

## **THE GOODS OF FRIENDSHIP**

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My topic is the value of friendship, but I will extend it to include all forms of love or close personal attachment, including familial love, such as between parents and children, and erotic love, between spouses or committed sexual partners. I take these all to involve the same principal elements, namely a desire to be with another person and get pleasure from her company, and a desire for her happiness or for whatever else is good in her life, such as success in her career. We want to be with the people we care for and we want them to lead fulfilling lives, and we want these things more for them than we do for strangers. The forms of love of course differ in important ways. Erotic love, for example, involves a desire to share sexual pleasure with a partner that is not found in familial love or non-sexual friendship. But this is just a specific form of the desires to be with a loved one and to give her pleasure. It does not make for something completely distinct from non-sexual friendship but for friendship with an added erotic element.

I will assume that friendship is indeed good, or does have value: that it is worth pursuing for its own sake and makes our lives more worth living. Other things equal, a life with close personal relationships is more desirable than one without. It is not that friendship is the only thing of value. Pleasure and happiness are good even when they do not result from a personal relationship. So is knowledge, or understanding the world around you; achievement, or successfully pursuing a challenging goal; and virtue, or being a morally good person. Nor is friendship an essential good, one without which a desirable life is impossible. If someone without

significant personal attachments gets enough happiness from other sources, or achieves sufficiently important goals or is sufficiently virtuous, his life can be good overall, and even as good as some lives that do contain such attachments. But without friendship it lacks something that would have made it better, and for most of us our personal relationships are among the best things we know.

Assuming that friendship is a good, there is a philosophical question of why it is good, or what kind of value it has. If it makes our lives more worth living, how exactly does it do so? In this paper I will explore three views on this topic. The first view says that our personal relationships are a part of our lives where other, more generic goods are realized to a high degree. Friendship is not a distinct value, just a place where values that can be enjoyed elsewhere are especially easily found. The second view says that certain key features of our personal relationships make for distinctive forms of the more generic goods, with distinctive and additional value. Though not a completely free-standing good, friendship does make a separate contribution to value by generating special instances of value. And the final view says there are entirely distinct values in our personal relationships, containing goods not found in any form elsewhere. To participate in a friendship is to share in a kind of value that only friendship allows. These three views are not in competition with each other. They could all be true together, so friendship has value of three different kinds. But they make successively stronger claims about the distinctiveness of this value. Let me start with the first view.

### 1. Friendship and Generic Goods

This view says that friendship is good because it embodies other, more generic goods to a

high degree, or is a part of our lives where goods that can be enjoyed outside of friendship are especially easily found. This was thought to be the whole truth about the value of personal relationships by the early twentieth-century moral philosopher Sir David Ross. He thought there are only three basic human goods – pleasure, knowledge, and virtue – and that all other goods are compounded out of these three. Thus aesthetic enjoyment, or the appreciation of art, is ‘a blend of pleasure with insight into the nature of the object that inspires it,’ while mutual love or friendship is ‘a blend of virtuous disposition of two minds towards each other, with the knowledge which each has of the character and disposition of the other, and with the pleasure which arises from such disposition and knowledge.’<sup>1</sup> Friendship may embody some of these goods to an especially high degree and therefore be especially valuable, but it does not involve any distinctive goods.

This first view certainly contains much truth and will be a large part of a complete account of the value of personal relationships. Love and friendship are, first, the source of powerful good feelings: the physical pleasures of sex, the delight of a good friend’s company, your joy when she succeeds in her main pursuits, and perhaps most importantly, the standing happiness of knowing that someone you care for cares for you. Given the time you spend with a friend, you also understand her better than you do a stranger, so your relationship is an occasion for valuable knowledge, and it is also a site for valuable achievements. In a lasting relationship you pursue not just momentary but long-term goals, such as to raise a child or first save for and then decorate a house, and if there is extra value in cooperative activities, where you mesh your actions with another person’s, those too are found to a high degree in love and friendship. Finally, and most centrally, your friends are the people toward whom you feel and act most

virtuously. A key aspect of moral virtue is wanting other people's happiness and flourishing for its own sake, or overcoming your natural egoism and caring about another as much as you do about yourself. Most of us do this to only a limited degree with most other people, but much more with our children, partners, and friends, so with them we are most virtuous or morally at our best. Concern for another is good whoever its object, but we feel it most and best with friends.

To be sure, friendship also poses dangers. The more you care about a person, the more you will be pained if some tragedy befalls her; think of the anguish parents will feel if their young child dies. And in erotic love there is the hurt when the person you want rejects you. Love can also blind you rather than prompt knowledge, making you ignore a partner's obvious faults, and it can distract you from your most valuable projects – think of those who have wasted their talents because of an unwise infatuation. But despite these dangers, love and friendship are for most of us well worth seeking, offering more of goods like pleasure and virtue than they threaten harms, or a greater chance of enriching than of damaging our lives.

It may be objected that these goods are not ones *of* friendship but are merely caused by it, so the friendship is only instrumentally and not intrinsically good. And it is certainly true that the pleasure you get from spending time with a friend is an effect of your interaction with her, which is therefore good as a means. But I think the pleasure is internal to the friendship itself and helps make it what it is; surely if you got no pleasure from a person's company, your relationship with her would not be one of friendship. The same is certainly true of virtue. If you did not have any desire for her happiness you could not count as her friend, so your virtuous concern for her is part of your friendship rather than something resulting from it. It is not that all the goods I have listed

are in this way essential to a relationship. There could be a deep friendship that did not involve much in the way of joint achievement, perhaps because the friends live far apart and communicate only by letter or email. There might also be a friendship without much mutual knowledge. But when these goods are present they help make the relationship what it is and are therefore internal to the friendship rather than mere effects of it, and that is certainly true of pleasure and virtue. That you enjoy being with another and want her good is not something caused by your friendship but part of its essence.

This first view will be part of any account of the value of friendship, but will it be the whole account, so the goods of friendship are always and only ones that could be found in other aspects of life? I think many will resist this conclusion and think friendship also offers distinctive goods, ones not found elsewhere. And the second and third views affirm different versions of possibility. But to approach them we need first to discuss another question about friendship, namely what its basis is, or what, when you love a person, you love her for.

## 2. Friendship and History

There is a kind of love that cares for all people equally – call it impersonal benevolence – but it is not our subject in this paper. We are discussing relationships in which you care especially about a particular person, wanting more to be with her than with other people and caring more for her happiness. But what attaches your love to this specific person, or what do you love her in particular for?

Partly – though only partly, I will argue – you love her for qualities that other people could in principle share, such as her wit, generosity, and red hair. She is not the only witty or red-

haired person in the world, but she does have those qualities – she is witty and has red hair – and you love her in part for that fact. But the qualities you love are of two kinds: some you admire, and some you just like.

You admire a quality if you think it is intrinsically good and would make anyone's life more laudable. Thus you may admire your partner's wit and generosity, and if you do, you do not think that is just a quirk in you. You think everyone should admire traits like those. But when you merely like a quality, you do not have that thought. If you like her red hair, for example, you do or should not think it is better than any other hair colour or the one everyone should prefer. You just happen to like it yourself. Or if you especially enjoy her company, you need not think her style of socializing is the best possible. You can recognize that other reasonable people may prefer other styles of socializing and not enjoy her company most – but you just do.

Some philosophers have thought that a valuable friendship must be based primarily on qualities you admire or think of as good. More specifically, they have thought that a valuable friendship must be based on loving another person's moral character, or virtue. Aristotle, for example, thought that if you like someone because she is useful to you or fun company you do not really like her for herself and therefore are not really her friend; that is true only if you love her for her character.<sup>2</sup>

But this view is far too high-minded. What is wrong with just liking somebody or being attracted by her non-moral features? Aristotle seems to have assumed that if you like someone because she is fun company then you really like her only as a means to your fun, which is selfish rather than friendly. But this does not follow. Enjoying her company can lead you to want her happiness, success, and even moral virtue as ends in themselves, and in fact this often happens.

You are attracted to someone first for partly selfish reasons, such as that she makes you laugh, but then come to care for her altruistically or for herself. What is valuable in love is the desires and feelings it involves once it has developed, and their value is largely independent of their origin. Beautiful flowers can blossom in ordinary dirt.

Though you love someone partly for qualities others could share, you do or should not love her only for those qualities. If you did, then if someone came along with the same qualities to a higher degree – someone wittier, more generous, and with redder hair – you would switch your love to her. Any reasons you had to love your present partner would apply even more to the new person. Or if your partner was about to die and scientists could replace her with a perfect molecular duplicate, you would not feel at all troubled by your loss. Everything you now had in your love you would have in her replacement. But surely you would not do or feel these things, and surely you should not; they would be emotionally unfaithful. In a truly valuable relationship you do not love another just for qualities she has that others could share; you also love her as an individual or for herself. But what exactly does that mean?

I do not think it can mean to love a person apart from all her qualities, if that even makes sense. It is to love her for qualities no one else could share, qualities that are unique to her and therefore separate her from everyone else. More specifically, it is to love her for historical qualities, involving her having participated with you in a shared past. The two of you have done things together and affected each other in many ways, and you can love her now for those historical facts: for how you first met in the park, for that chilly walk you took along the lake, for the concerts you enjoyed together. And later you can love her for how you together bought a house, raised children, and then matured and aged together.

These historical qualities are still qualities, or things true of your partner, and you can love her for having them. But they are also qualities that, once she has them, no one else can share. Someone else can be wittier or have redder hair, but once she met you in the park no one else can be the very person who did that then. Nor can any substitute, even a perfect molecular duplicate, be the same person you walked or heard that concert with. A shared history ties you to this person and only this person, and a love based on it therefore will not accept replacements. It will not trade up to greater wit or redder hair because it is loyal to the one person who did those things then.

It is not just any history that can play this role. It must be a history with a significant degree of interaction or mutual contact, and it must also be in some way a good history, one that involved concern for each other or in which you together did substantial good, either to each other or to others. (Think of that part of a couple's history that involved jointly raising a child for a good and happy life.) If your past with a person involved mutual hatred and hostility, that will or should not ground a positive attachment to her now. Likewise if your history was one of harming outsiders, as with former gang members who together terrorized a neighbourhood. But if your past with another involved mutual benefits given from mutual love, that is another basis, alongside qualities like wit and red hair, for loving her especially now.<sup>3</sup>

This historical attachment is not something we feel only for people. I love my living-room furniture partly because it is a beautiful example of twentieth-century modernist design, but also because it is the furniture my father bought in the 1940s and that I grew up with. There may be more beautiful pieces in the world, even in the same style, but I want to keep living with these chairs and these bookcases. You can keep wearing a ratty sweater or driving a clunky car because

you have done things and gone places with it for such a long time. The people we love are more complex than chairs or sweaters, and so is our history with them. But when we feel attached to them as individuals we love them in the same historical way as we can love material things, or for a similar role in our past.

A shared history is therefore an additional basis for love, alongside the qualities you admire or like in a friend. But it can also add to the qualities you like in her. Maybe you were first attracted by your partner's wit and generosity, but now also treasure her throaty laugh and fondness for snow. Did you think in the abstract about these qualities and decide, independently of who has them, that they are likeable? Or did you come to like them because they are hers? Surely the latter. You first liked her for some non-historical qualities such as her wit and generosity, then developed a history with her and loved her for her part in it, and later come to like others of her qualities because they are hers. You love the throaty laugh because it is the laugh of the person you did all those things with, though if she had had a tinkly giggle you would have loved that instead. A George and Ira Gershwin song relishes 'the way you wear your hat / the way you sip your tea.' But the singer did not first admire those ways of handling hats and cups and then notice his love using them; he first loved her and then loved them as things she did.

This second role of a shared history explains why love can survive the loss of the qualities that first inspired it. Maybe you first loved your partner for her smooth skin and slender waist, but now it is thirty years later and she has wrinkles and a thickening middle. Do you stop loving her? Not at all. You now love her wrinkles and bulges because they belong to the person you did significant things with. Having once loved her for her appearance, you now love her

appearance for being hers.

### 3. Friendship and Partiality

So a shared history adds to the bases of love, or the things you love a person for, in several ways. But it also allows our second view: that friendship is a partly distinctive good, whose features make for distinctive instances of the more generic goods Ross discussed.

Consider first virtue. A central aspect of it is wanting another person's good for its own sake, and this is something you do more with a friend than with a stranger. You want her happiness more intensely than you want a stranger's and are more pained by her troubles; in that way you are partial to her, or favour her interests over other people's. Some may condemn this partiality, saying you should care equally for all people, but this is not the view of everyday morality, nor, I think, what most of us believe. Imagine that your spouse is drowning in one lake and two strangers are drowning in another and you can only get to one lake. Surely you do not act wrongly in this situation if you save your spouse. On the contrary, if you decided to save the two because there are more of them, that would be wrong because it would violate a special duty you have to care for your partner. Or if you can comfort either your own child after a hurt or a stranger's child after a slightly worse hurt, you act wrongly if you save the other child. You have, most of us think, a stronger duty to promote the good of someone who is closer to you just because she is closer.

Nor is this the only duty that is stronger toward someone close. Alongside the positive duty to promote other people's good are negative duties not to hurt them, lie to them, break promises to them, and so on. And however wrong it is to do these things to a stranger, it is even

more seriously wrong to do them to a friend or spouse. If you lie to her or break a promise to her, she can ask not only ‘How could you do that?’, but ‘How could you do that *to me?*’.

Let us concentrate, however, on the duty to promote a friend’s good. What gives this duty its extra strength cannot be the qualities you admire or like in her, because others could have those to a higher degree: the two strangers in the other lake could each be wittier, more generous, and redder-haired than your spouse. It must instead be your shared history with her, or the things you have done together. And the way this history strengthens your duty to promote her good, I suggest, is by generating what philosophers call an agent-relative value. Though from a neutral standpoint your spouse’s life is no more valuable than a stranger’s – it is a human life, like his – it is a life that has more value from your point of view, or relative to you, because of your shared history, and it should therefore matter more to you. More generally, the happiness or flourishing of someone close to you is a greater good relative to you than the equal happiness or flourishing of someone distant, and that gives you a stronger duty to promote it. You have in general a stronger duty to promote greater goods; thus, if you could either relieve one stranger’s intense pain or another stranger’s mild pain, you have a stronger duty to do the former. But then if your shared history with a friend makes her happiness a greater good relative to you than a stranger’s, and you have a stronger duty to promote greater goods, it follows that you have a stronger duty to promote your friend’s happiness than the stranger’s. If you save your spouse from drowning rather than two people you do not know, you do what is positively right.

But as well as strengthening your duty to seek goods in your friend’s life, your shared history with her also makes your wanting these goods a greater good, or a more valuable instance of virtue, in your life. It is an aspect of virtue that it is better and more virtuous to want or love

greater rather than lesser goods and to hate greater evils. Thus, it is more virtuous to want another's immense happiness than to want to the same degree her slight happiness, or to feel compassion for her great suffering than to feel similar compassion for her mild suffering. The same attitude with the same intensity to a greater good or evil is a greater or better instance of virtue,<sup>4</sup> and that is also true of the attitudes characteristic of love. If your spouse's happiness is a greater good relative to you, then your wanting it to a given degree is better and more virtuous than your wanting a stranger's happiness to the same degree, and your being pained by her suffering is better than your being similarly pained by a stranger's. The history that gives your partner's happiness more value relative to you also makes your caring for her happiness more virtuous and therefore a greater good in your life.

This idea is different from Ross's. He thought friendship is especially valuable because in it you care more about another person's good than you normally do. You want a friend's happiness more intensely than a stranger's, and your doing so is more virtuous because it is more intense. While that is true, I am now suggesting that, differences in intensity aside, caring for a friend's good is also better because it concerns your friend. Wanting her happiness is more virtuous than wanting a stranger's even if the wants are equally strong, and it is better because it aims at what, relative to you, is a greater good. If your desire for a friend's happiness is stronger than for a stranger's, that only means that, on our current proposal, it is better in two ways. It is better because it is more intense, but it is also better because it concerns your friend, or concerns someone whose happiness has more value relative to you.

And this means that your friendship makes for a distinctive form of the generic good of virtue. You are tied to this person by a shared history, and that now makes your concern for her

more valuable than an otherwise similar concern for someone to whom you are not similarly tied. An essential feature of friendship, one not found in more distant relationships, makes for more value in your virtuous concern for a friend, or for a more valuable instance of a generic human good.

And what is true of virtue may also be true of other goods such as knowledge. Ross thought knowledge of a friend's personality is good because it has the features that make any knowledge valuable: it is integrated, explanatory, and leads to understanding rather than a mere grasp of unconnected facts.<sup>5</sup> But it is no better than a similarly integrated and explanatory knowledge of some other subject, and in particular, it is no better than a similarly integrated knowledge of a stranger's personality. Given your more extensive interaction with your friend, you are more likely to have this kind of knowledge of her, but if you somehow had it of a stranger, that would on Ross's view be every bit as good.

We may wonder, however, whether that is true. A psychiatrist may understand a patient's personality as well as she understands her spouse's, but is understanding her spouse's not more important for her and therefore a greater good in her life? Would it not be worse if she was mistaken about her spouse than about some patient? It may be said that correctly understanding her spouse will enable her to do many other good things for him, such as comfort him effectively when he is troubled. But understanding her patient will enable her to do the same for the patient, and if the patient's needs are greater it may enable her to benefit the patient more. It seems to me that her understanding her spouse is a greater good just because he is her spouse, or because their shared history makes her knowledge of him more valuable than an otherwise similar knowledge of someone else. I am not saying this kind of knowledge is the best or most important possible,

because it is not. Given its immense breadth and explanatory power, Stephen Hawking's understanding of physics probably has more value than anyone's knowledge of even her closest intimate. But just as your shared history makes your wanting a loved one's happiness a somewhat better instance of virtue, so it can make your understanding her a somewhat better instance of knowledge.

This suggestion may connect with a more general claim about the value of knowledge. Arguing against the view that only pleasure is good, Robert Nozick asks us to imagine an 'experience machine' that by electrically stimulating your brain can give you the experience and therefore pleasure of anything you would like. Before plugging in you decide what experiences you would like to have – maybe that of being the first person to climb Mount Everest or that of seducing Brad Pitt – and then it is exactly as if you were doing those things. You get all the pleasure you would get from really doing them, and you believe you are really doing them, but in fact they are a machine-induced illusion.<sup>6</sup>

If pleasure were the only intrinsic good then a life spent entirely on the experience machine would be as good as a life can be, but many of us do not think that – we think such a life would be seriously impoverished. And a central reason is that while on the machine you are isolated within your mind, lacking the contact with outside reality that normal life involves. One aspect of this contact is knowledge, or having true beliefs about reality, and it is partly its lacking such knowledge that is disturbing about life on the machine. But what specific lack of knowledge is most disturbing?

You need not lack knowledge of yourself while plugged in, since you have the same access to your inner mental states as you do in normal life. And though you may lack knowledge

of how reality is apart from you, for example, knowledge of scientific laws, that does not seem as disturbing as the fact that you lack knowledge, and in fact have positively false beliefs, about where you are in the world, or about how you relate to your environment. You think you are halfway up a mountain or gazing into Brad Pitt's eyes when in fact you are motionless in a machine with electrodes in your brain. This suggests that alongside the value in integrated, explanatory knowledge that Ross discussed there is special or additional value in knowing how you relate to the world or how you are placed in your surroundings.

And it is not a great extension of this to say there is also special value in knowing your friends. They are an important part of your environment, in particular of your human environment, since they are the people you have interacted with most and will interact with most in the future. There can therefore be more value in knowing about your history with them than in knowing other historical facts, and that seems intuitively right. Is it not more important to remember your past with your spouse or best friend than to remember some stranger's past? There may similarly be more value in knowing facts about a friend that are independent of that history, such as her inborn personality. If it is in general better to know about your close environment, the shared history that makes her a key part of that environment may also make it better to know facts about her.

Something similar may hold for achievement. I have suggested that there is special value in cooperative achievements, where you organize not just your own activities in pursuit of a goal but another person's too, or work out with her what each of you will do. This too may have more value if it is done with someone you have a history with. Jointly designing a house or starting a business with a spouse or longtime friend may be a greater good than doing the same thing, even

with the same degree of collaboration, with someone who outside this project plays little role in your life. Wider-ranging and longer-established ties may make for more value in specific cooperations now. The idea, again, is not that collaborative achievements with friends are the most valuable achievements possible. Even the solitary achievement of a very difficult goal, such as climbing Everest or making a major invention, can be more valuable than most shared projects of friends. But if there is some extra value in cooperative achievements with people you are close to, your history with those people will again make for a distinctively valuable form of a generic good.

Finally, the same may even be true of pleasure, so pleasure got from a friend's company is more valuable than the same intensity of pleasure from a stranger's, just because it is from your friend. Pleasures that connect to a shared history, in other words, can be better than ones that do not. But we need to be careful here. If your pleasure in a friend's company is in part pleasure that she is happy or in other ways flourishing, that is a form of virtue and more valuable as a virtue because its object is a state of your friend. So it is not relevant to the value of your pleasure just as pleasure, or apart from considerations of virtue. And it may be argued that the value of pleasure as pleasure, unlike that of virtue, knowledge, or achievement, depends only on its intensity and not at all on its origin or tie to a friendship. Then, setting aside these other values, the value of pleasure from a friend's company is no greater than that of an equally intense pleasure from some other source. I am not sure that this view is true, but I am also not sure it is false. Even if it is true, however, we have seen several ways in which love or friendship can make for distinctive versions of other generic goods: by making your virtuous concern for your friend, your understanding of her, and cooperative activities with her more valuable than

otherwise similar instances of those goods that do not involve a friend.

This, then, is the second view I distinguished earlier: that an essential feature of friendship, its basis in a shared history, makes for distinctively valuable instances of more generic goods such as virtue and knowledge. But the third and more radical view is that friendship involves distinctive goods of its own. Let me end by considering that.

#### 4. Friendship and Reciprocity

The goods of friendship we have discussed so far have all been states of you, involving how you relate to your friend: your pleasure in being with her, your understanding of her personality, your achieving things with her, and your virtuously wanting her happiness. May there not be other goods in friendship that are not just states of you?

The most obvious possibility is that it is good not only to love someone but also to be loved by her: to have her want your company, understand you, and seek your happiness, all in part because of a history she has shared with you. The good here will still be located in your life, in that it will make your life more desirable. But what makes your life desirable will be a state of her, namely her loving you. It will be a good in your life not only that you care for her, but also that you are the object of her concern and affection.

Another person's love can have many good effects in your life. It can give you the pleasure of her company, as well as the standing happiness of knowing that you are loved. It can also lead to her helping you in your major projects. But in these cases her loving you is good as a means, or as something that promotes states of pleasure and happiness in you. And the possibility we are now considering is that her loving you is good for you in itself, or apart from any further

effects. Does that sound right? Does her loving you by itself make your life better?

Precisely because of what it involves, this possibility is hard to assess. Ideally we want to consider a case where her loving you does not have good effects, for example, does not cause you pleasure. But there are only two ways this can happen: either she loves you and you do not know this, so you get no pleasure from her love, or you do know it and do not care. But in neither case do you have what can be truly be called a friendship with her, so neither can help us decide whether, when there is a friendship, her love by itself makes your life better. And I have to say I am skeptical of this possibility. I do not see how something that is initially true just of her can make your life better, or be a benefit in your life. This is especially so when there is another way love can have distinctive value.

Imagine that you love another who loves you back. Your love involves pleasure, knowledge, and virtue that make your life better, and the same elements in her life make her life better. But the fact that your loves are reciprocated, or that each of you loves someone who loves you back, I now want to suggest, makes for a further value over and above those in your individual loves. The whole composed of each of your loves for the other is, because those loves are returned, a separate intrinsic good. The value in the relationship is not located just on its two sides, in what each wants and feels for the other. It also depends on the relationship's mutuality, or on the fact that the object of each love is a lover in return.

This idea involves what the early twentieth-century philosopher G. E. Moore called the 'principle of organic unities,' according to which the value of a whole need not equal the sum of the values its parts would have on their own, because the relationships among the parts can have additional value.<sup>7</sup> This principle is illustrated by the idea of moral desert. Imagine that you could

give some pleasure either to a virtuous person or to a vicious one. It would presumably be better to give it to the virtuous person, since pleasure is something he deserves, whereas the vicious person deserves not pleasure but its opposite. But how exactly does desert make the virtuous person's getting the pleasure better? Moore would say it is because the combination of virtue and pleasure in the same person's life is good as a combination, or in addition to any values in the items it combines.<sup>8</sup> The first person's virtue is good, as is his pleasure, but there is a further good in the fact that the two are joined in one life. By contrast, if the vicious person got pleasure, his vice would be evil, his pleasure would be good, and there would be a further evil in the fact that the vice and pleasure are had by the same person. In each case the value of the whole – either virtue plus pleasure or vice plus pleasure – does not equal the sum of the values its constituents would have on their own, because there is a further value in the way they are combined.

This same idea can be applied to love or friendship. Your love for your friend has value on its own, because of the pleasure, knowledge, and virtue it involves, as does her love for you. But there can be a further value in the combination of your loves as a combination, or in the relationship of mutuality between them. Another Gershwin brothers' song speaks of 'loving one who loves you / And then taking that vow'; vows aside, we can see the reciprocation it describes as a distinctive good found only in relationships of mutual love. This reciprocation will of course have many good effects: knowing you are loved is pleasing, and mutual lovers can more easily know and cooperate with each other. In addition, another's virtuously caring for you can heighten your concern for her: that she wants your happiness makes you want hers more. But I do not think reciprocated love is good only because of these effects; it is also good to some degree in itself. Imagine two situations involving the same four people. In the first *A* loves *B* who loves *C*

who loves *D* who loves *A*, but no one's love is reciprocated. In the second *A* and *B* love each other, as do *C* and *D*. Even if the loves in these two situations are equally virtuous and the people in them equally happy – since the people in the first cannot get happiness from being loved, imagine that they get compensating happiness from some other source – is the second situation not better just because its loves are reciprocated? If so, there is value in reciprocation as such.

That there is this value seems to be another lesson of Nozick's experience machine. While on the machine you lack contact not only with your physical surroundings but also with other people, in that you have no real relationships with them. You may imagine you are sharing mutual love with Brad Pitt and feel pleasure and have virtuous desires as part of that, but you are not actually relating to him and in particular are not loving someone who actually loves you back. If its lack of real and especially reciprocated relationships is another disturbing feature of life on the machine, that suggests that reciprocated love is another human good. There is, to be sure, room for debate about how great a good this is. Perhaps the lack of reciprocated love on the machine is, though disturbing, not as disturbing as the lack of knowledge and achievement. Maybe the situation with reciprocated love is somewhat better than the situation without, but not vastly better. If so, reciprocation is not as great a good as the pleasure, knowledge, and virtue in which the two situations are equal. Even so, it can be one good found in full-fledged friendships.

If we follow Moore's understanding of the principle of organic unities, we will see this good as located not in your life nor in your friend's but in the friendship as a whole, understood as a complex combining the two of you and your loves for each other. The good of mutual love is therefore not like the ones Ross discussed, which are located in the individuals who are parties to the friendship. It is a good found in the friendship itself, or in the reciprocation between its

participants, and therefore is a good of a different type from the more individual goods discussed by Ross.

There are other possible organic unities in friendship. Consider the history that ties you to your friend, understood as a series of good interactions through time, interactions in which you successively benefit each other or an outsider from virtuous motives. Each one of these interactions has value because of the virtuous motives it involves, but it may be that there is additional value in the series as a whole, just because it is a unified series of good interactions between the same people. If this is so, then it is, other things equal, better to interact continuously with the same person than to have a series of distinct interactions, each as good in itself, with different people, or to have a lifelong attachment to one person than to have a series of distinct relationships, each in itself as intense, with different people. This again will not be a supreme value, or one that necessarily outweighs all others, so a life with, say, one marriage is necessarily better than any life with successive marriages. But it will be one additional good, of at least some weight, if your attachment to a given person lasts longer and thereby makes for a larger organic whole.

## 5. Conclusion

There may be yet further goods in friendship that involve organic unities, but rather than explore this possibility let me conclude by summarizing the three views I have discussed of the value of friendship. And remember that these views are not in conflict: it may be that all three are true, so personal relationships are good in three different ways.

The first view says friendship is good because it is a part of our lives where more generic

goods, ones also possible outside friendship, are present or realized to a high degree. These goods include the many kinds of pleasure friendship can bring, the knowledge it involves of a friend's personality, your joint achievements with her, and your virtuous desire for her happiness, success, and overall flourishing. This first view may be the most important, accounting for the largest share of the value of friendship. And the most important good it cites may be virtue: the most valuable thing about friendship may be the way it takes you out of yourself and makes you care about another as much or almost as much as you care about yourself. Your friends are the people whose good you care about most and in relation to whom you are morally best or most virtuous.

The remaining two views say there are distinctive goods in friendship, ones not possible outside it. The second says your shared history with a friend makes for distinctive and better instances of the generic goods. Your virtuous concern for a friend has more value than your concern for a stranger not only because it is more intense, as the first view says, but also because it is concern for a friend, one whose involvement in your past makes her happiness, success, and so on greater goods relative to you than similar states of other people. Your caring for anyone is good, for a friend especially so. Something similar may be true of knowledge, achievement, and perhaps even pleasure: knowing a friend's personality may be better than having similar knowledge of a stranger, and likewise for joint achievements with her and perhaps even, though more controversially, for pleasures derived from her company.

Finally, the third view says there are completely distinctive values in friendship, involving what, following Moore, I called organic unities. Thus mutual love, where the love of each is reciprocated by love from the other, may have additional value because it is mutual, or

over and above the values of the individual loves that are its constituents. Now it is the relationship itself that has value, rather than what either friend brings to it, though the relationship only has this value because of what each brings. And there may be further organic unities in friendship, for example, in a long history of mutually loving interactions between the same people. All of which is just to say that love and friendship, though definitely and even incontrovertibly desirable, can be so in several different ways and on several different grounds.

## Notes

1. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 141.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), Bk. VIII, Ch. 3.
3. I defend this historical account of the basis of love in 'The Justification of National Partiality,' in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan, eds., *The Morality of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.139-57. It is also defended in Niko Kolodny, 'Love as Valuing a Relationship,' *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 135-89.
4. I defend this 'proportionality' view of virtue in *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Ch. 3.
5. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 147-8.
6. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 42-5.
7. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 27-36. I discuss Moore's principle in 'Two Kinds of Organic Unity,' *Journal of Ethics* 2 (1998): 283-304.
8. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. 214-16.