

Name: _____ Class: _____

“Three Types of Friendship” — Excerpt from The Nicomachean Ethics

By Aristotle
Roughly 340 BCE

Aristotle (385 BCE – 322 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist. Some of Aristotle’s best-known works on ethics can be found in his book Nicomachean Ethics, which was published in approximately 340 BCE. In this excerpt from his book, Aristotle defines three types of friendship. As you read, take notes on what differentiates the three types of friendship that Aristotle outlines.

- [1] Those who suppose that there is only one kind of friendship, because it admits of degrees, go upon insufficient grounds. Things that differ in kind may also differ in degree...

Perhaps these difficulties will be cleared up if we first ascertain¹ what is the nature of the lovable. For it seems that we do not love anything, but only the lovable, and that the lovable is either good or pleasant or useful. But useful would appear to mean that which helps us get something good, or some pleasure: so that the good and the pleasant only would be loved as ends.



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Now, do men love what is good, or what is good for themselves? for there is sometimes a discrepancy² between these two.

The same question may be asked about the pleasant.

[...]

- [5] The kinds of friendship accordingly are three, being equal in number to the motives of love; for any one of these may be the basis of a mutual affection of which each is aware.

Now, those who love one another wish each other’s good in respect of that which is the motive of their love. Those, therefore, whose love for one another is based on the useful, do not love each other for what they are, but only in so far as each gets some good from the other.

It is the same also with those whose affection is based on pleasure; people care for a wit,³ for instance, not for what he is, but as the source of pleasure to themselves.

1. **Ascertain (verb):** to find something out for certain
 2. **Discrepancy (noun):** a lack of similarity between two or more facts
 3. a funny, clever person

Those, then, whose love is based on the useful care for each other on the ground of their own good, and those whose love is based on pleasure care for each other on the ground of what is pleasant to themselves, each loving the other, not as being what he is, but as useful or pleasant.

These friendships, then, are “accidental;” for the object of affection is loved, not as being the person or character that he is, but as the source of some good or some pleasure. Friendships of this kind, therefore, are easily dissolved, as the persons do not continue unchanged; for if they cease to be pleasant or useful to one another, their love ceases. But the useful is nothing permanent, but varies from time to time. On the disappearance, therefore, of that which was the motive of their friendship, the friendship itself is dissolved, since it existed solely with a view to that.

[...]

- [10] The friendship of young men is thought to be based on pleasure; for young men live by impulse, and, for the most part, pursue what is pleasant to themselves and what is immediately present. But the things in which they take pleasure change as they advance in years. They are quick to make friendships, therefore, and quick to drop them; for their friendship changes as the object which pleases them changes; and pleasure of this kind is liable to rapid alteration.

[...]

But the perfect kind of friendship is that of good men who resemble one another in virtue.⁴ For they both alike wish well to one another as good men, and it is their essential character to be good men. And those who wish well to their friends for the friends’ sake are friends in the truest sense; for they have these sentiments towards each other as being what they are, and not in an accidental way: their friendship, therefore, lasts as long as their virtue, and that is a lasting thing.

The Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle (translated by F.H. Peters) is in the public domain.

4. **Virtue (noun):** morally good behavior or character

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following statements best summarizes Aristotle's view on friendship?
 - A. The different types of friendship are primarily distinguished by what drives a person to care for another.
 - B. While there are different types of friendship, all friendships are based on a sense of mutual respect and affection.
 - C. The types of friendships differ based on the strength of the bond between individuals and the benefits of the relationship.
 - D. The quality of a person's friendship is determined by how long that friendship is maintained.

2. PART A: Which statement best describes the connection that Aristotle identifies between friendship and virtue?
 - A. Friendship between two people of virtue is of better quality because everything they do is virtuous and each person wants the best for the other.
 - B. Friendships with a foundation of virtue encourage both friends to push one another to change and become better people.
 - C. People who are virtuous make more friends because they are fundamentally better people.
 - D. People who are virtuous are often taken advantage of by other in friendships, because they assume the best in everyone.

3. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Those who suppose that there is only one kind of friendship, because it admits of degrees, go upon insufficient grounds." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "These friendships, then, are 'accidental;' for the object of affection is loved, not as being the person or character that he is, but as the source of some good or some pleasure." (Paragraph 9)
 - C. "They are quick to make friendships, therefore, and quick to drop them; for their friendship changes as the object which pleases them changes; and pleasure of this kind is liable to rapid alteration." (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "But the perfect kind of friendship is that of good men who resemble one another in virtue. For they both alike wish well to one another as good men, and it is their essential character to be good men" (Paragraph 11)

4. How does Aristotle describe the first two types of friendship developing over time?
 - A. Aristotle describes the first two types of friendship as strengthening over time, as the two friends grow to rely on each other.
 - B. Aristotle describes the first two types of friendship as deteriorating over time, as they are based on selfish and brief needs.
 - C. Aristotle describes the first two types of friendship as developing into the third type of friendship as friends mature.
 - D. Aristotle describes the first two types of friendship as turning bitter over time, as the friends realize they are using each other.

5. How does Aristotle support his claim that the third type of friendship is “perfect”?
