On Sacred Friendship

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By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine friendship as a multi-faceted phenomenon and finally present a "sacred face" of friendship. Drawing mainly on the works of Aristotle and Montaigne, I identify several features commonly associated with friendship including: goodwill, affection, the particularity of the friend, and the certainty of the friend's affection. Combining these features, I give an account of the activity of giving a gift of affection. This gift need not take on any particular form, but can be present in the way something is done for the friend. Using Mircea Eliade's account of sacred experience, I build on to this notion of giving a gift the concept of sacred experience to make it a ritual.

Gift-giving as a ritual is an interruption in the lives of friends. This interruption marks a new way of experiencing the world, and the friends are responsible for that way of being in the world. Through gift-giving the friends experience the world together as an "us," and through the gift of affection they can return to that way of being.

By using Claudia Card's account of responsibility, I detail how gift-giving is both a spontaneous taking of responsibility as well as a caretaking form of responsibility. By becoming twofold responsible for the friendship, the friends experience the world as an "us," as a composite entity where their selves mingle. The being an "us" by way of giving the gift of affection is at the heart of the sacred face of friendship.
"For the rest, what we ordinarily call friends and friendships are nothing but acquaintanceships and familiarities formed by some chance or convenience, by means of which our souls are bound to each other. In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again. If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I.”

Michel de Montaigne

Preface

I will examine friendship as it is experienced rather than fitting it into some larger theoretical work. The goals I set for myself in this essay are then somewhat outside of expected norms in philosophy papers, and therefore I should mention them before starting the essay proper.

My first goal is to be thought provoking. I want to challenge readers to think more deeply about how their friendships are meaningful. I am not trying to define friendship or defeat a definition of it through argument. To the extent that readers are able to gain a deeper understanding of their friendships from this essay, this essay is successful.

My second goal is to preserve a reverent attitude toward friendship. I assume friendship’s value; I do not set out to prove it. To this end, I take as my starting point the common notion of “holding something sacred.” Moving beyond the mere phrase, I consider Mircea Eliade’s phenomenological account of the sacred. In so doing I generate an etymology of the word “sacred” that is meant to uncover something that is present in the phenomenon but inaccessible in our everyday encounters with sacredness. The success of the second goal is measured by how able I am able to produce a work that is familiar with the way we talk about friendships and does

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not reduce the beauty of friendship. Unless I am providing exegesis, I try to avoid overly technical language.

Finally, this discussion of friendship is not bound by a particular notion of love or affection. I will not strictly maintain the Greek distinctions between philia, eros, and agape. I do not attend to these distinctions despite the fact that several of the philosophers' works I examine do maintain such distinctions. Philia is a concept that includes more relationships than our concept of friendship such as business relationships and the relationship between host and guest, but is close enough that it is translated as "friendship." Eros is an erotic love, and is often characterized as an intense, passionate desiring of the beloved. Finally, agape, which is "a kind of love that does not respond to the antecedent value of its object but instead is thought to create value in the beloved," is the kind of love most often associated with Christian love. I am making an assumption that the relationships people have that involve affection will sometimes exhibit features of different types of love simultaneously or at different times.

**Introduction: Faces of Friendship**

I intend to show that there is a distinct sacred face of friendship that has not been properly explicated in the philosophical literature on friendship. The sacred face of friendship is a way of being in the world for the friends; it is being an "us." This way of being in the world is brought about by the act of giving the gift of affection. By drawing on several features commonly associated with friendship, I will detail the activity of giving the gift. I will continue to develop this activity as a sacred ritual. Finally, by looking at different senses of responsibility, I will give an account of how the ritual of gift-giving affection is a transformative act that makes the friends an "us."

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Instead of examining the general notion of friendship in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, I will be using the concept of “family resemblance.” A family resemblance approach is one that focuses on different features in different contexts rather than finding a rigid definition. Friendship is generally a relationship that may have one or more of a number of features, none of which is individually necessary. Some features of friendship may appear more frequently than others or may be considered more important than others. I take these features of friendship to be “central,” even though they are not individually necessary. It is in light of these central features of friendship that I will present sacred friendship.

Throughout this paper, I will be referring to different accounts of friendship as “faces of friendship.” A face of friendship is a collection of family resemblance features that describe a type of friendship that a person may have. Each individual face of friendship may have necessary and sufficient conditions with additional peripheral features of friendship added on. Sacred friendship differs significantly from other faces of friendship, but it is still composed of some common features associated with friendship in general. The sacred face of friendship is significantly different from other faces of friendship because of the presence of sacred experience in sacred friendship, which is built on to the features of goodwill, affection, particularity of the beloved, and the certainty of the friend’s love.

The goal of this section of the essay is to explain some common features of friendship by turning to the work of past philosophers. I turn to Plato’s *Lysis*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Montaigne’s “Of Friendship.” By looking at what past philosophers have said of friendship,

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3 “Family resemblance” was a term made by Ludwig Wittgenstein. From The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available online at [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/) under the heading “3.4 Language-games and Family Resemblance.” In Wittgenstein’s work, the notion of family resemblance appeared in *Philosophical Investigations*.

4 In Young, Iris Marion, “The Five Faces of Oppression,” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 1990), Young uses the phrase “faces of oppression,” in a similar fashion. She simultaneously highlights the differences in the way people have been oppressed and notes the unity in their oppression while trying to not be reductive of particular cases.
I will be able to sort through some of the features associated with friendship and build the presentation of sacred friendship on this foundation. The specific features I will use are affection, goodwill, the particularity of the beloved, and the certainty of the friend’s love for us.

Now I will turn to several faces of friendship to find what features are commonly taken to be associated with general friendship. I will take as the core text of this section one that construes the notion of friendship broadly but does not stray from some of our common intuitions about friendship. This text is Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he divides friendships into friendships of utility, pleasure, and true character friendships. To contextualize Aristotle’s work, we will begin with Plato’s *Lysis*. After examining Aristotle and some of his commentator’s, I will turn to Montaigne’s account of friendship to further elaborate the four features of friendship that I will be using in presenting the sacred face of friendship.

After elaborating on the notions of goodwill, affection, the particularity of the beloved and the certainty of the friend’s affection for us, I will outline what sacred experience is. My account of sacred friendship is building up to how the activity of giving affection in sacred friendship changes the way the friends are in the world. Because of the gift-giving of affection, the friends become an “us” rather than a “you and me.”

**Plato and Instrumental Friendship**

In Plato’s *Lysis*, we see a presentation of friendship that is entirely constituted by the notion of usefulness. As a face of *philia*, the centrality of the notion of usefulness applies to all relationships that humans are a part of, even ones with non-humans. For Plato, the same usefulness a person may have for medicine when they are sick is at play in interpersonal relationships.

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Lysis begins with Socrates challenging Lysis's assumptions about his parents love for Lysis; Socrates argues that Lysis is only loved for something rather than unconditionally. When Lysis's friend Menexenus joins the conversation, Socrates shifts from looking at parental friendship to the friendship a sick person has with a doctor (and a sick body has with medicine). Socrates argues that a person only loves someone or something instrumentally. The patient is only a friend of the doctor and medicine for the sake of health. From this, Socrates further argues that the true friend is the final thing in which other friendships terminate. The final friend would be the one that is loved intrinsically rather than instrumentally. Socrates finishes this line of thought by claiming that we are not final friends with other human beings, but rather the good.

Lorraine Smith Pangle finds this view of friendship problematic because of the relationship Socrates describes between friendship and goodness. Pangle takes particular issue with Socrates painting a picture of goodness as merely a remedy to deficiencies. She does not like the fact that Socrates presents happiness as an absence of the evils, deprivations, and ignorance that seem to be “fundamental facts of life.” Pangle argues that in the Lysis, Socrates advances the claim that not only does all human love start in neediness, but it begins, ends, and is wholly driven by it. Pangle observes that the conception of human desires presented in the Lysis fails to distinguish between pursuing something to be free of a want, i.e. instrumentally, and desiring things that are “good in themselves for us,” as an end. As a result Socrates only presents cases of the former kind of desire. To distinguish between the two, Pangle characterizes

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6 Plato, *Lysis* 210c2-8
7 Ibid. 219a1-219b2
8 Ibid. 220a9-220b2
9 Ibid. 220b8-220d6
11 Ibid. 20
12 Ibid. 30
the desire for things that are “good in themselves” as a kind of desire that we want, whereas no one desires to be sick or poor or disabled.\textsuperscript{13}

The Socratic notion of friendship, with its focus on utility and overcoming ills, does not present a very flattering face. Emphasizing the centrality of utility in the Socratic face of friendship, David Brink argues that Socrates closes the possibility that a friend could be loved for her own sake.\textsuperscript{14} This is because on the Socratic notion of goodness, virtue is understood to be merely instrumental in trying to attain happiness, which is only a negation of ills. Each ill is an obstacle that gets in the way of a starting point of contentment. Virtues are the character traits that one has that helps one overcome these obstacles.

One could phrase the thesis of the \textit{Lysis} as being that one never loves the friend, but only her qualities insofar as those qualities can help one in overcoming one’s own obstacles. A friend’s character is a placeholder for virtue that one wishes to utilize. Brink writes: “Socrates believes that the lover values his beloved for the lover’s own \textit{eudaimonia}, as Socrates must if he is to reconcile friendship with his eudaimonism.”\textsuperscript{15} Under this notion of friendship, a person only has friends to ensure that she can overcome any setbacks that may come her way.

The thesis of the \textit{Lysis} is a challenge. Socrates put forth a definition of all friendships, and that definition is meant to be the final word. Although we disagree with Socrates’ argument, understanding this challenge helps in understanding Aristotle’s account of friendship. Aristotle’s account of friendship is not an isolated set of faces, but is actually a response to the face of friendship presented in the \textit{Lysis}. The main difference in the accounts of Socrates and Aristotle is that Aristotle maintains that a person or a thing can be loved for her own or its own sake rather

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 30-1
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
than merely instrumentally.\textsuperscript{16} Aristotle acknowledges that there are friendships entirely rooted in utility, and he concedes that desire plays an important role in all friendships. It is the valuing of the friend as an end, though, that helps make Aristotle’s account of character friendship so important.

\textbf{Aristotle and Character Friendship}

Focusing on utility as the root of all friendship does not quite capture what most of us have in mind when we think of the friendships we hold sacred. In \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} Aristotle presents three faces of friendship based on the objects worthy of affection: utility, pleasure, and the good.\textsuperscript{17} In friendships of utility people are friends in virtue of what they give one another, and often the friends are different so that they may give each other different things. This would be like a friendship between a customer and the neighborhood butcher who are on friendly terms and know each others’ names. But if the customer were to run out of money or the butcher were to run out of meat, they would cease to have a relationship. Aristotle writes “Now usefulness is not something permanent, but differs at different times. Accordingly, with the disappearance of the motive for being friends, the friendship, too, is dissolved, since the friendship owed its existence to these motives.”\textsuperscript{18} Friendships of pleasure are similar insofar as the friendship is based on something the participants get out of each other, namely pleasure. Often what one finds pleasant can change quickly and these pleasure friendships can dissolve easily.\textsuperscript{19} The third type of friendship is friendship which is “between good men who are alike in excellence or virtue,” and this type is called “perfect” or “true” friendship.\textsuperscript{20} Unlike the previous two types of friendship, the affection in true friendship is not based on what each friend gets out of the other,

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 34 and Book 1 of Aristotle, \textit{NE}

\textsuperscript{17} Aristotle, \textit{NE} 1153b18-9

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 1156a22-4

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 1156a33-6

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 1156b6
but is based on each other’s goodness which is intrinsic to the person. Here, “intrinsic” means “not incidental” and is a feature of who someone is.21

I agree with Aristotle that goodwill is a feature of most friendships. Unlike Aristotle I do not think it is a necessary and sufficient condition for friendship as such.22 However, since goodwill is a feature of gift-giving, I will examine it closely here. As Rosalind Hursthouse points out, even though only in true friendship do the friends wish for each others’ goods for their own sakes, all three of them involve some form of goodwill.23 A utility or pleasure friendship allows that the friends wish for each other’s well-being beyond what they get out of each other. However, the friends in utility and pleasure friendships only wish each other well in the way in which they love one another.24 I can hope that my butcher does well outside of getting me a good deal on the meat I buy and beyond being able to remain my butcher; I may wish him happy holidays when the occasion calls for it, or sympathize when something in his life goes awry, like a divorce. It is still true, though, that I am only friends with him insofar as he is my butcher; and if I were to stop visiting his shop my goodwill for him would dissolve shortly after.

While Aristotelian character friends have affection based in each other’s goodness, it is unclear if they love each other for their own sakes since the basis of that love does not make essential reference to the friend. One could still ask whether the beloved is loved for herself or just for her virtues. It is on precisely this issue that Brink argues against Vlastos that it is still possible in a eudaimonist framework to love someone for her own sake.25 Brink claims that in order to account for the friend qua friend, one must attach significance to the historical

21 Ibid. 1156b7-10
22 Ibid. 1155b32-3
24 Ibid.
25 Brink, “Eudaimonism”
relationship between the friends, and Aristotle does just this in claiming that friends must live
together and share their thoughts and discussion.\textsuperscript{26}

The second feature of friendship I will examine is affection. As I write about it, affection
is an attitude we have toward someone. "Affectionately" is a way actions are done. Affection-
giving is the making manifest a fondness or love of someone. Affection-giving is not strictly
internal. It is public and perceptible. I can affectionately joke around with a friend, share a meal
with her, challenge her to reflect on something, or give her a hug. What counts as giving varies
across contexts. Affection-giving can manifest \textit{philia}, \textit{eros}, or \textit{agape} and in any combination.
Coupled with the notion of goodwill, affection requires a concern for the friend for her own sake,
which is different from a mere extension of the lover’s own interests.

To give further characterization of affection and its role in friendship, I will turn to
Montaigne. For Montaigne, virtue is merely a condition of perfect friendship; it is not what
constitutes it.\textsuperscript{27} Virtue is a coincidence, of which he writes: "So many coincidences are needed
to build up such a friendship that it is a lot if fortune can do it once in three centuries." [my
emphasis]\textsuperscript{28} But this is not the cause of love or affection; Montaigne is very clear in saying that
giving any reason at all for loving is "to point beyond and away from the friend to something
else as our highest concern."\textsuperscript{29} It is based on these considerations that Pangle, I think rightly,
characterizes Montaigne as placing great emphasis in the freedom by which one chooses to

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. 270 and Aristotle, \textit{NE} 1156b25-9 and 1157b6-7  
\textsuperscript{27} Pangle, \textit{Friendship} 65  
\textsuperscript{28} Montaigne, "Friendship" 165  
\textsuperscript{29} Pangle’s phrase in Pangle, \textit{Friendship} 65 which echoes in Montaigne, "Friendship" 169-70 where he writes, “It is
not one special consideration, nor two, nor three, nor four, nor a thousand: it is I know not what quintessence of all
this mixture, which, having seized my whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in his; which, having seized his
whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in mine, with equal hunger, equal rivalry.”
become devoted to another, a devotion where one eagerly gives up the liberty and autonomy of judgment and action and surrenders it to the will of the friend (which is mutual).\textsuperscript{30}

Friendship for Montaigne is a perfect intermingling of selves, rather than an extension of the self as it is for Aristotle. By insisting on this perfect intermingling of selves, Montaigne is able to bypass an absurdity whereby the friends would be competing to try to be the other’s benefactor—which would be a strange inversion of priorities, since it would be the beneficiary who would oblige the benefactor in allowing her to do good.\textsuperscript{31}

The Aristotelian valuation of giving affection over receiving it is what sets up this paradox. We can think of two friends at a restaurant who compete and argue to see who pays because paying for both meals would be nobler. However, in allowing the other friend to pay for her meal, the beneficiary gives the greater gift, which is the opportunity to be virtuous and noble, and therefore the beneficiary is nobler; \textit{but}, in getting to perform the more noble action, it turns out the benefactor is allowing the beneficiary to perform the best action and the whole situation collapses into absurdity.

The third member of the family of characteristics associated with friendship that I will use builds upon the notion of goodwill. It is the importance placed on the friend \textit{qua} friend. It is her particularity. This is opposed to the friend \textit{qua} a mere collection of character traits or \textit{qua} someone who is capable of giving benefits. The importance of particularity in friendship, at least at first glance, is corroborated by both Montaigne and Aristotle. Montaigne writes of his affection for La Boétie, “If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be

\textsuperscript{30} Pangle, \textit{Friendship} 66, 68
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. 69
expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I.” There is textual evidence in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that supports this hypothesis regarding the particularity of friendship:

To be friends with many people, in the sense of perfect friendship, is impossible, just as it is impossible to be in love with many people at the same time. For love is like an extreme, and an extreme tends to be unique... Also, one must have some experience of the other person and have come to be familiar with him, and that is the hardest thing of all.

The fourth feature of friendship is that of certainty of the friend’s affection for us. In faces of friendship such as those of utility or pleasure, it always appears at least possible that the friend has ulterior motives or in some way does not really wish for the good of her friend. Once again, this feature is found in Montaigne and Aristotle. Montaigne writes: “It is not in the power of all the arguments in the world to dislodge me from the certainty I have of the intentions and judgments of my friend.” Later, Montaigne writes: “not only did I know his soul as well as mine, but I should certainly have trusted myself to him more readily than to myself.” Aristotle writes, “Also, only the friendship of good men is proof against slander. For a man does not easily trust anyone’s word about a person whom he has himself tried and tested over a long period of time. The friendship of good men implies mutual trust, the assurance that neither partner will ever wrong the other.”

From these four features there is one activity that I would like to draw attention to: gift-giving. Giving a gift draws upon goodwill because it is given to the friend for the sake of the friend. The gift makes essential reference to the friend in her particularity, not because of any feature she may have. It is freely given to her regardless of how deserving she may be. The giving of a gift is a performative act. This means it requires that the friend acknowledge the gift

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32 Montaigne, “Friendship” 169
33 Aristotle, *NE* 1158a11-16
34 Montaigne, “Friendship” 170
35 Ibid. 170-1
36 Aristotle, *NE*1157a23-4
and receive it as a gift; she must be certain it is born out of goodwill and is directed at her.

Finally, the gift the friend gives to another friend is the gift of affection. It is the way something is done. In the following section, I detail that “something” in terms of a sacred ritual.

**Sacred Experience**

There is significant overlap between Aristotle’s account of character friendship and my account of sacred friendship. No feature of either face of friendship excludes features from the other, which makes a clear line of demarcation difficult. The best way to keep separate these two faces of friendship is to focus on what each face takes to be the central feature. In Aristotle’s character friendship, virtue is the central feature; and character friendship can exist without sacred experience. In sacred friendship, sacred experience is the central feature; and sacred friendship can exist without the friends being virtuous. Further, it is possible to have a hybrid face of friendship, in which both friends are virtuous and they have sacred experiences together.

In this section, I outline Mircea Eliade’s account of sacred experience and show how it applies to friendship.37 The presence of sacred experience is itself necessary for the sacred face of friendship. I begin by discussing “sacredness” and my secular use of the concept.

Traditionally, sacredness has been coupled with the over-awing presence of the divine. Here I do not intend to claim that friendships are experiences of the divine, nor am I insinuating that they are religious. As I use it here, “sacredness” is a manner of experience. It is not the content of experience, but rather the way content is perceived and felt. Experience is thought to occur within the dimensions of time and space; sacredness is a concept which describes the kind of time and space in which an experience occurs. I will now consider three features of sacred experience.

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The first feature of sacred experience is that it is heterogeneous to the rest of experience, which is referred to as “profane.” Eliade describes the sacred and profane as being “two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history.” This means that sacred experiences are qualitatively different from profane experiences, and sacred experiences are marked off from profane experiences through thresholds. “The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds—and at the same time the paradoxical place where those two worlds communicate, where the passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.” Physical spaces that are sacred have literal thresholds which are meant to impress and awe the person who crosses through it. Old Catholic churches have huge, ornate doors to pass through, and the theme of big and impressive remains throughout the church experience.

Sacred activities are marked off from profane activities by a threshold of activities, by engaging in rituals and rites. The rituals that constitute the giving of affection create a “friend time.” The friends become an “us” rather than a “you” and “me.” Each time we are together with the friend, giving each other affection, we enter that same kind of time. The threshold of entering sacred “friend time” can be a handshake, a hug, or even a shared smile. Exiting friend time is also often marked with a clear ritual, such as saying “I love you” at the end of a conversation. Unlike other greetings and goodbyes, these are not simply ways to respond to another person. Rather they mark a difference in a way of being for the friends; these greetings and goodbyes mark the merging together and splitting apart of the friends.

There are two uniting themes of these “friend time” rituals that build off of features of friendship. Sacred rituals involve giving affection and having it mutually known by the friends.

38 Ibid. 14
39 Ibid. 25
40 Ibid. 68
that each of them care about the other for her own sake. Rituals are the actions that manifest the friends' affection for one another, and the visible co-performance of these rituals is what makes the mutual affection clear.

The second major feature of sacred experiences is that they are a form of world-making. Those who participate in sacred experience are responsible for bringing about a change in the world they inhabit. In friendship, we can understand this feature as leaving behind the relationship two people had before it was a sacred friendship. The sacred friendship now incorporates shared sacred experience which is now the most central feature of the relationship. The affection the friends give each other in their shared rituals is both the act that makes the friendship what it is as well as the evidence that the friendship is a sacred one.

It is important to note that in each instantiation of affection, it is simultaneously spontaneous, and therefore apparently new, and also the re-instantiation of the same affection, and therefore old. Each ritual is the same performance each time rather than a simply repeated activity, and by being this same re-making of the friendship, this same re-instantiation, it brings back some state of relationship that is equal to itself but heterogeneous to all other relationships. We always love our sacred friends in the same way each time we love them. Our love for a friend is particular because the friend is particular, and since the basis for that love never changes neither does that love. Regardless of what events may happen over the course of a sacred friendship, that the two friends are friends in the same way remains true. Other affection we have for non-sacred friends can change depending on our mood or if they have done something for us. Our love for non-sacred friends may change when the friend changes even a little. The stability of our love for the sacred friend is not brought on by circumstance but by the simple presence of the friend as we engage in shared activity and conversation with that friend.
The final feature of sacred experience is that it centers. On one hand, sacred experience is *central*; it is already structured and placed within our experiences of the world in general. On the other hand it actively *centers*; it structures further experience. As Eliade writes, "the discovery or projection of a fixed point—the center—is equivalent to the creation of the world."\(^{41}\)

A sacred friendship is a relationship we may find at the center of our relationships. To further the space metaphor, sacred friendships are the ones where we are closest to the friend; where we are most affectionate. Sacred friendships may be the friendships from which other friendships we have derive their meaning precisely because the high intensity of affection make the friendship appear "friendliest." Sacred friendships can be the ones that appear to be most truly friendship. They seem to be the most real. Aristotle asserts roughly the same claim about character friendships.\(^{42}\) For him, character friendships are the form from which other friendships derive their meaning based on how similar they are to character friendships.

Sacred friendships center our understanding of other relationships by providing a paradigmatic case of friendship and affection; they are often the pinnacle of our joy. Furthermore, sacred friendships help us prioritize conflicting obligations to different people. Aristotle devotes the entirety of chapter 2 in Book IX to the role of friendship whenever we have conflicting obligations; the title of the chapter is "Conflicting obligations."\(^{43}\)

**Sacred Experience as Made and Discovered**

Now I will turn our attention to a tension in sacred experience. Sacred experience is simultaneously experienced as both a discovery and as a making. We find ourselves with sacred friendships, which suggests that the friendships are something independent of us. As Eliade

\(^{41}\) Eliade, *Sacred*

\(^{42}\) Aristotle, *NE* pages 248-50. Exactly how friendship affects competing obligations is a matter of context. Aristotle comments on this as well writing, "Surely, to draw an exact line of demarcation in all these cases is not an easy matter." (116427-8)
writes, sacredness is discovered because sacred places rely on a sign to mark what should be sacred. “Often there is no need for a theophany or hierophany properly speaking; some sign suffices to indicate the sacredness of a place.”44 In the discussion of how sacred experiences “center,” I mentioned how sacred experience is already central. Sacred experience necessarily relies on an interruption. It is from this interruption of the sacred sign that we organize our experience. Upon receiving the gift of affection from the friend as a sign, we build our friendship around it. Further, it is on the foundation of this gift of affection that we come to understand even non-sacred friendships. It is interruption of the gift that reveals the possibility for a sacred friendship.

For sacred friends, each discovers she has received of a gift or generosity in the form of affection. Regardless of the motive of the person who first gave the gift, the beneficiary can still accept the act as though it were a gift. It is not generally assumed that people have a deep concern for us as individuals for our own sakes; and so the presentation of a gift, which I am presenting here as a combination of affection and goodwill, is seen as a dramatic change in the previous relationship dynamic. The discovery of someone’s concern for us is an interruption which changes the way we see the beneficiary. The discovery of affection opens up the possibility for a profane relationship to become a sacred one.

In order to complete the transformation of a profane relationship into a sacred one with an isolated receiving of a gift of affection, we then give that same affection to the friend. We act generously and for the sake of the friend; we love her for her own sake. If she receives the affection as a gift and it provides her with the discovery of someone having genuine concern for her, then the transformation of the friendship into a sacred one has begun. Once the friendship becomes reciprocal, and both friends acknowledge the gift of the other as a gift of affection, the

44 Eliade, Sacred 27
friendship becomes sacred. Our giving the gift of affection back to the friend is the “making” aspect of friendship, which will be the discovery aspect for the friend. What counts as a gift in both presentations of it will vary from context to context; and since the friendship is not yet sacred when the gift is first presented, it is still open to misinterpretation. Both giving the gift and receiving the gift-giving are necessary for the sacred face of friendship.

In the final section of this essay, I will focus on how the activity of gift-giving affection brings about a different way of being in the world for the friends. This section will tie together features of friendship and sacred experience as well as Claudia Card’s trustee paradigm of informal obligation in order to present the friends as being an “us.” It is the being an “us” that is feature from which the sacred face of friendship derives its meaning.

**Gift-giving and Being an “Us”**

In this section, I will give a brief account of gift-giving based on the four features of friendship from the fourth section. The activity of gift-giving as a sacred experience is a transformative act; gift-giving makes the friends an “us.” In this section, I will be drawing on Claudia Card’s different senses of *taking* a responsibility in order to bridge this gap between activity and way of being.  

As Card writes, there are two different perspectives in dimensions of responsibility. One perspective looks backward, focusing on “punishment and reward, praise or blame, excuses, mitigation, and so on.” Card’s focus is on the second perspective that looks forward and “embodies a perspective of *agency*, focuses on what is not yet completed or does not yet exist.”

Taking responsibility is something someone voluntarily undertakes. The kind of responsibility one takes depends on the type of agency, and the type of agency and corresponding

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46 Ibid. 25
47 Ibid. 26
responsibility I will be focusing on here is that of caretaking. The caretaking sense of responsibility is “committing oneself to stand behind something, to back it, support it, make it good (or make good on one’s failure to do so), and following through.”\(^{48}\) In addition to the caretaking sense of responsibility, I will also be looking at the obligation sense of responsibility as it is explained in Card’s “trustee paradigm of informal obligation.”\(^{49}\)

The act of taking responsibility as a caretaker corresponds to the act of giving the gift of affection. One makes good on the friendship; she commits herself to her friend. Giving the gift of affection in the rituals friends have is an affirmation of the friendship. The gift shows that the friends care for each other. By performing these sacred, affectionate rituals, the friends perform an act of world-making. Their world is now one in which they are friends, and this is because they took responsibility as friends.

As caretakers in the friendship, the friends do not take responsibility independently of each other. Giving affection is a co-performance of a ritual; friends enter sacred time together. Without the other friend simultaneously giving affection, there could be no sacred friendship. The friends are reliant on each to take responsibility as caretakers.

The giving of affection is tied to rituals in sacred friendships. It is through the affectionate co-performance of rituals that the friends become co-responsible for making the friendship sacred. Other relationships may have responsibilities in them, but these differ from the ones in sacred friendships. For instance, I have a responsibility to my old high school buddies to show some minimal level of respect and not to act maliciously toward them. If my old buddies or I were to fail to take up these responsibilities, it would make our relationship as buddies next to impossible. In sacred friendships, however, responsibilities are not like obligations to avoid some

\(^{48}\) Ibid. 28
\(^{49}\) Ibid. 130
particular behavior or meet some minimal requirement. Taking up one’s responsibility in a sacred friendship is the act of friendship itself at the same time it enables the relationship to take place. It is by performing the sacredly friendly act that “friend time” begins.

There is another level of responsibility in the friendship. This form of responsibility comes directly from being the object of the gift of affection, and is different from simultaneously giving affection to the friend. The presence of the friend’s gift generates an informal obligation to acknowledge the gift and hold it dear. By accepting the gift of affection one still takes responsibility, but now it is the responsibility of accepting an obligation from outside of oneself. By giving the gift of affection, one takes responsibility as a caretaker; by receiving the gift of affection from the friend and acknowledging it as a gift one becomes a trustee of the friend’s affection. Card details the trustee paradigm of obligation as the informal paradigm of obligation, which is the kind we would think of for a friendship.\(^{50}\) Accepting the responsibility from such an obligation is not like being indebted to another, as in formal obligations; but is rather like accepting a deposit and becoming its trustee.\(^{51}\) One allows oneself to become the beneficiary of the “deposit,” and is informally obligated to be the trustee of the friend’s affection.

Giving affection in sacred friendships is an active response to the friend’s presence and gives the beloved the opportunity take up our affection and reciprocate. If both friends do not take responsibility as caretakers of the friendship, the love of one may go unrequited. But when the friend responds affectionately, we affirm our knowledge of the friend as friend.

There is a tension in the Aristotelian notion of simply giving affection for the sake of the friend. This occurs in both Aristotle’s character friendships as well as this sacred face of friendship. If these faces of friendship involve caring for the friend simply for the sake of caring

\(^{50}\) Ibid.
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
for the friend, then the friendship should not need to be a reciprocal relationship. Or at least we need not know the friendship to be reciprocal.

Making sense of this tension involves the trustee paradigm of responsibility. In sacred friendships, friends become co-responsible for giving affection. This is not an economic exchange of benefits, but rather a joining-in of giving affection. It is not enough to say that friends give affection one time and then receive it another, back and forth forever; this leads back into thinking of friendship as an economy which does not capture the conception many of us have of the friendships we hold sacred. Instead, we should think of these two ways of being responsible for both friends as inseparable and simultaneous. The friends give the gift of affection together at the same time, and they are responsible recipients of the affection of the other at the same time. Card’s trustee paradigm of responsibility helps describe this gift-giving. Accepting a deposit better reflects what it is for the friend to give us affection, and in turn for us to give it as well. We, as friends, do not count out how much affection we have in love-reserve and then distribute it according to who has asked for it. Rather, we spontaneously make a deposit without a regard for future withdrawals.

Focusing on accepting a deposit as being the paradigmatic act of responsibility is a subtle-shift in thinking about the perspectives in friendship. Friendship is generally thought to lie in giving affection, and fulfilling one’s responsibility is thought to lie in returning the affection. There is more to be said of how one responds to being the object of love, however; and the trustee paradigm does just that. To elaborate further on being loved, I turn back to the discovery feature of sacred experience.

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52 Card talks about the trustee paradigm and debts of gratitude. The difference is particularly important here because for her, one fulfills one’s responsibility by not giving the benefactor reason to regret her benefaction. This, she thinks, preserves the sense of valuing our benefactor as more than merely useful and as well as not something which would make the beneficiary feel guilty and impossibly indebted. Card, Ibid. 127-9
The experience of receiving affection in such a way that we see the friend expressing genuine concern for us for our own sake finds a parallel in the sacred appearance of signs. Signs mark something that does not belong in the profane world. Signs interrupt and mark sacred space.\(^{53}\) A physical threshold can act as a sign, insofar as it signals the interruption of profane space and the emergence of the sacred. Events as a threshold in time also act as a sign of the sacred. When someone shows genuine concern and affection for us, it often comes as a surprise. With the possible exception of family members, most people do not do that. They may have some passing goodwill for us, as is the case with business associates and leisure-time buddies, but we are not such an important part of their lives that they would give us the kind of intense affection that characterizes sacred friendships. When our sacred friends say, "I love you," they mean it; and it is significantly different from when our other buddies and associates express fondness.

The sign of affection from a friend also seems to match up with how we have come to have the friendships we hold sacred. Eliade writes that people seek the sacred, they do not choose it.\(^{54}\) We cannot decide for someone whether she will give us the gift of her affection. We can only love her and hope she will love us back so that we can cherish that gift of affection. Similarly, we may constantly be on the lookout for friends, and we make efforts toward having them; but we cannot simply choose who will be dearest friends. The fact that a friendship comes about, or more precisely, seems to get started by something outside of us makes its discovery non-arbitrary. In joining in the giving of affection we give that same sign to the other friend.

The simultaneous giving and receiving of affection for the friends transforms them into an "us." The "us" is a complex entity. It has two parts, yet those parts cannot be separated and

\(^{53}\) Eliade op. cit. 27
\(^{54}\) Ibid. 28
remain a full two parts. By giving affection, the friends become something greater than they were individually. Their caretaking of the friendship make them the safekeepers of a love that unites them. The end of being an “us” can have just as profound an effect as having become an “us.” After Montaigne’s friend, La Boëtie, died, Montaigne wrote, “I was already so formed and accustomed to being a second self everywhere that only half of me seems to be alive now.”

This union is the heart of the sacred face of friendship.

Conclusion

Friendship has many faces. Drawing mainly on the works of Aristotle and Montaigne, I have identified several features in common including goodwill, affection, the particularity of the friend, and the certainty of the friend’s affection. Friends make all of these features manifest in the activity of giving a gift. This gift need not take on any particular form, but can be present in the way something is done for the friend. When friends give each other the gift of affection, it can become a ritual.

Gift-giving as a ritual is an interruption in the lives of friends. This interruption marks a new way of experiencing the world, and the friends are responsible for that way of being in the world. Through gift-giving the friends experience the world together as an “us,” and through the gift of affection they can return to that way of being.

Gift-giving is both a spontaneous taking of responsibility as well as a caretaking form of responsibility. By becoming twofold responsible for the friendship, the friends experience the world as an “us;” as a composite entity where their selves mingle. The being an “us” by way of giving the gift of affection is at the heart of the sacred face of friendship.

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55 Montaigne, “Friendship” 174
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