PHENOMENOLOGY OF FRIENDSHIP

ROBERT SOKOLOWSKI

C'est la haine qui est mal, jamais l'amour
Ester Rota Gasperoni, Oraje sur le lac

In this essay, we will use Aristotle to bring out some important features of friendship and of moral action in general; we will show that friendship is the highest kind of moral excellence. We will then make use of phenomenology to determine the kinds of intelligence that provide the substance of both moral conduct and friendship. Moral action and friendship are defined by special kinds of rational form, and it will be our goal to describe these forms.

I

Aristotle's description of the moral virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics is developed in a logical progression. His analysis, as it moves along, reaches three successive summits or crests, each higher than the previous one. (1) The first crest is the treatment of the virtue of pride or magnanimity, megalopsychia, in book 4 chapter 3. Magnanimity is the completion of what we could call our “internal” or “individual” virtues, such as courage, temperance, and generosity. It is moral virtue brought to self-awareness, the confidence that comes to us when we have achieved virtuous dispositions and know that we are able to act in a noble manner. Magnanimity consolidates the possession we take of our own emotions, our desires, aversions, and fears.

(2) The second high point in Aristotle’s treatment of moral virtue is found in the discussion of justice in book 5. Justice goes beyond the virtues treated in the earlier books because it deals with our relationships with other people and not just the control we have over

Correspondence to: School of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America, 620 Michigan Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20064

1This essay was originally written for a volume that will appear in French, edited by Bernard Schumacher

The Review of Metaphysics 55 (March 2002): 451-470 Copyright © 2002 by The Review of Metaphysics
ourselves and our impulses. What Aristotle calls particular justice, the subject of most of book 5, deals with the things we can exchange with other people, things that can be transferred from one person to another and that can be possessed in a greater or lesser amount. Such justice does not deal, say, with intelligence or with physical beauty, because these things cannot be transported from one person to another, but it does deal with wealth, money, honors, and offices, as well as with public burdens and obligations. "Distributive" justice deals with the allotment of benefits and burdens to various members of a community, while "corrective" justice deals with remedies that must be imposed when one person has been injured and hence deprived of some goods; corrective justice deals with the restitution that must be made in order to bring back the original and just condition. Distributive justice is proportional, corrective justice is arithmetical.

(3) We might think that the treatment of justice is the culmination of Aristotle's discussion of moral excellence. Justice seems to be the highest moral virtue, and the classical listing of virtues, the "cardinal" virtues, comprised temperance, courage, prudence, and justice. But there is still another crest to be reached beyond justice in the study of moral virtue. It is reached in books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which discuss friendship. Friendship should not be taken as a mere appendix to ethics; it completes justice and the other moral virtues.

Aristotle distinguishes between pleasant, useful, and perfect friendships, with the latter being the paradigm of human agency. In perfect friendships the friends must be virtuous and capable of working together to accomplish things in common. They wish the good of each other as their own good. The activity of each of the friends is intensified and made more perfect precisely because they are engaged in a corporate effort; each of the friends is "another self" to the others. The practice of friendship in its highest sense is a form of moral activity and the capacity to be a true friend is a virtue. It is an excellence of the soul that enables us to act in keeping with our nature. It perfects us as human beings, as rational animals, and it is the finest way in which we exercise practical reason.²

Practical reason finds its highest employment, therefore, not in justice but in friendship. Friendship exceeds justice as a human perfection; Aristotle says, "Friendship seems to hold cities together, and lawgivers seem to care for it more than for justice; for concord is like
friendship, and this they aim at most of all; ... and when men are friends, they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well.3 The Nicomachean Ethics reaches its highest point in the discussion of friendship because the exercise of friendship is the best form of human moral action. It is true that in book 10 Aristotle goes on to say that the theoretical life is higher than the practical life, but in the practical order noble friendship is the highest form of activity that men are capable of.

II

The moral virtues all involve an exercise of reason. The moral virtues are not just natural inclinations, but inclinations that have been perfected or rectified by reason. The virtues are embodiments of practical intelligence. The virtues do not, however, come about by the simple imposition of reason on inclination. They have to be installed gradually, by the repetition of actions. They are habituations. They are dispositions or capacities to act, but they are established not by nature nor by a single decision but by earlier choices that we have made; they are the outcome of what we have done and they make it possible for us to continue to act in the manner in which we have formed ourselves. We shape ourselves through our own actions; as Joseph Pieper says, "Human activity has two basic forms: doing (agere) and making (facere). Artifacts, technical and artistic, are the 'works' of making. We ourselves are the 'works' of doing."4 Virtues, therefore, are embodiments of practical reason, and the installation of reason into our inclinations takes place through the actions we perform and the choices that we make. Our virtues and our character are

2 On reason as constitutive of friendship, see Guy Mansini, "Aristotle on Needing Friends," American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 72 (1998): 405–17. On p. 416 Mansini writes, "The achievement of friendship ... means an appreciation of mind, of minding, that liberates it from mine or thine. Our empirical egos, we might say, suffer from their having always to be at a particular time, in a particular place, taking a particular point of view. But the known mutuality of this one and the same act [in friendship], this one and the same mindfulness, is a sort of experience of the transcendence of mind itself."

3 Nicomachean Ethics 8.1.1155a22–7.

more profoundly “ours” than are our inclinations because they incorporate our reason, which more than anything else “is” what we are, as Aristotle says: “this [reason] more than anything else is man.” The practical intelligence embodied in us will then be exhibited in our subsequent virtuous actions.

How does reason enter into moral conduct? To clarify how intelligence is present in our actions, I wish to appeal to a concept in phenomenology, the concept of “categoriality” or “categorical form.” Husserl introduces the notion of categoriality in *Logical Investigations.* It became one of the most important concepts in phenomenology. Besides being extensively analyzed by Husserl, it played a strategic role in Heidegger’s development of the question of being. Categoriality refers to the formal structures that shape both our language and the intentionalities that are expressed in our speech and our activities. Categoriality is found in judgments, collections, disjunctions, distinctions, and all the other complex entities that we constitute as thinkers and knowers. For example, a judgment like “The house is white” is composed of the categorial form *S is p* and the material content, *house-white.* The conjunction “horse and rider” is composed of the conjunctive categorial form *x and y* and the material content *horse-rider.* Categoriality introduces an explicit, formal part-whole structure into what we intend. There are many different kinds of categoriality, such as the predicational, collective, disjunctive, additive, and relational; there are as many categorial forms as there are articulations that the grammar of various human languages and mathematics can generate. Categoriality deals with the combinatorics of human intentionality. As Husserl shows, furthermore, categoriality does not arise abruptly in the propositional and mathematical domain of hu-

---

5 *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7 1178a7.
man thinking; one of his greatest philosophical achievements is to have shown how categorial forms have their roots in precategorial ex-
perience, how the various nuances and modalities of perception give rise to the more fixed and formal structures of logic and mathemat-
ics.  

Although Husserl recognizes the great range of categorial forma-
tion, he generally limits his study to the kinds of categorial form that occur in logic and mathematics. I wish to claim that there are catego-
rial forms in human practical conduct. Exploring what such forms are and explaining how they function will illuminate the nature of human action.

There is one categorial form that has long been recognized in practical conduct, the formal structure of means-to-ends. Aristotle de-
scribes this structure, showing that when we act we begin with ends and purposes that are set down for us or by us. We then reason back-
ward toward things that we must achieve if we are to fulfill our pur-
poses: if we wish to achieve the purpose or goal X, we must first attain c, then we must do b, and then we must accomplish a. Our reasoning continues in this backward fashion until it finally arrives at something that we can do here and now, something immediately within our reach: in order to attain a, b, and c, and ultimately to attain my goal X, I here and now can and must do this. At this point, deliberation gives way to choice, which is the execution of that which had been deliber-
ated about, the accomplishment of that which had arisen as the imme-
diate means toward the purpose we have in mind. Such practical thinking, such an articulation of steps toward a goal, introduces the categorial form of “means toward an end” into our experience.

This structure is found in all practical thinking, even the kind that is not specifically moral. It occurs, for example, in the simple exercise of a skill (we need shelter, we need wood to build a shelter, we begin

---


cutting down a tree to get the wood). There are, however, other categorial forms that enter into specifically moral action, forms that determine the action as moral. In the case of virtues like courage, temperance, and generosity, the categorial form that is at work is the determination of a middle in contrast with the two extremes of excess and defect. The moral thinking, the practical intelligence that is required for such virtuous action, is the kind that can intuit the appropriate middle: the courageous person faced with a dangerous situation experiences the appropriate amount of fear and is able to deal properly with the situation, in contrast with the rash person, who has too little fear and acts recklessly, and the coward, who has too much and who runs away from the danger or surrenders to it instead of dealing with it. Such a virtuous action is not a mere impulse; it is not a mere inclination that carries us along; it is not a mere impression that a situation makes on us. Rather, it is a thoughtful, intelligent response to the situation, which is brought to its moral truth by a virtuous agent. The moral intelligibility of the situation is disclosed most truly to and by the courageous agent. Our action is pervaded by practical reason, and the way it is pervaded by reason is in the insight that one should act in this way with this kind of fear, and precisely not that way, with that deficiency or excess. In this concrete situation, the agent makes a distinction between the way he should act and the ways he might act but should not.

This distinction is an understanding, an intuitive intelligence. It is not a mere sensory reaction or an undifferentiated feeling. Aristotle compares it to a perception ("the decision rests with perception"), but he also uses the term nous to name it.⁶ It is a perception in the sense of an articulation of a whole with its appropriate parts, a thoughtful perception that brings the intelligibility of a situation to light. It involves insight and categorial form, but a categorial form of its own, which is not the form, say, of a predicative judgment or an arithmetical collection; it involves the categoriality of recognizing a middle be-

⁶ Nicomachean Ethics 2.9.1100b23. For the use of nous see 6.11.1148a35–b11. Intuition or nous is not the "taking in" of a simple, undifferentiated given; it is, rather, the presentation of an articulated whole. The following remarks by Gödel, taken from Wang, A Logical Journey, express the nature of intuition very well: "9.2.28. Intuition is different from construction; it is to see at one glance" (302); "9.2.46. Intuition is not proof; it is the opposite of proof. We do not analyze intuition to see a proof but by intuition we see something without a proof" (304).
tween two extremes. The action of a virtuous agent involves a moral kind of categorial intuition. Moreover, this categorial form is value-laden; the middle course shows up as the good way to act in contrast with the vicious or shameful extremes.

The vicious person, incidentally, is incapable of exercising this moral categoriality; he does not see the middle but lurches toward one of the extremes and does not even know that he is acting in a defective manner. The vicious person fails in his moral understanding of the situation before him; it is not just that his inclinations have become unmasterable, but his reason itself has been corrupted by his earlier actions and the habituation they have left him with. Things appear to him in a false manner and the true intelligibility of the situation is not manifested to him; the situation appears to him in a false light. The character he has shaped for himself by his actions now distorts his moral understanding: "If each man is somehow responsible for his state of character, he will also be himself somehow responsible for the appearance." 11 The triadic structure of a middle disclosed between two moral extremes is, therefore, the categorial form proper to our internal or individual virtues. It brings out the objective truth of the situation, the course of action that is admirable and praiseworthy.

The virtue of justice involves a different kind of categorial form. Justice involves another kind of objectivity than do the virtues of courage, temperance, and the like. It requires that I take a distance to my situation and judge with a kind of neutrality about it, not giving too much of the benefits and too little of the burdens to myself. Temperance and courage do not aim at a mathematical middle between extremes, but justice does involve a quasi-mathematical kind of categoriality, whether proportional in distributive justice or arithmetical in corrective justice. 12 The moral error or vice in the case of justice is not the same as that in the other virtues; it is not primarily a matter of deviating into qualitative excess or deficiency. Rather, the specific viciousness in matters of justice is more quantitative: it is to allot too much of the good things or too little of the burdensome things to myself or to those who are "mine" in some sense. Injustice is a distortion introduced by self-interest.

---

11 Nicomachean Ethics 3.5 1114b1–2.
12 On the "middle" as not being mathematical, see Nicomachean Ethics 2.6 1106a24–b7.
It is not easy for us to take a detached, objective view of things in which we have an interest, whether for ourselves directly or for our relatives, friends, community, or affiliations. We spontaneously want more of the good things and less of the bad ones for ourselves. To be able to judge justly, to be able to allot the proper measure for ourselves and for the others (whether in distributive or corrective justice), is a virtue, the virtue of justice. It involves both strength of character and clarity of vision. Like all virtues, it is the outcome of earlier actions that have become consolidated into our character and give us an "eye" for judging what is just. There is a categoriality in a just decision, but it is not that of a middle between extremes; rather, it is that of proportional or arithmetical calculation. This calibration, however, is not simply mathematical; it is a measurement of goods and bads, of things we want to have or want to avoid. To be able to measure objectively in such matters is a moral perfection, not merely an intellectual one. The person who judges justly will not let his own interests spoil his calculation of what should be done in a situation calling for a distribution or correction of goods; he will be able to judge objectively, not letting "his own" distort the measure. He will be able to exercise the virtue of justice.

Let us dwell for a moment on the difference between the triadic categoriality of virtues like courage and temperance and the more mathematical categoriality of justice. The individual virtues call upon me as the agent here and now to determine myself in a certain way, given the pleasant and fearful things facing me, and given my own condition as an agent. In the exercise of such virtues, I deliberate about how I will define myself as I face this pleasant or painful situation. In contrast, the virtue of justice calls upon me here and now to determine an arrangement of benefits and burdens among several of us. I am not going to determine only myself; I have to take a distance and measure from a certain elevation. I will, obviously, also remain who I am, but I must also take up a standpoint that is somehow "outside" myself because I have to judge as an impartial observer. If I succeed in being just, I will bring about a just resolution that will be a better arrangement for all concerned; I will have brought about a public good and not only my good, and if the issue is an important one, I may have become a great public benefactor, one whose achievement is commemorated by others. Precisely in doing so, however, precisely in bringing about a good for the community, I will have also perfected
myself. I will have become just as an agent. Precisely by overcoming my own partisan self-interest I will have achieved a greater good for myself, that of being just and even of being recognized as being just. I make myself honorable, worthy of honor, precisely by not seeking my own less worthy good.

III

Let us now consider friendship. Is there a categorial form specific to friendship? How does it differ from the triadic form of individual virtues and the mathematical forms of justice? Friendship does involve a categorial form. It is not the case that friendship reverts to mere feeling or inclination; rather, it involves practical intelligence and such intelligence engages a categorial structure.

Perfect friendship, friendship of the highest kind, requires that each of the friends wishes and performs the good of the other friend. He wills the good of his friend; that is, he takes the good of the friend as his own good. When I act with and for a friend, I act in such a way that what is good for the friend, as such, is wished for and done as my own good. His good, as good for him, has become my good, and he acts in the same manner toward me. The good each of us seeks is not just our own individual good but the good in common and the good for the other. If my friend and I are accomplishing something as friends, I am not just trying to do something that benefits me; I am trying to do something that benefits him as well, and I do it precisely as benefiting him. Its being good for him has become good for me. I have enlarged my sense of what is good for me. I wish not only things that benefit me individually, but also things that benefit others (my friends), and I wish those things precisely as benefiting them. This expansion of my desire for the good, this “intersubjectivizing” of the good by me, means that I have become more virtuous, more human, more perfect as an agent.

I do not seek this larger good simply because it is useful for me. If I were to do so, my “perfect” friendship would have slipped into being a friendship based on utility. Nor do I seek this larger good simply because it gives me a good feeling to do so, because it is pleasant to me. If I were to do so, my “perfect” friendship would have deviated into being a friendship based on pleasure. Rather, I seek this good for
another because I have become someone who is capable of friendship, someone who can desire and accomplish the good of others as my own good. I want good things not only for myself but for others as well, and the others in question have the same disposition toward me. The friendship is reciprocal and mutually acknowledged. This reciprocal and enlarged well-wishing involves a categorial form. It is a highly sophisticated intellectual structure. It is a form of recognition or identification. The good of my friend is identified as my own good, and my good is identified as the good of my friend, and both of us rejoice in the identifications that we mutually accomplish. Friendship is an exultation not only in sentiment but in intelligence as well.  

The ability to engage in friendship, the virtue of friendship, requires that we possess the other virtues, both the individual virtues and the virtue of justice. We have to be morally good in all the other ways in order to be able to enjoy true friendship. If we are intemperate or cowardly, for example, we will find that our intemperance or cowardice will prevent us from even thinking about someone else’s good, or they may make us think wrongly about what is good for our “friend”: we may draw him into self-indulgence or into the avoidance of responsibilities, and may think we are benefiting him as we do so. One of the most devastating effects of vice, whether of intemperance, cowardice, injustice, or the other vices, is that the vicious agent makes himself incapable of perfect friendship. He may be able to enjoy other people for their usefulness or the pleasure they give, but he cannot enlarge his soul to wish the good of others as such, nor can he know what it is for others to wish his good as such. He cannot love and be loved, and this is why tyrants, being incapable of friendship

---

13 Mansini, in “Aristotle on Needing Friends,” 412–13, comments on a passage in Death in the Family, in which James Agee describes a friendship between a boy named Rufus and his father: “The chief object of satisfaction and enjoyment is not the contentment Rufus feels in the mood of the spring night, or knowing that his father is enjoying a similar contentment, but the knowledge that his father knows his, Rufus’ contentment, and he knows his father’s, and that they know that they know. This makes for an altogether ‘peculiar’ contentment. It consists in a mutual knowing of a knowing. It is not that the other helps me have the perception and understanding in question, or even helps me to sustain my perception and understanding; though friends do these things for one another, too, and Aristotle recognizes it, it is not the point here. The savoring of the other’s exercise of perception, the awareness of his exercise of wit, intelligence, nous, an exercise I share with him, is the point.”
("in tyranny there is little or no friendship"), try to trick or compel others to love them.\textsuperscript{14}

It may seem obvious that a person will have to be courageous and temperate if he is to be a friend, but it might appear strange that he will also need to be just. In the virtue of justice, we look at things from a more purely objective point of view; we overcome our own interest and evaluate ourselves as equal with others. We do not prefer our own but look to what would be the same and the equal for all. In friendship, in contrast, we seem to do the opposite; we wish well specifically to those who are our friends, those who are other selves to us. Friendship seems to concentrate precisely on "our own" and hence it seems to be the opposite of justice. But we would not be capable of the moral excellence that we call perfect friendship, we could not enlarge our souls so that we can directly wish and perform the good for another, unless we had been purified by the virtue of justice. If we had not reached the moral objectivity of a person who judges justly, we would not be able to wish the good of another in a morally appropriate way. If we put our own self-interest above the just distribution or correction of goods, then we would not be able to love our own in a proper manner either. Only a just person can be a true friend; without justice, "friendship" becomes blind partiality. The love for our own that is proper to perfect friendship can be attained only by someone who can also judge objectively about goods that must be apportioned justly among many who are not specifically his friends. An unjust person cannot be a friend to someone else; just as his self-interest will spoil his judgment when he deals with other people in matters of justice, so his self-interest will constrict his ability truly to wish the good of someone who should be his friend. In both cases, he will seek his own good rather than the good of another, even when the other is another self to him. Friendship is not an alternative to justice but a completion of it.

The fact that justice is a prerequisite for friendship is brought out in book 1 of Plato's Republic. There, Polemarchus offers the first definition of justice that is examined in the dialogue.\textsuperscript{15} He equates justice


\textsuperscript{15} Republic 331e–336a. I am grateful to Kurt Pritzl for showing me the relevance of this definition of justice to my essay.
with friendship, saying repeatedly that justice is to benefit one’s friends and harm one’s enemies. Now, this is indeed a kind of justice, but not an adequate one. Someone who thought and acted this way would have enlarged his soul to some degree, but not in a sufficient and truthful way. He could not judge whether his friends truly deserved this sort of help and whether his enemies truly deserved to be “harmed.” This formula for justice—helping your friends and harming your enemies—could endorse vicious ethnic rivalries. The failure to distinguish between justice and friendship ruins both virtues, because the allegiances in question are not based on truth. Justice introduces the concern with truth that is needed as a condition for friendship.

We have claimed that friendship involves a special categorial form, an identificational form in which we each take the good of the other, as such, as our good. We mutually wish for and perform the other’s good; as such, it becomes good for us. This is the kind of reason or intelligence that constitutes friendship. Since friendship is the highest moral excellence, superior even to the individual virtues and justice, this particular categorial form, this form of moral intelligence, is the highest kind of moral thinking. Friendship is not just an impulse or a feeling; like justice, it involves calibration, but of a different kind. It demands that in the contingencies and vicissitudes of life we possess the insight and the character to achieve truly the good of another. This requires a particularly sensitive knowledge of what is the true good for the other: we must be temperate and courageous so that we will not think that self-indulgence or rashness, for instance, can be good for our friend, and it also requires a profound knowledge of the friend, so that we will know precisely what he needs, especially as a moral agent, and how he needs it. It is for this reason that we cannot be friends with too many people; we simply cannot understand many people with the detailed and personalized knowledge that friendship demands. Friendship, therefore, requires an act of intelligence; it has to understand the needs, inclinations, and emotions of the friends so that it can calibrate the equation that is the friendship between them.

IV

Friendship is the paradigm of moral thinking and acting. If friendship is the highest form of moral reason, then we can expect
that all the other virtues, both the individual virtues and justice, will in some way participate in it. Such is indeed the case. If we, through temperance and courage, order our emotions properly, we can be said to be friends with ourselves, because our inclinations and our moral intelligence will, in a sense, "wish well" to each other. Someone whose emotions and reason are in concert is a friend to himself, a philautos. As Aristotle says, "he is of one mind with himself and he desires the same things with his entire soul; and therefore he wishes goods for himself . . . and does them, . . . and does so for his own sake (for he does it for the rational element in him, which is thought to be the man himself)."\(^\text{16}\)

Likewise, if we are just in our dealings with other people, we can be said to be friendly toward them and our justice can participate in friendship, even though we are not friends in the strict sense. Justice does not involve reciprocity and intimacy as friendship does. If I judge justly in regard to certain other people, they do not necessarily judge justly toward me, and they are not necessarily close to me: justice always involves a certain moral distance between the one who acts and the ones who are affected. For this reason a person should not be called upon to exercise formal justice in regard to his relatives and friends. It is often tragic when he is forced to do so and it may well lead to a loss of friendship, because what has been an intimate relationship becomes transformed into an objective exchange. How could a faculty member, for example, be called upon to evaluate his or her spouse for tenure, or how could someone be required to evaluate the job performance of one of his best friends? How could a policeman be required to arrest his uncle or aunt? The memory of such an action cannot be erased from their future relationship and the earlier intimacy and reciprocity cannot easily be restored. As Henry James writes about Kate Croy at the close of *The Wings of the Dove*, "She turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. 'We shall never be again as we were!'\(^\text{17}\)

The structure of friendship, therefore, touches all the other virtues, which participate thereby in the highest form of moral excellence. Obviously, it is not the case that we literally become friends to

\(^{16}\) *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.4.1166a13–17. See also 9.8

everyone toward whom we act virtuously, but it is true that every
good moral transaction has something of friendship in it. This “touch
of friendship” can be described as a special kind of categorial form,
which we can call “moral categoriality.”\textsuperscript{18} Moral categoriality has a
structure like the one we have discovered in friendship: an action that
is morally good is one in which we wish and perform the good of an-
other; we wish and perform it as our good. A morally good action is
beneficent at its core. An action that is morally bad, in contrast, is
one in which we wish and perform the bad of another as our good.
We are malevolent: what is bad for the other is taken and done pre-
cisely as our good. We want that which harms another, specifically as
such. Benevolence and malevolence are at the center of moral ac-
tions; they are what make the actions moral. For example, if I acci-
dentally bump into someone and hurt him, I have not performed a
moral transaction. The other person has been bodily harmed but not
morally injured, and I have not acted in a wicked manner. No moral
relationship has been established between us. If, however, I wish to
bring about the injury, if I strike the person voluntarily, if I take and
do this harm to him as my good, I am engaged in a moral transac-
tion. I have acted toward that person and he can bear resentment toward
me for what I have done. This moral categoriality, of willing and do-
ing the good or bad of another as my good, is what makes my action
moral.

Even acts of temperance and courage, acts of the individual or in-
ternal virtues and vices, embody the categorial form of benevolence
or malevolence. If I act temperately, I enter into a kind of complexity
in which I will and do what is good for me precisely as such. I will and
do it as good, I do not merely do what is good. If I act intemperately, I
will and do what is bad for me, precisely as such. My own bad be-
comes my good. Through this categoriality, an element of friendship
or enmity is found at the heart even of courage, temperance, and their
associated vices. When we are temperate or courageous we become

\textsuperscript{18} I have developed the concept of moral categoriality in my book, \textit{Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), and in two essays, “What is Moral Action?” and “Moral Thinking,” which have been republished in my collection of essays, \textit{Pictures, Quo-
tations, and Distinctions: Fourteen Essays in Phenomenology} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). See also “Friendship and Moral Ac-
"friends" to and with ourselves, and when we are intemperate or cowardly we become "enemies" to and with ourselves. Also, if we are just toward other people we become "friends" with them. In these cases, we are friends in only an analogous way; we are not literally friends, because there may strictly speaking be no reciprocity in the benevolence, and the kind of well-wishing is not quite the same as that which occurs in friendship, but all these cases are something like friendship and they have an element of friendship in them.

If friendship is the paradigm for good moral action, enmity or malevolence, the contrary of friendship, is at the heart of all bad moral behavior. The purest form of malevolence is the case in which we directly will and do something that is bad for another, and we will and do it precisely as our good. We want it specifically as bad for the other person. This is the paradigm of vice. Such explicit malevolence involves a categorial form. It is a rational way of inflicting damage, and it corrupts the doer far more than it injures the one who suffers the harm. It is not an action done out of weakness or self-interest, but one done purely and simply to injure another. Many of our wicked actions are not done out of such pure malevolence; most are done out of weakness or because we are seeking some interest of our own: I need more income, I want your job, so I slander you in order to get your job. I do not slander you simply out of malice but only because I want the position you have; there is "nothing personal" in what I do. Even in such cases, however, an element of malevolence obviously survives. I may injure you only to get your job, but it still remains true that I have willed and done what is bad for you as my good, even though it is only my instrumental good, not my direct good. The categorial, identifying form of willing and doing what is bad for you as my good is still at work. It is interesting, incidentally, that while Aristotle discusses, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the vices that are associated with every virtue, he does not treat the opposite of friendship. He does not treat enmity or malevolence 19

It should be clear from this analysis why a vicious person cannot achieve perfect friendship. A vicious person is one whose reason has been morally corrupted; he wills the wicked action directly as such.

19 Plato, however, does treat enmity as the contrary of friendship, when he has Socrates say that he would rather suffer harm than inflict it. See Sokolowski, "Friendship and Moral Action in Aristotle," 365–8.
He may will and perform one of the extremes associated with the personal virtues, such as intemperance and cowardice, or he may will and do the unjust action, preferring his own to the common good. In all of these vicious actions he deliberately chooses what is bad; he makes the bad his own good. Friendship is precisely the opposite of this: it is to choose the good as such, the good of the friend. To act in friendship is to engage the highest categorial form of a good moral action, which is the direct opposite of the malevolence involved in a rational choice of what is bad. The rational part of the vicious man, his practical intelligence, his ability to constitute moral categorialities, has been corrupted and hence it renders him unfit for friendship and for virtue generally. Vice is self-destructive because even the vicious agent is striving for what is good, but he has made himself incapable of displaying the good to himself, and so as a “rational” agent he acts blindly and ruins himself.

It follows that an agent who is not vicious but only morally weak, the agent who suffers from what Aristotle calls akrasia, is still capable of friendship. He is not a good agent because his inclinations overcome his better judgment, but he does have a better judgment and he is full of regrets for what he, in his weakness, is forever doing. The akratic agent may cause great sorrow to those who are his friends, but he does have friends. It makes sense for them to want to help him. His moral intelligence, that part of him that is most himself, may be weak but it is still truthful. The vicious agent, because his reason is corrupt, is beyond help and beyond sympathy; the deepest part in him chooses the bad and not the good as such. He has become untrue in the things that matter most: “therefore, we see, the bad man does not have a friendly disposition even toward himself, because there is nothing lovable (philēton) in him.”

V

Four points remain to be made at the close of our study. The first concerns the sophistical question, “Why be moral?” It is hard to take

---

20 The morally weak human agent is discussed by Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics 7.1–10. In 7.8, 1151a25–6 Aristotle says that in the akratic man the best part (his reason) does remain intact, even though it is often overcome. The weak man’s moral opinions are sound.
this question seriously, but we may feel perplexed about what to do with it. The emptiness and unreality of the question are made vividly clear, however, if, as we have argued, the core and climax of morality is friendship. The question “Why be moral?” would then amount to, “Why should I make myself capable of having friends?”, and the absurdity of such a question becomes obvious. It might be hard to respond to the question if it is taken to mean, “Why be just?”, but it is easy to respond to it if it is taken to imply that we could meaningfully renounce the possibility of friendship with others and with ourselves. Even the vicious man knows that one cannot be happy without friends, and hence that one cannot live without being moral. It would be an obvious incoherence for a human speaker to declare himself uncertain whether he wanted to be capable of friendship or not.

The second point concerns the extent to which friendship can be deliberately chosen. If friendships are constituted by a special categorial form (through which the friends act in concert and wish well to one another), can we bring about a friendship wherever we wish, simply by installing this rational form into a relationship? Obviously, we cannot do so; friendships are not under our direct control in that way. As Laurence Thomas writes, “We do not self-consciously choose our friends in the way we choose, say, the clothes we wear. One does not shop for a friend in the way that one shops for an article of clothing.”

It should be noted, however, that we may indeed shop for useful or pleasant friends in this manner; we might look in the advertisements for a good auto mechanic or a doctor, but we do not look there for friends in the highest sense of the term. We receive such perfect friendships; we are blessed or lucky when we make them.

What happens in the development of friendship is that we first act with others in regard to more mundane, ordinary tasks: we work with

---

21 Nicomachean Ethics 9.4 1166b25–6. Following Aristotle and Husserl, we have distinguished a wide range of categorial forms that operate in moral conduct: means to ends, middle versus extremes, the forms of justice, the combinatorics of friendship, the forms of benevolence or malevolence that constitute an action as moral. In contrast, Kant sees simply one form, that of the categorical imperative, as constitutive of morality. For a thorough discussion of Kant’s treatment of friendship see the classical study by H.J. Paton, “Kant on Friendship,” in Friendship. A Philosophical Reader, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 133–54. The essay was originally published in 1956.

22 Laurence Thomas, “Friendship and Other Loves,” in Badhwar, Friendship. A Philosophical Reader, 49.
someone in an office or factory, we play golf with someone, we attend classes together. Such friendships may be useful and pleasant and as such they are more under our control. Then, gradually, we realize that we and the other person can deal not only with such “superficial” things, but that we begin to “face life together.” We begin to cope with the deeper contingencies and situations that arise in life. We begin to deal with the kinds of things that our moral virtues (our courage, temperance, generosity, justice) are concerned with. We find that we can deliberate and choose with the other person in regard to the obligations, difficulties, and projects that define us as human beings and not just as employees or consumers. A “hand in glove” cooperation becomes possible that can arise for us with only a few people in a lifetime. The kind of reciprocal trust, disclosure, and benevolence that constitutes a noble friendship gradually takes shape. The intelligence that comes into play in this relationship, the particularized categorical form that becomes constituted in it, is built up upon a foundation of precategorical experience. Just as we cannot make a judgment unless we have a perceptual, precategorical foundation for it, so we cannot achieve the categoriality of friendship without a suitable base.

The third issue to be discussed deals with malevolence, the opposite of friendship. It is the situation in which people are united by hatred, in which someone wishes and does what is bad for another, formally and precisely as such. Just as all good moral actions participate in friendship, so all wicked ones participate in its opposite; they all have a “touch” of malevolence and hence destroy the agent more than the target of his action. Sheer malevolence is the most radical perversion of the desire for good that is natural to human beings, because the malevolent agent takes as his explicit good the bad for someone else: not “evil” as an abstraction, but some concrete thing that is bad for a particular person. It is interesting, however, that Thomas Hobbes, as hardheaded a thinker as he is, does not acknowledge such direct malice. In speaking about cruelty, he writes, “Contempt, or little sense of the calamity of others, is that which men call cruelty, proceeding from security of their own fortune.”

Cruelty for Hobbes is not malevolence but indifference, which he calls contempt. He goes

---

on to say, “That any man should take pleasure in other mens’ great harms, without other end of his own, I do not conceive it possible.” Hobbes cannot conceive how a man might rejoice or “take pleasure” in the suffering of another unless that man saw some benefit to himself; a fortiori would he not conceive that anyone should inflict harm on another without some advantage to himself. For Hobbes, if a person does something malevolent, it is not sheer malice but a merely utilitarian injury, something done for the agent’s own advantage.

It is strange that Hobbes should say this; does he not recognize that malice and simple cruelty sometimes occur in human exchanges? Perhaps his unwillingness to see them is related to the modern rationalist and scientific project. If one is to hope that all essential human needs can be satisfied by the scientific approach to nature and the rational approach to politics, one would have to say that no human problems would be left over once nature had been made abundant and society had become well regulated. To enlist in the modern project, one would have to believe that all human problems can be solved by its measures. In this view, human beings would have to be understood as essentially self-interested agents, and if their self-interest could be gratified, no further human problems would remain. However, if sheer malevolence were to survive the completion of the modern project, it would follow that the modern project could not take care of everything. There would be questions that it could not answer and truths that it could not achieve. The problems addressed by Socrates, Plato, and the Bible—all of which Hobbes dismisses—would still be outstanding.

Furthermore, besides denying that anyone can directly wish the harm of another, Hobbes also denies that a human agent can formally wish the good of another. Just before he defines cruelty, Hobbes examines pity, which he says is grief for the calamity of another. This grief, however, is not based on the agent’s wish for the other person’s good; rather, it “ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself.” We pity others not because we wish them well and grieve over their loss, but because we fear that the same thing might happen to us. Self-interest and self-preservation thus trump any concern for the good of another precisely as such. The entire field of

---

24 Some remarks by Christine Neulieb were helpful to me in this context.
moral conduct, defined as the taking of the good or bad of another as
our good or bad, drops out of Hobbes’s philosophy of human nature

The fourth and final point we wish to make is theological. It con-
cerns the relationship between friendship, moral action, and the
Christian virtue of charity. We have said that virtuous moral con-
duct is constituted by the categorial form in which we achieve the
good of another as our own good. This “touch of friendship” in all
good moral action is a natural substrate that can be elevated by grace
into the Christian theological virtue of charity. It is the point of con-
tact between nature and grace. Charity, therefore, is not without a
natural anticipation. It perfects human moral conduct, and the spe-
cific element it brings to perfection is the form of friendship that lies
at the heart of natural virtue. Charity relates human benevolence to
divine generosity; it associates human virtue with the generosity at
work in the life of the Holy Trinity and the overflow of such generos-
ity in Creation and Redemption. The friendship that completes hu-
man agency is thus transformed by grace into an intimation of the life
lived and given by God.

The Catholic University of America

---

25 On the change of context between the natural order and grace, see
Robert Sokolowski, The God of Faith and Reason. Foundations of Chris-
tian Theology (Washington, D C : The Catholic University of America Press,
1995), 53–87