

# Aristotle on friendship and mentoring juniors

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**Research:** Moral philosophy: theory of character and action; normative ethics; philosophy of human rights.

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**Professional history:**

2015-2018 Ethics Fellow, the Jackson Family Center for Ethics and Values, Coastal Carolina University (SC)

2018-2021 Director, the Jackson Family Center

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**Personal:** Arsenal fan who loves playing with his kids, cooking, and bass-centric music.



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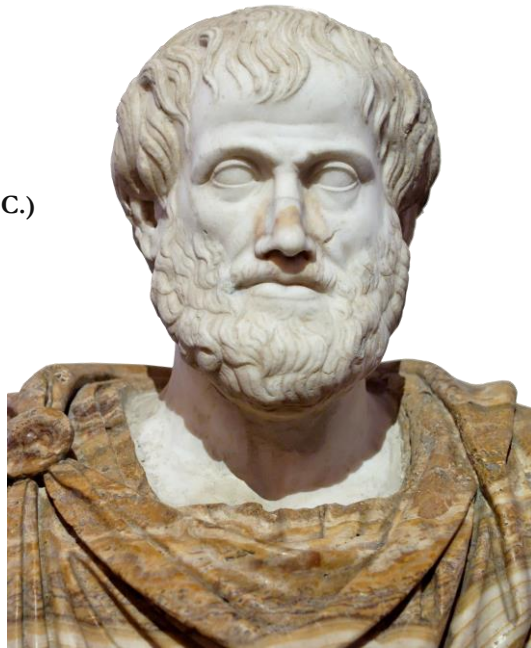
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**ARISTOTLE**

(384-322 B.C.)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

“let us examine ... whether friendship can arise between any two people or people cannot be friends if they are wicked, and whether there is one species of friendship or more than one.”

*(N.E. Book VIII Chapter 1)*

**Question 1: Can wicked people be friends?**

**Question 2: Are there different kinds of friendship?**



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

**What is friendship?**

1. Any mutual or reciprocal relationship ...
2. in which some (real/apparent) good is exchanged.



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Examples of kinds of friendship under A's definition:

buddy	acquaintance	romantic partner
BFF	spouse	business partner
teammate	workmates	many family members
book club/golf/fishing friends		Greek life bigs/littles
fellow congregants		mentor
fellow HOA members/PTA members		boss / manager
fantasy league participants (excluding commissioners)		



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #1

### USE

- Anything functionally good (helpful, valuable, beneficial, profitable...)
- A's examples: guest and host; people in a binding legal contract.
- Contemporary examples: business partners, study mates, collaborators, contractors, colleagues in your professional network...



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #1                      USE

Based in **self-interest**: "...those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves *but in virtue of some good which they get from each other.*"

(N.E. Bk VII Ch 3)

highly **contingent**: "Now the useful is not permanent but is always changing. Thus *when the motive of the friendship is done away, the friendship is dissolved*, inasmuch as it existed only for the ends in question."

(N.E. Bk VII Ch 3)

"Those who are friends for the sake of utility part when the advantage is at an end; for they were *lovers not of each other but of profit.*"

(N.E. Bk VIII Ch 4)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #1                      USE

Often a *poisonous* kind of reciprocal relationship:

"the friendship of utility is full of complaints; for *as they use each other for their own interests they always want to get the better of the bargain, and think they have got less than they should*, and blame their partners because they do not get all they 'want and deserve' ..."

(N.E. Bk VIII Ch 13)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #2                      PLEASURE

- Anything that we *enjoy* about a person: entertaining, funny, calming, reassuring, attractive...
- A's example: young people in (puppy) love
- Contemporary examples: past-time/hobby friends, drinking buddies, book club participants, collegial colleagues....



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #2                      PLEASURE

“These friendships are only incidental; for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but as providing some [...] pleasure. Such friendships, then, are easily dissolved, if the parties do not remain like themselves...”

(N.E. Bk VIII Ch 3)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Notes on USE and PLEASURE friendships

Anyone can have these kinds of friendship:

“For the sake of pleasure or utility, then, even bad men may be friends of each other, or good men of bad, or one who is neither good nor bad may be a friend to any sort of person...”  
(N.E. Bk VII Ch 4)

*However, they are contingent, unstable and tend not to last.*



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #3                      GOODNESS

- Goodness in the sense of having *virtue*: a fine (noble, excellent) character – i.e. being humble, honest, diligent, brave, kind, generous...
- Friendship for people we respect, admire or value (cherish)
- Friendship as love: “Love and friendship therefore are found most and in their best form between [good] men.” (N.E. Bk VIII Ch 3)
- The real deal: the *perfect* or *ideal* form of friendship.



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #3                      GOODNESS

- Goodness friends love one another as they are

*Why this friendship is the best:*

- Includes USE and PLEASURE benefits
- Adds GOODNESS (moral/character) benefits
- The stablest & strongest kind (because it *deepens over time*)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #3                      GOODNESS – the virtuous spiral

“For those who are friends on the ground of virtue are anxious to do well by each other (since that is a mark of virtue and of friendship), and between men who are emulating each other in this there cannot be complaints or quarrels; no one is offended by a man who loves him and does well by him – if he is a person of nice feeling he takes his revenge by doing well by the other.”

(N.E. Bk VII Ch 13)





## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Benefit #3                      GOODNESS

“Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good-and goodness is an enduring thing.”

(N.E. Bk VIII Ch 3)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### GOODNESS vs USE & PLEASURE friendships

The key difference:

USE & PLEASURE friendships are an exchange of a good *received*  
– something each party GETS

GOODNESS friendships are an exchange of GIVING



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

“[real friendship] seems to **lie in loving rather than in being loved**, as is indicated by the delight mothers take in loving; for some mothers hand over their children to be brought up, and so long as they know their fate they love them and do not seek to be loved in return (if they cannot have both), but seem to be satisfied if they see them prospering; and they themselves love their children even if these [children], owing to their ignorance, give them nothing of a mother's due.”

(N.E. Bk VIII Ch 3)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

### Complications

There are also *mixed* friendships of two varieties:

- 1) mixed in kinds of *friends*: old/young, single/married, student/teacher, pro/amateur, Christian/Muslim, Southern/Northern ...
- 2) mixed in kinds of *friendship* (goods exchanged): different uses and different kinds of pleasure exchanged; even use/pleasure, goodness/pleasure & goodness/use composites.



## **Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics***

**Application:** Professional mentor/protégé relationship



## **Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics***

**Application:** Professional mentor/protégé relationship.

### **Definitions:**

A **mentor** is an experienced person who supports the development of a new or more junior person.

A **protégé** (mentee or understudy) is the recipient of such support.



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Application:** Professional mentor/protégé relationship

“...as a young man [Thomas Jefferson] had the good fortune to find a mentor, George Wythe, a Williamsburg lawyer whose original house still stands in the restored village. George Wythe was a substantial man of his times, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Constitutional Convention. But his chief claim to fame is as Thomas Jefferson’s mentor. It was probably the influence of mentor on understudy, as Jefferson studied law in Wythe’s office, that moved Jefferson toward his place in history and somewhat away from his natural disposition to settle down at Monticello as an eccentric Virginia scholar... The point of mentioning George Wythe is that old people may have a part to play in helping the potential servant-as-leader to emerge at his optimal best.”

(R. Greenleaf - *The Servant as Leader* pp.16-17)



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Application:** Professional mentor/protégé relationship.

**Why this fits A’s model of a goodness friendship:**

1. Centered on giving, rather than getting.
2. Only possible in a context of mutual respect and trust.



## Aristotle on Friendship: *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Application:** Professional mentor/protégé relationship.

**The benefits:**

1. Benefits to protégé: USE, PLEASURE *and* VIRTUE !
2. Benefits to mentor: USE, PLEASURE and... *VIRTUE??*



**Thank you for your attention!**

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