

# An Interpretation of Aristotle's Thought on Friendship: Based on a Textual Analysis of Books VIII and IX of Nicomachean Ethics

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## Abstract

Aristotle believed that friendship is not only a certain virtue but also the most essential thing in life. There are mainly three different types of friendship: friendship based on goodness, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on utility. Friendship is characterized by reciprocity, similarity, and the need for shared living. Friendship is the bond that connects the city-state and is an important condition for the transition from individual virtue to public virtue. Aristotle's thought on friendship is a relationship that regulates interpersonal communication with action as its characteristic, a rational emotion accompanied by choice and deliberation, a unity of ethical virtue and practical wisdom. We should carry forward Aristotle's thought on friendship, and promote personal happiness, interpersonal harmony, and social harmony through friendship.

## Keywords

Friendship, Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

## 1. Introduction

In the new era of Internet-based collaborative economy, while the sharing economy has become the new favorite of the times, it is eroding the trust among people and triggering new social problems. The abundance of material things has brought about a shortage of spiritual life, the depletion and barrenness of the soul, and the continuous expansion of personal desires. During the drastic historical changes, China has also experienced the severe impact of utilitarianism on traditional virtues. At present, China is in a period of transformation, and the phenomenon of moral anomie in daily life is common. The decline of morality constantly challenges

harmonious interactions among people. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, the ancient Greek thinker Aristotle pointed out that “Friendship is the bond that holds the city-state together.” (Aristotle, 2003). As a human quality and even virtue that depends on the community for existence, friendship is not only a good personal moral quality but also the moral root for creating a harmonious atmosphere within social groups. With this in mind, this article aims to, through grasping Aristotle’s exploration of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*, re-understand friendship, and correctly bring into play the value of friendship in aspects such as the development of personal personality, interpersonal relationships with others, the degree of social civilization, the improvement of ideological and moral standards, and the construction of a harmonious society. It is hoped that this can improve the current social situation in China, bridge social divides, and enhance the degree of social civilization and the ideological and moral standards of the people.

## 2. The Evolution of Friendship

The Greek word “*Phileo*” is generally translated into “friendship” in Chinese. Initially, the meaning of friendship did not merely refer to the emotion between people, but rather denoted a kind of love and concern for something or an event. This love and concern mainly possess two characteristics: goodwill and initiative. “Goodwill is amicable, yet it is not friendship. One can have goodwill towards strangers, and this goodwill may not be known to the other party. Friendship is not like this, nor is goodwill love. Love also encompasses the formation of common morality, while goodwill arises suddenly.” (Aristotle, 2003). That is to say, friendship necessarily implies common moral requirements. The objects of friendship are extremely broad, including the intimate relationships between ordinary friends, those among family members, among fellow citizens, among business partners, and even various friendly feelings among members of civil societies. It can be said that this term is a comprehensive reflection of interpersonal and social relationships.

Friendship has always been an important topic in the history of Western philosophy. It was widely discussed and applied in literary works during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Many thinkers such as Epicurus and Cicero also studied friendship. During the Middle Ages in the West, Christianity advocated “love for one’s neighbor” and incorporated it into the category of theology. Since the Enlightenment, Kant regulated the love between people in the form of moral imperatives. Modern and contemporary philosophical thinkers have advocated and adhered to the fraternity of humanism, rarely touching upon the friendly relationships between individuals. Subsequently, virtue ethicists represented by Alasdair MacIntyre advocated re-establishing the authority of virtue, bringing virtuous friendship back into the public eye. With the evolution of social relations, as a specific term for the practical communicative activities and emotions between people and the most essential virtue in human life, it has developed into a specific moral category.

As the first person in the history of Western thought to systematically expound on ethical theories, Aristotle has had a profound impact on the development of Western ethics. Friendship, as an important research topic of ethical virtue concerning others, holds an extremely important position in Aristotle's virtue ethics. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he devotes two books, the eighth and the ninth, to expounding on friendship. He also devotes a part of *Eudemian Ethics* to this topic. Meanwhile, he touches on the issue of friendship in *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, and *Magna Moralia*. Through his discussion of friendship, Aristotle achieved a transition from personal ethics to interpersonal ethics. He then sought the path to achieving the highest good, i.e., happiness, from the perspective of the relationship between individuals and others, and looked for ways to build an excellent city-state from the good virtues inherent in citizens.

### 3. The Origin, Nature, and Key Characteristics of Aristotle's Thought on Friendship

#### 3.1. The Origin of the Thought on Friendship

Aristotle's original exploration of the origin of friendship stemmed from the great significance of friendship in human social life. He believed that friendship emerged and was maintained due to the need for human self-perfection, the need of instinct or nature, and the need of political life. The emergence of friendship is an inevitable result of the development of the relationship between humans themselves, between people, and between humans and the city-state. We can discover the ideological structural relationship of "human (oneself), society (between people), state (between human and state)" from Aristotle's dialectical relationship between "human and the city-state", and thus summarize three profound reasons for the emergence of friendship.

Firstly, friendship originates from self-love. Xiao (2004) once mentioned that "the starting point of human moral progress and the main spiritual driving force stem from human self-love." In Aristotle's thought on friendship, self-love is a fundamental prerequisite for an individual to develop friendship towards others. Noble self-love, as an innate ability, serves as the emotional foundation for the emergence of friendship. When discussing this, Aristotle first distinguished two forms of self-love: one is self-love purely out of physical desires, which regards the pursuit of external things such as honor, wealth, and status as the most worthy pursuits; the other is self-love generated by the logos part in the soul. The former is addicted to emotions and desires and cannot extricate itself, thus confining all emotions entirely to oneself and being unable to develop friendly feelings towards others. The latter, however, always engages in actions with the virtues of justice and temperance, and is addicted to noble and inherently good things. "Such a person seems to be more of a self-lover. He gives himself all that is most noble and best. He is addicted to the highest part of himself and obeys it in all things." (Aristotle, 2003). In this process, not only is one's self good, but also one can share love with others while loving oneself. When facing conflicts, one will selflessly

sacrifice one's own interests. In such friendship, people can correctly understand themselves and help others, and consider others' feelings while loving themselves. Therefore, only rational and unselfish self-love is the fundamental prerequisite for us to develop friendship towards others.

Secondly, friendship originates from goodwill. In Aristotle's thought on friendship, goodwill is not only a kind wish that springs from the heart, hoping that the other party can continuously maintain virtue and enjoy happiness, but also a favorable impression that suddenly emerges due to the noble actions of the other party and has the potential to develop into friendship. However, goodwill is only a sufficient condition for the emergence of friendship. "It is the starting point of friendship, just as the pleasure of sight is the starting point of love." (Wang et al., 2005). Without goodwill, no friendship will arise, but having goodwill does not necessarily mean becoming friends. Because if one person has goodwill towards another, but the other party does not reciprocate this goodwill, then no friendship will be generated between them. At the same time, friendship can only operate among familiar people. "Sometimes a person has goodwill towards those he has never met but thinks are good or useful, and it is possible that someone among them also has the same goodwill towards him. Of course, these two people have goodwill towards each other, but if each of them is unaware of the other's goodwill, how can we say they are friends? Therefore, to become friends, they must not only have goodwill towards each other, that is, both hope the other well, but also be aware of each other's goodwill, and this goodwill must be generated by one of the reasons mentioned above." (Aristotle, 2003). Therefore, for goodwill to develop into friendship, it needs to start from the mutual existence and mutual awareness of each other. Only then can we develop an intimate relationship in actions and generate friendship, thus becoming friends.

Thirdly, friendship originates from shared living. Proceeding from the social situation of the city-state, Aristotle regarded shared living as an important external condition for the emergence of friendship. Without shared living, love can only be self-love for an individual, and it cannot be further sublimated and extended to love for other citizens and the collective of the city-state. In reality, the loving actions based on blood relationship and shared living between parents and children are the most original form of love. Relying on this form, different levels of friendly feelings among brothers, partners, and citizens in the community are derived. Long-term shared living can ensure the maintenance of the relationship between the two parties in friendship. "People who live together and provide each other with pleasure and service are being friends. Those who are asleep or separated from each other are not actually being friends, but only have the quality of being friends." (Aristotle, 2003). Long-term separation will make us estranged. We enhance our pleasure and sense of happiness in shared living. "Some friends drink together, while others engage in philosophical pursuits. ...Because they hope to live with their friends, they all participate as much as possible in the activities that give them a sense of togetherness." (Aristotle, 2003). Only in the process of jointly engaging in certain activities with friends can the two parties in

friendship promote each other on the basis of mutual understanding and maintain the stability of their relationship. Only through continuous shared living can we better achieve the unity of the self and the other.

### 3.2. The Nature of the Thought on Friendship

In Aristotle's view, based on the nature of the objects and the differences in their levels of convergence with virtue, friendship can be classified into: friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on goodness. Friendship based on utility occurs when one perceives and recognizes that the other party has "instrumental" benefits for oneself. This kind of friendship is full of purpose and practicality. "Utility is not a lasting quality; it changes over time. Friendship based on utility is common among the elderly, middle-aged people, and young people who aim to make a profit." (Aristotle, 2003). People interact with each other only because the other party can bring them something useful. Once the other party loses their usefulness, the interaction will cease. When the two parties form a friendship based on utility, they merely seek benefits from each other. Conversely, it will also cease to exist due to conflicts of interest. This instrumental friendship is the foundation for the existence of society. It is the form of friendship with the lowest requirements and the most widespread. Friendship based on pleasure arises because both parties can obtain pleasure from the friendship relationship and is based on a shared sense of pleasure. Aristotle believed that "Friendship among young people seems to be based on pleasure. Young people live by their emotions and pursue what is pleasant and present." (Aristotle, 2003). Friendship among young people is easy to form, but it can also fade away quickly as the pleasure dissipates. Friendship based on goodness exists only between two virtuous people and is generated when both parties act for the goodness of the other.

Aristotle believed that among the three types of friendship, only friendship based on goodness is the most worthy of pursuit and is friendship in the original sense. From the perspective of conforming to virtue, the first two types are not for the purpose of perfecting one's own virtue or fulfilling the virtue of the other party. Only friendship based on goodness comes closest to the standard of perfect virtue. Friendship based on goodness "is not about mutual help out of need between the weak, but about active mutual assistance between the strong." (Aristotle, 2003). It is a union of two personalities through equal mutual love and respect. Friendship based on goodness emerges among people with mutual virtue. The interaction between them is not to meet any utilitarian or instrumental survival needs. They do not regard others as a means to an end, but truly act out of appreciation for the other party's noble qualities, share with the other party, and wish the other party a good life.

### 3.3. The Characteristics of the Thought on Friendship

As can be seen from the origin and nature of friendship, the most perfect and best

form of friendship discussed by Aristotle should possess the characteristics of reciprocity, similarity, and the need for shared living. These three elements are indispensable. Other different types and forms of friendship may accidentally possess only some of these qualities or none at all. Meanwhile, the most perfect friendship also requires the tests of time and limitations in quantity as important supplementary conditions.

In the above discussion of the causes of friendship, we understand that friendship essentially emerges in the practical process of mutual goodwill. "Mutual goodwill is friendship." Only when goodwill is manifested as a voluntary and proactive act in factual actions beneficial to the other party, and the other party reciprocates this goodwill in the same way, can we determine that this mutual goodwill has generated a positive interaction. Only on this basis is friendship possible. "If both parties do not have the same goodwill, then this kind wish for the friend is merely goodwill." Friendship without reciprocity can only be regarded as a one-sided emotion. In terms of the characteristic of reciprocity, friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure, and friendship based on goodness are consistent. At the same time, the reason why friendship based on utility and friendship based on pleasure can be formed on the basis of reciprocity is that both parties recognize that the other can bring them pleasure and utility, thus also demonstrating the characteristic of similarity. However, since these two types of friendship can change and disappear as time and place change, only the similarity of the two virtuous people reflected in friendship based on goodness, under the condition that their virtues remain unchanged, can make friendship eternal.

Shared living is the foundation of the three types of friendship. As the bond of social life, friendship can only function within the same social environment and cultural system. "Nothing is more characteristic of friendship than living together." (Aristotle, 2003). Therefore, not only those who live in hardship need friends, but also those who live in affluence need friends to share their lives. No one wants to live in solitude. "Friendship means commonality. One treats a friend in the same way as one treats oneself. It is gratifying to feel one's own existence, and it is equally gratifying to feel the existence of a friend. And this feeling can only be realized through activities in shared living." (Aristotle, 2003). Thus, truly virtuous friendship can only arise in an environment where both parties have in-depth understanding and communication. Without shared living in the same society and lacking communication between people, friendship would be out of the question.

### **3.4. The Coexistence and Transition of Different Types of Friendship in Real Relationships**

The above text divides friendship into three types: utility-based, pleasure-based, and virtue-based, but does not discuss how these categories coexist or transition in real relationships. Utility-based friendship is relatively common in reality. People establish connections with others because they can obtain certain practical benefits from them. In some cases, this type of friendship can evolve into virtue-based

friendship. During the utilitarian interaction, if both parties gradually discover each other's good moral character, and similar values, and start to genuinely care about each other's well-being, not just focusing on the exchange of interests, the foundation for transformation is laid. For example, two business partners initially establish a friendship due to business cooperation. In the long-term interaction, they go through difficulties and share joys together. They discover each other's good qualities such as perseverance in the face of difficulties and kindness towards others. They begin to appreciate each other's character, hope the other person will live well, and are willing to offer help without expecting any return. At this point, the utility-based friendship gradually transforms into a virtue-based one.

In real relationships, different types of friendship may also coexist. A person may maintain a utility-based friendship with colleagues. They collaborate with each other for work goals and achieve mutual benefit. At the same time, they may have a pleasure-based friendship with partners in an interest group, enjoying themselves in activities related to their common hobbies. They may also maintain a virtue-based friendship with a few close friends, caring for and supporting each other purely. These different types of friendship play their respective roles in different life scenarios and levels, jointly enriching people's social lives.

#### **4. The Connotation of Aristotle's Thought on Friendship**

When discussing friendship, although Aristotle absorbed the widely recognized connotations of friendship in the society at that time, he did not give a complete definition of friendship himself. Instead, he merely explained it from different perspectives. In the current discussions of the concept of friendship, most scholars in the academic community agree with what Ross said: "any mutually attractive relationship between two people." In addition, John M. Cooper believes that friendship is a mutual liking formed when one likes others and is also liked by others, and both like each other for the sake of the other person themselves, which is an expression of the emotion of liking. Through combing the definitions of friendship given by relevant scholars and Aristotle's discussions on different aspects of friendship, this article argues that friendship is not only a human-specific, action-and practice-oriented regulatory relationship that adjusts interactions between people, but also a virtuous quality that unifies reason and emotion, guided by the logos in the soul.

##### **4.1. Friendship Regulates Interpersonal Relationships with Action as Its Characteristic**

Friendship is a relationship that regulates interpersonal communication with action as its characteristic. When discussing friendship, Aristotle absorbed the common connotation of friendship in society, that is, friendship must be proactive. On this basis, he further expanded this idea, believing that friendship is not static in concept; it is a relationship of action and activity. (Sun, 2019). That is to say, the friendship formed in an intimate shared life is not a static indication of one's

own identity, nor is it an emotion without action or a spectator—like appreciation that has nothing to do with oneself. Instead, it is a behavior and practice in which the actor actively does what should be done for a friend, and it is a positive relationship in which both parties are willing and proactive in doing things for others.

As a reciprocal relational virtue, friendship can only exist between two people involving feelings and emotions, and it can only be a relationship that regulates the communication between two people. As Liao Shenbai said, friendship is a certain emotional relationship existing between two people. The so-called relationship is a requirement that can only be explained by its correlation with other things and cannot explain itself. Therefore, friendship needs to be explained in the interaction with others. A true friendship is a unique type of human relationship. Only humans can have a real-sense friendship. It is different from the relationship between any two inanimate objects. Inanimate objects only have a simple physical relationship of mutual attraction that does not involve emotions and rationality, and can only offer us the value of their existence. It is also different from the relationship between humans and inanimate objects. A person's love for an inanimate object may stem from the benefits it brings to oneself, but one cannot hope for it to improve further. It is also different from the relationship between humans and non—human living things because this kind of relationship is unequal. Other types of living things do not possess the same emotions, understanding abilities, and choices as humans. Therefore, as a relationship of action, friendship can only exist in the ethical relationship formed by free citizens based on choice and willingness. Thus, as a relational virtue that realizes the relationship between people as human beings, where the self and the other are equal subjects involving feelings and emotions, friendship must be embodied among people. It can only exist as a regulatory relationship that adjusts the communication between people, can only be achieved through active practical activities, and only has value and significance in specific behavioral activities.

#### **4.2. Friendship Is a Rational Emotion Accompanied by Choice and Deliberation**

In Aristotle's view, love exists merely as a person's affection for another. It occurs naturally, relies on sensibility, or is determined by sensuous impulses. It is a love with the nature of physiological emotions, mostly existing as a desire stemming from physical passion and impulse. Although friendship has an emotional aspect, it is not confined to emotions alone. Friendship is the proper handling and application of such emotions through choice and careful deliberation. It is the state of virtue that contains the most emotions. Choice means making a decision after calculating and considering various actions and desires before acting. Deliberation refers to considering the consequences of various desires before taking action. That is to say, love is merely an emotion arising from passion and impulse. We cannot make any choices or considerations in advance regarding this emotion. Such emotions often arise suddenly, and they are unable to pursue goodness and beauty in a deeper sense under the guidance of reason. However, as a rational

quality and an embodiment of the rational part of the soul, friendship is not a blind compliance with the emotional feelings in the heart. Instead, it is the result of adjusting such emotions. It is an intellectual expression of these natural emotions, something normative generated through rational thinking by people (Chen, 2018), and something related to human will and reason. As a form of love that takes the other person as the object of choice and a reciprocal love, friendship must involve choice and deliberation. People consciously choose those who share the same ideals and beliefs as friends, or those who bring them pleasure or benefits. Therefore, it is the result of choosing various desires through one's own rational thinking.

Therefore, although friendship exists as an emotion, it is a more advanced, complex, and rich form of rational love. It lies in the will, not in emotional preferences. In essence, the love of friendship is the product of the combination of reason and emotion. It is superior and more advanced than love precisely because it is the commander that disposes and controls love. It can be controlled by the rational ability in the soul instead of being dominated by sensuous natural impulses. It always maintains a reasonable state in interactions with others. It not only does not restrict the other person's interactions with others but also keeps every move of one's own under the control of reason. It undergoes careful thinking and choice before communication, thus existing as a non-emotional and rational emotion.

### 4.3. Friendship Is an Ethical Virtue

Friendship is an ethical virtue and a unity of practical wisdom. Before discussing friendship, Aristotle expounded on various virtues such as self-control, temperance, and courage. All these virtues share a common feature: the cultivation and perfection of these virtues are centered around the individual's own happiness, with the individual self at the core. Thus, they exist merely as individual virtues. However, friendship, as a special ethical virtue, is unique in that it transcends the individual self and exists as a group-oriented virtue that regulates the relationships among individual citizens. This is the fundamental essence of friendship as a virtue.

As an ethical virtue that regulates interpersonal relationships, friendship is also restricted by intellectual virtues in practice. In the actual process of interacting with others, it always involves choice and deliberation. That is to say, friendship is a chosen desire. Like Plato, Aristotle believed that both friendship and love lie between knowledge and ignorance. The highest realm of friendship is to progress from loving people to loving knowledge, that is, loving wisdom. However, unlike Plato, who considered knowledge as wisdom, which is the wisdom of the highest speculative activity, Aristotle regarded this kind of knowledge as practical wisdom (phronesis). Its basic characteristic is practice and action. The scope of application of practical wisdom is also different from that of wisdom. It focuses on the behaviors and characters of people in the process of change, and is concerned with

specific things related to practice. It is closer to us, easier to practice, and we can more easily grasp and understand it. It is the behavioral good that brings us the greatest benefit (Wang & Liu, 2016). In Aristotle's view, practical wisdom, as a practical quality related to human good and evil, which is both truth-seeking and logical, is always full of consideration and deliberation. "The characteristic of a person of practical wisdom is being good at considering what is good and beneficial for himself."

In friendship, wisdom does not play a direct role. Instead, it exerts an indirect influence on friendship through phronesis, a form of practical wisdom. When people apply phronesis, in the specific context of interacting with friends, they consider factors such as the goodness or badness of their actions and the consequences. For instance, when a friend encounters difficulties, they use phronesis to think about how to offer appropriate help. This means neither over-helping to hurt the friend's self-esteem nor under-helping to seem indifferent. Such wise thinking and choices enable the proper management of friendship in practice, making it conform to ethical and moral norms and ensuring the healthy and long-lasting development of friendship. Meanwhile, the understanding of the essence of things and universal truths, which wisdom pursues, allows people to understand their friends' behaviors, values, etc. from a more macroscopic perspective in friendship. As a result, it can enhance mutual understanding and resonance at a deeper level, enabling friendship to go beyond superficial interactions and be based on in-depth insight into and recognition of each other's innermost selves. In Aristotle's opinion, friendship is a behavioral quality with inherent emotions. The ultimate measure of friendship is relative to the individual's perception of goodness and beauty. As a human good, friendship is practicable and operable for most people. Humans themselves are the best judges and controllers of friendship, and practical wisdom serves as a guide for people's behavioral choices and judgments in friendship, providing a rational guide for people's actions. Therefore, as an ethical virtue and a relationship of action and practice, friendship is the handling and application of specific human affairs under the guidance of practical wisdom, that is, the virtue of practical wisdom, and it represents the yearning and pursuit of a good life.

## **5. The Enlightenment of Aristotle's Thought on Friendship**

In today's society, friendship is no longer the sole bond that sustains relationships among people. To extricate ourselves from the plight of the current moral norms being weak and ineffective, it is necessary for us to draw on Aristotle's research on friendship, salvage the neglected virtues, and retrieve the most original and beautiful state of the idea of friendship. Aristotle's thought on friendship is of great guiding significance for us to correctly handle the relationships between individuals and other aspects of society. It provides important theoretical guidance for establishing a sense of friendship, strengthening the concept of friendship, and coordinating interpersonal relationships.

Firstly, Friendship Promotes Personal Happiness. Aristotle believed that happiness is the highest good, and its essence lies in practical activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. Happiness lies in activity, and happiness requires friendship. Different from other external conditions of the relationship between virtue and happiness, friendship itself is a virtue or contains virtue. Happiness is based on friendship. Without the spirit of friendship, the foundation of happiness cannot be formed. Aristotle believed that happiness means living well or doing well. Although the standard of happiness is difficult to define, one thing is certain: a happy person must be living a life full of joy and pleasure, and a pleasant life cannot lack friendship. The activity of practicing virtue, that is, a life with friendship, is the core content of a happy life. Friendship presents the relationship between people, requiring people to achieve spiritual unity in the same experiences. True friendship contributes to people's shared lives, unity, and the realization of the goal of happiness. A person lacking friendship in life cannot have a truly happy life. This is first determined by the essential attributes of human beings. "No one would choose to possess the whole world on the condition of being alone." (Russell, 2001). A person who lives in isolation cannot achieve true happiness. The activities required for happiness are long-lasting and solitary. Without friends, such long-lasting and pure activities of realization cannot be carried out. Secondly, a happy life needs friends to receive one's good deeds. One needs to share joy with friends in times of happiness and needs the help of friends in times of trouble. One needs the presence of friends to seek comfort. Thirdly, "Friends, through their role as a mirror, provide a person with what he himself cannot provide." (Yu, 2011). Communicating with friends of similar temperament allows one to reflect on one's own conduct and activities through the behavior of friends, and then further care for and inspire each other. Therefore, friendship is a crucial virtue on our path to happiness.

Secondly, Friendship Promotes Interpersonal Harmony. The idea of friendship can serve as an adhesive for interpersonal relationships. In the new era, it helps people re-think the original meaning of friendship, strengthen the sense of friendship, cultivate the spirit of friendship, resolve conflicts and contradictions in interpersonal communication, and enable people to regain warmth, touch, care, and help in communication, thus constructing harmonious and equal interpersonal relationships. Since friendship is premised on emotion and goodwill, when getting along with friends, people pay more attention to the moral character of the other party. Even if there are deviations, due to the existence of the friendship relationship, people will not overly care about the gains and losses of interests. Moreover, in the process of getting along, people will be influenced by the other party's character and reduce the occurrence of unjust behaviors.

Thirdly, Friendship Promotes Social Harmony. Aristotle's thought on friendship encompasses almost all the interpersonal relationships in ancient Greek family life, partnerships, and among city-state citizens. Its extension far exceeds the concept of friendship today, covering various aspects such as family kinship,

romantic love between men and women, legal friendship, and ethical friendship. Similarly, it basically includes all social relationships among people in modern society and has strong ethical values.

In Aristotle's view, friendship is not only a principle of self-love for citizens but also an altruistic principle. Although friendship originates from self-love, this kind of self-love is different from simply pursuing one's own self-interest. Under necessary circumstances, one can also sacrifice oneself for the interests of others, achieving love for others while loving oneself. At the same time, the essence of friendship does not lie in passively receiving the love and dedication of others, but in actively loving. It is a love formed out of one's own consciousness as a kind of obligation. Although there is also practical friendship limited to obtaining benefits, this kind of friendship is the most basic form. Only the kind of friendship characterized by mutual respect, mutual dedication, negotiation and cooperation, and everything for the good of others is the form of friendship truly needed for social development. As a virtue concerning others, his thought on friendship can not only stimulate the inner nature of citizens to jointly build a harmonious society in communication but also further prompt people to think about how to get along with others from the perspective of others, thus achieving mutual understanding, alleviating conflicts and contradictions in communication, and jointly constructing a harmonious and orderly society.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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