On Pattakos, Aristotle, and the Modern Ideas of Friendship

Pattakos—backed by the friendship types stated by Aristotle—argues in *The Meaning of Friendship in a Social Networked World* that Facebook and other social media websites are reducing the idea of friendship into something that is not nearly as meaningful as it was before such technological advances. Friends on Facebook can now be categorized into a large pool of acquaintances, some close friends, or a varying number of people known only by name or not at all. The word friendship now has four phases as opposed to just the three that Aristotle set: Aristotle’s utility friend, pleasure friend, good friend, and the Internet’s virtual friend—someone who you *may* know in real life, but *do* know online.

This fourth friend type creates very limited windows of interaction between two people because there are many people who have incredible numbers of friends on social media. This basically serves as the main fuel for Pattakos’ argument that social media is making people more lonely. If we make the excuse that we do not need to talk to our friends in person, yet we miss the follow-through and only make small interactions with them—likes, comments, etc.—then people are not even meeting the utility friend standard that Aristotle sets, the friend from whom one can benefit.

Friendships solely developed on social media have also become faulty in the respect that people are able to hide behind a screen and an online identification, therefore having the benefit of lying about themselves and their true thoughts. People cannot figure out who they are really talking to, and in this sense, we are isolating ourselves by focusing our attention on “friends” whom we might never be able to meet.

The convenience that comes with online messaging also leads people to tend to stay on their computers or phones rather than desiring face-to-face communication. They are more comfortable being able to talk with their friends from a distance, and this lack of genuine conversation means a loneliness that can only have been brought upon by such a technological achievement.

What needs to happen is there needs to be a societal boundary set between physical friends, like those described by Aristotle, and virtual friends with whom people interact with online. Physical friends, especially those whom Aristotle calls “good friends,” should be interacted with in the physical world, as well as online, since they are people who we can gain something from. And virtual friends can be interacted with, but to a lesser extent, since all that people do with them is—through likes and comments—is give.