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Aristotle's account of Friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics

A. D. M. WALKER

The *Nicomachean Ethics*, as is well known, distinguishes three types of friendship – the friendship of goodness, the friendship of pleasure, and the friendship of utility. How are these three types of friendship supposed to be related to one another? It has often been said that Aristotle regards them as *focally* related¹, but W. W. Fortenbaugh has recently argued against this and suggested that the essential connection is provided by the notion of *analogy*². It seems to me, however, that neither Fortenbaugh nor his opponents are correct. It will be the central claim of this paper that Aristotle relates the three types of friendship not by appeal either to the notion of analogical or to that of focal homonymy, but in terms of a third and little noticed form of homonymy: his view, very roughly expressed, is that all three forms of friendship do in a sense meet the definitional requirements for friendship but that whereas the friendship of goodness does so straightforwardly, the friendships of pleasure and of utility do so only in a way or only with certain qualifications.

My programme is rather complex. Fortenbaugh's claim, that the three types of friendship are analogically related, is part of a wider interpretation of *NE* VIII and IX and cannot be considered in isolation from this. I shall therefore begin in Part I by examining Fortenbaugh's case for his interpretation. In Part II I shall sketch out an alternative interpretation, which, I believe, more accurately reflects Aristotle's view of the relationship between the various forms of friendship. And finally in Part III I shall try to clarify the view I have attributed to Aristotle by defending it against the charge that it does after all reintroduce focal homonymy into his account.

I

I begin therefore with forttenbaugh's overall interpretation of *NE* VIII and IX. For my purposes the essence of his approach is captured in the following four propositions to which he declares his adherence:

- (i) that friendships are defined by Aristotle in terms of their function (*op. cit.* pp. 52-53);
- (ii) that since the three types of friendship have different functions they

- cannot be given a single definition but are to be regarded as analogically related (pp. 53-54);
- (iii) that this relation of analogical homonymy is referred to in *NE* 1157 a 31-33 (where many commentators have supposed a reference to focal homonymy) (p. 54); and
 - (iv) that the three features enumerated in VIII 2 (1155 b 27-1156 a 5) – reciprocal affection, goodwill, and an awareness of such affection and goodwill – constitute necessary but not sufficient conditions of friendship (p. 55).

Of course, these four claims do not exhaust Fortenbaugh's interpretation. He allows, for example, that the three kinds of friendship are linked by Aristotle not only in terms of analogy but also by a web of more obvious points of resemblance (such as, for example, the pleasantness which characterises both the friendship of goodness and that of pleasure) (pp. 54-57). My present concern, however, is not to oppose this 'secondary' strand in Fortenbaugh's interpretation – it will receive some indirect comment in Part II – but to examine his case in support of claims (i)-(iv).

We do well to appreciate at the outset the connections between these claims and, in particular, that the truth of claim (i) is crucial to Fortenbaugh's approach. This is not simply a matter of claim (i)'s being presupposed by claims (ii) and (iii), so that the falseness of the former carries with it the falseness of these latter. More significantly, (i) plays a vital, if inexplicit, role in Fortenbaugh's *argument* for his interpretation. For if we grant claim (i), that friendships are to be defined in terms of function, it seems plausible that the different types of friendship must have different functions; and once the inevitable question 'Why, then, should these different associations all count as friendships?' gets asked against such a background, an appeal to the notion of analogy does have a certain attractiveness. Thus claim (ii), while not logically implied by (i), is what we might call a *natural* consequence of it. Besides this, (i) obviously constitutes a conclusive ground for (iv): clearly, if friendships are to be defined in terms of function, the features listed in VIII 2, which include no reference to function, cannot be sufficient, but must be at best necessary, conditions of friendship.

The crucial part which claim (i) plays in Fortenbaugh's case becomes even clearer when we notice that Fortenbaugh adduces almost no evidence specifically in support of claims (ii)-(iv). Thus, he finds only one reference in the text of *NE* VIII-IX to the supposed analogical relation between the three types of friendship (the existence of which is asserted in claim (ii)),

and that is the passage at 1157 a 30-33 whose interpretation is the subject of claim (iii). Moreover, he offers only the weakest of reasons for supposing that these lines do contain such a reference: his argument is in effect that the passage *should* be interpreted as containing a reference to analogy because it *can* be so interpreted³. Finally, claim (iv) is simply stated in passing (p. 55) as though it were an obvious truth not needing further argument – a reasonable procedure if (i) is already accepted but not otherwise.

Claim (i), then, that friendships are defined by Aristotle in terms of their function, obviously lies at the heart of Fortenbaugh's interpretation, and that being so, we must look closely at the grounds on which he urges its acceptance.

Fortenbaugh opens his case for claim (i) as follows:

'It is an Aristotelian principle that the being of any functional thing consists in its capacity to perform its function (*Meteor.* 390 a 10-13). For any purposeful thing, whether a natural object or an organism, whether a man-devised tool or activity or association, its essential nature is determined by its function and is expressed by the *logos* which states its purpose. This is well-known in the case of a non-natural object like the saw . . . Friendships . . . are like saws in being purposeful.'

It is difficult to be certain exactly how Fortenbaugh wishes to argue here. Part of the trouble stems from his using 'functional' and 'purposeful' as equivalent (a tendency exacerbated in the rest of the paragraph when he rings the changes on a whole galaxy of expressions ('having a use', 'having a purpose', 'goal directed', 'goal oriented', 'having a goal') as though each was straightforwardly interchangeable with 'functional'). On the face of it, his argument seems reducible to the syllogism: whatever has a function is, according to Aristotle, to be defined in terms of that function; friendships have a function, and hence, according to Aristotle, are to be defined in terms of that function. As it stands, though, this argument merely *assumes* the truth of the minor premiss, that friendships are, either in fact or in Aristotle's eyes, functional. If Fortenbaugh considered it obvious, that would seem to be the result of his treating 'function' and 'purpose' as interchangeable. It may perhaps be true that friendships have a purpose, at least in the sense that friends generally have certain purposes within the relationship: but nothing follows from this about the functional nature of the relationship. The function of an activity or association cannot be equated with the purposes of the participants: when Aristotle functionally defines the *polis* as existing to promote the good life (*Pol.* 1280 b 31-1281 a 4), this function cannot be straightforwardly read off from the purposes of the *politai*. Of course, the troublesome premiss that friendships are func-

tional could be omitted, and so not require justification, if Fortenbaugh supposed Aristotle to hold the stronger thesis that *everything* is to be functionally defined – a view which *Meteor.* 390 a 10-13, as well as *Pol.* 1253 a 23, might tempt us to regard as Aristotelian. Clearly, this more powerful premiss would immediately yield the conclusion that, according to Aristotle, friendship should be functionally defined. But the snag in this new version of the argument, embodying its yet stronger ‘commitment to function’ on Aristotle’s part, is that from time to time Aristotle explicitly, and very sensibly, denies the principle that literally everything is to be given a functional definition (*De Gen. Anim.* 722 b 30, 778 a 16-b 11; *Pol.* 1267 b 7; and see the note on *Pol.* 1253 a 23 in W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford, 1887) II pp. 127-8).

In any case, even if Fortenbaugh’s argument did establish that Aristotle should, on his official principles, so to speak, have given friendship a functional definition, we should not be justified in assuming automatically that the *NE* discussion would actually proceed in accordance with these principles. Discrepancies between principle and practice are not uncommon. A philosopher may decide to waive or ignore his general principles for a particular purpose⁴, or, less interestingly, he may simply forget them in the heat of discussion or the throes of perplexity. Thus even if Fortenbaugh’s argument were sound, we should not accord it great weight: certainly we cannot assume solely on the basis of that argument and without evidence from the text itself that the *NE* treatment of friendship observes some general ‘commitment to function’.

Fortenbaugh would probably agree. At any rate, he next turns for support to the text of the *NE*:

‘It is’, he says, ‘because friendships are goal oriented that Aristotle begins his discussion of friendship by considering the objects of friendship (*philêta*, 1155 b 18,20): the good, pleasant and useful. Friendships have a goal (*telos*, 1155 b 21) or purpose which determines their essential nature. Since there are three kinds of goal, there are three kinds of friendship.’

Even if we ignore the implicit equivalence between ‘goal’ and ‘function’, this passage seems to rest on a confusion. Admittedly, VIII 2 speaks of the objects of affection (*ta philêta*) and classifies them under the headings of the good, the pleasant and the useful. But objects of affection are simply things towards which, or persons towards whom, affection may be directed. That affection has, and is recognised by Aristotle as having, objects *in this sense* does not import the notions of goal or purpose, and only an equivocation on the word ‘object’ could lead one to suppose otherwise. Certainly, the word *telos* appears, as Fortenbaugh notes, at 1155 b 21, but it is there

used to distinguish between what is valued for the sake of something else and what is valued for itself ('it is the good and the pleasant', says Aristotle, 'that are lovable as ends (*hōs telē*)'); its occurrence in such a context provides no justification for ascribing to Aristotle the view that friendships have a goal or function.

Fortenbaugh's remaining evidence for claim (i) (the four passages 1156 a 18-24, 1157 a 14-16, 1159 b 10-11, 1162 b 6-17) is both slight in quantity and, for the most part, distinctly equivocal. Taken in context the passages do not suggest that Aristotle conceives of friendship as essentially functional. Thus in 1162 b 6-13 (the only passage of the four to relate to the friendship of goodness) it is stated merely that when good men become friends, 'they are eager to do good to one another, . . . there is a kind of rivalry directed towards the good'. Zeal in good works is mentioned here only as *a* mark of the friendship of goodness, and the point is brought up casually in a discussion of the recriminatory character of the friendship of utility. Similarly in the other passages, which deal with the friendships of pleasure and utility, and are equally unemphatic, Fortenbaugh can discern a reference to *function* only by illegitimately equating 'function', 'goal' and 'purpose'. Besides, these latter passages must be of very doubtful value if Fortenbaugh wishes to attribute to Aristotle a view about the functional nature of friendship *in general*; for, as the context of these passages makes clear, Aristotle hesitates whether the inferior friendships should count as friendships precisely because they possess the features to which Fortenbaugh draws attention (i.e., because they are based merely upon the mutual pleasantness or usefulness of the parties).

Fortenbaugh's evidence for claim (i) is, I conclude, unpersuasive; and since, as I have shown, the truth of this claim is fundamental to his case, its weakness must damage the acceptability of his overall interpretation of *NE* VIII and IX (at least so far as this is represented by claims (i)-(iv)). In particular we seem to have no good reasons for holding, with Fortenbaugh, that Aristotle saw his three types of friendship as related in terms of analogical homonymy.

II

However, I am reluctant to accept Fortenbaugh's interpretation not merely because of the fragility of his arguments, but because there seems to be a more natural and straightforward way of understanding Aristotle's account of friendship, and, as part of this, a more attractive way of construing his view of the relationship between the three types of friendship.

The cardinal points of this alternative interpretation, for which I shall argue in this part of the paper, are:

- (i) that Aristotle regards the three conditions enumerated in VIII 2 – namely, reciprocal affection between the parties, reciprocal goodwill, and a mutual awareness of such affection and goodwill – as *sufficient* and not just *necessary* conditions of friendship;
- (ii) that he doubts whether the friendships of utility and pleasure are friendships precisely because he is uncertain whether they do fulfil these conditions;
- (iii) that his remarks about the ‘simple’ resemblances and dissimilarities between the three friendships (in 1157 a 1-3, 1158 b 1-11, etc.) arise out of this concern as to whether all three types do satisfy the definitional requirements of VIII 2; and
- (iv) that the thought underlying 1157 a 30-33 (where Fortenbaugh discerns a reference to analogical homonymy) is that the inferior friendships (of pleasure and of utility) may count as friendships because they meet the conditions of VIII 2, but are not strictly or properly friendships because they meet these conditions only in a way, or only with certain qualifications.

Of these claims, it will be observed, the first conflicts directly with Fortenbaugh’s (iv) (see p. 181), and hence with his (i) and (ii) as well, while the fourth is a contrary of Fortenbaugh’s (iii). It is, of course, the truth of (iv), with its implications for Aristotle’s view of the relationship between the three types of friendship, that I am particularly anxious to establish.

Let us begin, though, with claim (i), which concerns the status of the conditions for friendship laid down in VIII 2. Now VIII 2 is of course the only chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to deal in general terms with the definitional question ‘What is friendship?’, and this fact seems in itself *some* reason for assuming that the three conditions enumerated there – reciprocal affection, wishing well to the other party for his own sake, and an awareness that the first two conditions are fulfilled – are offered as necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship. This assumption is reinforced when we examine in more detail the way these conditions are presented. At 1155 b 27 Aristotle says in effect that affection by itself is not *sufficient* for friendship: the affection we feel for lifeless objects is not friendship because it is not returned and because we do not wish such objects well (1155 b 28-29). His next move is to combat the assumption that reciprocal affection and goodwill jointly constitute sufficient conditions (1155 b 33-34): there must be, as well, an awareness by the parties that the

preceding conditions are fulfilled (1155 b 34). Such being the structure of the passage it seems perverse not to take its conclusion at 1156 a 3-5 as a statement of necessary and sufficient conditions. Surely if there is no evidence to the contrary elsewhere, we may be confident that this reading of the chapter is correct. Not only is no such evidence to be found; rather, I believe, the subsequent course of Book VIII positively favours the opposed interpretation.

That Aristotle cannot intend the conditions of VIII 2 as sufficient may be sterer by the impression that he elsewhere insists on the necessity of certain other conditions. What, in particular, of his claim that friendship requires some *activity* by the parties, mere feeling is not enough (1167 a 1-2, 8-10), and his emphasis on the point that time spent together is the most characteristic feature of friendship (1157 b 17-19, 1158 a 8-10, 1171 a 2)? In fact, neither claim is a genuine difficulty. Despite his language in certain passages Aristotle clearly regards the requirement that time be spent together not as a necessary condition of friendship, but as a feature of the best form of friendship (1156 a 27-28, 1156 b 4-5; and for Fortenbaugh's agreement see *op. cit.* p. 56 n. 3). Nor does he see the former requirement as introducing a condition over and above those of VIII 2, but as being already included with the latter: unless there is an obstacle, the satisfaction of the conditions of VIII 2 will naturally lead to, or involve, some activity (1157 b 7-11, 1166 b 32-34).

Our next move, then, must be to review the subsequent course of the discussion in Book VIII and consider whether it bears out the claim that the conditions of VIII 2 are intended as necessary and sufficient for friendship. This review, it will be seen, further contributes to the strategy of this part of the paper by giving me the opportunity to argue for the truth of my claims (ii) and (iii).

The opening lines of VIII 3 (1156 a 6-8) distinguish three types of friendship corresponding to the three possible grounds of affection – goodness, pleasure and utility – noted at 1155 b 18-19. Aristotle says that all three types of friendship meet the conditions laid down in VIII 2 – though he immediately adds a significant qualification: that the friends wish each other well in that respect in which they feel affection for each other (1156 a 8-10). This qualification initiates a train of thought which is pursued intermittently throughout the next few pages: what preoccupies Aristotle is the variety of ways in which the several types of friendship satisfy the conditions of VIII 2 and whether indeed they do all *genuinely* satisfy these conditions. The lines 1156 a 10-19 provide a sample of his thinking: the parties to a friendship of utility, he says, do not feel affection

for each other for their own sakes but only in virtue of some good which they get from each other; similarly with the parties to a friendship of pleasure; hence those who feel affection because of utility or pleasure do not feel affection for the other person because he is the person he is but only insofar as he is useful or pleasant; and thus these friendships are only incidental. The theme is, in other words, that with friendships of utility and pleasure the parties do not really feel affection for each other and so these associations are not really friendships. The same idea is put forward again, but from the opposite point of view, when Aristotle says (1156 b 9-11) that those who are most truly friends (*malista philoi*) are those good men who wish well to each other for their own sake, that is, because they are the sort of person they are⁵.

There arises out of this first line of reflection, however, a second theme. Having remarked that in the inferior types of friendship the parties do not love each other for their own sakes but only for certain incidental pleasures or benefits, Aristotle proceeds at 1156 a 19 to show that *because of this fact* such friendships are readily dissoluble. A little later (1156 a 27) he explains why the friendship of utility, *because of the way in which it meets the 'affection'-condition*, lacks one of the features most commonly associated with friendship, time spent together: if the friends' affection rests on their mutual usefulness, there is no reason why they should find each others' company agreeable and hence no reason why they should want to spend time together. Conversely, Aristotle argues (1156 b 7-17), because the friendship of good men genuinely satisfies the conditions laid down in VIII 2 it has all the commendable features of friendship – durability, imperviousness to slander, the spending of time together, and the like – and is beneficial, enjoyable and useful for both parties.

It would seem, therefore, that the course of VIII 3-4, besides bearing out my claims (ii) and (iii), is entirely compatible with, indeed rather favours, our construing the conditions of VIII 2 as necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship. The discussion in VIII 3-4 also forms the background to the passage 1157 a 30-33, whose interpretation is the subject of my claim (iv) and which we must next consider.

The emphasis in VIII 3-4 on the differences between the various types of friendship would naturally raise a doubt as to whether the inferior types really deserve to be called friendships at all. It is plainly this question which Aristotle answers at 1157 a 29-33: we ought, he says, to follow ordinary language and 'call (those who associate for pleasure or utility) friends, but say that there are several kinds of friendship – firstly and in the proper sense that of good men *qua* good, and the other kinds by similarity; for in

that respect in which there is something good and something similar, they are friends; for in fact the pleasant is good to the lovers of pleasure⁶.

The main problem in this passage is of course: what exactly does Aristotle have in mind when he says at 1157 a 30-32 that 'there are several kinds of friendship — firstly and in the proper sense that of good men *qua* good, and the other kinds by similarity' (*kath' homoiotêta*). And my claim, to repeat, is that he invokes here neither focal nor analogical homonymy, but wishes to say, rather, that the friendships of pleasure and of utility (unlike the friendship of goodness) are not primarily or properly friendship, because they meet the conditions for friendship only in a way, or only with certain qualifications. In support of this claim I propose to offer four distinct lines of thought.

(A) My interpretation allows 1157 a 25-b5 to follow on naturally from the preceding discussion. In interpreting 1157 a 30-32 we should remember that Aristotle has already supplied us with material which would justify our accepting ordinary usage and resisting the temptation to hold that the inferior friendships are not friendships at all: namely, the fact that the friendships of pleasure and of utility do in a way satisfy the conditions of VIII 2 — the premiss which, as we have seen, underlies much of Aristotle's thinking in VIII 2-4. According to my claim, it is essentially this idea that is developed in 1157 a 30-32.

Moreover, the assumption that 1157 a 25-b5 refers us back to previous material is confirmed by our finding in the passage a number of verbal echoes of earlier remarks. Thus the use of *homoios* at 1157 a 32 and 1157 b 3 recalls the language and sentiment of 1156 b 7-24; the idea that all friendships involve an element of goodness (1157 a 32-33) has cropped up earlier at, for example, 1156 a 11-12; and the statement that the inferior types of friendship are only incidentally friendships (*kata sumbebêkos*, 1157 b 4) repeats the point made at 1156 a 16-19.

(B) On my reading of 1157 a 30-32 we can give good sense to the immediately following remarks in a 32-33 ('for in that respect in which there is something good and something similar, they are friends; for in fact the pleasant is good to the lovers of pleasure'). The substance of 1157 a 30-32, on my interpretation, is that while the inferior friendships may count as friendships because they do meet the definitional criteria of VIII 2, they are not friendships proper because they meet these criteria only in a certain way or only with certain qualifications, whereas the friendship of good men satisfies the requirements without qualification and hence is primarily or

properly friendship. And this view Aristotle would elaborate, if I am right, by appealing to the fact that in the friendship of goodness the parties feel affection for each other, and hence are friends, without qualification, whereas in friendships of utility and pleasure the parties feel affection for each other, and hence are friends, only insofar as they are mutually useful and pleasant respectively. Now the remark at 1157 a 32 ('in that respect in which there is something good and something similar they are friends') seems a commendably brief way of making precisely this last point. In case, however, we should have failed to grasp it, the next sentence (in a 33) adds an explanatory note: those whose affection is based on the fact that they are mutually pleasant will possess some goodness – because, after all, 'the pleasant is good to lovers of pleasure'.

(C) At this stage it will be as well to dispose of an objection that may seem the more powerful because of my insistence that we should understand 1157 a 30-32 against the background of the preceding discussion in VIII 3-4. That discussion, it will be said, underlines several points of similarity between the three kinds of friendship: Aristotle says that the friendship of pleasure resembles the friendship of goodness in that the parties to it find each other mutually pleasant, while the friendship of utility resembles the friendship of goodness in respect of the mutual usefulness of the parties (1156 b 35-1157 a 3). But that being so, when it is stated at 1157 a 30-32 that the three forms of friendship are related by similarity (*kath' homoiotêta*), why not suppose that Aristotle is referring directly to *these* points of similarity? Is not this a more natural way of understanding the passage than that which I have suggested?

Such is the objection. A good deal can be said in reply, but the essence of my rebuttal is that the allegedly more natural interpretation of 1157 a 30-32 does not allow Aristotle to explain in even a remotely satisfactory way why we should follow ordinary usage and call friendships of utility and friendships of pleasure friendships. In the first place, it seems intuitively implausible to justify acceptance of ordinary usage by a bare appeal to the fact that the friendship of pleasure resembles the best form of friendship in respect of pleasantness while the friendship of utility does so in respect of usefulness. These points of resemblance seem too slight and superficial to do the work that is required of them. Moreover, there are, so far as I know, no parallel cases and certainly none in the *NE*, where hesitation over whether a single term properly applies to a range of items is resolved by Aristotle in a similar manner. More seriously, once the context is fully taken into account we can see that the answer attributed to Aristotle by the

allegedly more natural interpretation involves a blatant *ignoratio elenchi*. The doubts which 1157 a 30-32 are intended to settle have arisen during a discussion in which the friendships of utility and of pleasure were said to possess some of the characteristics of the best form of friendship and to lack others. But if Aristotle's uncertainty whether friendships of pleasure and of utility are to count as friendships has its source in the fact that there are both points of similarity and points of difference between these types of friendship and the best type, he cannot remove that uncertainty merely by referring to the points of similarity; that is simply to rehearse some of the considerations which generated his problem, and to ignore the others. To solve the problem he needs, of course, to go *beyond* these considerations – which is precisely what he does on my interpretation of 1157 a 30-32. (My point here is underlined by a later passage which mentions these same similarities and differences between the several types of friendship (VIII 6, 1158 b 5-11): 'It is', says Aristotle, 'from their likeness and their unlikeness to the same thing that they (the inferior friendships) *are thought (dokousi)* both to be and not to be friendships. It is by their likeness to the friendship of goodness that they *seem (phainontai)* to be friendships . . . , while it is because the friendship of goodness is permanent while these quickly change (besides differing from the former in many other respects) that they *seem (phainontai)* not to be friendships'. These lines (more particularly, their use of *dokousi* and *phainontai*) make it clear that the similarities and differences discussed in VIII 3-4 as well as VIII 6 *generate* the problem. Hence Aristotle's answer at 1157 a 30-32, if it is to be a genuine answer, must take us beyond or behind *these* similarities and differences.) It seems, then, that the objection we have considered is unpersuasive.

(D) So far in trying to understand Aristotle's description of the inferior friendships as friendships *kath' homoiotêta*, I have said nothing about the phrase *kath' homoiotêta* in its own right. This I must now remedy.

The idea that different types of like-named items are related *kath' homoiotêta* is no stranger to *NE* – excluding 1157 a 31-32, it occurs at least seven times in no fewer than four separate discussions.⁷ Of course, it would be foolish to imagine that the phrase *kath' homoiotêta* should be glossed in exactly the same way on each of these occurrences – I do not suggest this, nor is it necessary for my argument that it should be so. However, on the one occasion when Aristotle explains at some length what lies behind his description of two types of like-named items as related *kath' homoiotêta*, he plainly has in mind a similar thought to that which I have ascribed to him

in my interpretation of 1157 a 31-32. In the discussion of *akrasia* he says at 1147 b 31:

‘Those who go to excess with reference to the latter (i.e., honour, wealth, and so on), contrary to the right rule which is in themselves, are not called weakwilled simply, but weakwilled ‘in respect of money, gain, honour, or anger’ – not simply weakwilled, on the ground that they are different from weakwilled people and are called weakwilled *kath’ homoiotêta*. (Compare the case of Anthropos, who won a contest at the Olympic games; in his case the general definition of man differed little from the definition peculiar to *him*, but yet it was different.)’

Clearly the *akratês kath’ homoiotêta* is described as such because he satisfies the definition of the *akratês* (‘he goes to excess contrary to the right rule which is in himself’), but *with a qualification* – his failing does not relate to the things with which *akrasia* proper has to do, but to honour or anger or something of that sort. This explanation of why certain forms of *akrasia* count as *akrasia kath’ homoiotêta* is reinforced by Aristotle’s use of the phrase *kata prothesin* later in the same chapter (at 1148 a 4-11):

‘Of the people who are weakwilled with respect to bodily enjoyments . . . he who pursues the excesses of things pleasant . . . not by choice . . . is called weakwilled, not with the qualification (*kata prothesin*) ‘in respect of this or that’, e.g., of anger, but just simply’.

Of course, the phrase *kata prothesin* is not intended as synonymous with the *kath’ homoiotêta* of some dozen lines earlier; it refers to our adding a clarificatory qualification when we use the word *akratês* to describe those who are weakwilled not in relation to bodily pleasures but in relation to honour, anger, and the like. All the same, the occurrence of the phrase seems to bear out our view that Aristotle regards cases of *akrasia kath’ homoiotêta* as satisfying the definition of *akrasia* proper but with a qualification.

Obviously, as I have already said, what lies behind the talk of *akrasia kath’ homoiotêta* at 1147 b 31 cannot be invoked automatically to elucidate the phrase *kath’ homoiotêta* wherever else it may occur in *NE*.⁸ On the other hand, and to return to *philia*, there are numerous points of similarity between Aristotle’s treatment of friendship in *NE* and his treatment of weakness of will which make it entirely reasonable that we should take 1147 b 31 as shedding light on, and confirming our interpretation of, 1157 a 30-32. These points of similarity between the two discussions have been little noticed and deserve attention in their own right. I can do no more here than merely list a few of them. Most obviously, perhaps, the claim that there are several *eidê* of *philia* parallels a similar acknowledgement in the

case of *akrasia* at 1149 a 23. Again, as we have seen, Aristotle remarks that we describe some cases of weakness of will as *akrasia kata prothesin*, as *akrasia* with a clarifying qualification. The phrase *kata prothesin*, it is true, does not appear in the discussion of *philia*, but it well might have done: Aristotle refers to the inferior forms of friendship by means of the ‘X with a clarifying qualification’ form of words (*hê dia to chrêsimon philia*, 1159 b 12, 1162 b 16; *hoi di’ hêdonên philoi*, 1162 b 13) and describes the parties to the best form of friendship as *haplôs philoi* (1157 b 4-5) just as those who display weakness of will over bodily pleasures are described in Book VII as *haplôs akrateis* (1147 b 31-34, 1148 b 4-11). More interestingly, Aristotle’s reason for distinguishing the friendship of goodness from the other types closely resembles his reason for distinguishing simple *akrasia* from *akrasia kath’ homoiotêta*: both appeal to evaluational discriminations – *akrasia kath’ homoiotêta*, unlike straightforward *akrasia*, is not a vice (*kakia*) (1148 a 2-4); similarly, *philia* proper is highly admirable and desirable, while the *philiai kath’ homoiotêta* are, if admirable at all, very much less so (1156 b 33-1157 a 25). This parallelism between the two discussions surely gives us some ground for supposing that what was plainly in Aristotle’s mind when he spoke of *kath’ homoiotêta* at 1147 b 31 also lies behind the similar remarks about *philia* at 1157 a 30-32.

The arguments advanced under (A)-(D) above seem to provide, collectively, strong support for the truth of claim (iv). It is therefore reasonable to hold, as claim (iv) maintains, that Aristotle regards the inferior forms of friendship as friendships because he thinks they do meet the conditions of VIII 2, but is unwilling to allow that they are friendships in the primary or proper sense because he thinks that they meet these conditions only in a way, or only with certain qualifications.

That concludes my case for interpreting the *NE* account of friendship in accordance with my claims (i)-(iv).

III

I should like to devote the remainder of this paper to bringing my interpretation, and more particularly claim (iv), into sharper focus. And I propose to do this by considering, and rebutting, the charge that the interpretation does, after all, relate the three kinds of friendship in terms of focal homonymy.⁹

How such a charge might be brought is not difficult to understand. I have argued that, according to Aristotle, the inferior forms of friendship satisfy the definitional requirements of VIII 2, *but with a qualification*,

whereas the friendship of good men meets these requirements without any qualification: in the inferior forms of friendship the parties wish each other well and feel affection for each other *in a certain respect or with certain restrictions*, whereas in the best form good will and affection are unqualified. But is not this, it may be asked, simply to treat friendship as a case of focal homonymy? According to the usual explanations, X_1 , X_2 and X_3 are focally related when the definition of X_1 reappears as part of the definitions of X_2 and X_3 ; (thus a healthy body, a healthy complexion and a healthy diet are focally related because, supposing a healthy body to be a ϕ body, a healthy complexion will be a complexion indicative of a ϕ body, and a healthy diet a diet productive of a ϕ body). But then surely, as I have presented Aristotle's account, will not the definition of the best form of friendship reappear in precisely this way as an element in the definitions of each of the inferior forms?

The short reply to this objection is to repeat a point made by G. E. L. Owen:¹⁰ 'When Aristotle comes to specify the criteria of focal meaning he is at once too narrowly scholastic and too hospitable. He calls for precise definitions which exhibit a particular formal connexion — *λόγοι ἐκ τῶν λόγων*, one definition contained in the rest; yet his criterion would admit the Academic example that elsewhere he seems to reject . . . Aristotle has not solved the problem of defining focal meaning fully and exactly . . .; he has given only the necessary, not the sufficient conditions . . .'. We can, in other words, deal with the objection by pointing out that it erroneously takes as a *sufficient* condition of focal homonymy what is merely a *necessary* condition. The fact that the several forms of friendship satisfy this necessary condition does not establish them to be focally related.

However, this brief answer, adequate as it may be, can be supplemented in a more positive spirit. The obvious way of bringing out that the objection is ill-founded is to make more explicit some of the differences between *focal* homonymy and the homonymy that I have claimed to find in the case of friendship (homonymy *kath' homoiotêta*, let us call it.) In this connection there are, I think, two main points to be made.

First, even if we concede that both focal homonymy and homonymy *kath' homoiotêta* involve the idea that the definition of one item in a set of like-named items reappears as an element in the definitions of the derivative or related items, we should distinguish the way in which the 'derivative' definitions are formed in the case of friendship and the way in which they are formed in a paradigm case of focal homonymy. With a focally related set of items (for example, healthy body, healthy complexion, healthy diet, and the like) we generate the definitions of the

derivative items by operating on the definition of the 'nuclear' item with a phrase such as 'productive of', 'indicative of', 'useful to', 'preservative of'; the definition is thereby, as it were, transformed. By contrast, in the case of friendship we form the definitions of the 'derivative' items by *qualifying* the definition of the 'primary' or 'nuclear' item; such a phrase as 'insofar as they are mutually useful' functions as a *qualifying* addition to the definition of the 'primary' item. We cannot pretend that its role in relation to the definition of *philia* proper is at all akin to that of 'productive of' or 'indicative of' in a paradigm case of focal homonymy.¹¹

However, in making this point we are in danger of conceding too much to the objector and neglecting a more basic consideration. This is that in characterising as he does the relationship between the various forms of friendship our objector distorts the essential nature of that relationship as it is presented in *NE VIII*. Even if the three types of friendship do possess a necessary characteristic of focal homonymy (in that the definition of the best type reappears as an element in the definitions of the other types), they possess it only *incidentally*. We can appreciate this by recalling the outlines of Aristotle's account. As I understand that account, *VIII 2* sets out the conditions for friendship *tout court*, conditions which the friendship of goodness is then said to meet without qualification, unlike the lesser friendships which meet them only with a qualification. It is merely as a consequence of this that the definition of the friendship of goodness might be said to enter as an element into the definitions of the lesser types of friendship, i.e., because the friendship of goodness straightforwardly meets the conditions for friendship *tout court* while the other types do so only with qualifications. Thus the best form of friendship is primary, not because its definition enters as an element into the definitions of the other forms of friendship but because it most completely satisfies the definitional requirements of friendship *tout court*. (As is well known, nothing similar to this can be said in a genuine case of focal homonymy: the healthiness of a healthy body is not primary because it most completely satisfies the definitional requirements for healthiness *tout court*; there is no such thing as healthiness *tout court*.)

We must insist, then, that Aristotle's account of friendship cannot involve focal homonymy, because he is prepared to offer a definition of friendship *tout court* which the various forms of friendship satisfy in different ways. But in insisting on this we must guard against distorting his account in the opposite direction, and thinking that the various forms of friendship are related to friendship *tout court* as species to genus. (Clearly, if that were so, we should immediately be attacked by a swarm of puzzles:

for, on the one hand, how can the friendship of goodness be a species if its definition is identical with the definition of the genus? and, on the other, how, if the friendships of pleasure and of utility are species of friendship, can we refuse to regard the friendship of goodness as a third co-ordinate species?) The truth is that although the inferior forms of friendship do with certain qualifications satisfy the conditions for friendship *tout court*, the addition of these qualifications casts doubt on whether they genuinely satisfy the conditions. In other words, it is not the case that the three forms of friendship all in their different ways straightforwardly meet the conditions for friendship *tout court* – that *would* relate them as co-ordinate species of a single genus. Rather, the ways in which the friendships of pleasure and of utility meet these conditions tempt us to believe that, after all, they do *not* really meet them.

This paradox obviously deserves further exploration, but to provide that would unfortunately take me well beyond the concerns of the present paper. It will be sufficient if I have shown that previous interpretations of *NE VIII*, which find there either focal or analogical homonymy, not only misconstrue Aristotle's account of the relation between the three types of friendship but blind us to the presence in that account of a largely neglected, though no less intriguing form of homonymy.

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¹ See, for example, G. E. L. Owen, 'Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle', in I. Düring and G. E. L. Owen (eds.), *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century* (Göteborg, 1960), p. 169; and R. A. Gauthier and J. Y. Jolif, *L'Ethique à Nicomaque* (Louvain, 1959), II 2, pp. 669 and 686. W. W. Fortenbaugh (op. cit. infra, p. 51, n. 1) has a longer list of those who have taken this view. The notions of focal and analogical homonymy are well explained in J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (2nd ed, Toronto, 1963), pp. 116-125.

² 'Aristotle's Analysis of Friendship: Function and Analogy, Resemblance and Focal Meaning', *Phronesis* 20 (1975) 51-62. For hints of a similar view see J. Burnet, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London, 1900), p. 365 ('The different *φιλίαι* are therefore τῶ ἀνάλογον ἐν . . .'), and G. Percival, *Aristotle on Friendship* (London, 1940), pp. 22-23.

³ 'The *possibility* of an analogical relation is clear when Aristotle says that the pleasant is good to friends of pleasure. Filling out the analogy, we get: As the good is related to friends of goodness, so the pleasant is related to friends of pleasure' (pp. 53-54, my italics).

⁴ Aristotle himself seems to have envisaged this possibility at *De Anima* 403 a 24 ff., when he stipulates that the definition of a *pathos*, such as anger, should conform to the pattern ' . . . a particular movement of a body of such-and-such a kind . . . as a result of this thing and for the sake of that', but then immediately considers that different interests might permit a different style of definition.

⁵ The theme resurfaces again much later during the discussion of the connection between goodwill and friendship (1167 a 10-18).

⁶ The clause 'in that respect in which there is something good and something similar they are friends' (a32) has been much discussed: does 'something similar' mean 'something similar to the good', 'something similar to the friendship of good men', or rather differently 'something similar between the parties'? The issue need not detain us here. It is thoroughly discussed by R. A. Gauthier and J. Y. Jolif (*L'Ethique à Nicomaque*, II 2, pp. 685-6), who decide unhesitatingly, and in my opinion correctly, in favour of the last alternative. However, my case in relation to the crucial *kath' homoiotêta* in a 31-32 is only marginally affected if a different interpretation is preferred.

⁷ It is to be found in the discussions of *akrasia* (at 1147 b 34, 1148 b 13, and 1149 a 3); of *andreia* (at 1115 a 19); of *enkrateia* (at 1151 b 33-34); and of *dikaiosunê* (at 1134 a 30 and 1138 b 5-7).

⁸ Undeniably, though, 1147 b 31-1148 a 2 illuminates at least some of these passages (such as 1148 b 13, 1149 a 3 and 1151 b 33-34).

⁹ To judge from the remarks of Gauthier and Jolif (*op. cit.* II 2, pp. 669 and 686), they might well be tempted to make this charge.

¹⁰ 'Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle', p. 189.

¹¹ This point can be underlined in various ways. With focal homonymy grotesque falsehood results if the definition of the 'nuclear' item is predicated of any of the derivative items, whereas with friendship the results of such a procedure seem closer to mere inaccuracy. Again, the friendships of pleasure and of utility might not unnaturally be regarded as *borderline* cases of friendship, whereas the healthiness of complexions and the healthiness of diets are not *borderline* cases of that healthiness which is paradigmatically manifested in the health of the body.