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Abstract:

This paper will consider C. S. Lewis's exposition of love as friendship, in particular his chapter on friendship in *The Four Loves*. After a brief review of his concept of friendship as one of the four kinds of love and its context within the history of Western views on friendship, two features of the essay will be more closely analyzed. These are:

1. The legitimacy of limiting the definition of friendship to a shared interest.
2. Lewis's hesitancy to use friendship as a model for the relationship between God and man.

The paper will conclude with a brief comparison of Lewis's understanding of friendship with the biblical views, especially those of Proverbs and the Gospel of John, and a proposal for friendship as a model for Christian spirituality.

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C.S. Lewis on Friendship

Michael Pakaluk claims that Elizabeth Telford's 1970 essay on friendship was "the first serious work by an English-speaking philosopher on that subject since Emerson" (248). One might quibble with the exclusion of Lewis's previously published chapter on friendship from The Four Loves, especially if Emerson is considered to be a serious philosopher; nevertheless, Pakaluk's statement does show that Lewis's piece on friendship arrived at a time when there was a significant gap in thought on an important aspect of human life, especially within the context of specifically Christian reflection on friendship.

This paper will consider C. S. Lewis's exposition of *philia* or friendship in The Four Loves (87-127). After a summary of his concept of friendship and comments in passing on its place in the history of Western views of friendship, two features of Lewis's thought will be analyzed more closely. First, we shall question the legitimacy of limiting the definition of friendship to a shared interest. Second, Lewis's hesitancy to use friendship as a model for the relationship between God and man will be examined. The paper will conclude with a brief comparison of Lewis's understanding of friendship with biblical views, especially those of Proverbs and the Gospel of John, and a brief proposal for friendship as a model for Christian spirituality.

The closest that Lewis comes to defining friendship is when he distinguishes it from companionship. Companionship, which revolves around the pleasure of shared responsibility, is the matrix of friendship, but it is not friendship (94). "Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)" (96).

Here Lewis shows both similarities and differences from classical expositions of friendship. On the one hand, Lewis's shared interest appears to be so passionate and central to who a person is that his understanding of friendship approaches Cicero's claim that "a true friend is, so to speak, a second self" (Pakaluk 108). On the other hand, Aristotle writes of three types of friendship (1059-1063. bk 8, chaps. 2-4). The first, virtue or character or complete friendship, is based upon the shared love of the good. The second, pleasure friendship, is derived from gaining pleasure from another. The third is advantage or utilitarian friendship, which is based upon one person being of some practical use to another. Lewis's common interest basis for friendship would seem to fit best in the second category of pleasure friendship and would not necessarily include the other two types of friendship.

The origin of friendship in common interest leads to the two principal characteristics of friendship, according to Lewis. It is uninquisitive and unnecessary. Friends are not inquisitive about one another's personal matters. Their concern is for their shared interest or vision. Lewis uses quite radical language to explain the uninquisitive nature of friendship. "This love (essentially) ignores not only our physical bodies but that whole embodiment which consists of our family, job, past and connections. … It is an affair of disentangled or stripped minds. Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship naked personalities" (103). In defense of friendship as a shared interest or vision Lewis makes it almost impersonal.

As the above quotation makes clear, the uninquisitive nature of friendship distinguishes it from "Eros" or romantic love. In an apt image Lewis writes, "Lovers are normally face to face,

absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in the common interest" (91). Being uninquisitive also makes friendship more social. Lovers seek privacy, but friends are open to

receiving others that share the common interest (97). Furthermore friendship is not an unconscious or hidden form of homosexuality, a perverted form of Eros in Lewis's opinion (90-94). Friendship's legitimacy as a distinct type of love is thus protected from being absorbed into Eros. If we wish to place Lewis's understanding of friendship in Aristotle's category of pleasure friendship, we need then to exclude from it the sexual nature of much of Aristotle's understanding of pleasure friendship.

The second principal characteristic of friendship is its unnecessary nature, which has two important implications according to Lewis. First, the unnecessary nature of friendship relates to freedom. Freedom involves choice. We select our friends. There is no moral necessity or duty to be the friend of someone. This makes friendship a relationship among equals without "claim on or responsibility for one another" (105). As we shall see, Lewis here departs from a major aspect of the biblical and even the pagan classical views of friendship, which recognize it as entailing mutual responsibilities.

Second, friendship is unnecessary in a biological sense. It is not like the family, which is based upon blood relationships and is necessary for the continuance of the human race. Nor is it like the need for and pleasure in food and drink. This is what Lewis means when he says that friendship is the most "spiritual" form of human love in the sense of "the opposite of corporeal, or instinctive, or animal" (111). For this reason friendship "has no survival value" (103). The fact that it has no survival value does not mean that friendship is worthless. Indeed, "it is one of those things which give value to survival" (103). This is an important reminder. We need food and drink. Society needs for men and women to have children and to rear them. It is, however, the unnecessary things like art, philosophy and friendship that give pleasure to life and make life to be more than just mere animal existence. Of friendship Lewis writes, "Life—natural life—has no better gift to give" (105).

The uninquisitive and unnecessary nature of friendship leads Lewis to distinguish it from appreciative love and affection. Lewis realizes that the image of friends not looking at each other but at the thing that interests them can be overstated. As the relationship develops around the common interest, the friends form a personal attachment and admiration. Friendship "is the medium in which their mutual love and knowledge exist" (104). In fact, if they had attended to one another and not to the shared interest, they would not have grown to love and know each other so well.

Affection or *storge* is the love especially shared between parents and children. It is distinct from friendship because the latter "is utterly free from Affection's need to be needed" (102). This is also why a friend is not really an ally who helps us in times of need. A true friend will prove himself to be an ally when needed. If he did not, he would be a "false friend," but "such good offices are not the stuff of Friendship" (102).

Now, it is with these distinctions about what friendship is and what it is not that one begins to become a little uncomfortable with Lewis's exposition. If something is necessary to true friendship, how can it not be part of the definition of friendship? I believe that there are two problems with Lewis's viewpoint here.

First, it would appear that Lewis's understanding of the definition of a thing is faulty, at least in the case of friendship. According to Lewis, the common interest is that which initiates

the friendship relationship and remains central to it throughout. All else, even necessary outgrowths, like mutual responsibilities, are secondary and not part of the essence of friendship.

Lewis's experience of a shared interest or insight is something like Aristotle's efficient cause. It is what produces the thing called friendship. But what if the *telos* of friendship is the mutual responsibility and the character transformation brought about by the initial shared interest or insight? Does not the final cause of something have a part to play in its definition? I think that it does.

In addition, Lewis is probably reflecting the more private nature of friendship in the modern world as well as his own wonderfully intense and enjoyable experience of friendship, as reflected in the Inklings. The ancient pagans and, as we shall see, the biblical writers believed that friendship necessarily included obligations or responsibilities with regard to the friend; that is, a friend was an ally.

The second issue that needs to be examined is Lewis's hesitancy to view friendship as a figure or model of the relationship between God and man. There are two reasons Lewis doubts the propriety of seeing in friendship a natural love that is like divine love or *agape*. The first derives from Lewis's Christian convictions about human sinfulness. Human friendship is affected by the reality of human sin. Lewis writes, "Friendship … like the other natural loves is unable to save itself" (124). True, it is spiritual and freely assumed like God's love (111), but this is nearness of likeness in which humans and angels are nearer than animals are to God's nature because of the way God created them. Lewis distinguishes this nearness of likeness from nearness of approach (15-17). Nearness of likeness means that good and bad men and angels are near to God's nature. However, nearness of approach involves becoming more like God's character. It means to imitate God incarnate in Jesus Christ. As with any human love, friendship is open to abuse from man's sinfulness.

There are two basic problems with friendship among sinful men and women, according to Lewis. The first is societal and causes the governing authorities to be suspicious of it. The common interest could be evil. Also, close-knit groups of friends are more impervious to outside influences, making them more difficult to manage (113-116). The close knitted nature of the friendship relationship leads to the second problem related to human sinfulness, which is that of the inner ring, against which Lewis so strikingly warned in his sermon of that title. The inner ring becomes so exclusive that it is unmerciful to outsiders; takes pride in its own special knowledge and can end up being nothing but the love of exclusion (116-124).

The problems of likeness of approach are due to the abuse of friendship, but Lewis is also reluctant to use the real good of friendship as an image of God's love. He points out that Scripture rarely uses friendship to represent the love between God and man but rather "ignores this almost angelic relation and plunges into the depth of what is most natural and instinctive. Affection is taken as the image when God is represented as our Father; Eros, when Christ is represented as the Bridegroom of the Church" (112-113).

Why is this? According to Lewis, Eros and Affection are less likely than Friendship to confuse the symbol with the thing symbolized. It is unlikely that we would think that God is our biological Father or that Christ and the church are married in anything but a metaphorical sense. Friendship, however, "is too spiritual to be a good symbol of spiritual things" (124).

This does not mean that human friendship is of no use in the Christian life. Lewis concludes his chapter on friendship with reflections on its value, a section that shows his

indebtedness to the Platonic tradition reinterpreted through his Christian faith. In Plato's Symposium Diotima says the lover "will abate his violent love of the one … and will become a

lover of all beautiful forms" (353). Against the perversion of friendship into a mutual admiration society in which we not only admire one another but admire ourselves for choosing such admirable friends, Lewis writes that Friendship "is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauty of all others" (126). In other words, God uses human friendship to school us in the love of our neighbor. At the same time we realize that we do not choose these friends nor are our relationships the result of chance circumstances of birth and location. For Christians "there are, strictly speaking, no chances. God's providence has been at work to bring us together. If that is so then Christian friendship recognizes that God is the Host who has brought friends together and so human friendship teaches us to love God" (127).

While admitting that friendship with God is not as commonly spoken of as God's fatherhood and the marriage union of Christ with his church, one does feel that Lewis could have explained how the Scripture views friendship and how this relates to the love of God. We shall therefore now turn to the specifically biblical teaching on friendship, focusing on the Book of Proverbs and the Gospel of John.

The Hebrew word most commonly translated "friend" or "neighbor" in the Book of Proverbs is *rê'a*, a noun derived from the verb *rā'āh* which means "to associate with." Thus, it can mean "friend" or "companion" or anyone with whom there is a reciprocal relationship either by geographical proximity, such as a neighbor, or a fellow-citizen with whom one shares a political bond (Brown 946 II). Other commonly used words for "friend" are 'llûp and the cognates of 'āhab, the Hebrew verb "to love." All of these are regularly translated in the LXX by *philos*.

This understanding of the Hebrew words can certainly include Lewis's view of friendship as a relationship between people with a common interest or vision, although it probably reflects more his notion of companionship as the matrix of friendship. Proverbs appears to understand friendship in a much more ample way than does Lewis, one that is closer in this respect to classical expositions. As was said previously, Lewis's more private view of friendship reflects not only his own personal experience but probably also the modern privatization of friendship.

The breadth of Proverbs' understanding of friendship can be seen by how it describes friends and friendship. Proverbs highlights four basic characteristics of friendship. The first is trust or confidence. "A perverse man spreads strife and a whisperer separates close friends" (16.28. All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version). Maintaining confidence is even related to forgiveness. "He who forgives an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter alienates a friend" (17.9).

The second characteristic is faithfulness. This can mean being there to help in hard times. "A friend loves at all time, and a brother is born for adversity" (17.17). Faithfulness also involves speaking a painful but necessary truth to another. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but many are the kisses of an enemy" (27.5-6).

Third, Proverbs recognizes with Lewis the voluntary nature of friendship. "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (22.24-25). We can and do choose our friends; so we should be careful to choose those who will have a good influence on us and avoid those who won't.

All of these characteristics point to the overarching fourth one. Friendship is a school of virtue which involves a high level of commitment to the good of one's friends. Once again Proverbs appears closer to the classical pagan understanding of friendship than does Lewis.

Although Lewis does not deny the place of morality or virtue in friendship, in the final analysis, he does regularly make it a secondary consideration to his shared interest as the essence of friendship.

If the Book of Proverbs emphasizes the level of commitment in friendship and the relationship with one's friends as a school of virtue, chapter 15 of the Gospel of John's record of Jesus' teaching places friendship at the heart of the Christian disciple's life. Jesus says, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (vv. 13-15). The level of commitment of a friend to another is complete. It entails willingness to lay down his life for his friend. And Jesus' love for his disciples, soon to be manifested on the cross, is the model. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12).

In addition, B. Franklin Curry in his paper stresses the importance of the vine imagery to the whole passage and its portrayal of friendship. The fact that the image of the vine points to the union between Christ and his disciples and that without him they can do nothing (v. 5) demonstrates that the love of Christian friendship is a participation in the divine love between the Father and Son and even the Spirit, about whose person and work so much of these chapters in John occupy themselves. Raymond Brown's claim that John makes *philia* and *agape* synonymous and so there is no teaching here on friendship as such therefore misunderstands the relationship between the two (Brown 497-499). *Agape* or divine love should not be seen as a separate category of love in sharp distinction from friendship. Rather, we should see that *agape* takes up into itself the other forms of love, in this case friendship, and so transforms them with the result that they become faces of *agape*. The oneness of the disciples in friendship love becomes then a mark of the presence and truth of Jesus as God's son (John 17.21).

I would like to pick up another aspect of the vine imagery in order to understand the biblical teaching on friendship. The vine is a common figure in the Old Testament for Israel as God's chosen covenant people. Isaiah 5 uses it to show how abundantly and tenderly God had provided for Israel, only to be disappointed in its rebellion. Jesus forms with his disciples the new covenant people of God, defined by their relationship of love toward him and toward one another. Unlike the exclusivist tendencies of Israel, God's new people is to include all nations, thus giving to friendship a universalistic trajectory unknown of before.

Furthermore, the command that Jesus leaves to his disciples to love one another in this context of the vine imagery means that Christian friendship among his disciples is related to the covenant. In a sense they become covenantal allies or partners. This is reflected especially in John 15.16-17. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another."

First, our friendship with God and with fellow Christian disciples relates to God's election. God has planted the vineyard, according to Isaiah 5. In Isaiah 41.8, Israel is not only the offspring of Abraham, God's friend, it is also Jacob whom God has chosen. Jesus retains this

strong sense of covenantal election when he says to his disciples, his friends, that he has chosen them, not they him.

In choosing his friends God has set up a relationship of mutual responsibility. On the one hand, God has promised to care for his friends. The vineyard figure of Isaiah 5 describes God's care and provision for Israel. When Abraham is called God's friend, both in Isaiah 41.8 and II Chronicles 20.7, the context makes it clear that God will care for and protect Israel, Abraham's descendants. Jesus continues this Old Testament theme when he relates his election of his disciples to a friendship relationship by promising to them God's ready response to their prayers so that "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (John 15.16)."

On the other hand, the friends of God have responsibilities. In Isaiah 5 and John 15 the vineyard or God's chosen people are expected to bear fruit in accordance with God's purposes. In Isaiah 5.7 Israel is condemned because God "looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry." The fruit Jesus looks for from his friends is obedience to his commandment to love one another.

Finally, the friends of God are intimate with God in the sense that God shares his desires and purposes with them. Exodus 33.11 says, "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend." So also, Jesus says that the disciples are no longer servants because a servant does not know what his master does, but rather they are friends because he has made known to them what he has heard from the Father (John 15:15).

While admitting with Lewis that friendship is not as common a biblical image as Affection and Eros, it is still a theme rich with implications for Christian spirituality when understood as covenantal allies or partners. We have been chosen by God to be Jesus' friends. He has promised his care and answer to our prayers because we call upon him in Jesus' name. He has also brought us into his confidence through the revelation we have received of him through Jesus Christ, our friend. Finally, we have been chosen by God to carry out his purposes in the world by exhibiting and promoting love, which is defined above all by God's love for us shown in the cross of Christ. Being the friend of God thus means being caught up into the life of God, which is eternally one of love, and following that love as it goes forth to save a lost world.

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