

# *Teaching as a Primordial Act of Friendship*

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**ABSTRACT:** The central claim of this article is that through the activity of teaching, most especially that associated with moral education, teachers and students can enter into a unique friendship. It will be argued that teaching embodies many of the essential characteristics traditionally associated with friendship. In both teacher/student relationships and in friendships there must be frankness, critical self-assessment and self-understanding, a sense of duty to seek the perfection of the soul, to care for the world, and to express love and respect for humanity. Against the view that teachers and students cannot or should not be friends, because friendship is of necessity a private, intimate, and highly individualized relationship, Hannah Arendt will be enlisted to conclude that friendship between teachers and student is neither intimate nor private but is rather a public and political relationship and that teaching is indeed a primordial act of friendship.

**Résumé:** La première revendication de cet article montre qu'à travers la fonction de l'enseignement, et plus précisément celle qui est liée à l'éducation morale, les enseignants et étudiants peuvent connaître une amitié particulière. Toujours dans cet article, on évoque l'enseignement qui est la personnification même de beaucoup de caractéristiques essentielles associées traditionnellement à l'amitié. Dans les rapports et amitiés entre professeurs et étudiants, la franchise, l'autocritique, l'auto compréhension, un sens du devoir pour aller à la recherche de l'âme parfaite, l'intérêt manifeste pour le monde, l'amour et le respect envers l'humanité, sont de rigueur. En dehors du fait que les professeurs et étudiants ne peuvent ou, ne devraient pas être amis parce que l'amitié ressort forcément du domaine privé, intime et de relations vraiment individuelles, Hannah Arendt s'engage à conclure que l'amitié entre professeurs et élèves n'est ni une relation intime, ni une relation privée mais plutôt une relation publique et politique et que, de surcroît, l'enseignement est avant toute chose, une réelle démarche amicale.

### *Introduction*

Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs, essentially his ethics and politics, is much preoccupied with moral education. The *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. 1999) is his most concentrated and comprehensive discussion of what is required for human beings to live virtuously and happily. Friendship occupies a rather remarkable place of importance in both Aristotle's ethics and politics evident simply in the extensive treatment it receives in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, of the ten books which comprise the *Ethics*, a full two books, 8 and 9, are dedicated to friendship.

Not only is friendship central to Aristotle's project of moral education, it is, in his view, indispensable to life. Note Aristotle's powerful words to this effect at the beginning of Book 8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. After having discussed the importance of virtue in the good and happy life he says, "the next topic is friendship; for it is a virtue or involves virtue. Further, it is most necessary for our life. For no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all other goods" (1999, Book 8, p. 119).

Aristotle's discussion of friendship not only in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but in the *Eudemian Ethics* (trans. 1938) and *The Politics* (trans. 1984), is arguably one of the most important in the history of western thought. At the very least, his treatment of friendship exposes us to a remarkable range of issues associated with friendship and appries us of the extraordinary importance of friendship in the moral life. And yet, it is actually Aristotle's teacher Plato who helps us see that the activity of teaching, explicitly that of moral education, is itself a primordial act of friendship, a foundational embodiment of many essential features of true friendship. As I argue in this essay, those engaged in moral education are, and indeed must be, engaged not only in demonstrating the centrality of friendship in the morally good life but also in expressing friendship toward their students in the very activity of moral education itself. I make a case for a unique sort of friendship that is possible between teachers and students. The idea of friendship that I have in mind has its roots in Plato, yet I appeal to several thinkers in the history of philosophy who have written classic texts on friendship in order to explicate the way in which friendship is, or certainly can be, expressed in teaching.

No doubt some will object that classic texts, perhaps most especially those of the ancient Greeks, cannot be made relevant in a discussion of contemporary issues in teaching and education, that the ideas in these

texts are not transferable to our own time. Regrettably, a good number of such objections are the result of the current dirth of learning in the classical philosophical and religious traditions of western culture. The response to such objections must not be to further abandon such traditions but rather to redouble efforts to plumb them and unearth lost riches buried therein. Indeed, a portion of my overall purpose in this article, albeit not the largest portion by any means, is to show how even a select examination of classical texts can enliven contemporary discussions of issues in teaching and education. Moreover, while it is true that in certain respects education in ancient Greece is not easily and immediately comparable to present-day stratified, consecutious formal education, the friendship I describe should be viewed as a philosophical overarching attitude that teachers should have toward their students at any level of education.

A more specific and pointed objection to my approach might be that, especially in the philosophies of education of Plato and Aristotle, women were left out. This is of course a serious and indeed an indefensible omission. No enlightened person today stands for such discrimination. But such failures of thought, or worse yet of nerve, so deeply ingrained in ancient culture have not stood the test of time. Kenneth J. Dover, for example, in his important book, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (1974), makes it abundantly clear that women in ancient Greece were excluded from participating in virtually all of the major social, political, and economic institutions and activities of their time.

My appeal to Plato and Aristotle begins with the presumption that gender-bias in education is morally untenable. But such a presumption does not lead to the claim that all of what each of these thinkers had to say about teaching, education, and friendship is fully irrelevant today. Such a claim amounts to throwing the baby out with the bath-water. Mine is a decidedly philosophical reflection on the nature of the relationship between teaching and friendship unfettered by political and ideological concerns, the sorts of concerns which get Plato and, to a greater extent, Aristotle into trouble with contemporary educational theorists. I hope to make it apparent and compelling that certain of their thoughts on teaching, education, and friendship form the ground on which a unique conception of friendship between teachers and students could rest.

In order to argue for this unique friendship between teachers and students I first comment briefly on Aristotle's view of friendship and

then on why my perspective on friendship between teachers and students has its roots more in the thought of Plato than in that of Aristotle. I will then show how Plato's philosophical and educational exhortation to "know thyself" is integral not only to his view of teaching and the moral life but that it is also integral to friendship, especially friendship between the teacher and the student. I will argue as well that the activity of teaching embodies many of the essential characteristics traditionally associated with friendship. Among these characteristics are, frankness, critical self-assessment and self-understanding, and the obligations to perfect the soul, care for the world, and express love for humanity. I conclude by arguing, against the oft-made claim that teachers and students cannot or should not be friends, that such a claim is premised on a misconception about what sort of friendship is appropriate between teachers and students. In this conclusion, I enlist the thought of Hannah Arendt to explain how teaching is a primordial expression of friendship.

### *Aristotle and the Difficulties of Friendship Between Teachers and Students*

In Aristotle's well-known discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he says that there are three kinds of friendship – friendship of pleasure, use, and goodness (1999, Chapters 2-6). It would be difficult to imagine any considerable friendship of pleasure, in Aristotle's understanding of it, between most teachers and students. And of course such friendship does not, in Aristotle's view, occupy much of a place of importance in the moral life. Friendship of use does seem to exist between teachers and students, for example with regard to the way in which teachers are useful to students by contributing to their education and students useful to the teachers who seek to fulfill their vocation or to at least make a living. Yet such a friendship for Aristotle would be incidental, impermanent, and not very deep. Needless to say for Aristotle the highest, most noble type of friendship is friendship of goodness. Friends of this sort are alike in virtue, similar in moral character, and are essentially equals who extend themselves to one another equally in goodness of will and in services appropriate to such friendship (Aristotle, 1999, Book 8, Chapters 3-4). We can see already that a friendship of goodness of any depth between teachers and students would in all likelihood be at best difficult if not impossible to achieve. Teachers and students are ordinarily not equals in any of the above-mentioned

respects and, as Aristotle says, “friendship is said to be equality” (p. 125). He also claims that “friendship is said to be reciprocal good will” (p. 121). Generally, teachers tend to be both moral and intellectual superiors when compared to their students, not to mention the fact that they are more experienced in life. Further, teachers wish their students well for their own sakes while students do not always or consistently express equal and reciprocal goodwill toward their teachers.

It seems evident that the considerable moral and intellectual inequality between teachers and students would make friendship of goodness unlikely in Aristotle’s terms. I make this claim without even exploring Aristotle’s less than optimistic view of the possibility of true friendships between people of unequal authority or power. And yet teachers and students might have a “friendship of unequals.” Actually, Aristotle makes room for the possibility of such friendships when he says that the inequality between unequals can be mitigated to an extent. He claims that,

In all the friendships that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance, the better person, and the more beneficial, and each of the others likewise, must be loved more than he loves; for when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved in a way, and this seems to be proper to friendship. (Aristotle, 1999, p. 127)

Aristotle concludes that, “friends whose love accords with the worth of their friends are enduring friends and have enduring friendship. This above all is how unequals as well as equals can be friends, since this is how they can be equalized” (1999, p. 128).

But even if through some extraordinary effort on behalf of a teacher and a student, such an equalizing and proportionate reciprocal love was struck between an individual teacher and a student, other obstacles to friendship would exist. Constraints regarding the time and familiarity necessary to cultivate a friendship of goodness aside, such an intimate relationship between a teacher and a student would appear to out of line, as Patricia White puts it:

The norms of impartiality which must govern the teacher’s conduct. Just as doctors or lawyers would be likely to create ethical complexities for themselves if they entered into intimate personal relationships with their patients or clients, so it is with teachers. (1990, p. 70)

To an extent I think this is true. I think it is also true that a teacher could not possibly develop friendships along these lines with *all* of his or her students.

For my purposes, Patricia White's article is interesting on two counts. First, her reliance on classical texts and authors, especially Aristotle, reinforces my claim that we can still read these texts profitably as we contemplate contemporary issues in education. Note her comment to this effect.

Most of the great classical treatises on friendship, those by Aristotle, Cicero, and Montaigne, for instance, do not allow for the possibility of friendship between women or men and women. Had the authors not held views about the inferiority of women, it seems to me, they could have applied what they have to say about friendship without difficulty to those cases, too. (White, 1990, p.72)

Second, even given this support for the use of classical texts in discussions of contemporary issues in teaching and education, White's overall discussion of friendship between teachers and students can have little to do with my argument. The reason for this is that she finally comes to view friendship in distinctly modern terms. This is especially evident in her understanding of friendship as a highly private, personal, and intimate relationship (White, 1990, pp. 68-69). The friendship I have in mind between teachers and students is decidedly public, neither personal nor intimate. And so in the end, White's perspective stands in stark contrast to my own.

It is for this same reason that the discussion of personal relationships between teachers and students by H.P. Hirst and R.S. Peters (1970), in *The Logic of Education*, is equally unrelated to the view I advance. In Chapter 6 of that work, entitled "Teaching and Personal Relationships," Hirst and Peters explore a variety of interesting and instructive distinctions regarding teacher and student relationships (pp. 88-105). But in no part of this exploration do they discuss friendship, indeed, to my knowledge the topic of friendship is not addressed anywhere in their text. Their focus in this particular Chapter is on personal relationships, none of which capture my view of teacher/student friendship.

Clearly Aristotle does not leave us much room to believe that teacher/student friendships are possible. And as mentioned above, Patricia White points out other difficulties with such friendships as well. However, the view of friendship I have in mind does not require such great equality or reciprocity, nor does it demand intimate and profound love of the individual student by the teacher and vice versa. Indeed, the sort of friendship I have in mind is resistant to deeply personal attachments between individuals and is therefore not designed to extend

only to select individuals with all of the requisite virtuous qualities of character Aristotle says must be at the base of all friendships of goodness. An adequate description of such a friendship, however, demands that I trace its roots back to the thought of Aristotle's teacher, Plato.

### *Plato and the Relationship Between Friendship and Self-Knowledge*

In Plato's *Apology* (trans. 1977), Socrates is portrayed defending himself against charges of impiety and corruption of the youth of Athens. In the course of that defense Socrates tells why and how he became a philosopher and why there has been such great hostility toward him in the city of Athens. Over the course of his life Socrates examined those who claimed to have knowledge, specifically the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen. He did this on the provocation of the oracle at Delphi, the shrine which honored the god Apollo. Asked by a friend of Socrates whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, "the Pythia replied that there was no one wiser" (Plato, 1977, p. 81). Puzzled by the god's pronouncement, Socrates sought out those who claimed to be wise and questioned them as to their purported wisdom. He found that the politicians, poets, and craftsmen thought themselves wise when they were not (pp. 83-89). This persistent questioning caused the individuals Socrates examined to resent and even hate not only him but philosophers and philosophy as such. From these experiences Socrates was forced to conclude that while others thought themselves wise when they were not, Socrates at least knew that he did not know. He was wise in the awareness and admission of his ignorance. It was as if the god said to Socrates, "human wisdom is of little or no value" and that "this one of you, O human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, recognizes he is in truth of no account in respect to wisdom" (p. 87).

From then on Socrates committed himself to a life of philosophy, a life in which he would examine both citizens and foreigners and exhort them to care most of all for the perfection of their souls (Plato, 1977, p. 109). For Socrates, the god Apollo symbolized, among other things, the imperative to self-knowledge, an imperative etched into the stone at the entrance to the temple at Delphi. Socrates' belief that each human being should heed the command to "know thyself" became a hallmark of his philosophical view of the moral life. A crucial precondition of such knowledge, however, was that each of us must admit our ignorance or

our lack of knowledge in the first place. Indeed, the primal failure of those who claimed to be wise lay in their unwillingness to admit their ignorance under the pressure of the Socratic cross-examination. Clearly for Socrates, the possibility of learning and teaching depended on such an admission as the initial step toward self-knowledge.

This powerful notion of the importance of admitting ignorance as a first step toward self-knowledge becomes an important consideration in Plato's only dialogue which explicitly has friendship as its central theme, the *Lysis*. This early aporetic work is set against a rich and complex backdrop which includes important references to the Pythian god, Apollo. Socrates narrates the dialogue and at the outset says that he was walking along the wall that surrounded Athens, on the outer road. He says that he was traveling from one school, the Academy, straight to another, the Lyceum (Plato, trans. 1975, p. 7). This latter school was adjacent to a temple which honored Apollo one of whose epithets was *Lukeios* reminding us that Apollo once cleared Athens of wolves. Hence the school's name, Lyceum (*Luceion*).

There are other references to Apollo in the *Lysis*. For example, the considerable discussion of Hermes and of medicine in the dialogue recall Apollo's gift of the caduceus to Hermes in exchange for the lyre. However, the most interesting reference to Apollo comes when Socrates discusses the importance of self-knowledge and its precondition, that is, the requisite admission of ignorance, for achieving true friendship. After several failed attempts to answer the question who is the friend and to define friendship, Socrates lights on a promising definition. Socrates summarizes his view of those who would be friends to his young interlocutors, Lysis and Menexenus, as follows:

And now there remain those who, while possessing this bad thing, ignorance, are not yet made ignorant or stupid, but are still aware of not knowing the things they do not know. It follows, then, that those who are as yet neither good nor bad are lovers of wisdom. (Plato, 1975, p. 55)

Socrates sees friends as those individuals who are neither good (wise) nor bad (ignorant) but who are aware of their badness (i.e., of their ignorance or lack of wisdom) and, in response to this badness, such individuals love or have friendship for wisdom, that which they lack. While this definition of friends and of friendship falls prey to Socrates' relentless questioning (the dialogue ends with Socrates' saying that they have not yet discovered what a friend is) we are left with the impression

that this definition offered the most promise out of all of the definitions discussed.

Evidence abounds in the *Lysis* (Plato, 1975) that this is so. The most striking parcel of this evidence is the early conversation Socrates has with young Lysis. That conversation is arranged by Hippothales, an admirer of Lysis who has been unsuccessful at securing Lysis' affection or friendship (pp. 7-13). Hippothales' error is that he praises Lysis beyond reason, writing him poems and letters which puff him up. The conversation unfolds as Menexenus and Socrates begin speaking to one another. Eventually Lysis is lured into the conversation with them. Once Menexenus steps out of the discussion Socrates talks to Lysis asking him about his life, the things he is allowed to do and not do, about how happy he is. Hippothales is quietly watching from a safe hiding place, for Socrates intends to model for or teach Hippothales how one talks to an individual whose affection one seeks. In other words, Socrates tries to demonstrate how one goes about attracting a friend (pp. 19-31).

Much to Hippothales' horror Socrates proceeds to humble Lysis, explaining to him that his parents do not allow him to, for example, drive the mule cart or the chariot, to cook, or to have a say in the management of the household, not because of his age as Lysis believed, but because he lacked knowledge. Socrates concludes his initial talk with Lysis by explaining how we will secure the affection, trust, and respect of others by saying, "then if you become wise, my boy, everybody will be your friend, every one will be intimate with you, since you will be useful and good" (Plato, 1975, p. 31). Recall how in the *Apology* (Plato, 1977) Socrates recounts his life as a philosopher and a teacher of Athenian citizens, precinding now from debating over the restrictive sense in which Socrates would use the word teacher during his defense. Recall also that Socrates says that he was sent by Apollo to urge these citizens to humbly admit their ignorance and seek self-knowledge. Here in the *Lysis* Socrates models the way in which we should seek our friends, that is, by helping them to admit their lack of wisdom, as Socrates does for Lysis, Hippothales, and all of the young men who witnessed their conversation. Socrates the teacher is Socrates the friend who helps Lysis and the others to see that the first step toward knowledge not only of oneself, but also of friendship itself, is the admission of ignorance.

### *Differences Between Aristotle and Plato on Friendship and One Deep Affinity They Share*

It is important that we realize that the friendship Socrates outlines in the *Lysis* (Plato, 1975) is quite different from the friendship of goodness discussed by Aristotle. For Aristotle friendship is primarily between individuals of a specific character, a character comprised of very specific excellences. Socrates' friendship is primarily a friendship *with wisdom*. In a sense, that the boys in the dialogue, or any individuals, can be friends of each other depends on whether they admit their ignorance and recognize, in their lack of wisdom, the need to seek it out, to love or have a friendship first and foremost with wisdom itself. Such individuals are only friends secondarily or derivatively of each other based on their primary relationship with wisdom or truth.

We know that Socrates values wisdom or truth highly, it would appear more highly than life itself given the fact that he died for it. That he would even place truth higher than the individuals who speak about it and seek it is evident in his comment about the great Homer. He says from boyhood that he had always had a certain friendship and reverence for Homer, the first tragedian. "For he appears to have been the first teacher and beginner of all these beauties of tragedy. Yet all the same we must not honor a man above the truth" (Plato, trans. 1980, pp. 419-21). We cannot help but to notice that Socrates' view of friendship is not very intimate or highly personal, nor is it reserved for a select few who possess a predetermined set of characteristics. Rather the friendship of which he speaks is available to all who question, all who admit their ignorance and seek the truth and have a friendship first and foremost with wisdom.

And yet as different as Aristotle and Plato appear to be, and in fact are, regarding true friendship, they do share a deep affinity. For Plato moral education must proceed from the admission of ignorance about ourselves and about the human good. But such an admission is of necessity the result of a self-examination, an examination of the soul. In other words, we must, in the spirit of St. Augustine, become a question or a riddle to ourselves (Augustine, trans. 1960, Book X, Chapter 33, p. 262). Early on in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle talks about the origins of moral education (1999, Book I, Chapters 3-4). A clear difference between Aristotle and Plato on this matter is Aristotle's more profound preoccupation with habit. He says, "it is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our very youth. On the

contrary, it is very important, indeed all important" (1999, Book 2, Chapter 1, p. 19). And yet habit needs choice or decision, *prohairesis*, an activity which implies reason. In Book 1, Chapter 3 Aristotle speaks about why young people would not do well as students of political science, that is, about why they would not be good recipients of moral education. His comments indicate, among other things, the importance of cultivating the rational part of the soul. In Chapter 13 of Book 1 Aristotle tells us that the examination of virtue is the examination of human virtue or virtue of the soul. Therefore those who study the human good of necessity must study the soul. This study would include an examination of the parts, capacities, and powers of the soul or what is essentially the seat of the human self. In a word, even for Aristotle the proper propaedeutic to moral education is to have students study the soul. And herein lies the affinity between these two great thinkers and teachers. For both Plato and Aristotle, a full-bodied moral education, and thus the very possibility of a virtuous life dedicated to the perfection of the soul, depends on a certain kind of self-knowledge, a knowledge achieved only in a penetrating self-analysis. As I have suggested throughout this essay, true friendship begins in and hinges on self-knowledge.

*Teaching and the Admission of Ignorance:  
"Know Thyself!"*

In the remainder of this essay I will unfold further this essentially Platonic/Socratic conception of friendship, a friendship that might exist between teachers and students, and argue that such friendship must adhere in the very activity of moral education itself. It would appear from our discussion thus far, that teachers engaged in moral education will be friends to their students if from the outset they assist them to an admission of their ignorance about themselves and most especially about what it means to live well; to disabuse them, so to speak, of common misconceptions about the moral life. Moral educators must first help students to see that they likely do not know what they think they know, namely, themselves or the nature of the human good. This is not only a stiff challenge for teachers pedagogically speaking, but the difficulty here is in part an ontological one, as Martin Heidegger reminds us. Speaking of *Dasein*, that is, the human person, and the ordinary or everyday view this person has of himself or herself, Heidegger says, "that which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the

farthest and not known at all" (1962, p. 69). Moreover, Heidegger recalls Augustine's tortured question in *Confessions*, X, 16, about his inability to discern and remember who he is when he asks "Quid autem propinquius meipso mihi?" ["But what is closer to me than myself"] (pp. 69 & 489 n.i.).

In our everyday view of ourselves, the true self is ontologically far away and consequently a teacher's efforts are often met with great resistance. This resistance is not unnatural, however, as Immanuel Kant reminds us in his discussion of friendship, "From a moral point of view it is, of course, a duty for one of the friends to point out the other's faults to him. But his *alter ego* sees in this a lack of the respect which he expected from his friend" (1964, pp. 140-141). The fact is that, on the one hand, we say we want frank, critical talk from our friends but in truth we take criticism badly. Indeed, "the greater effort in friendship lies not in revealing our faults to a friend but in getting him to see his own" (La Rochefoucauld, 1929, p. 79). Well-thought and frank criticism is certainly a duty of the teacher to the student and yet as Plutarch tells us, "frankness of speech, by common report and belief, is the language of friendship" (trans. 1927, p. 277). Plutarch also correctly worries that mistimed or overly harsh criticism could wound the individual who is being admonished. Frankness must always be tempered (pp. 393-395). But teachers must strike this balance with their students all of the time, and they must persevere in this duty of friendship in order to provide students with a clear access to their true self or true nature. As Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us, however, this is not to say that friendship is delicate and cannot stand such rough treatment. He says, "I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest thing we know" (1983, p. 346). Emerson tells us that the obligations of friendship are demanding and integral to the moral life when he says, "the laws of friendship are austere and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals" (p. 345). I would suggest that one of the laws of both friendship and morals, if not nature, is that those who expect to live well must submit themselves to legitimate critical assessments. This may well be a law of education as well.

At the beginning of "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend," (1927) Plutarch talks about Plato and about the blinding effects of self-love. In this context Plutarch is enlisting Plato to explain how flatterers use self-love as "an excellent base of operations against us" (p. 265). Self-love is of course natural and yet, "it is because of this self-love that everybody

is himself his own foremost and greatest flatterer, and hence finds no difficulty in admitting the outsider to witness with him and to confirm his own conceits and desires" (p. 265).

Plutarch's worry is that unbridled self-love and the self-conceit born of it will cause us to misjudge our own knowledge of our selves and to become vulnerable to flattery. The flatterer is then the clear antithesis to the true friend, the person who will speak to us frankly in an effort to help us correctly assess our qualities good and bad. Thus, Plutarch is led to characterize the flatterer as,

An enemy to the gods and particularly the Pythian god. For the flatterer always takes a position over against the Maxim 'Know thyself,' by creating in every man deception toward himself and ignorance both of himself and of the good and evil that concerns himself. (Plutarch, 1927, p. 267)

And so one of the things we must learn in the course of our moral education is how to subject ourselves to a Socratic self-analysis. In this spirit, Plutarch tells us that we need to "learn that the precept, 'Know thyself,' is valuable to each of us," and that we must also be willing to "carefully review our own nature and upbringing and education" (Plutarch, 1927, p. 349). The point of such self-analysis is of course to continue to cultivate the ground from which true moral education grows, that is, self-knowledge.

While flatterers inhibit our ability to achieve self-knowledge by fostering or assisting us in a self-created ignorance about who we are and what is good and evil for us, friends promote both correct self-understanding and what is noble and good for us. In the frank critical assessments of our friends we can achieve great sincerity about ourselves. According to Emerson there are two equally sovereign elements of friendship, truth, and tenderness. Speaking of the former he says, "a friend is a person with whom I may be sincere" (1983, p. 347). According to Emerson sincerity applies even more to one's relationship with oneself than to our relationships with others; for as he tells us, "every man alone is sincere" (p. 347) or honest with himself. Beyond those rare occasions of searing honesty that we have in solitude, we can hope to replicate an opportunity for such honesty only with a true friend who frees us to be ourselves, to, as Emerson puts it, "enter into a grander self-acquaintance" (p. 344). I believe it is not accidental that Plato's dialogue on friendship is named *Lysis* from the Greek word *luo*, meaning to "set free." For Socrates the teacher and friend hopes to liberate Lysis from his ignorance, to free him up to experience his true

self. Socrates wants Lysis to see that through his admission of ignorance he will be free to seek not only self-knowledge but friendship as well, friendship with wisdom.

### *Teachers and Students as Truth-Seekers and Friends of Wisdom*

But teachers engaged in moral education should see that they have a duty, not a merely professional one, but a duty of friendship, to be frank with their students, to offer them their very best critical assessment of who they are and of what is good and evil for them. Moral education must begin with such critical self-assessment and the language of friendship must pervade the relationship between the teacher and the student. We might ask, however, what are the eventual goals of such a friendship between a teacher and his or her students, a friendship premised on the admission of ignorance? Well, as I have said, one goal is self-knowledge and yet there is more to this. Ideally students will become independent "formidable natures" in their own right for "the condition which high friendship demands is the ability to do without it" (Emerson, 1983, p. 350). The duty of friendship that the teacher takes up requires the teacher to assist the student to become an independent and fit seeker of wisdom and the truth. Both Emerson and Henry David Thoreau consider friendship to be a sacred calling in this respect. As a matter of "divine courtesy" Thoreau says of the friend, "I will be so related to thee as thou canst imagine; even so thou mayest believe. I will spend truth – all my wealth on thee" (1983, p. 272). Indeed, the generosity of the teacher toward the student with regard to the truth and the very best that the teacher's mind can offer is the mirror image of generosity of the friend, of whom Thoreau says "is the one whom I can associate with my choicest thought" (p. 271). For Emerson, "the essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust .... It treats its object as a god, that it may deify both" (Emerson, 1983, p. 354). And again, "friendship demands a religious treatment .... Reverence is a great part of it" (p. 350). We revere the friend and approach the friend with a grand hopefulness because we recognize the remarkable potential for goodness or virtue which resides therein, the potential, which for Emerson, God has placed in all of humanity.

And yet, the sacredness of friendship between the teacher and the student is not to be taken as one requiring a specific religiosity on the part of either. For the search for the truth must not be made narrowly

doctrinally sacrosanct. Rather teachers must, out of friendship, ask students to travel the path of truth together. As C.S. Lewis asks, in the spirit of Emerson, “Do you see the same truth – Or at least do you care about the same truth?” (1960, p. 97.) Persons, including teachers and students, who appreciate the importance of such a question will be friends; and yet friends do not always need to agree about the answer to such questions (p. 97). Indeed, friendship generally, and most especially friendship between teachers and students, won’t often be warm and cuddly. When Socrates is critically examining or questioning someone about their knowledge of themselves, or about some important moral concern, he is hardly an endearing personality, a person with whom one would immediately desire to have a close and intimate relationship. But this is as it should be. For it is true that “friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody” (Thoreau, 1983, p. 266). Friendship invites some dissonance, some deep melodic interplay. In this interplay each of the friends stands as a unique and individual musical counterpoint, as it were, a countervailing tone or rhythmic arc. Plutarch tells us, speaking of his own friends, that he has

No use for a friend that shifts about just as I do and nods assent just as I do (for my shadow better performs that function), but I want one that tells the truth as I do, and decides for himself as I do. (Plutarch, 1927, p. 287)

### *Teachers and Students:*

#### *Caretakers of the World, Friends of Humanity*

The sort of friendship between teachers and students that I have described might seem a bit sterile to some largely because it lacks the intimacy and selectivity ordinarily associated with friendship. But this is a great prejudice of modernity, that is, that friendship is essentially a personal, private, intimate relationship between individuals. In her important essay, “On Humanity in Dark Times,” Hannah Arendt explains how we children of modernity “see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, in which the friends open their hearts to each other unmolested by the world and its demands” (1955, p. 24). She says that this view is best advocated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and I would add Michel de Montaigne. According to this view, friendship is a private affair conducted primarily between individuals. For Montaigne, friendship required the individuals party to it to commit themselves, their wills, their very souls, to each other alone (1957, p. 139). Montaigne thought friendship to be an intimate, utterly private, and implicitly non-

political relationship. He even goes so far as to say that “a single dominant friendship dissolves all other obligations” (p. 142). For Arendt, however, friendship is a public relationship, one that is political in nature. Arendt’s perspective on friendship has its origin in the thought of the ancient Greeks who believed that “the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest” (Arendt, 1955, p. 24).

What the Greeks talked about was the world. In making the world the focus of their discourse, the Greeks humanized the world.

However much we are affected by the things of the world ... however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows. Whatever cannot become the object of discourse – the truly sublime, the truly horrible or the uncanny – may find a human voice through which to sound into the world .... We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human. (Arendt, 1955, pp. 24-25).

The humanness to which Arendt refers, a humanness we cultivate through the discourse of friendship, was called by the Greeks *philanthropia* or “love of man.” This humanness expresses itself as a desire to care for the world and to share this care, and indeed the world itself, with other people (1955, p. 25).

The sort of friendship I envision between teachers and students is one in which they share a love of wisdom about and a concern for the world and the human experience in it. Such a relationship begins when teachers help students to accept their lack of, and thus need for wisdom about themselves, others, and their world. Moral educators must create in students a concern for the world and their place in it, they must cultivate the very humanness of which Arendt speaks. However, this “humanness should be sober and cool rather than sentimental” (Arendt, 1955, p. 25). The friendship that would arise then “is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to the world” (p. 25). Such, I would submit, must be the deep and substantive friendship between teachers and their students.

Teachers engaged in moral education must endeavor to draw students into the larger circle of humanity, into the circle of those who would be friends and caretakers of the world. This circle, the teacher must make clear, is one to which she (or he) herself belongs. The teacher

must reveal to his students a most crucial element of true friendship, namely that the teacher is a student as well, and in being a learner the teacher shows his students that he (or she) is something of a *second self* for them. Many of those who have written about friendship have argued that the friend is a kind of second self, Aristotle, Cicero, Sir Francis Bacon, and Emerson among them. It is enormously important in education, especially moral education, that the teacher as friend exemplifies for the students the search for wisdom, a passion for self-examination, and an appreciation for how unnerving the experience of confronting and admitting one's own ignorance can be.

Given such honesty by teachers, they might hope to lay the groundwork for great trust between them and their students and perhaps over time for a certain equality and reciprocity characteristic of deep friendship. For teachers who allow their students to see them as travelers along the same path of truth, and who live the same life of self-examination, create the possibility of a proportionate admiration and regard for the activity of teaching and learning both. Ideally, as Augustine tells us speaking of one of his own friendships, friendship can indeed develop from and mature through a commitment to common studies (1960, p. 97).

Teachers engaged in moral education must remember, however, that friendship generally, and thus friendship between them and their students of necessity takes a long time to develop. A dilemma of course is that teachers often do not have their students for an extended period of time. And yet it would seem to me that teachers do have an opportunity to accomplish in the name of friendship what Hannah Arendt said the great 18<sup>th</sup> century thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing did through his work, that is, he created a movement of thought, what he called *Selbstdenken* or "independent thinking." Out of a certain friendship for the world and for mankind he "scattered into the world ... nothing but fermenta cognitiones" (Arendt, 1955, p. 8). Lessing spread fertile thoughts in service to the preservation of the world, in service to what Arendt calls his "partisanship for the world" (p. 8). That teachers engaged in moral education could bring their students into such a partisanship would truly be a primordial act of friendship.

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