**With a Little Help from my Friends**

**Section 0: Introduction**

Three sorts of relationship count as friendship for Aristotle[[1]](#footnote-1) - distinguished by *object* and reflected in *form*.[[2]](#footnote-2) Concerning the former, reflection on lovable objects (what is advantageous; pleasant; good) and the grounds on which agents love (of lifeless things; unreciprocated goodwill; mutually recognized and reciprocated goodwill for the other’s sake)[[3]](#footnote-3) results in Aristotle characterizing friendship as mutually recognized and reciprocated goodwill between agents for each other’s sake due to advantage, pleasure, or goodness.[[4]](#footnote-4) Concerning the latter, Aristotle parallels lovable objects with three broad forms friendship might take. Friendships of advantage - call them *Use Friendships* - are roughly those involving mutually recognized and reciprocated goodwill for each other’s sake based on the prospects of receiving benefit. Friendships of pleasure - call them *Pleasure Friendships* - are roughly those involving mutually recognized and reciprocated goodwill for each other’s sake based on the prospects of receiving pleasure. Lastly, the best friendships - call them *Virtue Friendships* - are roughly those involving mutually recognized and reciprocated goodwill for each other’s sake based on an appreciation[[5]](#footnote-5) of character.[[6]](#footnote-6)

But an interpretive puzzle arises from this straightforward reading of Aristotle’s analysis of friendship. Shortly after Aristotle claims friendship involves mutually reciprocated goodwill for another’s sake, he claims those involved in Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships *do not* bear goodwill to their friends for their own sake, but instead only for the sake of what is – respectively - advantageous or pleasant.[[7]](#footnote-7) Many proposals have been offered to ease the interpretive tension.[[8]](#footnote-8) In what follows, we arbitrate between two. The *Standard Reading* treats goodwill for the other’s sake as a defining feature of Virtue Friendship, with Use and Pleasure Friendships resembling this form in other ways, but involving goodwill only for the sake of what is advantageous or pleasurable. On this reading, Aristotle either misspoke in his initial presentation of what varieties of friendship require, or – perhaps more charitably – dropped the requirement that all forms of friendship involve goodwill towards another for their own sake as he refined his characterizations of the lesser forms.[[9]](#footnote-9) In contrast, the *Goodwill Reading*[[10]](#footnote-10) treats goodwill for the other’s sake as a feature of *all* forms of friendship discussed by Aristotle, though they are nevertheless differentiated based on their respective objects. On this reading, Aristotle’s later remarks concerning the lesser forms of friendship are perhaps meant to merely emphasize the crucial role use and pleasure play in the corresponding forms of friendship, but were not meant to undermine each form of friendship involving goodwill towards others for their own sake. Arbitrating between these two readings stands to clarify Aristotle’s intended analysis of varieties of friendship while simultaneously providing a foundation on which alternative interpretive proposals may be evaluated.

In **Section 1**, we examine Aristotle’s discussion of varieties of friendship further, extracting salient details. Here too we outline and motivate the Standard Reading of Aristotle’s discussion, and note the Standard Reading appears to treat most friendships as based entirely on egoistic motivation. These observations inspire seeking an alternative. In **Section 2**, we contrast the Standard Reading with the Goodwill Reading, which we also outline and motivate. We then pose several objections to the latter reading. In particular, we undermine the Goodwill Reading insofar as it relies on Aristotle’s definition of friendship from the *Rhetoric*, and observe this reading entails various relationships Aristotle explicitly counts as friendship fail to count as friendships. Having posed trouble for the Goodwill Reading, rather than retreat to the Standard Reading, we extract lessons from the preceding discussion and gesture at a *prima facie* promising synthesis of these distinct readings that provides a more nuanced solution to the interpretive puzzle than its predecessors.

**Section 1: Aristotle’s Analysis of Friendship and a Standard**

In this section, we outline features of the varieties of friendship Aristotle discusses, pulling from both the EE and NE. Additionally, we introduce the Standard Reading in detail. Our discussion sets the stage for the following section, where we examine an alternative reading and offer criticisms.

***φιλία***

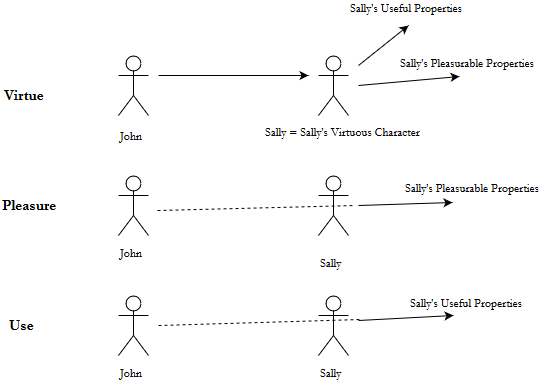
Aristotle’s topic – ***φιλία* – is broader than our notion of friendship.**[[11]](#footnote-11) **Some examples Aristotle cites of friendship track our notion, e.g.** lifelong friends,[[12]](#footnote-12) while others do not, e.g. cities,[[13]](#footnote-13) parents and their children,[[14]](#footnote-14) comrades and soldiers,[[15]](#footnote-15) vendors.[[16]](#footnote-16) While Aristotle does not consider each friendships mentioned friendship of the *proper* sort,[[17]](#footnote-17) he follows the credible opinions of predecessors in treating them as friendships nonetheless. Still, Aristotle seeks a primary sense of friendship, and so refines the term further than his predecessors. His exploration results in the threefold classification above: Use Friendships, Pleasure Friendships, and Virtue Friendships.

Use Friendships are the broadest group of friendships,[[18]](#footnote-18) quick to start and end based on the availability of benefits.[[19]](#footnote-19) An illustrative example might be the economic relationship between a local farmer and restaurant owner. The farmer might seek to sell his products to the restaurant owner, who in turn might seek to purchase these products for redistribution for profit. Each would be benefitted by the success of the other, and similarly failures of one may lead to costs for the other, e.g. farmer’s crop yield is low, putting restaurant owner in need of a new supplier; restaurant attendance is low, leaving the owner unable to purchase crops resulting in the farmer in need of an alternative buyer. The friendship between them plausibly continues insofar as the associated benefits are on offer. Pleasure Friendships comprise a smaller group than Use Friendships,[[20]](#footnote-20) are often found among youths, are driven by emotion,[[21]](#footnote-21) and tend to dissolve[[22]](#footnote-22) quickly.[[23]](#footnote-23) Passionate young lovers typify this form of friendship. Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships count as such insofar as they resemble the best sort[[24]](#footnote-24) – Virtue Friendships.[[25]](#footnote-25) Like Use Friendships, Virtue Friendships are advantageous, and like Pleasure Friendships, they are pleasurable. However, neither advantage nor pleasure is the primary grounds for Virtue Friendships.[[26]](#footnote-26) The best sort of friendships take significant time to form,[[27]](#footnote-27) are rare,[[28]](#footnote-28) require cohabitation,[[29]](#footnote-29) involve trust,[[30]](#footnote-30) agreement on ends and methods to achieve those ends,[[31]](#footnote-31) are[[32]](#footnote-32) long-lasting,[[33]](#footnote-33) and directed towards virtuous character which is a dispositional state of an agent and so rather stable.[[34]](#footnote-34) Concrete examples of Virtue Friendship are difficult to provide. One might imagine, however, virtuous individuals engaged in virtuous activities appreciating each other’s character and seeking out a relationship for that reason.

*Standard Reading*

According to the Standard Reading, a defining characteristic of Virtue Friendship is goodwill[[35]](#footnote-35) for another’s sake, and this feature distinguishes this form of friendship from those of Use and Pleasure. These latter forms of friendship are - in every case according to this reading - directed towards some egoistic end. More concretely, according to the Standard Reading the Use Friendship between the farmer and restaurant owner is maintained solely because each side expects profit from the relationship. For the farmer, any other crop buyer might do just as well – holding the purchase price constant. Any goodwill the farmer feels in this friendship is for the sake of that benefit. Similarly, according to the Standard Reading, two passionate lovers who bear goodwill towards one another do so only for the sake of prospective pleasure. Absent the expected pleasure, Pleasure Friendships dissolve, and goodwill along with them. In each respect then, according to the Standard Reading, individuals maintain the respective goodwill grounded in either the prospects of benefit or pleasure. It is in this respect that agents involved in these friendships are plausibly egoistic. They do not appreciate others for their own sake, but only insofar as they might provide benefit or pleasure. In contrast, Virtue Friendships, rather than being purely egoistically motivated, involve appreciating one’s friend regardless of thoughts of advantage or pleasure. That said, the Standard Reading leaves room for Virtue Friendships to involve both pleasure and advantage, since Virtue Friends may also bear goodwill to their friends because pleasurable or advantageous.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Altogether, the Standard Reading understands Aristotle as distinguishing Virtue Friendship from Use Friendship and Pleasure Friendship based primarily on the target of the involved goodwill. When the primary target is another’s good character, the friendship counts as Virtue Friendship; when the primary target is use or pleasure, the friendship counts as Use Friendship or Pleasure Friendship, respectively. We may convey these relationships diagrammatically:



*Diagram 1: The Standard Reading*

Diagram 1 reflects the goodwill John might bear to his friend Sally in each of the three sorts of friendships considered on the Standard Reading. If John and Sally are Virtue Friends, then John bears goodwill (one-directional solid arrow) towards Sally, i.e. Sally’s virtuous character. Because Sally is virtuous and so has pleasurable and useful properties, John thereby bears goodwill towards Sally for her pleasurable and useful properties as well. If John and Sally are Pleasure or Use Friends, in contrast, then John bears goodwill towards Sally (one-directional dotted arrows) only for her pleasurable or useful properties. The dotted arrows are meant to indicate John treats Sally as a means to pleasurable or useful outcomes, so that John’s goodwill is directed *through* Sally but not *at* Sally.

One might have worries about this reading. To see why, note since Virtue Friendships are rare, given the Standard Reading it seems few friends exhibit goodwill primarily for the sake of others. Hence, most friendships end up being egoistic.[[37]](#footnote-37) This attributes a rather unsatisfying picture of friendship to Aristotle, where we are each largely out for our own gain. Surely, however, many of us – though less-than-virtuous – maintain friendships based on goodwill for the sake of our friends, rather than any expected advantage or pleasure. Farmer John might wish restaurant owner Sally well as she prepares to complete a marathon, though he stands to gain nothing from her victory. Related, the Standard Reading seems to provide no space for, say, Use Friends to bear goodwill towards one another for each other’s sake after, say, several years of a mutually beneficial and useful relationship. But surely Aristotle was aware that in some cases Use Friends may bear goodwill towards one another without requiring that goodwill be bound to expected benefit or advantage. These brief observations motivate seeking an alternative interpretation which does not attribute such an egoistic picture of friendship to Aristotle.

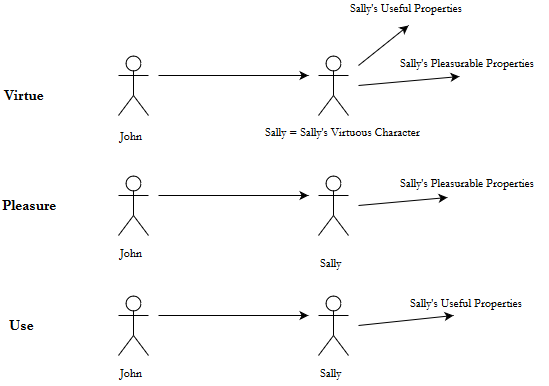
**Section II: Goodwill Reading and Discontents**

In this section, we outline an alternative reading of Aristotle’s analysis of friendship proposed by John Cooper. Following presentation, we pose several difficulties for this reading, ultimately concluding it fails as an interpretation. Rather than return to the Standard Reading, we extract lessons from both the Standard and Goodwill Reading, gesturing at a *prima facie* plausible interpretive synthesis of the two.

*Goodwill to All*

The central tenet of the Goodwill Reading is that *all* forms of friendship involve goodwill for another’s sake. This is, of course, in contrast to the Standard Reading which finds this a feature of only Virtue Friendship.[[38]](#footnote-38) John Cooper, who introduced and defended the Goodwill Reading, provided textual evidence by appealing to the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle provides an explicit definition of “friend.”[[39]](#footnote-39) In this work, a friend is defined as one who is liked and who likes another person, where the verb “liking” is defined as, “…wanting for someone what one thinks is good for his sake and not for one’s own, and being inclined, so far as one can, to do such things for him.” This definition of friendship implies then that friends exhibit goodwill towards each other for each other’s sake. If applied to Aristotle’s characterizations of friendship in the EE and NE, then goodwill for another’s sake seems essential to friendship, and so a feature of each form considered.[[40]](#footnote-40)

To illustrate, return to the farmer and restaurant owner exhibiting a Use Friendship. Given the benefits accrued by, say, the farmer due to the relationship held with the restaurant owner, the farmer may come to bear goodwill towards the restaurant owner for his own sake, rather than simply due to the benefits on offer. As another example, consider a Use Friendship between a manager and a favorite employee under the manager’s charge. Plausibly, the employee’s, say, repeated demonstrations of reliability may result in the manager bearing goodwill towards the employee for the employee’s own sake, rather than simply due to the prospects of benefit. Indeed, we can easily imagine a situation in which the manager takes a special interest in the employee’s personal life and well-being, perhaps inviting the employee to events outside of work, and genuinely enjoying the employee’s company. Following Cooper, we might call the mechanism by which such instances of goodwill arise “causal-psychological,” with the idea being that through repeated causal association between an individual and benefits provided by that individual, goodwill emerges for the sake of the individual rather than simply the benefits.[[41]](#footnote-41) Similar causal-psychological mechanisms, moreover, may underwrite Pleasure Friends bearing goodwill towards one another for their own sake, rather than simply for the sake of pleasure. As before, we can illustrate diagrammatically:



*Diagram 2: The Goodwill Reading*

According to the Goodwill Reading, if John and Sally are involved in a Virtue Friendship, then John bears goodwill towards Sally’s character just as he would on the Standard Reading, and similarly to Sally insofar as Sally has useful and pleasurable properties. Since John’s goodwill towards Sally targets Sally’s character, this goodwill is not dependent on Sally’s useful or pleasurable properties. Conceptually, Sally might lack these while John’s goodwill persists, though practically speaking Sally’s virtuous character makes her both pleasurable and useful as well.[[42]](#footnote-42) On the other hand, if the friendship is one of pleasure, then John bears goodwill to Sally (one-directional solid arrow) for her own sake insofar as Sally has pleasurable properties. Similarly for Use Friendships. But in these lesser sorts of friendship, there is an asymmetry of dependence. John might bear goodwill towards Sally for her own sake as a consequence of repeated interactions with Sally who John finds useful. However, if this relationship is merely a Use Friendship, then as soon as the prospect of advantage vanishes so too does John’s goodwill towards Sally for her own sake. John’s goodwill towards Sally is thus dependent on Sally having advantageous properties. Similarly, John’s goodwill towards Sally for her own sake – if they are involved in a Pleasure Friendship – is asymmetrically dependent on Sally having pleasant properties. Absent these properties, John no longer bears goodwill towards Sally for her own sake.

Given that according to the Goodwill Reading each variety of friendship involves goodwill towards another for their own sake, one may wonder how these varieties of friendship are distinguished. A plausible distinction – between an agent’s essential and incidental properties – provides an answer. Concretely, John’s goodwill towards Sally in a Use Friendship is not towards Sally’s character, but is instead towards Sally insofar as she bears incidental properties that make her useful. In contrast, John’s goodwill towards Sally in a Virtue Friendship is towards Sally’s character which underwrites virtuous activity – the proper function of human beings[[43]](#footnote-43) - which is comprised of Sally’s essential properties, those properties of Sally that make Sally the sort of entity she is.[[44]](#footnote-44) Virtue Friends are then distinguished from Pleasure and Use Friends, in bearing goodwill towards another for the sake of something *essential*, virtuous character. Pleasure and Use Friends, on the other hand, bear goodwill towards one another for the sake of something *incidental*, such as beauty or economic prospects. These latter features are contingent, and not nearly as durable as character. Hence, though each form of friendship involves goodwill for the other’s sake, they are readily distinguished.

The contrast between the Goodwill Reading and Standard Reading is stark. Where the Standard Reading leaves most friendships grounded entirely in egoistic tendencies, the Goodwill Reading permits many more friendships to involve goodwill towards our friend for their own sake. Importantly for what follows, our project is not to articulate what Aristotle *should* have said, but rather provide a coherent explication of what Aristotle *did* say. To that end, we examine whether the Goodwill Reading is an accurate portrayal of Aristotle’s analysis of the varieties of friendship.

*Two Minor Objections to the Goodwill Reading[[45]](#footnote-45)*

There is much the Goodwill Reading gets right. Aristotle’s distinction between essential and incidental properties seems appropriately employed on this proposal, and it seems charitable to interpret Aristotle’s analysis of friendship as not requiring most friendships be entirely egoistic.[[46]](#footnote-46) There are worries to be had, however, with some worse than others. We examine some lesser worries first. One worth pointing out, is the Goodwill Reading’s reliance on Aristotle’s definition of ‘friend’ in the *Rhetoric*. Providing a detailed analysis of friendship does not seem to be Aristotle’s intention in this work, as providing detailed analyses of notions in general does not appear to be the purpose of this work. Rather, the *Rhetoric* seems more concerned with emotional and phenomenal aspects of individuals engaged in friendship rather than providing a taxonomy of the various forms, as we see in EE and NE. These observations provide reason against thinking Aristotle’s definition of “friend” in the *Rhetoric* should hold much weight as a guide for Aristotle’s analysis in EE and NE. That said, we will bracket this concern in what follows.

Another lesser worry stems from observing that in the NE, Aristotle suggests some Use Friendships are significantly different from others. More precisely, among Use Friendships there are *mere associations* – friendships resting on a compact - and listed among these are comrades, as well as hosts/guests.[[47]](#footnote-47) Use Friendships of the mere association sort are clearly counted as ‘friendship’ in the NE, but it is not obvious comrades bear goodwill towards one another *for each other’s sake*. For it seems plausible – at least intuitively – that two agents may be comrades without being *aware* *of each other*. For example, two soldiers in the Athenian military who have never met might count as comrades if they have a common goal, i.e. defend the polis, support the aristocracy, etc. Of course, it might be objected that such a relationship could not even count as a Use Friendship because there is no mutually reciprocated goodwill, and to count as a Use Friendship each agent involved in the relationship must recognize the goodwill of the other. But in response, it seems plausible an agent may – perhaps as a *standing* personal commitment - bear goodwill towards *anyone* who shares a certain common goal with that agent, even if there is no direct acquaintance. Soldiers seem just such a case. More concretely, soldiers defending the Athenian polis may bear goodwill towards any other soldier similarly defending the polis, though they need not all be directly acquainted.[[48]](#footnote-48) Given their station as soldiers, and mutually reciprocated goodwill, it seems plausible to count them as comrades, and so Use Friends. But given a lack of direct acquaintance, it seems incorrect to say each bears goodwill towards the others *for their own sake*. If so, then there may be two agents who bear goodwill towards each other because each shares some common goal, though neither agent has met the other and neither agent is, say, directly acquainted with the other. Then it seems odd to require that comrades bear goodwill towards each other *for each other’s sake*, since neither *has ever met the other*. But then we have an example of Use Friendship not necessarily involving goodwill towards another for the other’s own sake. Hence, the Goodwill Reading makes a false prediction. That said, the preceding rests on the contentious claim that Aristotle would treat the preceding agents sharing a common goal as Use Friends. There is, unfortunately, hardly support for this in the NE or EE. Thus, advocates of the Goodwill Reading should not be moved. We turn to more substantial objections to the Goodwill Reading next.

*Major Objection: Moral Use Friendships*

Note Aristotle’s discussion of friends in the *Rhetoric* does not stop with the definition indicated above. The passage also includes further attributes of friends, e.g. mutual comfort with each other, mutual honesty, reciprocated love, etc.[[49]](#footnote-49) Hence, if we take Aristotle’s definition from the *Rhetoric* at face value, then friendships require mutual honesty, among other things. This is *prima facie* plausible, since trust is useful, e.g. tends to preclude complaints between parties. But in the NE, Aristotle also holds that complaint may arise between friends, and is indeed a characteristic found in Use Friendships.[[50]](#footnote-50) This is because Use Friends always want to get the better of each other.[[51]](#footnote-51) More specifically, Aristotle distinguishes between Use Friendships of the *moral* and *legal* sort, where the latter sort is on fixed terms offering either immediate benefit or contracted benefit and is unambiguous, while the former sort is not on fixed terms and so is often ambiguous. Use Friendships of the moral sort expect more than what they have been given,[[52]](#footnote-52) with the absence of fixed terms frequently leading to complaints among parties. Indeed, the moral sort is claimed to *imitate* trust between individuals where none should be expected.[[53]](#footnote-53) This characterization is echoed in the EE, where Aristotle asserts imitation leads individuals to treat each other as true friends when they are not.[[54]](#footnote-54)

It seems plausible then to understand Use Friendships of the moral sort as *not* involving genuine trust between agents but instead as involving mere imitation of trust, since parties are always trying to get the better of each other.[[55]](#footnote-55) But if this is correct, we find a patent tension between NE/EE and the *Rhetoric* definition. For if the *Rhetoric* definition holds, all forms of friendship, and so moral Use Friends, involve mutual honesty as an ingredient. It is not obvious, however, how to reconcile moral Use Friendships as involving both mutual honesty and mere imitation of trust. This suggests, pace the Goodwill Reading, the *Rhetoric* definition is incompatible with Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in the NE and EE. To that extent, the Goodwill Reading appears to make a false prediction concerning Aristotle’s analysis of friendship in the NE and EE.

It might be objected that we have no reason to adopt *all* of the definition from the *Rhetoric*. For it seems plausible that Aristotle may have initially intended the *Rhetoric* definition as an accurate characterization of friendship, but reflection led to refinement, so that in the EE and NE we see features such as mutual honesty dropped from the analysis. Then the proceeding simply rehearses the reasons Aristotle himself provides for not requiring mutual honesty for all forms of friendship, but this is no trouble for the Goodwill Reading, since this reading does not require all features of the *Rhetoric* definition apply to all forms of friendship. Perhaps. But note responding in this manner has advocates of the Goodwill Reading accept some parts of the *Rhetoric* definition, but not others, pointing to the EE and NE as evidence for which to drop and which to accept. But then where there is evidence in these later works that a feature of the *Rhetoric* definition has been abandoned, that should indicate a refinement of Aristotle’s analysis of the forms of friendship. But the EE and NE strongly suggest, with respect to Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships, agents involved do *not* bear goodwill towards one another for their own sake.[[56]](#footnote-56) This is, of course, the central tenet of the Goodwill Reading. The result is a dilemma for advocates of this reading. Either we adopt the *Rhetoric* definition entirely, and moral Use Friendships incoherently involve mutual honesty and imitation of trust or we adopt only parts those parts that do not appear to conflict with the EE and NE, and so Use Friendships do not involve goodwill towards one another for the other’s own sake. The former seems the preferable bullet, but a bullet to bite nonetheless.

*Major Objection: Toleration*

The Goodwill Reading requires that all forms of friendships involve goodwill towards another for their own sake. A plausible causal-psychological mechanism is appealed to, moreover, to explain how such goodwill might arise. John and Sally may initially form a relationship based entirely on mutual benefit, but over time they may each come to bear goodwill towards the other for the other’s sake. When this occurs, John and Sally are involved in a Use Friendship. But while such plausible examples provide motivation for the Goodwill Reading, they also reveal problems. To see why, consider again the Use Friendship subclass - mere associations. Among these Aristotle counts host and guest. Suppose Sally hosts John for a week, but John is a rather obnoxious guest. Suppose John does not realize that he is obnoxious, and Sally decides to put up with his behavior since she knows he will not be a guest in her home for long. Suppose finally that John adequately compensates Sally in the future[[57]](#footnote-57) for hosting, so that each party ultimately benefits from the arrangement. Then presumably Sally and John bear mutually reciprocated goodwill towards one another, *at least* insofar as they each benefits. However, according to the Goodwill Reading, Sally and John bear mutually reciprocated goodwill towards one another for each other’s own sake as well. But this seems implausible. Sally – fulfilling her duties as host – *tolerates* John, but it seems a stretch to claim Sally bears goodwill towards John for *his own sake*. What seems more likely is that Sally bears goodwill towards John insofar as he provides the promise of future benefit, and insofar as social norms dictate such an attitude towards guests. But that seems to fall short of goodwill towards John for his own sake.[[58]](#footnote-58) Since Aristotle would count this relationship as a Use Friendship and since it seems implausible that agents involved bear goodwill towards one another for each other’s sake, the Goodwill Reading makes another false prediction.

*Standard Reading Revisited and Synthesis*

We have then offered four complaints against the Goodwill Reading, two minor and two more substantial. Concerning the minor points: appealing to the *Rhetoric* seems poorly motivated, and a *prima facie* comrade relationship fails to count as a friendship on this reading. Concerning the more substantial points: moral Use Friends end up as both mutually honest and always seeking to get the better of the other party, while Use Friendships between hosts and guests do not end up counting as friendships at all. If accurate, these objections provide good reason to reject the Goodwill Reading, and perhaps revisit the Standard Reading. This, of course, brings us back to our worries at the end of **Section I**. Aristotle’s characterization of friendship – understood according to the Standard Reading - seems too demanding. For nearly all friendships will likely fall short of the paradigmatic kind, and so nearly all friendships will involve treatment of others as instruments for egoistic gain, whether it be for advantage or pleasure. Moreover, it seems plausible friendships involving goodwill towards another for their own sake may arise from repeated exposure to benefits or pleasure stably offered by a Use or Pleasure Friend. But according to the Standard Reading, only Virtue Friendships bear such goodwill towards one another, with the lesser forms ultimately egoistic. Both worries seems unpalatable bullets to bite.

What seems needed is perhaps a third reading, a synthesis of parts of the Standard Reading and parts of the Goodwill Reading. From the Standard Reading we might adopt Virtue Friendships as the paradigmatic form between virtuous agents bearing goodwill towards others for their own sake, while not requiring either Use Friends or Pleasure Friends involve goodwill towards others for their own sake. From the Goodwill Reading we might adopt the lesson of the causal-psychological mechanism, whereby repeated exposure to benefits or pleasures may result in goodwill towards another for the other’s own sake, though this might fall short of goodwill towards another for their character. The picture then, would be one on which Virtue Friendships involve goodwill towards others for their own sake *and* for their character, while Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships need only involve goodwill towards others for their useful or pleasurable properties. Nevertheless, Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships might *also* involve goodwill towards others for their useful or pleasurable properties *and* for their own sake (but not for their character), where goodwill towards another for the other’s own sake arises through some causal-psychological mechanism.

On this proposal, there is no need to preclude, say, relationships based on just a few instances of usefulness or just a few instances of pleasure, from counting as Use Friendships or Pleasure Friendships. Similarly, we need not preclude an individual bearing mutually reciprocated goodwill towards any other sharing a common goal, i.e. comrades, as Use Friends, or preclude hosts/guests or – more generally – what Aristotle calls moral Use Friendships as friendships. Rather, friendship can be understood on a spectrum, with Virtue Friendships at one extreme, relatively simple and fleeting Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships on the other, and a causal-psychological mechanisms providing an explanation for movement along the spectrum from one extreme to the other insofar as agents bear goodwill towards another for the other’s own sake, or not. Near the middle of this spectrum we might expect to find, say, John the farmer and Sally the restaurant owner who, having maintained a Use Friendship for many years, share mutually reciprocated goodwill towards one another for each other’s own sake.

While plausible, this proposed synthesis – if it is to be understood as an interpretation of Aristotle’s characterization of friendship rather than, say, perhaps what Aristotle should have said – must be defended as accurate. Since there seem passages in which Aristotle appears to reject such a picture,[[59]](#footnote-59) such a defense is warranted. Unfortunately, we must leave that for another time.

**Conclusion**

Aristotle provides a compelling, detailed, analysis of friendship in the EE and NE, laying the groundwork for discussion of the well-functioning polis as Virtue Friendships engender unanimity,[[60]](#footnote-60) and unanimity is the aim of lawgivers.[[61]](#footnote-61) Given the apparent centrality of friendship to Aristotle’s overall project, providing a coherent, tenable, reading of this analysis is crucial. Here, we examined the Standard Reading and the Goodwill Reading of Aristotle’s analysis, showing the latter susceptible to objections. Given more space, a fuller treatment of this topic would examine the costs and benefits of the Standard Reading in more detail, and would in particular contrast this reading with the synthesis proposed just above. Though it suffices for our purposes to have suggested the Standard Reading and Goodwill Reading are unsatisfactory, and gestured at an alternative, extracting the best reading of Aristotle’s analysis of friendship is a goal – much like friendship itself – worthy of pursuit, and one to which I will no doubt return.

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1. As developed in the Eudemian Ethics (EE) and Nichomachean Ethics (NE). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Fortenbaugh, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (1155b17-1155b24). Bekker citations are to the Nichomachean Ethics unless indicated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (1156a5; 1167a3) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (1156a6) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. How are these forms of friendship related? One natural thought is that each is a species of a common genus. A mark against this, however, is that for Aristotle providing a common genus under which species fall requires more than being able to characterize varieties of phenomena as resembling. What is required, rather, is a generic definition (Z.11, 1035a29), but the various grounds of friendship suggest a real definition of this sort should not be expected (1236a12-18). Instead, Aristotle claims varieties of friendship should be understood with respect to a paradigmatic type. Specifically, Use Friendships and Pleasure Friendships count as such insofar as they resemble Virtue Friendship. We might claim varieties of friendship are *focally connected* (Owen, 1960) given (EE; 1236a16-18). Note, however, Aristotle does not seem to carry a similarly focused analysis over to NE discussion of varieties of friendship, employing instead connection based on resemblance. These details are orthogonal to our focus in what follows, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (1156a11-3; 1164b10; 1167a14). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See (Nehamas, 2010) for an overview of interpretive options. See (Whiting, 1991) among others, for more detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (Pakaluk, 2005, pg. 270-1); (Nehamas, 2010, pg. 220). The characterization of the *Standard Reading* here is from (Cooper, 1999), and shares much in common with the first option (Nehamas, 2010, pg. 220-1) considers as a solution to the interpretive puzzle. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (Cooper, 1999, pgs. 312-35). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. **It also differs from our notion insofar as how important Aristotle takes friendship to be, e.g. sought for itself; involves virtue; necessary for living; natural; stimulates noble deeds** (1155a2-1155a28). See (Nehamas, 2010) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (1156b2) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. (1157a26) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (1158a28) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. (1159b28) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. (1163b35) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (1157a27) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. (1157a15). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. (1162b17) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (1156a19) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. (1156b4) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. (1156a4). An illustrative example of when this fails is between a lover and beloved, where the former takes pleasure solely in loving while the latter takes pleasure solely in being loved. (1157a13) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. (1156b7) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. (1156b8; 1157b4) [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. (1157a13-25); though the *Magna Moralia* is questionably attributed to Aristotle, there we also see: “He then whose love is based on the pleasant does not love with the love which is based on the good, nor does he whose friendship is based on the useful.” (*MM*, 1209a4-1209a37) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. (1156b15). Cp. “Friends belong to the class of pleasant things; for it is pleasant to love…” (*Rhetoric*, I, 1372a1). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. (1158a2-8) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. (1156b25) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. (1157b5) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. (1158a10). In *On the Divination in Sleep* Aristotle also claims friends tend to have foresight respecting each other (464a27-464b5). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. (1167b5) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Cp. “A true friend will treat his friend as if he were going to be his friend forever.” (*Rhetoric*, II, 1395b19) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. (1156b36) [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Roughly, a property of the individual to manifest virtuous activity in appropriate circumstances [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. (1155b24) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This is *not* to say, however, there are two senses of goodwill on the Standard Reading (cp. Nehamas, 2010, pg. 7). Rather, there is one sense of goodwill that is directed towards different targets. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Aristotle suggests as much in discussing why one would not wish their friend to be a god (1159a11-2), with the last reason he offers being that one withholds the greatest goods for oneself. Cp. (Nehamas, 2010, pgs. 221-2) who makes much use of this passage. Note, this *is not* to collapse the Standard Reading offered here into the second option (Nehamas, 2010, pgs. 221-3) examines as a solution to the interpretive puzzle, on which all varieties of friendship are ultimately egoistic, as perhaps advanced in (Vlastos, 1991). The claim here is that most – not all – friendships end up ultimately egoistic, with (1159a11-2) offering support insofar as we understand Aristotle in these remarks as implicitly restricting his discussion to most – not all – friendships. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Cooper, pgs. 314-5), for example, claims Aristotle’s refinement of his predecessors’ opinions maintains goodwill as a common feature of all forms of friendship. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. (*Rhetoric*, 1381a1-5) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. (Cooper, 313) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. (Cooper, 314) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. (Cp. Nehamas, 2010, pg. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. (1098a17) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. (1113b1; Cooper, 319) [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. An objection we do not press, but which is worth noting, is that Aristotle claims vicious agents tend to be only Use Friends, if friends at all. But if the Goodwill Reading is correct, this suggests vicious people – when they are involved in Use Friendship – are friends *for each other’s sake*. Yet, Aristotle explicitly writes “clearly only good people can be friends for the sake of the other person himself, because bad people do not enjoy each other’s company unless there is some benefit in it for them.” (1156b3). See too (1157a3). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Especially given (Vlastos, 1999)’s reading, where he contrasts the egoistic Plato with Aristotle who permits loving for one’s friend’s own sake. See (Whiting, 1991) for rebuttal. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. (1161b16) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. If this is unpersuasive, then consider a battle where Athenian soldiers are offered support from soldiers from another polis, though the support comes *in media res* so few soldiers in the battle are able to meet directly. It seems plausible the members of the resulting combination of soldiers bear goodwill towards one another, and they count as comrades and Use Friends. However, it seems implausible they bear goodwill towards one another for each other’s own sake. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. (*Rhetoric*, 1381b34) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Complaints might also arise in Pleasure Friendships, e.g. a lover loves a beloved for the sake of pleasure, while a beloved loves a lover for the sake of utility (1163b32). This seems a mixture of Use Friendship and Pleasure Friendship, two different sources, presumably with the complaint resulting from the former component. Aristotle does qualify the origin of complaints noting they arise either, “only or chiefly,” among Use Friends (1162b5). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. (1162b17) [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. (1162b20) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. (1162b25-27) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. (*EE*, 1243a1) [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. (1162b17) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. (1156a11-3; 1164b10; 1167a14). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The future clause is required since mere associations differ from other Use Friends insofar as they are not friends for the sake of some present usefulness, but for the sake of some future usefulness (1156a30). This in turn implies mere associations require mutual trust (1162b25). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Indeed, we might adjust the case so that Sally owns a large home and is a wealthy, successful member of a certain class of individuals inhabiting her polis (something like successful alumni of a university) in the area. Out of a desire to, say, assist developing members of her class, Sally might offer lodging. If the number of developing members of her class is large, it seems plausible Sally may play host to at least one guest – call her Susan - whom Sally has not met. It seems plausible to me Sally and Susan might be involved in a Use Friendship, perhaps similar to the way in which it seems plausible comrades might be though they have never met. But if this contentious claim is accepted, the Goodwill Reading makes another false prediction. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. E.g. “Those who love each other for utility do not love each other for themselves by because of some good they get from each other; similarly for those who love for pleasure…it is not as being the man he is that the loved is loved, but because he provides some good or pleasure.” (1156a11-14). There are many other harmonious passages, see (1165b1-3; 1167a13-15) among others. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. (1167b5) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. (1155a27) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)