

ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF FRIENDSHIP AND THE IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Friendship as a term, as a concept is the foundational, it should be said, fundamental reality behind every human interaction, whether formal and professional, as in doctor to patient relationship, lawyer to client relationship and the likes, or informal as seen in relationships that are of a familial type. What is being said here is that friendship underlines every human relationship. The early Greek poets and philosophers understood the important place friendship held in the lives of the human person, and in the functioning of his society. Thus they spoke brilliantly about this, using target words and punchlines to drive home one fact, which sought to praise the beauty of this reality. Friendship was necessary not only for a strong and prosperous society, but also for a well defended and progress minded country. In the Greek system of thought, friendship was for the human being, which in the Roman political system was only for the human person. What the Romans referred to as the human person, was anyone who was a free citizen of the state, and this was a tradition that was seen in the Greek political system. Friendship thus was for the free citizen of the state, it was for the human person. It was for that set of animals who are imbued with a certain type of consciousness called rational. Of all the poets and philosophers who devoted time to the praise of friendship, none came close to the full elaboration provided by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics, where he adumbrated explicitly the meaning and reality of the term. The Igwebuike thesis arises from the Igwebuike reality, which says that in number there is strength, there is power. The Igwebuike reality is positively enmeshed in the concept of friendship. The belief here is that persons cannot total to a "numberful" force without the accord and concord that friendship gives. The implication is that we cannot be a united force without a united goal, and intention, and we cannot have a united goal and intention, without a united mind and soul, and there can be no united mind or soul, without friendship. The famed saying, whose origin is still not certified, that "friendship is one soul in two bodies" (some attribute this to Aristotle, others Cicero, others to Augustine), defines in clear terms what the Igwebuike stands for, and what it hopes to achieve as an African Philosophy, for Africans in a world where unfriendliness and selfishness seems to be becoming more of the norm. The Aristotelian concept of friendship is a broad project, whose concerns are elaborate, much of which would not be considered here, for we intend to indicate that the Igwebuike philosophy is one that enshrines and crowns the beauty of

friendship in human interaction. Igwebuike is the priceless fruit of true friendship. What is true friendship? Aristotle's classification of friendship, will shed more light and provide an answer to the aforementioned question. The heart of this paper is to indicate that there can be no strength in number, no Igwebuike, without friendship, and that friendship is what makes for a well-defined Igwebuike.

Keywords: Aristotle, Friendship, Igwebuike, Philosophy, Igbo, Nichomachean Ethics.

Introduction

Human beings are social creatures, and Making friends is one of most fundamental experience we will have as social creatures, but despite that, friendship has just recently been addressed as a research topic. Friendship is something that is part of the private as well as the public. It can be analyzed both philosophically and ethically, as an individual condition or a social reality.¹⁸

Friendship was a great subject of stories and of philosophical reflection in classical antiquity. Friendship was associated in the popular mind with courage, with republicanism, and with the spirited resistance to injustice and tyranny. The Greek poets celebrated the stories of such famous pairs of friends as Heracles and Iolaus, Theseus and Pirithous, and Orestes and Pylades. Festivals were held in honor of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who were stubbornly credited in folklore with unseating the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus, despite the efforts of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Aristotle to prove that popular memory had gotten the story wrong.¹⁹ The phenomenon of friendship, with its richness and complexity, its ability to support but also at times to undercut virtue, and the promise it holds out of bringing together in one happy union so much of what is highest and so much of what is sweetest in life, formed a fruitful topic of philosophic inquiry for the ancients. Plato and Cicero both wrote dialogues about friendship, and a number of others, including Plutarch and Theophrastus, wrote treatises on it, most of which have now been lost. Epicurus devoted much of his life to cultivating friendship and counted it as one of life's chief goods; he and Seneca both expounded their teachings on friendship in epistles to friends.²⁰

¹⁸ M. Yusuf, *The Meaning of Friendship. An investigation of what it entails to be a friend among young men and women*, Lund University Press, Sweden, 2015, 1.

¹⁹ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 1-2

²⁰ Ibid.

Friendship, for Epicurus, fits into the category of the natural and necessary desires. According to Mitchell, channeling the Epicureans: "A life without friends is a life diseased, pained, and in need of succor."²¹ Solitude is *not* conducive to happiness. Friendship for the Epicureans is necessary for achieving *ataraxia*, or a state of lucid tranquility. However, it is not the same as the need for water or shelter or food, other natural and necessary desires.²² Nonetheless, the fullest and most probing classical study of friendship is to be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which devotes more space to it than to any of the moral virtues and which presents friendship as a bridge between the moral virtues and the highest life of philosophy. The study of friendship in the classical authors is in many ways a study of human love altogether, and the Greek word *philia* can cover all bonds of affection, from the closest erotic and familial ties to political loyalties, humanitarian sympathies, business partnerships, and even love for inanimate things. But *philia* means first and foremost friendship, and it is the contention of Aristotle and all of the classical authors who follow him that precisely in the friendships of mature and virtuous individuals do we see human love not only at its most revealing but also at its richest and highest.²³ A friend is a person capable of loving irrespective of whether he is being loved or not.²⁴ Friendship can exist between the same sex: man-man, woman-woman, or opposite sex: man-woman. It transcends age and could subsist between even an old man and a small boy. Friendship can also be felt in familial relationships between father and son, mother and daughter, husband and wife, brother and sister, elder brother and younger brother. Yet, more than friendship, love is the binding force in familial relationships.²⁵ That which underlines friendship is a reciprocity that which Cicero refers to as a mirror representation, for "he, indeed, who looks into the face of a friend beholds, as it were, a copy of himself".²⁶ St Augustine considers friendship as "*the disinterested desire for good for that person whom one loves, together with a reciprocal desire on his part.*"²⁷ This

²¹ A. Mitchell, *Friendship Amongst the Self-Sufficient. Epicurus*, in *Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 2, iss. 2 (Humboldt State University), 1-2.

²² R. Kreitner, *The Stoics And The Epicureans On Friendship, Sex, And Love*, in *The Montréal Review*, January 2012, <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/The-Stoics-and-the-Epicureans-on-Friendship-Sex-and-Love.php>

²³ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 2

²⁴ This definition is the ideal, but as we will see in the course of the work, that is not all about friendship. We will get to see this in Aristotle's categorization of friendship.

²⁵ T. Ravichandran, *On friendship*, in *College English Review*, Vol. 3: No. 2, April-June 1999, pp.23-25

²⁶ Cicero, *De Amicitia*, VII.

²⁷ St Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus* 83 (388/396)

reciprocity is always beneficial but is being beneficial can either be on the side of a symbiotic kind or a parasitic (in which the giver gives because of what he is to receive; also in which the giver gives less than he receives). This categorization of friendship is well defined in Aristotle's notion of Friendship

Aristotle's notion of Friendship

According to Aristotle, Friendship is a beneficial relationship that cuts across every sect and walk of life, without any age-discrimination. He states that Friendship benefits the young by keeping them from making mistakes, and the old by caring for them and helping them to finish jobs they are unable to finish themselves because of their weakness. And it benefits those in their prime by helping them to do noble actions 'two going together' since with friends they are more capable of thinking and acting.²⁸

The bond of friendship is the source of every successful nation and people. For it binds people together in justice, weaving them as one and creating a harmonious existence, which sees every party coordinating itself in sync. Thus "Without friends," Aristotle says, "no one would choose to live, though he possessed all the other goods"²⁹. Friendship is an essential safeguard for the life, property, and political freedom or power that virtue requires as equipment for its full exercise, and it provides the worthiest objects of virtuous action.³⁰ According to Aristotle, nature has imbedded in man, the desire to be grafted towards engaging in a friendly relations with those that one is related to, as seen in familial relations, that is the friendship of children and parents above all, but also of fellow tribesmen and even of the whole human race.³¹ Yet, friendship is indispensable to the political community: "Friendship also seems to hold the polis together, and lawgivers seem to be more seriously concerned with it than with justice. For concord seems to be something similar to friendship, and they strive most to attain concord and to drive out faction, its enemy".³² Without the concord that comes from a common purpose and the faith in a common good, without the sympathetic interest in one's fellows that makes one want to treat them equitably and to pursue their good along with one's own, no political community can exist

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1. 1155a10-14

²⁹ Ibid, 1155a5-6

³⁰ Ibid, 1155a6-10

³¹ Ibid, 1155a16-22

³² Ibid, 1155a22-26

in Aristotle's view; he considers it naive to think that a true community can ever be secured by a mere compact. Various combinations of self-interest and fear may hold alliances and empires together, but a political community that seeks to promote the good life for human beings requires something more. Aristotle's stress on the need for friendship suggests that even good laws, even when supported by a dedication to justice among the citizenry, are not sufficient to maintain order and harmony.³³

Friendship for Aristotle is entwined to the reality of love. *The spark of friendship is directly proportionate to the fire of love.* That which the human person befriends, must be that which he loves. He classifies this as the love for what is good, or what is pleasant or useful. It is from these that his threefold classification of friendship is borne (we would consider that a little later). Aristotle seems to strike at a point that later thinkers, like Augustine, would capitalize upon, namely that for any bonafide friendship to exist, for any friendship to be worth its salt, it has to be founded on love. The question that would be raised at this point is, what kind of love are we speaking of? Is it the one that is directed to the other or that which is directed to the self? Is it the love that is aimed towards the animate or the inanimate? To the second question, Aristotle holds that there can be no love directed to the inanimate, since love in its build, calls for a reciprocal action or at least a recognition. Love is for the animate, on this sphere, it can either be other directed or self-directed. In any case, the categorization of friendship, in its types, can be seen arising from the love for the animate, whether it be self or other-directed.

The Types of Friendship

Aristotle divides friendship into three types namely: friendship based on utility, friendship based on pleasure and friendship based on virtue/goodness.

Friendship of utility: in this is the first type of friendship, people are attached to the other, not for the sake of the other, but for their own sakes, that is to say that the other person merely is an object of utility serving the needs of the subject. He notes that Those who love one another for utility love the other not in himself, but only in so far as they will obtain some good for themselves from him.³⁴ Friendships of utility are commonly found between opposites, Aristotle says, such as the pairing of rich and poor, or ignorant and learned – or perhaps we

³³ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 17

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1156a12-14

should say rich ignorant and poor learned, since each must find in the other something that he needs.³⁵ They are also found between those who have similar things to offer at different times, as do guest and host in traditional Greek guest-friendships,³⁶ and in general between allies. Aristotle suggests repeatedly that friendships of utility are most characteristic of old, crabbed men, who are incapable of giving anyone pleasure and narrowly intent on gain. The overwhelming impression he gives is that friendships of utility turn upon the desire for external goods or goods of fortune.³⁷ This is a parasitic and selfish kind of friendship.

Friendship of pleasure: this is not so different from the first kind, in that it also reeks of selfishness, for one engages in this kind of friendship for the sake of the pleasure that one derives from the other. Thus the other, as in the friendship of utility becomes an object of use. Accordingly, Like the desires that spawn them, such friendships are transient, but as long as they last they are warm and heartfelt, and the friends do cherish one another's company.³⁸ In part simply because pleasures are increased while being shared, whereas useful goods are in general decreased, friendships of pleasure seem more generous and suited to free men than are friendships that consist in exchanges of goods and services.³⁹ More importantly, friendships of pleasure are sought for their own sakes. Every friendship of utility would become superfluous if the partners had direct access to the goods that they seek through it, but the sharing of pleasures gives life a sweetness that can be attained no other way. In enjoying one another's companionship for its own sake, then, friends of pleasure come closer than friends of utility to loving one another for their own sakes: The presence of the friend is cherished as an end in itself, even if the friend's complete good is not actively sought as an end in itself. Among friendships of pleasure, Aristotle classes attachments of erotic love. In keeping with his customary denigration of eros and his elevation of sober, gentlemanly virtue, Aristotle here portrays eros as based only on emotion and impulse and the pleasures of the senses, in contrast to the finest friendships, which rest on virtue and rational choice.⁴⁰

³⁵ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1156a30-31

³⁷ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 40

³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1156a31-b6

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1158a18-21

⁴⁰ L.S. Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, 40-41.

That which differentiates friendship of utility from that of pleasure is that, in the first the aim is to what one is going to achieve, while in the second, the aim is just for the sake of a pleasurable time or moment. In that of utility, one is trying to get some benefit out of the relationship, while in the second, all one wants is to have a good time.

Friendship of virtue: this is for Aristotle, the most perfect of all friendships, one that considers the other more than the self. This type of friendship stands in sharp contrast to the other two because it is other directed. In the friendship of virtue, the value of the other appreciated not for the sake of the self, who is appreciating, but for the sake of the other, who is being appreciated. In this best form of friendship, Aristotle says that the partners love each other for themselves, cherishing each other for their characters and not for some incidental benefit that they provide each other.⁴¹ According to Aristotle, this is a complete friendship, for Complete friendship is that of good people, those who are alike in their virtue: they each alike wish good things to each other in so far as they are good, and they are good in themselves. Those who wish good things to a friend for his own sake are friends most of all, since they are disposed in this way towards each other because of what they are, not for any incidental reason. So their friendship lasts as long as they are good, and virtue is an enduring thing.⁴² It should be noted that friendship in its truest form is the friendship of virtue.

Friends together, Igwebuiké forever

The Igwebuiké existential-ness is founded on the solid base of friendship, that which knits a group of people, a race together as one. According to Kanu, Igwebuiké, “Put together, means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’, that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force”.⁴³

Igwebuiké rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. ‘To be’

⁴¹ Ibid, 43.

⁴² Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, 1156b10-15

⁴³ A.I. Kanu, Igwebuiké as a trend in African Philosophy, in IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 2 No 1, March 2016, 108-113.

is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings.⁴⁴ Igwebuiké bespeaks of a communality that thrives amongst individuals and has been aptly termed by Kanu as a communal-individual reality, which is expressed in the Igbo-African proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man); *ntugwa bu uto ndu* (variety is the spice of life); *otu asisi anaghi eme ohia* (a tree does not make a forest); *gidigidi bu ugwu eze* (the dignity of a king is the number of his followers); *mmetuko ahu bu uto ndu* (the beauty of life is in mixing up with others).⁴⁵ Mbiti has classically proverbializes the community determining role of the individual when he wrote, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am".⁴⁶ This would mean that the confidence of being is because others are in being. The existence of others assures me of their solidarity and complementarity without which I cannot be. Achebe brings the essential nature of the Igbo-African communal relationship to a higher and more fundamental focus when he wrote:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.⁴⁷

This communal-ness of the Igwebuiké does not delete nor deny the individuality of the human person. That is to say that the Igbo-verse, and the African worldview does not pay little attention to the individuality of the human person, but rather insists that the richness of such individuality is found in communality. How can the individual meet the communal? *Friendship*.

This meeting point between the individual and the communal that is occasioned by friendship is conducted towards the reality of complementarity, that which is an intrinsic part of the Igwebuiké.

According to the Igbo tradition, the other is referred to as *ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuiké and the Unity of the African Philosophy*, in Igwebuiképedia. Internet Encyclopedia of African Philosophy, A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, URL: <http://igwebuiképedia.info/Intricate.asp>

⁴⁶ J. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, East African Educational, Nairobi, 1970, 108.

⁴⁷ C. Achebe, *The Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, England, 1958, 133.

cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m* which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being).⁴⁸ This notion is very well employed when referring to relationships and shows forth the relational aspect that is seen in complementarity. The Igbo language boasts of phrases like love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc⁴⁹ which depicts how much of the *ibe*, is contained in the "*onwe m*".⁵⁰ According to Kanu,

Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself.⁵¹

The love that is buttressed in the above quotation is the love that is intimately knit to friendship. Recall that it was earlier asserted that the spark of friendship is proportionate to the fire of love, as pertaining to the Igwebuiké, the love is what unites persons of different orientations together, holding them into one piece. This love is directly proportionate to friendship. Thus we can affirmatively say that it is in friendship that the complementarity of the Igwebuiké lies.

Aristotle names the three kinds of friendship and goes on to add that it is the friendship of virtue that is the best of them all. Thus when we say that the complementarity and the solidarity of the Igwebuiké hinges on friendship, we do not make reference to the friendship of utility or pleasure because as Aristotle puts it, such friendships are incidental, bearing no essence, and to this the person who is loved, is loved not in so far as he is who he is, but in so far as he provides some good or pleasure. Such friendships are thus easily dissolved, when the parties to them do not remain unchanged; for if one party is no longer pleasant or useful, the other stops loving him.⁵² The Igwebuiké is bound to dissolve if it is founded upon the friendship of utility or pleasure; these types of friendship are shallow. *The Igwebuiké existentiality is founded on a well solidified base, a deep rooted friendship of virtue. It is one in which the persons involved are willing to*

⁴⁸ A.I. Kanu OSA, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ This refers to myself, and can be well construed as referring to the self.

⁵¹ A.I. Kanu OSA, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* 1156a20-25

give more than to receive. In such wise, there is a reciprocity of giving such that justice and equity is easily seen, and the tightness of the bond is forever maintained. In the friendship of virtue, there is no need for the demands of justice, because each party lives for the other, as the other returns the gesture received freely without compulsion.

Some Recommendations

The Igwebuiké existentiality speaks to the African contemporary situation whose ethos is gradually fading with the massive incursion of western trends of thoughts and systems of operation. The confusion that is presently being witnesses in the African society pays tribute to this unfortunate divorce of the African people from her culture. The Igwebuiké existential-ness bespeaks of trust, it speaks of confidence in the other, it speaks of complementarity and solidarity, in a word, it speaks of friendship. All these ideals that should be natural to the African, are begged for when it comes to the reality of the African society. The friendship of virtue, according to Aristotle is rare, because people of this kind are few.⁵³ As rare as it might seem to be, the friendship of virtue, was never rare to the African, this is because it has always been a part of the African. We might allude here that this friendship in the present time for the African is rare, Igwebuiké calls out to us all, telling us to retrace our steps, to find out who we truly are. In Igwebuiké, the strength of the other is my strength, the glory of the other is my glory, the positives of the other and her concomitant negatives is mine, *I live for the other, just as the other lives for me.* It is a reality founded on the friendship of virtue, thus making it an existential reality that ought to stand the test of time.

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⁵³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* 1156b31-32

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