

**“BECAUSE IT WAS HE, BECAUSE IT WAS I”:  
THE GOOD OF FRIENDSHIP**

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An advance draft of a paper to be delivered to the Aristotelian Society on Monday 10 May 2010 at 4.15pm, Room G22/26, South Block – Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

I want to begin with a question about a painting by the Florentine artist Jacopo Pontormo: Two Gentlemen with a Passage from Cicero’s “On Friendship.” To motivate it, I will show you two others, one of an erotic scene, the other of a killing. That we can tell simply by looking, and with a little iconographical knowledge we see Mars after one of his encounters with Venus in the first and Judith beheading Holophernes in the second. So: What would we make of the Pontormo without Cicero’s text? How could we see it as a painting of friendship?

We couldn’t. Nothing that depends on the visual features of painting is associated with friendship firmly enough. The visual signs of sexuality are many but their range is limited; friend-ship is different: it has no sure signs. In painting, friends can be of any age or gender, cool or passionate, reserved or affectionate, absorbed in each other or in their own interests: they can be doing almost anything together.

So they can in the world as well. We can’t tell whether two people are friends by looking at them any more than we can do so in painting. There is no path from a particular interaction between two people to their friendship. Even dying for me does not necessarily show that you are my friend. In A Tale of Two Cities, Sidney Carton died for Charles Darnay, but only out of his love for Lucie, Darnay’s wife.

There's another problem. Friendship is only manifested in a series of actions that occur over time, and painting has trouble with subjects that are temporally extended. But if that is so, it is striking that friendship is not an important subject for the novel, since the novel focuses on relationships that span large tracts of time. Only a few novels do more than include friends among their characters and take friendship as their subject in the way others address love, family, education, adultery, treason, revenge or war and peace. And part of the reason, I think, is that, as William Hazlitt remarked, "in our habitual intercourse with others, we much oftener require to be amused than assisted. We consider less, therefore, what a person with whom we are intimate is ready to do for us in critical emergencies, than what he has to say on ordinary occasions." Friendship is not often associated with extreme situations or feelings. Achilles' desperate mourning for Patroclus' death and his bloody revenge prompted classical Athens to see them as lovers and in Montaigne's ardent description of his feelings for Etienne de la Boetie, his readers have sometimes felt the stirrings of lust. Ordinarily, friendship is manifested in the most, well, ordinary situations, which all but the friends themselves are likely to find inconsequential. To establish a friendship, a novel would have to include many inconsequential moments and events, only against the background of which, when the extraordinary occurs, we could tell that the characters act out of friendship and not duty, love, recklessness or some other unrelated motive.

We might think that is not peculiar to friendship. Little, for example, seems less consequential than the "unhistoric acts" of George Eliot's characters, people who "lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs"? But there is a difference. Eliot presents characters who spend themselves "like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength . . . in channels which had no great name on earth," precisely to endow them with significance, to trace

the growth that springs to life when the river's waters finally find their way into the earth. But the events through which a friendship is manifested, if they are to serve their purpose, must be represented as insignificant and a narrative of insignificant events is unlikely to absorb its readers. That is driven home by what may be one of the two great novels of friendship – Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet (his Sentimental Education is the other), into which Flaubert, wrote, he hoped “to spit . . . the gall that chokes me . . . stupidity now crushes me so hard that I feel like a fly with the Himalayas on its back! . . . I will try to vomit my venom into my book.” To lift the weight of stupidity from his shoulders, Flaubert transferred it to two friends, for only friends, retired copying clerks who, though totally incompetent, try to master the totality of human knowledge – agriculture, chemistry, medicine, history, archaeology, literature, aesthetics, politics, love and much else besides – could tolerate each other through all their miserable failures and only a repetitive series of incidents could display their friendship convincingly.

The novel raises two questions for us: if friendship enables this sort of farcical behavior, what is the good of it? and is it possible to represent it both interestingly and convincingly? Flaubert was clearly worried about the second, worried his book would put its readers to sleep “from the start” since it presents “the same situation over and over [and] might bore [them] to death.” And although it has been hailed as both a modernist and a postmodernist masterpiece, although its most recent translator claims that “boring it's not, once we've accepted the ground rules,” the book, I assure you, is not really a joy to read. To claim that its repetitiveness is “a huge part of its comic effect” is only special pleading and to compare it to “the Three Stooges' head bonks and nose tweaks, or Laurel and Hardy's fine messes: the more we expect them, the funnier they become” seems to me to concede that, as I believe, drama is better suited for this job

than narrative. A novel that consists of a long series of insignificant occasions is bound to be, to that extent, a boring novel.

Friendship, then, is associated with no particular type of action and most of the actions with which it is associated are insignificant, humdrum everyday events. What then is so good about it? Why does Cicero insist that if friends, “charity and goodwill are removed from life, all the joy is gone out of it” while Emerson sees in it “that select and sacred relation which . . . even leaves the language of love suspicious and common, so much is this purer, and nothing is so much divine”?

On that issue, philosophy is of one mind. Some, of course, have had their doubts: St. Augustine, La Rochefoucauld, Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard. On the whole, though, the tradition is overwhelmingly on the side of Aristotle, who thought that friendship is “either a virtue or follows upon it, and is absolutely necessary for life: no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had every other good,” and distinguished between friends who profit from their relationship, friends who care for the pleasure they derive from it, and genuine friends, who are attracted to each other’s virtue. This third kind is the most perfect but since few people are virtuous it is very rare. It is also an unalloyed good.

To an extent completely unparalleled in a field that sometimes considers agreement a discourtesy, the philosophical tradition concurs. Cicero, Seneca, St. Aelred, St. Thomas, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, and many others, including most recent authors on the subject, repeat Aristotle’s threefold classification, limit true friendship to the morally virtuous and consider it an unmixed moral blessing. Without it, even Paradise is robbed of pleasure: “With me,” Milton’s Adam laments, “I see not who partakes. In solitude / What happiness? Who can enjoy alone, /

Or all enjoying, what contentment find?”

Are all good friends virtuous or could a good friend be a bad person? The Aristotelian tradition thinks not. Aristotle did not give examples of the virtuous; Cicero, trying, he says, to bring virtue down to earth and make it achievable, refers to specifically to individuals who had been “models of honor, integrity, justice, and generosity . . . [without] avarice, lustfulness, or insolence, and with unwavering conviction” – but that still leaves most of the people I know, myself included, friendless. My colleague John Cooper, more realistic than Cicero, has argued that neither in fact nor in Aristotle is friendship restricted to “moral heroes.” Genuine friendship requires only “the binding force within it of some – perhaps, for all that, partial and incomplete – excellence of the character”; it binds people who “love one another because of their good human qualities.” But despite acknowledging human imperfection, that leaves the connection between friendship and moral virtue intact: “one chooses a friend for his proved virtue.”

Yet Frederick Moreau, the hero of Flaubert’s Sentimental Education, befriends Charles Deslauriers because Deslauriers beat a servant almost to death for calling him a pauper’s brat. Frederick found that honorable and brave but the text gives us every reason to think of it as impetuous, excessive and typical of Deslaurier’s “hot temper.” Frederick’s love springs not from a recognition of excellence, “proved virtue,” but from a mistaken interpretation.

And yet, although it is not excellence that binds these two to each other, it is hard to deny that their friendship is genuine. In the novel’s closing scene, “reconciled once again by that irresistible element in their nature which always reunited them in friendship,” they reminisce about their visit to a brothel, “the secret obsession of every adolescent”; Frederick, it turned out, froze, speechless and motionless in fear and embarrassment and they ran off to the sounds of the

prostitutes' laughter, only to be caught and provoke a scandal. Here's how the novel ends:

They told one another the story at great length, each supplementing the other's recollections; and when they had finished:

“That was the best time we ever had,” said Frederick.

“Yes, perhaps you are right. That was the best time we ever had,” said Deslauriers.

Virtue? No – only two trivial characters, reveling in the banalities that sustained their close and intimate friendship.

Friendship is by no means the Sentimental Education's central theme. The true place of friendship is in drama – theater, film and television. And in Thelma and Louise, Ridley Scott's 1991 film, friendship is manifested in actions that are neither trivial nor morally neutral but positively wrong. Thelma, pathologically flighty and insecure, and Louise, who treats her like a child, go off on a two-day vacation. On their way, Thelma is almost raped, and Louise, after stopping the assault, almost gratuitously murders the man when he makes a nasty comment. They try to flee to Mexico, but their troubles, mostly because of Thelma's foolishness, multiply and when their money is stolen by a robber with whom Thelma spends the night, Louise finally collapses. At that point, Thelma, who has gradually begun to rely on herself, finds her self-respect and becomes capable of doing things on her own – like robbing a store, forcing a policeman into the trunk of his car and blowing up a truck because of its driver's obscene gestures. **She goes from this to that.** Eventually, at the rim of the Grand Canyon with a throng of police cars blocking their escape, they decide not to give themselves up and they drive their car over the cliff, remaining frozen in midair to the sound of B.B. King's “Better Not Look Down.”

These are not just friends who do bad things, as friends often do. Theirs is a friendship through which both women, especially Thelma, become more admirable because of the bad things they do. Their friendship gradually becomes a friendship of equals and gives them a way out of the dead ends to which their lives were heading, choosing a short but glorious life over a long and shabby. You find my implicit comparison with Achilles ridiculous, but why is desecrating an opponent's dead body over the death of a warrior, which is what happens to warriors, so much better than the murder of a malicious would-be rapist and the relatively minor crimes to which it leads?

Before turning to that question I would like to suggest, tentatively, why drama is suited for the representation of friendship. But to do so I need to make another detour, to an episode I will rely on a lot in what follows.

A visiting friend (I'll call him "Tom" since that is his name) decided, on a cold and rainy winter morning several years ago, to come along while I drove my son to school; we were in a hurry and, planning to stay in the car, he threw a raincoat over his pajamas and ran, barefoot, to the car. On arriving, I realized I had a flat and no idea of how to replace it. While the traffic, which was very heavy, was stopped, Tom leapt out of the car and took over. The children stared, some of the adults offered to help, others just watched or made jokes (one, a colleague, told me he loved my friend's outfit). Oblivious to the excitement, Tom fixed the tire, drove us to a gas station, where, still in pajamas, he discussed the situation with the owner, and returned home ready to work while I collapsed in a useless heap.

If you ask me why Tom is my friend, I will cite this episode and tell you that he acted kindly, generously and with a strong practical sense. But that would miss the point, which is that

he did so in that ridiculous outfit without a second thought, that his practical sense exists along with a touching otherworldliness, that it was completely in character, and so on: no one else could have done it. What mattered was not in fact just what he did but – I say unhelpfully – who he is, and that is not something no list of his features could ever capture. Think how banal we sound when we try to say why we love someone and how disappointed we feel once we run out of positive features – kind, generous, intelligent, imaginative, open, sensitive, loyal and so on and so on. There are plenty of kind people in the world but that’s no reason to love them; why, then, is it a reason for loving this particular person? Could it be his particular kindness, kindness as only he can express it? Yes, but explaining how one person’s particular kindness differs from another’s is exactly as problematic as giving a full list of my reasons for loving them. And so we often say that we love our friends not for this, that or any other feature but for themselves, and wrap our original mystery in the enigma of a self that seems to stand behind, over and above, or separately from the totality of its features.

Still, there is something to that way of speaking. Some people with whom I interact satisfy desires I already have and generally I know what to expect from them. My interest in them, beyond a minimum of necessary respect, is limited to the features that enable them to serve my purposes and, although I know that there is more to them than that, I don’t for that reason feel the need to know them better: they are means to my ends. But others I treat not only as means but also as ends in themselves, taking what they want as seriously as I take my own desires and being ready to want new things, and so to change myself, through interacting with them. These are the people I love.

Aware that my knowledge of my friends is only partial, I expect that what I don’t yet

know about them will be as attractive as what I know already and, with that expectation, I want to come to know them better. Friendship, like every kind of love, is a commitment to the future. My reasons for loving you include what I expect to find as I come to know you better – and that commitment is what every explanation necessarily leaves out: that promise of a better future, which depends specifically on my the friend. How can I possibly express what I know that I don't know? But what I know I don't know is exactly what underlies talk of loving our friends “for themselves.” Where others saw an amusing eccentric or a bother (both of them right) I saw in Tom's action an expression of much that I knew of him already and, in addition, the promise made in this new aspect of himself – a promise only he, with his history, could make, and only I, with my own history, could see – a product, in fact, of our history together, in which no one else can share. In his action, I saw Tom himself.

In other words, the action expressed who Tom is and, in understanding it, I took everything I knew about him into account, including included his decisiveness, his motions, gestures and tone of voice, his way with practical things and a myriad other details that were, to me, visible in his behavior. But nothing I could say about them could enable enable another to see what I saw in that action. Friendship, like the self that emerges through it, is always embodied and its depictions require embodiment as well, including the looks, gestures and bodily dispositions that are essential to textured communication. Since these are irreducibly visual, that makes friendship a difficult subject for narrative. But since they are also inherently temporal, that makes it a bad subject for painting. They are actions, the stuff of drama.

The problems faced by the representation of friendship show something about friendship itself, which is why I have spent so much of our time with them. They show that friendship is

expressed in every kind of action; in trivial and commonplace events; in crimes; it takes time to manifest itself and it may often affect us before we are even aware that we have become someone's friend; and it is inherently dangerous because we never know what its promise will bring: I may one day judge, perhaps too late again, that our relationship has done me harm or, worse, my judgment may have suffered as well and I may find myself happy in situations I would have thought intolerable before I met you. And so we must ask again: if friendship does that, what good is it?

I begin in an unlikely place, a notorious passage in Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality:

Just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.

Nietzsche charges that Christianity, which for him is just a revolt of "the weak" of the Roman Empire against their "strong" pagan oppressors, invented "the subject" so that it could attribute our manner of life to a free choice. If I am distinct from what I am doing, I can stand back, examine my alternatives and decide to act one way rather than another. In that way, the weak could think "strength" as a vice, something "the strong" need not have exercised, while elevating weakness, "that is to say, their essence, their effects, their whole ineluctable, irremovable reality [into] a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a deed, a meritorious act." But Nietzsche's view

seems to make it impossible to explain what makes my actions mine if there is no subject whose actions they are. Why are they even actions at all? Actions are always someone's and connected to their agent's intentions – intention, as Wittgenstein put it, making the difference between my arm going up and my raising it. Without agents, we are left only with rootless, atomistic events.

In fact, Nietzsche's view is more modest. He does not reject the subject altogether but only a subject that is, as he writes, "behind" or "separate from" its deeds, a "neutral" agent free to choose between virtue and vice. He claims that the agent is not behind the deed but in it: our actions express precisely who we are, not who we have freely chosen to be among various different possibilities.

But the view still conflicts with a common understanding of actions as a special group of the events that constitute the world: events whose causes are mental: desires, beliefs and intentions. On a physical level, raising my arm and my arm going up are exactly alike; the only difference is that the former is caused by my desire to do so while the latter occurs, perhaps, simply because of an electric shock to my brain. Nietzsche's view, by contrast, denies that intentions are distinct mental events preceding the actions they cause, as if we can have an intention without ever, even in principle, performing the relevant action. If I intend to tell you I like you but only manage to sound ambivalent or unkind, the causal view would take my action as a failed effort to say why I like you: I would still be the person who likes you and I would have to find a better way to express myself. If the intention, though, is in the action, I turn out to be the person who put you down and I would need to consider whether I want to stay that way or not.

This implies that we don't know exactly what an action is until it is complete and that its

character can change while it is being performed. Our actions, most of which are much more complicated than the stock philosophical (and, recently, neurophysiological) examples of moving an arm or a finger, begin with a relatively hazy idea of their purpose and character. Think, for example, how you often have to say something to know what you believe or how you find out what movie you want to see only after your friend make a suggestion, not to mention actions as complex as writing a poem or, come to think of it, preparing this lecture. To say that my intention was all along to show that friendship is a good is only to say that I began with that general idea, which, I hope, I have managed to refine a bit while working on it, my intention gradually becoming inseparable from the lecture I produced: I can't tell you exactly what I intended without having you hear or read it. Moreover, every step in that direction affected what I could intend to do next in ways I couldn't possibly anticipate beforehand and what I took myself to be doing kept changing as a result. Whatever my lecture turns out to be will reveal the kind of agent, the kind of philosopher, I am. My ideas emerge as I formulate them and my actions acquire their character as I perform them: it is through them that I become who I am.

At some point, of course, my action is complete and its character settled, but when exactly that happens is not written in stone. To understand an action is to understand the agent expressed in it, and to understand the agent we must fit the action into what we already know about that agent (we may know little; and the more we know the more complete our understanding is likely to be). We must therefore see how this action affects and is affected by that agent's other actions – establishing connections is interpretation. But our interpretation, so conceived, may put an earlier action in a different light: what may have earlier (as we will now say) appeared as arrogance, placed along a new piece of information, may turn out to be

indifference and, in light of later events, the act that expresses indifference may turn out to have been an expression of shyness after all. Our actions are not only affected by our past but, hard as it is to say it without sounding silly, by our future as well.

Accordingly, as literary criticism has long known, we don't have a privileged position in regard to our own actions: others may well be better judges of what we meant to do. That seems to be the point of many of Nietzsche's attacks on consciousness: "Men were considered 'free' so that they might be judged and punished – so that they might become guilty: consequently, every act had to be considered as willed, and the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness (and thus the most fundamental counterfeit in matters psychological was made the principle of psychology itself)."

And so, sadly perhaps, who I am is constituted not by unrealized possibilities or unfulfilled plans but only by the possibilities I realize and the plans I fulfill: I am in and not behind them; what I accomplish is in the long run the best I can do. "The bite of conscience" is not a sense of guilt for having chosen wrongly but the painful realization that in acting as I did I showed myself to be inferior to what I had supposed or hoped I was. On this conception an action succeeds not because it fulfills the intention that prompted it but when I can see myself (that is, the self I want to be) in it – and to see myself I need to take account not just of my action itself, but also my other actions, my character, my history and even my place within a social tradition. And since I have no privileged access to my intentions, my action can be successful only if others can also see it in similar terms: "I haven't performed the action, haven't volunteered for the mission, say, if nothing I do is understood by others as such an act."

So if intention is not the cause of action, what is it? I suggest that it is nothing but that

action itself, fully specified. It is not an independent object which the action means (even if it is a failure) but what the action fully and exactly is. But our specifications are always provisional: they are full only relative to the information we already have and the extent of our interest, and both can change. The interpretation, and the nature, of our actions can always be contested and there are no neutral criteria for getting it right – otherwise the humanities and many of the human sciences would be long dead by now. Some actions, of course, may not be worth contesting, others unsuited for self-expression: does a casual greeting really express who I am? I answer that it does, though it expresses generic features of mine, like a modicum of sociability, which I share with many others – self-expression need not always be far-reaching: it may instead reveal the countless ways in which we are similar to the people around us.

Nevertheless, we take our differences from one another seriously. Now, from one point of view, everyone is different since our personal histories, in their particularity, are (as we say) uniquely ours. Being necessary elements in everyone's life, differences are not on their own, despite early American education, grounds for pride and joy. The differences that count are those that literally make a difference and distinguish us from others in interesting, admirable or perhaps even contemptible ways. Here, friends – close friends – make a difference that counts. Perhaps Aristotle was right when he said that to live alone one has to be either a god or a beast (Nietzsche added their combination: the philosopher).

To see that Aristotle had a point, we must reject not only his restriction of friendship to men, as we philosophers have already done, but also his restriction of it to adults, as, unlike sociologists or social psychologists, we have not. We can learn from the friendships of children. For instance, it is important that although children, adolescents and young adults find it relatively

easy to make new friends, while people around the age of forty have serious difficulties. We usually attribute that to growing professional and family obligations but there is more to it than that.

C.S. Lewis once insisted that friendship is “almost wholly free from jealousy,” seemingly thinking of only the most idealized adult relationships and leaving the intense jealousies of children and teenagers totally out of account. But why should being deserted by a friend desertion provoke the sharp pangs of jealousy or the dull pain of dejection? Not simply, I think, because of the loss of a playmate, a schoolyard ally, a theater companion or a tennis partner nor because of the loss of a secret sharer or someone in whom, as in a mental mirror, we see what we can’t see of ourselves on our own. At the core of this “grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear” lurks the anguish of a deeper, more pervasive abandonment, a rejection not merely of what we have done but of what we are. We don’t just love, we also leave, our friends for themselves, which is why “What have I done wrong?” is always the wrong question. And that is partly because, as Lewis in this instance was right to observe, “Friendship must exclude.”

If I say, “These are my friends,” I imply, “These are not.” Our friendships make us different from “the others” and our differences are essential to our own self-understanding: through them we establish who we are and develop features and capacities that only that relationship can generate. So when a friend abandons me, she rejects what both of us became through our relationship. She is rejecting my part in what she is – which is why “It’s not you, it’s me” is no consolation.

I return, once again, to the idea most of what friends do together is commonplace and unimportant. That is not exactly wrong. It is like saying that for most of the people in the

schoolyard Tom's behavior was just eccentric, which is also not exactly wrong, whereas to me it was an expression of generosity, independence, practicality and willingness to help that only he could accomplish. In seeing it thus I did not only confirm what I already knew about him because, although I knew he was generous, the generosity in his action was inseparable from it; it was his "particular" way of being generous, which it could only be described by describing as exactly as possible what he did on that rainy morning. And that was not something I could have known beforehand.

What others may perceive as an isolated action, friends understand in terms of everything they know about each other. And to the extent that what we know about each other is always provisional, what our friend did remains unclear. But as the action unfolds and gets connected to still other actions, it is reinterpreted in their light and that new understanding may lead in new directions, revealing ways of continuing that only become possible now and, once followed, again affect the action and the interpretation of its purpose, and so on without an end that is externally imposed. What I am doing, what my action expresses and who I am all come to be together.

But since others also have a hand in understanding my action, they can affect both what I do and how I understand it and so what I am likely to become (which is why we are told to choose our friends with caution). My friends are not the only people who can do that, but the large body of knowledge they bring to their interpretation implicates more aspects of myself and affects me more radically. What I become, therefore, is very much their doing and the less settled I am in myself, the greater their contributions and the more pervasive their influence. Since we are considerably more changeable in youth than we eventually become, friendship

comes easily while we are young. This is by far the single most important reason why making friends becomes more difficult with age: a new friendship brings with it the prospect of serious change, and the more settled we are in ourselves the less we are willing or able to confront it.

Friends have a privileged role in this life-long process of self-construction not because they are good people or wise or generous but because we love them – and love them for themselves: not just for what we know them to be but also for what they will become and how they will then affect us. We expect from them help with our current needs, desires and plans but, more important, we give them the power to lead us to need and desire new things which we can't now even imagine.

The sense that there is more to our friends than we have seen so far is a constant incitement to come to know them better. Knowledge, in this context, is not passive: it changes both the knower and the known and the further we look and reinterpret the more extensively we are likely to change. *Life is a habit*, says Frankie Blue, the hero of Tim Lott's White City Blue, as the novel begins. *You do something, then you do it again, then again, and before you know it, that's what you are, and that's who you are, and you can't imagine being anything or anyone else.* But Frankie doesn't know that he will soon fall in love and reaffirm an old friendship, which will lead him to acknowledge a painful truth in his past and a joyful one in his present, making it possible for him to imagine that he might not remain, as he has always been so far, forever "Frank the Fib."

Friendship is a mechanism of individuality; art – more generally, everything that we find beautiful – is another. Both spark the need to come to know things as intimately as possible, in their particularity, to understand just how they are different from anything else in the world.

They pull in a direction opposite to the direction of morality, which enjoins us to extend our fair and impartial treatment of others as far as we possibly can – not just to believe that it is right to do so (or to intend to do it!), but actually to do it. That, I believe, requires reciprocity on the part of those we treat in that manner; and that in turn requires significant changes on both our parts: we can't assume that people mistreat one another only because of ignorance or irrationality and that they can always, at least in principle, be convinced to change their ways: as Bernard Williams once asked, "What will the professor's justifications do, when they break down the door, smash his spectacles, take him away?" Many significant moral and social changes occur not because their proponents convince the world with their arguments but because – more women, say, entering the workplace, more homosexuals living openly – the others get used to their presence and gradually change, becoming able to treat them with trust and respect. These changes establish common psychological, institutional, and cultural ground between us – they make us, to that extent, more similar to one another and on that their value depends. But the values of morality – values that promote our commonalities – are not the only values there are, despite the "pan-moralism" that permeates both academic thought and the broader public and confuses even professional courtesy and etiquette with "ethics." There are also the values of love – I am almost tempted to call them aesthetic – which pull us toward establishing our differences from one another and set us on a singular path through the world – a path that may sometimes conflict with morality, with, once again, no neutral criteria to decide which to give up – another job for the humanities.

To the extent that I can see an object in its particularity I see something that is nowhere else in the world – something that can only be expressed in that particular object (or person) and

nothing else. To that extent, my friends – the people I love – stand out against the rest of the world of my acquaintance and make, to me at least, a difference that counts: they are, to that extent, individuals. And so am I – because, as I said earlier, when I see my friends in their actions, which depends on our history together, I see something no one else sees. If another friend had been in the schoolyard with me that day, our reactions would have overlapped, but to the extent that our histories were different so would our reactions have been. According to C.S. Lewis, Charles Lamb said somewhere that if one of three friends (A, B, and C) should die, B loses not only A but also “A’s part in C,” while C loses not only A but also “A’s part in B.” “In each of my friends there is something that only another friend can truly bring out” (61).

Our lives and the lives of our friends interpenetrate, the more so the closer we are, and our lives develop in ways made possible only by our relationships with one another. If I and someone else are both your friends, and love you for yourself, the self we love is bound to be at least a little different. That I love you for yourself is only a partial truth. The full truth is in Montaigne’s famous non-explanation: If you ask me why I love you, I can only say, “Because it was you, because it was I.”