MORALITY, METAPHYSICS, AND THE ROMANCE OF FRIENDSHIP

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"Friendship and love are, . . . excluding union with God, the highest expressions of the harmony between the mind and being."

1. DISINTERESTED LOVE

Robert Spaemann begins his suggestive essay "The Paradoxes of Love" by quoting the empiricists Hume and Hobbes. Hume: "We never advance one step beyond ourselves." Hobbes: to know a thing means "to know what we can do with it when we have it."[1] That is, human beings are incurably self-interested, lacking any capacity for engaging in anything other than what Simone Weil calls "first-person thinking."[2] Without this capacity, the entire possibility of genuine moral action collapses.

Spaemann advances the existence of friendship and love as a self-evident refutation of such a pessimistic view of human

1. Robert Spaemann, *Love and the Dignity of Human Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1.

2. See Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), 174ff.

nature, and indeed little philosophical reflection is required to observe the apparent transcendence of self in some quite commonplace occurrences. My friend has had some good news; although it will not materially affect my own life in any way, I am thrilled about it. My friend has undergone some crucial medical investigations. I find myself reluctant to inquire about their outcome; if the news is bad, I am not sure that I will find the right thing to say. But I overcome my apprehension and make the phone call. My friend is very ill. I hate hospitals, but my sense of the duties of friendship surmounts my instinctive aversion to visiting him.

All these scenarios are, of course, susceptible to a behaviorist reductionist critique. The kind of despairing reflection upon ourselves in which some of us are prone to engage reveals to us that human motivation is rarely, if ever, pure. As Spaemann remarks, "reflection cannot find innocence, but can only unmask every impulse for disinterested activity as a case of subtle self-love."[3] In *Anna Karenina*, Dolly recognizes bleakly that her impulse to do good is motivated by a desire to look better in the eyes of other people, in her own eyes and in God's eyes. Fundamentally, so the argument goes, I take pleasure in my friend's success insofar as it contributes to my own pleasure; I dread his reception of bad news because I perceive the threat to him as a threat to my own well-being. What seems to the unreflective person an act of going forth from the self is disclosed to the reflective person as, in fact, an act of coming back to the self. I rise to the demands of friendship ultimately because I wish to be perceived by others, and to perceive myself, as a good friend; just as, if I make an entirely anonymous donation to charity, I still have the consolation of beholding myself as a virtuous person. Perhaps, we think, Hume and Hobbes are right after all, and human life is governed by the sovereign masters of pain and pleasure, in however subtle a form. Even in friendship and love, there would seem to be no getting away from the question, crudely framed, "What is in it for me?"

The possibility of an unconsoled, disinterested love of the Good is raised by Plato at the beginning of the *Republic*, which, in the passages concerning the myth of the ring of Gyges

3. Spaemann, *Love and the Dignity of Human Life*, 14.

and the idea of the perfectly just man who is degraded even in his own eyes, tests the concept to its limits.

Socrates is arguing against the sophists, who echo the pronouncement of Thucydides—"Of the gods we believe and of men we certainly know that it is a necessary law of their nature to rule whenever they can"[4]—and so anticipate the "new" Renaissance view of Machiavelli and Hobbes that the wolfish natural state is a *bellum omnium contra omnes* ("war of all against all"). In this gloomy setup, "the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation. The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous."[5] Such a man is self-evidently a fool, posits Glaucon, an interlocutor of Socrates. Our only sensible course of action is to adopt a policy of enlightened self-interest and do (but do only) whatever we can get away with doing. For if we could put on the ring of the mythical shepherd Gyges, which can confer invisibility on those who wear it, who among us, since "no man is just of his own free will, but only under compulsion,"[6] would not do wrong when he got a chance? According to this reckoning, human society is not divided into the just and the unjust but into the more and less accomplished in injustice. "The man who is found out must be reckoned a poor specimen, and the most accomplished form of injustice is to seem just when you are not."[7]

To advance the argument, Glaucon takes this disjunction of seeming and being to a further level in the hypothesis of the perfectly just man, so radically stripped of the consolations of virtue that (in a mirror-image of the man accomplished in injustice) he will seem unjust although he is not: he "must have the worst of reputations for wrong-doing even though he has done no wrong. . . . He will be scourged, tortured, and imprisoned,

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4. Thucydides, *A History of the Peloponnesian War* 5.105.

5. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 15.

6. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1955), bk. 2, 360b. Hereafter citations from the *Republic* refer to this edition.

7. Ibid., 361a.

his eyes will be put out, and after enduring every humiliation he will be crucified, and learn at last that one should not want to be, but to seem just."[8] Who would be foolish enough to incur such a fate? Many commentators have, of course, remarked on the startling resemblance of this description to the Passion of Christ, the "folly" of the Cross. One of them, Simone Weil, is at pains to emphasize what Plato must surely have intended: that this nakedness of the just man is not just a social but a spiritual nakedness. Christ, she says, did not die a martyr's death, but the death of a common criminal, inglorious even in his own eyes, stripped even of the self-consoling awareness of being virtuous;[9] like the suffering servant of Isaiah, "without beauty or comeliness . . . one from whom men screen their faces" (Is 53:2–3).

Although Socrates assists them to make their case, the sophists of the *Republic* espouse a view of human nature and human society not shared by Plato, Aristotle, and medieval Christian thinkers, one which largely disappeared from philosophical discourse until its resurgence in the Renaissance. According to this view, life is, famously, nasty, brutish, and short; society is not, as Aristotle would claim, our natural habitat but an artificial construct designed, in everybody's interest, to limit the damage human beings can do to each other. We are venal, vicious, acquisitive creatures for whom friendship and love are mere conventions by which we embellish our (social) self-image and collaboratively sustain the fiction that, if not exactly good, we are really very nice.

In letting the sophists have their say, Plato is undertaking a radical purification of the idea of justice (justice being coterminous with virtue) and an exposure of the duplicity of human motivation. Are human beings capable of acting against what they perceive to be their own interests, even if such action requires the loss of what they hold dear and the elimination of their carefully constructed social selves? By extension, and as the focus of this essay, are particular relationships of friendship and love necessarily impure and self-interested in that, in them, love seeks a return

8. Ibid., 362a.

9. Weil, *Intimations of Christianity*, 137–38. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar's discussion of the *kenosis* of Christ in *Mysterium Paschale*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 23–36.

of love? These are not unrelated questions, because the answer to each depends upon the metaphysical universe we inhabit. We can if we wish, and many do (indeed most of us do, quite without shame, in the small interactions of our lives), choose to live in a Hobbesian universe of one-upmanship. In so choosing, however, we refuse to align our minds with reality (*adequatio rei et intellectus*), and so turn away from the truth about the world and our place within it. It is in the context of the alternative classical and Scholastic metaphysics that I agree with James Daly both that "while a disinterested love of the Good may be possible, there is a higher virtue in expecting consolation from the Good in return for this disinterested love," and that this view must be held in a disinterested way (a paradoxical but coherent statement to which I shall return).[10] Socrates begins with the ethical question, but it takes Plato's entire metaphysics to show that justice does, in fact, make sense, though not in the manner of the sophists, and that the good man is at the same time a happy one.

2. A DEFENSE OF *INTENTIO UNIONIS*

To these early passages from the *Republic* the whole of moral philosophy stands as a footnote. To read them is to grow in moral, and mental, health; they effect a necessary purification of our inner life. Yet the obsessive scrutiny of our own motives can be morally debilitating and ultimately self-defeating. Glancing again at Plato, it can lead to our mistaking the fire of self-infatuated self-knowledge for the sun of simple right action. This is because, Spaemann (quoting Fénelon) argues, this kind of reflection "itself has its motivation in self-love."[11] It imprisons us in the circularity of our endless desire to justify ourselves to ourselves. And even if self-accusation (the fire) may sound more worthy than self-justification (the cave), is not forgetfulness of self (the sun) the hallmark of true virtue? As Simone Weil suggests, "the exposure of the soul to God condemns the selfish part of it not to

10. James Daly, "Doing Good and Suffering Evil," in *Linguistic Analysis and Phenomenology*, eds. Wolfe Mays and S. C. Brown (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1972), 213.

11. Spaemann, *Love and the Dignity of Human Life*, 14.

suffering but to death."[12] It is salutary to remember, in this context, Balthasar's comment that "the consciousness of Jesus does not reflect upon itself, but finds total expression in doing the will of the Father."[13] Ultimately, there is no great mystery attached to "doing the will of the Father," which consists simply in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick or imprisoned, and being prepared, should it be required of us, to lay down our life for our friends. And all of this without any self-conscious heroism, indeed without any self-consciousness at all; for Weil, the good man should not be able to remember whether or when he has clothed the naked.[14] "When did we see you naked and clothe you?" (Mt 25:38).

The return of consciousness upon itself is, in any case, a Cartesian preoccupation, and, to return to our main theme, there is a notable and new unease with the notion of friendship after the seventeenth century, a difficulty in accommodating it within philosophical thought. By contrast, within the classical and Scholastic tradition, broadly supportive of the idea of reciprocal or particular friendship, there is a fairly brisk dismissal of the objection that such friendship is primarily a form of self-love, a possibility first raised in relation to Aristotle's treatment of the theme.[15] Every existing thing has a (completely legitimate) tendency to perfect its own nature (that, after all, is why we may seek our salvation), and in human beings one of the forms this tendency takes is the cultivation of particular relationships that contribute to our human flourishing (*eudaimonia*); for Aquinas, our preference for some human beings over others is simply an inherent disposition of our nature, and a natural inclination cannot be wrong.[16]

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12. Iris Murdoch's paraphrase of *Intimations of Christianity* (130–31) in her *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

13. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, vol. 1 of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, eds. Joseph Fessio, SJ, and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 325.

14. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 40.

15. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4 (1165b35–1166b27) and 9.8 (1168a30–1169a34). M. C. D'Arcy discusses this question in *The Mind and Heart of Love* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), chap. 3.

16. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 36, a. 6.

Rather more recently, in his seminal work *The Nature of Love*, Dietrich von Hildebrand also asserts the central Thomistic position that *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*, which he approaches from a phenomenological perspective. The enemy of this position is not Descartes but Kant, whose deep, anti-classical suspicion of happiness, which he sees voiding an act of all moral value, erects an impenetrable barrier between duty and inclination. But for von Hildebrand, the unembarrassed happiness of loving and knowing myself loved is, in fact, part of my "self-donation" to the other, who, as the experience of friendship teaches us, remains irreducibly other, never simply an extended ego, but rather an alter ego called forth by my participation in his life.[17]

In this encounter between subjects, I do not make the other the means to my happiness, thereby instrumentalizing him; the inescapable, lateral awareness of my augmented well-being does not make it the primary motivation of my going forth in friendship and love. Nevertheless, "a very personal and deep commitment to another implies that I wholeheartedly yearn for union with the beloved person."[18] That is, in willing goodness toward him (*intentio benevolentiae*), I cannot but will something for myself: *intentio unionis*. To the riposte that the Good Samaritan scarcely waited around to experience a return of love from the man lying by the roadside, von Hildebrand would assert that such exclusively altruistic love cannot, indeed should not, be the prototype of all loves. This leaves us free to conjecture that, in other relationships, the mythical Samaritan also knew himself to be loved.[19] After all, as St. Paul might put it, we can pass on to others only what we have ourselves received. In any case, von Hildebrand goes even further: the selflessness of "extreme altruism" (Fénelon's *amour désintéressé*),[20] far from being an ideal to

17. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 162.

18. Ibid., 141.

19. It is John F. Crosby, editor of *The Nature of Love*, who, in his excellent introduction, cites the Good Samaritan as an example of "extreme altruism." See ibid., xxvii.

20. Fénelon's work, referred to by both Spaemann and von Hildebrand, is entitled *L'Amour Désintéressé*. See von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 141 and 220.

which we should aspire, can be self-less in a new and appalling way, a refuge for the person who in a sense *has* no self, whose relation to himself is so attenuated and deformed that he remains enclosed in a "withered *Eigenleben* [subjectivity]."[21]

Spaemann agrees that there is an entirely proper kind of self-love pertaining to friendship: for him also, in a well-ordered friendship *amor concupiscentiae* (von Hildebrand's *intentio unionis*) and *amor benevolentiae* come together.[22] Now, this coming-together reposes on what James Daly, in a memorable phrase, calls "the superiority of rational, requited love over passionate, unrequited love."[23] For St. Francis de Sales, "friendship is mutual, reciprocal, and if it is not mutual, then it is not friendship."[24] I can certainly love someone who manifestly does not love me; indeed, I am commanded so to do. I cannot, however, describe him as my friend; in that curiously impersonal relationship, there is *caritas* but no *philia*.[25]

Why should rational, requited love be superior to passionate, unrequited love?[26] The reason for the sympathy accorded to the notion of reciprocal friendship in the classical and Scholastic worldview must ultimately be found in its realist epistemology and intentionality theory of consciousness, which make room for the encounter between knowing subject and known object at all levels of being. Uniquely at the level of human interaction, however, we find not just an intentional union between subject and object (as, to give Aristotle's example, between myself and the

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21. Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 211.

22. Spaemann, *Love and the Dignity of Human Life*, 11.

23. Daly, *Lingusitic Analysis*, 213.

24. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 3.19.

25. I should perhaps clarify the sense in which I am using the notoriously general and overlapping terms pertaining to this topic. *Agape* denotes the Christian concept of universal love for all men and women equally. Although *philia* has in Aristotle a wider connotation than the English "friendship," I use it interchangeably with *amor amicitiae* to signify a mature nonsexual relation of particular friendship between equals. *Eros* I generally (though not always, as will become apparent) use in connection with sexual love.

26. For a classic discussion of the difference, see Denis de Rougemont's *Passion and Society* (originally *L'Amour et L'Occident*) (London: Faber and Faber, 1940).

desired bottle of wine)[27] but a reciprocated encounter between two subjects. Friendship and love are, therefore, excluding union with God, the highest expressions of the harmony between the mind and being. The self moves forth from itself in the *ecstasis* of love and knowledge not in order to subjugate or subdue, but to encounter being that is "separate and external": Aristotle says very clearly that *philoi* are "the greatest of the *external* goods."[28] This unassailable separateness of the other, notwithstanding my involvement in his life, is part of what makes friendship an apprenticeship in virtue: through my discernment of his separateness, my respect for it, my reticence before it, I learn to see my friend as another subject, another center of freedom and personhood; not, despite the affinity that has drawn us together, as an extension of myself, but, in George Eliot's marvelous phrase, "an equivalent centre of self."[29] This is a much more profound and helpful way of construing the term alter ego than the variant that is a commonplace of popular discourse, which does indeed make my alter ego an extended version of myself. But the other, we come to realize, is precisely that, a *different* self, which stands over and apart from me, yet makes the same claims and possesses the same inherent worth as I do myself.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle locates his treatment of friendship immediately prior to his discussion of contemplation, the *summum bonum.* He aims, like Plato and unlike Kant, to defend the thesis that the good man is a happy one. Happiness "in the highest sense" is, to be sure, the contemplative life. We might wonder, however, if it is possible to arrive at it without the instruction in virtue and the opportunity for carefully learning how to be happy that friendship provides.

Is it even possible to "do" metaphysics without first "doing" ethics? Certainly, in the *Republic*, as we have seen, it is the ethical question of the first books that opens up the metaphysical question. Yet it is also the case that the ethical question, as we see in our own impoverished and beleaguered time, trails off into incoherence and existentialist despair in a world characterized

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27. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 8.2 (1155b27–31).

28. Ibid., 9.9 (1169b10) (emphasis added).

29. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, pt. 2, chap. 21.

by forgetfulness of "the metaphysics of the primacy of being,"[30] whereby knower and known are contained within the real. Plato moves swiftly on from the ethical question to the metaphysical questions adumbrated in the simile of the divided line and the allegory of the cave.[31] In the simile of the line, the ascending mind is seen as having progressive access, not, reflexively, to itself, but to the reality that measures its distance from the shadow-world of the cave, where, trapped in illusion and fantasy, *eikasia* and *pistis*, the unhappy prisoners do not even know themselves to be such. Being is prior to knowledge: we can know only what is, and the degrees of knowledge are proportionate to the degrees of being. The good man is at the same time a happy one because his mind is attuned to reality: the resistant, independent reality of the external world, the irreducible reality of other selves, and the highest reality, the form of the Good, which exists in sovereign independence of us, unutterably beyond our every attempt at manipulation. And this gives the good man a certain insouciance, a freedom from fashionable angst.

3. DOES AGAPE PRECLUDE PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIP?

In *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh makes the large claim that "to know and love another human being is the beginning of all wisdom."[32] Classical and Scholastic philosophy is hospitable to the idea of friendship because friendship, we have suggested, attunes the mind to reality. This attunement, visible in the early explorations of the child, who very quickly emerges from solipsism to discover that the world is independent of his will (to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase), is not just an epistemic process; when it takes place in the context of our encounter with other selves, it assumes a profoundly moral dimension. In what follows, I shall continue to argue that the context most favorable to the growth of full moral consciousness is the intersubjectivity of particular

30. Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 19, 38.

31. Plato, *Republic* bk. 6, 509–512; bk. 7, 514–51.

32. Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1945), 56.

friendships, notwithstanding their risks, and the bewilderment and pain they often engender.

We know that this position is not without its opponents within religious discourse itself. St. Benedict's Rule, for example, expressly forbids particular friendships among monks, and that prohibition still holds sway in religious communities. In *The Works of Love*, and in typical either/or style, Kierkegaard holds firm to the view that preferential love is a disguised form of love of self, the pursuit of self-fulfillment, whereas universal love involves the denial of self. For him the alter ego is indeed the "other-I": "Love and friendship are the very height of self-feeling, the I intoxicated in the other-I."[33] In 1932, Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren's influential book *Agape and Eros* also upset the Augustinian synthesis (in the concept of *caritas*) of disinterested Christian love for all men equally (agape) and desirous Hellenistic love for particular human beings (eros or philia): "Human love is not love at all in a deeper sense, but only a form of natural self-love, which extends its scope to embrace also benefactors of the self."[34]

Certainly, it is not difficult to assemble arguments from the New Testament in support of the alleged incompatibility of universal with particular love. The law set down in Genesis that we leave our father and mother receives a new force in the gospels, despite the much-vaunted "family values" that play so large a part in contemporary moral catechesis. Whosoever loves father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life more than Christ is not worthy to be his disciple (Lk 14:26). If we love only those who love us, do good to those who do good to us, lend to those from whom we hope to receive, what credit is that to us? Rather, we are to love our enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return (Lk 6:32–35). If we ourselves hope to be present at the feast of eternal life, we are to invite to our own feasts (or dinner parties) the lame, the poor, and the blind, precisely because they cannot repay us (Lk 12:12–14). How few of us take these strictures seriously!

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33. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 58.

34. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 66.

In a penetrating analysis of the ways in which the Last Supper both resembles and diverges from the Passover meal, Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas comments that while "the Passover meal is a *family* event, the Last Supper concerns a *group of friends* with Christ presiding. The difference indicates that with the Last Supper we move away from a sort of natural community in order to move to another kind of community—formed by a group of friends who love their master and love each other."[35]

"A group of friends with Christ presiding": is that not a quite simple and beautiful vision of agape, the universal charity, a love of mankind as such, created and redeemed, which surpasses all merely "natural" or preferential friendships? Of course it is. And it is an ideal to which we might aspire, and which we sometimes realize in this life; we like to think that it governs Christian communities, schools, religious orders, that it describes those gathered together for the eucharistic sacrifice or other religious ceremonies. Yet Zizioulas also stresses the crucial *eschatological* dimension of the Last Supper. Just as the Mass has an eschatological signification in its prefiguration of the beatific heavenly banquet (*futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur*), so was the first Eucharist an "eschatological reality arising in the history of the people of God."[36] Although indisputably situated in "the context of the history of the people of Israel" (that is, in the paschal meal's *anamnesis* of the exodus from Egypt), it yet relativizes and transcends that history by the eschatological significance embedded precisely in its moving beyond a gathering based on natural ties: "In the New Testament, such transcending of natural family ties as they exist in the present is rooted deeply in the eschatological nature of the Church. . . . Inasmuch as the Last Supper is not an event of familial life but an event for the 'friends of the Lamb,' the supper marks an eschatological 'inbreaking' in the natural course of historical life."[37]

In the *eschaton* there will be no giving or taking in marriage (wherefore celibacy is also an eschatological sign in the course

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35. John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Community and the World* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 3.

36. Ibid., 4.

37. Ibid.

of historical life); likewise will particular, preferential friendships belong to that category of "former things" that will have passed away. No Christian defender of such friendships has, so far as I am aware, argued for their persistence in their present form[38] beyond the boundaries of this present, pilgrim's state of our life. Their principal justification is that they are an indispensable training for that eschatological charity that we should like to extend to all men and women, but which our life in time, *in statu viae*, renders impossible.

Both the Old and New Testaments, in fact, abound in examples of how the way charted toward the universal (agape) passes unavoidably through the particular (philia). The pattern of God's dealings with man laid down in the Old Testament is one

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38. This of course touches upon a delicate and complex subject; it has been pointed out to me that Beatrice, after all, accompanies Dante through the spheres of heaven, parting from him only at the threshold of the Empyrean, in Canto XXX of the *Paradiso.* An illuminating source is Jennifer Rushworth's *Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Although conceding that "medieval theologians . . . more typically stressed either the individual's relationship with God or the generality of ties among the blessed" (49), Rushworth contends that "while *Purgatorio* . . . enforces a process of detachment from past ties and earthly affections . . . *Paradiso* reinstates specific earthly attachments" (48).

It is true that only a very crude reading of the educative process by which Beatrice leads Dante from the slavery of ignorance to the freedom of knowledge would allow us to see her as a mere instrument of Dante's salvation, to be discarded once that lofty end is attained. Dante loves Beatrice; the *Comedy* is, in one sense, a study of the indissociability of love and knowledge, since knowledge of reality is possible only for the one who loves. And love does not permit us to instrumentalize our friends. Furthermore, despite its proper reticence about the unimaginable *eschaton* and its insistence that beatitude consists primarily in the *visio Dei*, there is in Catholic teaching a strong predisposition toward some form of reunion, in that time and place that are no time and place, with all whom we have loved. Beatrice, having smiled at Dante, does, however, turn back to the vision of God. Is this parting an occasion of melancholy or loss for Dante? Despite Jorge Luis Borges, there is no indication in the poem that such is the case (see "Beatrice's Last Smile," in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, trans. Esther Allen, ed. Eliot Weinberger [London: Penguin, 2001], 302–05). Rushworth argues that in paradise the "rational categories of understanding" will be transcended: separation will not occasion grief, nor parting sadness. Attachment and detachment will no longer be mutually exclusive. To suggest that particular friendships are only for this life is, then, simply to emphasize the extent to which they will be purified in the next life, and the folly of supposing that they will continue there in anything like their present form. "See, now they vanish, / The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, / To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern" (T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Collected Poems 1909–1962* [London: Faber and Faber, 1963], 219).

whereby he summons individuals to conversion, speaking to the whole people of Israel through the prophets: these calls, by which "the word of the Lord" comes to Abraham, to Samuel, to Elijah, are mysterious and thrilling, addressed to whatever is deepest, most subjective in the individuals concerned, even though, through them, that word will go forth through all the earth, as it did at the moment of creation itself.

In the gospels, likewise, the saving work of Christ, subject in his humanity to the limits of time and space, begins in a series of particular (that is, differentiated) relationships that call forth whatever is entirely unique and subjective in the other person. Each encounter is different: with Nicodemus, with Peter, with Matthew the tax collector. Some (Peter, James, and John), are able to get closer to Christ than others (*quidquid recipiens secundum modum recipientur recipiens*); one at least, the healed Gerasene demoniac, begs Jesus that he might follow him but is abjured to stay at home, in his own place, and proclaim the good news there (Mk 5:18–19). Sinners, demoniacs, the sick, the disciples: everyone seems to feel equally but differently *looked at*, known, the focus of unwavering, redeeming attention; he "told me everything I have ever done," says the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:29). In a beautiful passage from *The Vision of God*, Nicholas of Cusa uses the analogy of the omnivoyant to capture this coexistence of the particular and the universal. The omnivoyant is a medieval icon whose face "by the cunning painter's art [is] made to appear as though looking on all around it. . . . Each of you shall find that, from whatever quarter he regardeth it, it looketh upon him as if it looked on none other. . . . [It] taketh such diligent care of each one who findeth himself observed as though it cared only for him, and for no other."[39]

No love and knowledge in the realm of human intersubjectivity can be spoken of in the same breath as the creative, redeeming love and knowledge of the Father and the divine Son, which draw us into the life of the Trinity itself. Yet there is a purely analogous sense in which human beings can, as it were, mirror this trinitarian receiving and sending-forth of love, and

39. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, as reproduced in *The Portable Medieval Reader*, eds. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1997), 685.

so make time, in Plato's marvelous phrase, a moving image of eternity.[40] In particular friendships, human beings can, in a limited, analogous, yet real way, create and redeem each other, and so model the love of God in Christ.

4. PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIP: A CONDITION FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF AGAPE

When we read how he calls Simon, Andrew, and Matthew the tax collector, who, just like that, leave everything to follow him, or how he bids Zacchaeus to make haste and come down from the tree, what we perhaps want to say is that Jesus *sees something* in each of these people. Now God, because he is God, "sees something" in everybody, as Nicholas of Cusa's image of the omnivoyant makes clear. Because of our finitude and our fallenness, we do not. We do, however, "see something" in our friends, and that is why without particular friendships we are in danger of attaining only a bland, unchallenging, and undifferentiated goodwill toward other people; this is why only particular friendships, and the specific kind of attention to the other they involve, tutor us in the kind of love God has for us, and which we hope eventually to have for all men and women.

The origins of friendship are profoundly mysterious. Why am I attracted to this person, and not that? I can attempt to enumerate reasons, but ultimately no list of qualities can provide an explanation. The explanation falls away into the fathomless subjectivity of the other, and into my own fathomless subjectivity: *parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi*, as Montaigne would have it.[41] It is the singularity of the other that both arrests and moves us, which leads to a deep, appreciative delight in him, and which enables us to understand that it is the singularity of each and every man and woman, including our own, that God desires and cherishes.[42]

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40. Plato, *Timaeus* 37c–e.

41. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Friendship," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 139.

42. It may, of course, be argued that I can find this kind of appreciative delight in another person without its being reciprocated; the phrase may, for

However, because singularity is, by definition, a deeply individualizing idea, it creates problems not only for Christian thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Nygren, who see particular friendship as being at variance with the universalizing nature of agape, but, as Roger Scruton points out in *Sexual Desire*, for Plato and Aristotle, both of whom wish to draw distinctions between higher and lower forms of friendship.[43] For Plato, falling in love with the lovely boy can only be an initiation into the higher eros, love for the form of Beauty: the higher love, which, once attained, means that the boy can now be discarded; at the end of the *Symposium*, Socrates walks away alone. Kant might ask, is the boy then to be used as a means to an end, rather than, as the categorical imperative demands, viewed as an end in himself? Aristotle famously distinguishes friendships based on utility from those based on pleasure, in turn separable from the highest friendships, those based on esteem. Yet I can esteem people I do not know. Are friendships valuable only insofar as they allow me to extrapolate estimable qualities that may be given an abstract formulation? We have a deep sense that this does violence to our every intuition about friendship.

The answer comes in a refusal of Cartesian dualism and a defense of the Christian anthropology, which views man as embodied spirit, spirit-in-the-world, as Rahner would have it. We do, of course, admire the virtuous qualities of our friends and, in doing so, see them as qualities to which we ourselves aspire: here already we glimpse the mutuality of friendship, the deep involvement of my self with the self of the other. Likewise, we regret those tendencies in him that we must regard as less than admirable, rather as we regret our own radically incomplete virtue. But in our friends, the virtues we admire we also love (the

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example, describe my feelings for certain writers, thinkers, composers, or artists, living or dead, who did not or do not know of my existence but have yet made me aware of the significance and splendor of human life, and who inspire in me feelings of love and reverence. But the lack of mutuality in this experience makes the other to a large extent instrumental to the enrichment of my inner life; perforce there is receiving but no giving. Friendship and love are, rather, characterized by the continuous emanation-and-return dynamic of giving and receiving.

43. See Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Continuum, 2006), 216–28.

moral and the aesthetic come together) because they are embodied in this particular individual, in his unique mode of being-in-the-world; they are modified by the way he looks and laughs, by his speech mannerisms, his predictability and unpredictability. If he were to die, that singular instantiation of virtue would pass out of existence. We would not see his like again.

The deep bonds of affectionate sympathy formed between human beings attach, then, only to relationships that, as Aristotle saw, go beyond the superficial and material, the utilitarian and the pleasurable. They may emerge between people who have faced together situations of danger or harrowing difficulty; we recall that, in the ancient world, the noblest and most stirring relationships were those formed between soldiers in battle, the king and trusty henchman, for whom life is often not to be endured after the death of the master: Achilles and Patroclus, Enobarbus and Marc Antony. We experience also feelings of affectionate, grateful warmth toward our friends of many years, who have remained loyal to us in good times and in bad, through all the vicissitudes of fortune, and whom we would not readily hurt or betray; there can be few more moving moments in the gospels than when, in words of simple human gratitude, so moving in that they are spoken by the divine Son, Jesus tells the disciples, "You are the men who have stood faithfully by me in all my trials" (Lk 22:28).

To these bonds of sympathy and interest, however, there is added a quality of excitement that typically characterizes two forms of human relationships: that of people who are, in the mysterious phrase, "in love"; and the no less mysterious encounter between "mind and delighted mind" (Yeats's words),[44] which is a feature of certain intellectual friendships. By intellectual friendships I do not simply mean friendships based on "common interests," such as we might find between two chess players, but rather a commingling of ideas between people for whom the life of the mind is as real as the life of the feelings; who, as Eliot famously has it in one of the great essays of our time, "feel their thought"; for whom "a thought is an experience, modifying their

44. W. B. Yeats, "Friends," *Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 24.

sensibility."[45] Such friends will typically talk about books and ideas, dispassionately and without any explicit or embarrassing self-disclosure, yet speaking obliquely out of their deep, impassioned quest for truth, for a just perception of the whole of reality, a quest so constitutive of their inner life. We can trace out the trajectory of this movement in its most heightened form in a famous passage from Augustine's *Confessions*.

In most discussions of the treatment of friendship in this text, it is customary to focus on those chapters that speak of the saint's imperfect friendship with the unnamed youth of Thagaste, and that youth's death, an event that gives rise to Augustine's masterly study of grief and the intolerable restlessness it brings. Reviewing a recent translation of the book, Peter Brown points out,[46] however, how often it is forgotten that the mystical experience at the window at Ostia, described in book nine, takes place in the context of a conversation with Monica: that is, in the context of human friendship and love. Returning to the scene, we see that context very precisely described. "She and I stood alone leaning in a window. . . . There we talked together, she and I alone, in deep joy." But there is another presence in the conversation:

> We were discussing in the presence of Truth, which You are, what the eternal life of the saints could be like . . . with the mouth of our heart we panted for the high waters of your fountain. . . . And our conversation had brought us to this point that any pleasure whatsoever of the bodily senses . . . seemed to us not worthy of comparison with the pleasure of that eternal Light. . . . Rising as our love flamed upwards towards that Self-same, we passed in review various levels of bodily things. . . . And higher still we soared, thinking in our minds and speaking and marvelling at Your works: and so we came to our own souls, and went beyond them to come at last to that region of richness unending, where You feed Israel forever with the food of truth. . . . And while we were thus talking of His Wisdom and panting for it, with all the effort of our heart we did for one instant attain to touch it; then sighing,

45. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 64.

46. Peter Brown, "Dialogue with God," *The New York Review of Books*, October 26, 2017, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/10/26/sarah-ruden-augustine-dialogue-god/.

> and leaving the first fruits of our spirit bound to it, we returned to the sound of our own tongue, in which a word has both beginning and ending. For what is like to Your Word, our Lord, who abides in Himself forever, yet grows not old and makes all Things new![47]

Although it has to be conceded that a rather small minority of conversations is likely to end in mystical illumination, there are features of the passage that shed some light on what can happen between friends.

Firstly, Augustine and Monica are engaged in a distinctively human occupation: "We talked together." This is reiterated: "We were discussing"; "our conversation"; "speaking"; "thus talking." Without communication, there can be no friendship; to say that I do not enjoy talking to my friend would be to void the notion of friendship of all meaning. And talk between friends cannot (or cannot always) be just idle chat: in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Dorothea, although grievously mistaking a feeling of admiring friendship for the love that ends in marriage, speaks of the delightful sensation of finding in another mind "a home for what she most cared to say."[48]

Secondly, the conversation of Augustine and Monica leads them away from themselves; each finds "deep joy" in the company of the other, but, in a way that is often said to distinguish *amor amicitiae* from sexual love, they do not talk directly about themselves but about aspects of reality, "soaring" thence to the highest reality, "that supreme Loveliness which is above our souls, which my soul sighs for day and night."[49]

Finally, when, in book ten, we hear Augustine tell God, "I talked with You as friends talk,"[50] we deduce that it is through his human friendship with Monica and others (both before and after his conversion, for he had a great gift for friendship)[51] that,

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47. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Frank Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 9.10 (hereafter citations refer to this translation).

48. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, pt. 4, chap. 37.

49. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.34.

50. Ibid., 10.1.

51. See James McEvoy's "*Anima una et cor unam*: Friendship and Spiritual Unity in Augustine," *Récherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 53 (January-

however imperfectly and incompletely, he has learned the language of friendship.

Even though we see clearly that the eros of this passage is not directed by Augustine and Monica toward each other but toward God, the excitement that characterizes such marriages of true minds, the undeniable affectivity of friendship, has given rise to a great deal of nervous commentary, especially when the friendship is between people of different sexes. Much of what has been written on this subject is scrupulous and frankly silly, and falls victim to a kind of puritanism we might, ironically, associate with Freud's reduction of all affectivity to sex. Because the love of friendship and sexual love are different in kind rather than in degree, it is in practice quite easy to distinguish between them. Marriage does not just equal friendship plus sex, as though those were its discrete components; it is, in its entirety, a sexualized love. The love of a celibate or married person for a friend of the other sex does not consist in stopping short of doing certain things; it is a different kind of love. It is true that an inescapable awareness of what is now called gender difference gives a certain edge to all male-female relations (I leave to one side the matter of same-sex attraction): for women, friendships with men are different, and enjoyed differently, from friendships with other women. Yet the relation remains one of friendship. We might ask ourselves, do I desire a relationship of sexual intimacy with this person? (Unthinkable!) Do I wish to make of our lives a shared project? (Of course not!) Do I seek an exclusive relationship with this person? (Don't be silly!) And so on.

Is there a sense, however, in which we can speak of the romance (even eros) of friendship? Yes, I would say, if the notion of romance is shorn away from the idea of sexual desire. There is a kind of romance that attaches to things personal, profound and (as Kant and the nineteenth-century poets would have it) sublime. We find it in those things that move us. We can find it (rather dangerously) in our awareness of our inner life, despite the shabby and chaotic guise in which that so often appears to us. We can find it in the discovery of our deep affinity (experienced as a kind of recognition) with some other people.

December 1986): 40–92. This article provides an excellent bibliography for Augustine's writings on the theme of friendship.

Tolkien found romance in the blessed Sacrament.[52] Augustine, of course, thought that the true romance was the romance between God and the soul: "God and the soul are what I want to know. Nothing else matters. Nothing at all."[53] Indeed, if we could set aside for a moment our Darwinian preoccupation with efficient causality, we might reflect that eros is the force that, in response to the final causality exercised by the Prime Mover, activates all the spheres of the beautiful and dynamic Aristotelian cosmos. It was, after all, in this cosmos that Dante's will and his desire were "turned by love, / The love that moves the sun and the lesser stars."[54]

5. FRIENDSHIP AND THE VIRTUE OF DETACHMENT

The mutual appreciative delight that characterizes friendship pertains to what, following von Hildebrand, might be called its indispensable aesthetic dimension: that tendency or going-forth toward the other, in friendship and love, as a value-response to what is real, or realized, in him. This I have seen as an attunement of the mind to reality. However, alongside that going-forth is a simultaneous holding-back, holding-off, a kind of decorum that schools us in that sense of limit without which the moral life would be impossible.

The threat they are alleged to pose to agape is, as we have seen, one of the two main arguments traditionally brought against the liceity of preferential friendships within Christian life. The other is that they militate against the virtue of detachment. To use this virtue as a reason, more properly an excuse, for avoiding particular friendships can be a dangerous deformation that, in its worst manifestation, may mask a hatred for what is human, in oneself and other people. However, there is a strict moral requirement that the virtue of detachment be operative *within* friendship.

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52. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Letter 43," in *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, eds. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 53.

53. Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.7.

54. Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 144–45.

Upon first acquaintance, our friends seem to us unambiguously attractive and delightful. The relationship, however, will not have progressed very far before recognition dawns on us that they, and our responses to them, are more complicated than they might first have appeared. So does the aesthetic precede the moral. It is at this point that a particular and painstaking kind of learning begins. Here we glimpse a Platonic insistence on the indissociability of love and knowledge. Where there is no learning, no reflection, no growth in knowledge, no real life or movement therefore, friendship becomes sterile and dead. We sometimes see that in depressing scenarios where friends merely reinforce one another's prejudices, having, Simone Weil would allege, simply substituted the first-person singular for the first-person plural.[55] In a testy exchange of letters with St. Jerome, Augustine asserts the freedom to challenge and correct a friend without fear of giving offense.[56] Sometimes this is done simply by humor: good friends are allowed to tease each other out of pomposity, vanity, and fantasy.

Despite its freedom, though, and the relaxed pleasure of being in the company of the other, we come to learn in the practice of real friendship that love is attended by detachment and restraint, a kind of "chastity of mind."[57] This difficult though liberating lesson is not set down in a book but is acquired from slow and unpredictable experience. As a friendship gets underway, a delicate, implicit, and enduring process of negotiation begins, which requires that my friend and I learn, for example, what may and may not be said between us: some things are not up for discussion, many privacies may not be violated. (While friends

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55. "[When] one renounces the first-person singular only to substitute the first-person plural . . . there is no distance between [friends], no empty space between them where God might enter. . . . The first-person plural is not susceptible of being involved in a relationship of three terms of which the middle term is God" (Weil, *Intimations of Christianity*, 176–77). This idea of God as the third person in a relationship is not new. Aelred, for example, invokes it in his *De amicitiae spirituali*: "Ecce ego et tu; et spero quod tertius inter nos Christus est" (bk. 1).

56. Augustine, *Letters to Jerome*, letters 73 and 82.

57. The phrase is used by Gerard Manley Hopkins in *Poems and Prose*, selected and edited by W. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1953), 198.

know each other well, they may not necessarily know a great deal *about* each other.) I may not try to possess my friend by seeking to satisfy my curiosity, or by bullying him into accepting my view of things. I must recognize that there are between us large areas of incompatibility: that we both speak and do not speak the same language. What my friend invokes by his use of the pronoun "I" is quite other than what I invoke by its use. In all this dialectic of moving toward and standing back, of delight and discipline, I acquire a greater sense of myself, of where I begin and leave off,[58] as someone who can both give pleasure and disappoint; and I come to view my friend, not so much as a second self (which, we have seen, for all its worthy parentage, can be a misleading and claustrophobic notion), but, again, in George Eliot's phrase, an equivalent center of self.

This sublime idea of the other shows, in Christian terms, how philia should lead to agape: through the practice of philia, I seek to love all men and women with the same kind of love with which I love my friends, as equivalent centers of self. In Aristotelian terms, it shows how the cultivation of personal *philoi* can extend into the body politic, wherein the model of civic relationships is seen as a relation of friendship. In Enlightenment and Marxist terms, it can be construed as the foundation of human rights and of the radical equality of human beings, all of them equivalent centers of self.

How does the relation of philia to agape now stand? George Eliot was, interestingly, a great admirer of Kant and his stern fidelity to "the moral law within me,"[59] and it is at this point that we might admit Kant to the discussion and return to the postulate of a disinterested love of the Good with which this essay began. There can be no doubt that the frighteningly distorted parody of friendship in a self-interested, self-referential solipsism *à deux* (or *à trois* or *à quatre*) vitiates morality. It is a lie about the world. It makes me and the other human beings whom

58. See Robert Bolt's preface to his *A Man for All Seasons* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1960), xii.

59. This phrase comes from the concluding pages of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). The work is translated by Paul Guyer in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

I have reduced to extensions of myself the measure of all things. Genuine moral action requires the purifying, disinterested impersonality of the categorical imperative: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[60]

Self-abnegation, as it happens, is also a lie about the world and our place within it: we are required to love not just others but ourselves with a disinterested and impersonal love. The apparent paradox or inconsistency here dissolves in some quite commonplace examples. If I am subjected to an unjust and offensive tirade I will, no doubt, feel a strong sense of outrage. There is, however, a world of difference between offense taken in response to an outrage perpetrated against myself viewed as *my* self, the center of the universe, and offense taken in response to an outrage perpetrated against myself viewed simply as a human being. My indignation should transcend the personal and express itself in the general proposition, "one human being ought not to treat another thus," quite regardless of the fact that I am the human being in question.[61]

Yet, because we disregard the personal at our peril, the relationship of philia to agape, the particular to the universal, remains a dialectical one. It is one thing to assent to the proposition, "human beings should be viewed with compassion," but something quite other, more demanding and more real, to struggle toward a compassionate view of the particular human being who has injured me. Only in the specific kind of attention we give to our friends, our horror of hurting them, our desire for their good, do we learn about the care we must take with other people, and gain the rich understanding of the concepts of self and personhood without which agape's appreciation of human beings as such would be impossible.

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60. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), trans. James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 4:421 (30).

61. This point has some bearing on the stimulating discussion that followed James Daly's essay, "Doing Good and Suffering Evil." Reprinted in *Linguistic Analysis and Phenomenology*, the discussion at one point focuses on Simone Weil's distinction between the comment "Votre personne ne m'intéresse pas" and the contrasting "Vous ne m'intéressez pas." See *Linguistic Analysis and Phenomenology*, 220–24, 231–32.

6. THE LIMITS OF FRIENDSHIP

So much for "live" friendship as a school for the moral life. What, however, about the quite devastating experience of a friendship that is deliberately and unilaterally broken off? How can this be integrated into a philosophical view of the world, of the interaction between the self and other selves? How can it be an occasion for moral growth?

Fortunately, the deliberate ending of a friendship is comparatively rare. Many friendships, particularly those based on pleasure and utility, simply fade painlessly away, once the context (a shared workplace, a shared activity) that sustained them has gone. Also, friendship by its nature is not (or should not be) intense enough, or large enough a feature in the life of either party, for it to warrant the complete rupture that might threaten a married relationship, where there is obviously a much greater investment in the other person. Partly for these reasons, when such a rupture occurs within a friendship, the opportunity for moral growth comes in the context of a singularly painful experience for at least one of the friends.

There are, of course, occasions in life where it seems morally unavoidable that we hurt and disappoint other people, and there are some entirely justifiable reasons for bringing a friendship to an end. Perhaps the expectations that friends bring to their relationship turn out to be different: the other person may, for example, persist in wanting from me something that is not in my gift. Perhaps trust has been irreparably destroyed by the breaking of a confidence, or some other act of betrayal. Perhaps my friend has been revealed as a fair-weather friend after all, and has manifestly not stood faithfully by me in all my trials. It may simply be that there are aspects of my own psychological history that make it difficult for me to sustain friendship, that I find in myself, and must face honestly, an insuperable timidity that makes impossible friendship's great adventure.

Whatever the reason, it should be well pondered and well substantiated before steps are taken to end the friendship. Even if I conclude, perhaps regretfully, that it is my moral duty to bring the association to a close, I must effect the rupture with tact and sympathy, taking great care not to violate more than I can help the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of my friend. There

are two people involved: myself and an equivalent center of self. Ending a friendship is not like giving up wine for Lent: if, in doing it, I deliberately inflict misery or act out of malice, then I am offending not just against the law of friendship, but, more seriously, against the law of charity itself.

If I am the person now relegated to the status of a former friend, subjected to the complete withdrawal of all friendly feeling, the loss is likely to be keen and often bewildering. How could the other person discard our friendship as if it were something of no consequence? I will experience ugly and inharmonious emotions: dodging the sting of grief and humiliation, I may initially seek refuge in feelings of anger, bitterness, and resentment,[62] wanting, but not quite able, to soothe the wound by a settled dislike of the other person. As Augustine realized (and Dante: *nessun maggior dolore. . .* [63]), memories of our pleasant conversations and mutual goodwill now become a source of pain. Joy has turned to bitterness.[64] Each of us, who once sought the other out, will henceforth avoid him or her; the person who once tended toward me has now turned away. The kindest thing I can now do for him is to keep out of his way. Sensibly, I may work hard at my other friendships, but people are not interchangeable; no friend can replace the friend I have lost. I feel that my trust has been misplaced, my judgment has been at fault. Perhaps I have allowed the other person, now perceived as at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to glimpse the singular form that distress which characterizes all human life takes in me; I may feel that I have given away something of myself that, impossibly, I should now wish to have back.

What philosophical, moral, and spiritual considerations might we enlist to find our way out of such labyrinthine feelings? In the first place, I must accept what has happened: the friendship is now over. My friend no longer participates in my life, nor I in his. There is no necessary law of nature that decreed that we should be friends; no vowed commitment was made. Friendship is given freely

62. Martha C. Nussbaum writes excellently on initial, well-grounded responses of anger that must, nonetheless, be made "transitional." See her *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

63. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto V, 121–23.

64. Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.11.

(which is its peculiar joy), without coercion or constraint, and it may be freely withdrawn. Paradoxically, in acknowledging this freedom and so recognizing the limits of my own will, I become myself more free. Friends, as Aristotle points out, are external goods, and the continued possession of external goods is independent of my volition. In entering into a relation of friendship, I become in a sense porous to the fragility of circumstance, to borrow a point brilliantly argued by Martha Nussbaum,[65] and therefore to grief and loss. The only barrier against these painful emotions is to adopt an attitude of Stoic self-sufficiency, such that we allow no one to matter to us enough to engender them. The price of such indifference, however, is too high in terms of our humanity; few of us would wish to pay it.

Not a great deal has been written on the cessation of friendship, although Aristotle devotes some lines to the moral strictures that govern painful relationships of what he calls "former intimacy."[66] For, even though there will be no further communication between us, my former friend is not, in fact, a stranger, and still makes distinctive moral claims on me; in endeavoring to think graciously about him I come very close to a disinterested love of the Good. From a great distance now, I continue to wish him well and to desire his good, remembering that "the gentle-tempered person is not vengeful, but rather tends to make allowances."[67] I do not say anything that may discredit him in the eyes of other people; I continue absolutely to respect his confidences. When it comes to reviewing my own judgment, I must strive to remain loyal to my earlier perceptions of him. The things that first attracted me to him were, as von Hildebrand would say, a value-response to real qualities in him, which may not now be obliterated from memory by my hurt and anger. (We learn yet again how complex is the human person.) I might also embark on a difficult process of self-examination: what in my behavior and personality created difficulties for him?

Above all, I must take great care to remain temperate in my responses to what has happened. Here we might invoke

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65. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 2001), 354–72.

66. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.3.1165b30.

67. Ibid., 4.6.1126a1–3.

Augustine's idea of the *ordo amoris*,[68] and return to his post-conversion revisiting of the grief consequent upon the death of the youth of Thagaste: that grief, he now realizes, was disproportionate, the fruit of an attachment that was itself ill-ordered. "O madness that knows not how to love men as men !"[69] This present world, the *regio dissimilitudinis*, is so ordered that everything we love is finite and imperfect, and knowledge and love are themselves finite and imperfect. Even the wisest, most compassionate friendships between Aristotle's virtuous people may end in suffering, travail, and incomprehension. "The best in this kind are but shadows."[70]

In love and friendship, we call forth the humanity of the other person, summon him out of solitude, and are ourselves so summoned and made more humane. Yet our friends remain mysterious to us, their lives hidden and their own: "Men go by me whom either beauty bright / In mould or mind or what not else makes rare: /. . . Death or distance soon consumes them: wind / What most I may eye after, be in at the end / I cannot."[71] As Monica and Augustine knew at that far-off window, we do not find our final *quies* in another person, but only in a flight, prompted by friendship's delights and disappointments, to the Self-same, supremely and transcendently personal, "Who abides in Himself forever, yet grows not old and makes all things new." Or, as Plotinus puts it, "here what we love is perishable, hurtful. . . . Our loving is of mimicries and turns away because all was a mistake, our good was not here, this was not what we sought. . . . There only is our veritable love and There we hold it and be with it. . . . The soul takes another life as it approaches God; thus restored it feels that the dispenser of true life is There to see, that now we have nothing to look for, but, far otherwise, that we must put aside all else and rest in This alone."[72]

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68. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 15.22.

69. Augustine, *Confessions* 4.7.

70. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 5, scene 1, line 3.

71. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Lantern Out of Doors," in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1979), 71.

72. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.

What, then, does the experience of particular friendship contribute to the deepest romance of our lives, the journey of our soul to God? Following Aquinas, we might identify a mutually corrective *via positiva* and *via negativa*. From the imperfections and fragility of our human relationships, we come to realize anew that "God is what we are not"[73]: the gifts he has given, he does not take back; he is the one who will never turn away, because it is not in his nature so to do, and he cannot deny himself. Only by him are we completely understood, and so forgiven.

We must beware, however, as the study of Feuerbach might remind us, not to make an impure movement of projection here, extrapolating from the deficiencies of the human to form a compensatory idea of God as the perfect celestial friend. Better, perhaps, to reflect that the spontaneous, sustained, appreciative delight in another person just because he is the person he is, which is characteristic of particular friendships, is a novitiate for our appreciative delight in God, not because of anything he has done for us, but simply because he is God. "If you ask a good man: 'Why do you love God?'—you will be answered: 'I don't know—because he *is* God!'"[74] Yet here also there must be a corrective: to love God for who God is, is entirely different from loving John for who John is. Who God is, is he who is. We drink from the stream of his delight because in him is the source of life, and in his light we see light (Ps 35:9–10).* □

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73. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 110.

74. Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), 242.

* The author wishes to dedicate this article to James Daly, her friend of many years, who will know exactly how indebted it is to his teaching and to his insight in beginning his course on ethics with the questions opened up by the first books of the *Republic*. The essay is dedicated also to the memory of Rev. Professor James McEvoy, whose theme was friendship, in scholarship and in life.