KANTIAN FRIENDSHIP

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Abstract

This chapter spells out Kant's account of friendship, with a particular focus on what Kant calls moral friendship. Kantian moral friendship, while resembling Aristotelian complete friendship in many ways, differs in that it emphasizes the importance and challenges of maintaining trust and mutual respect in relationships. Kant sees friendship as a central good in human life, at least among people who are themselves good. The intimacy of friendship fosters self-disclosure and facilitates moral self-understanding. It also presents practical and moral risks, including the possibility of betrayal and the loss of the other person's respect. These risks, however, are worth taking, given the value of moral friendship. We should, Kant thinks, seek out friendships and endeavor to be good friends to each other. In crucial ways, Kantian moral friendships embody the idealized human relationships for which we ought to strive.

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When people look back into the history of philosophy for an account of friendship, they rarely think to reach for Immanuel Kant. This is unfortunate, because Kant's picture of friendship is rich and nuanced, with insights relevant to friendship in contemporary contexts. It shares key features of Aristotle's much more famous account, but it also contains distinctive Kantian elements that modern readers might very well find appealing.[1] Like Aristotle, Kant thinks that good friendships are tremendously valuable contributors to a good human life. Kant, however, is rather more concerned about the fragility of friendships in light of common human failings. In Kant's eyes, friendships can be risky undertakings, but the moral value of friendship makes the risks well worth taking.

Readers with only a passing acquaintance with Kant might be surprised to learn that he even has an account of friendship. To many people, Kant seems like someone who spent his life

essentially alone in his ivory tower, producing ambitious and sweeping works of philosophy for the ages. Moreover, Kant's ethical writings are well known for their emphasis on individual rational agency. It can be hard to imagine that he would have bothered to write on a mundane topic like friendship or that he might have had anything philosophically interesting to say about such a practical ethical matter.

This common picture of Kant as a philosopher concerned only with the most abstract ethical questions is, however, a caricature. In fact, Kant's published writing on ethics contain many discussions of social relationships and the ethical issues that arise within those relationships. (Among other things, Kant had well-defined views about how to host a good dinner party.) Moreover, Kant wrote on such topics from his own experience as someone who enjoyed the company of others and who benefited greatly from his own friendships. It should not really come as a surprise that he had philosophically interesting things to say about the relationships he valued so highly himself.

Studying Kant's views on friendships is also illuminating as a way of understanding Kant's often forbidding discussions of rational moral principles. The best kind of friendships, which Kant called moral friendships, can be understood as imperfect embodiments of idealized moral relationships between rational agents. In reading what Kant wrote about such friendships, we can make better sense of Kant's famous categorical imperative and the ways in which it structures our actual human relationships and interactions. In many ways, friendships are the embodiment of the kind of moral community Kant thinks we should be aiming to build.

Kant's works contain three main discussions of friendship, each of which has a distinctive tone and advances slightly different claims. One discussion is at the end of the *Metaphysics of Morals* and the other two are in the *Lectures on Ethics*. This essay will draw on

all three discussions, as well as relevant sections of his other works.[2] My aim is not to engage in the kind of scholarship that would generate an authoritative account of what Kant thought about friendship; rather, my goal is to provide a more general picture of Kantian friendship for readers who are not deeply familiar with Kant's texts. The picture, I suggest, is one worth taking seriously in contemporary discussions of friendship.

This essay will be structured as follows. I'll begin by laying out Kant's account of friendship, emphasizing the ways in which it both resembles Aristotle's account and departs from that account. Kant's picture of friendship, like his broader moral theory, rests on an idealized conception of moral relationships. As we'll see, that idealized conception informs the way we should undertake actual human friendships. I'll then turn to the challenges of friendship as Kant understands them. The challenges arise from fundamental human tendencies and propensities that detract from our capacity to develop and sustain the best kind of friendship. The remainder of the essay aims to highlight some of the especially philosophically distinctive and interesting features of Kant's account.

In the *Lectures on Ethics,* Kant distinguishes among three types of friendships—friendships of need, friendships of taste, and friendships of disposition or fellowship (C 424-427). In this, he more or less follows Aristotle, who divides friendships into the categories of utility, pleasure, and complete friendships. (Since Kant quotes Aristotle on friendship, it is safe to assume his familiarity with his predecessor's account.) Kant sometimes employs a fourth category of friendship, a category representing an ideal against which ordinary human friendships might be measured. Aristotle's account of complete friendship is also idealized in important respects, but the ideal friendship functions differently in Kant than it does in Aristotle. I will have more to say about this below. First, however, I will explain Kant's three categories of

friendship, focusing especially on the third. Like Aristotle, Kant considers one form of friendship as having singular importance in human life.

The threefold division has a somewhat hierarchical structure. Friendships of need are focused on a reciprocal exchange of goods and services necessary for continued life and functioning. In this, they resemble Aristotle's concept of friendships of utility, which do not seem much like friendships to modern readers, given that something as mundane as a carpool might qualify. Likewise, at one point, Kant seems to dismiss friendships of need as a primitive kind of friendship, based on the importance of banding together for purposes of survival. And yet Kant also takes seriously the fact that we are, by nature, needy creatures and that one of the morally important features of friendship is the ready willingness to respond to the needs of one's friends. As we'll see, Kantian ethics generally has what we might call a complicated relationship with human vulnerability. Any friendship will have to take into account our situation as limited, dependent beings who rely on others for support in achieving our ends. In that sense, every friendship is a friendship of need. But of course, not all friendships are merely about meeting each other's needs, and Kant certainly thinks that the best friendships involve quite a bit more.

The second type of Kantian friendship is a friendship of taste. It resembles Aristotle's friendship of pleasure insofar as it rests on a foundation of mutual enjoyment of each other's company. Kant, however, adds an interesting twist when he emphasizes the value of disparate backgrounds for such friendships. We often suppose that people will be drawn to others who are similar to them when it comes to things like interests, hobbies, and work. Kant, however, suggests that friendships of taste function best when the parties involved have different occupations. He says that:

> one scholar will have no friendship of taste with another, for the one can do what the other can; they cannot satisfy or entertain one another, for what one knows, the other

> knows too; but a scholar may well have a friendship of taste with a merchant or a soldier, and so long as the scholar is no pedant, and the merchant no blockhead, then each can entertain the other on his own subject (C 426).

Perhaps when he developed his account of friendships of taste, the scholarly Kant was thinking of his own very close friendship with an English merchant named Joseph Green. There is no doubt that Kant deeply valued Green, finding him an important source of information, insight, and wisdom. Indeed, it is the capacity of others to provide us with new perspectives and expand our knowledge of the world that, for Kant, makes them suitable candidates for friendships of taste. Such friends are obviously much more than drinking buddies or bowling partners. Rather, these friendships appear to revolve around conversation and the sharing of ideas. We seek out friendships of taste as a way of learning more about the world, and we value these friendships because of their ability to expand our intellectual and social horizons.

Kant's emphasis on mutual enlightenment in friendships of taste is a distinctive feature of his account. It also illustrates the importance of friends to our own self-improvement. We do not seek out friendships of taste merely as a matter of personal benefit; indeed, doing so would put the friendship squarely back into the category of friendships of need. But friendships of taste do benefit us by improving our understanding of the world and other people, something Kant takes to be a significant good in its own right. We might see such friendships as helping us fulfill one of the two "ends that are also duties" that structure the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant's last and perhaps most comprehensive ethical work.[3] There Kant asserts that I have a duty to myself to cultivate my own natural and moral perfection, insofar as that is possible for me. Friendships of taste help sharpen my power of rational judgment, something that Kant, at least, found both pleasant and practically useful.

Kantian friendships of taste are appealing in their own right. But for Kant, there is another level of friendship, one that he initially calls friendships of disposition. The name is a bit misleading because the disposition Kant has in mind is a moral disposition. These are the friendships that Kant sometimes calls moral friendships. (Kant also uses the term 'moral friendship' to refer to the idealized version of these relationships, a point to which I will return shortly.) Friendships of disposition are based on mutual trust in the other's good will. In Kantian terms, to have a good will is to have an abiding commitment to morality. Kant's friendships of disposition can take place only between people with such a commitment.

Readers of Aristotle will recall that his third and final category of friendship, known as complete friendship, has virtue as a precondition. It is not possible to be a complete friend in Aristotle's sense without virtue because only virtuous people are capable of acting for the other's good, something that is a requirement of Aristotelian friendship. This is in part because friends must be unselfish enough to put their friends first, but it is also because for Aristotle, it takes virtue to know what the other's good consists in. An example will help make this clear.

Consider someone who thinks that their friend spends too much time on their schoolwork and not enough time relaxing. In the Aristotelian moral framework, there is a fact of the matter about whether this is true. It is possible that the friend is genuinely overworked and needs to have their priorities corrected. It is also possible that the friend's priorities are fine as they are, and that slacking off would be the wrong choice. On Aristotle's view, it takes virtue (specifically the virtue of practical wisdom) to know which of these things is true. A vicious person is going to get it wrong. And this is part of the reason why a vicious person cannot reliably act for the good of their friend. They simply won't know what it is. Vicious people are more likely to corrupt their friends, and so cannot be, as Aristotle says friends must be, a good to their friends.

Only a virtuous person is capable of making someone's life genuinely better through their presence.

Kant largely agrees with Aristotle that moral friendship can exist only between two morally good people, but his reasons are rather different. While Kant does share Aristotle's view that friends make us better, that isn't the primary point of moral friendship, nor is it the reason why we need our friends to have a moral disposition. Rather, Kant's focus is on the importance of trust in our personal relationships. We need our friends to be good people because we must be able to trust them. And we need to be able to trust them because the familiarity that goes along with friendship makes us vulnerable. Friendship, for Kant, is a relationship of great intimacy. We reveal ourselves to our friends—our thoughts, feelings, and flaws. This kind of self-revelation comes with risks. There is always a danger that we will put ourselves in the hands of people who prove unworthy of our trust.

In order to understand why Kant worries so much about the risks of self-revelation, it is helpful to take a step back and consider his broader picture of human nature. Perhaps reflecting the Pietist Lutheran tradition in which he was raised, Kant takes a rather unhappy view of our natural state as human beings. In one essay, Kant describes the human condition as one of "unsocial sociability."[4] By that he means that while we are drawn into society with others by both natural inclination and moral reasons, we find it difficult to coexist peacefully with other people. We are prone to competing with others and jockeying for position in social life. Kant ascribes this to our natural tendencies to pursue our own self-interest and to want to feel superior to others, tendencies that Kant refers to as self-love and self-conceit respectively. It is a constant struggle for us to rein in our self-love and squash our self-conceit, even in the context of

friendships. Envy and rivalry are difficult to eradicate in any relationship. This means that in pursuing moral friendships, we are, in some respects, fighting our natures.

This is why Kant thinks that true moral friendship is inevitably an ideal. There is no such thing as a perfect friendship because there is no such thing as a perfect person. No matter how committed we are to our friends, we are still prone to acting on reasons of self-love or self-conceit, rather than reasons of friendship. It is hard to keep one's "dear self," to use Hume's phrase, out of the way, even when it comes to our dearest friends. Even so, the ideal of friendship plays a very important role in helping us conduct our actual friendships because in those friendships, we aim to approximate the ideal. Because we can understand what idealized friendships are like, we are able to strive for them in our actual lives. Although we may not be able to rid ourselves of self-love and self-conceit, we can appreciate what it would mean to be in friendships where such tendencies played no role.

In his discussion of moral friendship in the *Metaphysics of Morals,* Kant defines it as the "union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect," a relationship that involves "each participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's well-being through the morally good will that unites them" (MM 469). The context makes it clear that he is talking about idealized moral friendship, especially since he goes on to say that it is "unattainable in practice" (MM 469). It is unattainable for several reasons. First and probably foremost, human nature makes it difficult for us to maintain a consistent focus on the other's well-being. But even when both parties to a friendship have the right moral disposition, there are additional challenges arising from what Kant describes as the two great moral forces of love and respect. It turns out that it is difficult to keep these two forces in balance because they are in some tension with each other. Kant rather memorably describes it this way:

> …it will be difficult for both to bring love and respect subjectively into that equal balance required for friendship. For love can be regarded as attraction and respect as repulsion, and if the principle of love bids friends to draw closer, the principle of respect requires them to stay at a proper distance from each other. This limitation on intimacy…is expressed in the rule that even the best of friends should not make themselves too familiar with each other (MM 470).

This tension is present in any human relationship, but it is especially apparent in friendship. Love draws us toward intimacy while respect tells us to maintain some boundaries. The challenge lies in determining how to keep those forces in the right balance.

Kant thinks that we owe duties of respect and love to all rational agents. The origins of this idea can be found in his articulation of the humanity formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (GW 430). There Kant claims that we have duties to treat others as ends in both a negative and a positive sense. The negative sense corresponds to the duty to avoid treating others (and ourselves) as a mere means. The positive sense corresponds to the duty to treat others as setters of ends. This latter duty is the source of our duties of love, including the duties of sympathy and beneficence. Kant argues that we are morally required to act to promote the permissible ends of others, although always in a way that respects their status as a fellow rational being with dignity.

Friendships are subject to the same moral constraints as any other relationship, in the sense that we owe general duties of love and respect to our friends. But of course, the relationship between friends is different from other moral relationships that we have. This is especially obvious when it comes to our duties of love. Although Kant thinks that we have duties to promote the (permissible) ends of all rational beings, we clearly have particular reason to care about the ends of our friends and to bring those about so far as we are able. Likewise, our general duty to sympathize in the fate of other rational beings takes a specific form in the case of our friends. It might seem, then, that the challenge of keeping love and respect in balance in

friendship is largely on the side of love, with the difficulty lying in ensuring that we overcome our own self-interest and act for the sake of our friends. And it is true that we often find it hard to do what love requires of us, whether we're talking about strangers or friends. But Kant seems to think that the more serious challenges of friendship have to do with respect, not love. We make a mistake if we dismiss the importance of respect in friendship or imagine that if friends can get love right, appropriate respect will naturally follow in its wake. Getting respect right in friendship can be even harder than getting love right.

One problem is that if we are not careful, the demands of love can swamp the demands of respect. In his discussion of the general duty of beneficence, Kant emphasizes that our obligation is to promote the ends that others actually have, not the ends that we would like them to have or that we think would be better for them. It is disrespectful to substitute our judgment for the judgment of another, acting as if we know more about their happiness than they do. This kind of boundary crossing is usually more apparent to us in the case of strangers than in the case of friends. If a stranger on the street stops me and offers me unsolicited parenting advice, it is relatively easy for me to recognize it as intrusive and respond accordingly. It is much more difficult to identify and maintain such boundaries among close friends. When people act from love, they sometimes lose sight of the need to respect their loved ones as separate individuals with goals and projects of their own. And likewise, it can be easy for us to lose sight of our own status as setters of ends in the context of loving relationships. Kant insists that friends need to be able to respect each other as setters of ends. Unbridled love is a threat to friendship in the absence of mutual respect.

There is a second, more specific problem about keeping love and respect in balance in friendship, a problem to which Kant returns in multiple places in his writings. This problem

arises from the intimacy generated by self-disclosure and the associated risks we take in engaging in it. As we have seen in the context of friendship of taste, Kant thinks that a significant part of friendship consists in sharing our thoughts, feelings, and ideas with each other. (Aristotle too emphasizes the importance of conversation in complete friendships.) Moreover, although Kant does not explicitly point this out, the mere fact that we spend so much time with our friends means that they have insights in our behavior and motives that strangers usually lack. Between what we reveal to friends through conversation and what is revealed to them in the course of our joint activities, it is evident that our friends know a great deal about us.

In the ideal version of moral friendship, there would be no danger that my friend would abuse my trust or cause me harm in virtue of what they know about me. Kant claims that idealized moral friendship permits "the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other" (MM 471). But this confidence is not easy to acquire in actual relationships, where ordinary human frailties and weaknesses routinely lead to betrayals, even among friends. In the real world, it can be hard to shake the feeling that we must inevitably be watching our backs, giving no one our complete trust.

Kant's writings on friendship repeatedly stress the difficulty of creating and sustaining mutual trust. It is not always clear whether he thinks it is difficult because we are unable to trust people even when they warrant our trust or because people are in fact not to be trusted, although he tends to focus on the latter. He is keenly aware of how frequently human beings fail to live up to what morality requires of us, and how readily our trust can be misplaced and misused if we are not careful. This means that if we are too quick to reveal ourselves to others, we may put ourselves in danger. Self-interested people may try to manipulate us. Envious people may try to

gain a feeling of superiority by divulging our flaws and weaknesses. This suggests that prudential considerations direct us to hold our cards close to our chest:

> …the evil is that we virtually never regard the other as a friend, but rather as an opponent, who will exploit our weakness and cleverly conceal his own. Hence the accepted rule: Deal with your friend as though he may well in the end become your enemy, can be explained as follows: Trust him with caution only, and disclose to him nothing which he might be able to misuse, to the detriment of your respect (V 679).

Kant isn't exactly endorsing this approach, but it does explain why he maintains that open-heartedness cannot be a duty. The world is too shadowy a place for that. As a general rule, we are wise to "keep the shutters closed" on our innermost thoughts and desires, lest we put ourselves at the mercy of unscrupulous people (C 445).[5]

And yet, Kant fully appreciates that this is a miserable way to conduct our lives. Although we find it hard to trust others, we are also drawn by the sociable part of our natures to the prospect of doing so. Open-heartedness is desirable, even if it is not a duty. This presents us with a practical tension:

> Man is a being meant for society (though he is also an unsociable one), and in cultivating the social state he feels strongly the need to reveal himself to others. But on the other hand, hemmed in and cautioned by fear of the misuse others may make of his disclosing his thoughts, he finds himself constrained to lock up in himself a good part of his judgments. He would like to discuss with someone what he thinks about his associates, the government, religion and so forth, but he cannot risk it: partly because the other person, while prudently keeping back his own judgments, might use this to harm him, and partly because, as regards disclosing his faults, the other person may conceal his own, so that he would lose something of the other's respect by presenting himself quite candidly to him (MM 471-472).

The practical tension arises from our deep desire to unburden ourselves to other people combined with a felt need for reserve as a matter of self-protection. Moral friendship, if we can pull it off, holds out the prospect of enabling us to resolve this tension, at least insofar as that is possible for flawed creatures like us. But in order to resolve the tension, we must find ways to create

intimacy within friendship that does not threaten the mutual respect that must be at its foundations.

Self-revelation poses prudential risks, at least if I put my trust in the wrong person. My so-called friend may take advantage of my unreserve and use it to their own advantage, and to my disadvantage. But the risks aren't merely prudential. There are moral risks to open-heartedness as well, risks having to do with respect and self-respect. This is why Kant is not confident that we can solve the problem of self-disclosure simply by ensuring that we reveal ourselves only to trustworthy people. The worry goes deeper than that.

Kant's concern is not simply that my friend will misuse the information I reveal to her. I may well have enough confidence in her commitment to morality to be sure she won't post my self-revelations on Twitter. But self-disclosure itself opens up my character in ways that may threaten the moral basis of our friendship. When we lay ourselves bare to another person, we risk losing the other person's respect. This is particularly true when we have reason to think that our friend will see faults in us.

Kant claims that it is duty for friends to tell each other what's wrong with them: "From a moral point of view, it is of course a duty for one of the friends to point out the other's faults to him; this is in the other's best interests and is therefore a duty of love" (MM 470). This claim is in some tension with his earlier insistence that we do not have a positive moral duty to improve other people, only ourselves (MM 394). It would seem that something about friendship alters this dynamic, although Kant does not explain it. In general, Kant thinks we cannot improve other people, since we cannot make it the case that another person has a good will. I cannot have a duty to do what it is not possible for me to do. We are obligated not to corrupt people, but otherwise, we are not obligated to make others better. It is thus not clear why Kant thinks that we

have a duty to point out flaws in our friends, unless he regards friendship as involving a kind of mutual assistance pact. If pointing out flaws is, as he says, a duty of love, it may fall under the duty of beneficence, which is a duty to promote the ends of others as they see them. But as we saw earlier, that duty is constrained by the ends that others actually have. It cannot be my duty to improve you unless you want me to improve you. So perhaps Kant is assuming that friends have it as their ends to be improved by each other. Even so, there are dangers to respect: "But the latter sees in this a lack of the respect he expected from his friend and thinks that he has either already lost or is in constant danger of losing something of his friend's respect, since he is observed and secretly criticized by him" (MM 470).

Here we see how our duties of love and respect put us in a bit of a bind. When we are open-hearted with our friends, we unburden ourselves, but we also reveal our flaws. Our friends have duties of love to point those flaws out to us. Even if they abstain, we are still aware of the possibility that their perception of their flaws will make them lose respect for us. Our own self-respect is also at stake. If my friend does not respect me, it is harder for me to respect myself. This is why open-heartedness, even among friends, generates moral risks and not merely prudential risks. Even if we can be confident that our friend will not abuse our trust, we find it difficult to maintain that all-important mutual respect.

One solution would be to give up on the idea of open-heartedness, but Kant thinks this would be a mistake. Although he worries about the risks of frank self-disclosure, he clearly thinks that we are all better served by living in a world in which open, honest conversation is possible. In such a world, our desire for knowledge can be satisfied more fully, and we are capable of making social progress. The need for reserve is regrettable for us as members of a moral community. It is also regrettable for us as individuals who wish to be known by others.

We should, therefore, work to create contexts in which open-heartedness is possible. Moral friendships are one such context. The person in such a friendship "is not completely alone with his thoughts, as in a prison, but enjoys a freedom he cannot have with the masses, among which he must shut himself up in himself" (MM 472). Moral friendships are a source of liberation, an escape into a world in which human beings relate to each other as members of the kingdom of ends. There is value for us in being able to experience such a world, both in its own right and because it helps us maintain our commitment to that larger moral kingdom.

This might explain why Kant claims that it is a moral duty for us to strive for such friendships, despite our inability to achieve them in their ideal state. He calls it a "duty set by reason, and no ordinary duty but an honorable one" (MM 469). Moral friendships are ways in which we imperfectly instantiate idealized moral relationships with other people. Although we ordinarily think of friendships as making us happy, Kant thinks that they do more than this. In striving to succeed in moral friendship, I make myself more deserving of whatever happiness they bring.

But in order for our moral friendships to succeed, we must solve the problems generated by the tension between love and respect. Essential to the resolution of this tension is the need to maintain moral equality in our relationships with our friends. Self-disclosure is prudentially riskier when it is one-sided. It is also morally riskier because it destabilizes our sense of ourselves as the moral equals of our friends. In order to address these risks, it is essential that our moral friendships involve reciprocity.

Kant's discussion of friendship is, in many ways, almost romantic. Indeed, it closely resembles his discussion of marriage (which would be more romantic if it weren't for his persistent and pervasive sexism). Kant sees marriage as a form of reciprocal self-giving. There is

risk to giving oneself over, body and soul, to another, but those risks are minimized when the giving is mutual. If I hand myself over to you and you hand yourself over to me, Kant thinks, there is a sense in which I get myself back. In the context of friendship, this means that when I open myself up to you and you do the same, our relationship is a relationship of equals.

The equality is crucial. Self-disclosure is less risky when it is reciprocal. This is not because it means that I'm in a better position to retaliate if you betray my trust. Rather, it reduces the likelihood that one party will end up feeling morally superior or inferior to the other. Remember that Kant thinks that self-conceit is a constant threat to our ability to engage in idealized moral relationships. It is what leads us to be constantly focused on our position relative to others. Being confronted with another person's flaws feeds our self-conceit, since it makes us feel superior to them. Likewise, being confronted with our own flaws is anxiety-producing because it threatens our perceived status in relationship to others, making us feel inferior. If I present myself as flawed when you do not, my fear is that you will be unable to respect me, something that impinges on my own capacity for self-respect. But if you also present yourself to me as flawed, our equality is restored.

Kant does not, of course, think that perceived moral superiority or inferiority is equivalent to actual moral superiority or inferiority. All rational beings are moral equals in the sense of having equal dignity and equal claim to being members of the kingdom of ends. This is true regardless of how others perceive us or how we perceive ourselves. But the perception of inequality is, in Kant's view, a threat to our ability to maintain relationships that reflect our actual equality. And this is why we have to worry about perceived inequality and its impact on mutual respect.

The threat of perceived inequality in friendships is not limited to the revelation of our flaws. It also looms over the ways in which friends present and respond to each other's needs. In his discussion of beneficence in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant raises the concern that beneficence can disrupt relationships of moral equality, particularly when it is one-sided (MM 453-454). He suggests that it is demeaning to be in the position of needing another's assistance (a view that is certainly controversial). He also says that benefactors have to take pains not to allow their acts of beneficence to generate moral smugness (a view that is likely much less controversial). The mere fact of our vulnerability generates problems about respect, particularly since we are not all equally in need of help.

Kant is aware of the challenges that lopsided neediness and beneficence pose to friendships. He thinks that friends, motivated by love, will want to respond to each other's needs. And friends, also motivated by love, will not want to burden each other with their needs. (This view, it is worth noting, is shared by Aristotle.) On paper, this may sound contradictory, but it is familiar to most of us from our own experiences. Often we don't want to bother our friends with our troubles, but at the same time, we want to help our friends when they have troubles of their own. As Kant sees it, these are both admirable feelings. And crucially, what they inspire is trust. Moral friendship is not merely a mutual aid society, but it presupposes trust in the other person's willingness to come to one's aid:

> Yet in every friendship we must still presuppose this friendship of need, not in order to enjoy it, though, but to trust in it; I must, that is, have confidence in each of my true friends, that he would be able and willing to look after my affairs, and promote my interests; though in order to enjoy that confidence I must never ask him to do it. He is a true friend, of whom I know and can presume, that he will really help me in need; but because I am also a true friend of his, I must not appear to him in that light, or impose such dilemmas upon him; I must merely have trust on that score, not make demands, and will sooner suffer myself than burden him with my troubles. And he must likewise have confidence in me, and be equally undemanding (C425).

Kant almost certainly takes the requirement of undemandingness too far. It is hard to imagine a friendship in which no one ever needed anything from their friend. It also seems likely that the trust of which Kant speaks so highly is built through a process of mutual responsiveness to actual needs. No one is in fact as independent as Kant suggests, nor is it obvious that the independence he describes is admirable. But Kant is surely right that one of the most valuable parts of friendship is the absolute trust that our friends are *willing* to come to our aid, even if we never ask anything from them.

Kant's picture of friendship is complicated, not least because of the way in which he moves back and forth between idealized moral friendship and the actual circumstances of human life. He is at once a pessimist about human nature and an optimist about human possibility. Regardless of our limitations, though, we have reason to pursue friendships. They make our lives better by enabling us to disclose ourselves to others, something that, while not free of risk, is much less risky when it takes place between friends. The intimacy of friendship provides us with a space in which we can engage in mutual self-development and self-improvement, trusting our friends to value and care for us in the same way we value and care for ourselves. The relationship of moral friendship is a microcosm of the idealized moral relationship between rational agents. As Christine Korsgaard puts it, "to become friends is to create a neighborhood where the Kingdom of Ends is real" (1996). This is why moral friendships are worth the effort it takes to create and sustain them, even in their imperfect form. It is through moral friendships that we learn how to relate to each other as fellow rational beings, despite our flaws.

I will conclude by pointing to a risk of friendship that often goes unrecognized, although not by Kant. That is the risk that fulfilling friendships will close us off to the rest of the world. Our neighborhood of friends may become overly exclusive and insufficiently concerned with the

well-being of others outside of those friendships. Kant sees this danger and warns us against it: "But that which diminishes the generality of good-will, and closes the heart toward others, impairs the soul's true goodness, which aspires to a universal benevolence" (C 428). Insofar as moral friendship is a good for us, it should have the effect of leading our gaze outward as well as inward. The best friendships expand our moral horizons and help us create a community in which the idealized relationship characteristic of moral friendship becomes the dominant way of relating to other people. In this way, friendships are the basis on which moral community is built.

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[1] Although Kant's account of friendship is not widely known outside of Kant-focused circles, there are a number of excellent essays on the subject in the literature on Kantian ethics. See especially Denis (2001); Veltman (2004); Biss (2019).

[2]In quoting Kant, I will follow standard conventions and employ the Prussian Academy pagination system for references. Specific translations are listed in the bibliography. References to*The Metaphysics of Morals* will appear as MM followed by the page number. References to the *Groundwork* will appear as GW followed by the page number. References to the Collins lectures in the *Lectures on Ethics* will appear as C followed by the page number. References to the Vigilantius lectures in the *Lectures on Ethics* will appear as V followed by the page number.

[3] The *Doctrine of Virtue* is the second half of the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

[4] The phrase "unsocial sociability" appears in Kant's essay, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1970).

[5] On Kant's account of reserve, see Stohr (2014).