

Routledge Research in Character and Virtue Education

LITERATURE AND CHARACTER EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES

THEORY, METHOD, AND TEXT ANALYSIS

Edited by

Edward Brooks, Emma Cohen de Lara,
Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz, and José M. Torralba



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Friendship, self-knowledge, and core texts: a pathway for character education at university¹

Ana Romero-Iribas

Introduction

For many students, the university years are a period for getting to know oneself. It is a time when they develop moral autonomy and take advantage of their time for reflection, growth, change, and for forging lasting friendships. These friendships may in turn feed back into the student's development on the cognitive, volitional, affective, and social level (Kristjánsson, 2020a; Brooks et al., 2019; Hoyos-Valdés, 2018; Walker et al., 2016; Vakirtzis, 2014; Cooper, 1977).

The connection between friendship and virtue ethics is not new. Already Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, stresses the role of friendship for the development of the human being, underlining its centrality for moral growth in both its personal and its social dimensions. For example, friendship helps two friends being better and able both to think and to act (Aristotle, 1999, 1155a20). In moral terms, friendship is, thus, conducive both to practical wisdom and courage. Indeed, the most perfect, and lasting form of friendship is one between people alike in virtue, the virtue friendship (Aristotle, 1999, 1156b1–3), which Cooper (1980) renamed as *character friendship* since he claims it is possible between people who are not fully virtuous. This kind of friendship seeks to benefit one's friend for her own sake, and thus is not instrumental (Kristjánsson, 2020a). Aristotle held that there is also a kind of friendship between members of a political community (Aristotle, 1999). Cooper (1977) recalls that 'Aristotle holds not only that active friendships of a close and intimate kind are a necessary constituent of the flourishing human life, but also that "civic friendship" itself is an essential human good' (p. 622).

In recent decades, the role of friendship in character education has attracted increasing interest. For instance, Vakirtzis (2014) argues that character friends are models of good action who guide us through 'interpretative mimesis,' that is, character friends provide models for moral growth to one another. After all, human beings are prone to imitate whom they love. Walker et al. (2016) try to identify 'aspects of moral virtue significant for friendship as a basis for empirically investigating the role of ethical qualities

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and philosopher P. Laín Entralgo's *Sobre la Amistad* [*On Friendship*] (Laín Entralgo, 1986). Ultimately, of course, friendship is practiced, rather than studied. However, 'in the art of growing, the first thing is to devote time to thinking about one's life' (Nubiola, 1999, p. 50). The classroom is a setting that lends itself well to reflection and thinking about one's life. What I am hoping to show is that reflection on friendship, by means of reading and discussing core texts on friendship, provide a particularly valuable contribution to character education, and one that is not only pleasant—who does not like to talk about friendship?—but also meaningful.

The chapter will start out with an explanation of the privileged space that friendship offers for the cultivation of character. Next, the chapter develops the connection between friendship and self-knowledge. Here, the chapter makes a distinction between self-knowledge on the psychological level, and self-knowledge on the anthropological level. The chapter then turns to an analysis of the two proposed core texts on friendship, Lewis' *The Four Loves* and Laín Entralgo's *On Friendship*, in order to articulate a pathway for character education at university.

Friendship and character education

Friendship offers a privileged space for character education for several reasons. First of all, friendship is a relationship that develops in freedom. No one can force another to become one's friend. Now, recent investigations show that emerging adulthood is a time of intense explorations of identity and existing scholarship suggests that this developmental stage is an appropriate time for character formation (Lamb et al., 2021). At university, young people may take their own responsibility for moral growth more consciously and more maturely than in previous phases of their life. That is to say, the university years are a time when life begins to be understood as a task. Here, the exercise of freedom also becomes more necessary. Carr (2017) accurately calls for respecting a student's moral autonomy as a mature adult when it comes to character education at higher educational stages. This means that friendship provides fertile ground for personal and moral growth, exactly because it constitutes a free relationship. Students choose their friends freely and maintain their friendships in freedom.

In addition to being an inherently free relationship, friendship connects to the four dimensions that constitute a person's character: volitional, affective, cognitive, and social-contextual. Regarding the volitional level, friendship encourages and promotes the development of virtue (Schwarzenbach, 2009); friends may make us want to become better, they shape our will. On the affective level friendship offers a ground on which other-oriented emotions such as respect, empathy and gratitude, can be cultivated, which in turn facilitates social behaviour and civic habits. Friendship also provides emotional security (Mendelson & Aboud, 2014) and improves self-esteem

(Weiss & Smith, 2002). As to the cognitive dimension, friendship promotes sound moral reasoning, as discussed by authors as diverse as Kant (transl. 1988), MacIntyre (2001), and Kristjánsson (2020a). Finally, friendship contributes to the development of important social values and civic virtues. Friendship involves a certain equality as it is based on common ground and unites people around shared projects. It develops attitudes that facilitate coexistence and generate social cohesion (Romero-Iribas, 2018).

Furthermore, there is a kind of democratic aspect about friendship. Friendship is a relationship within everyone's reach. And friendship offers a context for moral growth that is natural, attractive, and appreciated by young people as it goes beyond the formality of educational intentions.

Focusing on friendship as the context for character education does not imply understanding this personal bond in an instrumental or moralizing way. Rather, mutuality and free giving are prerequisites for friendship (Romero-Iribas, 2015). The mutual knowledge and personal development that arise out of friendship are inherent, yet also subservient to it. Friendship is 'just because,' or rather, 'because of you.' In other words, although character friendship involves self-knowledge and mutual growth and provides a context for human development inasmuch as it is a kind of love, both self-knowledge and growth are, in a sense, incidental effects of friendship (Lewis, 1986). As a consequence, friendship cannot be considered a properly educational relationship,² since it is devoid of the conscious intention to educate. Moreover, friendships require a certain kind of equality that does not easily occur in educational relationships. We may wonder, for example, whether a teacher and a student may become friends, as 'unequal character friends' (Kristjánsson, 2020a, p. 362). If anything, such unequal character friends are unlikely to share the same level of intimacy as friendships between equals. In this chapter, I focus on friendships between equals. Such friendships may become informal pedagogical contexts, where the subservience of personal knowledge and mutual growth to friendship does not reduce their value.

Friendship and self-knowledge

Following the importance of friendship as providing the context for moral education, the ability of friendship to facilitate self-knowledge calls for more detailed exploration. Here, it is worthwhile to distinguish two levels of self-knowledge. First, there is self-knowledge on the psychological level, by which a person knows *how* one is, that is, how one is constituted and how one functions and operates. This level of self-knowledge and the ability of friendship to promote this kind of self-knowledge has been explored by Kristjánsson (2020a). Kristjánsson argues that Aristotle understood the self as 'objectively identifiable and not reducible to mere self-concept' (p. 359). How we perceive ourselves, that is, our conception of the self, effectively mirrors our objective self. In this way, our self-conception belongs to the

self, in the same way that 'the mirror which mirrors the furniture in a room is also part of that furniture' (p. 359). However, so Kristjánsson continues, our self-conception is not always a very accurate rendition of our objective self. Oftentimes, there is a discrepancy between how we conceive of ourselves and how we really are. Friends, Kristjánsson argues based on his reading of Aristotle, may correct our self-conceptions, and bring them closer to who we really are objectively. For example, someone might conceive of herself as cowardly.

This moral self-conception may be adjusted by a friend who points out to her that there is a particular area in her life where she actually displays quite a bit of courage. Or someone may think of himself as prudential, whereas a friend may 'hold a mirror' to this person, showing him that in certain areas he is actually prone to make bad decisions. The psychological level of self-knowledge has to do with one's character in a very practical sense. Friends who know each other intimately will trust each other enough to accept this kind of mirroring in terms of one's moral strengths and weaknesses whereby one's character is shown in one's behaviour.

This kind of self-knowledge on the psychological level may be understood in at least two senses (Cocking & Kenneth, 1998), namely, as mutual reflection, and as mutual self-disclosure between friends. Someone who tells her friend that perhaps in certain areas of life he is not prudential at all reflects a character trait, in this case foolishness, back to her in conversation. The beauty about friendship is that this kind of mirroring may occur without moralistic judgment; in friendship, while being accepting and respectful of one's friend, one may be deeply honest. A friend returns one's full reflection, be it pleasant or not. What is valuable is that it is a loyal reflection and that the reflection provides something more than a purely literal image; this is an interpretive reflection, a version of oneself that sheds new light on one's character (Romero-Iribas, 2002, p. 95). And in that sense, one's friends are, to some extent, creators of oneself.

Furthermore, a friend may disclose herself—show herself—in a way that would not happen outside of the friendship relationship. By disclosing herself to her friend as part of the dynamics of the relationship, the friend also learns something about herself. Lewis, writes that 'in each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out' (p. 95) indicating the dynamics between a group of friends. This dynamic brings out an aspect of the self that only becomes evident in the relationship. Here, as with a friend who reflects a certain character trait back to her friend in conversation, there is a kind of mirroring taking place. However, this time it is not the friend who acts as a mirror to the other on a particular trait of one's personality that one had not been much aware of before. Rather, the dynamics of the relationship function as a mirror, bringing out a particular trait in the friend that would not have been brought out without the relationship. For example, the connection between two particular friends may cause a kind of spark that causes one of

them, who is otherwise level-headed and a bit of a bore, to become witty and light-hearted. This character trait, may remain a hidden aspect of one's character if it were not disclosed and developed in the company of that friend. In this way, the relationship brings out a particular aspect of one's character that would otherwise remain hidden.

Next to self-knowledge on the psychological level, there is also self-knowledge on the anthropological level, which applies to *who* one is as a person, beyond her manifestations, biographical or psychological. On one hand, we see that a person is more than her actions. By bearing witness to one's current reality, one's friends are also capable of seeing what one was and no longer is, or what in the future one may become (Little, 2000). One is more than one's mere present, as one is also what one wants and is directed or projected towards. Thus friendship allows one to see oneself reflected in one's friends, and also projected in them: projected in one's best version and, beyond what one is today, what one may become. A friend is precisely a witness to the fact that in each human being there is more than what there appears to be; that is, that a person is more than her actions.

Friendship may uncover one's self beyond the psychological level, to the extent that a friend recognizes the other for who she is beyond what she is, how she is, or what she does, produces, or says. What is special about friendship is that a friend can explain to us who we are, that is, that we are more than what we do, that we are more than our manifestations; that we are persons. As Scheler (2005, p. 232) writes, when thinking about the reasons why someone is loved, one realizes that the person always goes beyond the reasons that are adduced and that these are sought only after finding ourselves loving someone. According to Scheler (2005), love—and therefore friendship—allows us to discover in the human being a real distinction between the spirit-person and the self (in classical terms, act of being-essence). The human being has as a distinctive feature that she is more than her qualities, actions or virtues: she is valuable by herself beyond any manifestation (p. 231).

This knowledge of who one is (the person), beyond how one is (one's personality), is of an existential character. And what is revealed in friendship is that another person is always somewhat elusive; that while one's friend is 'another self,' she is at the same time 'another self,' in the sense of existential otherness. That is to say, in friendship I learn that the person is a unique being. There is always something unique and irreducible in the person, which is more than her psychological manifestations. Nietzsche (transl. 2011) and Derrida (1998) saw this clearly, taking it to its ultimate consequences; that is, they emphasized that between friends there is an ontological estrangement. Ultimately, so they argued, one can never really know the other.

In friendship we are offered a perception of the person as existential and not as predicative (Agamben, 2004); like a who beyond a what. And that perception of the other in her ontological otherness allows a growth that is freer of one's friends. Strictly speaking, a person is intangible, is not reducible to any

concept, and is not exhausted by it. In friendship I know that my friend is more than her manifestation, and that allows me to know her personal condition. In this way, the character of friendship appears in its deepest sense, which is the anthropological one. This becomes central for character formation, since it provides the personal self-awareness necessary for freedom and, therefore, for moral growth.

Friendship producing self-knowledge, in particular on the anthropological level, thrives on intuitive knowledge. The person can only be intuited, penetrated by a direct act, by direct contact between life and life' (García Morente, 1996, p. 436). This means that to know someone requires having a personal and intimate relationship with her. In friendship, self-knowledge largely occurs in the contexts of conversation and coexistence. Here, a conversation between friends is not only, nor always, verbal. A 'conversation' can also be a way of being that speaks for itself, and sometimes such an unspoken conversation is more powerful than actual speech, because the ultimate reality of one's friend—her reality as a person—is not apprehensible through the spoken word but only by means of an intuitive knowledge that comes about by being in her company. Good friends can understand each other not just by talking but also by being silent.

It is within the framework of living together and being in conversation that people naturally share what is valuable in their lives on account of the mutual trust that exists between them. There is then a voluntary disclosure of one's intimacy, which is an act of friendship that Laín Entralgo (1986) has called 'confidentiality' and which is fundamental to the understanding that exists between friends. Little (2000) explains that the mutual discovery that occurs in friendly conversation does not imply that friends have any kind of true self hidden away, waiting for someone to find it. It is rather that one's inner life manifests itself in friendship. Thus 'the conversation is the essence of what is going on, not some unsatisfactory approach to a more fundamental reality "hidden" elsewhere' (Little, 2000, p. ix). Although this mutual exchange is essential to friendship, the final unveiling of the self and the other is something that never fully completes itself. Indeed, it is in the interest of the relationship that the conversation is continued.

True friendship is essentially dialogue; conversation—in the broadest sense of the word—is the essence of the relationship, and of the way it takes its course. To paraphrase May (2012), in a dialogue between friends, a 'space between' is created in which both knowledge and the mutual configuration of personality develop (p. ix).

Likewise, Cocking and Kenneth (1998) argue that the self is not static but rather dynamic, and of a relational character, which they refer to as the relational self. That is, the self changes in its interaction with the world and with others. The not-static being of the self does not disqualify friendship from being a form of mutual knowledge. But the changing nature of the self does show that its revelation in friendship is not definitive. In other words,

the knowledge that one has of one's friend by means of intimate communication is not something finished or closed, but is always open to reacquaintance. In this sense, friendship is formed by walking through time and the world 'on the same side of the road' (Marín, 2019), and this ends up generating a shared sense of self between friends. The vital intertwining that occurs between them constitutes one's own life story, so that in some of its passages 'the *I* has the shape of the *we*, and one cannot tell one's own story while leaving out one's friend' (Marín, 2020). Hence it follows that strictly speaking there is no autonomy in self-knowledge; nor does it make sense to speak of personal self-sufficiency.

The passage of time in which all friendship unfolds, through the situations and circumstances that friends face, produces a mutual understanding that becomes self-knowledge, and in which each friend plays an essential role. Friends mutually discover capabilities and traits in each other's personality that did not previously show themselves, and have appeared on account of the company of those who walk by one's side. In this way, friends become a necessary condition for one's own being to unfold, and in that unfolding one comes to know and is reacquainted with one's self. Persons are neither something given or finished, nor a thing or an object. As a person, one is alive, and one lives in the company of others, who are chosen or given to them: one's friends.

Both kinds of self-knowledge—psychological and anthropological—contribute to character formation, although in different ways. The former, the psychological knowledge of the self, is a starting point for growth, since growth only makes sense following a more accurate perception of how one is constituted, and what are one's strengths and weaknesses. The latter, the anthropological knowledge of the self, provides awareness of one's condition as a person, which is necessary for that growth to be truly free and, therefore, moral.

Two philosophical core texts on friendship and self-knowledge

So far, we have looked at the way in which friendship promotes self-knowledge, both on the psychological and anthropological level. Self-knowledge is fundamental to character growth. Indeed, we may say that character growth is predicated on knowledge of the self and, in the anthropological sense, self-awareness necessary for freedom.

A person learns more about herself in the context of living with and conversing with a friend. One may, therefore, ask the question whether the act of reading a text may actually contribute to friendship, and the particular self-knowledge that develops in friendships. Of course, as was mentioned already, students are particularly apt at forging friendships, given the stage of life that they are in. But is there also something to be gained from *reading* about friendship? Here, we answer the question in the affirmative. The classroom is a

setting that lends itself well to reflection and thinking about one's life in conversation with others. The reading of core texts on friendship promotes what one may call an inner dialogue about the topic, and the discussion of core texts on friendship in the classroom promotes an actual, in-depth dialogue on the topic. This in-depth dialogue may even foster a sense of friendship in the classroom itself. Under the careful guidance of the teacher, students may come to a better realization of what friendship means in all of its dimensions. With this realization may also come an awareness of the importance of friendship to their personal lives and, to use an Aristotelian term, to their flourishing. This awareness may, furthermore, encourage them to become more conscious friends, that is, friends who know and appreciate more fully why they are friends. They may even be encouraged to turn friendships into more genuine *character* friendships by means of more purposefully responding to a friend who holds up a mirror to them.

In what follows, the chapter will discuss the two core texts on friendship in light of the earlier discussion about the relationship between friendship and self-knowledge, both on the psychological and anthropological level. The first text concerns a chapter on friendship by Lewis in *The Four Loves* (Lewis, 1986, pp. 87–127). The second text is by Laín Entralgo (1986) in *Sobre la Amistad [On Friendship]* (pp. 163–173), which is centred on what he calls the aspect of 'confidentiality' in friendship.

Both Lewis and Laín Entralgo serve key references for today's philosophy of friendship (Marías, 2001). For Lewis, sharing one's life with friends is the context in which mutual self-knowledge occurs. Likewise, Laín Entralgo considers mutual self-knowledge to be born from an act of friendship, which consists of sharing intimacy, understood as 'confidentiality.' The relative contemporaneity of these authors may facilitate reflection in students, since they are closer than other, more ancient philosophers to our own ways of living and thinking about friendship. Lewis' and Laín Entralgo's ways of approaching friendship are different, as is clearly reflected in the different genres of the texts; Lewis' chapter on friendship offers a suggestive description, written with delightful mastery, in a literary prose whose apparent simplicity does not hide the lucidity and depth of its content. In comparison, Laín Entralgo's text offers a systematic and analytical exposition. Despite being different genres of philosophical prose, combining the two texts adequately offers the student two complementary approaches to the subject: one more intuitive and inviting, and the other more technical and discursive.

Friendship in Lewis' The Four Loves

Two aspects of friendship developed by Lewis in *The Four Loves* are particularly noteworthy: first, friendship is a type of love, and secondly it is an intensely free, even though a limited, type of love. Having the character of a gift, it is valued as being undeserved and free (p. 84). Above all, in Lewis'

view, friendship is the least biological and freest of all four loves, the other ones being affection, eros, and charity (p. 70). As a selfless love, it deeply affirms the other and allows each person to be who they are. As a mutual discovery, starting from a shared vision, friendship provides friends with specular knowledge—they function as a mirror to one another. As a free love, friendship provides anthropological knowledge.

Several key aspects regarding the relationship between friendship and self-knowledge addressed by *The Four Loves* may help students reflect on their own friendships. First, Lewis envisions friendship as a mutual discovery between two people who find that they have something in common that others do not share. This is a mutual recognition in the midst of many other people, where one's friend reveals herself as 'another self,' as someone just like me (p. 77). Students may be asked if this is something that they recognize in their own lives. Lewis writes about friendship, also in terms of specular knowledge; we see ourselves reflected in our friends. For students, it may take some time to think about this. Is Lewis right? Can a friend be 'another self,' and if so, what aspects of one's self have ever been reflected in a particular friendship? Students may be asked if they have a friend in whom they recognize 'another self,' and how this 'other self' is manifested.

Secondly, Lewis describes friendship as a spiritual, selfless and free love, by means of which one person deeply affirms the other. This allows friends to behave authentically, and get to know each other intimately: 'Only they really know our mind and only they judge it by standards we fully acknowledge' (p. 91). One's friends return one's image without judging it, which is another form of specular knowledge, that is self-knowledge gained by the friend acting as a mirror. At the same time, since friendship allows friends to be themselves and behave freely, it becomes a truthful context that values personal authenticity over the social posturing, which dominates many other types of relationships. With one's friends, pretences not only make no sense, but also deprive friendship of one of its most precious elements, namely, knowing that we are accepted, loved and respected as we are, and not because of what we look like or have. Friendship craves 'naked personalities' (Lewis, 1986, p. 103). Again, students may be asked if they recognize this aspect of friendship: not having to pretend might feel as a relief.

Thirdly, and in line with the idea that one's friend is 'another self,' the knowledge provided by one's friends is valuable, because they are not only 'another self,' but also 'another self,' someone who is not me. That is to say, one understands one's friend from the inside, while at the same time seeing her from the outside, and with a perspective that she lacks, because we each have a blind spot with respect to ourselves. This illustrates the idea of the development of one's moral personality, which is based on self-knowledge on the anthropological level as a starting point, and which receives from one's friend a look that allows it to overcome or transcend her current reality and go further.

Fourthly, there is another key idea presented by Lewis' text that connects friendship to self-knowledge on the anthropological level. The environment of freedom that friendship generates around her not only allows her to show how she is (i.e. providing psychological knowledge), but also to show that she is more than what she displays through her actions and words. Friendship discovers and values the person herself, rather than what she is or does. 'At home, besides being Peter or Jane, we also bear a general character; husband or wife, brother or sister, chief, colleague or subordinate. Not among our Friends' (p. 82). In other words, a person may transcend her social, familial, and marital roles in friendship. In friendship, a person 'just is.'

A final key aspect of *The Four Loves* (pp. 82-83) of the relationship between friendship and self-knowledge is that Lewis recognizes that one's friends provide self-knowledge to the extent that they shape one's existence. One's self is constituted by 'us' and not only by 'me.' Mutual knowledge is produced, above all, in the shared journey that is friendship, in walking together through life, or walking through it on the same side of the road. Our shared life is where we come to know each other increasingly well.

As students read and discuss the text, they may be asked at any point whether they think Lewis is right, and whether they recognize what he writes about friendship in their own lives. It might even be an idea to ask students to take a few minutes to think about the most important friendships in their lives before the reading of the text. One more controversial aspect of Lewis' chapter on friendship is that he mainly reflects on friendship as it exists between men and men, and not friendship between women and women, or a woman and a man. This, again, raises an interesting question for the students. Is Lewis being backward, or is there indeed something distinctive about male friendship, female friendship, and mixed friendship?

The act of 'confidentiality' in Laín Entralgo's On Friendship

Laín Entralgo's *On Friendship* provides significant insights into friendship, which resonates with some of the aspects of friendship that have already been discussed, such as the ability of friendship to produce self-knowledge in terms of self-disclosure. Here, the discussion will focus on two ideas in *On Friendship*, namely, the importance of confidentiality, and the importance for genuine friendship of understanding that the human being is a person.

First, Laín Entralgo explores the meaning of confidentiality by focusing on the difference between companionship and friendship. Companionship turns into friendship when confidences begin to be exchanged. Confidentiality involves sharing one's intimacy, which does not imply the communication of something that is truly personal or truly 'mine,' in the sense that it is something essential to me, without which I could not continue to be myself (Laín Entralgo, 1986, p. 164). For Laín Entralgo, mutual knowledge arises above all from this act of friendship, which is a form of self-revelation. Since friendship

involves sharing intimacy, it may lead to cultivating one's inner world, which raises a relevant topic for today's students. For in societies dominated by rapid changes, which are often superficial, cultivating one's inner world is at once a necessity and a challenge to which friendship leads.

Secondly, friends grant each other trust, and with trust grant the other access to one's intimacy. This act of trust allows friends to grow. The act of trust provides the possibility of getting to know each other and of enriching each other. This shows how the mutual knowledge that occurs in friendship is not finished but rather a constant reacquaintance, because personal identity is not fixed, and is enriched by friendly dialogue. This also shows that a person is more than her manifestation and allows us to look at her personal condition, that is, at one's anthropological knowledge of one's friend.

Thirdly, Laín Entralgo points out that personal communication can be achieved through gestures, words and silence (p. 170). Friendship is articulated in conversations and needs them, because friends also give themselves to each other with words and through words. This is related to how, in a dialogue between friends, a 'space between' is created in which both knowledge and the mutual configuration of personality and identity develop; the self is something dynamic that is enriched by one's relationships with others. Although friendship is nourished more by dialogue than by silence, silence as a channel of communication between friends is something that is worth presenting to one's students, precisely because they are not used to this and even fear it. And yet silence is necessary for the task of listening to oneself and one's friends, which is required for self-knowledge and human growth. This may lead students today to reflect on the question whether friendship is possible in the context of social media. Following Laín Entralgo's insights about conversation, one may have to conclude that there are matters that need to be discussed in more words than can fit in a text or audio message. Following Laín Entralgo's insights about presence and silence, one may come to realize that screens cannot adequately express the person. Self-disclosure requires the personal context in which the other is directly perceived through gestures, looks, and words, and not a virtual framework, which is always a mediated response.

Fourthly, and significantly, in Laín Entralgo's view, confidentiality has to be distinguished from what he calls 'cathartic liberation' or relief (p. 164), which also produces self-revelation. Cathartic liberation can be done in a technical way, with a psychologist or psychiatrist, or informally and casually with an acquaintance or companion. However, Laín Entralgo argues the confidentiality of friendship is different because it brings about a *mutual* self-revelation, while in the case of relief there will not usually be reciprocity in communication. This also means that only the mutual self-revelation experienced as part of the confidentiality between friends may give rise to a shared sense of self.

Fifthly, Laín Entralgo argues that confidentiality is not limitless. There is a relevant limit to confidentiality, which is demarcated by respect for the other

person (p. 169). This idea of Láin Entralgo underscores the person's free character, which is the basis of moral growth. Ultimately, also in friendship, the person is free to develop the self. Students may be asked about this conception of freedom. Have they ever experienced it? What does respect mean to them in friendship? Has their limit of confidentiality ever been betrayed, and what did this entail for their friendship?

Conclusion

Friendships are important to human beings, and perhaps especially so to young people at universities. This chapter has, therefore, taken up the legitimate question about the relationship between friendship and character education, as this may take shape at universities. Friendship, so this chapter has argued, acts as an unintentional educational agent, and it does so in an attractive context of growing up together with one's peers. Although millennials often feel lonely, at least in countries like the USA (Twenge, 2017), other research shows that young people today maintain true friendships, even online (Kristjánsson, 2019b).

As I have argued, friendship contributes to character education because it affects the different levels that are involved in that process: affective, volitional, cognitive, and contextual. This chapter has placed a special focus on the cognitive, and specifically on the relationship between friendship and self-knowledge, because this is a key factor in character formation. It is by facilitating self-knowledge, both on the psychological and anthropological level, that friendship contributes to education. Moral growth requires knowing 'how' and 'who' one is. This is a task that cannot be performed alone.

On the psychological level of self-knowledge, or knowledge of 'how' I am, friendship helps by promoting both mutual reflection and mutual self-disclosure. Furthermore, friendship allows one to know one's friend not only as 'another self' but also as 'another self,' that is, it reveals one's friend in her similarity, and at the same time, in her existential and unique otherness. On the anthropological level, through friendship it is known that the other is more than the way in which she manifests herself. Friendship allows one to know the personal condition of one's friend, that is, her irreducible character. This knowledge of the other in her existential otherness is acquired through having a personal relationship whereby intuitive knowledge that is produced especially through living with one's friend. Finally, friends provide self-knowledge to the same extent that they shape one's existence, which is in some respects an identity constituted by 'us' and not only by 'me,' an insight reflected in Lewis's text.

The reflection on friendship by means of the reading and discussing of core texts is valuable because: (a) to think about one's own life is essential for personal development; (b) reflection is especially needed in the current cultural context; and (c) the university is a place particularly appropriate for such

reflection, which in turn may help students develop self-knowledge and cultivate genuine friendship. In a way, just like in actual friendships friends may function as a mirror to one another, so certain core texts on friendship may offer specular knowledge as well.

Notes

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- 2 This is a matter that has elicited conflicting opinions, as can be seen in Jover (1991) and Kristjánsson (2020a).

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