

The Character of Friendship

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For all the ways in which human beings differ with respect to objectives, practices, and preferences a striking commonality among human beings is the considerable value that is placed upon friendship. There is every indication that what counts as a good friendship is the same across the globe, even when there are differences owing to societal practices. For example, whether they are female or male, it is commonplace for good friends in France to *faire la bise* (the kiss on each cheek) as a form of greeting; whereas in other parts of the world, for example, North America, women may greet one another with a ‘peck’ on the cheek but not men.

If two people are walking down the street together, it is often easy to tell that they are good friends just by the non-verbal behavior that they exhibit in interacting with one another while walking and talking. From their non-verbal behavior, what is clear is not just that each knows who the other is, since that is possible and yet there is not a deep friendship between the two individuals at all. Rather, it is quite apparent that they are manifestly at-ease with one another and, moreover, that they are taking considerable delight in one another’s company, as is evident from their smiles, glances, and gestures towards. In the language of Aristotle, good friends love one another.¹

Now, two people can love one another and not be friends at all. The most obvious example of this is the parent-child relationship. Can parents and children turn out to be the best of friends? No doubt that is possible. But surely it is rare. Or so I shall argue. Now with respect to love and friendship, romantic love presents an interesting case. It is not all that uncommon these days to hear people say that their romantic partner is their best friend. Yet, romantic love tends not to be what we first think of when we think of friendship at its best. And it seems unlikely that romantic love at its best and friendship at its best will ever be simply two ways of saying the same thing.

My aim in this essay is to offer an account of the character of the friendship. The focus shall be what Aristotle calls perfect friendship, but which I shall refer to as companion friendship.

I. First Things First: Mutual Affirming Trust

Children do not ask to be born and they enter the world entirely dependent upon their parents for survival. Moreover, newborn children have no abilities that would warrant their

¹ The classic account of friendship is to be found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, chapters 7 and 8. While my intellectual debt to Aristotle should be apparent, the views concerning friendship developed in this essay go substantially beyond anything that Aristotle says.

being trusted by their parents. With respect to trust, then, the parent-child relationship is constitutionally asymmetrical at the outset. In a word, then, trust is not the beginning of the parent-child relationship. Interestingly, there is a very significant respect in which this point also holds for romantic relationships. This is because the initial impetus in a romantic relationship is not trust but erotic attraction; precisely what we know is that erotic attraction for another can render the person thus attracted 'blind' to the deficiencies of the erotically desired individual in the realm of trustworthiness or moral character generally. With companion friendship, however, the issue of the trustworthiness each is front and center for both quite early on, if not at the very outset. To be sure, there is the issue of overlapping mutual interests.² But two people can easily have overlapping mutual interest and yet the issue of friendship between them is entirely out of the question. After all, most people who attend regularly the home game of their sports team have at least significant overlapping interest, namely the sport and the team in question. But few would suppose this commonality is sufficient to make a friendship. As true as it is that friends like doing things together, common interests as such hardly suffice to make a good friendship.

Finally, there is the obvious fact that the trust of friendship is not about basic trust but self-disclosing trust. To be sure, each person asks whether they both share the same basic ideals and moral values. However, two people can have this much in common and yet be quite some distance from one another in a multitude of ways. In particular, they would never think to share anything personal with one another. They would not want a bond of revealing trust between one another. Presumably, in a just world this would be common enough. At the very center of self-disclosing trust is the issue of whether a person can trust another to understand her or him about quite personal matters and do so across the board. The very majesty of friendship is part due in large part to the fact that each can count on the other to understand what she or he says in just the way that the person meant to say it, no matter how unexpected the remark might be. This is so whether the conversation pertains to a very serious matter or there is a wonderful moment of teasing between them. And on any given occasion with two companion friends, the direction of the conversation could pertain to a very serious matter or strike a very humorous chord; and with extraordinarily rare exception both friends respond as they should without any difficulty whatsoever. The following is an actual phone conversation between two close friends that took place:

Josh: My father is in the hospital.

Neil: Oh my, I must go and see him.

Josh: But I should tell you that my father no longer likes black people.

Neil: No problem. I am no longer black.

What followed was sheer laughter between Josh and Neil. Of course, Josh never expected Neil to take seriously that second claim about his father. And Neil spent not so much as a

² For a most sophisticated and informed philosophical account of trust, see Annette Baier, 'Trust', *The Tanner Lectures*, 1991.

nana second taking that claim seriously. What is more, that simple and humorous exchange between the two served to marvelously underwrite the majesty of their friendship.

The preceding example helps us to see why it is that in terms of its initial formation companion friendship can resemble something akin to spontaneous combustion. First of it all, we really do not expect deep, deep understanding to occur between ourselves and most people. This is part of the explanation for maintaining a measure of privacy in our lives. While we can certainly be private about things that are shameful or embarrassing, there are lots of things about which privacy is warranted that do not at all warrant that characterization. An obvious example is that a person can be rightly private about how much money she or he has in the bank although there is nothing at all inappropriate that is applicable to that reality. Second, there is no way to know in advance whether the person with whom we are socially interacting for the first time will exhibit such understanding. The third and last point is that it very rarely takes more than a few seconds here and there to see that during a conversation with another person one is being marvelously understood by that person in just the way that one was aiming to be understood; and when that perception is mutual, an initial chord for mutual trust of the self-disclosing kind has thereby been struck.³ In some way or the other, person A offered a glimpse into her or his very soul; and by the very content of person B's comments it is clear that person B got the 'picture' precisely the way in which A meant to reveal it. And that, needless to say, tells person A something considerable about person B. Both individuals are aware of what has happened so unexpectedly.

To be sure, such enormous understanding could be a fluke. That is rare, though. In any case, two individuals who have had the initial interaction described in the preceding paragraph get to put their assessment of one another to the test through subsequent interactions and the conversations to which these interactions give rise. It does not take long for each to realize that indeed they can mightily trust one another to understand what she or he says. This consideration points to why friends so very much enjoy doing things together. On the one hand, there is the delight that comes with being in one another's company and participating together in activity that both like. This enjoyment is marvelously underwritten by the depth of self-disclosing trust between them. On the other, there is the reality that being in one another's company allows for either to display other instances of self-disclosing trust in the other, where this unfolds in quite an unscripted manner. Of course, companion friends can meet on this or that occasion precisely because one very much needs the advice of the other about some important issue. What will typically be the case, however, is that through any given routine conversation between them their self-disclosing trust in one another will manifest itself in some way or the other. After all, we can reveal much about ourselves

³ A lot concerning non-verbal behavior is presupposed in these remarks. Non-verbal behavior includes voice tonality, facial expressions, and body posture. For an important and classic discussion of facial expressions, see Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), editors Paul Ekman and Phillip Rodger. See also Guy Barrier, *La Communication Non-Verbal. Comprendre les Gestes, Perception et Signification* (Paris: ESF Éditeur, 2008).

without talking about ourselves but by commenting upon (making observations about) the things that go on around us. Likewise, there can be much room for misunderstanding if what is said is not taken in precisely the right way. Accordingly, companion friends can feel comfortable discussing matters with one another that neither would feel comfortable discussing with others, even though they are not disclosing to one another any personal information about themselves.

Owing to the very depth of their trust that has been tremendously underwritten over time, companion friends can be warranted in asking a quite searching question of one another. And, of course, what is of the utmost importance is that the friend asks the question in just the right way. For instance, suppose that we have companion friends Adrian and Leslie, each of whom is in a marital relationship. While they certainly do not talk about their sex life with their spouse each makes a comment here and there that makes it manifestly clear to the other that things are going quite well in that domain. Given the appropriate context such a comment might be 'We got so busy while watching that movie that neither of us has clue as to how it ended'. Now, imagine that weeks go by, perhaps even a month or two, and no such comment is forthcoming from, say, Leslie. It could be perfectly appropriate for Adrian to inquire whether everything is all right on the home front, pointing out that it has been quite some time since Leslie has made one of those comments that indicate how marvelously things are going in terms of sexual intimacy. Notice that Leslie can hardly criticize Adrian for noticing the silence in that regard. Indeed, precisely because they are companion friends it would be rather natural for Leslie to say to Adrian 'I was wondering when you might say something'. Leslie can proffer an explanation or simply note that the time is not yet right to talk about the matter. Needless to say, Adrian will respect that decision and then add something like the following remark: 'You know that I will be there for you when you need me'.

It should be manifestly clear that one does not have to devalue romantic love at all in order to appreciate how absolutely wonderful and marvelous it is for mutual self-disclosing trust to be the fundamental bond between two individuals. A more forceful way of putting the point is that companion friendship is not some sort of romantic love manqué—a bond between two people that somehow falls short of romantic love thereby not reaching its full potential.

In simply spending time together, in order just to be together because they take such delight in one another's company, there is always a measure of self-disclosure between companion friends. Each new meeting either reinforces some important insight or adds a new insight (or both). This permits extraordinary refinement on the part of each friend with respect to the character, personality, and views of each other. When two people know one another well enough, a simple hesitation on the part of one friend can be revealing; and the friend who hesitated in the slightest before the other friend will not be at all surprised that the other friend noticed it. The other friend might make an inquiry right then and there, or raise the issue at a later date. In event, the inquiry will be made at the appropriate time.

In understand the richness of companion friendship, learning to speak a foreign language proves to be rather instructive. No matter how much a person studies a foreign language, the person can have no better evidence that she or he speaks that language well than that native speakers of that language communicate with the person just as they would communicate with other native speakers of the language. They provide the person who has learnt the language with an insight into her or his command of the foreign language that the individual simply could not otherwise attain. One reason for this is that discussions between people who know one another are replete with quick digressions of one sort or another, either as a means of humor or in order to call attention to something that caught everyone by surprise. And so on.

Companion friends are very much a reflection to one another's life. The depth of their familiarity with one another's life and their purity of heart with respect to one another enables each friend to have a glimpse of himself or herself that self-reflection alone could not yield. For no matter how honest a person is in terms of the self-reflection that she or does, that self-reflection will never be the equivalent of being witnessed by another person, just as practicing a foreign language in the classroom will never be equivalent of being engaged in a conversation with native speakers who, owing to one's command of the language, take it as a given that one understands all that is said.

The above consideration suggests that companion friendship plays a fundamental and equal role in the life of each friend. Interestingly this brings us to an important reason why companion friendship is not replaceable by romantic love.

As noticed above, a defining aspect of romantic love is its erotic component. When things go well, romantic love is unsurpassable in its majesty. However, we all know that erotic passion can 'blind' people to lots and lots of things. Indeed, it can get in the way of commonsense itself. There are countless instances where out of feelings of deep erotic attachment people have stayed in a relationship that was obviously quite detrimental to them. In some cases, even physical abuse is involved. Thus, in ways that **are** truly astounding erotic passion can override even self-interest.

Companion friendship is entirely without that kind of liability. Although companion friends care deeply about one another and are eager to spend time together, what is also true is that they stand entirely as equals with respect to one another. And the absence of eroticism in their relationship contributes mightily to that very reality. It is no doubt fair to say that even with the most admirable romantic relationship there is an interdependence forged through the erotic bond that does not take place between friends. This, in turn, further contributes to companion friends genuinely being a mirror to one another's soul. Their deep love for one another is not a threat to their independence.

The last observation brings us to one more consideration regarding companion friendship that needs to be brought out, namely that it is rare for companion friendships to be between the young and the elderly. I explain why in what follows.

A substantial difference in age between two people typically marks a significant difference in experiences, self-development, and perspectives regarding life, which in turn typically bears mightily upon what a person finds novel or enjoyable or worth exploring or most disgusting. One does not expect a 50-something person to be exploring the same issues and facing the same challenges as a 20-something individual. In the other direction, one does not expect a 20-something person to know either the successes or the failures of a 50-something individual. Then, of course, there are the typical differences with regard to sheer physical fortitude, health, and agility, with the 20-something individual far surpassing the 50-something individual in those respects. Lastly, there are the normal differences in the self-presentation and sheer tastes between a 20-something person and a 50-something person. Behavior that would be deemed immature for the latter can be quite appropriate or at least not inappropriate for the former. This applies also to language and attire. As for tastes, it is well known that, for instance, 20-year olds and 50-year olds tend to have quite different tastes in music. Nowadays, rap and hip-hop tend to be the music du jour among the 20-something, but not so among the 50-something. What is more, a 50-something moving her or his head while listening to music in that manner that a 20-year old does nowadays would tend to look rather silly.

Taken together, the above considerations simply make it rather unlikely that a companion friendship would take place between two individuals where there is a significant age difference between the two of them. But, of course, there can be exceptions here. A young person can be particularly mature and have a set of interests that set her or him apart from most people in the same age group. By contrast, an older person could share precisely those interests and also have a natural demeanor and measure of physical agility whereby the person's age does not readily call attention to itself. What is more, it turns out that the two individuals have no difficulty at all in communicating with one another in way that is entirely natural for both and thus renders both quite at-ease with the one another. Moreover, there is no respect in which either the older person is seeking to have authority over the younger person or the younger person is look to have an authority figure in her or his life. Last but not least, it is clear to both that they both wondrously benefit from their interaction.

I noted earlier how quickly two individuals can sense that they identify with one another. That point holds no less so when there is a significant age difference between two individuals. Indeed, it would be ever so clear to both from the very outset that the other got her or his remarks just as they were intended. Perhaps the older person was trying to convey an experience without in the least being authoritative; and the younger person understood it in just that way. Or, from the other direction, the younger person had a quite novel insight to share with the older person; and it was manifestly obvious that the older person had no difficulty whatsoever in seeing the insight in just the way that it was intended and did not come across as patronizing in any way.

To state the obvious, a 50-something individual could be the parent of 20-something person. Still, a friendship can happen. Yet, I suggest that it is far more rare for parents and

children to become companion friends. I turn now to explain why.

II. Can Parents and Children Be Companion Friends?

When a child enters into the world, the child's parents quite literally know more about the child than the child knows about her or himself, since a new born child is entirely without a sense of self. Of course, the child comes to have a sense of self quite rapidly. Still, it remains true for a significant period of time that the parents know more about the child than the child knows about herself or himself. Good parents, then, are parents who do what is good for their child although the child is without a conception of the good. Indeed, part of being a good parent is fundamentally tied to helping the child to formulate a proper conception of the good, so that the child can make good decision, and so live a good life, even in the absence of the parents.

If all goes well, the child fully realizes this; accordingly, it is perfectly natural for the child to talk to her or his parents concerning just about everything that takes place in her or his life: feelings, hopes, disagreements, and so on. Notoriously, without at all being malicious, children can ask questions and make comments that are quite embarrassing. This is because they do not yet have a developed sense of either propriety or privacy.

Needless to say, that changes with age. At the age of 6, a child might very well ask: 'Mommy, why were you and dad making so much noise last night in the bedroom?' No child at 13 will ever ask that question precisely because a 13 year old already knows the answer. The child is also respecting the privacy of her or his parents. Similarly, out of a sense of privacy and appropriateness, a 13 year old child would not take a shower with the parent of the opposite sex—probably not even with a parent of the same sex other, except in such public places as the gym. By the age of 13, a child grasps what it is for parents to have their own private conversation. Likewise, good parents give their child a measure of 'space', as the saying goes. Needless to say, their doing so constitutes none other than the recognition on their part that their child is entitled to a measure of privacy. Finally, I should point out that a 13 year old has friends of her or his age, and this is seen as wonderful sign of social development on the part of the child. Indeed, parents who did not encourage their child to have friends would be parents who are unsatisfactory in a fundamental way.

Now, there are four salient differences between the parental bond and the bond of friendship that is forged, including such a bond forged by the children of parents. 1) There is a complete absence of any antecedent obligation on the part of either individual to the friendship to the other. By contrast, parents have a fundamental obligation to care for their child thereby insuring the child's proper development. In turn, the child rightly has an enormous debt of gratitude towards the parents who are good parents in that regard. 2) The formation of companion friendship is entirely an expression of the mutual wishes of both parties. There is no antecedent obligation for them to become friends with one another. By hypothesis, the parental child relationship begins entirely without the permission of the child. 3) There is no antecedent sense in which friends have any entitlement to know anything about

the other. By contrast, parents are clearly entitled to know all that there is to know about their child's wants, tastes, behaviors, psychology, and so on. 4) Companion friends do not have authority over one another. By contrast, parents have authority over their child.⁴

The forgoing points hold whether we are talking about friendships between young people who are still under the authority of their parents or individuals who have the complete moral and social standing of an adult. The significant difference between these two cases is that with young people who are still under the authority of their parents, a friendship which a young person wishes to forge may meet with the disapproval of the young person's parents. Strictly speaking that could also happen with an individual who has the complete moral and social standing of an adult. The difference of course is that in the latter case the mere disapproval of the person's parents would presumably have no bearing on the individual pursuing the friendship in question; whereas in the former case, parental disapproval would typically mean that the friendship could not proceed.

Points (1) through (4) above make it clear that companion friendship is a fundamental expression of personal choice on the part of each individual to a companion friendship. And this consideration rebounds with an explanation for why it is ever so rare for there to be a companion friendship between a child and her or his parents, especially when the child is an adult but yet relatively young. On the one hand, there are simply too many moral debts that a child owes her or his parents for the salubrious role that they have played in the child's life. This consideration is related to the idea of a child having honor for her or his parents, where this constitutes the child's having a measure of moral deference with regard to them. There is also the issue of parental authority or, in any case, the residue of parental authority even when the child is an adult, whereas there is no sense in which the child even has a semblance of authority over the parents. This difference is a series impediment to having companion friendship between equals with a parent and a child. Last, but certainly not least, there is way too much information that the parent knows about their child that precludes forging a relationship of genuine equality between the parents and child with respect to self-disclosure. Two individuals who have been companion friends can indeed say to one another 'I know you'. Alas, that truth is owing to mutual self-disclosure from the very start of their friendship, something that is not possible between parents and their child. Finally, in this regard, there is the idea of the sanctity of parenthood. It might be impossible to maintain that conception of a parent and, at the same time, have a companion friendship with a parent. For instance, while companion friends might be mindful of the ways in which each other has a rich sexual life and occasionally tease one another in that regard, people are less inclined to do that with their parents precisely because this is typically seen as being out of step with interacting with parents in a manner that is in keeping with the sanctity of parenthood, which is not altogether

⁴ The above 4 points owe much the following individuals: Onora O'Neill, 'Children's Rights and Children's Lives', *Ethics* 98 (1988); Ferdinand Schoeman, 'Rights of Children, Rights of Parents and the Moral Basis of the Family', *Ethics* 91 (1980); and 'The Child's Status in the Democratic State,' *Political Theory* 3 (1975).

unrelated to **the** reality that there is a residue of parental authority and also to the idea of honoring parents. There is no need to insist that it is impossible for there to be a companion friendship between parents and a child. Enough has been said, though, to explain why it would be extremely rare for that to happen. Indeed, the considerations proffered suggest that such a rapport is perhaps even more rare than is a companion friendship between two people with a 30 year age difference between them.

A most interesting way of lending credence to the final point of the preceding paragraph is by noting that companion friendships can end. It does not take much imagination at all to see that if a companion friendship between parents and a child ends, this has all sorts of untoward and undesirable consequences for the parent-child relationship. In the typical case of the dissolution of a companion friendship each can go their separate ways. And there will effectively be no reason for them to interact with one another again with the same degree of trust and concomitant self-disclosure. This they could do even if they work in the same building; for they could manage to be agreeable and polite to one another. By contrast, if the companion friendship between parents and a child were to end, it is not at all clear how they could simply roll their relationship back to no more than the salubrious parent-child bond that they once had. In this regard, the principle of better-safe-than-sorry might be most applicable. It is perhaps better never to have a companion friendship with loving parents than to have one that dissolves.

III. Companion Friendship: The Beginning and the End

There is very straightforward sense in which companion friendship has a remarkable parallel to parental love.⁵ As noted earlier, parental love is surely an everlasting reminder that a most meaningful and salubrious bond need not in any way involve an ounce of eroticism. Companion friends delight in one another's company, spend enormous amounts of time together, and share significant details about their lives with one another without ever supposing that a romantic relationship would somehow make their relationship better. Nor, again, does anyone suppose that this is all in preparation for a romantic relationship.

A far from trivial difference between parental love and the love of companion friendship is that with the latter each has chosen the other from the very start. Thus, companion friendship is a profound way of sanctifying the wherewithal of both parties to the friendship to choose wisely, in exercising both their autonomy and their judgment of good character. Each is a living reminder to the other of that sublime reality. Yet, an inescapable truth would seem to be that parental love serves as the backdrop for that choice; for when parental love is as it should be that child comes to have a deep sense of worth that is entirely independent of merely fulfilling the wishes of another, namely the parents in this case.

⁵ I am relying upon the account of parental love developed in *The Family and the Political Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also 'Friendship,' in the *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (2011), where I briefly discuss the role of parental love in the development of friendship.

If I may invoke and extend the use of Kantian language, when parental love is as it should be the child profoundly experiences being valued as an end and not as a means. The child is emotionally configured in that way when parental love is as it should be. That emotional configuration is entirely shorn of eroticism. The love of companion friendship majestically moves the experience of being thus valued beyond the parents. In effect, I have suggested that in general we would expect the best companion friendships to be between individuals who have enjoyed parental upbringing at its best.

Needless to say, not even companion friendships always last. In the absence of simply having made a tremendous error of judgment at the outset which is quickly recognized, there are typically two possibilities. One is that the two individuals drift apart. Perhaps they come to be separated by a vast geographical distance that simply precludes spontaneous interaction. Or their interests pull them radically apart. Or, they come to differ markedly with respect to the values that animate each of their lives. What I want to draw attention to, however, is the case of betrayal; and my contention is that the betrayal in companion friendship is rather akin to betrayal in romantic love. Here is why. Romantic love involves two people in the endeavor to realize a shared ideal. Likewise, companion friendship involves two people in the endeavor to realize a shared ideal. In either case, to betray another is to give the person in question good reason to believe that one fully embraces and is committed to the continued realization of that shared ideal and then to turn around and do with unquestionable deliberateness and intentionality that which is unequivocally contrary to the realization of that very goal. With romance, the most well-defined and most decisive case of betrayal is typically sexual infidelity. With companion friendship, there is no well-defined act that is the parallel to sexual infidelity. It will be remembered, though, that sexual infidelity is none other than a particular form of the betrayal of trust. Alas, with companion friendship it is manifestly clear that there can be ever so disconcerting and pugnacious instances of the betrayal of trust.

Here is an example. Imagine that Leslie, who is a stunningly handsome man, is absolutely devastated over what he has done. Here is what happened. Having just been fired from Major Company, he goes back to his hotel (for he is on the other side of the country) and orders one drink after another at the bar. An hour later, he is completely inebriated. He is then approached by a woman and they have a sexual twist. He is pained beyond measure over what he has done; and calls up his best friend Adrian, his buddy of 15 years, to talk about it. Needless to say, this is a conversation in confidence if ever there was one.

Now, Adrian does not doubt for a moment that Leslie is tremendously sorry for and pained by that unintended act of infidelity in which he (Leslie) engaged. Indeed, Adrian has never seen Leslie so pained. In fact, Leslie even considered committing suicide. In any event, it turns out that Adrian goes on to commit a tremendous indiscretion; for a week later, Adrian tells Leslie's wife about the affair. Adrian claims that he did so in order to help Leslie's wife understand Leslie's rather strange and stand-offish behavior around the house. Clearly, Adrian has betrayed Leslie's trust; and it is arguable on several accounts that

Adrian's betrayal is worse than Leslie's untoward moment of infidelity, since there is a very straightforward respect in which Leslie's infidelity was not at all intentional. What is more, Adrian most certainly did not need to disclose that infidelity in order to make sense of Leslie's unusual behavior to Leslie's wife. One can debate whether the wife needed to be informed at all about this tremendously unintended transgression on Leslie's part. However, it is clear that Adrian should have given Leslie some time to make this confession. In fact, it is not at all clear that Adrian should ever have informed Leslie's wife about Leslie's unintended transgression. And if Adrian saw that Leslie was not doing to do so, that could be a reason for Adrian to re-evaluate their friendship. However, that is another matter entirely.

Understandably, Leslie is simply furious with Adrian and has doubts about whether their friendship can continue precisely because Adrian's action has a level of intentionality to it that is entirely at odds with his respect for Leslie. Indeed, Adrian's action has all the air of utter indifference or callousness to it. Needless to say, Leslie's reaction is not at all unlike the kind of reaction that a person has when it is discovered that her or his romantic partner has been intentionally unfaithful. This, of course, tells us what we already know, namely that a violation of trust that tares at the very core of our being need not involve marital infidelity or physical violence. And the point that I am making here is that although romantic love differs from companion friendship in that sexual eroticism has an absolutely central place in romantic love but not friendship, it nonetheless turns out that romantic love and companion friendship are more alike than not with regard to the issue of betrayal.

Can parents betray their children or the other way around? Absolutely. However, it is manifestly clear that betrayal in either direction simply does not suffice to vitiate the parent-child ties. For one thing, there is simply no sense in which a child can say 'I made a mistake in my choice of parents. I should never have chosen you'. Of course, parents can perhaps make that claim; but short of putting their child up for adoption, nothing absolves them from their obligation to be good parents. And in looking back, a child can rightly ask whether her or his parents measured up in that regard.

This last observation provides us with a most fitting way to end this essay. While there can be no doubt whatsoever that in a companion friendship, one of the friends has changed in ways that no one could have foreseen, there is a question that forcefully presents itself no less so in companion friendships than in romantic ties, namely the following: 'Did I choose well?'

An observation from Philippa Foot's profound essay 'Moral Beliefs' is most relevant here.⁶ Acknowledging that that even a just person makes mistakes, she makes the quite profound observation that a person cannot be just if she or he is prepared to do certain things; and if an individual is too easily tempted to do those things, then the individual was prepared

⁶ (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

after all. This insight applies equally to love for another; and we may refer to it as the preventive character of love.

If we respect and love another as a companion friend, then precisely what follows is that the very idea of harming that friend is repulsive to us. For example, the very idea of sexual twist with our companion friend's spouse would simply be repulsive to us. For anything like that to occur we would already have to be completely inebriated and the spouse would have to look for all the world like an entirely different person. Or, suppose **that** a companion friend has shared a most intimate detail about her or his life, such as the friend had been sexually abused by a sibling or parent. Again, the friend to whom this has been told would be so respectful of the friend's trust and the friend's privacy that it would take something akin to a lobotomy before the friend would ever reveal what has been shared with her or him.

In the language of Bernard Williams,⁷ it takes a long and unobvious argument to excuse the absence of the preventive character of love. It is very rare that anyone has a good excuse in that regard; and no one should ignore that reality. Being guided by the preventive character of love is one of the immutable aspects of a friendship (or a romantic relationship). When that preventive character turns out to be absent on a particular occasion, the friend who has been wronged has a most important decision to make and the alternatives are simply the following: (a) Should I forgive the friend and maintain the companion friendship? (b) Should I end the friendship? Whatever else is true, the answer to that question cannot always be (a). Indeed, it is perhaps rarely (a). This speaks to a courage with regard to friendship (as well as romantic love), namely the courage to move on, that is rarely considered. Defending these last two points, however, would be an entirely different essay.⁸

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⁷ 'A Critique of Utilitarianism,' in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁸ In writing this essay, I am particularly grateful to Helm's recent book *Love, Friendship, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). I have also benefited enormously from the comments of Tarik Yildiz and two students: Jesse Feitel and Andrew Riess. A special word of thanks goes to Laurent Rougemont who has brilliantly modeled the ideal of familial love.

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