



ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS | ROME, ITALY

Digital Commons @
Assumption College

Philosophy Department Faculty Works

Philosophy Department

2013

Friendship and Teaching Philosophy in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1

Daniel P. Maher

Assumption College, dmaher@assumption.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/philosophy-faculty>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maher, D. P. (2013). Friendship and Teaching Philosophy in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1. *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87: 271-283. <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro2014448>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@assumption.edu.

Friendship and Teaching Philosophy in *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1

Daniel P. Maher

Abstract: In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the relation between teachers and students during his treatment of “non-uniform friends.” These friends exchange goods differing in kind (e.g., something useful is exchanged for pleasure). Such friendships depend on the needs of the friends, and we are invited to ask whether some need induces a philosopher to teach a not-yet-philosophical student. In this paper I argue that the philosophical teacher does not approach his pupil out of need nor as he would approach a contemplative friend who is an equal. The teacher chooses to benefit students as a morally virtuous human being would, although not as if his happiness depends upon their success in learning. A teacher is not an ordinary benefactor, intent upon seeing his power made actual in some other person. Aristotle’s philosophical teachers seem to be simultaneously more generous and less interested in their students.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the active exercise of intellectual virtue is the most complete or most final target of our striving—choiceworthy for its own sake and not for the sake of some further activity.¹ Why, then, has Aristotle interrupted his own contemplative activity and taken the time and trouble necessary to produce lengthy works for us to read? He says *studying* his *Ethics* is ordered to action rather than knowledge (I.3.1095a2–6), but that does not yet tell us what Aristotle’s own end in writing may be. Even if we try to draw all of his literary activity under a contemplative umbrella by saying that he is always urging contemplation or he is always framing some aspect of the world for contemplation, we must wonder why he

¹ “The simply complete thing, then, is that which is always chosen for itself and never on account of something else. Happiness above all seems to be of this character” (I.1.1097a33–34). In this paper, I have used Bartlett and Collins, eds., *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), except for books VIII and IX, where I have followed *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX*, translated with a commentary by Michael Pakaluk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For the Greek text: *Aristotelis: Ethica Nicomachea*, edited by I. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894). For translations of Aristotle’s other writings, I have used Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). Unless otherwise identified, citations are to *Nicomachean Ethics*, and unless those citations are identified by book and chapter, they refer to book IX, chapter 1.

makes the effort to help others understand. To aim at influencing others is not to aim at contemplation.²

There is no need to presuppose that Aristotle has a single goal in all of his writing or that he must be contemplative always because his *Nicomachean Ethics* presents that as the best activity.³ Nevertheless, we should look for some account of how Aristotle understands the relation between the contemplative life and the non-contemplative activities (such as teaching and writing) in which he was evidently engaged. We can gain some light, I claim, from his discussion of friendship, in which he shows how a contemplative life engages us in common with others. Elsewhere I argue that, contrary to the apparent conclusion of book X, Aristotle should be understood as holding that the best human life is not that of a solitary sage but the sharing of speech and thought enjoyed by contemplative friends.⁴ At present, I set aside the case of the philosopher and his intellectual equal in order to consider how a contemplative human being relates to the non-philosophical or the not-yet-philosophical people with whom he speaks and, presumably, for whom he writes.

I. Introduction

In *Nicomachean Ethics* book IX, chapter 1, Aristotle discusses the relation between teachers and students, a topic addressed nowhere else in the books on friendship. He considers

² Aristotle presents the contemplative life as undertaken for its own sake and as perfective of the one living that life. This makes it unlike the art of medicine, which is devoted to the good of the patient or to the preservation of the art in the training of the next generation of physicians. The idea that the contemplative seeks immortality in a manner analogous to the animal species, viz., by producing intellectual offspring, is difficult to square with Aristotle's text.

³ Richard F. Hasting argues that Aristotle is more interested in shaping the opinions and attitudes of politically influential Athenians than he is in describing the contemplative life in a way that is straightforwardly accurate ("The Question of Self-Reference in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI," a paper given in the 2003 Fall Lecture Series at The Catholic University of America). Accordingly, Aristotle's goals in the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself may not be simply contemplative, and the depiction therein of the wise human being may be distorted in some respects.

⁴ See my "Contemplative Friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Review of Metaphysics* 65 (June 2012): 765–94.

three cases: (1) Protagoras and his students, (2) the sophists and their students, and (3) those who share philosophy as teacher and student. All three appear to be instances of the sorts of friendship Aristotle examines in this chapter: “non-uniform friends” (*anomoioeideis philiai*), which translators render variously as “dissimilar friends,” “heterogeneous friends,” friends “not of a single form,” or even “hybrid friends.” These friends exchange goods that differ in kind, such as when one friend provides something useful, and the other provides pleasure (cf. VIII.6.1158b3–5). Aristotle introduces these friendships as founded in the needs of the friends, which invites us to consider the possibility that a teacher of philosophy might trade philosophy or knowledge for some other good, such as money or honor. In this light, the fact that a philosopher teaches might suggest the insufficiency of philosophy itself to secure human well-being. In this paper I argue that Aristotle distinguishes the relations between teachers of philosophy and their students from other friendships founded in need. He does not deny that the person capable of teaching philosophy has other needs, but he does make it clear that the teaching of philosophy is not essentially an exchange of something high for something low.

In chapter 1 of book IX, which has the marks of a textually unified whole set off from its neighboring chapters,⁵ Aristotle addresses difficulties attaching to what I will call non-uniform friendship. Without fully developing the specific nature of this friendship, he proceeds almost immediately to the complaints that occur within it. This friendship exhibits some undeniable similarities to and some apparent overlap with the earlier treatment (beginning in VIII.7) of friendships characterized by superiority.⁶ The chapter could easily appear to be separated from

⁵ Aristotle concludes the final chapter of book VIII with the words, “So then, this much should be said about these matters” (1163b27–28), and he begins chapter 2 of book IX with the words, “Such matters as the following also contain difficulties” (1164b22).

⁶ Pakaluk (*NE VIII and IX*, 149) begins his discussion of the first chapter by noting the incompleteness of the treatment and the imperfect separation of what appears to be the focus of this chapter (relationships focused on exchange of things that differ in kind and that appear to be incommensurable as opposed to the exchange of useful items, which can be measured in common by money) from some material in the preceding chapters.

the other material simply due to poor organization. And yet, Gauthier and Jolif at least see this as an entirely new division that greatly multiplies the possible kinds of friendship.⁷ On their view, Aristotle begins with the three paradigmatic forms (based in utility, pleasure, and virtue), each of which obtains between people who are equal in the relevant respect. The addition of friendship characterized by superiority (beginning in VIII.7), which occurs between father and son, man and wife, older and younger, or ruler and ruled, does not merely add a fourth kind of friendship, but rather a new principle of division, which produces a total of six forms of homogeneous friendship: each of the three forms of friendship (originally said to hold between equals) may obtain also between unequals. And so when Aristotle introduces non-uniform friends, this constitutes yet another principle of division cutting across these six kinds and yielding either twelve or fifteen forms of friendship in total.⁸ Their logic makes sense, and yet it seems strange to hang so much on such an obscure chapter that Aristotle left undeveloped.⁹ Why would Aristotle bother to introduce all these forms when he has so little to say about them?

Even if we are disinclined to find six or as many as nine new forms of friendship in this chapter, we must nevertheless admit that non-uniform friends cannot be numbered among the

⁷ René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque* II.2 (Louvain-la-Neuve, Paris, and Sterling, VA: Editions Peeters, 2002), 688–89. Grant says this form is “not quite the same as” friendships characterized by superiority (*The Ethics of Aristotle*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, [London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1866], 281). Burnet insists that the two kinds of friendship “must not be confused” (*The Ethics of Aristotle* [London: Methuen & Co., 1900], 400).

⁸ The ambiguity between twelve and fifteen arises because it is not clear how to count non-uniform friendships between unequals. Gauthier and Jolif produce a chart with four quadrants. In one quadrant are the first three types of friendship, which are homogeneous and between equals. In another quadrant are the three homogeneous friendships marked by superiority (the friendship of the more virtuous to the less virtuous, and so on). The text in IX.1 suggests two more quadrants: heterogeneous friendships between equals and heterogeneous friendships between unequals. The friendships in this last quadrant would obtain between three pairs: the virtuous and the useful; the pleasant and the useful; and the pleasant and the virtuous. The difficulty is whether the friendship between the person who is more virtuous in relation to the person who is less useful is the same kind of friendship as that between the person who is less virtuous in relation to the person who is more useful. Reading the text as Gauthier and Jolif do adds at least six and as many as nine new kinds of friendship to the six kinds already distinguished.

⁹ Pakaluk writes, “It is difficult to see what the structure or dialectic of the chapter is, and some passages seem simply to repeat what was said in earlier chapters (e.g. 1164a20–3 and 1159a14–15)” (*NE Books VIII and IX*, 149). Pakaluk does not surrender to this difficulty and avoids interpreting Aristotle as simply repeating himself. He tries to find something specific to the exchanges between non-uniform friends throughout the chapter.

three paradigmatic forms, and yet they do not essentially involve the sorts of superiority and inferiority Aristotle had been discussing in the last chapters of book VIII.¹⁰ At the same time, it proves extremely difficult to keep the latter two categories of friendships distinct. In fact, book IX uses the same kinds of examples of friends that also appear in book VIII, chapter 8: lover and beloved, poor and rich, and even uneducated and learned; both passages also refer to the relation between children and parents and that between human beings and gods. More important, he appeals to the same principle as the animating core of at least some of the friendships discussed in each passage. In book VIII, he describes these friendships between contrary types as somehow centered on exchange, and he explains, “For whatever anyone happens to need, because he aims at this, he gives something else in return” (VIII.8.1159b14–15). We find this same principle re-asserted in IX.1 in an almost identical form.¹¹

To sum this up, I note that Aristotle gives a separate treatment in book IX to matters already treated to some extent in book VIII and probably able to be incorporated there. In the second treatment, he ignores any superiority of one friend to the other and concentrates instead on the difficulties of achieving a proportionate equality in the items exchanged by the friends. Furthermore, he addresses for the only time in these books the friendship between teachers and students, and he speaks specifically of teachers of philosophy. Aristotle ended the chapter immediately preceding IX.1 by announcing the completion of his discussion of the complaints or quarrels that arise in friendships based on superiority (see note 5 above). By discussing teachers

¹⁰ See VIII.6.1158b1–5: “The aforementioned friendships, then, depend on an equality, since each gets the same things from the other, and they wish the same things to each other. (Or they exchange different things, such as pleasure for help; but that these are friendships to a lesser degree and are less enduring has been said.)” This occurs near the end of chapter six, just before Aristotle turns to friendships based on superiority. In this text, then, he suggests non-uniform and equal friends, but he does so as if he does not anticipate that he will give that class another treatment in book IX.

¹¹ “For it is what he happens to need that he is intent upon, and it is for the sake of *that*, that he will give up *these* things” (1164a20–22). (I return to this passage below.)

and students under the heading of non-uniform friends rather than as friends characterized by superiority and inferiority, he invites us to consider this friendship specifically in terms of what they exchange.

II. A Reading of Book IX, Chapter 1

Non-uniform friends are brought together by some lack or need, and, when the friendships are successful, they are equalized by finding some proportionate exchange. Aristotle focuses on the complaints that arise when these exchanges disappoint the friends. At the opening and the conclusion of the chapter he appeals to money as a common measure for equalizing at least many such exchanges.¹² Between the two references to measuring exchanges with money, he considers especially two kinds of relationship: (1) that between lover and beloved and (2) that between teacher and student. Between his remarks on these two cases he announces a principle that seems to be operative in all these sorts of friendships: “For it is what he happens to need that he is intent upon, and it is for the sake of *that*, that he will give up *these* things” (1164a20–22). This thesis re-formulates the principle first identified in VIII.8 (1159b14–15), and it serves to emphasize the centrality of *need* or at least of the interest in acquiring what one lacks. For, when Aristotle discusses these friendships, he considers them almost exclusively from the point of view of those who enter the friendship as a way of meeting needs.

In non-uniform friendship, at most one party acts virtuously, which at least means *not* in order to gain something. As captured in the principle just quoted, others enter into this friendship as the means to the satisfaction of a felt need. Aristotle’s point here seems to be that non-uniform

¹² Pakaluk suggests, correctly in my judgment, that Aristotle is contrasting the friendships under discussion with commercial transactions, in which money serves as the common measure for things that seem very different in kind. The friendships under discussion here differ from what Aristotle describes in V.5 (1133a13–33), despite the attempts of some to measure even wisdom with money.

friendships are inherently unstable because the friends are engaged with one another on dissimilar terms. One friend acts virtuously, and the other strives to be useful, or one friend acts usefully, and the other aims to please. One difficulty is that within this chapter and elsewhere Aristotle distinguishes friendships rooted in need from those based on virtue. Virtuous friends do not complain because they do good without anticipation of return (1164a33–b2 and 1162b6–8). Even in these non-uniform friendships, they will not be looking for an equal return, unless they have ceased acting nobly and have begun to act out of desire of gain. It is not clear what sort of friendship that would yield.¹³ Aristotle gives little help for sorting out such questions; he speaks mostly about friends who strive to satisfy needs that differ in kind. The kinds of complaints these friends have against one another reveal the necessary imbalance between friends with differing understandings of what is good.

The chapter as a whole concentrates on the ensuing obstacles, especially those stemming from differences of opinion between the friends regarding the worth of the goods exchanged. It is not obvious whether the person who lacks a certain good and feels the need for it is a better or a worse judge than the person who possesses that good and no longer feels desire for it. Does desire for an absent good distort or improve our judgment of its true worth? Do we value properly what we have grown accustomed to and perhaps complacent with, or should we estimate the worth of goods by reference to what giving them up or doing without them would mean? Absence may make the heart grow overly fond, and familiarity might teach contempt.

¹³ If a philosopher, as distinct from a sophist, did not act nobly toward a student, but chose to exchange knowledge out of a need for money, it is not clear where that would fall in Aristotle's scheme. Would this be some kind of friendship between a virtuous and a useful person, even though the one offering knowledge does not do so as a virtuous person would? Does this become a friendship between two useful people? The text invites more questions than it provides resources for answering clearly.

Furthermore, the self-love that apparently prompts this friendly association also tends to interfere with good judgment because it leads each party systematically to rate what he must give up more highly than what he receives (1164b16–18). In this way the very difference between the two that makes this friendship possible also threatens to issue in complaints that might dissolve it. Aristotle considers the possibility that a lover does not actually possess what the beloved expected from him, or he does not deliver it, or he delivers something different. Believing that a friend will in the future actually provide what he needs, a man delivers his own end of the exchange today, but sometimes this trust proves to be misplaced. We may also misjudge the worth of what we actually receive. Our misapprehensions incline us to befriend the person we expect can or will gratify our needs, but when events make these errors plain, the friendship collapses, and our disappointment at not getting what we expected is intensified by the bitterness or enmity we feel toward the person we had trusted.

Even if one friend acts virtuously and not on the condition that he receives some equivalent return, the other party acts in anticipation of gain. Accordingly, the relationships themselves reflect people's success or failure in estimating the worth of various goods and determining where they might be obtained. Inability to negotiate the difference between the genuine and the merely apparent good may lead to a poorly chosen friendship that almost certainly must end in frustration, resentment, or even a sense of betrayal. As Aristotle puts it, "It is like nothing is coming to you at all, when you fail to obtain what you are aiming to get" (1164a14–15). And people *do* aim to gain something through the friendship in accord with the principle already quoted: "For it is what he happens to need that he is intent upon, and it is for the sake of *that*, that he will give up *these* things" (1164a20–22).

These friendships turn on judgments regarding the worth of the items exchanged. Consequently, it hardly seems accidental that, just after drawing attention to the importance of discerning judgment (1164a22–23), Aristotle introduces the relations between teachers and students. He begins with Protagoras, who taught students and then accepted in payment whatever the student thought the teaching was worth. Protagoras’s most famous teaching—that man is the measure of all things—would seem to require this approach. His teaching is worth whatever it seems like it is worth, or, at least, that is its worth according to his teaching. This charming consistency between theory and practice reveals Protagoras as the man who never quarrels, indeed, as the man who could never feel cheated. He could not claim that what he gave was worth more than his student thought it was worth. To put an end to the types of quarrels that destroy friendships, we seem to need to embrace Protagoreanism. If we do not become Protagoreans, we must sift through differing opinions on the genuine and the relative worth of goods, and we must not be cowed into thinking that persisting disagreement renders the search for good judgment futile. Furthermore, Protagoras’s teaching that man is the measure recalls Aristotle’s prior claim in this chapter that money has been invented as “a common measure, and so everything is referred to this and measured by this” (1164a1–2). At first, Protagoras’s teaching seems to conflict with this principle (insofar as man, not money, is the measure), but Protagoras also allows money to measure his teaching, and so *consumerism*, understood as the commodification of all goods, might be simply one way of implementing Protagoreanism.

Even if Protagoras never quarrels, other people do, and by quarrelling they show they think others both can and do judge falsely. The sophists exhibit one alternative to Protagoreanism. The sophists also allow their teaching to be measured by money, but they require payment in advance because only in this way can they entice their students to an inflated

estimation of its worth. When students have received the teaching, they can no longer be deluded regarding its worth. Aristotle remarks acerbically and somewhat implausibly that no one would pay for what they actually teach.

He turns then to philosophical teachers, who are distinguished in at least three important respects. One of these must be examined at some length, after which the other two may be stated more briefly. First, Aristotle likens philosophical teachers to virtuous friends. The virtuous give gifts for the benefit of their friends and not in order to acquire something in return. Protagoras and the sophists relate to their students on different terms, according to which one friend owes a benefit equivalent to the advantage gained through the friend's assistance. As Aristotle explains, the value of a rich man's gift is not determined by the fact that it has cost him little, but by the actual benefit it produces for the recipient. In Aristotle's view, then, the sophist's student would owe nothing or little in return for their teaching, no matter the effort or the time required to convey it. Virtuous friends deserve a different sort of recompense. A virtuous friend gives without designs for an equal return. He would not complain even if there were no return, but the appropriate return is recompense in accord with the *choice* of the giver (1164b1–2), as distinct from something equivalent in worth to the benefit received (see VIII.13.1163a21–23).

Aristotle does not elaborate to clarify what this standard means, but we may say at least that it points us away from the actual benefit of the gift and toward the nobility of the giver's action. To focus on the giver's choice means, we would say, to recognize that the giver meant well, that he gave generously and in a way that is mindful of the other. If we take the example of two wealthy friends who have the virtue of generosity, when one gives the other a gift, the point is not the benefit derived from having received it and not the monetary expense incurred, but the consideration and thoughtfulness of the choice that animates the giving. Aristotle says, "Thus it

seems also for those who have shared philosophy” (1164b2–3). The context seems to require that this not be interpreted as the sharing of philosophy between equal contemplative friends (e.g., IX.12.1172a1–8); nor does it seem best understood as referring to a public presentation of philosophy designed to affect citizens morally or to enhance the political standing of philosophy. Instead, this seems to be the unequal relation of teacher and student, and that relation in a particularly imperfect form because Aristotle is speaking about teacher and student as *non-uniform* friends, i.e., *not* as friends who share the same kind of good (philosophy) in greater and lesser measures. He is speaking about teachers who have chosen to share philosophy with those who can offer in exchange only something different in kind.

To the extent that the teacher of philosophy is like a virtuous friend, the teacher chooses to act not for his own advantage but for the benefit of the student.¹⁴ We might say that Aristotle asks the student not to try to repay something equal to what was given, but to acknowledge the generosity in sharing philosophy. The teacher deserves recompense that recognizes the specific character of the choice he made.¹⁵ Aristotle contrasts the teacher’s choice with those choices made “on a condition,” that is, choices where someone confers a favor with expectation of some return. The no-strings-attached character of the teacher’s choice simultaneously underlines the teacher’s generosity and precludes the teacher from indulging in self-pitying resentment if students fail to make a display of honor or gratitude in return.

¹⁴ In Aristotle’s view, the virtuous friend has not simply ceased to care about his own good. When he assigns benefit to his friend he knows that his choice is noble, and he understands that nobility is better than benefit. That does not yet make this choice an exchange of one good for another, nor does it unmask the virtuous giver as a man who outwits his friend and takes advantage of him. In Aristotle’s example, the giver gains the noble good by choosing the advantageous good for his friend. To borrow Robert Sokolowski’s language (see *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study* [Indiana University Press, 1985]), the giver seeks the good of his friend as good for himself. This is not crypto-selfishness. As Aristotle works out the difference between exchange friendships and virtuous friendships, he exploits ambiguities in the word “good.” The result is that the virtuous man is neither foolishly seeking only what is good for others, nor is he always selfishly seeking his own advantage.

¹⁵ See VIII.13.1163a21–23, and compare with IX.1.1164a33–b6.

The philosophical teacher's activity comes to light as, so to speak, self-contained, in a manner analogous to other morally virtuous activity. Aristotle does not make the excellence of a courageous deed in battle dependent on victory or on saving the city from danger, and he does not locate the goodness of liberality in its effective alleviation of others' material deprivation. If teaching is like that, its nobility lies essentially in the choice made by the teacher and not in the benefit actually received by students. The teacher acts for the benefit of the student, but Aristotle emphasizes the teacher's choice instead of the effective conferral of benefit. There is something abstract about isolating teaching from learning too purely, but there is also a point to be preserved. One part of the point is the non-instrumentalization of the teacher,¹⁶ and another part is the independent and indispensable agency of the student. The teacher cannot guarantee success, and one must acknowledge that, even if that teacher is *open* to success in every case, considerable obstacles stand in the way of successful philosophical teaching.

After this lengthy discussion of the first point, we can consider more briefly two additional respects in which Aristotle distinguishes philosophical teachers from Protagoras and sophists. First, by denying that philosophy can be measured by money, he removes from this relationship what other teachers accept for their teaching. Second, Aristotle assimilates this relationship to that obtaining between gods and human beings (cf. VIII.7) and parents and children. These are both relationships characterized by superiority; gods and parents have bestowed what Aristotle calls the greatest goods: existence, sustenance, and education from birth (VIII.12.1162a4–9). And yet, just after comparing teachers to gods and parents, he says that no one owes everything to any one person—not to one's father and not even to Zeus (see

¹⁶ Compare Nietzsche's remark: "Whoever is a teacher through and through (*von Grund*) takes all things seriously only in relation to his students—even himself" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Random House, 1966], 79 [aphorism #63]). Aristotle's philosophical teacher seems not to be a teacher "through and through." I am grateful to Jeff Black for drawing this connection to my attention.

IX.2.1165a14–16). Parents have made life possible, but a philosophical teacher is capable of initiating one into the best life, and the student should recognize that this is what the teacher has chosen to make available.¹⁷ The teacher gives the very best there is for human beings, and yet, as I argue below, the teacher is not primarily a teacher.

The comparison to gods and parents reinforces the claim of the teacher to a kind of independence and superiority. All three are owed a debt that cannot be adequately repaid (VIII.14.1163b12–18). Parents, mothers in particular, constitute a paradigm for generous love, and they pour out their attentions on children because they are their own. Teachers, by contrast, would apparently offer their teaching to anyone who would receive it. Teachers thus seem to be in one sense less discriminating, not to say prodigal, and yet they show less devotion to individuals than do mothers.

Aristotle tells us why parents love their children despite their not being useful, pleasant, or good, but he does not tell us why his philosophical teachers act benevolently and in the manner of friends toward students. The philosophical teacher is not related to his pupil as he would be to a contemplative friend who is an equal. Because they are not in the relevant respect “good people alike in virtue” (VIII.3.1156b7–8), they are not equal in their capacities for philosophical activity. The teacher enjoys a decisive superiority over his pupil, and he chooses with respect to the student as a morally virtuous human being would.¹⁸ If their relationship is

¹⁷ “It is just that we should be grateful, not only to those whose opinions we may share, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the powers of thought” (*Met.* II.1.993b11–14). For obvious reasons, I have been emphasizing the superiority of the teacher to the student, but it is also necessary to recognize the student who may prove to be more excellent than the teacher. This is probably the most important aspect of the indispensable agency of the student: a philosophical teacher who aimed simply to produce a student after his own mind would, if he succeeded, stifle any intelligence greater than his own. A more generous teacher does not insist on the outcome of the teaching.

¹⁸ At this point it seems that we are admitting something like the schema introduced by Gauthier and Jolif. The friendship that may exist between teacher and student involves *both* superiority and non-uniformity. Friendships could also be found that involve superiority *and* uniformity (homogeneity) (e.g., a food connoisseur and a relative novice) and that involve equality and non-uniformity (e.g., neighbors who trade favors or services with one another).

characterized by an exchange, they exchange things different in kind. Nevertheless, Aristotle distances the philosophical teacher from the others treated in this chapter insofar as these teachers do not act for their own advantage. The teacher offers access to the best life available to a human being, and he also permits the students to turn their backs. The teacher neither insists on his own advantage nor does he demand that the student acknowledge the goodness of what he conveys. We might say his philosophical teachers benefit students almost accidentally. In order to explain this claim, it is helpful to consider what Aristotle says about the internal division and consequent unlovableness of a vicious or bad human being: “If, then, it is intolerable to be very much like this, one should strenuously avoid badness and attempt to be good, since in that way one would both be amicably related to oneself and become a friend to another.”¹⁹ One does not aim at virtue primarily in order to be loved by a friend, but only such a person has become lovable for himself. Similarly, Aristotle’s philosophical teacher has probably not chosen to become such as he is in order to be a teacher, but, because of what he has become, he is able to teach.

III. Teaching, Philosophy, and Friendship

In this last part of the paper, I want to explore this friendship between philosophical teacher and student further by considering some of Aristotle’s other texts. In *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle says that teaching and learning do not occur between equals: “For friends who are self-sufficient, neither teaching nor learning is possible; for if you learn, you are not as you should be: and if you teach, your friend is not; and likeness is friendship” (VII.12.1245a16–18). If we bring this understanding to our reading of *Nicomachean Ethics*, it seems that the inequality

¹⁹ IX.4.1166b26–29 (I have modified Pakaluk’s translation slightly).

between the teacher and the student prevents the student from correctly understanding the choice the philosophical teacher makes. The student is only dimly aware of the life he is coming to lead; he does not know adequately what he receives or even what he needs. In some cases, he might, like Alcibiades, not accept the teaching no matter how generous the choice of the teacher. And still the teacher makes the choice.

Aristotle does not say why the teacher does so. One reason that might incline us to believe that no philosopher would make this choice is that it might seem to make him not a contemplative but a practical human being, even a productive human being. As Aristotle puts it in *Physics*: “Teaching is the activity of a person who can teach, yet the operation is performed *on* some patient” (III.3.202b6–8). Like building or cooking, teaching is a movement that aims to terminate in an end distinct from and better than itself.²⁰ Insofar as teaching is productive, the teacher becomes subordinated to the well-being of the learner. Why would the philosopher turn away from his own immanent, contemplative activity and subject himself, as if he were a menial laborer, to the uncertain task of benefiting another?

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents the life of the king as the busy life of seeking to benefit others through action (VIII.11.1161a10–22 and VIII.10.1160b1–6). The happiness of the king depends in part on the success of that activity; a beneficent king cannot be fully happy if his practical efforts end in frustration. When Aristotle speaks generally of benefactors, he says

²⁰ See *N.E.* I.1.1094a3–6 and X.4.1174a19–21. The controversy between John Bowin, Robert Heinaman, and Myles Burnyeat about *De Anima* II.5.417a31–b16 and the proper understanding of various transitions or alterations in the soul from potency to act is not unrelated to the conception of teaching at issue here, but I do not think their controversy affects the essential claims made in this paper. See Myles Burnyeat, “*De Anima* II 5,” *Phronesis* 47 (2002): 29–90; Robert Heinaman, “Actuality, Potentiality and *De Anima* II.5,” *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 139–87; John Bowin, “Aristotle on Various Types of Alteration in *De Anima* II 5,” *Phronesis* 56 (2011): 138–61.

that while it seems being treated well is painless, doing well is bothersome (*eu poiein ergôdes*) (IX.7.1168a23–24). His description of benefactors (in IX.7) provides a helpful contrast with what he says about teachers. Benefactors differ from lenders not materially but formally. Whereas lenders give something up in expectation of repayment, benefactors are concerned to bring others into fulfillment. Aristotle points to craftsmen generally and poets paradigmatically as those who communicate form or actuality without seeking return from the recipient. The benefactor does not simply stamp his monogram on things, like a dog marking territory; there is generosity, but the benefactor seems eager to see his power reach fulfillment in another. In doing so, benefactors subordinate themselves to those achievements, and they are less lovable than their productions. Like craftsmen, benefactors are potentially what their works are actually. Poets are essentially makers, and they need their works to behold themselves in actuality in another.²¹ Perhaps some teachers operate in that way, just as some might simply be interested in marking their students as disciples and epigones. By contrast, Aristotle's philosophical teachers seem to be simultaneously more generous and less interested in their students. They are benevolent and generous, but they are not busybodies who insist on being effective.

Two final considerations may be offered, not as conclusive proofs of Aristotle's thinking, but as suggestions that have some support in his texts. The first comes from his discussion of what to do when, over time, one friend greatly outstrips another in virtue. This is clearest, he says, when dealing with friends from childhood. It is particularly interesting that Aristotle frames the case in terms of one friend who has remained a child in his thinking (*tên dianoian pais*) and another who has become a man very powerful in this respect (*anêr hoios kratistos*). They cannot be friends because they cannot share their lives, but the superior one, remembering their

²¹ See IX.7.1167b31–1168a9.

familiarity and prior friendship, ought to act graciously toward the other (*dein charizesthai*). The superior friend looks at his intellectually immature, former friend and sees someone who is still like what he himself once was. Aristotle suggests that one must give something (*aponemêteon ti*) to this likeness of one's immature self.²² Perhaps teaching is like that. You act in a friendly or a virtuous way toward this person who is intellectually like what you used to be. You offer the best you have found, but you do not try to form the student into a copy of yourself, just as Aristotle does not recommend that the superior friend try to transform his childhood companion.

The second suggestion emerges from Aristotle's comparison of teachers to gods. Aristotle's God does not engage in active benevolence or providential care for human beings, and yet, by being accessible to our understanding through the intelligible order of nature, his God may be described as contributing to human happiness. While non-human things might be described metaphorically as loving God (*Met. XII.7.1072b3*), human beings can become aware of God's perfection, and this intelligibility to us amounts to a kind of natural benevolence. The excellence of divine self-sufficiency appears to us, and in that light we discern the contemplative life as the closest *human* approximation to divine self-sufficiency. The best human life is the life according to nature, which is intelligible in its dependence on God's perfection. God is available to us for imitation, and, similarly, the philosophical teacher is available to students, although not as if his happiness depends upon their success in learning. Somewhat like God and without loss to his own happiness, the philosophical teacher is able to give students access to the life that is best according to nature. Perhaps it cannot be proved that this is Aristotle's understanding, but this just might be the choice made by the philosophical teacher.

²² See IX.3.1165b26–36.

In conclusion, I turn to Augustine for a historical contrast. Augustine's mother, Monica, hounded him for years before Augustine finally converted to Christianity. She wept, prayed, fasted, and nagged until he ordered his life in a way akin to what she thought best. Indeed, her happiness and peace of mind were intricately bound up with the character of Augustine's life. It is impossible to imagine Aristotle with anything approaching this attitude toward some exceptionally talented but wayward student. Aristotle's prolific writing demonstrates the absence of stinginess, but his happiness consists in his contemplative activity, perhaps with equal friends, not in the training of students. As a teacher and a writer, Aristotle is benevolent but not servile or acquisitive, and he acts more in the mode of a final or an exemplar cause than in the mode of an efficient or productive cause.

N.B.: A different version of this paper, which was entitled "Aristotle on Friendship and Teaching Philosophy," was delivered at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, on 25 October 2013. The present version of the paper reflects refinements made in light of comments by John W. Peck, S.J., at the ACPA conference in Indianapolis on 2 November 2013. I am grateful to him for his careful consideration of the paper and to others who offered questions or comments.