people will have perfect friendships.[5] So the theory may be read as a description of an ideal of friendship, which people can more or less closely approximate depending on the state of their own and their friends' characters. One need not read this as implying a strict correlation between the goodness of friends' characters and the goodness of their friendship. Some virtues and vices may have a more direct bearing or a more significant impact on a friendship than others. But the Aristotelian can and should say that thoroughly bad people cannot be good friends, while people with better characters will tend to have better friendships, all things being equal.

It is a basic assumption of most eudaimonist theories of ethics, including Aristotle's, that character matters to one's wellbeing: virtue is important for the best life, and vicious people do not live the best lives. If one cannot show that an apparent virtue is related to the good life of the individual who possesses it, this is generally taken to cast doubt on its status as a virtue. Philippa Foot, for example, famously said that 'if justice is not a good to the just man, moralists who recommend it as a virtue are perpetrating a fraud.'[6] This premise then yields at least one plausible connection between good friendship and virtue. Good, virtuous people have the best shot at living well, being equipped to value and promote their own and other people's good, and better people are better

[3] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b, p. 123.

[4] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b, 1157a; p. 123.

[5] John Cooper, 'Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship', *The Review of Metaphysics* 30 (1977), pp. 619–648.

[6] Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 126.

at this, all other things being equal. Friendship involves concern for friends' wellbeing, and so it is, then, no accident that good friends are called *virtue* friends in Aristotle's theory, and that the best people make the best friends.

Against Highly Moralized Friendship

We might worry, however, that tying friendship too closely to virtue rules out an intuitively important feature of a good friend: your responsiveness to their interests, even when these interests seem to be in conflict with your morals. Cocking and Kennett[7] charge that one important feature of friendship is being directly receptive and responsive to friends' concerns in a way that precludes what they characterize as *filtering*: evaluating the friend's concerns in terms of one's own conception of morality, before taking them as reasons for action. While friendship is a valuable human relationship, they conclude, its norms and ideals clash with those of morality: in fact, it necessarily involves moral danger.

They appeal to a bit of dialogue from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate the point. Elizabeth Bennett tells Mr. Darcy that 'A regard for the requester would often make one yield readily to a request, without waiting for arguments to reason one into it.'[8] Similarly, Michael Stocker argues that in becoming a friend, one becomes the kind of person for whom the friend's concerns are taken directly as reasons for action.[9] Though these reasons of friendship may not always override competing considerations, they nonetheless characteristically figure in friends' deliberations and choices. In fact, failure to be open to the other's point of view seems inherently unfriendly. 'If I always insist upon my own point of view, or really refuse to listen, then I have not made a serious commitment to the other person in the strong sense that friendship requires,' argues Richard White.[10] But listening to morally bad reasons seems incompatible with excellent character. Note that the concern I am raising here is not merely one of epistemic modesty (about the importance of being open to other viewpoints, say, or willingness to concede that one might be

[7] Cocking and Kennett, 'Friendship and Moral Danger'.
[8] Jane Austen, qtd. In Cocking and Kennett, 'Friendship and Moral Danger', p. 285.
[9] Michael Stocker, 'Values and Purposes: The limits of teleology and the ends of friendship', *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 747–765.
[10] Richard White, 'Friendship and Commitment', p. 82.

wrong), but rather that friendship involves a commitment to take a particular other person's reasons as prima facie valuable in their own right, in some special and strong sense above and beyond general norms of discourse and interpersonal conduct. But this can be hazardous to one's character. For an ordinary example of this, consider that being a good friend to a person with a particularly sharp wit may involve laughing at his jokes, reinforcing this trait in the friend while also leading one to share, somewhat indirectly, in his cruel humor.

This kind of closeness then seems incompatible with being a fully virtuous individual. Friendship requires relinquishing some control over the shape of one's life, desires, and goals. For contrast, Cocking and Kennett invite us to imagine someone whose responsiveness to you is 'subordinate to and filtered through moral considerations'.[11] Such a person seems to be too cold and inflexible, too much of a goody-two-shoes, to make a very good friend, and it is her goodness that gets in the way of her friendliness. For her to display the appropriate warmth and responsiveness that characterize good friendship, she would have to set aside her moral 'filter' when it comes to the friend's concerns. But that would leave her susceptible to the friend's vices.

If closeness involves taking the other's perspective and subjective interests as prima facie valuable, even where one would ordinarily be left cold by these considerations, one's own values and judgments about what is right may change over time, and such change may not be an improvement: as Alexander Nehamas puts it, rather starkly, 'I may never realize that as a result of our relationship my judgment was gradually debased and that I may find myself happy to have become someone I would have hated to be had I not submitted to you.'[12]

To avoid this fate, one may choose morally good people as friends, so as to limit the likely number of practical conflicts between morality and friendship. But that only shows why good people ought not to choose bad people as friends, not why bad people make bad friends, at least to people who have no special commitment to morality and/or who share the same vices. It also shows that morally, one ought to choose good people as friends, but not why bad people make bad friends as such. To reach this stronger conclusion, we would need to see why the best possible

[11] Cocking and Kennett, 'Friendship and Moral Danger', p. 295.
[12] Nehamas, 'Good of Friendship', p. 280.

friendships are necessarily between virtuous individuals, as Aristotle claims. But this claim seems implausible without further defense.

Virtue, for the Aristotelian eudaimonist, is an excellence of the best possible human life, and so desiring virtue for someone means desiring what is best for them. To defend the idea that norms of friendship entail that good people and good friends are the same people, one must persuasively show why virtue is a necessary component of good friendships rather than accept that a perfectly good friendship can morally corrupt a person, reinforce one's own vices through shared celebration of flaws, or simply be unrelated to the moral character of friends. Closeness alone seems to offer no such reason.

Why Mutual Concern for Wellbeing Is Inadequate for Friendship

Closeness alone, as I have indicated, seems insufficient for a good friendship. Friendship includes not merely responsiveness to a friend's subjective interests, but also concern about friends' well-being. It is by no means guaranteed that responsiveness to a friend's subjective concerns will coincide with concern for the friend, especially if the friend's subjective values fail to adequately track what is good for them. As Diane Jeske puts it,

> . . . if Henry is not good, it seems that I cannot promote his ends as 'independent goods' – his ends simply are not goods at all. This sort of objection, however, confuses concern for a friend with concern for his subjective ends. I can care about Henry, be concerned to promote his well-being, and yet recognize that he has chosen to pursue harmful or trivial ends. My concern for him will lead me to try to help him to revise his ends – my concern for him is a concern that he pursue worthwhile ends, or, in other words, that his subjective ends correspond to his objective ends. Concern for a person need not involve valuing the ends she has chosen for herself; parental concern for children and especially for teen-agers is a good example of concern for a person coming apart from concern for her chosen ends.[13]

[13] See Diane Jeske, 'Friendship, Virtue, and Impartiality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), pp. 51–72, at pp. 65–66.

Jeske ultimately concludes that concern for a person's objective ends may not always keep friendship consistent with morality. But others take the spirit of her concern to motivate an account of friendship that traces a necessary connection between virtue and concern for wellbeing characteristic of friends. In this vein David O. Brink argues concern for a person provides a natural account of the relationship between friendship and virtue.[14] Just as people concerned about their own wellbeing will have reason to become virtuous, on a eudaimonist account, they are concerned for each other's wellbeing and so seek to promote virtue in their friends. In his account, mutual concern yields a natural connection between friendship and virtue, but it does so only at a cost that I think is too high.

Brink argues that it would be a mistake to think that friendship of virtue requires one to love people just for the virtue they (already) possess, because this would seem to make friends valuable just as *bearers* of virtue: if that were true, then what one really loved would not be the friend, but the virtue that friend exemplifies, a concern he gets from Gregory Vlastos.[15] Instead, Brink argues, what is most central to virtue friendship is that virtue friends care about each other. Given that they care for friends as they care for themselves, they want what is best for them. When we care about friends, argues Brink, we desire virtue for them, because virtue is importantly related to a person's wellbeing. Thus, while we need not have friends who are *presently* as virtuous as possible, argues Brink, 'we can understand Aristotle's claim that interpersonal virtue-friendship reflects the comparative worth of friends as the claim that friends who care about each other for the other's own sake will prize and seek to promote the other's virtue.'[16] He concludes that virtue friends, the best kind of friends, are characterized by virtuous manner of caring, rather than the sorts of people who enjoy such relationships.

But this seems unsatisfactory without taking into account the closeness discussed in the previous section. As Cocking and Kennett argue, in ordinary cases, it seems inaccurate to describe friendship exclusively in terms of concern for the friend's welfare.

[14] See David O. Brink, 'Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship, and Political Community', *Social Philosophy & Policy* 16 (1999), pp. 252–289.

[15] See Gregory Vlastos, 'The Individual as Object of Love in Plato', in his *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3–42.

[16] Brink, 'Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship', p. 273.

> [T]he nature of the interest I have in her as my friend, and the reasons I have to act as her friend which I do not share with others, such as, for example, my colleague, is more naturally explained by my special receptivity to her direction than by any distinctively moral concern for her welfare.[17]

Brink's account, then, seems lacking because it avoids any 'special receptivity to direction' that might come apart from concern for the friend's moral character.

On Brink's account, it seems to be entirely possible that a good friend may, for instance, report a friend's tardiness to the boss, if doing so will be conducive to the development of the friend's character. For example, facing up to the consequences of his actions may give the friend a chance to reflect and repent, to reconsider life choices, and thereby become a better person. This sounds counterintuitive as an account of a friendly action, however. Brink would either have to argue that it is *never* in a person's interest to be forced to own up to the consequences of his actions, or else that turning a friend in to an authority figure is in fact a friendly action, counterintuitive as it sounds.

But it is troubling to suppose that because a person knows what will be good for his friend, their friendship entitles him to act against that person's wishes, for her own good. Such paternalism, while eminently appropriate in, for example, relationships between parent and child, or even (in limited circumstances) between teacher and student or therapist and client, seems to be incompatible with good friendship in a great many cases. There may be times when friendship allows or even calls for *some* paternalism, but there are important limits. It will be problematic if promoting a friend's virtue seems to require or allow for more paternalism than is plausibly characteristic of good friendship. A good theory of friendship will allow one to distinguish, then, between friendly (meaning: compatible with being a good friend) and unfriendly paternalism.

It seems important to respect and respond to a friend's subjective interests. In some cases, as a friend, you ought to support her even though you disagree. A good friend may date or marry a person you find unappealing, and yet friendship may require you

[17] Cocking and Kennett, 'Friendship and Moral Danger', p. 287.

to muster up some congeniality toward the partner, or at least to keep quiet about your distaste. Or, a friend might decide to pursue a career that you disapprove of, but your concern for your friend might compel you to support her, nonetheless. Friends may disagree, sometimes quite deeply, about politics, religion, and social issues, and yet, out of respect for their friends' perspectives, tone down or avoid voicing their objections in their friends' presence, or where their friends might be affected. (There are limits, of course, to how much one might be expected to tolerate, but some tolerance is, it would seem, desirable.)

Some tensions between sensitivity to a friend's subjective interests and what you take to be her wellbeing will turn out to be illusory, and in some cases paternalism will be justified even between friends: if what your friend is pursuing is dangerous, as a friend you may be obliged to say that you think this is a bad idea, present her with reasons to reconsider her plans, or even, in extreme cases, actively oppose her (suppose I hide her car keys when she's been drinking). This might seem sufficient to justify Brink's version of virtue friendship, and Jeske's example of parents and teenage children trades on the intuition that setting aside a loved one's subjective interests is sometimes justified by concern for their objective wellbeing.

However, some important constraints must be placed on such concerns to prevent counterintuitive conclusions about the role of paternalism in friendship. After all, relationships between parents and teenage children are not paradigm cases of good friendship. Something like Brink's approach runs the risk of widespread paternalism, because when one acts purely out of concern for the friend's objective wellbeing, the friend is not consulted, nor is their perspective factored in. Thus, it seems lacking as a description of good friendship if it cannot plausibly explain how friendship may at least occasionally involve setting aside one's values (moral or otherwise) to support a friend, nor why closeness seems to require taking friends' reasons to be at least prima facie reasons for oneself. We could stipulate that what we are sensitive to is the friend's good as the friend himself conceives it. However, once we do this, we seem to be back at the problem Cocking and Kennett pointed out. Taking a friend's concerns as directly important to oneself, without an intermediary moral filter, leaves one susceptible to acting immorally or at least less morally than one might otherwise be inclined to do.

Valuing Friends vs. Valuing Virtue

If a theory lacks the ability to distinguish between promoting a friend's wellbeing, and promoting a friend's subjective interests (or at least respecting and supporting them), either too much paternalism seems to be endorsed, or friendship seems to be merely a matter of closeness. We need a finer-grained approach in order to accommodate both the intuitive point that friends are responsive to each others' interests, and the thought that friends are concerned for each other's objective wellbeing.

There are additional reasons to think friendship cannot and should not be contingent on a friend's virtue, presented in Vlastos' objection to Aristotelian virtue friendship, which was part of Brink's motivation for developing his own version of virtue friendship. Vlastos argues that in Aristotle's account, virtue friends are valued as bearers of virtue and are thus not themselves intrinsically valued, and this sounds quite unfriendly.[18] We can respond to Vlastos' challenge, however, by carving out a new role for virtue that makes the best friends (evaluated by the standards of friendship) neither (mere) bearers of virtue, nor recipients of paternalistic beneficence, nor yet major sources of moral danger, as the accounts surveyed so far seem to do. Furthermore, such an account can draw on reasons and concerns internal to friendship to explain the importance of character.

It seems intuitive that in valuing a friend, one values the person, not merely their virtue. And it seems natural to think that in valuing a friend as a person, one should take a friend's subjective values and concerns to be important and valuable; this explains the closeness emphasized by Nehamas, White, O'Connor, and Cocking and Kennett. This does not, however, rule out virtue as a concern for friends, because in valuing the person one does not (as Jeske points out) *merely* value that person's subjective perspective on the world; one also wants the friend to do well, and have a good life. And recall, for the eudaimonist, that the virtues are associated with the best life.

Grant that a friend's perspective can differ from one's own. Where subjective values are shared, clashes between friends' values and interests are minimized, and closeness is achieved. While we can imagine friends who 'agree to disagree' about, for example, religious matters or social issues, this seems most

[18] Vlastos, 'The Individual as Object of Love'.

successful when they agree about other central matters of value: integrity, honesty, and so forth. As Laurence Thomas notes, friendship is a 'minimally structured' relationship, but 'minimally structured interaction will be harmonious only if the parties involved are sufficiently attuned to the way in which each other views and interacts with the world. . . . Successful minimally structured interaction requires a shared conception of the good.'[19]

The friend whose idea of caretaking is to leave a person alone will make a poor friend for the person who expects and offers more involvement in times of stress and hardship (and vice versa: the person who wants time alone to process things may feel smothered by attention from a friend who can't see and respect this). This, then, gives a reason internal to friendship to think the best friendships are those between friends who share at least some important values. Shared values promote closeness, which is central to friendship.

Values, however, influence how a person lives her life, and we want our friends to have good lives. So at this point, a eudaimonist should ask which values a person ought to have. Given that friends care about each other's good *and* are sensitive to each other's conception of the good, the best friendships to be in will be those in which the friends are both in agreement about what is good, and correct about what is good. Such friends will tend to promote each other's actual wellbeing, and not inadvertently encourage friends to pursue harmful or self-destructive goals.

For friends who are close but not virtuous, however, prospects are less sanguine. A gambler, for example, may promote his own pleasure at the expense of his bank account, and friends gambling together may jointly promote their pleasure at the expense of their finances. Even where direct sensitivity fails to adversely affect another's character, friends with vices fail to consistently promote their own interests, and thereby harm the interests of those who care about them, because in harming themselves they harm something of value to their friends. It seems incorrect to call people like the gambling partners above *good* friends, though they are directly sensitive to each others' interests, because their shared conception of the good ends up being bad for them, and so they inadvertently help each other to hurt themselves.

Although this point might seem tendentious, it is consistent with the majority of popular eudaimonist theories of virtue.

[19] Laurence Thomas, 'Friendship', *Synthese* 72 (1987), pp. 217–236, at p. 220.

Consider the possible ways that virtues can contribute to living a good life, and the ways that vice can prevent this. Some of the most common strategies are as follows. One may hold, as the Stoics did, that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for a good life. Or, following Aristotle, one may think that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for a good life; one cannot live a good life (or at least, not the best possible life) without virtue, but some 'external goods' are also required; contingencies like health, resources and social circumstance. Finally, one might hold that virtues are the most reliable strategy for living a good life, though one might end up with a good life by being lucky or pursuing less reliable or more risky means (or, alternatively, one could take the most reliable approach and fail anyhow). Combinations of these positions are possible (some virtues might be necessary for a good life because they are partly constitutive of it, others could be merely reliable means of achieving an independently specifiable good), but for our purposes it will be enough to take each in turn and see how direct sensitivity to a vicious person ends up exposing a person to harm, or potential for harm, in a way that is incompatible with the best sort of friendship.

Suppose the Stoic approach is correct, and virtue is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. Then, if one is close to a vicious person, and hence directly sensitive to their subjective concerns, one ends up less virtuous than one would otherwise be, and so less happy. The vicious friend thus makes one less happy, and this seems intuitively unfriendly. Or, suppose the Aristotelian approach is correct: virtue is necessary but not sufficient for happiness. Closeness to the wrong people can thus deprive a person of at least some virtues necessary for a good life, and this also seems unfriendly. Finally, suppose virtue is the most reliable strategy for living a good life. Vicious friends then encourage one (not deliberately, but simply by presenting one with their subjective concerns and values) to adopt strategies less reliably connected a good life; again, this seems unfriendly, and unfriendly in virtue of failing to promote friends' wellbeing, and in fact making them worse off.

But the story cannot end there, because the cases raised so far presume that having a friend *more* vicious than oneself is damaging, and hence unfriendly. One might wonder about cases where one's friend is only equally vicious. Consider the two gamblers, who in fact bond over and share in a vice together. Why think that this is incompatible with the best friendship, or at least, the best

friendship available to them? Here, to respond, it is important to note that friends not only change us, but can reinforce traits in us, as well, by responding to us and by sharing our concerns. This is a good thing if these traits are those one ought to have (the friends who reinforce each other's thoughtfulness or bravery seem to be good for each other), but bad if you would be better off without those traits. Again, a quick survey of the possible connections between virtue and a good life shows that in each of the most popular versions of virtue ethics, one is worse off for having bad traits reinforced by a friend who shares those traits. If virtue is necessary and sufficient for a good life, vicious friends reinforce each other's vices and each makes it less likely that the other will move away from vice and develop the traits that would constitute a good life for them. That seems unfriendly. The same is true even if virtue is necessary but insufficient for happiness: by reinforcing traits that stand between people and the best possible life for them, one seems to harm them. Finally, even if virtues are merely the best possible strategy for living a good life, vices which are reinforced will make it less likely that one will live a good life, not a fate one ought to wish for a friend.

While vicious friends may display the characteristic sensitivity to each other's needs that we find in friendship, there is no reason to think that these cases are especially exemplary or choiceworthy cases of friendship. In fact, there is reason to think that such friendships are flawed, because such friends cannot reliably or consistently promote each other's good, and in fact such friends tend to harm each other. This clashes with the common sense view that a good friend will not help you hurt yourself. Thus, at least major vices, the sorts of character flaws which are significantly detrimental to one's ability to live a good life, will clash with the requirement that friends show concern for wellbeing.

Finally, one smaller point about the interactions of friendship, virtue, and concern for wellbeing: just so long as a vice is harmful to the person possessing it, the vicious friend ends up harming a portion of her friend's interests by harming herself. So even in the event that friends' closeness is insufficient to influence each other for the worse, the friend of the vicious person ends up worse off simply because the person whose well-being they value is incapable of being as well off as they would be if they had better character. Although none of us are perfect, friendships are in general made better by virtue, and worse off

by vice. Though some minor flaws and failings may have little impact on the quality of a friendship (someone who is a little vain may still be quite a good friend), major vices will be incompatible with good friendship.

Connecting Virtue and Friendship

One need not value a friend as a mere bearer of virtue, but friends should be virtuous to enjoy the best friendship. Friends can be 'partners in crime', but these will not be the best sort of friendships because they will not consist in both friends consistently and wholeheartedly wishing and promoting what is good for each other, because their reasons for action are not consistently good even for themselves. This is not just a good self-interested reason to be selective in one's choice of friends; it is a reason internal to friendship to think character matters.

Direct sensitivity to another's concern does not rule out the possibility that bad people may be interconnected by sharing concerns. But it does give reason, based in concern for wellbeing (both one's own and one's friend) *not* to become close to another unless both parties are virtuous. As Aristotle predicted but Brink conceded, the best friendships will be limited by the number of virtuous people who can participate in them. This does not eliminate moral danger entirely, but it does provide a necessary connection between good friendships and good people; between standards of friendship and standards of character.

We might worry that accounts like Aristotle's overlook moral danger inherent in friendship; friendships are characterized by closeness and sensitivity to each others' needs and concerns, which may compromise one's commitment to living a virtuous life. But as Brink notes, friends are concerned for each other's wellbeing and so (on a eudaimonist account) have reason to promote each other's virtue. But without closeness, which entails sensitivity to a friend's subjective values and concerns, attempts to promote virtue can risk unfriendly paternalism. In friendship, it is important to consider both a friend's actual and perceived good. I conclude that direct sensitivity and objective concern for the friend's wellbeing together provide reason to think that bad people cannot participate in the best friendships. Something like Aristotle's virtue friendship reemerges as the ideal friendship. Though in some cases friendship between even the best people

may present some moral danger, the best friendships are nonetheless those between virtuous people. Though friendship poses some moral danger, standards for excellent friendship depend upon the moral character of the friends.[20]

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