
Completeness, Self-Sufficiency, and Intimacy in Seneca's Account of Friendship

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Abstract

Examining Seneca's account of friendship produces an interpretative puzzle: if the good of the Stoic sage is already both complete and self-sufficient, how can friendship be a good? I reject the solution that friendship is simply a preferred indifferent instead of a good and argue that though Seneca's account can consistently explain both why friendship's nature as a good does not threaten the completeness or the self-sufficiency of the sage, Stoic friends must choose between intimate friendships that leave them vulnerable or impersonal friendships that lack intimacy but do not undermine their happiness. The consistent Stoic must choose the latter, but I argue that this conflict shows why we ought to reject the Stoic model of friendship.

Keywords: Seneca, friendship, intimacy, the good, self-sufficiency, Stoicism

I

Friendship occupies an important place in Seneca's philosophical thought, but it also produces several interpretative puzzles regarding the sage's good and the nature of friendship, both of which are underexplored in the existing literature. The first puzzle arises because friendship seems to be a good for Seneca (and for Stoics more generally), and, as a good, friendship must benefit the Stoic sage by

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adding to her good. However, the sage's good should already be complete; that is simply what it is to be a Stoic sage. Thus, Seneca seems to face a dilemma: either friendship is not a good (and thus cannot contribute to the sage's good), or friendship is a good, but the sage's good is not complete. This additionally suggests a more general worry that applies beyond friendship: since the sage should already have complete happiness, how can her happiness be added to? In response, I reject the argument that friendship should be considered a preferred indifferent instead of a good before arguing that although a sage's virtue is complete on its own, the *exercise* of certain virtues still requires friendship. Thus, although the practice of virtue occurs in friendship, this does not threaten the completeness of the sage's virtue itself.

The second interpretative puzzle is related: the sage's happiness must be stable and non-contingent. However, friendship is a necessarily relational good, and thus will be contingent on an agent other than the sage, which threatens the self-sufficiency of the sage's happiness. I suggest a way out of this dilemma by showing that the self-sufficiency of the sage's virtue is not threatened because the benefit she receives from friendship does not depend on the individuality of the friend and hence is easily replaced if lost.

Next, I contend that Seneca's account of friendship faces a significant practical tension between the intimate friendships Seneca seeks and the role self-sufficiency plays in the Stoic good. Thus, since these are competing goals, any Stoic who accepts both Seneca's account of friendship and his broader ethical account must choose between having friendships full of intimacy and trust that leave the Stoic susceptible to grief or distant friendships that lack intimacy but do not make her vulnerable to the loss of her happiness. I conclude that this practical dilemma demonstrates why Seneca's model of friendship should be rejected on ethical grounds.

II

Seneca's framework for articulating the nature of the good, friendship, and the relationship of the good to happiness relies on his general commitment to Stoic ethical and metaphysical views. On the Stoic account, things that benefit are good, things that harm are bad, and things that neither harm nor benefit are indifferent. For something to count as a good, it must be always and everywhere good, and it must benefit. Since goods are always choiceworthy and beneficial, and what

is beneficial is what contributes to one's happiness, what is good is what is required for and contributes to the final end of happiness (Seneca, *Ep.* 87.36 and 117.2).¹ Goods are divided into final (constitutive) goods and instrumental (productive) goods, with the virtues being both instrumental and final goods. The only good that is simply a final good is moral action, while the prudent person and her friend are the only purely instrumental goods (DL 7.96; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 11.22–26; Stobaeus 2.70).

In contrast, health, wealth, beauty, and even life itself are classified as indifferents (*adiaphora*), since none of them truly benefit or harm an agent (*Ep.* 82.11; DL 7.101–105, 160; *Math.* 11.61). The indifferents, however, can either be preferred or dispreferred, the sorts of things that are naturally sought or avoided. While the preferred indifferents have more value than the dispreferred indifferents, they do not necessarily benefit the possessor or contribute to happiness, and any life can be happy without any of the preferred indifferents (*Ep.* 74.17 and 92.14–18; DL 7.104). The wise person exercises virtue when she chooses between the indifferents, but it is the choice itself that is good as an exercise of virtuous activity, and not what is selected (*Ep.* 82.12 and 92.11–12).

On the Stoic picture, all actions aim at happiness, which is constituted by virtue (DL 7.89). Thus, the Stoic sage chooses virtue for its own sake, and is fully virtuous. The sage does not act against her will, nor does she act in ways she regrets later, for everything she does is virtuous and right. Her life is happy because it is tranquil and peaceful (*Ep.* 92.3). Her happiness is complete and lacks nothing, and neither her virtue nor her happiness can be added to since addition would suggest something was lacking before (*Ep.* 66.9).

Furthermore, the sage's good must be stable and not open to the vagaries of fortune since it depends on her virtue and not her access to indifferents, preferred or otherwise (*Ep.* 92.18). So the sage's happiness is up to her, and not open to destruction due to other people or things. This, of course, does not mean that she is self-sufficient for her mere existence; she must depend on others for that. Despite requiring others for a normal existence, her happiness does not depend on anything external (*Ep.* 9.3–5, 13 and 92.2). Unlike Aristotle's virtuous agent but like Plato's, the Stoic sage will be happy on the rack; there is no tragedy that could befall her that would undercut her happiness. Additionally, once perfect virtue has been achieved, it cannot be lost, since virtue is according to nature and vice is not (*Ep.* 50.8–9, 66.7, 76.19, 79.10, 92.23, and 117.15). Such an agent is self-sufficient and responsible for her own happiness, which is constituted by her virtue.

The Stoic sage is both complete (her rationality is perfected and she lives the consistently virtuous life) and she is self-sufficient (her happiness is entirely up to her and does not depend on any others). Nevertheless, even the complete and self-sufficient Stoic sage will have friends, if only to keep her 'great virtue from going unused' (*Ep.* 9.8).² However, although Stoic friendships are formed so that friends benefit one another, they are chosen for their own sakes, and are inherently pleasurable (*Ep.* 6.3, 9.6, and 109.4–13).³ These are not simply utilitarian friendships, and the friendships are also described as interconnected, involving the sharing of lives together as companions (*Ep.* 9.3–4 and 48.2). Friendships are formed between those who are similar in having established, deep, and consistent good character and they make one another better people through living together (*Ep.* 6.5). In fact, it is *only* the wise and good who can enjoy true friendship at all, since the two friends must be of one mind, sharing a conception of the Good in order to trust and rely upon one another (*Ben.* 7.12).⁴ Since only the wise person knows how to truly convey benefits and benefitting friends is essential to Stoic friendship, it follows that only the Stoic sage can be a real friend (*Ep.* 81.10–12).⁵

III

It is now clear why there is tension between the Stoic conception of a good and the role of friends and friendship. Since the Stoic sage is complete and self-sufficient, her good cannot be added to and it cannot depend on anything external. If friendship is a good, however, then it necessarily contributes to the final end and thus to the sage's happiness. However, friendship, as a relational good, depends on more than just the sage, and so if friendship forms a part of the sage's happiness, it is not a part that the sage can control. This seems to undermine both the completeness of the sage's good and also her self-sufficiency. Since the sage should already have complete happiness, how can her happiness be added to? And if friendship is a part of her good and friendship is an external good, then part of her good seems contingent, since her friend could always be lost through distance or death, and that would undermine the sage's self-sufficiency, implying that the sage's good is dependent on something contingent.

One solution might be to say that friendship is not actually a good, but instead is a preferred indifferent. Since the sage's happiness is up to him, while friendship is external to the sage, and anything that does not

affect happiness is an indifferent, this might suggest that friendship is a preferred indifferent.⁶ And in some places, Seneca does seem to speak as though this is the case. For instance, he says that the wise person 'is self-sufficient, not in that he wants to be without a friend, but in that he is able to' (*Ep.* 9.5), and further that the sage does not need a friend 'in order to live a good life' (9.15). The latter passage, in fact, explicitly contrasts what the sage finds use of and yet does not need for a happy life (such as her hands and eyes) with that which she does need for happiness (virtue), and then explains that though friends are useful (just as one's hands and eyes are), the sage can do without them, which seems to be exactly how a preferred indifferent would be described.⁷ Since friendship is external to the sage and the sage must be self-sufficient in her happiness, this may seem like an obvious solution to both the problem of contingency and the completeness worry.

But while simply saying that friendship is a preferred indifferent might be a tempting solution, this conflicts with the fact that friendship is consistently and explicitly referred to as a good.⁸ If simply relabelling friendship as a preferred indifferent rather than as a good created no further problems, it nevertheless might seem that this is the obvious solution. However, it is not merely that friendship is labelled as a good, but also that the characteristics ascribed to friendship by Seneca and other Stoics are not compatible with it being merely a preferred indifferent.

First, it is a standard part of Stoic doctrine that wise friends benefit one another (*SVF* 3.626), so it is not surprising that Seneca notes that true friendship is always beneficial (*Ep.* 35.1).⁹ Since nothing can benefit the sage that isn't a good, it therefore seems we must conclude that friendship is a good. Further, the fact that Seneca himself recognises that calling friendship a good might be thought to be a problem and tries to answer it in *Ep.* 109 indicates clearly that Seneca himself sees friendship as a good. Additionally, friendship is also choiceworthy for its own sake, not merely naturally desired (*Ep.* 9.12).¹⁰ Preferred indifferents are only choiceworthy insofar as they are chosen, since choosing between indifferents utilises virtue. Thus, relabelling friendship as a preferred indifferent would require much more than simply re-classifying it; it would require that friendship play a very different role than it does in Stoic philosophy. As a result, friendship does seem to be a good, albeit external and relational.

But if friendship is a good and therefore benefits the sage, we must ask how it benefits without undermining the completeness of the sage's good. In *Ep.* 109, Seneca directly addresses the question of how one wise

person can benefit another one, concluding that it is indeed possible to do so because the sage's virtue is activated in friendship. Seneca describes the process of activation of one's mind by a good thing as 'arous[ing] the mind's impulse toward itself in accordance with nature' (*Ep.* 118.9). The good 'shapes and structures' the mind (*Ep.* 106.4), and thus activates the mind not by changing the qualities that already exist but by spurring the agent herself to engage in activity. To see how one may possess a quality fully despite needing another force to demonstrate possession of the quality, consider a fragile vase. Even though the vase's fragility may not be demonstrated until I carelessly drop it and it shatters into thousands of pieces, my dropping the vase did not make it fragile. The vase was fragile already, even when that fragility was not being demonstrated.¹¹ Likewise, when two virtuous friends benefit each other by activating the virtue of the other, each friend is able to bring out something in the other that would otherwise lie dormant, as Seneca explains:

Good people are helpful to each other because each gives exercise to the other's virtues, keeping his wisdom in the stance proper to it. Each needs someone to compare and investigate with. Practice is the training for proficient wrestlers, and musicians are stimulated by those who are as expert as themselves. The sage too needs his virtues to be activated [*agitacione*]: just as he makes himself active [*movet*], so also he is made active [*movetur*] by another person who is wise. How exactly will the one help the other? By giving him a prod and demonstrating opportunities for honorable actions. Apart from this, the wise man will give utterance to some of his own reflections and let the other learn his discoveries; even he will always have something to discover, something to extend his mind with (*Ep.* 109.1–3).¹²

The friendship between the sage and her friend provides an opportunity for the activity of virtue, just as wrestlers wrestling or musicians playing together also offer an opportunity for two partners to make certain qualities active. Although virtues may be activated by this activity together, the sense of activation intended here does not suggest that the friend is *adding* anything to the sage's own virtue that the sage is missing, but instead offers circumstances under which she may engage in activity and *exercise* the virtue she already possesses. The musician possesses his musical ability independently of playing music with his fellow musician, and yet the two playing together may provide stimulation to exercise each's existing musical talent and produce something new. The production of a new musical piece by the two musicians working together does not suggest that the musical qualities

of either musician were incomplete; instead, they produce something new together that results from the skills each already possesses since perfect and complete virtue does not mean that the two sages cannot discover new things together. 'By working together', Seneca explains later in the letter, 'they will produce an excellent result' (109.16).

Likewise, the fact that the wrestler benefits from practicing with another expert wrestler does not show that his talent for wrestling is lacking in some way, but rather, it is the result of a constraint imposed by the activity itself. A wrestler cannot wrestle by himself, and yet his wrestling ability may still be complete even though he cannot demonstrate it without his partner. Thus, even if the practice of this ability requires the partner, the wrestling partner does not add anything to the original wrestler's ability. In the same way, the friend does not benefit the sage by providing something she lacks but instead by helping her to practice the skills she already has. The sage's virtue is independent and complete, and yet there are certain virtuous acts that are relational and thus cannot be performed outside of a relationship. That the sage cannot benefit someone outside of a relationship, for instance, does not entail that her virtue is not complete.

Moreover, the benefit that is provided to the sage by the virtuous friend is not one-sided, since both benefit by the mutual opportunities to engage in intellectual discourse and practice virtue together. While any interaction might provide an occasion to act virtuously, Seneca explains that the only external person who can help a sage to activate her perfect reason is another sage (109.11). Together, the two virtuous friends may discover and share knowledge together, help one another by pointing out opportunities to exercise virtue, and encourage one another in the pursuit of virtue. This does not undermine the sage's virtue, since the friendship does not make the sage's virtue more complete but rather enables conditions in which she can exercise her already-complete virtue.

A third analogy discussed in this same letter shows the importance of friendship for the maintenance of virtue through offering opportunities for practicing virtue. Here Seneca responds to an imagined interlocutor who objects that the complete sage has no need of benefit and any action someone took to benefit him would therefore be merely superfluous, in much the same way that heating an already-hot object is. Just as it is pointless to heat a hot object, so, too, it is to benefit the sage who already has complete happiness and virtue.

Seneca begins his response by objecting that the metaphor is a limited one, since – among other factors – 'heat is a single thing' but the ways

in which a friend can benefit the sage by activating virtue are many (109.9). I take Seneca here to be highlighting the fact that there are many ways that a fellow sage may help another sage maintain virtue, rather than the much simpler 'add additional heat' approach that must be taken to ensure hot objects remain hot. In spite of the limitations of the metaphor, however, Seneca does acknowledge that a hot object will not indefinitely maintain its temperature without heat, and likewise, the sage requires friends so that he may 'share his virtues with them', allowing the friends to share the good of enjoying virtue together and to engage their virtues in concert with one another. This mutual exercise of virtue does not add any additional good to the sage; while the sage's good is already complete, friends help him to maintain the fullness of his virtue in accordance with nature by providing occasions for virtuous activity. But while the Stoic sage has perfected his rationality and he is consistently virtuous (showing that his virtue and happiness are complete), even the sage does not know all facts, so his virtuous friends may contribute by filling in facts he does not know, using their own knowledge to help him apply his perfect virtue in new environments, helping him to discover quicker ways to the truth, and making use of an outside eye since even perfect knowledge of virtue does not guarantee perfect application in all circumstances (109.5, 14). As Seneca notes, 'even the wise see more accurately in cases that are not their own' (109.16).

This interpretation of activation also makes more sense of the rest of the letter that follows this. Seneca continues by explaining that friends prompt one another to virtuous acts and their interactions produce joy and tranquillity. While wisdom is excellent and beneficial in itself, sharing it with friends also produces joy. They benefit one another not by completing one another's virtue, but through participating in virtuous actions together (109.5).¹³ The two friends take joy in one another's virtue and practice their virtue together, but this does not take away from the completeness of each sage's virtue, since it is virtuous actions practiced together that produce joy and tranquillity.

This interpretation is further supported by Seneca's remark at *Ep.* 9.8 that the wise person desires friends so that he may practice his own virtue, indicating that friendship offers additional opportunities for virtuous action. In addition to being consistent with the general thrust of *Ep.* 109, this interpretation does not conflict with Seneca's Stoic position that the sage cannot lose or gain virtue, unlike an interpretation on which virtue is added to the sage through friendship. Given this, I conclude that the exercise interpretation offers a coherent and

compelling explanation of the goodness of friendship that does not undermine the completeness of the sage's virtue.

IV

This explains the benefit of friendship for even the sage and why such help doesn't undermine the sage's completeness in a plausible manner, but this may seem to feed into the worry about self-sufficiency, since it underscores the fact that the friendship is required for the sage to practice some types of virtue. If friendship is necessary in this way, then it seems as though the sage's happiness depends upon her friends and hence that she is not self-sufficient. Yet Seneca himself explicitly rejects the notion that the Stoic's good depends on her friends, noting that although the sage desires friends, she does not need them for a happy existence (*Ep.* 9.4–5). How to reconcile these claims, however, is a puzzle. Since the continuance of friendship is contingent on the friend, this seems to undermine the Stoic sage's self-sufficiency since her happiness is thus partially dependent on someone other than herself.¹⁴ Thus, if friendship truly is a good for the sage, how can she remain self-sufficient?

The answer, I suggest, will importantly depend on why friendship is a good and why the loss of a friend does not harm the sage. Though possessing a friend is a good, the sage need never worry about the loss of a friend undermining her happiness since particular friends are merely preferred indifferents, and the loss of a preferred indifferent is no real loss at all.

For the Stoic, friendship is a good because it benefits the friends, and it is this loss of benefit that might harm the Stoic when the friendship is lost. The wise person, however, will not be harmed since she will have more than just one friend, and thus need never worry about lacking friends, at least theoretically. Moreover, the wise person possesses the art of making friends, so she will simply be able to find an appropriate substitute if the need arises (*Ep.* 9.5–6). In fact, Seneca writes that the person who decides to grieve the loss of a particular friend instead of making new friends is foolish, comparing him to someone who loses his only tunic: 'If someone who has lost his only tunic were to weep and wail, rather than look about for something to put over his shoulders to keep himself warm, wouldn't you think he was an idiot?' (*Ep.* 63.11). Seneca's explanation for why the aspiring Stoic should not grieve is not merely a way of convincing the person who is not yet a sage to avoid

grief but also an explanation of why that behaviour is not rational, which offers insight into why it is that the sage will not grieve in the first place. By having more than one friend and always being able to make a new one, Seneca ensures that his happiness will remain intact, since he can always turn to his other friends if one is lost.

Even so, we might wonder whether it will really be as easy to make friends as Seneca claims it is. After all, he concedes elsewhere that true friendship and other Stoic sages will both be rare. This, however, need not be an obstacle for the Stoic, since friendships outlast the friends, so the sage can always be with her friend even when he is absent or dead (*Ep.* 9.6). This also means that the wise person who is shipwrecked will still possess the good that her friends brought her, even without an ongoing reciprocal relationship, since the sage may spend her time always with whomever she chooses, if only in her memory (*Ep.* 9.16 and 55.11). The friendship, Seneca writes movingly, is not buried with the friend, and thus since the Stoic's memories of a friend can always continue to contribute to her good, she will be free from worry (*Ep.* 99.4–5).

Additionally, the sage need not restrict her circle of friends to those she has actually met, since she can be friends even with virtuous people from the past; Seneca himself extols the benefits of being friends with Zeno, Pythagoras, Democritus, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Chrysippus, and Posidonius, who are always accessible through their writings and whose wisdom promotes the Stoic sage's happiness (*Brevitate Vitae* 14.5). In opening up friendship to wise people of the past, the Stoic gains wisdom and ensures that she will never lack friends. Since the sage never need be at a loss for friends or worry about running out of friends, she thus remains self-sufficient.

That the Stoic sage's friends may include people she has never met indicates how expansive the Stoic understanding of friendship is, and provides evidence that the good of friendship is neither personal nor particular. Moreover, if the friendship is valuable because it is a chance for the sage to practice virtue and benefit her friend, then one wise friend is as good as any other. And if one friend is as good as any other, then it also must be that old friends are easily replaced, which is exactly what Seneca suggests. He recognises that losing a friend results in a perceived loss, but says that the Stoic who fails to realise that his other friends can make up for the loss misunderstands the nature of the loss. Why the Stoic himself suffers no loss when his friend dies thus depends on his friend being replaceable, and thus interchangeable; it is because his friends are easily replaceable that he simply turns to another friend

and thus never lacks the good of having a friend. Seneca thus advises the Stoic in the following way:

Look on everything that pleases you in the same way as you look at verdant leaves: enjoy them while they last. One or another of them will fall as the days pass, but their loss is easy to bear, because leaves grow again. It's no different with the loss of those you love and think of as your life's delight. They can be replaced, even though they are not reborn (*Ep.* 104.11).

We ought to regard our friends and loved ones like plants: while in leaf, we enjoy them, but we recognise that just as leaves must fall, so our particular friends will die and be replaced by other friends without any real loss occurring. Moreover, replacing a lost friend is a straightforward process: 'The one you loved has passed away: find someone to love. Replacing the friend is better than crying' (*Ep.* 63.11). For Seneca, it is under the Stoic's control how many friendships he has since

it rests with [the sage] how quickly he gets a replacement. Just as Phidias, if he should lose one of his statues, would immediately make another, so this artist at friend-making will substitute another in place of the one who is lost (*Ep.* 9.5).

Here making a new friend is compared to carving a statue, implying that the sage can simply make more new friends rather than mourning those he has lost. Critically, not only *can* the sage do this, but he *ought* to, and hence he need never fear that his happiness will be undermined.

Thus, if the good in the friendship is not personal and friends can be easily replaced with other virtuous people, the sage's reliance on friendship doesn't depend on any *individual* friend but on having a virtuous friend generally. But if an individual friend does not contribute to the sage's good, this has the further implication that although friendship or having a friend *qua* virtuous activator is a good, a friend *qua* individual friend is *not* a good.¹⁵ That is, while friendships generally are part of the sage's good, her friendship with a particular person is merely a preferred indifferent, since the loss of the particular friendship will not undermine her happiness.

The specific claim Seneca makes about the necessary benefit of friendship even though the wise person does not need a friend gives additional support to the interpretation I offer above. For instance, at *Ep.* 9.5 and 9.15, Seneca claims that the sage does not wish to be without a friend and yet he may do so without undermining his happiness, indicating that the friend is a preferred indifferent. Here, however, Seneca is clearly speaking about a friend *qua* particular friend (that is,

the sage can lack any particular virtuous friend without undermining his happiness, and hence any particular friend or friendship is a preferred indifferent). Yet in the very same letter, Seneca says that 'friendship is choiceworthy in itself' (9.12), which is only true if friendship itself is a good and not a preferred indifferent. Moreover, Seneca elsewhere explicitly distinguishes between friendship and particular friends, writing that though friends die, friendships do not, suggesting that friendship and friends can come apart (*Ep.* 6.2).

Understanding individual friends as preferred indifferents also makes sense of Seneca's analogy between the loss of part of one's eye or hand and the loss of a particular friend (*Ep.* 9.4–5, 14–15). Since neither the particular body part nor the particular friend is necessary to the sage's happiness, she is self-sufficient without either, even though she prefers to keep both. This is precisely how one would speak of a preferred indifferent, and hence the interpretation I offer shows that Seneca is not simply being inconsistent here. In contrast to particular friends, however, friendship is necessary (like the body itself), and again, this is how we would speak of a good. Thus, while friendship *is* a good, particular friends are not, and thus the loss of a particular friend does not undermine happiness, just as the loss of one's eye or hand would not. And if replacement of an individual friend is easy, then the sage's happiness is still up to her, and the loss of any individual friend doesn't threaten her self-sufficiency.

V

The easy replaceability of the Stoic sage's friend with other virtuous people sits uneasily with Seneca's claim that close friendships are characterised not just by virtue but also by intimate bonds created through a shared life together.¹⁶ Contra arguments that valuing friends *qua* virtue does not undermine intimacy, I will show the kind of intimacy Seneca presupposes and aims at requires valuing the friend and their shared bond as irreplaceable, so a consistent Stoic must resolve the tension by detaching from his friend to remain self-sufficient. Detachment is at odds with developing intimate friendships, so the type of friendship that will be consistent with maintaining self-sufficiency will be shallow and distant, rather than deep and intertwined. Since the deepest form of friendship is incompatible with valuing friends *qua* virtue alone, I thus conclude that Seneca's account should therefore be rejected as a model for our own friendships.

Seneca's correspondence presents a picture of friendships constituted by intimate bonds between friends who share a common life. This demonstrates that Seneca sees an ideal friendship as intimate and particular, not detached and impersonal. In a letter to Lucilius, Seneca writes that good friendship is characterised by trust, self-disclosure, and attachment, and he illustrates those qualities in his own letters, which often openly discuss his own feelings and struggles. Making a friend, he advises, entails being ready to 'receive [the friend] with all your heart, and speak with him as candidly as with yourself' since trust, self-disclosure, and emotional openness go hand-in-hand (*Ep.* 3.2). Though Seneca acknowledges that the good Stoic should live so that she is not ashamed of her secrets, there are nevertheless matters that she should keep only for her closest friends, since sharing those private concerns is an important part of the trust that is central to intimate friendship (*Ep.* 3.3–4). Trust with one's deepest concerns and secrets relies on valuing the friend not only as a virtuous person (since any virtuous person would be objectively trustworthy) but as the particular person who is trusted. This trust between friends thus creates a relationship characterised by mutuality and attachment.

The two friends do not only share secrets and spend time with one another in shared activities, however; they also see all of their interests as interwoven with one another's. Being concerned about all of the things that affect one's friend is necessary for good friendship because 'friendship creates between us a shared interest than includes everything. Neither good times nor bad affect just one of us; we live in common' (*Ep.* 48.2).¹⁷ While we have some things in common with all people in virtue of our shared humanity, Seneca emphasises that Lucilius should have 'everything in common with his friend' (*Ep.* 48.3). On Seneca's picture, good friends share a life together that is characterised by commonality of lives and interests. What affects one friend will affect both because they are friends, showing that an intimate bond is integral to Seneca's conception of ideal Stoic friendships. This inseparability of the two friends and the interconnection of their interests implies a deep attachment that is rooted in their shared bond and cemented by their mutual trust, emotional investment, and activity together. While virtue is an important basis for beginning the friendship in the first place, the importance of taking all interests of the other in common shows that the bond becomes valuable for its own sake. Thus, it is not simply that each friend sees the other as instrumental to pursuing an end that they both happen to have (virtue), but that the

friends see their life together and the bond created between them as intrinsically valuable.

To avoid the loss that might naturally seem to follow from losing an intimate friend, it might be thought that Seneca would recommend less intimate friendships, but Seneca believes that relying on Stoic doctrine will provide all of the protection the sage will need against grief since death itself is not evil; it is only the fear of death and the judgement that death is evil that is bad (*Ep.* 104.10).¹⁸ Just as one enjoys a tree's leaves in spring and summer but knows that in the autumn they will fall, the same is true of those the sage loves. Thus, the Stoic should enjoy her friends and relatives while they are alive, but replace them when they are gone (*Ep.* 104.11). No matter what it may seem like, death is unavoidable, so it is not a real loss and grief is not appropriate (*Ep.* 99.6–10). Seneca acknowledges that we will naturally feel a brief mental sting and tears may accompany that biting (*morsus*) of loss but this pang is distinguished from grief, which is emotional distress based on false beliefs (*Ep.* 99.14–15, 20; cf. *Ep.* 63.1 and 71.27).¹⁹ A Stoic sage may briefly feel the loss of the friend, but she is not undone by it since she can cherish her loved ones for a season and avoid grief after the season is done by remembering the good times she had with her friend. In this way, the Stoic is able to have an intimate relationship with her friend without the threat of undermining her own happiness.

However, although Seneca did not explicitly engage the tension between intimacy and self-sufficiency, he did recognise the limitations of the Stoic account, reporting that he was overwhelmed with grief after the unexpected death of a younger friend (*Ep.* 63.14).²⁰ It is not hard to see why: sharing a common life together is what bonds the friends together, but it is also what makes each vulnerable to the other's loss. Intellectually accepting that a friend is merely a preferred indifferent who can be replaced by another virtuous person without loss is one thing, but being confronted with the loss of a particular individual and their shared life together is quite another. Deep attachment to the friend as an individual opens each friend's happiness up to contingencies beyond their individual control as their lives and goods become intertwined. Grief thus seems inevitable on either her part or his, since it is the rare pair of friends who pass away at the same time, and forming attachments to friends will subject Stoic friends to externalities that they have no control over.

If this is right, the replaceability assumed by Stoic doctrine is not compatible with intimate friendship in which the friends create a shared bond that depends, at least in part, on valuing one another as the

particular individuals they are. But perhaps valuing friends as particular, irreplaceable individuals is not necessary for close friendship, and if so, the Stoic need not choose between self-sufficiency and developing the kind of friendships Seneca desires.²¹ Indeed, a view like this is defended by Jennifer Whiting, who argues that loving a friend properly does not involve valuing her *qua* irreplaceable particularity, but rather *qua* embodiment of virtue. While this view of friendship is impersonal in that the friend is not loved for her particular features and is thus replaceable with another virtuous person, Whiting contends that her impersonal account values the friend for what makes her a worthy friend, rather than valuing her for accidental features that are unrelated to her virtue, such as being conceived from a particular sperm and egg.²²

Moreover, since one virtuous person is no more worthy of concern than any other virtuous person and a virtuous agent should have disinterested affection for all other virtuous people, there is no intrinsic justification for loving one virtuous person over another. If both friends take virtue to be important for their identities (as Stoic friends do), sustaining each other's commitment to virtue demonstrates loyalty to the individual friend, not just to the virtue that the friend embodies. Even though each friend is theoretically replaceable with any other virtuous person, this does not undermine love for the friend since virtue is central to the self-identities of such friends.²³ Valuing friends *qua* embodiment of virtue still values friends for their own sakes since it values them for what they themselves take to be important, thus treating them as subjects and not merely the means by which virtue is practiced.²⁴ Therefore, Whiting concludes that the proper ground of friendship is virtue, rather than particular characteristics.²⁵

If virtue is the proper ground of friendship, then emotionally attaching to and valuing the particular friend as irreplaceable is not only unnecessary but also misguided. If what matters for both shared activity and trust is virtue and similar goals, virtuous friends can engage in shared activity and trust without valuing the friend for her irreplaceable particularity. What makes a person trustworthy or good to pursue virtue with is her virtue; particular personality traits, like possessing a sarcastic sense of humour or enjoying Jane Austen novels, have little to do with it. Additionally, it is common to trust one's therapist with private information, even though the therapist is replaceable and the therapist-patient relationship does not entail any shared emotional attachment or commitment to an intimate bond, showing that trust need not require either irreplaceability nor emotional

attachment.²⁶ Since neither shared activity nor trust depend on a friend's particular characteristics or irreplaceability, virtuous friends may engage in shared activity and trust one another without seeing the friend as irreplaceable. Thus, it seems that the impersonal account of friendship can preserve the Stoic need for self-sufficiency without excluding the aspects of shared life together that proponents of intimate friendships (including Seneca) desire.

I agree with Whiting that all virtuous people are equally worthy as potential friends and that the reasons for developing a friendship with one over another are often due to serendipitous factors like proximity and psychological preferences. In advance of becoming friends, there may be little reason to choose one virtuous person to befriend over another. Nevertheless, once they become friends, each friend gains reasons to value the other friend's particularity that are rooted in their shared commitment. These reasons are not simply justified by pragmatic concerns like practical limits on time, as Whiting suggests.²⁷ Instead, they are generated by the bond between the friends and it is this sort of union that is impossible if friends are not valued for their particularity. If the friend is valued only for her virtue, this will limit how much intimacy is possible in the relationship since developing intimacy depends on valuing the friend *qua* particular person and taking their shared bond to be valuable in itself (not just instrumentally valuable as a means of practicing or developing virtue). Thus, the kind of intimacy that Seneca desires cannot be grounded in valuing one's friend for her virtue alone.

To see why this is so, consider the aims for which shared activity and trust are pursued on the intimate view of friendship. In intimate friendships, shared activity is aimed at building the connection between friends. It is not just that the friends have similar tastes or interests, since there are plenty of people who enjoy the same activities and yet do not become more than acquaintances. Instead, the two friends engage in shared activity together as a means of developing connection.²⁸ As Nancy Sherman emphasises in her discussion of friendship, common interests may develop out of the friendship itself, so that friends might find an activity they never pursued separately (say, watching birds frolic) that they now enjoy because the two friends do it together.²⁹ The activity is therefore valuable because it builds the friendship, not simply because it is an end each individual brought to the friendship.

Likewise, the aim of self-disclosure in friendship is to build a shared bond of trust between friends. This contrasts with the goal a patient has in sharing with his therapist, where his aim is to address psychological

concerns, not to share as a part of a mutual exchange intended to demonstrate trust and sustain intimacy.³⁰ In friendship, however, sharing demonstrates that one values the friend *qua* particularity, not merely because the friend is a person who is objectively trustworthy. As Laurence Thomas explains, it is by the 'equal self-disclosure of intimate information' that 'the bond of trust between deep friends is cemented', since the willingness to share private information signals to the friend that they are valued in a special way.³¹ Thus, sharing secrets in the context of friendship is a sign of trust that seeks to deepen the bond between friends by demonstrating a desire to be known by the other.³²

As the shared trust, activities, and ends build and sustain the emotional connection between the friends, the friends develop a special concern for one another and their good that is integral to the friendship. This concern for the friend as the particular person one has a committed relationship with is important here, as Elizabeth Telfer, Nancy Sherman, Diane Jeske, and Bennett Helm have all emphasised in their discussions of friendship. This mutual commitment creates a deep emotional attachment between the friends and a reciprocal willingness to prioritise the good of one another so that one friend's good also becomes part of the other's good.³³ The kind of attachment here is not just a general well-wishing that one should feel for any fellow person, but a special attachment to the particular individual that one has developed an intimate bond with. The practices of sharing and pursuing common interests cannot be disentangled from the creation of emotional attachment and commitment because the reason for self-disclosure and shared activities is not merely to pursue one's individual aims with someone else whose aims are similar, but to pursue the friends' mutual aims together in a kind of shared agency. In the most intimate form of friendship, then, the friends' commitment to one another transforms each friend so that they come to share a single pursuit of life together in a mutual union that makes each friend non-fungible for the other.³⁴ Thus, it is the particular friend and the intimate bond that the friends share that is irreplaceable, not the friend's role as secret-keeper or activity partner.

The impersonal account of friendship assumes that since the role that the virtuous friend plays is replaceable, so, too, is the friend and the shared bond. But while the function the friend played as virtuous partner can be replaced, the bond they shared cannot. Imagine that instead of a friend, it is a person's spouse who dies. Even if the widow re-marries years later, it would be a mistake to think that her new spouse is interchangeable with her old one, or that grief over losing her

old spouse is inappropriate now that she has a new spouse. If we take the second spouse as a mere replacement for the first, we have confused the role the first spouse played for the relationship that the couple shared. The relationship and the role are separate things, and it is appropriate to mourn the loss of the deceased spouse and the shared bond while at the same time appreciating and nurturing the new spouse and the different bond shared with him. Though the role is replaceable, the person and the bond created is not; forming a new relationship does not replace the original attachment because it is not merely the function that the person played but their particularity and the shared bond that is valued intrinsically. On the impersonal account, however, the bond between the friends only has instrumental value to promote virtue in each friend, not intrinsic value in itself. Hence, impersonal friendship cannot account for the intrinsic value of the bond and the friend.

If what is important for friendship is simply having someone to participate in virtuous actions with and to trust with secrets, then one virtuous person will be as good as any other and thus the friend's value is fungible. For impersonal friends, the individual ends of two virtuous people happen to coincide, and hence the friends pursue virtue in a way that seems shared because they engage in virtuous activity side-by-side. But such friends do not pursue common interests or share private information because it develops their commitment or because they value their bond as an intrinsic good, but instead because it develops individual virtue. Assuming the friends are virtuous, this does allow each to value the other friend for the characteristic the friend most values, but this kind of valuing alone cannot develop the bond that leads each friend to take the other's interests to be shared in common and intermingled with their own. Neither friend can invest in a shared bond like that without the friend and their bond becoming irreplaceable and thus a risk to self-sufficiency. This does not rule out all forms of friendship on the impersonal account, but it does rule out the deepest forms of intimacy.

I have argued that Seneca must adopt the impersonal account of friendship if he is to remain self-sufficient. This is because taking the friend to be easily replaceable with any other virtuous person is not merely an accidental feature of Stoic friendship but is crucial for the Stoic's maintenance of his happiness. If the Stoic were to value his friend *qua* particularity, the Stoic's happiness would become partially contingent on something external to himself, and this would undermine his self-sufficiency. Likewise, taking the friend's good to be

entangled with the Stoic's own, as happens when the two friends come to form an intimate bond with one another, would make the Stoic's good contingent, and hence this deepest form of intimate friendship is ruled out for the Stoic.

Seneca thinks he can accept the importance of the shared bond between friends without any individual friend becoming intertwined with the Stoic's own good. But Seneca's own writing testifies to the very real difficulty of actually forging such a friendship, precisely because the Stoic must choose between truly intimate relationships that make her happiness vulnerable to loss and relationships that do not compromise self-sufficiency but lack intimacy. The bond and common life the two friends share has a relational value that is specific to their individual relationship, so if the friendship and the friend can so easily be replaced without any loss, Stoic friendships must be detached and shallow. The Stoic will be unable to form intimate relationships since Stoic friendship strips away all of the interconnected vulnerability at the heart of intimate relationships and replaces it with friendships whose intrinsic value derives only from producing virtue. Since the Stoic sage will always act virtuously, he will not behave selfishly toward his friends (indeed, he will sacrifice even his own life, if the situation calls for it), but there will be a fundamental alienation from other people at the heart of the sage's happiness due to the disconnection of the sage's good from those he is in relationship with.

Thus, anyone sympathetic to the Stoic account faces a tough choice between truly intimate relationships that make them vulnerable to loss and impersonal relationships that do not compromise self-sufficiency but lack intimacy. Those who wish to resolve the tension between intimacy and self-sufficiency and remain consistent with Stoic doctrine must take the latter option; control over their own happiness is too important for it to remain contingent as happiness is in relationships characterised by intimacy. With the comfort of Stoic doctrine that promises the Stoic that her own good will remain intact as long as she maintains her virtue, perhaps the Stoic will not be troubled by this. I suggest, however, that those of us who are not committed to Stoic doctrine should be. Though taking our good to be interwoven with the good of another carries with it the risk of loss, doing so recognises our nature as interdependent social beings, not merely isolated individuals, and allows us to form the intimate relationships that are central to the pursuit of a full human life.³⁵

Notes

1. Cf. DL 7.98 and 7.101–103; and Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 11.22.
2. From Graver and Long's translation, as are subsequent quotations. See also *Ep.* 9.10. For discussion of this as standard Stoic doctrine, see DL 7.130; Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1068F; and *Math.* 11.22–26.
3. Cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.70; DL 7.124.
4. Cf. DL 7.33,124; Stobaeus 2.108.
5. See also Seneca, *Ben.* 2.18.5 and *Ep.* 35.1, and *SVF* 3.626.
6. Lesses 1993: 62 assumes this.
7. Holowchak 2006: 96 argues for this claim on the basis that this passage is decisive.
8. As examples, see the explicit claims that having a good friend is an external good in DL 7.95; *Math.* 11.22–30 and 11.46; and Stobaeus 2.70.8. See also Reydamas-Schils 2005: 69, Wilcox 2012: 9, and Long 2013: 226, who all note that friendship is explicitly classed as a good for the Stoics.
9. See also *Ben.* 7.12 and *Ep.* 109.9.
10. Cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.70 and *Leg.* 1.49; DL 7.124.
11. I am grateful to Jeffrey Wilson for pushing me to articulate this more clearly, and to Dan Speak for suggesting this analogy.
12. Both verb forms translated as 'activated' or 'made active' in 109.2 have the sense of motion and movement. The first, a form of *agitatio*, suggests a kind of agitation that leads to movement and activity, particularly contemplative activity. This may be a later manuscript addition, but there are several additional reasons to take the sense of 'movement' and 'activity' seriously. The second and third uses are forms of the verb *moveo* (also used later on for activation at 109.11–12 and 118.9), which also has the sense of movement and activity. This interpretation is additionally supported by the analogy to the activities of producing music and wrestling together.
13. Cf. *Ep.* 6.4.
14. The self-sufficiency question has been raised before in Lesses 1993, Cassidy 2004, Evenepoel 2006, Holowchak 2006, and Long 2013. Cassidy takes it to be an unresolved puzzle and Evenepoel suggests that there is simply a paradox, while Lesses, Holowchak, and Long think friendship is not necessary, so the Stoic does not depend on her friends.
15. While Lesses notes that friends are 'relatively replaceable', he claims that both friendship and having a particular friend are preferred indifferents (1993: 62, 72, and 74). Since, as I argued previously, friendship *is* a good for the Stoics, I do not think this is the right solution.
16. The thesis that Stoic friends are valued only for their virtue is explicitly endorsed in Lesses 1993: 72–74, Vogt 2008: 149, and Long 2013: 236. Whether Stoic friendships are to be distant is more disputed; Lesses holds that distance in Stoic friendships is necessary, but Graver (2007: 183–184) and Wilcox (2012: 123, 129–130) note that friendships between Stoics are characterised by intimacy and emotional entanglement.
17. See also *Ep.* 6.3
18. Cf. Epictetus, *Ench.* 5. See also Seneca, *Ep.* 74.24.
19. See Konstan 2018: 141–143 for a discussion of grief in animals and sages in Seneca.
20. Similarly, see also Cicero's moving account of his devastation in the wake of his daughter's death in *Epistulae ad Atticum* 12.13–28.
21. Thank you to the anonymous reviewer who pushed me to address this objection in more depth.

22. Whiting 1991: 12–13.
23. Whiting 1991: 22–23.
24. Whiting 1991: 13–14.
25. Whiting 1991: 23–24.
26. The example of therapists as trustworthy even though they are replaceable was suggested by anonymous reviewer.
27. See Whiting 1991: 23.
28. Similarly, Elizabeth Telfer explains that our shared activity must be motivated by certain reasons and desires that are specific to friendship, not simply by impersonal reasons (Telfer 1970–71, 224–225).
29. Sherman 1987: 598–599.
30. See Thomas 1987 for a more detailed discussion of the value of symmetrical disclosure and relationship for the development of friendship.
31. Thomas 1987: 223.
32. This point is nicely defended and articulated in Cocking and Kennett 1998, 505 and 518. They argue that it is not the privacy of the information shared between friends, per se, that creates intimacy, but rather that the friends choose to share what is important to each of them with the other. See also Sherman 1987: 611.
33. Sherman 1987: 600; Thomas 1987: 232; Helm 2008: 43.
34. Bennett Helm develops this point in Helm 2008: 41–43. See also Sherman 1987: 600 on friendship as forming a ‘singleness of mind’.
35. Particular thanks for their very helpful comments are owed to Corinne Gartner, Don Morrison, and Victor Saenz, and several anonymous reviewers.

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