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Special Obligations: The Structural Risks of Friendship

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Special Obligations: The Structural Risks of Friendship

Abstract

Friendship is often conceived of as a freely chosen intrinsic good, yet friendship gives rise to special obligations that can act against ethical regard for others. Philosophers who recognize the significance of special obligations, such as Diane Jeske in *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Creates Reason*, argue that special obligations are an undeniable feature of friendship and give rise to conflicts between friends and others to whom one has responsibilities. I argue that friendship can pose insoluble problems of special obligation, not just because obligations to friends can conflict with other obligations we have, but because friendship can challenge obligations we have to ourselves or to a conception of life that we hold precious. We must accept this as a risk of friendship and regard such dissonance as a sign of strength in friendship as well as a threat.

Keywords

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Philosophy Senior Thesis

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Senior Thesis

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Friendship is often conceived of as a freely chosen intrinsic good, yet friendship gives rise to special obligations that can act against ethical regard for others. Philosophers who recognize the significance of special obligations, such as Diane Jeske in *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Creates Reason*, argue that special obligations are an undeniable feature of friendship and give rise to conflicts between friends and others to whom one has responsibilities. I argue that friendship can pose insoluble problems of special obligation, not just because obligations to friends can conflict with other obligations we have, but because friendship can challenge obligations we have to ourselves or to a conception of life that we hold precious. We must accept this as a risk of friendship and regard such dissonance as a sign of strength in friendship as well as a threat.



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Introduction

I have never heard someone say “life would be so much better without friends” or “the last thing I need is a good friend.” As a chosen relationship, friendship is valued, and we naturally choose good things for ourselves over bad. In the selection process, we test people in the role of our friend, and if we do not like a friend or a friend group, we leave to find another. In this paper, I discuss philosophical questions that arise in considering friendship and the special obligations they create: the kinds of friends we choose and why, the different challenges that arise in friendships, and the sometimes insoluble problems that friendships present. I will argue that the special obligations found in close friendship involve great potential for conflict and challenging decisions that can threaten these friendships. Ultimately insoluble conflicts that arise from the special obligations that friendship creates can act as a catalyst for the decision to end a friendship for good.

Of course our dear friendships are partnerships that we embrace because of the overall good that they bring to our lives, as they act as support, a source of understanding, escape, and a buffer for the challenges that life brings. However, these positive goods do not eliminate the conflicts that friendships can present. The difficulties we encounter in close friendships do not comprise mere arguments over where to go for dinner or catty exchanges. The darker and more dangerous side of friendship has a depth that philosophers rarely acknowledge.

Why would it be that the friends whom we hold closest could bring such unhappiness? The danger of close friendship lies in the obligations we have to our friends, to others, and

ourselves. We face this danger when we are forced to choose between upholding one of two obligations: the obligation we have to our friends and giving them greatest priority, or the obligation we have to ourselves or to something else to which we are committed. We will ultimately decide what obligation to uphold in order to paint the picture of the life we want to live. This decision may sometimes bring about the end of a once valued friendship.

Chapter 1 Philosophers on Friendship

In Book Eight of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes three types of friendship. He regards two types, which he refers to as friendships of pleasure and of use, as lesser forms of friendship based on the extrinsic qualities that give rise to them. Aristotle writes: “when the useful is the basis of affection, men love because of the good they get out of it, and when pleasure is the basis, for the pleasure they get out of it,” (Aristotle 218). He admits that such friendship can be sturdy relationships, but does not consider them true friendships. They are not strong enough to carry them through all of the challenges that significant friendships can endure, nor reflect the shared concern for the good that Aristotle believes essential to true friendship. Unlike in friendships of pleasure, the truest friendship, Aristotle believes, is between “...men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good themselves,” (Aristotle, “*Nicomachean Ethics*”).

In a similar vein, the French Renaissance philosopher, Michel de Montaigne discusses acquaintances’ relationships with each other: “what we commonly call friends and friendships, are nothing but acquaintance and familiarities, either occasionally contracted, or upon some design, by means of which there happens some little intercourse betwixt our souls,” (Montaigne 4). Montaigne discusses some of the properties that can be applied to Aristotle’s friendships of use and pleasure and implies a shallowness about them, suggesting that these relationships may not be the closest friendships that we can obtain.

Aristotle's and Montaigne's friendships of pleasure and use fall under the category of what might be termed casual friendships. We cannot be equally committed to all of our friends, because we do not have enough time or energy to invest in the higher level of friendship by which significant friendships are categorized. This is not to say that casual friendships are unnecessary in our lives; the relationships we have with casual and significant friends, though different, both have important purposes in our lives.

Casual friendships of sheer use or pleasure are valuable to have in our lives as they are founded on convenience. These types of friendships are more commonly found than closer ones, since there may be more opportunities to find such friends based on the fact that all is required of them is use or pleasure. Friendships of use are very helpful in getting through life with the maximum amount of ease. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that this use will not fall under an emotional use but rather the use of a person as a resource or task provider. The convenience is emphasized more so in this relationship as the friendship does not necessarily have the happy component added onto it like the friendship of pleasure. This type of friendship may exist between neighbors who watch each other's houses while the other is out of town. This dynamic is unique in its simplicity as they are friends because they both need things from each other and maybe nothing else. Aristotle says: "such friends are not at all given to living in each other's company, for sometimes they do not even find each other pleasant. Therefore they have no further need of this relationship if they are not mutually beneficial," (Aristotle 219). This common desire from the other enables us to refer to this relationship of need as another form of casual friendship.

Friendships of pleasure are also very important in our lives. They act similarly to those of use but what we need is less material and more emotional. Such friends seek each other out to get pleasure out of an activity or situation rather than just the activity itself. We seek these friends out because we enjoy engaging in a common interest with them. This relationship of pleasure is more involved and personal than that of use but still extrinsic to the other person involved as it revolves around the common interest or activity. An example of this is may be friendships that arise between people from clubs, or intramural sports, but remained confined to those activities. While such relationships may seem to extend beyond a casual friendship of use, their friendship rests on an extrinsic quality of pleasure as the foundation of the relationship.

Yet these casual friendships are important to us even though they lack a certain depth. Without these friendships we would miss pleasant interactions and would not have the privilege of gaining connections to new people and expanding our experiences. These friendships can blossom from one of use and shared pleasure to a friendship that involves rarer, intrinsic qualities. Intrinsic qualities include focusing on the friend for his or her own sake, independent of the activity in which we engage together. It is at this deeper level that we begin to commit more of ourselves to our friendship and to the friend as an individual. At this stage of friendship we are able to be more than we could be without such friendship.

Aristotle describes his perfect form of friendship, friendships of virtue, as deeper than those of use and pleasure. He claims that “these friends wish alike for one another’s good

because they are good men, and they are good *per se*, (that is, their goodness is something intrinsic, not incidental). Those who wish for their friends' good for their friends' sake are friends in the truest sense," (Aristotle 219). The intrinsic component of the perfect friendship lies in the goodness that each person contains from the perspective of the other. He believes that this virtue between friends adds a greater depth and assumes that these forms of friendships must be long-lasting because they are between good men, and good lasts forever. Aristotle views this intrinsic component of virtue between men as essential to good friendships; anyone who does not fit these qualifications cannot be considered a friend in the truest sense of the word.

In *Lysis*, Plato also discusses intrinsic components as being essential to true friendships. He reasons through this by using a metaphor of a doctor, body, and disease, relating them as friends and enemies. He says: "the body, which is neither good nor bad, is because of disease—that is, because of what is bad—a friend of the medical art; and the medical art is a good. And the medical art has accepted the friendship for the sake of the health, and health is good," (Plato 44). This metaphor carries great extrinsic qualities within it as Socrates points out: "if there is no disease [enemy], then a drug [friend] is not required...it is of no use itself for its own sake?" (Plato 47). Socrates does not like this metaphor as he concludes that this would not be an example of a friend at all because it is not a friend for the friend's sake.

When we use Socrates' perspective, we can see that seeking friendship for the sake of virtue and good is not as intrinsically focused on the friendship as it could be. In order to

address this flaw, he looks to desire as indication of intrinsic quality in a friend (Bolotin 49). He reasons that if we desire to be with someone because of who they are and not what they do, such as for the sake of defeating evil or promoting good, then we are friends for intrinsic reasons; we are friends for the sake of being friends. Ultimately, significant friendship is a product of the desire to be together for no specific reason beyond the friendship itself and the shared regard for the good in each other.

While he never explicitly states this, Aristotle's limitations of friendship only being accessible to good men implies that bad people are incapable of befriending others. In Book Eight of *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes: "The perfect form of friendship is that between good men who are alike in excellence and virtue," (Aristotle, 219). Aristotle believes that virtue is a necessity for the truest form of friendship and provides its foundation and most common between men, with the exception of husbands and wives. He believes that the pairing of two virtuous souls allows for the most perfect friendship. While these two "goods" could combine to achieve the "good" together, I disagree with Aristotle in regard to the forms of friendship he distinguishes and the limitations he puts on the friendship.

I do not believe that two men of perfectly good characters, free of vice, are the only people who can obtain a partnership such as true friendship. The strongest kind of friendship is not the result only of two good men but a bond that makes possible a heightened good for each individual regardless of gender. A lack of inherent virtue among individuals should not prevent people from reaching the strongest degree of friendship as long as a common good is

embedded in the relationship of the two people. This differs from Aristotle's perspective, as he believes we must already be possessed of virtue at the start of a friendship, as if virtue is independent of the friendship itself. I view the good that arises from friendship as greater than two people can create on their own.

I share Aristotle's belief, however, that friendship is rare. Every friendship cannot reach such a high significance. Aristotle states that good men cannot be true friends to every other good man: "to be friends with many people in the sense of perfect friendship is impossible...for love is like an extreme, and an extreme tends to be unique," (Ostwald 225). The highest degree of friendship discussed here will not be a commonality in one's life, because significant friendships differ from casual friendships in their uniqueness. These friendships are not as situational as casual friendships since the friendship is not founded on the context in which it exists. Significant friendships are founded on a deeper relationship of the character of each of the people involved -- beyond what they may enjoy doing together.

In Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Essay on Friendship" (1841), Emerson claims that "when they [friends] are real, they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest thing we know," (Emerson 5). For Emerson, friendship is one of the purest forms of relationship between two people. He speaks of friends as entering a dyad in which they can only experience with the other person but not solely because of this other person. He explains that two people must remain individually sound and centered in a friendship. Emerson focuses on the intrinsic nature of friendship as key to individual growth. In a world filled with ambiguity and unknown

influences over our lives, the close friend acts as an anchor. This suggests that we may turn to friendship for extrinsic reasons but it does not suggest that friendship exists without intrinsic reasons as well. If it were solely an intrinsic relationship, then we could find ourselves absorbed in our friendship to the point that it became irrelevant to the rest of our lives.

What happens now that we know that we must seek intrinsic qualities in our closest and most significant friends? Once we discover these qualities, the friendship has really just begun. When we reach that point of deep friendship and identifying each other as friends, we are ready to raise the expectations we have of our friends and consider them a higher priority. We may experience a series of positive emotions as we further commit ourselves, yet this is the point in a friendship when there is greater risk. As soon as we ask more demanding obligations of one another, we are binding ourselves to a stronger commitment to the friendship from which risk, challenge, and conflict may arise.

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida conveys an idealized conception of the relationship between two people that aligns with which I argue to be the truest friendships. "The declaration would in truth be inscribed upon its act of birth. One loves only by declaring that one loves," (Derrida 9). While this declaration of friendship and true compatibility may seem overbearing, it is essential in initiating a significant friendship with someone. Such moments as these, comprised of looks or words, are part of the movement of a friendship to a more committed stage. Moments like these are subjective, but they signify a great understanding of each other that can be differentiated from other casual friends. Appreciation

and mutuality may then be acknowledged for the friendship. If the friendship is not mutual, then the friendship may not be strong enough to uphold the risk and danger found in the special obligations of significant friendships.

We can see signs of significant friendships in how people regard their friendship. Derrida says: "If a friend had to choose between knowing and being known, he would choose knowing rather than being known...One can love being loved, but loving will always be more, better and something other than being loved...one must first know how to love and know what loving means by loving," (Derrida 11). This desire to know our friend more than we want our friend to know us suggests the presence of intrinsic qualities we value in that friend. Granted, we would like to be noticed mutually by our friend, but wanting to know the friend more than the friend knowing us is a strong indication of being in a significant friendship. We are then interested in the friend for their own sake, independent of ourselves, which is an essential component of significant friendships.

Derrida discusses how the future must be considered in the truest friendships as well. He explicates by referring to the friendship of the future as being in a state of "perhaps": "to love friendship, it is not enough to know how to bear the other in the mourning; one must love the future. And there is no more just category for the future, and the *perhaps* to open on to the coming of what comes," (Derrida 29). He continues to say "perhaps" is not definite and embraces a sense of uncertainty that is necessary in a true friendship as it acts as a catalyst to discovering truth. While this concept of uncertainty is inimical to Aristotle and Plato, it is

essential to Derrida. He believes that this uncertainty only originates in the truest forms of friendship. The control we have when making decisions about future paths or courses we take in a friendship opens up a world of uncertainty and potential conflict. Our struggle in determining when to uphold our obligations to our friend suggests a dissonance that would not occur unless that friend held some sort of greater significance in our lives.

This struggle with conflicting obligations indicates when we begin to prioritize a person over other things and alongside already serious commitments in our lives. This is the partnership of two people growing stronger together and getting closer to being one unit rather than acting independently of each other. Yet as we enter the realm of significant friendships, greater dilemmas arise.

As we approach close friendship, our friend becomes more valuable to us as our desire to choose them over others increases. In a more casual friendship we may have been more interested in doing solely what benefits the friendship or even ourselves. Due to the commitment and obligations that derive from significant friendships, we begin to consider what is good for them, even if that is not necessarily what is easy for the friendship. Aristotle discusses this transference of obligations to a person versus to a friendship: "...in loving a friend they love their own good. For when a good man becomes a friend he becomes a good to the person whose friend he is. Thus, each partner both loves his own good and makes an equal return in the good he wishes for his partner and in the pleasure he gives him...friendship is said to be equality," (Aristotle 224). When people reach the level of true or virtuous friendship the

obligation to a friend resembles the obligations we have to ourselves. This commitment and application of obligation to our friend nearly matches our own in priority and can eventually pose problems of irreconcilable choice when such obligations conflict.

At this level of friendship, we may be harder on our friend than ever before because the degree of the obligation to our friend is similar to the degree of the obligations we have to ourselves. The priority of our friend may even become a higher priority than the friendship. It may seem paradoxical that the friendship becomes less important than the friend. However, at this level of friendship, a new relationship has developed that contains an intimacy that was not there before. This intimacy instills special obligations.

As we reach higher and closer degrees of friendship, we extend the degree of obligations we undertake in that friendship. In the most casual level of friendships, we consider obligations to ourselves and often act on what is in our best interest. As we get closer to a friend we focus on our obligations to the friendship and act on ways to nurture the relationship itself. As we reach the highest level of significance in friendship, we first prioritize our obligations to that friend with less consideration of the friendship itself, for a true friend will put the friend first before anything else because that is most important.

Montaigne mentions close friendship as having this significant connection: "A unique and particular friendship dissolves all other obligations whatsoever: the secret I have sworn not to reveal to any other, I may without perjury communicate to him who is not another, but myself," (Montaigne 6). This level of commitment to the friend is apparent and widely

understood in literature; yet this obligation is neither a pact nor guarantee that things will continue smoothly between friends. We embark on significant friendships in hope that they will last forever, but these increased obligations and our difficulty at times in carrying them through can sometimes tear such friends apart.

Chapter 2 Special Obligations

Life presents us with decisions over how we will carry out a plan of action, what we will do with our time, and more specifically what we will choose to do over something else. We should expect to make hard decisions in life about work, where we will live, relationships and marriage, etc, so friendships should not be any different. Just like any other relationship, friendship can cause great dissonance and conflict. We know well the experience of having to choose among obligations to different friends, or more seriously, we have felt the burden of having chosen sides in an argument between two friends. When it comes down to making these hard decisions we reflect on our obligations and what we hold as our highest priority.

We commit ourselves to friendships by choice, which results in special obligations that we must consider when making plans of action that are both related and unrelated to the friendship. However, we will not always prioritize our friends highly enough to create a dilemma of conflicting obligations; we will prioritize other variables in our lives above certain friendships. At the beginning of a casual friendships, we commit for our own sake and focus on upholding our obligations to ourselves. When we move into deeper and more significant friendships with people, our primary commitment changes from a commitment to ourselves to a primary commitment to the friendship as a whole. In even deeper and most significant friendships, our obligation to the friendship as a whole becomes a lesser priority and our priority turns to our obligations to the friend as an individual. At this most significant stage of friendship, we place our friend in alignment with the obligation we have to ourselves. This

leads to the possibility that we could favor the obligation to our friend and doing what is best for them rather than focusing on what is best for ourselves, and ultimately act on behalf of the our obligation to our friend over the obligation to ourselves.

In this chapter I will focus on how the special obligations are enough *reason* for a course of action in order to support my overall claim that the conflict that comes from special obligations is valid. In *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Creates Reason*, Diane Jeske discusses the belief that the special obligations, which she uses interchangeably with intimate relationships, can act as moral reasons for our actions. Jeske claims that moral reasoning, “reasons of intimacy”, are at the foundation of our choice to act in regard to our friends. These reasons of intimacy exist on the same premise that our prioritizing people over others is related to our level of intimacy with that person. Friendships are significant components of our lives, so we will look at what gives us reason to consider them in taking priority in ethical dilemmas of obligations where we must choose between multiple commitments and obligation. There could be several components of friendship that make us feel confident in the justification of our actions. Jeske defends a Voluntarist perspective that special obligations only exist as products of chosen commitments; therefore, she claims that friendships are unique in involving special obligations.

Jeske addresses the different reasons for action and which pertain to friendships or intimate relationships. She distinguishes between justification and explanation. She says: “we must distinguish between *justificatory* and *explanatory* reasons when deciding the ‘right’ thing to

do, focusing on supporting friendship as a justificatory reason," (Jeske). Jeske gives friendships the right to be considered rational reasoning for our actions, as opposed to being strictly an explanatory description of an internal state of being. As she makes the distinction between types of reason she also establishes her position that friendships can serve in ethical contexts as contributing to the rational measure of reason.

Since Jeske has now clearly positioned her argument around friendship's relevance to our actions and doing the right thing, she goes further into detail about how friendship pertains to actions. She is: "concerned with reasons that agents have for various courses of actions, not with whether or when they act on a basis of those actions," (Jeske 7), and she claims that the latter is for psychologists while the former is for philosophers like herself. Ultimately, we will examine the reasons that friends have for acting in regard to each other and how friendship may affect this overall condition.

Jeske elaborates on the different types of reasons on the basis of which we can engage and how they pertain to decision making in contexts involving friendship. She subdivides reasons into two greater categories of fundamental and derivative reasons, defining them in this way: "Derivative: derived from another reason to do something," (Jeske 11) and "Fundamental: we want to promote intrinsic value, keep our promises, and satisfy our desires," (Jeske 13). Jeske focuses on the fundamental reasons as the means to decision making within the context of friendship, since the truest friendship has intrinsic value. She considers alternate focuses, such as Utilitarianism and Consequentialism, which consider most of our reasoning to be derivative

and Jeske considers these but ultimately disagrees on the basis that the reasons are too external to the friendship.

Jeske also outlines what she believes to be an intimate relationship and what can be considered a rational type of reasoning. She claims that people involved in friendships must: 1. Have a positive attitude toward one another; 2. Have mutual attitudes; 3. Have concern for each other that exceeds the concern that they have for others; 4. Desire to spend time together; 5. Want to learn about each other more than most; 6. have spent time together; 7. Have a history of concern for another (Jeske 47). These properties of friendship are reasonable in the sense that many relationships fit under each category yet still remain special to each individual. Her basic outline of friendship indicates the condition of a true friendship, thus indicating the conditions that must appear in a relationship involving special obligations.

While this outline of the relationships is important, some of the most significant information is in her second chapter in *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Generates Reasons*, "How Not to Understand Reasons of Intimacy". She discusses the different forms of justificatory reasons and puts them into categories based on two components: the doer and the receiver. She introduces subjective agent-relative and objective agent-neutral as inappropriate contexts to view reasons of intimacy in order to help us understand our beliefs before we start to justify them.

First, Jeske considers the perspective that reasons of intimacy, choosing to do things for our friend, are subjective agent-relative. She uses the Humean account under this category and

the belief that: S's fundamental reason is to satisfy her desires or promote her interests and concerns meaning that we do things in lieu of a friend because it benefits us. She challenges this position by claiming that it is not the desire itself that should ground a reason for action but the objective value of the pleasure that will arise from fulfilling that desire, and that desires are not always rational and therefore cannot be pure sources of reasons for carrying out an action (Jeske 17-19). Her argument against desires being rational has to do with the fact that she views desires as a derivative reason rather than a fundamental reason for our actions and behavior (Jeske 33), thus lacking the intrinsic quality at the foundation of friendship.

Initially, this may seem to counter Plato's perspective on desires that I mentioned in the first chapter; however, there is a difference. In this context, desires are extrinsic because they act as a function of reason to fulfill any desire, whereas, in Plato, the desire to see each other is positive because the desire is specific to this. Jeske gives an example of desires that would be inappropriate to act on: "engage immoral activity (organizing neo-nazis); imprudent desires (excessive alcohol consumption); and trivial or superficial desires (getting botox injections)," (Jeske 19). These are all considered irrational desires and differ from the desire to see each other that Plato uses as a sign of good friendship. This desire differs mainly in the sense that it is anchored in their desire for the other person, not other outcomes as the others do. The Humean Account considers the friend as agent-relative, which is important because of the 'special' component of special obligations. However, that does not compensate for the fact that the subjective component detracts from any rational application to reasoning in friendship. It is not a good idea or the right one in a universal context.

Jeske looks for support that reasons of intimacy are also fundamental. In order to do this she turns her attention toward the objectivist account and, more specifically the objective agent-neutral reasons, which exist in an agent's awareness of objective value properties rather than that of their desires (Jeske 28). This "Aristotelian view understands reasons of intimacy as objective agent-neutral," (Jeske 31). The objectivity at the foundation of this perspective justifies and then standardizes our reasoning to create a common understanding that exists outside of our own personal experiences. However, the agent-neutral aspect presents a problem in relation to our reasons of intimacy as it suggests that these reasons of intimacy could be applied to any person. Our friendships are not accessible with just any one person at any moment but are unusual and rare. She says in more detail that: "whatever value my relationships have, other relationships of the same type that aren't my own will have the same value as will possible or potential other relationships" (Jeske 43) when considering agent-neutral relationships, which goes against her theory of friendships and her belief that special obligations cannot be applied to everyone because they would then not be special.

It is essential that special obligations occur only in relationships with people that are irreplaceable and incomparable with others in our lives. The special obligations can only be applied to people of this status because they give that person precedence over another in priority. If friends were agent-neutral, then we would not be able to prioritize anyone over anyone else.

Jeske combines subjective agent-relative and objective agent-neutral reasons to describe reasons of intimacy in order to maintain the principles under which she argues reasons of intimacy occur. She says: "We should view friendship and promise-making as types of commitments as voluntarily undertaken actions that ground objective agent-relative reasons," (Jeske 83). The agent-relativity suggests that actions cannot be aimed toward just anyone and the objective component sheds light on the idea that our reasons of intimacy are rational and true. This type of reason as applicable to her idea that special obligations are rational helps suggest that this is a true reason to choose our actions and behavior.

This claim proposes that reasons of intimacy exist between friends due to the objective component and agent-relative component. The objective part suggests that these reasons must be understood by those outside of the friendship, so that there is some form of objective validation. This validation is ultimately to accept the fact that those closer to us will take a higher priority in our life. The agent-relative component proposes that these reasons of intimacy cannot apply to just anyone but only to those under the conditions of friendship.

In Chapter 5, Jeske addresses three different types of Particularism, which she considers to be "not itself a theory, but, rather, a family of theses concerning the nature of moral knowledge, of moral ontology, and of moral practice," (Jeske 85). Particularists ultimately claim that there are "no general moral truths, no codifiable moral rules, no necessary connections between normative and nonnormative properties and that moral agents ought to make decisions by paying attention to particulars rather than by attempting to apply general rules or

truths," (Jeske 85). This perspective is somewhat subjective and ultimately challenges reasons of intimacy, or our special obligations.

A type of Epistemological Particularism -- Knowledge Acquisition Particularism -- works with reasons of intimacy if we consider friendship to be one of Wittengstein's family resemblances. Paradigm cases of friendship are instances of valuable reason-giving relationships; therefore, we can consider friendship as reason-giving and not having a general truth to be reason-giving (Jeske 103). This is not what Jeske necessarily aims for in her argument; however, it is a way for rationality to be found in a case where there is no room for general truth. This is consistent with her ideas of friendship because she ultimately claims that a set of normative properties cannot be applied to friendships based on the fact that no two friendships are the same. While this theory keeps this in consideration, it does not apply to the rational component that Jeske looks for.

Epistemological Particularism may be one of the greatest counters to Jeske's take on reasons of intimacy and friendship. It challenges the very reason that she begins this discussion on special obligations by claiming that there is no way to be certain about anything. Such ambiguity turns attention away from what could be an explanation of rationality by adapting an "it is what it is" attitude and merely accepting situations as they are. This perspective also takes away from the significance of Jeske's argument by suggesting that it is not even an issue that can be discussed or solved at any level. This perspective is an easy way out of what Jeske claims to be a frustrating and obligatory commitment to the most important people in our lives.

In addition to that, I find it hard to believe that someone who followed this kind of Particularism is able to maintain any friendships in its truest form as they are unable to apply the necessary qualities to the relationship.

In Chapter 6, Jeske investigates the role of constraints in our friendships, relating her explication of objective agent-relative reasons as representative of reasons of intimacy and using constraints as another level of support in this relationship. She says that if we “understand constraints as objective agent-relative reasons [then it] implies that reasons grounded in an agent’s awareness of her own desires (subjective) are not constraints,” (Jeske 108). She also says that: “constraints are meant to indicate objectivity and that reasons are grounded in ‘external’ facts that bind us in ways that we can’t alter merely by altering our desires,” (Jeske 109). Jeske’s examples of constraints are clearly understood to be rational at the external extent, and she ultimately figures that friendship is a constraint.

Friendship can act as a constraint in many ways as we often consider our friends in moral reasoning and what we want to do. She considers friendship a true constraint in our decision-making of our actions and behaviors, so what will happen when constraints of friendship go up against other objective constraints? Jeske acknowledges that tension and conflict come along with these constraints of friendship, but she never says we should live without them (Jeske 149). Ultimately she hopes that addressing the complexity that such constraints added to our lives will help lessen the negativity that arises from the tension and conflict, since it is now expected to come with friendships.

This tension is a result of conflicting obligations between two things to which we have obligations. As discussed in the first chapter, we experience such dissonance when we are forced to choose between obligation A and obligation B. Claiming that friendship acts as a constraint construes such obligations as a feature of some conflicting obligations, whether one can choose either obligation A or B.

Jeske also explores whether her reasons of intimacy could fall within the theories of Consequentialism. She agrees that “we need to be cautious about appeal to intuitions,” (Jeske 112) but for reasons that overlap with those of the inability to apply objective agent-neutral reasoning to reasons of intimacy, she is unable to completely make the connection. It seems as though she agrees with Elizabeth Anderson in saying that consequentialist reasoning is in alignment with what we value as lower goods but that “we need a logic that contrasts with consequentialism in order to express higher modes of valuation,” (Jeske 119). This would be the appropriate way to treat people in accordance to their value, as she believes that the Consequentialist perspective does not rightfully do so.

Consequentialism prevents us from ever considering our individual in regard to an outcome but rather guides us to consider the outside factor first, which is toxic to significant friendships. This approach closely resembles what Aristotle mentions about consequentialism. Francis Kamm argues that treating people correctly is manifested by acting out of respect toward them in ways that acknowledge their elevated status as inviolable beings (Jeske 122). He emphasizes the value of treating them as being more than a “mere use-value,” which echoes the

concept that our treatment of others must extend beyond casual friendships. Jeske's support of going against the objectivist approach is important in establishing her belief that friendships cannot directly apply to just anyone and that they deserve to have special consideration in our lives.

Jeske's most important material is in Chapter 7, "the Scope of the Objective Agent-Relative," where she explicates the concept of this further. She states her position on Voluntarism: "the *only* way to acquire special obligations-i.e. agent-relative obligations- is through some voluntary action(s) such that we know or ought to know that such action(s) constitutes the assumption of such obligations," (Jeske 127). The main focus of Voluntarism is choice; we choose to commit ourselves to relationships that bring about obligations. This choice makes them special in comparison to other relationships that we do not choose to have. Family and political relationships are left out of the special obligation category because of the fact that we do not have choice in what family or what political system we are born into.

The anti-voluntarist intuition argues that we have special obligations to our family members and society as a whole even though we do not technically choose to commit ourselves to either of them. While we are often tempted to consider relationships of non-choice, such as those to family or government, as special, Jeske argues that we need to put aside these natural anti-voluntarist intuitions and opt for understanding our reasons to benefit family members, fellow citizens, those who have done good for us in objective agent-neutral or subjective agent-relative forms (Jeske 127). Such relationships still fall into the categories that Jeske lists,

however, the reason category is not the category she argues friendship falls under but rather that friendship falls under reasons of intimacy. Jeske works inside-out in making sure that her readers understand every component of her argument. She says: “we believe ourselves to have reasons to care for our intimates- friends, family members, colleagues, lovers- [and] that we do not have to care for persons who are not our intimates,” (Jeske 1). Throughout her book, she addresses the differences between reasons of intimacy and those of the acquaintance, stranger, or people whom we do not choose to have in our lives. In the end, she explains her reasoning very simply: “One of the reasons we choose to do things is because of our intimate relationships” (Jeske 1) as ethically understood and rationally thought.

She acknowledges that the relationships we invest in and prioritize above others are not objectively supported for their own sake but supported because they bring us to objective greatness. She explains: “it is often the desires that aren’t always in line with objective value that make our lives peculiarly rich, satisfying, and, in the end, objectively valuable,” (Jeske 149). Our friendships bring value into our lives that would not exist without them; we can ultimately agree that said value is objectively good. With these come special obligations that, though taxing and capable of complicating any otherwise objectively simpler situation, we must accept for the sake of the relationship and what it brings us. Jeske advocates that in order “to get all of the objective values, we must simultaneously create relationships that generate reasons that compete with those generated by objective value,” (Jeske 149). This has somewhat of an ironic twist as it suggests that the subjectivity or agent-relative component of friendships is essentially an objective truth. Ultimately, we can see rational and moral reasoning in investing time in

friendships because of these objective outcomes. Because we agree and understand these terms we must also accept the special obligations that we commit to because they are what will support the relationship and keep it going.

Chapter 3 Conflicted Friendships

Despite the fact that friends provide support, intimacy, and unique experiences for each other, there are many ways that friends also create situations of dissonance. Whether we have to decide between doing a requested favor for a friend and going to the gym or are involved in a more serious conflict between two people, we can encounter situations in which we frequently confront and react to these points of dissonance. When life presents us with situations where we have to measure outcomes against other outcomes, we are forced to measure our friend against something else. Thus we can predict that situations involving our “casual friends” cause less dissonance than situations involving “significant friends”.

Our friends can be at the root of dissonance in two ways: first, in an indirect manner and secondly, in a direct manner. Situations that indirectly involve friends are situations that the friend is not necessarily aware of; for instance, a situation in which we might have to choose between helping a friend and helping a family member. Situations that directly involve friends are situations that the friend is aware of and actively involved in; for instance, an argument between two friends and the choice of a third mutual friend in handling it.

I have spent time discussing the various degrees of friendship and how our obligations shift from casual to significant friendships. I suggest that significant friendships act as the truest form of friendship in the sense that we have special obligations to solely the friend as they are our primary concern in that relationship. I also believe that special obligations – as Derrida affirms -- add a risky component to friendship as they have the potential to jeopardize a

relationship if what is best for the friend is prioritized above what is best for the friendship. This enables me to conclude that, in times of dissonance, we may end up losing our truest friends if what is better for our friend is not better for us.

Chapters 1 and 2 support the motive of my third chapter, which is to discuss the times of conflict, tension, and dissonance that generate danger in friendships. How do we handle these situations and make the right, or best, choice? We all come across situations when we do not know how to act in regard to our friendships, but is there one best way that to determine how we should make a decision on whether or not to honor the friendship and follow through with the special obligations? I argue that, ultimately, we must pay attention to the reasoning behind our decision in order to determine what is right for us by figuring out how our decision will lead to the life we are creating that we want to lead.

The obligations to our friends collide with obligations to society, others, and the self, which creates a gradation in degree of conflict and dissonance. I have come to discover that it is these special obligations that pose great risk at the basis of friendships. They can conflict with any other obligation we have, creating a situation in which we do not know which obligation we should act on first. In this next chapter, I will break down the interactions we could have with our friends and what kinds of situations could create great conflict.

As I examine the existence of conflict amongst friends in regard to obligations we have, some people may disagree that this is a problem at all. I frequently hear someone discussing their friendships, claiming that they have never gotten into a fight with their best friend. These

various people may see themselves as an exception to my rule, finding my theory inapplicable to their friendship. Certain situations between friends create dissonance when friends are directly involved, even when friendships have previously been free of conflict; thus I would like to discount this form of "perfect friendship". Even if they had not encountered a situation of conflict, they have had, almost certainly, to choose between doing something for that friend or for another, thus experiencing a form of dissonance I will discuss as occurring when the friend is indirectly involved.

There are also people who may claim that they do not have trouble choosing between their friend and other obligations. There are only two possible reasons as to why such ease might occur. One may be that the friend is not considered the most important obligation, which would reflect a more casual friendship. The other reason is that one might always choose the friend as most important without second thoughts. The person who does this prioritizes their friend first and could claim that they do not fit the scenarios of dissonance that I present; however, they would not then be able to say the same thing about another friend. Surely, they would not choose another friend over the one that they "always prioritize first". Ultimately, it is likely that everyone experiences some form of dissonance when dealing with friendships and other obligations whether they directly involve the friend or not.

As I already mentioned, there are various forms of situations that present dissonance pertaining to a friendship: where the friend is either indirectly or directly involved. We can look at the source of dissonance as well. Sometimes the dissonance is created when a friend is

measured up against obligations to variables outside of that friendship, such as social demands or other intimate relationships. In these situations, friends can be both directly or indirectly related to these scenarios. For example, when I agree to drive a friend to the airport but then my closer friend calls me saying that they need me to take them to the bus station because their ride cancelled, my closer friend is now an indirect source of dissonance that I experience. In this scenario, my friend may not necessarily be aware of my, now present, task of choosing what to do. My closer friend is also indirectly involved in such dissonance because that request would not have created such tension if my schedule had been open; she herself did not directly create the tension. In handling this situation, Jeske would claim that reasons of intimacy are all we need to determine what we should do; the context of each outcome is not as important.

A friend can also be the direct source of dissonance that is brought on by situations provided by influences outside of a friendship. This could occur when my friend realizes the position that they indirectly put me in. If my close friend asks for a ride after I already agreed to help another friend and they realize the position that they put me in, then they become directly involved. At this stage, greater tension is created in the decision process because our friend is aware of the decision that I need to make.

This form of dissonance is somewhat lessened because our closer friends have a special obligation to us as a significant friend and they should therefore want to do good for us as well. They should want to back down and suggest a way to solve the situation so that they and their friend benefit. For instance, my friend should look for other people who might provide the

ride. Even though I may feel badly that I could not be the one to help, I will not be putting her in a bad position.

The greater dissonance that could be destructive to a friendship occurs when the friend becomes a direct source of tension and our obligations no longer correspond. These situations occur during times of conflict primarily between two close friends, either during an argument, a disagreement, or a clash of obligations; it could be any situation that threatens the friendship in cases where neither friend is happy with the current situation. This differs from situations involving outside influences in the sense that these will only ever directly relate the friend to the tension we experience in making a choice.

When we fight with our friends, every step is a choice even though they may be unconscious or reflexive. If a fight gets stretched out over several hours or days, then we deliberate over when we will say something or what we will say. If we feel that our friend has wronged us in some way, then we put careful thought into how we will treat them and when we will forgive them and move forward. This kind of scenario involving ongoing dissonance is the severest degree of tension that we may experience in regard to our friends because what we choose to do will influence the future of our relationship with that friend.

In the first chapter, I concluded that our obligations in our most significant friendships are directed toward the friend for the friend's sake. These obligations and our commitment to our friends are challenged when we are in the midst of conflict with a close friend. There could be outside factors that help us determine what we will do, but ultimately, we are forced to

decide between doing what is best for us and what is best for our close friend. Regarding the conclusion that the strongest friendship means that our obligation to that friend is a higher priority than to that of a friendship, we can see how we would be in a great conflict over which obligation to act on. In this case, a friend's direct involvement could mean more dissonance.

Before going into more details about this concept, I will first discuss the minimum impact that obligations could have on a friendship in order to display the gradation of obligation that exists. First, we must acknowledge that there is a situation in which tension would not be a problem when we have two different obligations to consider: when what is right for me is also right for my friend. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses a mutual agreement on ending friendship: "if one partner were to remain mentally a child, while the other has grown to be a man in the best sense of the word, how could they still be friends, when they neither like nor feel joy and pain at the same things?" (Aristotle 251). Outgrowing our friends or vice versa is always a risk we take in investing in relationships. While we have obligations to those significant friends, we also may be in completely different points in our lives where the burdens of the friendship outweigh the good of the friendship. We may reach a point where we clash and no longer have shared experiences or understandings, as Aristotle suggests. If our friend has outgrown us, then is it our obligation to let them go and move on if we are holding them back, or is it their obligation to us to make it work? Each of us has those obligations to each other in considering the significance of the friendship; however, they could conflict with each other and with the obligations to ourselves. In Aristotle's example, we don't know the details behind the conflict and whether or not obligations conflict at all. If we are unable to

meet halfway in such situations, then it is at times of such conflicting obligations where the future of our friendship is at great risk. While obligations can conflict, it is not always given that they will.

In *The Philosophy of Friendship*, Mark Vernon discusses Nietzsche's conception of star friendships, which is a positive outlook on the breaking off of friendships: "we were friends and have become estranged...the almighty force of our tasks drove us apart again into different seas and sunny zone, and perhaps we shall never see each other again...Let us then *believe* in our star friendship even if we should be compelled to be earth enemies," (Nietzsche, Vernon, 70). Nietzsche presents estrangement as a mutual state where both friends may have outgrown each other and do not work together anymore. Unlike Aristotle's example, Nietzsche presents a situation in which the right thing to do is end the friendship because it would be best for both parties. Yet we preserve a sense of "star friendship" when we have become "earth enemies." Here our obligations to ourselves and our friends in ending the friendship do not conflict because what is best for my friend is also best for myself.

Not only is the same thing best for both parties in ending the friendship, but each friend can also recognize that the friendship was good at a certain time and is no more. Aristotle agrees that upon a broken friendship, we can reach a state of reconciliation in which we have an obligation to honor the past relationship: "we should remember our past familiarity with him, and just as we feel more obliged to do favors for friends than for strangers, we must show some consideration to him for old friendship's sake, provided it was not excessive wickedness on his

part that broke the friendship," (Aristotle, 252). Paying homage to the friendship validates the truth that it once held but also recognizes the fact that it is no longer a vital friendship for the people who were involved. It is understandable that people would not think about something as much if irrelevant to their lives; however, this is not the same as someone entirely forgetting a past significant friendship. It is important to remember such relationships because these past relationships had a meaningful position in our lives. Vernon agrees with this perspective as he believes that we are capable of ending a friendship on good terms and furthermore that we can learn and grow from them in a way that we could not have if they had not existed: "Past friendships should lend themselves to future graciousness, for, even if it was a gift wrapped in thorns or conversely less of a gift than it first seemed, friendship brought a gift nonetheless. For that it is remembered," (Vernon 71). Vernon's state may only be possible among the most significant of friends, despite the fact that they did not continue being friends. Ultimately, people that can end their friendship on such a note are two people who can look back and agree on everything that went right and everything that went wrong, which takes energy that most people might not expend in casual friendships.

Thus far we have looked at tension and dissonance that can be created within friendships where the friend is indirectly involved. Such scenarios show that our obligations to ourselves and our friends may align and lead to a clean ending between friends if forced to choose between the two. In these situations we acknowledge our obligations to ourselves.

Now, I address the situations that force us to face conflicting obligations to ourselves and our friend. These situations present the greatest tension between two friends and what we decide to do. We have an obligation to stay true to ourselves and fight for what we think is best for ourselves. If what is best for us is to fight for our friend to stay in our lives because we need them even though they have outgrown us, then it becomes a daunting task to determine what obligation to follow. In this situation we do more than recognize the obligation we have to ourselves to do what is in our favor, but we also must decide whether or not to act on those obligations. Consider that I outgrow someone whom I had considered a best friend and who had considered me a best friend in return. We had seen problems developing between us for a long time and decided to work through them from the obligation we had to each other as significant friends. Eventually when I realize that our friendship is no longer mutual and that they need me more than I need them, I must choose whether to continue the relationship for the sake of the friend or to exit the friendship for my own sake.

For those of us raised in the United States, we have grown up in an individualistic society that focuses on the individual and self. We are taught to look out for ourselves and achieve personal accomplishments as one of our main priorities. Of course, not everyone in the United States is entirely egocentric, however, we are likely to experience a greater focus on the self in this society. We are taught to love ourselves, which may act as the source for this natural urge for us to look out for ourselves. However, we must also hold our closest friends as high priorities in our lives even though our commitment and obligations to them are often what

conflict with the obligations we have to ourselves. So how do we choose whether to follow through with our obligations to ourselves or our friend in times of conflict?

Based on the conclusion of my second chapter, our special obligations to our friends are a source of moral reasoning for us to rely on; we do things for our friends for their own sake at a significant level of friendship merely because we have an intimate relationship with them. While putting our friends first may originally appear to be a selfless approach to friendship, there are philosophers who argue that it is completely selfish. In *Love, Friendship, and the Self*, Bennett Helm examines the view that our reasoning behind prioritizing our close friends is not actually for our friend's own good but for our own good. He says: "one's identity as this person is fundamentally a matter of the kind of life worth one's living, and that this is determined largely by one's personal values and priorities; after all, we tend to answer questions about who we are by specifying what we stand for, what is fundamentally important in our lives," (Helm 130). Our significant friendships are fundamentally important in our lives, which can be seen through the kind of tension that they can instigate. This perspective suggests that while we may be sincerely interested in doing what is best for our friend, we ultimately make decisions in regard to the life that we want to live. From this implication, we can assume that as long as our friend is still something we want in our life then we will continue to follow through with our obligation to them. However, if we decide that we no longer want them in our lives, then we will do what is best for ourselves and forgo the special obligations we have for our friend. This could be taken to the level that friends only remain an obligation as long as it is convenient for us.

My first reaction to this concept was to reject it because it ultimately seems to reflect poorly on friendships overall, portraying the institution of friendship as ultimately egoistical. Could it be that in choosing to follow through with our obligations to our closest friends, we are ultimately also doing what is best for ourselves? When you are that close with someone, what makes one happy will often also make the other friend happy. It is from this basis that the egoist perspective claims that we could be making decisions in terms of ourselves until what our friend needs is no longer what we want and we decide to weigh our independent desires more heavily. Helm explicates on how this can unintentionally occur through the process of confusing what we want strictly for our friend and what we want for ourselves. He says:

If in valuing something I thereby come to identify myself with it, such valuing, such identification, cannot ignore the potential unity that makes this be *me*. That is, for me to identify myself with something by valuing it, that thing must come to have a place within my identity as this particular person, so that we cannot understand such identification apart from the larger whole of the person's identity that identification presupposes." (Helm 121).

This perspective suggests that the reasoning behind our actions involving our friend is no longer a reflection of that friendship but merely what is best for us. This blurs the line between whom we make our decision for, ultimately enabling us to trick ourselves into thinking that we are acting for the sake of our friend when we are actually doing it for our own good.

He describes how this process of identification with self could come to exist: "*to identify* with something is to value it by bringing it into your evaluative perspective as a part of the kind of life worth your living, potentially as the result of the exercise of your autonomy and practical reason," (Helm 134). This could be a very dangerous component to a friendship in the sense

that it could reflect only a burning desire to please ourselves, so much that we only hold onto friendships when they conveniently appease our desires.

We could settle with this somewhat depressing conclusion that our truest forms of friendship turn out to be about ourselves, but I will not settle with this concept because this is not friendship. The egoist perspective is accurate in that the truest form of friendship does have an overlap of whose good is being acted on; however, it is not for purely selfish reasons. The egoist perspective leaves out two key components of friendship that refute the claim that it is only a selfish act. First, the egoist fails to acknowledge that the overlap occurs because our truest friends become an extension of ourselves. We can see this as the case when we prioritize significant friends in alignment with ourselves. We put them on the same level as ourselves; just as we would change things about ourselves and try to eliminate certain characteristics from our lives because we do not like them, we will do the same with close friends. Ultimately, we prioritize our closest friends alongside our strongest commitment which is ourselves.

Secondly, the egoist perspective ignores the concept of intimacy. We grow attached to people, which enables us to consider them so close; this is the whole point of Jeske's reasons of intimacy. This cannot be entirely out of selfishness because everything we experience will not be perfect. Knowing how much love you can feel for someone may also indicate how much pain you can feel from that same person; ultimately, this reveals the strength of that friendship in our lives. Helm presents the egoist perspective in his book but ultimately identifies friendships as containing a love that excludes friendship from an egoist account. He says: "To

love someone is to be intimately concerned for his well-being as this particular person. Such intimate concern I have cashed out in terms of intimate identification: having concern for his identity understood in terms of the sharing of his cares and values for his sake, that is analogous to, but not identical with, your concern for your own identity," (Helm 172). The egoist perspective differs from this because it neglects intimacy as an active component to the friendship. Without intimacy, we would find ourselves in a friendship for what we get out of it and our obligations would never cross over to what is only best for them.

My friend and I are two separate entities, but we often make the mistake of considering this distinctness as one unit. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says: "Since a good man has every one of these sentiments toward himself, and since he has the same attitude toward his friend as he does toward himself, for his friend really is another self, therefore friendship, too, is regarded as being one or other of those sentiments, and those who harbor them are regarded as friends," (Aristotle 253). He originates this perspective, as already mentioned, and is argued against by egoists or other philosophers leaning in that direction. However, Aristotle is not the only person to have said that such a thing exists between true friends. Emerson says; "I must feel pride in my friend's accomplishments as if they were mine," (Emerson). Here he looks at the merger of two people and how we are so able to empathize with our friends, experiencing their feelings as our own.

This level of intimacy may also act as a catalyst to create situations where what is directly best for us is also indirectly best for our friend because it is good for us, or the person

with whom they are intimate. If a parent told her child that she would do something for her but instead chooses to take a nap, she is then upholding the obligation to herself by going to sleep, yet also upholding her obligation of doing what is ultimately best for her child. If she did not take that nap, then she would not be rested or in a calm mood, and would be more likely to bring negativity into the child's life.

Ultimately, intimacy enables us to consider people as close friends and encourages us to make sacrifices for our friends because of their value to us. One could argue that this process still yields a positive result by making us look like a good friend or a good person in general, but there is more than that because we owe more to our friends because of the role they play in our lives as our second halves.

Obligations to our friends and to ourselves overlap so easily because friends define who we are. While the egoists are correct in saying that we identify with them as part of ourselves, we also interact with them in a greater society and have experiences with them that we would not have on our own. And while, metaphorically, our closest friends may be an extension of ourselves, we are actually still two separate people with two different perspectives. In a prior paper I wrote: "Friendship reveals the most accurate definition of a person because it is with friends that one's thoughts remain closest to their original form," (Myavec 5). Our friends offer us more than what we have on our own. While there is value in growing together, there is also value in remaining two separate entities that can learn and grow from each other.

Conclusion

We have been conditioned to look at friendship as a positive addition to our lives because we choose it, yet true friendship gives rise to special obligations that challenge more universal conceptions of our relationships to others and as such can be seen to act against ethical regard to others as human beings. These special obligations lead us to prioritize our friends over non friends and our more intimate relationships over our less intimate relationships. In doing so, we challenge universal conceptions of relationships to others. Utilitarianism says that we should act in accordance to what will maximize overall happiness, and deontological ethics claims that we should follow a universal set of rules in determining our actions. Special obligations allow us to focus on and single out an individual just because we are close with them, which conflicts with theories of universal obligation.

In this thesis, I have argued that friendship poses particularly insoluble problems of special obligation, not just because they can conflict with obligations we have to others, but because it can also challenge obligations we have to ourselves or to a conception of life that we hold precious. Just as we have obligations to others, we have obligations to ourselves, which may ultimately be more important than many of our obligations to other people as we are the leading character in our lives. We may reach what could be the greatest dissonance and internal conflict when the obligations to ourselves conflict with the obligations we have to others.

Ultimately, we will have to choose whether or not to uphold the obligation we have to ourselves and act for our own good, or uphold the obligation we have as a good friend to that friend. The decision we make in choosing which obligation to uphold is made in accordance to what is best for ourselves in the life we want to live; each choice a brushstroke on the painting that we create of the life we seek for ourselves.

The Egoistic perspective challenges this component of friendship, claiming that it is a selfish act as we only remain true friends with someone until it is no longer convenient and the dissonance becomes too much to bear. Even though we ultimately make the choice in regard to what is best for our lives, we are not committing a completely selfish act. First, we are not being selfish if what is best for ourselves is also best for the world around us and those intimate relationships in which we are involved. Secondly, we may still choose to uphold our obligation to our friend and sacrifice what is best for ourselves but this should not be seen as a sign of selfishness but a sign of strength in the friendship.

The internal conflict we experience is a sign of the level of priority that we have placed on our friend as we have put them in alignment with ourselves, our highest priority. The dissonance represents the struggle and tear we feel because we put them so close to us. This closeness suggests a near fusion between two people where they grow as close to one unit as possible. Friends at this level are still separate enough to contribute outside perspectives and experiences to relationship and the other person, ultimately, making them something they could not be on their own. Yet such closeness, as this argument has attempted to demonstrate,

can bring great risk and danger to both the individuals in the friendship and to the friendship itself. Ultimately the paradox of friendship is that the most significant friendships coincide with those that bring the greatest risk, both to the friendship itself and to the well-being of each friend.

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