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Friendship, Character Education, and the Human Good

Blaine J. Fowers

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Blaine J. Fowers
Austen R. Anderson
Department of Educational and
Psychological Studies
University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida, U.S.A.

Abstract

Although friendship was a central virtue for Aristotle, this character strength has been largely neglected in contemporary character education. This may be partly due to the lack of an obvious connection between friendship and academic performance. Aristotle emphasized friendship as a key virtue because he saw humans as social creatures that need strong attachments to flourish. Virtue friendship is the best form of human relationships. He defined friendship (*philia*) broadly, encompassing many relationships, including affinity based peer relationships, parent-child relationships, teacher-student relationships, marriage, and political ties. He delineated three types of friendships: utility, pleasure, and virtue. Utility friends provide one another tangible benefits and pleasure friends provide one another enjoyment. Aristotle saw virtue friendship as the best and most durable because it is based on having shared goals, on the mutual recognition of good character, teamwork, and on wanting the best for one's friend. He suggested that virtue friendship is a constituent of eudaimonia (human flourishing) whereas utility and pleasure friendship would contribute more to hedonia (pleasure and positive emotion). A recent structural equation modeling study confirmed that virtue friendship is more strongly related to eudaimonic well-being, mediated by commitment to the friendship, and that pleasure and utility friendship are related to hedonic well-being, mediated by the provision of enjoyment and benefits, respectively. The presentation concludes with a discussion of how virtue friendship can engender shared goals, mutual appreciation, teamwork, and commitment to each other's welfare in educational settings. This conceptual enrichment of friendship enhances our understanding of high quality learning partnerships (as well as other important human relationships).

No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods
(Aristotle, 1999, 1155 a 5-6)

In order to be *eudaimon*, a man needs morally good friends
(Aristotle, 1999, 1170 b 19)

These two quotations highlight Aristotle's view that a choiceworthy life and, even more, a flourishing life, are dependent on friendship. Friendship was such an important aspect of the good life for him that it is the topic for two of the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Many other ancient Greek philosophers were similarly focused on friendship (Annas, 1993). The centrality of friendship in ancient ethics contrasts intriguingly with the absence of friendship in most contemporary ethics (cf. Cocking & Kennett, 1998; Sherman, 1987; Thomas, 1987), but that is not the subject of this paper. Our focus is on character education, and we are interested in understanding and rectifying the absence of this central virtue in character education.

There are some apparently good reasons for this neglect of friendship in moral philosophy and moral education. Among them are the connotations of subjectivity, emotionality, partiality, exclusivity, and contingency that accompany friendship, characteristics that seem to render friendship suspect as a moral concept. Our modern understanding of friendship as an affinity-based peer relationship suggests that it is external to education and citizenship; part of one's private, as opposed to public life. Some authors have suggested that children may only be capable of rudimentary friendships, making the richest forms of friendship unsuitable for standard character education, including Aristotle himself (e.g., Damon, 1983; Healy, 2011). Walker, Curren, and Jones (2015) have offered a valuable empirical counterpoint to the theories that

children are incapable of moral friendship. In addition, friendship is not obviously linked to the performative aspects of education, taking it outside the usual ambit of character education. We focus our critique on three of these exclusionary premises: that friendship is a) solely an affinity-based peer relationship, that is b) morally suspect and c) external to education or citizenship.

The conception of friendship generally employed by psychology researchers also militates against seeing friendship as a moral concern. Psychologists most commonly study friendship simplistically, as a single form of relationship that is evaluated by subjective judgments about its quality or satisfactoriness (e.g., Demir & Özdemir, 2010). In addition, some features of friendship such as conflict or the amount of time together have been studied (e.g., Overall & Sibley, 2009). Psychologists attempt to divide the friendship into objective factual elements such as time spent together and subjective judgments, such as satisfaction with the friendship. In addition, friendship is seen almost exclusively as an avenue for obtaining support, pleasure, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. That is, friendship is conceived instrumentally, as a means toward desired outcomes. The classic, and most prevalent, psychological explanation for friendship is social exchange theory, the idea that people participate in relationships solely because they receive benefits and avoid costs (Huston & Burgess, 1979; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). In sum, psychologists treat friendship primarily as a subjective experience that is focused on obtaining beneficial outcomes. In addition to the three premises we already cited as targets of our critique, we will question the premises of the d) ultimate subjectivity and e) instrumentality of friendship.

Philia

Although Aristotle's term for close relationships, *philia*, is commonly translated as friendship, this is a very inadequate translation. *Philia*, referring to a type of love, is a much more capacious concept than the affinity based peer relationships moderns think of as friendships. Therefore, one adjustment that Aristotle's viewpoint encourages us to make is an expansion of the scope of what we see as friendships. *Philia* includes parent-child, family, and romantic relationships, and peer friendships of many kinds¹. Financial and political partnerships and alliances come under the purview of *philia*, as do teacher/student relationships and relationships among schoolmates. Viewed in this expanded sense, friendship includes both peer based relationships and hierarchically structured relationships. The scope of Aristotelian friendships is also broader because the point of friendship is not limited to subjective experiences of affection, security, or pleasure. The value of the friendship can also be found in mutual advantages in business or politics or long-term projects such as child-rearing or education.

A second way that *philia* differs from contemporary views of friendship is that it is a fundamentally ethical concept. This is because Aristotle saw ethics primarily in terms of clarifying what a good human life is. From this perspective, friendship is an essential good for human beings because it makes a very large difference in the quality of individuals' lives and of the communal life. Close relationships are vital because humans are deeply social creatures. This sociality is particularly evident in the importance of attachment, a ubiquitous feature of human life that is strongly related to

¹ *Philia* is more similar to the social psychological concept of "personal relationships" which includes friend, family, and mate relationships than it is to common construals of friendship.

individual well-being. The best kind of attachment relationship is one in which the participants have a deep and abiding interest in one another's well-being, which is to say that they are friends. We begin our discussion with the concept of attachment.

Attachment. Attachment is widely regarded as a basic proclivity of mammals, taking a particularly intense and long-lasting form in humans. It was first studied by Bowlby (1969/1982) in infant/mother dyads wherein infants managed proximity to the mother through distress signals. This proximity is adaptive because it enhances the nurturance and protection necessary for infants to survive and thrive. When the attachment is secure, infants can explore, play, and socialize, which are also necessary for development (Marvin & Britner, 2008). When infants feel insecure or threatened by an external factor, they seek comfort and protection from their caregivers. The complementary pattern of vigilance and responsivity is normative for parents and other caregivers. The attachment process begins with physical proximity and contact and is elaborated through childhood to include acceptable partings, planned reunions, goal coordination, and the symbolic presence of the caregiver. Attachment is particularly intense and lengthy among human children because humans take so long to become capable of self-sufficiency. Extensive evidence indicates that infants who are securely attached flourish and those who are insecurely attached languish (DeKlyen & Greenberg, 2008).

Adult attachment has also been widely studied, particularly in pair bonding relationships. In pair bonds, attachment behaviors closely parallel infant attachment, with proximity seeking, distress at separation, mutual gaze, cuddling, nuzzling, and other skin-to-skin contact (Coan, Schaefer, & Davidson, 2006; Hazan & Zeifman; 1999).

There are many indicators of the importance of pair bonds for humans. Temporary or permanent loss of a partner is associated with anxiety, panic, sadness, and depression (Diamond, Hicks, & Otter-Henderson, 2008), increased illness, reduced immune functioning, substance abuse, suicide, and premature death (Lee, Seccombe, & Sheehan, 1991; Stack, 1990). Adults experiencing distress seek proximity with their partner (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), and physical soothing reduces the fear response to an anticipated electric shock (Coan et al., 2006). There is overwhelming evidence that close adult relationships are necessary for living well as a human being (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Shor, Roelfs, & Yogev, 2013).

Function argument. It should be clear that we are employing a nature-fulfillment perspective, which assumes that human beings are naturally inclined toward and equipped to form close personal relationships because humans are, by nature, attachment-oriented beings. As a consequence, those relationships are critical to well-being. This philosophical view is strongly supported by scientific research in evolutionary, developmental, and social psychology (Boehm, 2008; Hold-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010) that suggests that humans are “ultrasocial” creatures (Fowers, 2015; Tomasello, 2014).

Social connections are strong predictors of life satisfaction, positive affect, health, and longevity (Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Lee & Ono, 2012; Vanasshe, Swicegood, & Matthijs, 2012). These studies typically focus on a global sense of connectedness and support rather than on specific relationships. In contrast, a very robust literature documents that marital relationships are strongly related to well-being, health, and mortality (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham, & Jones, 2008; Liu, 2009). All of

this suggests that close relationships with others are a key component of health and well-being. In addition, social exclusion and isolation are acutely painful (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Williams, 2007). Loneliness is an enormously powerful source of pain. It is a strong mortality threat in that it “has an impact on health comparable to the effect of high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity, or smoking” (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008, p. 5). Consistent with the nature fulfillment expectation for ultrasocial creatures, social connections foster flourishing and isolation leads to languishing.

Friendship Types

Although social scientists differentiate different types of close relationships, they tend to study them primarily in terms of variations in communication and affective properties. The dominant assessment of relationship quality across relationship types is the degree of satisfaction the respondent reports with the relationship. Satisfaction is a hedonic variable that implies the fulfillment of outcome expectations. Virtually no social scientific attention has been paid to the criteria by which people in close relationships gauge whether they are satisfied. (See Walker et al., 2015 for an interesting exception.) In contrast, Aristotle distinguished three types of friendship—utility, pleasure, and virtue friendships. These distinctions among friendship types were focused centrally on the criteria on which friends could evaluate the value of their relationships. Aristotle suggested that pleasure friendships are intended to provide enjoyment, utility friendships have the purpose of making instrumental help available, and that virtue friendships are oriented to bringing out the best in the friends and promoting their flourishing. We want to emphasize that utility and pleasure friendships focus on the benefits or outcomes that the individual receives, whether that is pleasure or utility.

However, virtue friends value the relationship and the friend's welfare at least as much as any instrumental friendship benefits. Virtue friendships are also pleasant and useful, but these benefits are not the primary focus of the friends. Eudaimonic theory suggests that all three kinds of friendship are valuable, but their value differs because their functions vary (Anderson & Fowers, 2015). This differentiation of relationship purposes allows us to evaluate the validity of the core social scientific assumption that relationships are valuable primarily because they provide instrumental benefits.

Pleasure friendship. Curiously, friendship as a specific relationship form has received relatively little social scientific attention. There are two general types of friendship studies, but both types assume that there is only one form of friendship and that friendships do not have a moral dimension. In the first type of study, friendship satisfaction is the measure of relationship quality and researchers have found that satisfaction predicts subjective well-being in children (Holder & Coleman, 2007), adolescents (Demir & Urberg, 2004), and adults (Demir & Özdemir, 2010). The second study type uses intensive longitudinal methods such as daily diaries and experience sampling and predicts HWB with the frequency of friend interactions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), conflict (Overall & Sibley, 2009; Helgeson, Lopez, & Kamarck, 2009), and closeness or mutual understanding (Carmichael, Reis, & Duberstein, 2015; Overall & Sibley, 2009). Unsurprisingly, life satisfaction is positively related to friendship satisfaction, interaction frequency, closeness, and mutual understanding and negatively related to conflict. These studies contain some crucial limitations. They were conducted with global measures of friendship and life satisfaction, assumed that there is only one type of friendship, and assumed that friendship is best understood as an instrumental

source of hedonic benefits. The research is also limited to examining affinity-based peer relationships. All of these features could inhere in at least some friendships, but these studies provide a very limited portrayal of the full range of friendship from an Aristotelian point of view.

Astute readers will have noticed that this empirical literature on friendship addresses only one of Aristotle's three friendship types, the pleasure friendship. These studies examine satisfaction with the friendship and life satisfaction, both classically hedonic assessments. Affinity-based peer relationships will often be simple pleasure friendships, and this friendship type can be a valuable part of one's life. The problem is that psychological theory and research is presented as though pleasure friendships are one of only two types of friendship, with utility as the second type. In addition, if the only point of the friendship is positive affect, then if that positivity diminishes, there is no reason to continue the relationship.

Utility friendship. Utility friendships are best understood as being oriented to the tangible benefits or advantages that friends can obtain as individuals through the relationship. This is a frankly instrumental way to view the friendship—one chooses to be with the friend because they help you obtain the ends you are pursuing. These friendships often have positive affect, but these good feelings are based on a history of past utility and when that utility falters, so does the relationship. Purely utility based relationships have not received very much empirical attention in the social sciences. The idea that close relationships are formed and maintained on the basis of an exchange of benefits is a core psychological explanation for relationships in the theories of social exchange (Huston & Burgess, 1979) and interdependence (Rusbult & Van

Lange, 1996). Some social scientists have studied romantic relationships as an exchange of affective benefits, something of a hybrid of the pleasure and utility friendship types. There is some evidence that relationship commitment and satisfaction are predicted by mutual exchange of benefits (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Rusbult, Martz, Agnew, 1998), but none of this research investigated any alternative explanations for relationship quality, so it is unclear how good this explanatory framework is.

Virtue friendship. Aristotle distinguished morally good or virtue friends from friends focused on pleasure or mutual benefit. Although the latter two forms of friendship are valuable, the point of the friendship is pleasure or utility *as an outcome*. We began this paper by quoting Aristotle's assertion that flourishing requires morally good friends. He is not merely claiming that virtue friends are beneficial or enjoyable; he is highlighting the idea that virtues can only be fully developed and choiceworthy goods can only be consistently attained in the context of moral friendship. This focus on virtue friendship clarifies both our dependent human nature and that we are dependent on others for our flourishing. Because we are dependent creatures by nature, we must engage in excellent dependency to flourish (Fowers, Richardson, & Slife, in press). Virtue friendship is the paradigmatic form of excellent dependence. The common Western illusion of self-sufficiency makes it more difficult to even understand what a virtue friendship might be. Consequently, we describe four important features of character friendship here: ongoing mutual commitments to jointly valued goals, the appreciation of the friend's good qualities, teamwork, and caring that elicits a strong

commitment to the friend's welfare. (For more on virtue friendship, see Cooper, 1980 and Fowers, 2000).

Virtue friendships are characterized by having shared goals. Shared goals are best understood in contrast to individual goals. The latter can be pursued and possessed relatively independently by an individual. Every individual has goals he or she pursues relatively independently and can achieve independently, such as a college degree, a career or vocation, and possessions. Of course, others assist the individual goal pursuit, but goal attainment can generally be rightly attributed to the individual. In contrast, virtue friends also pursue shared goals, which are ends that can only be pursued and possessed together. Friendship itself is a paradigmatic shared goal because no one can achieve a friendship on their own. Virtue friends cherish the relationship and actively attend to its maintenance and enrichment. Other important shared goals include justice, democracy, and social harmony.

Recognizing one another's good qualities is another important feature of virtue friendship. We choose and cultivate virtue friendship because we value the good qualities of our friend. The friend's goodness is what makes it possible to seek worthwhile shared goods together and to become a better person through the friendship. The friend's goodness also helps us to see our virtue friends as ends in themselves, not just someone who provides benefits to us. Each virtue friendship will be unique because it is shaped by the particular characteristics of the friends. The appreciation of the friend's good characteristics is therefore a key element in virtue friendship.

A pernicious effect of the widespread isolation so common in Western societies is that it has become much harder to persistently pursue worthwhile ends. A third characteristic of virtue friendship is teamwork. Virtue friends work together and depend on each other for pursuing the shared goals that characterize the relationship. This mutual dependency helps us to maintain our energy and devotion to important ends. When we pursue worthwhile goals in concert with others, it is far easier to remain committed to and enthusiastic about those goals. Our persistence is also encouraged because we know that we are accountable to our friend. Cooper (1980) stated this eloquently: “Only by merging one’s activities and interests with those of others can the inherent fragility of any human being’s interests be overcome” (p. 329). Mutual commitment is therefore another key element of virtue friendship. Sometimes teamwork means that all of the people involved do more or less the same things for each other, as in a book club. In other relationships, there is a complementarity of roles, as in parents and children or the different positions on a sports team. What is common to all cases is that mutual dependency is central, and the dependency can only be a good if everyone does their part to make the relationship or group the best it can be.

The fourth quality of virtue friendship is that the friends care about each other’s welfare as much as they care about their own. One reason for this mutual caring is that the strong identification with and dependence on the friend can make it difficult to fully distinguish one’s own welfare and interests completely from the friend’s (cf. Brewer, 2007). When a very close friend is hurt or suffering, that is clearly bad for you, too. If a friend is joyful or triumphant, that is shared joy. In addition, caring about a friend’s welfare is another way of recognizing that one is maturely dependent on the friend,

which entails being invested in the friend's welfare. The friend matters to you, whether or not the friend is providing benefits at the time.

Current Friendship Research

There are a few exceptions to the hedonic focus in friendship research. A few researchers have explored the differences in friends' characteristics according to this Aristotelian framework and found some support for it. Walker et al. (2015) conducted focus groups with nine and ten year olds and found that "the language of virtue seemed to come naturally to many of the children" (p. 11). Indeed, they found "a command of the language of virtue that was surprising" (p. 19). Murstein and Spitz (1974) investigated how college aged participants described their friends and found that the descriptions of most types of friends ("best friend," "most useful friend," "most pleasurable friend" etc.) revealed the three factors of utility, pleasure, and goodness. Bukowski, Nappi and Hoza (1987) also used this framework to investigate friendship characteristics and found similar results.

We adopted this framework to study friendships that might not fit neatly in the narrow categories of instrumental benefit and satisfaction (Anderson & Fowers, 2015). We approached this in four ways. First, we asked participants to describe their best friend in terms of their friend's characteristics, and these descriptors again mapped onto pleasure, utility, and virtue friends. Second, we assessed the participants' well-being with standard hedonic well-being (HWB) measures (positive affect and life satisfaction). The use of satisfaction measures alone places the value of friendship in the subjective assessment of how one feels about the friend. This subjective assessment stacks the deck in favor of an instrumental, preferential, and self-centered conceptualizations of

friendship. Therefore, we added a set of eudaimonic well-being (EWB) indicators (purpose, personal growth, and positive relationships) to investigate the presence and importance of the non-instrumental concomitants of friendship predicted by eudaimonic theory.

Third, there has been virtually no assessment of the actual goodness of the friend. Rather than asking individuals whether their friend is good for them, we asked whether their friends were good. We predicted that friends seen as distinctly good (virtue friends) would be more likely to contribute to EWB than friends who are primarily pleasurable (pleasure friends) or useful (utility friends). We predicted that the latter two sets of friendship characteristics would be related to HWB, but would be only weakly associated with EWB.

The fourth feature of our study was to explore the presence of unique mediators of the relationships between friendship characteristics and well-being. We conducted this study with college students who received course credit for their participation.

We analyzed our results with factor analysis and a series of structural equation models. Our factor analyses replicated the three factor structure of friendship characteristics. The full structural model was fit with EWB and HWB predicted by the three friend characteristics – utility, virtue and pleasure. The model resulted in an expected correlation of HWB and EWB residuals ($r = .63$). There were also significant correlations between the three friendship characteristic residuals, ranging from .43 to .67. The proposed model had an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 (12) = 33.13, p < .01, CFI = .97, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .08, 90\% CI [.05-.11]$). The results indicated that none of the three sets of friendship characteristics was directly related to HWB. However, virtue

characteristics were associated with EWB ($\beta = .42$ $p < .001$), but neither utility ($\beta = .16$ $p = .08$) nor pleasure characteristics ($\beta = -.10$ $p = .20$) were related to EWB. Overall, 25% of EWB was explained by the friend characteristics. See Figure 1 for complete results.

We also expected the relationships between friendship characteristics and well-being to be mediated in theoretically predicted ways. Results indicated that the relationship between the best friend's virtue characteristics and EWB was mediated by reliable alliance ($\beta = .25$ $p < .001$) but not by admiration, and a direct effect remained between virtue characteristics and EWB. Taken together, the direct and indirect effects explained 41% of the variance in EWB. The direct relationship between utility characteristics and HWB was absent, but we found a mediational pathway through received help ($\beta = .31$ $p < .001$), which accounted for, 76% of the variance in HWB. Pleasure characteristics did not have a direct relationship with HWB, but we found a mediation pathway through companionship ($\beta = .28$ $p < .001$), which accounted for, 31% of the variance in HWB. See Figures 2, 3, and 4 for complete mediation results.

These exploratory results have encouraged us to pursue additional studies to further explore the resources of Aristotle's theory of *philia* and *eudaimonia*. The ability to differentiate friendship types and forms of well-being make more nuanced study of these central relationships possible in psychological research. We are particularly excited about the possibility of challenging the reigning ideologies of individualism and instrumentalism in contemporary understandings of friendship. Our results suggest that perceived characteristics of friends are related to well-being, and that those relationships appear to be mediated by theoretically predicted interpersonal processes. This begins the process of undermining the idea that friendship is a purely subjective

state by clarifying that the friend's characteristics appear to be important contributors to a respondent's well-being. This interpretation is bolstered by the complete mediation of the relationships between pleasure and utility characteristics and HWB. We found that the friend's characteristics alone were unrelated to the respondent's well-being. HWB was only related to pleasure and utility characteristics when the friendship relationship included the elements (received help, companionship) that those friendship characteristics could offer. The mere perception of the characteristics was not sufficient.

Friendship and Character Education

Now that we have presented a theoretical model and some empirical data for the theory of *philia* and *eudaimonia*, it is time for us to clarify, in some detail, why friendship is such an important element of character education. The key to this is recognizing three things. First, explicit, extended teaching of the young who are not one's offspring is a uniquely human activity (Csibra, 2007; Premack, 2007). Education is one of the foremost ways that we express our humanity (Tennie, Call, & Tomasello, 2009). Second, the purpose of character education is to help students to flourish in the academic, personal, and civic pursuits. We have already noted that virtue friendship is central to human flourishing because humans are ultrasocial beings. Third, friendship, understood broadly as *philia*, is absolutely central to character education because education is a relational endeavor. The quality of the relationships between teachers and learners and among the learners plays a very strong role in the quality of the learning that can take place. One way to see this is to contrast a utility friendship approach to education with a virtue friendship approach.

Education as a Utility-Focused Pursuit

All of us have been utility-focused students and we have taught utility-focused learners. This is an acceptable approach for many things. Consider learning how to use a computer. Most of us see the computer solely as a tool we use to accomplish our goals. We just want to learn how to get the machine to help us complete our work. When learning is a simple means-end proposition, it is sensible to look at the knowledge to be gained as an outcome. We will call this the instrumental learning approach. Many students pursue all formal education in this way. Education is a means-end pursuit when the primary goals are course grades, certificates, degrees, or promotions. This approach specifies a desired outcome and everything else is just a means to that end, including textbooks, teachers, and institutions. As teachers, most of us do not like being simply a means to students' goals because that makes us dispensable, forgettable, just another rung on students' career ladders. Of course, some teachers also treat students as means to the instructors' ends. This occurs when teaching is solely a means to earn money or maintain a position or when learning is viewed in terms of a factory system in which knowledge is stamped into students.

The contrast to instrumental learning is already obvious to educators. In the contrasting view, which we call the constitutive learning approach, the goal is to find joy and meaning in the learning itself. Of course, there are many beneficial outcomes of knowledge and learning, but activity of learning is valuable with or without tangible outcomes. Joy in learning starts with the teacher's relationships to the subject matter and with the student. The teacher's love of knowledge, particularly a specific subject matter, infuses the learning with energy and focus. Excellent educators are keenly interested in their relationships with students as well, seeing the relationship as

important and valuable in itself. This approach also takes teaching as an endeavor that is designed to excite learners to curiosity and discovery in the process of helping them to become better educated persons, better human beings, and better citizens. These aims suggest a very powerful commitment on the teacher's part to the students' development and welfare. This commitment can only be sustained if it is reciprocated. Excellent learning occurs when students avidly seek knowledge and do so in an ongoing relationship in which the student accepts guidance and feedback. When this reciprocated devotion to learning occurs, the students' learning becomes a shared goal that requires the active participation of student and teacher.

We submit that a high quality teacher-student relationship is necessary and central to excellent learning. This is nowhere more true than in character education itself. If students are to accept guidance and feedback about the quality of their characters, trust and commitment are essential elements of the relationship. It would be foolish for students to allow themselves to be sufficiently vulnerable to enable the reform and improvement of their characters unless they can trust their teachers and see their teachers' commitment to their welfare. Now let us consider how the concept of virtue friendship can illuminate the sort of relationship that can foster excellent learning.

Education and Virtue Friendship

We outlined four features of virtue friendships in general, and now we apply those features to the teacher-learner relationship. This is possible because Aristotle's concept of friendship (*philia*) includes teacher-student relationships.

The core of virtue friendships is that the friends pursue jointly valued goals. Eudaimonic theory distinguishes between individual and shared goal pursuit. Individual

goals can be independently pursued and achieved. Virtue friends support and encourage each other in those individual goal pursuits. Academic achievements such as grades and graduation are individual goals in that the student possesses those achievements. Clearly, the teacher's support and guidance are integral to academic achievement, but the student earns and receives the diploma.

In educational settings, one of the most foundational goals is the establishment of a productive learning environment. This includes rules and expectations that everyone follows, mutual respect, honesty, and fairness. The teacher cannot establish this environment without the participation of the students. No individual student can create a good learning environment independently. The learning environment is a state of affairs that includes everyone's participation and is instantiated anew in every class session. Once it is established, its renewal becomes progressively easier as the students and teacher have developed habits that are conducive to learning together.

Second, virtue friends can clearly see each other's good qualities and strive to bring out the best in each other. Teacher-student relationships begin with reputation and first impressions, but ongoing contact provides ample information on which to recognize positive qualities. Personal strengths will vary in both teachers and students, both in breadth and in depth, but one of the keys to creating an excellent learning environment is to recognize and build on students' strengths. There are many possibilities, including curiosity, leadership, or fulfilling roles such as being a team player, contrarian, analyzer, synthesizer, and so forth. One key activity for excellent teachers is to look for these strengths, to find opportunities to draw them out, to help students enhance their strengths, and to help them develop new strengths. One way to gauge the quality of

teaching is to look at how well the teacher is teaching the pupils to be good learners. Similarly, it is important for teachers to let their students see their particular strengths as teachers in their commitment to their subject matter, their fairness in relationships, their generosity in seeing the best in the students, their wit in interaction, and so forth. Expressing these excellences will have a direct positive effect on students, but it is also vital to remember that learning through modeling is a primary mode of character education.

A third important feature of virtue friendships is that the friends commit themselves to working as teammates. Teamwork is vital to the best forms of relationships. In teacher-student relationships, teamwork will be complementary. The teacher offers material, provides feedback and guidance, and serves as a role model, and the student digs into the material, accepts feedback and guidance, and learns from the teacher. As students mature and develop, this teamwork will take on an increasingly peer-to-peer form. The teamwork characteristic of virtue friendships also includes a strong commitment to the endeavors that bring the participants together. In the case of education, the focus is on the learning environment and the students' learning and development. These commitments foster a mutual reliance that can carry the friends through difficulties they may face as individuals and as teammates. Cultivating commitment and teamwork builds the trust necessary for taking the risks required for personal growth and development in character education.

When people rely on each other and respond predictably to jointly valued goals, it is much easier to persist in long-term projects. Education is a very long-term project, and there are often significant difficulties along the way. Students may struggle with

mastering the material, conflict or strife can emerge within the class or the school, or they may have challenges and difficulties in their lives outside of class. Persisting in learning is much more likely when teachers and students have established teamwork. This persistence is supported by knowing that other people are depending on one and that one is accountable to others. Their support and encouragement are also key factors in educational persistence.

Having a clear and abiding interest in one another's welfare is a fourth key building block for virtue friendships. Given the asymmetry of most teacher-student relationships, this focus on welfare will tend to be unequal, with the teacher capable of benefitting the student disproportionately. Nevertheless, when teachers genuinely demonstrate that they care about their students, that caring will tend to be reciprocated. Good teachers want the best for their students, both within and outside the classroom. They are deeply invested in their students' growth and development, with emphasis both in academic achievement and in learning to contribute to their communities.

Conclusion

We have argued that friendship, broadly defined, is a core element of human flourishing and therefore central to education as a defining species characteristic. Aristotle's capacious definition of friendship (*philia*) includes asymmetrical relationships such as those between teachers and students. The relationships among teachers and students are critical to students' educational success. This is true for any academic discipline, but it is particularly true for character education. Given its centrality to education, it is strange that the virtue of friendship has been so thoroughly neglected. It is vital that character educators include the relational processes of education highlighted

by the concept of friendship in their materials and training so that teachers can systematically and consciously cultivate excellence in their relationships with students.

We suggest that it is only reasonable to ask students to cultivate character strengths in a trusting, stable environment characterized by commitment, support, encouragement, positive models, and a tangible concern for the students' welfare. We contend that character development can only ensue to the degree that these conditions are actualized. The most complete instantiation of educational friendships will take the form of virtue friendships, which are characterized by shared goals, seeing the good in each other, teamwork, and genuine interest in each other's welfare. Aristotle's eudaimonic ethics clarifies that virtue friendship is a necessary element of a flourishing life. We have argued that, as an integral aspect of human life, the best educational processes will have the form of virtue friendship.

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Figure 1

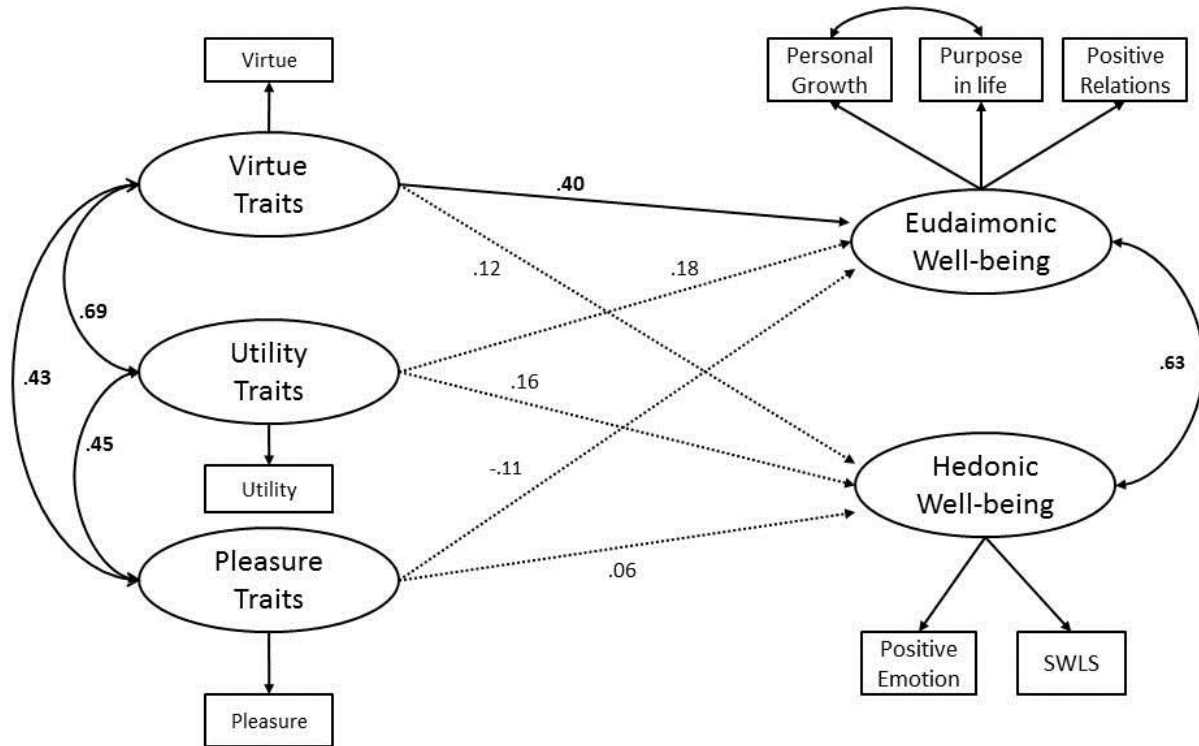


Figure 2

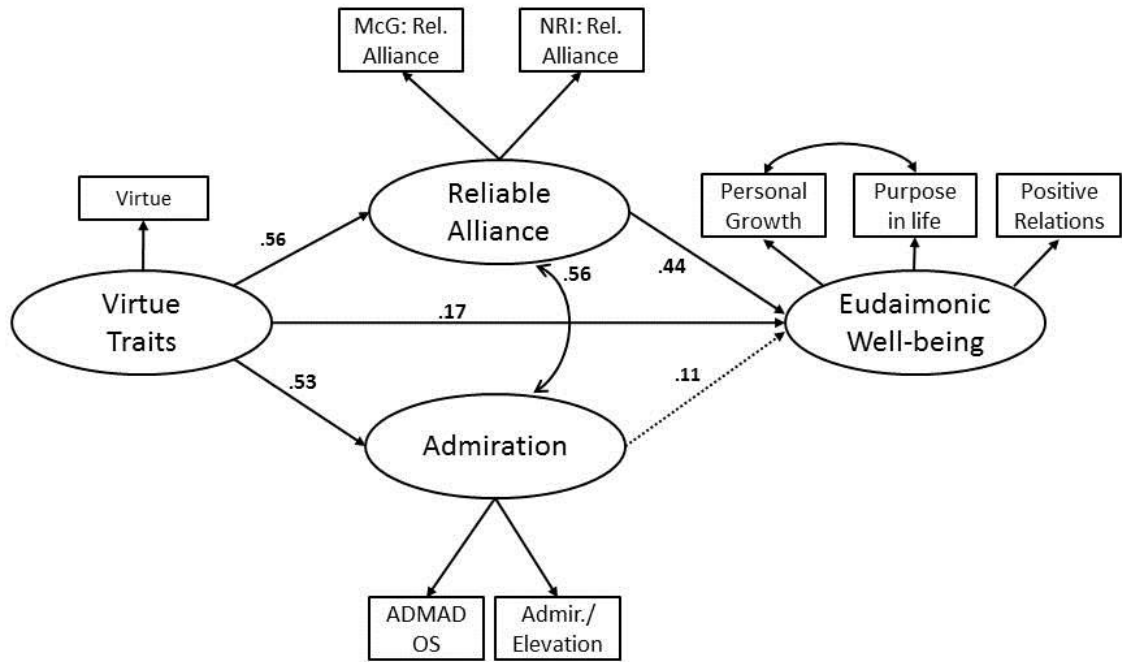


Figure 3

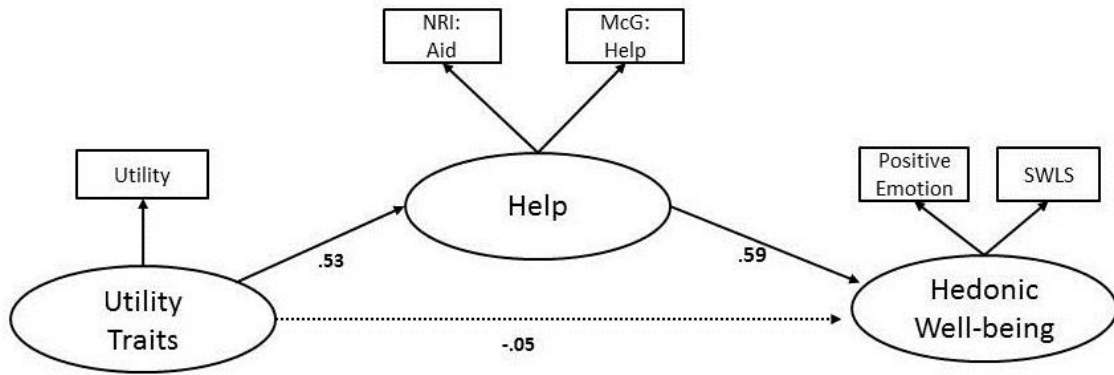


Figure 4

