

Aristotle on Self-Knowledge and Friendship

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In memory of Ian Mueller.

MAN'S NATURE IS POLITICAL, Aristotle tells us; he needs others to live and to live well.¹ The gods, on the other hand, are perfect, self-contained, self-sufficient beings.² And yet, he also tells us, we ought to become like gods as much as possible, following the divine part of our nature. As Ross puts it in his memorable translation:

We must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.
[*Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b31–1178a2]³

The good life for humans imitates divine life by its self-sufficiency, its provision on its own of what is worthwhile, its relative lack of dependence on external goods and matters of chance. In this way, our call to imitate divine self-sufficiency seems to conflict with our political nature, our need for other people.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle addresses this possible conflict between our political nature and our divine nature in ways that are not obviously consistent with one another. In Book 9, Chapter 9, he argues that the happy man, although he is self-sufficient, will still need

1. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, 1097b8–11; 8.12, 1162a16–19; 9.9, 1169b16–22; *Eudemian Ethics* 7.10, 1242a19–28; *Politics* 1.2, 1253a7–18; 3.6, 1278b15–30; *History of Animals* 1.1, 487b33–488a14. For a synoptic treatment of the doctrine see Kullman, "Man as a Political Animal in Aristotle", as well as Cooper, "Political Animals and Civic Friendship".
2. *De Caelo* 279a20–22; *Metaphysics* 1091b15–18; *Eudemian Ethics* 1244b8–10 (cf. *Magna Moralia* 1212b37); and as suggested at *Politics* 1253a28. I discuss some of these passages below.
3. Ross, *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*. Gerson points out a close parallel between this passage and *Timaeus* 90b1–d7 (*Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 244, 255).

friends. Likewise, in Book 1, Chapter 7, he claims a special sort of self-sufficiency for the good that makes a human life happy,

[N]ot for one alone, living a solitary life, but also for for-bears and children and a wife and in general for friends and citizens. [1097b8–11. All translations based on Ross, with some revisions.]

However, in Book 10, Chapter 7, he claims that the contemplative life is superior to the practical in part because of its greater independence from other people; and furthermore, that the wise man will need other people less the wiser he is:⁴

And the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) that is spoken of would belong most to contemplative activity. For while a wise man (*sophos*), as well as a just man or the rest, needs the necessities of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with such things the just man needs people toward whom and with whom he shall act justly, and likewise also the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others, but the wise man, even when by himself, is able to contemplate, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do better if he has fellow-workers (*sunergoi*), but still he is the most self-sufficient. [1177a28–1177b1]

The practical life, organized around the moral virtues, requires other people in order to perform its basic tasks; one cannot be just without others to distribute goods to, and one cannot be courageous without loved ones to defend. In 9.9, Aristotle describes those who fill these roles as friends, and appeals to the dependence of moral virtue on

4. *NE* 1.7 discusses the self-sufficiency of the *activity* that constitutes human good; 9.9 discusses the self-sufficiency of a *person*; 10.7 moves without argument from self-sufficient activities to self-sufficient people. I take it a person becomes self-sufficient by adopting a self-sufficient activity as the final end or overarching goal of his life. Hence his *life* also becomes self-sufficient, although Aristotle does not speak that way directly.

other people as one explanation of the need for friends in the happy life (1169b10–13). The contemplative life, on the other hand, even if it requires a community to nurture and train the wise before they have matured — or to provide food, shelter, and safety — can be pursued largely in solitude. In this passage Aristotle describes this difference in terms of the greater self-sufficiency of the contemplative activity and the contemplative person, and on this basis judges the contemplative life superior and more godlike.⁵ It is true that the sense in which the wise man needs friends less is ambiguous: does he need fewer friends, or is he just less dependent on the ones he does have? In a parallel statement of the difficulty in the *Eudemian Ethics* (1244b13–15), Aristotle suggests both things. In what follows I assume in general that if the wise man does not need friends, he will not have them, so that if he needs them less he will also have fewer of them.⁶ But I also will discuss the possibility that he may have friends without needing them, as well as the possibility that the wise man needs friends in a different, more self-sufficient way.

If Aristotle claims here, as he seems to, that the contemplative life is superior in its solitude, he faces problems with respect to truth as well as to consistency. If real human happiness is solitary, even for contemplators, how do we understand the figure of Socrates, accomplished in wisdom but surrounded by friends and companions? If the wisdom of Socrates seems not to be the kind of contemplative virtue Aristotle has in mind, how do we explain that both Plato and Aristotle

5. It is true that he uses the term ‘fellow-worker’ (*sunergos*) rather than ‘friend’ (*philos*); however, given that friends are those with whom we share our beloved activities (9.12), I conclude that all of the wise man’s friends (at least, those with whom he pursues wisdom) will count as *sunergoi*, even if some *sunergoi* may not count as friends. Likewise he may have family-members and fellow-citizens who may be *philo*i although not partners in the pursuit of wisdom.
6. One exception that Gabriel Richardson Lear has pointed out to me is if the same friends are used for different purposes as one progresses: the Greek tutor, necessary for my contemplation as a means to an end, can become my partner in contemplation, so preserving the number of friends while modifying the type of need.

founded schools rather than simply perching on solitary mountain-tops? Human philosophy seems to be an eminently sociable activity. Even if some truth could be found in the claim, Aristotle's thinking on the question looks inconsistent. If friends are a qualification on one's self-sufficiency, as the 10.7 passage about the independence of the wise man indicates, then it is hard to see how Aristotle can argue that friends are no threat at all to self-sufficiency in his solution to the paradox of the happy man's need for friends in *NE* 9.9 (and in 1.7 as commonly interpreted).⁷

A variety of strategies could be used either to alleviate or to accept the tension in the *Nicomachean Ethics* between the apparently full compatibility of human self-sufficiency with the need for other people seen in Books 1 and 9 and the claim in Book 10 that such a need is an unfortunate qualification on our self-sufficiency. For those who believe that Book 10 and its endorsement of the contemplative life are already inconsistent with the rest of the book, the apparent inconsistency in the treatment of self-sufficiency needs no special explanation.⁸ Eric Brown has recently argued that Aristotle appeals to two distinct and incompatible notions of self-sufficiency in Books 1 and 10: one political, one solitary.⁹ Others have tried to show that Aristotle's think-

7. For example, both Richardson Lear and Nussbaum read 1.7 as showing the compatibility of Aristotelian self-sufficiency with communal life, although their understanding of why that's the case is very different (Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, chapter 3; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 344–5, 354–372). I see no reason why it cannot be read as admitting that human self-sufficiency comes already qualified by the need to live with others, as Kraut reads it (*Aristotle on the Human Good*, 299n28). Richardson Lear has a helpful discussion of the ways this passage can be interpreted (*Happy Lives* 50, 62–3).
8. So Nussbaum, *Fragility*, who accordingly comes to quite different conclusions about the topics of this essay (318–377, especially 373–77); cf. also Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*"; Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*.
9. For Brown, the solitary sense of self-sufficiency is one where one reduces one's needs to where one needs nothing beyond oneself, while the political sense is one where one procures help and goods from others until one's needs are met ("Aristotle on the Choice of Lives: Two Concepts of Self-Sufficiency"). I am not convinced that there are two senses of self-sufficiency for Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The passages discussing self-sufficiency

ing on these points is consistent. Prevalent among these are those who think that the self-sufficiency of happiness as Aristotle conceives it is meant from the beginning to be consistent in principle with needs for external and other goods.¹⁰

I will begin by explaining in more detail the problem about friendship posed in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9, first by reference to its background in Plato's *Lysis*, secondly by looking more closely at the notion of self-sufficiency that generates it — a notion which, I argue, can be applied consistently throughout the *NE*. I will then turn to the arguments of 9.9 themselves. These arguments have not been sufficiently well understood by commentators, and the elaborate final argument (1170a14–1170b20) has long evaded interpretation and so has been unjustly neglected. The arguments of 9.9, on my interpretation, indicate that the need for friendship is indeed a different sort of threat to self-sufficiency than the vicious man's dependence on pleasure or honor. All the same, I argue, the hope that 9.9 might offer a picture of friendship as fully compatible with self-sufficiency is not justified. In the end Aristotle is left with the same counter-intuitive claim I

in 1 and 10 appeal to one sense: independence from need. The political life is more self-sufficient than a hedonistic life, although it still requires other people as 1.7 and 9.9 indicate. The contemplative life requires even less from the outside world and so is yet more self-sufficient. I defend this interpretation below. My disagreement with Brown is about how the political life is more self-sufficient. Brown argues that other people actually increase one's self-sufficiency, whereas I argue that other people are always a qualification on self-sufficiency, even if some uses of other people are more compatible with self-sufficiency than others. There is a question as to how the greater self-sufficiency of political communities described in *Politics* 1.2 is consistent with my account. One possibility is that the self-sufficiency of the political community does not strictly speaking increase the self-sufficiency of the individual; another possibility is that the picture of self-sufficiency I outline is technical and special to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

10. Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives*, and Cooper, "Plato and Aristotle on 'Finality' and '(Self-) Sufficiency'", both defend an interpretation of self-sufficiency where finality, rather than independence from need, is its central meaning; see note 15. While Stern-Gillet argues that friendship is self-actualization, and so is consistent with self-sufficiency, she also argues that Aristotle held two notions of the self, one in *NE* 1–9 and the other in *NE* 10, so she avoids reconciling 9.9 with 10.7 (*Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, 11–35, 123–145).

have outlined — that as a person grows in contemplative excellence, he outgrows his dependence on others and so his need for friends. If Aristotle is given a consistent view, in other words, it seems that what he says is false.¹¹

I. Friendship and self-sufficiency in the *Lysis*

The question whether human perfection implies solitude, and so whether progress in virtue also involves progress in solitude, is first raised in Plato's *Lysis*.¹² The *Lysis* presents a series of paradoxes about friendship, including an argument that friendship is inconsistent with the self-sufficiency of the good man. This paradox arises when Socrates and Lysis are discussing the attraction of like to like, and agree that since bad men are conflicted and so "unlike" themselves, they cannot be friends with anyone, even themselves (214b8–d3).¹³ Only the good can be friends with one another. However, this raises a problem: if the good are friends with the good, it isn't clear why they will *need* each other:

Isn't a good man, to the extent that he is good, sufficient to himself (*hikonos autôî*)? —Yes. —And a self-sufficient (*hikanos*) person needs (*deomenos*) nothing, on account of his self-sufficiency (*hikanotês*)? —How could he? —And the person who needs nothing wouldn't prize (*agapôê*) anything. —No, he wouldn't. —What he wouldn't prize

11. So my interpretations of self-sufficiency in *NE* 1.7 and *NE* 9.9 below are not the only possible interpretations; *NE* 1.7 can be read as describing self-sufficiency as fully compatible with life with others, and 9.9 can be understood as applying only to the political life. However, so read, Aristotle's views of self-sufficiency cannot be consistent between these passages and 10.7–8, and an interpretation that yields consistency ought to be preferred, other things being equal.
12. Smith-Pangle also notices the importance of the *Lysis* as background for Aristotle's discussion of friendship and uses its themes, including the reliance of friendship on need, throughout her book (*Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, especially chapter 1). See also Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, chapter 6.
13. Cf. the parallel argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4.

he wouldn't love (*philoî*). —Definitely not. —And whoever doesn't love is not a friend. —It appears not. —Then how are the good to be friends to us good men from the beginning? They don't yearn for one another when apart, because even then they are sufficient to themselves, and when together they have no need (*chreian*) of one another. Is there any way people like that can possibly value (*peri pollou poiêsthai*) each other? —No. —But people who don't place much value on each other couldn't be friends. —True. [*Lysis* 215a6–c2, Lombardo, trans.]

Given that friendship fills a lack or corrects a deficiency, it seems to conflict with the self-sufficiency of the good man — and so friendship among the good seems impossible. But, as is illustrated by Socrates' pronouncement of his passionate love for friends (211e), friendship seems to be pursued as fiercely by good men as by anyone else. Although the discussion of friendship develops after this point in the dialogue, it is clear that Socrates thinks that this particular paradox remains, as he mentions it repeatedly afterward as something established (216e1, 218b, 219b, 220d, 222cd), the last time at the end of the dialogue.

If ordinary friendships among ordinary good people were Socrates' concern here, his interest in the paradox and his treatment of it as intransigent would be hard to fathom. As the paradox is stated, all one needs to solve it is to assume that the good men in question are imperfectly good and so imperfectly self-sufficient. Their friends will then fill a need — their imperfect goodness — and also provide a good — namely, better achievement of the good. Of course, it is possible that Plato either deliberately or inadvertently wrote such a non-paradox as if it were a paradox. All the same, given the evidence and simplicity of this point, I suspect that we are meant to understand the friendship of the good as the friendship of the perfectly good. Then, at least, something genuinely puzzling is at stake: namely, that friends are qualifications on our self-sufficiency. That means that in conditions of perfect goodness — those held, for instance, by gods — no

friends will be necessary. But this seems to imply that the more perfect and self-sufficient a man becomes, the less he will need friends. This clashes with a certain common-sense picture of the reality, which is that very good men, Socrates for instance, seem to retain a passionate desire for friends and seem also to have no fewer friends than men of middling or lesser goodness.¹⁴

In this way, although the *Lysis* discussion is only condensed and suggestive, it appears on some reflection that the real problem it raises is not how ordinary good men can have friends, since they may need friends to become better, to correct their imperfections. Rather, the problem is that the perfectly good do not need friends, and so it is not clear why one ought not to need friends less the better one is.

II. Self-sufficiency and solitude

The suggestive puzzle posed in the *Lysis* is fleshed out with greater complexity and clarity in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There too, I will argue, the question is whether human perfection implies solitude, and so whether progress in virtue likewise implies progress in solitude. But the question is, so far, obscure. It is clear enough from our texts in Books 1 and 10 that happiness and self-sufficiency are closely linked. But why should a person become more solitary as he becomes more self-sufficient? Self-sufficiency in the *Nicomachean Ethics* has two features: something self-sufficient is *final*: it is sought for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else; and furthermore, something self-sufficient is *free from necessary conditions*.¹⁵ Both features can be un-

14. Socrates is also portrayed in *Symposium* 174d–e as getting lost in solitary thought, which indicates either an impulse or capacity for solitude; perhaps he ought be thought as a mysterious case on the *Lysis* or *NE* picture, as someone who has friends without needing them. I thank the anonymous reviewer for the point.
15. So argues Heinaman, “Eudaimonia and Self-sufficiency in the *Nicomachean Ethics*”, 45; in note 34 he points out that the necessary conditions must be distinct from what they are the conditions for. Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives*, chap. 3, argues (as does Cooper, “Plato and Aristotle”) that self-sufficiency should be understood only in terms of finality, so that the highest good is self-sufficient as a final end: it supplies everything needed to make a life

derstood as types of independence, and so ways of being complete and self-contained.¹⁶ Since Aristotle speaks in 10.7 of one activity and one person being more self-sufficient than another, we know that self-sufficiency is attained by degrees. Contemplative activity is more self-sufficient for its exercise than moral or political activity in both senses: moral activity is sought for the sake of something else (as well as for itself), whereas contemplation is not, and so contemplation is more final (1177b1–22); and further, contemplative activity is more free of necessary conditions than moral activity (1177a27–b1; cf. 1178a22–b7). And so we reach our conclusion: While the person who dedicates his life to contemplative activity, the wise man, still needs food and water, he no longer needs other people to do what he does. Other people are not necessary to his contemplative activity, as they are necessary for political activity. So the contemplator, insofar as he is a contemplator, will not need other people.¹⁷ And if he does not need friends, it is not clear why he would have them, since as the *Lysis* puts it, it seems that we have friends because they fill some lack or correct some deficiency.¹⁸

choiceworthy. Her view runs into difficulties with the book 10 passages (1177a28–1177b1, discussed above, and 1178b32–35, below), both of which indicate that self-sufficiency is also to be understood as independence from necessary conditions (such as food, water, friends, and other supplies). Richardson Lear and Cooper, along with Heinaman and Kraut (*Aristotle on the Human Good*, chap. 5), seem to me very effective in their attacks on “inclusivist” interpretations of self-sufficiency (for instance, Ackrill, “Aristotle on Eudaimonia”; Crisp, “Aristotle’s Inclusivism”; Devereux, “Aristotle on the Essence of Happiness”; Whiting, “Human Nature and Intellectualism.”)

16. Joachim seems to understand self-sufficiency in this way, when he describes happiness as “self-complete and self-conditioned” (*Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, 287) and *theōria* as “self-contained” (295); Bodéüs explains that contemplative activity is self-sufficient because unlike the other activities of the intellect, it requires nothing other than the intellect (*Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, 176).
17. The wise man may well need friends for other reasons, for instance, to provide him with food, shelter, and security. Aristotle suggests at 1178b5–7 that the contemplator will in fact live with others and will thereby sometimes pursue moral activities — once again emphasizing that contemplative activity will not involve others in the same way.
18. The connection between self-sufficiency and solitude explains why Kraut cannot be correct in distinguishing, in his reading of 10.7, the solitude of

As I have already suggested, the solitude that Aristotle seems to associate with the best human life is less surprising than it might be, since divine life for Aristotle is both solitary and a model for human life.¹⁹ While *NE* 9.9 on its face shows no indication of concern with the gods or our imitation of them,²⁰ in 10.7–8 Aristotle treats the gods as models or paradigms for the best human life. In the passage I quoted at the opening of the paper, he exhorts us to “make ourselves immortal” as much as is possible; he calls the highest, contemplative activity “divine” (1177a15, 16; 1177b28); he argues that since the activity of the gods is contemplative, ours must be also (1178b8–24); and that the lives of men are blessed (and happy) to the extent that they resemble the lives of gods (1178b25–27). In 10.8, Aristotle argues that divine activity is contemplative rather than practical, since it seems unworthy and unnecessary for them to perform just or generous actions (1178b10–19). This strongly suggests that the gods have no need to live in political community. In Book 12 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle also compares the life of God to the best human life (1072b13–30), saying that “he is always in the state that we sometimes are”, and attributes to God a single activity that, however we understand it, seems to be totally self-contained: thought thinking itself (1074b15–1075a10). The

prime mover does only one thing and requires absolutely nothing outside of himself to do it. Self-sufficiency is not referred to here directly; however, in the *De Caelo*, the being or beings “outside the heaven” are said to be “most self-sufficient” (279a20–21). That the prime mover is thus solitary and friendless perhaps explains the assumption in the discussion of friendship in the *Eudemian Ethics* 1244b8–10 and in the *Magna Moralia* 1212b37 that God has no friends; and why, famously, Aristotle describes a man who can live in total solitude as “a beast or a god” (*Politics* 1253a28).

The question, then, is what it means for a human being to be self-sufficient, what it means for a human being to pursue a single, self-contained activity. As Aristotle makes clear, a truly god-like life is impossible, since our nature requires external necessities:

Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation. But, being a man, one will also need external prosperity (*tês ektos euêmerias*); for our nature is not self-sufficient (*autarkês*) for the purpose of contemplation, but our body also must be healthy and must have food and other attention. [1178b32–35]

It would seem to follow that our need for other people is like our need for food, a need for an external good, a qualification on our self-sufficiency by consequence of mortal weakness. And if it is possible, by intellectual progress, to overcome our need for other people, at least in our contemplative activity, this will be to achieve greater self-sufficiency and so greater god-likeness. And so it seems that as our rational nature is perfected, our political nature is overcome.

The foregoing picture might be challenged, or at least some of its harshness mitigated, if the need for friends could be understood as unlike the need for food or other necessities. Aristotle seems to suggest in two major passages that happy people need friends in a way entirely compatible with self-sufficiency. If this suggestion turns out to be Aristotle’s considered view, then Aristotle will be inconsistent,

contemplation from the solitude of happiness (*Aristotle on the Human Good*, 170–171). Kraut argues that while contemplative activity can be solitary, a happy person cannot be. But while this is true in a limited way, since the wise man needs people to provide his food and safety, this can’t strictly be right. Self-sufficiency is a criterion for the highest good and is attained by the happy person. If self-sufficiency implies solitude, as I think it does, it will not make sense for Aristotle to praise an activity for its self-sufficiency while denying that the activity will in fact be pursued in solitude. So the wise man will be more solitary on account of his contemplative activity, even if he can’t be completely solitary.

19. That Aristotle sees divine life as a model for humans to imitate has been neglected in much of the literature on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with the more recent exceptions of Sedley, “The Ideal of Godlikeness”, Bodéüs, *Aristotle* 168–179, Gerson, *Aristotle* 242–260, and, most extensively, Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives*.

20. As Gauthier and Jolif complain (*L’Éthique à Nicomaque, ad loc.*)

but he will have resources to explain what appears to be the truth about friendship, namely, that wise people have as many friends as anyone else. If, on the other hand, as I will argue, these passages can be read consistently with 10.7, Aristotle's view will be consistent, but apparently false.

The first passage suggesting the compatibility of self-sufficiency with friendship is in *NE* 1.7, where Aristotle claims that the self-sufficiency of the happy life is "not for one alone, living a solitary life, but also for forbears and children and a wife and in general for friends and citizens" (1097b8–11). This passage is ambiguous. While it might be describing a different type or sense of self-sufficiency, so that human beings become more self-sufficient through others,²¹ it may also be putting a condition on the self-sufficiency available in political life, thus indicating that self-sufficiency is only possible for humans in a limited way.²² More promising is the in-depth examination of friendship and self-sufficiency in 9.9, which offers the best hope for a need for friends that might be consistent with a godlike life. The discussion in 9.9 indicates that in the highest types of friendship, the need for friends is different in kind from that in the lower. Put simply, in the best lives, a friend is not an external end to be collected with other goods but an integrated improvement to one's own activity. Whether the view of the self-sufficient man's need for friends that emerges from this discussion is enough to solve the difficulties I have outlined is another question. I will argue, in the end, that even a notion of friends as

21. As Brown, "Aristotle on the Choice of Lives" argues. Aristotle might seem to support the alternative interpretation of 1.7 in 9.9 itself, when he says that it seems inappropriate for a human being to be solitary, since man is a political animal (1169b16–19). But this is a preliminary argument, an indication that the happy man will indeed need friends. And indeed, Aristotle does believe that man is a political animal, and means to explain why in the rest of 9.9. But, as I argue below, his more considered arguments turn out to be compatible with the 10.7 qualification on the political nature of humans: friendship relies on defect, and defects can be partly overcome. To overcome them increases one's self-sufficiency.

22. Kraut interprets the passage along these lines (*Aristotle on the Human Good* 299n18). Richardson Lear has a helpful discussion of the ways this passage can be interpreted (*Happy Lives* 50, 62–63; see note 7).

improvements indicates that the more accomplished one gets in virtue, the lesser one's need is for others. If this is correct, the best lives will be most solitary — unless, that is, one may have friends without needing them, out of a gratuitous desire to share the good. (Here it would matter whether Aristotle accepts or rejects a key assumption from the *Lysis* discussion, whether love for another implies a prior need for them.) Accordingly, I argue that the 9.9 arguments, once properly understood, are entirely consistent with the 10.7 picture of the solitary happy life.

III. The arguments of 9.9

At the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9, Aristotle lays out opinions held by colleagues and predecessors (such as Plato in the *Lysis*) on the relationship between friendship and happiness:

It is also disputed whether the happy man will need friends or not. It is said that those who are blessed (*makariois*) and self-sufficient have no need of friends; for they have the things that are good, and therefore being self-sufficient they need nothing further (*prosdeisthai*), while a friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort. [*NE* 1169 b3–7]

The happy man is thought to be self-sufficient — he is thought not to need anything. Why then will he need friends? Friends help us accomplish what we cannot do on our own (1169b6–7). They compensate for failures, lacks, needs and deficiencies that we have. If when we are happy we have no such deficiencies, why will we need them?

Aristotle defends the idea that the happy man will need friends first by appealing to signs and indicators that this is the case (1169b8–22) and then giving two related sets of arguments, dividing the rest of the chapter into two sections. First, Aristotle gives a general outline of the value of friends as based in shared activity and the pleasure in that activity, along with ways that one's activity is easier and more effective with friends (1169b30–1170a13). Secondly, Aristotle gives an elaborate

explanation of the good of friendship based on principles of human nature (1170a13–b19; he calls the argument *phusikôteron* at 1170a13).²³ It is clear that the two sets of arguments are meant to differ somewhat in terms of the types of excellence they concern: the first section focuses on moral or political virtue, emphasizing the contemplation of *praxeis* or actions (1169b35) and the pleasure that the virtuous man is said to take in “actions in accordance with virtue” (1170a8–9).²⁴ The second section by contrast emphasizes the natural activity of thinking (*noein* or *noêsis*; 1170a17, 19, 32) as well as perception and so may be thought to include contemplative virtue as well as other virtuous activities.²⁵

23. One could read *phusikôteron* conservatively, as Gauthier and Jolif do, and point to the parallel use in *NE* 9.4, where the *phusikôteron* argument also concerns the definition of human life as perceiving and thinking and the sense in which one’s activities and their products are one’s own. So understood *phusikôteron* could mean simply “having to do with the nature of a human being”. However, it is also possible that Aristotle is appealing to a familiar contrast between speaking *logikôs* versus *phusikôs* (see references in Ross, *Metaphysics*, vol 2, 168). Burnyeat has argued (following Simplicius) that this distinction contrasts things true of a variety of subject matters — such as the *Organon* — and things true on the basis of natural philosophy or metaphysics, appealing especially to the distinction between matter and form — such as the *Physics*, *De Anima*, and much of the *Metaphysics* (*A Map of Metaphysics Zeta*, 19–25, 87–125). Burnyeat’s view fits our passage on account of the distinction between actuality and potentiality and because it relies on features of human soul found in the *De Anima* (2.1–3).
24. The phrase “*praxeis kata tèn aretên*” is sometimes ambiguous, as in 1099a14 and 20 where the context seems to be the life of virtue generally rather than of moral virtue specifically; but given that the examples are just and liberal acts the context may be narrow even there. The phrase is also ambiguous at 1176b7–9, although in 10.7–8 *praxis*, *praxeis*, and *prattein* are repeatedly and explicitly distinguished from *theôria* and the *energeia* of *nous* or *theôria e.g.* 1178b1–2, 1178b17–18, 20–21.
25. The 12th century commentator Michael of Ephesus claims that the whole of 9.9 is meant as only relevant to the political life (*Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, 509.17–19, 27–30). Since he claims there that the contemplative life does not require friends, I take it that he interprets in this way to defuse the tension between 9.9 and 10.7. While this possibility is attractive, I cannot see why the considerations appealed to in the last section of 9.9 may not apply directly to the contemplative life as well as to the active life, since thinking is included in the natural activities shared in friendship. Furthermore, on my reading, the tension between 9.9 and 10.7 is only apparent; they can be read consistently with one another.

Since the last argument, the argument from human nature, is more general and since it seems clearly meant as the culmination of the previous arguments,²⁶ I begin with it and will refer back to the first set of arguments when they become relevant. Its circuitous argument appealing to human nature and the value of friends in self-awareness has long puzzled and frustrated commentators. Gauthier and Jolif, for instance, complain that it “pretends to be more profound, but is only more laborious” than what precedes it.²⁷ Cooper also finds it unsatisfactory,²⁸ and no interpretation I have found gives any clear and convincing explanation of its content or its structure. I will first outline the bare-bones apparent structure of the argument, explaining difficulties that emerge there; I will then propose solutions to these difficulties and explain how the argument under my interpretation does not deserve the criticism commentators have heaped on it.

I begin by outlining the skeleton of the argument from 1170a13–b19, putting down the most basic inferential steps that Aristotle makes explicit:

1. The life of the good man is in itself good and pleasant (since it is choiceworthy by nature and pleasant in itself, and so choiceworthy and pleasant for him). [1170a14–20]
 2. The good man’s awareness of his life is in itself good and pleasant. [1170b1–5]
 3. As the good man is to himself, so he is to his friend (“The friend is another self”. [1170b5–7])
26. Thus while I agree with Pakaluk that the arguments for the desirability of friends are meant to improve in some sense as the chapter progresses, I think that the final two sets of arguments are not strictly speaking arguing to the same conclusion. Rather, the first concerns friends in the life of moral virtue alone, while the second includes also the contemplative life (*Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX, ad loc.*)
27. Gauthier and Jolif, *ad loc.*
28. Cooper “Friendship and the Good”, 341.

Conclusion 1. The friend's life is in itself desirable for the good man. [1170b7–8]

Conclusion 2. The good man's awareness of his friend's life is in itself good and pleasant. [1170b9–10]

4. The good man needs whatever is choiceworthy in itself. [1170b17–18]

Conclusion 3. The good man needs friends.

The argument as stated faces several grave difficulties. The first arises with the third premise, that the friend is another self. If it means what it appears to mean, that everything true of one's relation to oneself is true of one's relation to one's friend, it will not only be false on its face but it will assume the conclusion that it is being used to show in the argument. The argument would then read as follows:

- A. One's own life (and awareness of it) is desirable in itself.
 B. My friend's life (and awareness of it) is desirable in the same way mine is.

Conclusion. My friend's life (and awareness of it) is desirable in itself.

The second premise is too broad; it does not explain why it is that the friend is a second self in a way that justifies the conclusion. If we already know that every relation we have toward ourselves is true of our friend, then the fact that our friends are valuable is trivial.²⁹

If Aristotle is arguing from the similarity of the friends to their value to one another, he faces other difficulties as well. Because the class of

29. Accordingly, Stern-Gillet calls the premise an apparent "*deus ex machina*" (140), referring to complaints by Stewart, *ad loc.*, and Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, 332.

similar people is broader than the class of friends, he will have difficulty limiting the scope of his arguments only to friends rather than to much larger groups of people similar to the friend. For example, the argument from human nature seems to compare extensively the happy man's self-awareness with his awareness of his friend, and to draw conclusions about the value of the latter from the value of the former. How should we understand this? Stewart interprets as follows: "It is in the consciousness of the existence of another that a man becomes truly conscious of himself" (392). But as Cooper points out (340–1), this does not seem true, nor even if it were true, would it explain why we need friends rather than just any old other. The bare awareness of any person would provide the self-consciousness Stewart is interested in.³⁰

A similar problem arises for the argument parallel to this one, in the first argumentative section of 9.9. Aristotle seems to argue there that a friend is "one's own" (*oikeion*), and so the virtuous man will take pleasure in the friend's actions in a similar way to his own. The idea that a friend is *oikeion* plays a similar role in this argument to the idea that the friend is "another self" in the latter argument:

If happiness lies in living and being active (*energein*), and the activity of the good man is virtuous (*spoudaios*) and pleasant in itself, as we have said at the outset, and if a thing's being one's own (*to oikeion*) is one of the things that are pleasant, and if we can contemplate our neighbors better than ourselves and their actions better than our own, and if the actions of virtuous (*spoudaiôn*) men who are their friends are pleasant to good men (since these have both the attributes that are naturally pleasant) — if this be so, the blessed man will need friends of this sort,

30. Cooper accepts Stewart's interpretation, and, concluding that the argument is "abortive", rejects the passage as the authoritative account of the value of friendship. On Cooper's view, friends are necessary for self-knowledge understood as knowledge of one's character, not for the mere self-consciousness he sees described in 9.9. All commentators with the exception of Kosman (whose focus is the parallel argument in the *Eudemian Ethics*) agree that self-consciousness, narrowly conceived, is at stake here.

since he chooses to contemplate worthy actions and actions that are his own, and the actions of a good man who is his friend have both these qualities. [1169b30–1170a4]

Given that Aristotle draws conclusions about the similarity between friends and so the value of friendship from the fact that a friend is *oikeion*, it might seem that he means by *oikeion* here something like “similar”. Once again, this is how Stewart reads it: the friend’s actions are one’s own “in the sense of being *homoiai* [similar], and realising the one law of rectitude common to all good men.” The good man sees himself by “universalizing his own conduct. ... It is no longer *his* conduct, but the conduct of *all good men*” (385–86). But if Stewart is right, Aristotle’s argument is incoherent. Any good man could serve the purpose Stewart describes, whereas Aristotle is discussing the need for friends or loved ones. Strangers could reflect the goodness of the good man, and reading about good men similar to oneself would serve just as well as actually living with them. So in general it seems that any argument for the value of friendship based on similarity will have difficulties limiting the relevant similarities to friends.

The emphasis on awareness, perception, and thought in the final argument of 9.9 raises other difficulties. Self-perception is shared with all human beings, and so it is not clear why Aristotle has not argued that we ought be friends with all self-perceivers, or at least all good ones.³¹ If one shifts one’s emphasis to the thinking (*noiein* and *noêsis*) discussed in the passage, other difficulties arise, since thinking is also proper to God and God has no friends.³² The second section of 9.9 ap-

31. So Pakaluk’s interpretation cannot be correct. As Pakaluk interprets (209–215), the relation a man has to his own perception is valuable, and is similar to the relation he can have to his friend’s perception. “Sharing in perception is analogous to reflexive perception” (215). But then it will not be clear why, for Aristotle, the good man is not friends with every human being, since every human being is a perceiver and a possible object of perception.

32. Accordingly, Gauthier and Jolif complain about this argument that awareness cannot be the basis of friendship, since God is pure awareness, and he has no friends (761).

pears to argue from the value of thinking to the value of the awareness of thinking to the value of friends. If such an argument were effective, it would seem to establish that God had friends, which we know Aristotle believes to be false.³³ Furthermore, while awareness of one’s friends might seem to be an important condition for friendship, it does not seem to be what we value most about friendship, any more than bare self-consciousness is what we seem to value most about life. Accordingly, Aristotle seems to have put both the value of life and the value of friendship on a strange and implausible foundation.

Lastly, there are difficulties about what Aristotle says in the final argument about the type of good that friendship is and the way in which it is valuable. Premise 4 in my outline, that the good man needs whatever is choiceworthy in itself, seems to be both false for Aristotle and false simply. If what is choiceworthy in itself is to be understood as an intrinsic good as opposed to an instrumental one, as Cooper points out, it will follow that the happy man needs all intrinsic goods — spirited card games, elegant lawn decorations, foot massages, and so on.³⁴ But this is neither intuitively plausible nor something that Aristotle seems to think.

In the remainder of the paper I will argue, in response to these problems:

- (i) By calling the friend another self, Aristotle is not appealing to a general, implausible analogy between oneself and one’s friend. Rather, he understands friendship to involve collaborative activity, and so the friend is another self in the sense of being a helper rather than a mirror.³⁵

33. As Gauthier and Jolif see it, the first section of argument in 9.9 properly recognizes that we have friends because we are imperfect or defective; the argument in the last section of 9.9 does not seem to acknowledge this. It is better to argue, they think, as the previous argument does, that friends make our activity more continuous or godlike. On the interpretation that I defend, the last section also assumes human defects, and so this criticism of the argument is avoided.

34. Cooper “Friendship and the Good”, 338n5.

35. That the highest forms of friendship involve collaborative activity is a point

- (ii) Once the collaborative nature of friendship is understood, it can be seen that the final argument does not rely on a comparison between self-awareness and the awareness of someone else, but on collaborative thinking and perceiving, taken to cover a broad variety of life-activities. The emphasis on the value of life, perception, and thought, while applying, broadly taken, to a variety of types of virtue friendship, also explains the special way in which friends may be valuable in contemplative activity.
- (iii) The collaborative nature of friendship also helps to show that Aristotle is not arguing that friends are intrinsic goods, but rather that they are a type of external good I will call “integrated goods”.³⁶ Integrated goods can have both instrumental and intrinsic value even for virtuous people, so indicating that intrinsic value is not their key feature. Their key feature is that they improve and augment what the good man does already rather than providing outside supplies or supplements. Accordingly, they are compatible with the self-contained unity of the happy man in a way that they are not for the vicious man. Nonetheless, they depend on human defect, and the need even for such friends diminishes with greater contemplative excellence.

well-discussed by Kosman, “Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends”; see also Cooper “Friendship and the Good”, 346ff. The importance of collaboration in unifying the friends is neglected by all the other commentators. See, for example, Smith Pangle’s puzzles over how a friend’s activity can really be one’s own (Smith Pangle 187, 189); and Kahn’s claim that only by positing *nous* as the true self shared among friends can the friends share each other’s excellence in the right way (“Aristotle and Altruism”, 34–5).

36. This particular division of external goods into types has to do with who values them and thus the way they are valued, so that the virtuous person values them one way and the vicious person another. This is a different sort of division into types than the more commonly discussed division between instruments and things without which happiness is damaged.

IV. Collaboration

The final argument of 9.9 relies crucially on the idea that the friend is another self. What does this mean? We find in the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics* two different uses:

Version 1. Any relation I bear to myself, I also bear to my friend. [1166a31]

Version 2. A friend furnishes what one cannot provide on one’s own. [1169b7–8]

In the first case, the friend is a sort of mirror or double; in the second, he is a helper.³⁷ Which version is appropriate here? The first, taken on its own, runs into the problems in this argument that we have mentioned: it justifies too much and makes the conclusion that friends are valuable trivial. The second version, introduced in this same chapter and context, fares better; indeed, it ends up solving many of the apparent difficulties in the chapter. This is not to say that similarity among friends is unimportant, but that the type of similarity proper to friendship has its origin in shared activity and collaborative activity rather than vice versa.³⁸

Aristotle is emphatic on the importance of living together for friendship; as he says in 8.5, “There is nothing so characteristic of friends as

37. As Stewart interprets it: “a supplementary self” (384). I am indebted to Kosman “Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends”, which has a valuable discussion of the role this conception of the friend plays in the parallel passage of the *Eudemian Ethics*.

38. See 1155a32–35 for an endoxic claim that likeness founds friendship; it does not seem that Aristotle ever endorses this claim. Aristotle calls virtue friendship “the friendship of the good and of those who are similar with respect to virtue (*homoion kat’ areten*)” (1156b7–8) and all friendship, he says, is “according to a certain resemblance (*kath’ homoioteta tina*)” (1156b19–20). He also seems to equate friendship and likeness at 1159b2–6. This last passage may be the key to understanding the other two; Aristotle is there concerned about equality rather than other forms of similarity, as he emphasizes that the “likeness” of virtue friends means that neither does a base service for another.

living together" (1157b19).³⁹ Living together means shared activity, as is emphasized most clearly at the end of the discussion of friendship in *NE* 9.12. There, it is clear that shared activity is common to all types of friendship. Two gluttons may cook and feast together; soldier friends fight together; philosopher friends think together:

Whatever 'to be' means for each type of men, whatever it is for whose sake they value life, in *that* they wish to occupy themselves with their friends; and so some drink together, others dice together, others join in athletic exercises and hunt together, or philosophize together, each type spending their days together in whatever they love most in life; for since they wish to live with their friends, they do and share in those things which they count as living together. Thus the friendship of bad men turns out to be an evil thing ... while the friendship of the good is good, being augmented by their companionship; and they are thought to become better too by being active and by improving each other. [1172a1–13]

Here Aristotle describes a list of activities some of which are simply shared (drinking together); some are competitive (playing dice, athletic contests); while others are collaborative (hunting or philosophizing together).⁴⁰

One natural thought suggested by the examples in the passage is that the sharing of activities is different in different types of friendship. Drinking with someone may increase the pleasure of drinking, but ultimately the friends are simply doing the same thing in the same place. Whereas philosophizing with someone, or hunting with them, involves sharing a goal: the solution to a metaphysical problem, or

39. Cf. 1158a23, 1171a2–3, 10, and 1156b26 with 1156a27.

40. I set to one side the question as to whether competitive friendship is properly shared activity or collaborative activity. It seems to vary by context: gambling together seems not collaborative but rather zero-sum; whereas athletic contests could be a collaborative pursuit of fitness or physical excellence.

the capture of a dangerous wild boar. Aristotle marks as characteristic of good friendships as opposed to bad that they are "augmented"⁴¹ and that the friendships improve the friends by their activities. What does Aristotle mean when he says that the friendships of the good are "augmented"? I suggest that the better activities involve collaboration, hence that the friends help each other in whatever project is underway: they act together and in concert for shared goals.⁴²

If we see collaboration as assumed in the background of the discussions of 9.9 (where the friendship of the good is assumed), the arguments make more sense. The first stretch of argument that the friend is *oikeion* and so his *praxeis* are pleasant to behold can be seen to assume that the shared pleasure is part of a shared project. I behold my friend's actions with pleasure because in some sense they are mine — either because I share the action in a proximate sense, killing a wild boar, conquering Troy, or because I share it in a broad sense as when my friend is a fellow-contributor in whatever way to the good of our political community. This is why the considerations about the friend as *oikeion* and so pleasant to behold go along with considerations about the ways that the friend is an aid to activity: life alone is more difficult (1170a5); it is easier to be continually active with friends (1170a5–6); good friends provide practice in goodness (1170a11–13).

Aristotle makes explicit the value of collaboration in the highest friendships toward the end of the final argument of 9.9. At the end of his long comparison of the good man's self-awareness with his

41. "Augmented" (*sunauxanomenē*) modifies "friendship" (*philia*) but Aristotle must mean that it augments the friends themselves and their activities. Pleasure is said to augment (*sunauxanein*) activity at 1175a30.

42. One might question the limitation of collaboration to friendships of the good: a gang of wicked bandits collaborate in theft. However, as is the theme of many a bandit movie, since the goal (acquiring wealth) is zero-sum, the collaboration is both fragile and limited. Since the key goods for Aristotle (moral and intellectual virtue) are not zero-sum, collaboration in the best friendships can involve truly sharing a goal (*e.g.*, victory, truth) without loss to the others; accordingly, these friendships are collaborative in a much deeper and more robust way.

awareness of his friend, Aristotle pauses to make it clear that he is not drawing a comparison at all, but is describing collaborative activity:

So [the good man] must be aware also of his friend that he is, and this will happen in living together and in sharing discussion and thought. For this is what living together for human beings seems to mean, and not as for cattle, grazing in the same place. [1170b10–14]

Here Aristotle contrasts the merely shared activity of cattle (and human gluttons) with the collaborative activity of philosophic friends, who think and discuss in common and so help one another to achieve shared goals.

The argument that collaboration and collaborative activity plays a key role in the arguments of 9.9 is strengthened by a comparison between the 9.12 passage and other passages where Aristotle discusses the transfer in value from our activities (and what it is “to be” for us) to the people involved in our activities. So in 9.7 when Aristotle discusses why benefactors love whom they benefit more than vice versa, he explains (in considerations he also calls *phusikôteron*, at 1167b29) that the benefited are an extension of the benefactor’s activity and so of what he is:⁴³

This is what the position of benefactors is like; for that which they have treated well is their work (*ergon*), and therefore they love this more than the work loves his maker. The cause of this is that ‘to be’ is to all men a thing

43. See also *NE* 9.4, where Aristotle discusses the love of the good man for himself:

He wishes for himself what is good and what seems so, and does it (for it is characteristic of the good man to exert himself for the good), and does so for his own sake (for he does it for the sake of the thinking part of him (*dianoêtikon*), which is thought to be the man himself); and he wishes himself to live and to be preserved, and especially the element by virtue of which he thinks. For ‘to be’ is good to the good man, and each man wishes himself what is good And such a man wishes to live with himself, and does so with pleasure. [1166a14–24]

to be chosen and loved (*haireton kai philêton*), and that we are by virtue of activity (*i. e.* by living and acting), and that the work *is* in a way the producer in activity (*energeia*); he loves (*stergei*) his work, then, because he loves to be. And this is natural (*phusikon*); for what he is in potentiality, his work manifests in actuality (*energeia*). [1168a3–9]

Just as artists become attached to their inanimate products on account of their attachment to their own activity and what it means to be for them, so those benefiting others become attached to the object of their beneficial activity. The treatment of this as something natural or *phusikos*, and the connection of friends with activity versus potentiality, echoes in 9.9; we will return to it later. The passage for the moment is valuable as an example of a way another person can be unified with his friend’s activity and can be valued because of the value of that activity. It is my suggestion that collaborators in other contexts function similarly in human activity to the way the beneficiaries do here.⁴⁴

Not only is the affective attachment to one’s activity extended to the object of that activity and participants in that activity, but — as is crucial for the 9.9 discussions — one’s own activity is also pleasant. So in *NE* 10.4:

44. An earlier passage parallel to the one about beneficiaries is the discussion of the love between parents and children, where Aristotle says that parents love children as their products, and that accordingly the children are “other selves” (1161b27–31). I take this as evidence that it is the integration of the other person into one’s own activity that makes them other selves. Millgram, “Aristotle on Making Other Selves” (followed by Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, 181–183), also takes these passages to provide help in understanding why the friend is another self. However, his view takes the analogy to parents to be much closer than mine; he emphasizes the causal role that the friends play in making each other virtuous to begin with. Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 143, takes a similar view. While the formation of character is one way that the friends help in virtue, it is not the only way. Accordingly, I emphasize (more plausibly, I think) the more general role friends play in improving and augmenting virtuous activity. I also argue, *contra* Millgram, that what makes a person what he is is not virtue as such, but perceptive or intellectual activity.

One might think that all men desire (*oregesthai*) pleasure because they all aim at life; life is an activity, and each man is active about those things and with those faculties that he most loves (*agapai*); e.g. the musician is active with his hearing in reference to tunes, the student with his mind in reference to theoretical questions, and so on in each case; now pleasure completes the activities, and therefore life, which they desire (*oregontai*). It is with good reason, then, that they aim at pleasure too, since for everyone it completes life, which is desirable (*haireton*). [1175a10–20]

The parallel with 9.12 is striking; in both cases, Aristotle describes the love that we have for the activities that constitute our life and their objects. The difference is that here the love is also connected to the pleasure that completes those activities, whereas in 9.12 it was the friends with whom we share those activities.

So in 9.9 Aristotle emphasizes not only collaboration — as when friends help us to contemplate our own actions better — but also the pleasure that such collaboration brings (1169b32, 1170a1, 4, 9; 1170a20, 26, 1170b1–5, 10, 15). Aristotle makes it clear that, in general, the pleasure connected with an activity intensifies it and helps us to do it better than we would have otherwise (1175a28–b1). I suggest, then, that pleasure is connected with collaboration in three ways. First of all, the pleasure that we naturally take in our own activity transfers to the pleasure we take in collaborative activity and in our collaborators, as in the case of benefactors. Secondly, collaboration removes obstacles to certain actions and activities, improves their quality overall, and thereby makes them more pleasant. Further, such pleasure itself has an amplifying effect on our activity, making us pursue it with greater intensity and more continuously (1170b5–8).

With these passages we have the resources to see in which direction the two main arguments run in *NE* 9.9. The activities that constitute our life are desirable and pleasant, and because for Aristotle living

things are defined by their characteristic activities, these activities are also what we are. Accordingly, we identify with our activities and their products; we value them as extensions of ourselves. Likewise, those with whom we share our activities, especially those who share our goals and help us achieve them, will be valued, desired, and found pleasant because of the role they play in our activity. The integration of the person into our activities makes them “another self”.

V. “Sharing discussion and thought”

So far I have suggested that collaborative activity, rather than similarity between friends, is the basis for the value of friends to one another. This fits neatly with Aristotle’s summary of the 9.9 discussion at the beginning of 9.12:

Does it not follow, then, that, as for lovers the sight of the beloved is the thing they love most, and they prefer this sense to the others because it is most of all the seat and source of love, so for friends the most desirable thing (*hairetôtaton*) is living together? For friendship is a partnership (*koinônia*), and as a man is to himself, so he is to his friend; now in his own case the perception that he is desirable (*haireton*), and so therefore in his friend’s case; and the activity of this perception comes to be when they live together, so it is natural that they aim at this. [1171b29–a1]

Here we find the emphasis on living together and the idea that living together involves partnership or shared goals.⁴⁵ We also find summarized the second — still puzzling — aspect of the last argument of 9.9: that one’s own self-awareness seems to be compared with awareness of the friend; and this awareness seems meant to explain the value of the friend.

45. For the idea that friendship involves *koinônia* see 1160a8–30 esp. 29–30; 1161b11–15.

In the context of 9.12, this aspect of the argument seems less mysterious. The comparison between the friends — “as a man is to himself, so he is to his friends” — is put squarely in the context of living together and partnership (*koinônia*). Accordingly, we ought expect that the perception or awareness in question is not only similar or analogous but is rather shared or collaborative awareness connected with shared or collaborative activity. And indeed, this is just what Aristotle goes on to suggest: in the passage from 9.12 we cited earlier, friends seek to share all of their activities in common, drinking, dicing, and philosophy. This ought tell us that Aristotle is not talking about bare self-consciousness at all but rather consciousness as integrated into various life-activities — for example, in the pleasure or appreciative awareness we take in our various activities.

Since the range of life- and friend-activities are included explicitly in 9.12, and since 9.12 is clearly summarizing 9.9, it seems reasonable to conclude that Aristotle has a similarly broad notion of self-consciousness in 9.9 and that he means there to suggest a broad variety of life-activities — although now under the condition that the men are good. And so we ought see the argument as quite general: whatever virtuous activities friends do together, they will take pleasure in each other because of the pleasure in the activity itself and because of the help they supply to one another. Thus the awareness of life and its goodness described in the passage should imply awareness of a life in its fullest sense — of a whole human life, not just bare self-consciousness.⁴⁶

Still, more needs to be done to reconcile these claims with the overwhelmingly reflexive language of the final argument of 9.9, and with the emphasis on perception and thinking rather than on a broader variety of activities. 9.12 emphasizes perception of one’s own being and that of one’s friend; the first set of arguments in 9.9 also involve seeing the friend and beholding (*theôrein*) virtuous actions. The latter

46. As Kosman suggests (“Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends”, 152–3). His argument, like mine, reduces the apparent difference between the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian* accounts of friendship, as for instance Kenny sees it (*Aristotle on the Perfect Life*, chap 4, esp. 51).

argument of 9.9 begins from the definition of a human being as “perception or thought (*aisthêsis* or *noêsis*)”,⁴⁷ and perception of one’s own activity and the activity of the friend is what seems meant to establish the value of the friend. How ought we to understand this? I suggest first of all that the moral actions under consideration in both places are partly contemplative, and that this is importantly connected with our pleasure in moral action. Secondly, I suggest that in the final argument (as distinct from the first), Aristotle means to include narrowly contemplative friendship, and further that narrowly contemplative friendship involves a kind of self-knowledge. So — albeit in a highly speculative way in both cases — I mean to account for the emphasis on perception and thought, and for the emphatically reflexive language.

Moral virtue as Aristotle understands it has a contemplative aspect.⁴⁸ It is seen in the first part of the 9.9 argument, where the *theôria* of good actions is described (1169b33–35, 1170a2–3). It appears also when Aristotle describes the friendship of the good man with himself in 9.4, saying that:

He wishes to spend time with himself, since he does this with pleasure; for he has agreeable memories of the past, and good hopes for the future, and such things are

47. *De Anima* 2.2–2.3 and *NE* 1.7 (1097b34–1098a4) both give perception and thought as kinds of life, although thought as distinguished from perception is treated in those places as essential to human beings. The claim that human life is constituted by perception and thought appears in the *Protrepticus* B72–B92 (Düring), in passages echoing *Metaphysics* 1, as explaining why perception and knowledge are most desirable and choiceworthy in life: our desire for perception and knowledge explains our desire for life itself. As Düring (*Protrepticus*, 242–246) points out, these passages are also closely related to *EE* 1244b24–29, in the context of the Eudemian argument that the happy man, although self-sufficient, needs friends. The Eudemian argument is quite difficult and the text corrupt; see Kosman, “Aristotle”, for an interpretation similar in many respects to my interpretation of *NE* 9.9.

48. I discuss the implication of this point for the definition of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a forthcoming paper, “Happiness is Contemplation”.

pleasant; also his mind (*dianoia*) is well-furnished with subjects for contemplation (*theôrêmata*). [1166a23–27]⁴⁹

The type of contemplation or appreciation described in these passages could be understood in two senses. In one way, one's intellect or practical reason may appreciate the goodness inherent in a moral action.⁵⁰ In another (not mutually exclusive) way, the contemplative aspect of moral virtue could also be understood as connected to the moral agent's acting for the sake of the *kalon*;⁵¹ noble actions are appreciated for themselves just as other beautiful things are. So the first section of argument in 9.9 concludes with the following consideration:

The good man, insofar as he is good, enjoys actions in accordance with virtue, and he is pained by bad ones, just as a musician takes pleasure in beautiful melodies (*tois kalois melesin*) but is pained by ugly ones. [1170a8–11]

In these passages, the self-conscious awareness of moral action is clearly and explicitly related to the pleasure that it provides.⁵² This should

49. Aristotle may be suggesting contemplation proper in the last phrase; the use of *dianoia* certainly suggests this, although *theôrêmata*, on the model of 9.9, could be interpreted more broadly.
50. As is perhaps suggested in 9.8, where good actions are said to gratify *nous* or the most sovereign part of ourselves (1168b28–1169a6). See note 52.
51. The courageous man acts for the sake of or because of the *kalon* (1115b12–13, b21–24; 1116a11, 15; 1116b3, 31; 1117a17, b9, b14); the temperate man (1119b16); the generous man (1120a24); the magnificent man acts for the sake of the *kalon*, and “this is common to all of virtue” (1122b6–7). Both Cooper, “Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value”, and Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives*, chap. 6, and “Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine”, emphasize the orderly, determinate, “beautiful” aspect of the *kalon*. For other helpful discussion, see Taylor, *Aristotle*, 86–92, and Rogers, “Aristotle’s Conception of *To Kalon*”.
52. Richardson Lear argues that the pleasure in the *kalon* is an intellectual pleasure (“Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine”, 129–131.) It seems right that there would be a rational pleasure from moral action connected to appreciating that one does indeed have the correct grip on the practical good. All the same, Richardson Lear’s evidence for her view strikes me as somewhat weak. In *NE* 9.8 Aristotle describes the good man acting for the sake of the *kalon* and at the same time pleasing “the most sovereign part” of himself,

not be surprising, since in 10.4–5 Aristotle indicates that all pleasure is connected with either perception or contemplation (1174b14–1175a3, and throughout these chapters).⁵³ The perception in question in 9.9, then, is plausibly understood to be *appreciative* perception or awareness, not simply the bare perceptual capacities required to perform basic physical tasks.⁵⁴

I conclude that in the first set of arguments in 9.9, Aristotle extends the appreciation of one’s own moral actions as an individual to actions that we share collaboratively with others. The actions of our friends are ours because we collaborate with them. Since they are easier to behold and so to appreciate (1169b33–35), since beholding them is pleasant (1169b32–1170a1, 1170a4, 8–11) and since in other ways they aid us in action and in growth in character, they are needed in a morally virtuous life.

What then does Aristotle add in the final argument from human nature in 9.9? First of all, the final argument is more general and does not rely on special features of moral action. Perception or awareness does not only provide the crowning pleasure for a life of moral virtue. It is what a human being is; it is part of what constitutes his essence. Our friends and their actions are “our own” because in some sense

nous (1168b28–1169a6). But he is there contrasting someone who acts (generally) in accordance with reason with someone who follows his passions. We should not expect precise indications of the psychological source of the pleasure in moral action in such a context. Cooper’s view that the pleasure in question will be complex, involving a spirited love of the *kalon* and a rational love of the good, seems more plausible (“Reason, Moral Virtue and Moral Value”, 278). It is not obvious where the simple admiration of good actions (in oneself or others) fits into Aristotle’s psychological picture.

53. Bostock “Pleasure and Activity”, convincingly argues away the counter-examples; the pleasures in, say, housebuilding are pleasures in the perception of housebuilding. The connection between contemplation (in the broad sense) and pleasure explains why Reeve cannot be right that the value of contemplating actions is instrumental: to understand better how to perform them (*Practices of Reason*, 180).
54. This case is strengthened if Gonzalez is correct that for Aristotle, the pleasure in sight is essentially connected to seeing the *kalon* (Gonzalez, “Aristotle on Pleasure and Perfection”, 151–154).

they are us. This is not to say that our selves are conflated in some woolly pseudo-mystical way; our friends are us in a concrete sense, in that they share the activities that constitute what we are and help us with them. So Aristotle emphasizes repeatedly by connecting friends with what it is to be or *to einai* for a person.

Second, I suggest that the general focus of the final argument includes contemplative activity, and that in this way it extends the scope of the previous argument beyond morally virtuous activities.⁵⁵ For one thing, *noein* and *noêsis* are mentioned repeatedly in this passage (1170a17, 19, 32–33) and their pairing with *aisthanesthai* as kinds of life strongly suggests that Aristotle means to indicate high-level intellectual activity as he often does with this vocabulary.⁵⁶ Further, the discussion is capped off with a reference to philosophizing, “sharing discussion and thought (*koinônein logôn kai dianoias*)”. Lastly, the reflexive language also points to contemplative activity. Awareness of one’s life and the ways in which it is good, while it can (and ought) include a simple joy in one’s good existence, can also be taken to include quite

55. Michael of Ephesus says it does not; see note 25. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, 135, also argues that a happy person only needs friends because he has the ethical virtues.

56. So *nous*, *noein*, and *noêsis* are used in the *De Anima*, where kinds of life are discussed most extensively. (See Burnyeat, *Aristotle’s Divine Intellect*, for discussion). *Noêsis* appears only here in the *NE*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* and the other ethical treatises, while giving *nous* a specialized sense as a high-level intellectual virtue, sometimes refer to *nous* or *noein* in a practical context: practical *nous* defined, *NE* 1139a33; choice as “desiderative *nous*”, *NE* 1139b4; as source of law, *NE* 1180a22; *nous* makes a difference in action, 1144b12; as a source of movement, 1150a5; the good man obeys, 1169a18; in expression ‘*nous exein*’, “having sense”: *NE* 1110a11, 1112a21, 1115b9; cf. *EE* 1214b31, 1237b38, 1246b14; persons may have the same thoughts without acting the same way, *Magna Moralia* 1212a18–21. See also *De Motu Animalium* 701a7, 11, 13 (thinking the practical syllogism); 701a30, 33 (thinking as source of action); 701b20–22, 35 (thinking about the objects of pursuit and avoidance); cf. also 703b36. *Nous* is also sometimes used in the *NE* in a general, non-specialized sense, as when it distinguishes adults from children and animals at 1144b9 (cf. 1180a18 with *EE* 1240b34); *noein* is also used in an apparently general way to describe the effects of pleasure on thinking (1152b18), but the passage is endoxic; so also *nous* in 1168b35. Whether it is used in a general sense or in the special sense at 1155a16 is unclear.

sophisticated, philosophical understanding of one’s own nature as a human being.

Similar reflexivity is attributed to the human intellect in *De Anima* 3.4: once knowledge is acquired by a person, in thinking that knowledge he thinks himself, in that he thinks something that has been incorporated into him:

When the mind (*nous*) has become each of the things that it knows, as someone learned when active is said to do (and this happens, when he is able to be active on his own), even then the mind is in a way potential ... moreover, the mind is then able to think itself.⁵⁷ [429b6–10]

The geometer thinks about the geometry that he has learned and that has become a part of him; the student of nature similarly about the forms in nature that he has studied.⁵⁸

The language of the 9.9 passage, however, by emphasizing awareness of perception and knowledge and their goodness, and by emphasizing that they are what a human being is, suggests more than that. The language of the passage — for example, “life is by nature good, and perceiving what is good present in oneself is pleasant” (1170b1–3) — suggests that the good man thinks about the goodness of his whole life. This could cover a range of states, from awareness of the goodness of his actions, as in the previous argument; to awareness of the goodness of his specialized knowledge, as I have just suggested; or to a quite broad appreciation of his whole life as a perceiver or thinker, of what it is to be a human being. This last appreciation is a broad type

57. I take it that *nous* thinking itself here means thinking the acquired form, not the bare intellect itself. Contrast the interpretation of Hicks, *ad loc.*

58. On *nous* becoming the object of thought, cf. *DA* 429a24; 430a1, 3, 18; 431b20; on the learned man being able to act on his own once educated, cf. 417a27, 417a16–28. For a helpful discussion of this kind of subject-object identity in the context of the parallel *Eudemian* treatment of the value of friendship, see Kosman, “Aristotle” 141–145. For a discussion of subject-object identity in the *NE* discussion of pleasure, see Gonzalez, “Aristotle on Pleasure and Perfection”.

of self-knowledge — knowledge of what one is, of one's nature and its defining good.⁵⁹ So the passage describes self-knowledge not at all as a bare self-consciousness but rather as awareness of one's moral excellence; knowledge of the special truths of one's expertise; or, as the language of the passage suggests, knowledge of what one is, of one's nature and what its good consists in.⁶⁰

If these speculations are correct, Aristotle's vague and abstract language in this passage has a purpose: it means to capture a range of cases where a good man takes pleasure in his friends; the weaker sense in which one might delight in his team-mate's making a particular spectacular goal; the stronger sense in which a philosopher delights in a particularly productive conversation with a philosopher-friend; and the reflective person's delight in his nature as a human being, which he shares with his friends both because they are also human beings and because they are collaborators in his good human activities.⁶¹

59. It should be clear that the self-knowledge I describe is quite different from the one that Cooper treats as central to Aristotle's account of the value of friendship ("Friendship and the Good", 341–344), following the *Magna Moralia* (1213a10–26) and interpreting *NE* 1169b28–1170a4 in its light. On my view, *NE* 1169b28–1170a4 ought be understood as describing appreciative pleasure at beholding and understanding the actions of the friend. Likewise, the self-knowledge in the latter argument is not knowledge of one's character as in the *MM*, but knowledge of one's nature.

60. In Plato's *Phaedrus* 230a, Socrates explains that he wants to know himself, which he glosses as understanding what type of thing he is, whether he is a beast or a god. Likewise, at *Alcibiades* 129a–130e, Socrates exhorts Alcibiades to seek true self-knowledge, not knowledge of a particular individual self but of "the self itself", the human soul or human nature. Ian Mueller discusses the prevalence of this kind of self-knowledge in ancient philosophy in an unpublished talk, "Know thyself to I think therefore I am". Walker has a very interesting discussion of the role of the discussion of self-knowledge in Plato's *Alcibiades* in *NE* 8–10, although he interprets the shared knowledge of 9.9 as shared awareness based on similarity rather than collaborative awareness ("Contemplation and Self-Awareness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*".)

61. The collaborative contemplation of one's nature here need not involve a "no-etic conflation of the friends' selves", *contra* Stern-Gillet (*Aristotle*, 140). Nor is it necessary, on my version of the 9.9 argument, to supply the sameness of *nous* among all human beings (Kahn, "Aristotle and Altruism", 34–40). All the same, an interpretation of *nous* as a shared self or as God is certainly compatible with my interpretation. I wish to allow for this sort of thing at the highest

VI. How is friendship a good?

So far, I have revised the outline of the final argument that the self-sufficient man needs friends as follows (changes in italics):

1. The life of the good man *and the virtuous activities implied by it are in themselves* good and pleasant (since *they are* choice-worthy by nature and pleasant in *themselves*, and so choice-worthy and pleasant for him; 1170a14–20).
2. The good man's awareness of *these activities* is in itself good and pleasant (1170b1–5).
3. *Friends share collaboratively in these activities and help to achieve their goals* ("The friend is another self"; 1170b5–7).

Conclusion 1: The friend's *virtuous activities are* desirable for the good man (1170b7–8).

Conclusion 2: The good man's awareness of his friend's *virtuous activities* is in itself good and pleasant (1170b9–10).

4. The good man needs whatever is choiceworthy in itself (1170b17–18).

Conclusion 3: The good man needs friends.

The meaning of the first premises and the transition from them to the conclusions should be considerably more clear. However, Premise 4 remains necessary for the final conclusion and still faces a glaring problem. It suggests, first of all, that friends are intrinsic goods; and secondly, that the good man needs all intrinsic goods.

One independent reason to doubt that Aristotle means to argue that friends are intrinsic goods in 9.9 is that he treats them as instrumental

level of contemplation, while also allowing the final argument of 9.9 to be more general, and so to apply to non-contemplative friendships or contemplative friendships of a second-rate, casual, or inferior nature.

goods both within the chapter (as when friends are said to offer a certain training in virtue at 1170a11–13) and outside of the chapter. Friends, for Aristotle, are goods of fortune, by contrast with the goods of the soul, virtue, pleasure, or knowledge (1169b8–10, 1099a32–b1). An external good, whether a good of the body like health, or a good of fortune like a friend, is good because it removes an impediment to virtuous activity.⁶² In *NE* 1.8, Aristotle makes a division in the external goods between those that are valuable as instruments, as means to an end, and those whose absence blemishes happiness in some way.⁶³ Friends are there ranked among the instruments.⁶⁴

Does the final argument of *NE* 9.9 change the status of the good of friendship by claiming that a friend is “good by nature” and so “good in itself”, “pleasant in itself”, or “choiceworthy in itself” for the good man?⁶⁵ While intrinsic value may be implied – and indeed, the role of shared activity and pleasure in friendship supports its having both intrinsic and instrumental value – Aristotle is not, *pace* some

62. *NE* 7.13, 1153b14–21. Aristotle sometimes ranks the goods of the body among the external goods along with the goods of fortune, but sometimes makes a threefold contrast. For further discussion and an account of what it means for the external goods to remove impediments, see Cooper, “Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune”; Brown, “Wishing for Fortune”; and Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, 159–167.

63. *NE* 1.8, 1099a31–b8. Cooper, “Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune”, argues that the second class of external goods, those ‘the lack of which mars happiness’, remove impediments by providing opportunities for virtue, as for example good looks provide more opportunities for temperance. My concern about Cooper’s view is that it assimilates the second class of external goods to the first class, those that are good as instruments in virtuous activity. Likewise, it seems to be possible that the second class of goods remove impediments in a different way – for instance, by providing pleasures appropriate to the virtuous life. Brown adds that pain may diminish virtuous activity for the same reason. I find this point to be helpful and sympathetic to my own view, although I am concerned that Brown does not bind external goods closely enough to virtuous activity (“Wishing for Fortune”, esp. 234–238.).

64. As Cooper argues, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship”, the instrumentality of friendship in general is not incompatible with friends (even utility or pleasure friends) being valued for other reasons, *i. e.*, for their own sake.

65. 1170a14–16, 19–20, 21–22, 26; 1170b1–5, 9–10, 14–15

commentators, arguing here for its intrinsic goodness.⁶⁶ The appeal to instrumental considerations within the chapter suggests that intrinsic value is not Aristotle’s primary concern here, and a look at parallel passages confirms it. The principle with which the argument begins is that what is good by nature is good for the good man and pleasant in itself (1170a14–16). Aristotle indicates that this is something he has said before (*eirêtai*). Two passages in the *NE* seem relevant: one, the attribution of the naturally pleasant to the good man in the discussion of external goods in 1.8; two, the good man as the standard for the true object of wish in Book 3:⁶⁷

Now for most men their pleasures are in conflict because these are not by nature pleasant, but to the lovers of what is noble the things that are pleasant by nature are pleasant; and virtuous actions are such... Their life, therefore, has no need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself. [1099a11–16; cf. 1152b26]

[We say that] as such (*haplôs*) and in truth the object of wish⁶⁸ is the good, but to each person the apparent good;

66. So Irwin understands it (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 297); see also Crisp, “Aristotle’s Inclusivism”, 129–131. It is also worth remembering that intrinsic value may still be conditional; on my view, for Aristotle friendship may have intrinsic value (as well as instrumental value), but only on condition that one’s activity is defective.

67. Ross’s translation and Gauthier and Jolif, *ad loc.*, point to these passages. If we look outside the *NE*, we find closer parallels: “A good man (*agathos*) is one for whom the natural goods (*ta phusei agatha*) are good” (*EE* 1248b25–6; natural goods here are honor, wealth, bodily excellences, good fortune, and power); and “The good man (*spoudaios*) is he for whom, because he is excellent, the things that are good as such (*ta haplôs agatha*) are good” (*Pol.* 1332a21–5, where “goods as such” are opposite to poverty or disease and so are plausibly external goods). Cf. also *Magna Moralia* 1183b27–35. The *Politics* passage also makes an explicit back-reference; it seems to me possible that the *Eudemian* passage (or some commonly circulated equivalent) is the back-reference in that case and in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9.

68. This seems equivalent to *boulêton phusei* (the object of wish by nature) at 1113a20–21.

that which is truly an object of wish is an object of wish to the good man (*spoudaiôi*), while any chance thing may be so to the bad man, as in the case of bodies also the things that are in truth wholesome are wholesome for bodies in a good condition, while for those that are diseased other things are wholesome. [1113a24–28]

These passages distinguish the real good from the apparent good, and mark the good man (*spoudaios*) as the standard for the real good. His pleasures, unlike those of the wicked man, are in his activities themselves; they are not sought as ends external to him. The language of 9.9 is thus first of all the language of objective versus subjective goodness: what is good as such versus what appears good or is good only under special circumstances.⁶⁹ “In itself” refers, not to intrinsic as opposed to instrumental goods, but to goods internal to activities — what I will call “integrated goods” — as opposed to goods sought as external ends, which I will call “additive goods”. It is important that in many cases the same good — say, honor — can be additive for one person (the person with civic courage; *NE* 1116a17–19, 29) and integrated for another (the great-souled man of *NE* 4.3).⁷⁰ The distinction has to do with the way that the good is valued by the agent, as being ordered under its proper end.

The context of the first passage above about the good by nature and what is good for the good man is the discussion of external goods in

69. What is only apparently good and what is good only in special circumstances are of course distinct from one another. In these passages Aristotle seems to think that the cases coincide: what is naturally good or good as such also appears good to vicious people, even though these goods are not in fact good for them, just as food good for a healthy person is not in fact good for a sick person. See discussion in Woods, *Eudemian Ethics*, 148–150, 176–180.

70. I take it that what distinguishes civic courage from real courage is that the *kalon* end is external to civic courage, but internal to the action itself in real courage; the courageous man’s actions are *kalon*, and that is his aim. I take it that honor is integrated for the great-souled man because it is the proper ornament of the virtue that he seeks; that it is not his end is clear by his not caring much for it (1124a16–17).

1.8. It is suggested here that such goods are good as such (and so good for the good person) but not good for everyone. What is good as such is good for the good person because it is ordered by the correct final end (1152b3; cf. *EE* 1227a6–22) and so is integrated with virtuous activity. Such things are “good and pleasant in themselves”, not primarily by contrast with instrumental goods but by contrast with the benefits and pleasures attained by vicious people, which are either only apparently good (since they are not good for them) or good in a way extrinsic and additional to their actions (and so not in the activities themselves).

Things “good by nature” or “choiceworthy by nature” do not feature much in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but they do appear in the discussion of pleasure in *NE* 7.4, where they are identified as “victory, honor, wealth, and good and pleasant things of this sort” (1147b29–31); “gain” is added to the list at 1148a26 and “parents and children” at 1148a30.⁷¹ Such things are good but not good for everyone, since they can be used wrongly or sought in excess (1147a31–32, 1148a32–b2). “Good or choiceworthy by nature” thus seems to be used in a similar way as “good as such or without qualification (*haplôs*)”.⁷² So unjust men pursue things that are good as such — the goods of fortune or external goods — but more than they ought (1129b2–3; cf. 1134a34, 1134b4, 1137a27).

Early in the discussion of friendship, Aristotle appeals to the distinction between what is good as such and what is or appears good to

71. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, natural goods and goods *haplôs* are explicitly identified in the terms described here; see *EE* 1227a18–30 (discussed by Woods, *Eudemian Ethics*, 148–150) and *EE* 7.15 (Woods, 176–180). Natural goods are identified as “honor, wealth, bodily excellences, good fortune, power” (1248b27) and “bodily goods, wealth, friends” (1249b16).

72. In Lorenz’s discussion of this passage, he also concludes that Aristotle means that these things are choiceworthy not as goals but “as such and in general”. However, he does not see the connection between things choiceworthy by nature and things good *haplôs* — nor the references to natural goods in the *Eudemian Ethics* — and so misses a number of relevant parallel passages (“Plain and Qualified *akrasia*”, 78, 83–86). Accordingly, while he draws the contrast as between things good as such but bad in particular circumstances (as when valuable goods must be thrown overboard in a storm), the closer fit is in fact the contrast between what is good as such but bad for the vicious person.

a particular person, in order to distinguish the friendships of the good from the friendships of the bad:

The truest friendship, then, is that of the good, as we have frequently said; for that which is without qualification good or pleasant seems to be lovable and choiceworthy, and for each person that which is good or pleasant to him; and the good man is lovable and desirable for both these reasons (1157b25–27; cf. 1156b12–14).

Aristotle then applies in Book 8 the principle that he has applied in Books 1, 3, 5, and 7 to external goods generally and to friends in particular. He does so because, as in the other cases, he wants to distinguish the good man's pursuit of such goods from the universal pursuit of such goods.

Turning back to 9.9, it becomes abundantly clear that this is Aristotle's concern. After giving signs or indications that it is false that the happy man is friendless, Aristotle turns to the first major stage of the argument, asking what truth there could have been in the paradox (given the signs of its falseness). He responds by distinguishing utility and pleasure friends — the friends of the vicious (1157b1–3) — from virtue friends, concluding that its author must have been thinking that since a good man will not need friends of utility and pleasure, he will not need friends at all:⁷³

Of such friends [useful people] indeed the blessed man will have no need, since he already has the things that are good; nor will he need those whom one makes one's friends because of their pleasantness, or he will need them only to a small extent (for his life, being pleasant, has no need of pleasure brought in from the outside); and because he does not need *such* friends he is thought not

73. If this is meant to be an account of the *Lysis*, it is highly slanderous, since the question that introduces the paradox there is about whether the good will be friends with the good, and so it is raised especially for virtue friendship.

to need friends. But that is surely not true. For we have said at the outset that happiness is an activity; and activity plainly comes into being and is not present at the start like some piece of property. [1169b23–30]

Here Aristotle contrasts the happy or good man's friends with friends of utility and pleasure, and says that the latter provide supplies "from the outside" that the good man will not need. The good man's friends are rather connected with the coming-into-being of his activity. The bad man's friends will be external means to goods outside of his activity itself, and so "additive goods"; the good man's friends will be integrated into his activities and so "integrated goods".

The distinction between additive and integrated goods, and the connection between integrated goods and activity, are also used in 9.9 in the argument from human nature to distinguish the friendships of the good from the friendships of the bad:

Life (*to zên*) is among the things good and pleasant in themselves. For it is determinate (*hôrismenon*), and the determinate belongs to the nature of the good. For what is good by nature is also good to the good man (*ho epieikês*); on account of which it seems pleasant to all men. But one ought not take into account the wicked and corrupted life, nor a life in pain; for such a life is indeterminate (*aoristos*), just as are the things belonging to it. [1170a19–24]

Determinacy and indeterminacy are sometimes used in Aristotle analogously to form and matter, actuality and potentiality.⁷⁴ To be determinate for a human being is to be actualized. The actuality in question

74. Good men are more determinate (*hôrismenon*) than bad ones (*Protrepticus* 33 [Düring]); form identified with *hôrismenon* and contrasted with matter (*De Caelo* 312a16); potentiality ranked with matter and the indeterminate (*aoristos*), actuality with form and the *hôrismenon* (*Metaphysics* 13.10.1087a15–19); what is potential and not actual is *aoristos* (*Metaphysics* 4.4.1007b29); matter and *aoristos* used interchangeably (*Physics* 209b9).

here seems, as in the earlier 9.9 passage, to be the actuality of *eudaimonia*, virtuous rational activities. A friend may help to initiate activity, as when we cannot hunt a wild boar on our own; or to improve what we are already doing, as when we are furnishing a grand temple or theatre for our city; or to help perfect our activity, by making it more pleasant. In contemplation, friends may help us in actualizing ourselves by helping us to internalize more forms of knowledge, as when they teach us geometry; or they may help complete our study of nature; or in other ways to help make determinate the potential inherent in our capacities to know. Pains, on the other hand, or the “alien” pleasures of a corrupt life, are destructive to our proper activities, making them harder to undertake (in the case of pain, 1175b16–24) or actively interfering (in the case of alien pleasures, 1175b1–24).⁷⁵

To summarize, it is clear that Aristotle’s main concern in the chapter is to distinguish the goodness and pleasure of friendship for good men from the goodness and pleasure of friendship for bad men.⁷⁶ It is in this way an extension and clarification of his earlier distinctions in NE 8.2–4. Here, the types of friendship are not distinguished by their instrumental versus intrinsic value but rather, as is found elsewhere in discussions of external or natural goods, between, on the one hand, what is good and pleasant by nature and in general and, on the other, what is good and pleasant for a particular person. For a good man, a friend is valued — like other external goods — by reference to his end, virtuous activity. Accordingly, the friend is integrated with his life: in

75. Pleasure, like friendship, is for a virtuous person an integrated good: it improves virtuous activity. Although it is a good of the soul, and so an internal rather than an external good, it is likewise associated with activity that is unimpeded (1153a12–15, 1153b14–19). Activity can be impeded by internal factors like pain or fatigue; but it can also be impeded by lack of money or political power, or by the lack of other people to act either as beneficiaries or as collaborators. Pleasure, like friendship, is connected with the ability to do things more easily.

76. In the parallel discussion in the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle poses a similar paradox about how political human beings can resemble self-sufficient gods, and suggests that the solution lies in understanding virtue friendship (7.12, especially 1244b4–17). For a full account of the *Eudemian* passages, see Kosman, “Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends”.

other words, the friend’s goodness and pleasantness are intimately bound up with the goodness and pleasure of his own life. That is because a good man’s life consists of virtuous activity rather than the acquisition of external ends. When a person acts with external goods as an end, his friends are valued only incidentally (*kata sumbêbekos*; 1157b1–5, 1156a16–17); they provide goods to him “from the outside (*epeisaktos*)” (1169b26–27). By contrast, the good man’s friends provide more and better of what the good man has already.

To return, at long last, to the initial question of this section, what does Aristotle mean when he says that friends are choiceworthy in themselves? He means that friends are choiceworthy in order to be fully and properly active, that they improve our virtuous activities rather than providing necessities for our bare survival or for external goods that are not properly integrated. In other words, he means that they are integrated goods rather than additive goods. Why, then, does Aristotle say that the happy man needs whatever is choiceworthy for him? My suggestion is that what is choiceworthy for the happy man is something that is either a supply (which he needs) or something that helps him do better, a respect in which he is lacking. In other words, we desire and choose what we lack in one way or another.⁷⁷ Since external goods are good because they remove impediments, their value depends on those impediments. Lack and defect can thus be seen as background assumptions of the whole discussion of friendship, as in

77. To interpret the passages this way might seem to go against the grain of their language: for example, Aristotle says that since the happy man chooses to behold good actions, he will need friends (1170a2–3) and in the final premise of the argument from human nature, he says that the happy man needs whatever is choiceworthy for him (1170b17–18). So Aristotle seems to infer a need from a desire (or from choiceworthiness), which suggests that desire is a condition for need rather than vice versa. (My thanks to Eric Brown for the point.) I propose that the desire be seen as a sign of need rather than as a condition for it. The inference from desire to need is licensed, then, not because a desire produces a need, but the other way around: where we see a desire, we know that there is also a need, since need is a background condition for desire. If I am correct that the value of friends depends on their role in collaborative activity and in helping to actualize the happy man’s incomplete or defective activity, the proposal seems quite reasonable.

the discussion of external goods generally.⁷⁸ The dependence of our activities on external goods is a matter of their defectiveness, as is our reliance on others for collaborative help. Seen this way, the difficulties with the 9.9 argument we mentioned earlier are avoided. The happy man will need all integrated goods, that is, everything that can help him perform his virtuous activities better. So he may need amusements to restore his spirits, or decorations that may properly manifest his goodness to others. But he will not need all intrinsic goods, nor will he need every single instance of a natural good. His need is to be further actualized; nothing beyond what helps him do this is needed.

If this is correct, then the last premise of the 9.9 argument is repaired, and the argument from human nature can be seen as undeserving of the criticism it has received from commentators.

VII. Friendship, self-sufficiency and the imitation of God

I have argued that the difference between friends for bad men and friends for good men can thus be seen as partly a matter of the self-contained unity of the good life, ordered under the proper end, versus the patchwork vicious life of one external good sought after another, with the useful or pleasant friends discarded as the end or the appetite in question changes (1156a21–1156b6). The reason why external goods or natural goods are good for the good man is that they are all integrated into his activity. His wealth is integrated into magnificent civic projects; his victories into his courageous and prudent actions; his honor into his greatness of soul.⁷⁹ Since, as I argued earlier, self-sufficiency for Aristotle is a matter of self-contained unity and independence from external necessities, the different types of unity in the

78. Begorre-Bret suggests that the paradox is solved because the happy man does not need friends to fill a lack, but to perform fine actions. However, it is not clear why, if the happy man's action is in some way deficient without friends, his friends do not thereby fill a lack. A lack, as I understand it, is just some failure or deficiency, and friends do satisfy such a lack for the happy man (*Éthique à Nicomaque*, 121).

79. See Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, 167–173, for a powerful argument that all of the moral virtues are related to external goods.

different types of friendship can also be seen as connected to greater and lesser degrees of self-sufficiency.

The type of need in the higher friendships is more compatible with self-sufficiency than other types of friendship or other types of need. A gang of pirates collaborate for the sake of treasure: they rely on one another for the sake of a further outcome external to them, acquired wealth. The Spartans at Thermopylae, by contrast, collaborate in their own courage: they do not depend on some further outcome, victory or loss, for their courageous activity to be properly done. Independence from the need for further outcomes (finality) is one aspect of self-sufficiency. The Spartans also attain greater self-contained unity. Unlike the pirates, their end — courageous activity — is shared among them without mutual loss. The gain of one is not the loss of another. Nor are they resources for one another in the same way: there were 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, but there might have been 200 or 1000, whereas the pirates are numbered and united only by their usefulness to one another.

Just as moral friendship is more self-sufficient than pleasure- or gain-seeking friendship, contemplative friendship is more self-sufficient than moral friendship. The Spartans at Thermopylae did not need victory, but they did need invading Persians.⁸⁰ Contemplative friends rely on fewer things outside of themselves: they need only each other's knowledge and intellectual power, all of which are fully integrated into the person. This gives contemplative friendship more self-contained unity. This seems true when the fellow contemplators pursue the special sciences — geometry, astronomy and other theoretical or natural forms — since those sciences are incorporated into the friends themselves and so their contemplation involves contemplating one another.⁸¹ Still, the unity of contemplative friendship is per-

80. See Aristotle's discussion of leisure and the reliance of moral virtue on unchosen circumstances at *NE* 1177b4–26.

81. This is tricky, I think, because individuals matter less in contemplation than in moral virtue. It is my impression (I can't defend it here) that both Plato and Aristotle think that knowledge is inherently sharable; while of course different people know different things, what they know can always in principle

haps clearest when they contemplate their own nature and the goodness of human life — their own selves in a broader sense. In this way, whether special knowledge or knowledge of human nature is under consideration, contemplative friends are not only collaborative contributors to contemplation but also its objects. The unity between the subject and object of these activities implies independence from need, especially external needs, and so self-sufficiency.⁸²

However, despite the greater compatibility with self-sufficiency found in higher friendships, it remains true that friends as collaborators remove impediments to activity and so are needed on account of one's defects. As such, friends imply a lack of self-sufficiency. This is seen by the fact that friends remain external goods, and external goods are qualifications on self-sufficiency. In the passage from 10.8 I cited above (1178b32–35), our dependence on external prosperity is cited as an indication of our lack of self-sufficiency.⁸³ The use of actuality and activity in these arguments also shows this. Human beings are not pure activity. They can always be further actualized: they can do what they do still better, more often, or more independently.

In the case of moral action, the background conditions for friendship do not decrease no matter how virtuous one is: being perfectly courageous neither ends war nor allows one to carry it out single-handedly. But the need for contemplative friends will be gradually overcome as one reaches higher levels of intellectual achievement. The wise man will gradually acquire more knowledge to contemplate on his own, and he will need friends less for help in acquiring or

be shared with others. When I discuss geometry with my friend, what he understands becomes what I understand (given good circumstances). The geometry itself is shared between us. So the contemplation of the other person's knowledge and the contemplation of my own knowledge are only interestingly different when one is more ignorant than the other or they are each ignorant in different respects.

82. See Gonzalez, "Pleasure and Perfection", for a related discussion of degrees of completeness of activity and subject-object identity.

83. So also is suggested by the dependence of external goods on luck; see Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, 159–167, with references.

perfecting it. He will achieve greater self-contained unity this way, and so greater self-sufficiency. Thus contemplative friendship is not only more self-sufficient than moral friendship, since it relies less on external circumstances, but a life of contemplation allows the wise man greater independence even from the friends he has, and the more so the more he knows.

One consequence of the view of friendship Aristotle outlines in 9.9 is that human beings, through virtue friendship of both kinds, imitate the self-sufficiency that Aristotle elsewhere attributes to God.⁸⁴ The highest friendships have a kind of self-contained unity that resembles the ultimate self-contained unity found among Aristotle's divine beings. This resemblance can be understood both formally and — under one common interpretation of Aristotle's God — substantially.

Virtue friendship formally resembles Aristotle's God in being a nearer approach to pure activity. Friends help us to act more continuously (1170a6–8); Aristotle's God is always active.⁸⁵ Moreover, friends supply what we cannot do on our own; Aristotle's God is entirely self-sufficient and needs nothing from the outside.⁸⁶ While Aristotle argues in 10.7–8 that solitary self-sufficiency is available to contemplators and is more god-like than shared activity, he suggests in 9.9 that shared virtuous activity allows greater actuality and greater achievement for human beings than vicious activity, and in this way greater approximation to god-like activity.

84. This is suggested by Kosman, "Aristotle" 144–145; however, Kosman neglects the *NE* 10.7 passage and claims that human beings *only* imitate God through social activity, whereas I argue they also do by becoming wise enough that they do not depend on others.

85. Gods always enjoy pleasures, while we do not: 1154b20–28; humans are not able to act continuously (1175a3–6, 1176b34–35); contemplation as the most continuous human activity (1177a21–22).

86. It is important to see that other people do not increase the self-sufficiency of individuals, as Brown argues they do (see note 9). Human beings imitate divine self-sufficiency by collaborating — that is, in a way that shows their lack of self-sufficiency. That virtue friendship is more self-sufficient than vicious friendship should not obscure this point.

Furthermore, since friendship in 9.9—whether a friendship in moral virtue or in contemplation—has a contemplative aspect, and since friends are portrayed as extensions of oneself and one’s activity, friendship provides a form of self-contemplation and self-knowledge. As such, it resembles God’s own self-contemplative activity as described in *Metaphysics* 12.7. Contemplative friendship, to the extent that it includes appreciative knowledge of one’s nature, resembles God yet more than moral friendship, where one only appreciates the goodness or beauty of one’s actions.

For those interpreters of Aristotle’s theology who see Aristotle’s God as a self-thinker whose thinking is radically unlike ours, or as a purely formal metaphysical place-holder,⁸⁷ only so much can be said about the ways in which human friendship imitates divine activity. But for interpreters who see Aristotle’s God as thinking forms or essences, and so either closely analogous or partly identical with a human contemplator, other forms of resemblance will also be possible.⁸⁸ If contemplative friends can use each other’s knowledge of essences, either to make up defects in their own knowledge or to actualize more fully the knowledge they have, they will become more godlike in doing so. To the extent that a contemplator can acquire more forms and greater facility on his own, he can also approach God directly; to the extent that a human being contemplates forms or essences, in himself or others, he will become the God who thinks all of the essences. If, rather, his intellect is similar but independent, he will resemble him the greater his access to the essences of things; the more he acquires these essences for himself, rather than relying on others; and the more he thinks them. For these latter interpreters, then, Aristotle will have

87. So Norman, “Aristotle’s Philosopher-God”, charges of Ross that for him Aristotle’s god is “narcissistic”; see also Lear, *Aristotle*, 300. Wedin defends the radical difference between divine thinking and human thinking against Norman (*Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, 229–245).

88. Norman, “Aristotle’s Philosopher-God”, argues that the human intellect is in fact the divine intellect, or a partial or temporary version of it, as Burnyeat does also (*Aristotle’s Divine Intellect*).

described two ways of imitating God through friendship: greater unity and integration; and acquisition of essences to oneself and actively thinking about them.

VIII. Defective animals

Despite the approximation to divine activity that virtue friendship allows, it still relies on human defectiveness and imperfection, on the human inability to be fully and properly active on our own. Because the account of integrated friends in 9.9 as I have explained it relies on our defects, our need for “supplementary selves”, our inability to do things perfectly, it has been shown to be fully consistent with the 10.7 account, despite initial appearances. The need for friends is revealed in both chapters to be something that an individual of high ability can progressively, if not completely, overcome, even if this is not explicit in the earlier chapter.

However, Aristotle’s failure with respect to the truth still remains. It does not seem true, as the Socrates of the *Lysis* and the Plato of the Academy vividly illustrate, that the wisest men need friends the least, nor that (as Aristotle may also mean) they need fewer friends. All the same, this is what Aristotle says in his praise of the self-sufficiency of the wise man in 10.7. In making this claim he emphasizes that collaboration, while a reasonable approximation of divine unity and self-sufficiency, is a second-rate option that the virtuous man can at least partially rise above, if he becomes sufficiently wise. And so our need for friends does indeed reflect a failure on the part of human beings to achieve the highest good.

One final question lies open, namely, whether the wise man may have friends without needing them, for instance, out of a gratuitous desire to share the good. Socrates, it might be thought, is surrounded by friends and companions, but he does not depend on his friends; he would be just as well off without them.⁸⁹ In this case, friends would

89. Thomas Aquinas makes something like this suggestion with regard to friendship in heaven, that if there were only one soul enjoying God, he would be happy; but if there were one other person there, he would love the other as

simply be a matter of indifference to the wise man as far as his own interests are concerned — he would not necessarily be solitary, but if solitary, he would not miss the fellowship of others. This view, it ought be noticed, is not possible from the perspective of the *Lysis*, where a desire like *philia* — the love proper to friendship — implies a lack or a need. Does Aristotle reject this part of the *Lysis* paradox? There is no evidence that he does reject it, and the justification of friendship in the best life in 9.9 is quite clearly in terms of need. The point seems yet clearer when we compare the divine case: it seems that Aristotle's God is free of any desire or affect.⁹⁰ His causal power is through the desires or lacks of others. And this lack of desire or love seems connected to his perfection and his self-sufficiency. In the absence of evidence allowing love without need, and in the face of some evidence against it, it seems best to conclude that this possibility was not, in fact, in Aristotle's mind, and so that the wise man would indeed become more solitary as his need for others decreased.⁹¹

a result of his love of God (*Summa Theologica* 2.1, Q 4.8). (He does argue that friendship is necessary in earthly life, so that a good man's actions may be "done well".)

90. In 10.8 Aristotle does suggest that the happy man will be "most dear" to the gods (*theophilestaton*) and that gods care in some way for virtuous human beings. However, this passage seems baldly inconsistent with the more developed theology of *Metaphysics* 12.7; unless some philosophic sense can be made of the care of Aristotle's god for humans, I think this passage must be taken as in some way metaphorical.

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