

Friendship as a Family of Practices

*P. E. Digeser**

ABSTRACT: How should we understand friendship given the extraordinary diverse forms that it can take? Building on the idea that friendship is a family resemblance concept, this article argues that friendship can be understood as a set of social practices in which certain norms and expectations govern not only the actions, but also the motivations of the friends. As a family resemblance concept, no essential action or motivation differentiates friendship from other social practices or unites the different practices of friendship. Nevertheless, a repertoire of motives exists, at least one of which must be mutually recognised in order for friendship to get off the ground. In addition, the conventions governing the interactions of friends may be less about what to do at any particular time and more about how to go about doing whatever it is that friends wish to do for or with one another. The practices of friendship are diverse, historically contingent and adverbial in character. This understanding of friendship will be broad enough to encompass the wide variety of friendships. Friendship is a flexible relationship whose boundaries are ultimately established only by the human imagination.

Keywords: friendship, Oakeshott, practice, family resemblance, Telfer

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One of the great challenges of proceeding with any study of friendship - be it philosophical, historical, sociological, anthropological or psychological - is having an adequate account of the object of study. One can hardly proceed without providing some answer to the question 'what is friendship?' The challenge, however, is that any thoughtful exploration of friendship will soon face the reality of its extraordinary diversity. This article seeks to make sense of that diversity by building on the suggestion, offered by a number of philosophers, that different understandings of friendship bear no more than a family resemblance to one another. The theoretical challenge taken up here is to offer an account of friendship that is both consistent with the view that it is a family resemblance concept and that tells us something about how it differs from other sorts of relationships. The goal is to provide plausible generalisations that will hold, more or less, for how we use the concept. Helping to structure this endeavor is Michael Oakeshott's idea of practice. More specifically, the article primarily sets out what it means for friendship to be understood as a set of rule-governed social practices.

*Department of Political Science, University of California Santa Barbara, United States.
Email: digeser@polsci.ucsb.edu

The second part of the article considers a number of objections that could be raised to seeing friendship on these terms. After addressing three such objections, the remaining sections consider the criticism that, unlike the account I offer, it is indeed possible to set out the necessary and sufficient conditions for friendship. To develop and respond to this critique, the discussion takes Elizabeth Telfer's particularly concise and well-formulated account of friendship as illustrative of a philosophical attempt to nail-down the conditions for friendship. In response, I argue that no one motive or specific sort of action is essential for friendship.

Family Resemblance and Friendship

To cut to the chase, the basic elements of the theory of friendship offered here are rather simple: friendship is composed of a set of social practices in which certain norms and expectations govern not only the actions, but also the motivations of the friends. These practices bear no more than a family resemblance to one another. No essential action or motivation differentiates friendship from other social practices or unites the different practices of friendship. Supplementing these basic elements are certain features of practices. Like all practices, cultivating and having friends requires learning and subscribing to norms, conventions and expectations which are then interpreted and employed with varying degrees of skill and success. Like many practices, the conventions associated with friendship are less about what to do at any particular time and more about how to go about doing whatever it is that friends wish to do for or with one another. In addition to these more general features of practices, friendships entail more specific conditions. For example, friendships also appear to require the mutual recognition of appropriate motivations. As in the case of the actions that we expect from our friends, there exist multiple kinds of motivations that affect the tenor of the relationship. The practices of friendship are diverse, historically contingent and adverbial in character. This understanding of friendship will be broad enough to encompass the wide variety friendships. Friendship is a flexible relationship whose boundaries are ultimately established only by the human imagination.

Evidence of friendship's flexibility and breadth of character is not difficult to find. Not all of our friendships are the same and none is immune to change. The friends with whom we go to the movies, out to dinner, or celebrate the New Year may not be the friends at work or the bridge group or in the mosque. The friends that we have made simply because they lived next door may not be the friends with whom we confide our secrets and seek consolation. Our friendships at work may be extraordinarily important and, in many respects, fulfilling but those may not be friends with whom we feel most relaxed and ourselves. These differences that we experience are not hard and fast. Sometimes our closest friends fade out of our lives and other times a mere acquaintance, known for years, is transformed into a close and loyal friend. At any given time, different friends and sometimes the same friends play different roles. The diversity of the relationship is astoundingly rich and important to us.

This diversity is further confirmed when we move from an individual to a social perspective. What friendship means to children is very different from what it means to adolescents and adults (Pahl 2000, p.101). In addition, the ways of being friends may differ depending on the familiar distinctions of gender, class, and culture. In part, these differences are a matter of the sorts of actions that friends do with and for one another. The sorts of

accommodations expected in guest friendships in Ancient Greece are not the same expectations of a twenty-first century reading group in Freeport, Maine. These kinds of friendships may also differ depending on the sorts of motivations that drive the friendship. In the Greek case, they are founded on certain tribal or familial obligations; in the latter case, they may be based on mutual affection or a desire to have an enjoyable evening discussing ideas.

The diversity and flexibility of friendship is a puzzle that has fascinated philosophers from Plato to Jacques Derrida. For many ancient and modern thinkers, this diversity is a spur to discern the true form or the best type of friendship. In contrast, for Derrida the philosophical difficulties of setting down the necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship tell us something about the yearning for the presence of another (and ourselves) that can never be fulfilled (Derrida 1997). In the last century, however, an attention to language and meaning has provided a variety of ways to understand the flexibility and fluidity of language. In the case of friendship, one particularly useful suggestion is to see friendship as a family resemblance concept. As separately suggested by Sandra Lynch and Diane Jeske, the idea is that when we seek to find some common element that joins together all of the ways in which we use the word friendship, we find similarities that ‘crop up and disappear’ (Lynch 2005, pp.21, 189-191; Jeske 2008, pp.95-104). In effect, the similarities in these usages bear no more than what Ludwig Wittgenstein saw as a family resemblance to one another (1968, section 66). Just as we recognise certain familial traits (large nose, high forehead, a set of facial expressions) among a group of family members, we may associate certain characteristics (affection, loyalty, care, joint activity) as part of the meaning of friendship. Nevertheless, not all of those familial traits may be shared by all the family members nor may any one of them be deemed an essential trait. Not all members of the family may have the ‘family nose’ and some may merely have a high forehead, which others do not share at all. Similarly, not all friendships entail the sharing of secrets and some may simply involve common activities which other friendships do not entail at all. What joins together some uses of the word friendship will be unnecessary for other uses.

Seeing friendship as a family resemblance concept has a number of implications. First and foremost, it implies that ‘there is no determinate complete answer to the question, ‘What is friendship?’’ (Jeske 2008, p.96; Lynch 2005, p.22). All understandings of friendship need not share some common attribute that differentiates it from all other relationships.¹ Second, just as one conception of ‘game’ (which Wittgenstein uses as another example of a family resemblance concept) is not in competition with another conception, so differing conceptions of friendship can coexist. We need not choose between conceptions of friendship in order to establish that this conception is *more of a* conception of friendship than some other. The fact that a friendship was motivated by respect, does not make it less than a friendship based on affection. Abandoning the search for the essential motives and actions of friendship, however, does not mean that any sort of relationship is a friendship. It does not prevent us from distinguishing friends from lovers, partners, colleagues, comrades, customers and acquaintances (let alone strangers, enemies, rivals, and foes).² Third, the edges of the family are going to be blurry. The differences between a friendship and a partnership may sometimes be difficult to discern. Similarly, and certainly more fraught, the line between romantic entanglement and a caring friendship is also one in which clear distinctions can be elusive. These difficulties in identifying the conceptual boundaries of friendship are not necessarily to be seen as failures or inadequacies of the concept. Rather, the

lines that we draw with regard to these matters may be no more than provisional and indicative of traditions, purposes and norms that exist at a particular time and place. Finally, seeing friendship as a family resemblance concept does not preclude us from viewing certain forms of friendship as preferable to other forms of friendship. As in the case of the word ‘game,’ we may prefer certain games over others. Those preferences, however, do not make the less preferred games something other than games and the less preferred friendships something other than friendships. In other words, employing the notion of family resemblance does not preclude us from arguing that certain friendships are better or more desirable than others. It may prevent us, however, from saying that an ideal understanding of friendship is the only form of friendship.

Why should we accept or even entertain the possibility that friendship is a family resemblance concept? In Wittgenstein’s view, there is no better answer to this question than to go ‘look and see.’ Given the widespread experience of making, having and sometimes losing friends, readers may want to consider whether all of their friendships, from childhood on up, are/were driven by the same motives and expressed in the same actions. At a more theoretical level, the plausibility of seeing friendship as a family resemblance concept can be strengthened by considering a well-formulated account to the contrary: an account that argues that friendship has certain core or essential motivations and actions. As noted earlier, Elizabeth Telfer provides one such account and examining her position below will help illustrate the problems associated with attempting to set out the necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship. While these arguments hardly amount to a proof, they do suggest a certain skepticism in finding the necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship.

Suggesting that friendship is a family resemblance concept may help diminish our expectations of finding a definitive account of friendship, but that is not the same as saying that no account whatsoever can be given. After all, friendship is a something and not an anything or a nothing. To have a friendship is to have a kind of relationship that is distinguishable from other sorts of relationships (although it frequently overlaps with a variety of other relationships and roles). In order to map out those distinctions, the following sections turn to Michael Oakshott’s conception of practice and apply it to friendship. What is gained by employing the notion of practice is a clearer sense of the nature of the variation of understandings of friendship as well as the ways in which friendship differs from merely friendly relationships and relationships of good will.

Oakshott and Practices

Characterising friendship as a social practice is not new although little philosophical attention has been devoted to what that might actually entail.³ Here, the idea of a practice is meant to refer to a set of shared rules or norms to which participants must subscribe if they are to partake of the activity in question. In his account of practice, Oakshott writes,

A practice may be identified as a set of considerations, manners, uses, observances, customs, standards, canon’s maxims, principles, rules, and offices specifying useful procedures or denoting obligations or duties which relate to human actions and utterances. It is a prudential or a moral adverbial

qualification of choices and performances, more or less complicated, in which conduct is understood in terms of a procedure (Oakeshott 1975, p.55).

Moreover, he writes, practices 'may range from mere protocol to what may be called a 'way of life' They may acquire the firmness of an 'institution', or they may remain relatively plastic' (Oakeshott 1975, p.56). Practices that come to constitute institutions can take a formal character and be embodied in requirements that license sanctions or punishment if they are violated. In these cases, many of the rules and procedures that define the practice are formalised, ratified and sometimes enforced by an identifiable authority. These practices may establish discrete roles or distinctive personae that one assumes at a particular time (e.g., a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor).

In contrast, the practice of friendship is much more plastic (to use Oakeshott's term). It is not institutionalised in the sense that there do not exist formalised ways of becoming or being a friend (Allan 1989, p.4; Jeske 2008, p.129), at least in the contemporary West. Like the practices of parenting or entertaining guests, it admits a variety of approaches that are largely free of a recognized authority. Nevertheless, it is necessary to subscribe to the conventions of friendship in order to be friends. To not abide by these conventions - either through choice, misunderstanding, or lack of competence - can mean not merely failing to participate in the practice, but suffering from informal sanctions that, in the case of friendship, can have unfortunate and sometimes heart-breaking consequences.

It will also become important to note Oakeshott's claim that a practice entails rules that qualify or condition human actions and that those qualifications are adverbial in character. Practices do not specify performances. On Oakeshott's use of the term, a practice is defined less by what is pursued and more by how something is pursued. As a set of adverbial conditions, a practice does not tell us specifically what to do, but rather how to do it. Hence, central elements of practices may entail acting, 'punctually, considerately, civilly, scientifically, legally, candidly, judicially, poetically, morally, etc.' (Oakeshott 1975, pp.56). For example, in the practice of etiquette we are instructed how to eat, not what to eat, not what to say, but how to say it. Subscribing to a practice of etiquette does not preclude any particular kind of meal, merely how it will be eaten. Similarly, it does not prevent or demand that we say anything in particular, but rather how we say what it is that we are going to say. How we are to understand the adverbial character of the practice of friendship will be discussed below. As we shall see, it may be possible to distinguish different practices of friendship based on differences in the adverbial conditions that are expected in a relationship.

Oakeshott's discussion draws our attention to two features of practices (mentioned earlier) that will prove useful in this account of friendship. First, the practices of friendship condition the *actions* of agents, and second, they condition their *motives*. A focus on action presupposes a certain voluntary character to friendship in the sense that we must make choices as to how to be with our friends. The norms and expectations of friendship are not self-executing in the sense that friends must interpret and apply them to specific people and circumstances. Friends must make choices. To do otherwise is to act thoughtlessly and to act thoughtlessly with our friends is to violate a common norm of friendship. In this regard, Oakeshott notes that a practice entails a language of self-disclosure. We tell the world something about us not merely by having certain desires and interests, but by the way in which we pursue those desires and interests. As we shall see, friendships can be understood as requiring particular languages of self-

disclosure that set them apart from other sorts of relationships. In other words, we can distinguish practices of friendship from other practices (psychiatry, parenting, policing, and so forth), not so much by what is specifically done with or for friends, but how friends go about doing the things they do.

The idea that the practices of friendship condition the actions of friends also appears to be in accord in Graham Allan's view that 'friendship is not just a voluntary or freely chosen relationship. It is one which is patterned and structured in a variety of ways by factors which can be recognised, at least to some degree, as genuinely social and lying outside the individual's immediate control' (Allan 1989, p.152). While the rules of the practices of friendship may be outside the individual's immediate control, they are not totally beyond control. Practices of friendship vary within cultures, over time and between cultures. As we shall see, these variations further support the view of friendship as a family resemblance concept.

The voluntary character of friendship is embedded in the notion that friendship conditions how we are friends. Some go further and argue that the voluntary character of friendship also extends to the question of whether to initiate a friendship. In support of this position, it is argued that friendship is frequently distinguished from non-voluntary relationships of blood, in which one has little or no choice in one's parents, siblings, or cousins. The expression 'choosing a friend' or 'making a friend' appears to point to a rather robust voluntary element in creation of a particular friendship.

On the other hand, the voluntary view is sometimes contested by those who argue that we also 'discover friends' or find ourselves in a friendship. Anthropological and historical evidence suggests that not all peoples understand friendship as a simple matter of choice (Friedman 1993, pp.227-228; Bell and Coleman 1999, p.3). Even in the West, the practices of friendship may be a bit more nuanced than is frequently portrayed. While we may choose our friends, most friends come from the same socio-economic background (Allan 1989, p.23). Furthermore, the practices of friendship may not only tell us how to be friends, but with whom we should and should not be friends. Finally, to the extent that the motivations and sentiments of friendship (discussed below) are themselves unchosen, then the decision whether to be friends would also appear to be involuntary through and through.

In this dispute over whether the choice of friends is really a choice, one could argue that the involuntary elements that are part of a practice of friendship can never fully push out the voluntary elements associated with initiating and sustaining a friendship. Certain sentiments of friendship may spontaneously well-up inside us. Certain social sanctions may exist for failing to be friends with someone from a certain tribe or class. Social status may define the opportunity set for friendship. Nevertheless, even when we 'find ourselves' in a friendship because of an involuntary affection or social position we must still choose to act upon that affection as well as sustain and maintain the relationship. We may choose not to recognise the appropriate motivations in others, or resist acting on our own motives and never initiate the relationship, or we may refuse to live up to the appropriate adverbial conditions for how we should be friends and destroy the relationship. Clearly, our choices are influenced by context, although it is unlikely in the extreme that they are fully determined by context. After all, no one is attracted to everyone with the same socio-economic status. In contrast, one remains a sibling, even if one loses all (or

refuses to have any) contact with a brother or sister. Not so with friendship. At least in the contemporary West, friends can always ask whether they are or should remain friends.

A second dimension of the rules of a practice is that they condition the *motivations* of participants. Oakeshott calls a focus on motivations, self-enactment (as opposed to self-disclosure). From his perspective, the motive of an action ‘is the action itself considered in terms of the sentiment or sentiments in which it is chosen and performed. An agent may, for example, choose to perform an action in a sentiment of greed, fear, compassion, resentment, benevolence, jealousy, love, hatred, kindheartedness, pity, envy etc.’ (Oakeshott 1975, p.71-72). Because self-enactment refers to the choices of sentiments and because friendships need not rest on choices of this sort, I will simply refer to the *motivational requirements* that constitute friendship. Moreover, these motivational features can include not only sentiments but also duties, commitments, and self-interest. In sum, friendship can be understood as a set of practices in which there are certain rules that govern how friends interact as well as why they are motivated to be and remain friends.

Objections to Viewing a Practice-based Understanding of Friendship

Before proceeding, I will consider three objections to viewing friendship as a set of practices. The first is that our relationships to our friends are so idiosyncratic that whatever expectations and norms that compose a friendship can hardly be portrayed as having the rule-governed quality of a practice. A second objection is that if there are rules and expectations associated with a friendship, they are constructed by the friends themselves. If this is the case, then friendship cannot be understood as a *social* practice. A third objection is that friendships require that we act for the sake of the friend and not because of a set of rules or out of a role that constitutes a practice. From this perspective, viewing friendship as a family of practices distorts its motivational requirement.

The spirit of the first objection makes an appearance in Montaigne’s essay that honored his friend Etienne La Boétie. Here Montaigne asserts that the highest form of friendship is a joining of souls (Montaigne 1991, p. 192). ‘Our friendship,’ he noted, ‘has no other model than itself, and can be compared only with itself’ (1991, p.193). It is a friendship ‘so entire and so perfect that certainly you will hardly read of the like, and among men of today you see no trace of it in practice. So many coincidences are needed to build up such a friendship that it is a lot if fortune can do it once in three centuries’ (1991, p.188). It is a conception of friendship that not only turns on the individuality of the participants, but also sees the relationship itself as distinctive and close to being inimitable. It is a vision of friendship whose virtues are to be found in the very fact that it departs from ‘common usage’ (1991, p.197).

It is certainly true that something that happens only once every three hundred years can hardly be described as a social practice. However, it is also clear that Montaigne did not understand this model of friendship as encompassing what he sees as common friendships. Consequently, the idiosyncratic character of Montaigne’s ideal conception may not be as much of an objection to seeing friendship as a practice as an exception to a more general account. An alternative possibility is that it may be useful to consider a distinction between an ideal and a set of conventions and considerations that establish an ideal. The fact that there exists an ideal friendship (however rare) does not preclude that ideal from being part of a larger social practice.

From this perspective, Montaigne does carve out a vision of friendship that differentiates it from other social practices that he associated with the natural, the social, the hospitable, and the erotic (Montaigne 1991, p.188). In so doing, he is arguing that whatever friendship happens to be, it is not to be confused with relationships possessing these characteristics. More positively, he sees friendship as a relationship in which there is no ulterior end or purpose, but only a mutually recognised love that dissolves all competing obligations. In other words, his ideal friendship contains mutually recognised motivations (their mutual love) and adverbial forms of self-disclosure (lovingly, trustingly, willingly, conjointly) that do point to a nascent practice.

A version of the second objection could be drawn out of the claim that friendships are minimally structured interpersonal relationships. For example, Laurence Thomas writes that for friendship, ‘aside from the rules of morality, the nature of that interaction is not defined by this or that set of social rules’ (Thomas 1987, p.219). The sociologist Ray Pahl also notes that ‘There is an emerging modern ideal of friendship. This is not based on rules, regulations or any part of the institutionalised order. Individuals, out of their own volition, work out how they should behave with their friends’ (Pahl 2000, p.61). As a final example, the anthropologist, Robert Paine argues that what is deemed permissible or desirable in a friendship may be rule-governed, but ‘those rules appear not to be imposed from the outside, and, furthermore, they may be largely hidden from the view to all outside the relationship’ (Paine 1999, p.41). Whether these sorts of claims could serve as objections to the notion of friendship as a practice depends, in part, on how antinomian or private the relationship of friendship turns out to be. For example, on the one hand Pahl notes that the emerging modern ideal of friendship is not based on rules. On the other hand, he also outlines certain standards and norms that accompany that ideal; namely that the exchanges between friends are not scrupulously monitored, the attachments are free from legal or administrative regulation, the feelings are not ones of obligation and the origins and maintenance of the relationship is through conscious choice (Pahl 2000, p.62). Without a doubt, these understandings are meant to admit a high degree of variability and individuality within the relationship. Nevertheless, characterisations of the sort offered by Pahl do point to things that look like conventions, if not rules that identify a practice.

Still, there is something to the claim that the expectations and considerations that govern our relationships with our friends are privately negotiated and established (as suggested by Paine). For example, in the case of one’s closest friends, one friend cannot replace another. This attribute of friendship appears to point to the individuality of the friends as well as the possible uniqueness of each relationship. In response, one could argue that friends must understand themselves as being in a particular sort of relationship that is not just any kind of relationship. They share some kind of understanding that theirs is a friendship and not, say, a mere relationship of employer to employee, or brother to sister, or lord to vassal. There is some set of social customs or mores that allow such differentiation.

In addition, the idiosyncratic character of a particular friendship is not precluded by the idea of a practice. The rules, norms and conventions of friendship must be learned and hence presume a certain level of agency to acquire and apply those rules. Moreover, because they are learned, they can be learned well or poorly and practised clumsily or adroitly. For some, making friends will come almost naturally. For others, it will happen in fits and starts. Because of choice or chance many will have no more than a taste of friendship. A few adepts will be so

skillful as to be able to manipulate the conventions of friendship in order to establish the pretence of friendship. Out of these performances have come such assessments as true friends and false friends, close friends and fair weather friends. Some of our friends are simply better at being friends. Just as not everyone who learns to play the clarinet can play like Artie Shaw, the learned character of the practice of friendship means that it will inevitably be practised with a great deal of variability.

The variable character of our friendships is built into the idea of a practice in another, perhaps even more important, way. As noted earlier, the rules of friendship, like all social rules, are not self-executing. They must be understood and applied to particular persons in particular circumstances. The rules of friendship take one by the elbow and not by the throat so we must choose how we go about being friends with one another. As suggested above, while we do not choose the norms of friendship nor even perhaps choose our friends, we must choose how we go about being friends. In this way, the character of friendship must admit the idiosyncratic and the variable. The practice of friendship does not mean that all friends will respond to one another in the same way.

A third objection to seeing friendship as a social practice may be found in the claim that the reasons for friendship are very much focused on the friends themselves and not on external criteria such as social rules. For example, Lawrence Blum claims that ‘the conception of friendship as a practice, on the model of a game or institution involving rules, defined roles, positions, and responsibilities, etc. . . . applies very poorly to large areas of our personal moral lives and experience’ (Blum 1980, p.60). Blum filled out this objection in a later essay in considering friendship as more like a vocation than like a role. He wrote, ‘Thus if I appeal to the norms of friendship as a way of ensuring that I am able to regard myself as a good friend, I am not really acting for my friend’s sake. It can even be argued that appealing to the norms of friendship out of a genuine desire to *be* a good friend is too distant from a concern for the specific friend himself’ (Blum 1990, p.186). Within a practice, it could be argued that one is provided with a given set of reasons for doing something with or for one’s friend, whereas in a true friendship the only motivation that should count is acting for the sake of the friend. From this perspective, if Alan defends the name and reputation of his friend Denny not for Denny’s sake but because the rules of friendship tell him to do so, then he is not really being a good friend.

Blum’s argument points to a rather complicated feature of friendship involving the role of certain motivations in friendship. It also points to the question of the connection between the norms of friendship and friendship itself. On the one hand, the general thrust of Blum’s position is quite correct: there is something about certain motivations that appear to be incompatible with friendship. Envy, jealousy, and disdain are thought to be inconsistent with initiating or maintaining a friendship. In the contemporary West, self-interest or utility are rarely taken to be sufficient motivations for friendship. On the other hand, Blum’s assertions that ‘acting for the sake of one’s friend’ is a necessary condition for all understandings of friendship and that this condition must preclude all other motivations are less compelling. The presence of self-interest or personal advantage does not necessarily corrupt or disable friendship as long as there is also the mutual recognition of an appropriate motive (such as affection or desire). We may not see the friendships of egoists as the best sort of friendship insofar as they are based on pleasure or desire, but they may be friendships none-the-less.

At this point, I want to consider more thoroughly Blum's claim that something has gone awry in a friendship if Alan is defending Denny because the rules tell him to do so. Obviously, how one responds to this claim depends on one's view of rules and rule following. To simplify, if one subscribes to a mechanical view of rules in which they serve as a kind of algorithm, then Blum's observation makes sense. From this perspective, the rules of friendship may take the form of admonitions or imperatives such as 'defend your friend from any and all attacks,' 'evenly split the bill whenever you go out for a meal together,' or 'keep no secrets from one another.' These sorts of imperatives suggest that Alan should look to the rule and not to his friend. They substitute rule-mongering for judgment. If this is part of Blum's objection, then an adverbial conception of rules may help address it. Under an adverbial conception of rules, the rules of a practice of friendship condition, but do not determine, how the friends respond to and on behalf of one another. If Alan wants to defend Denny, then the adverbial rules of friendship (e.g., act loyally, considerately, openly, etc.) will guide Denny in a way that must be sensitive to a context that includes Alan, Denny, their circumstances and the sort of friendship they possess. In short, an adverbial conception of rules requires judgment. It is open to the possibility that sometimes the defence of a friend may be unwanted, costly, embarrassing, or unjustified. Sometimes the full payment of a bill is the expression of generosity, unequal ability to pay, or of who ordered what. Sometimes a secret is kept in light of its insignificance, in light of its significance or simply to protect the friend. If the actions of friends are guided by adverbial rules, then the rules cannot be the only things that matter, but neither can the friends simply look to each other (as perhaps Blum intimates). Alan must look to his friend, to himself and to their circumstances in order to determine which rules apply and then how to apply them.

The Essential Motivations of Friendship?

In responding to these objections to seeing friendship as a set of practices, I have suggested that motivations and actions play an important role in our practices of friendship and that as learned activities we unavoidably make choices over how to maintain our friendships and possibly whether to initiate them. Up to this point, however, the discussion has been little more than skeletal. The presumption that friendships are conditioned by rules governing the motives and actions of friends does not distinguish friendship from very many other practices. On the other hand, assuming that friendship is a family resemblance concept, we should not expect to be able to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for friendship as such. At best, I hope to offer a plausible array of motivations and range of adverbial conditions that constitute the practice of friendship. Some of these motivations and conditions of action may rise to the level of being necessities, but they are necessities that are subject to historical change and cultural variation. One may not be able to demand much more precision given the character of the subject matter.

Nevertheless, the philosophical call to provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for friendship has not gone unanswered. For if it was possible to set out the necessary and sufficient conditions of friendship, then we would not only have a better sense of what friendship is, we could also dismiss the idea that friendship is a family resemblance concept. In order to explore these matters it will be useful to consider a particularly concise contemporary philosophical discussion that appears to set out the essential motivational and behavioural elements of friendship, such as provided by Elizabeth Telfer. This section, after briefly

summarising her position, considers her discussion of the motivations of friendship and how a plausible case can be made for widening the scope of motivations. The next section turns to how to make sense of the action conditions of friendships.

In her account of friendship, Telfer argues that friends must share activities. More specifically, she argues that friends need to provide reciprocal services (you shovel my driveway and I take in your mail when you are on vacation), mutual contact (we talk, go to the movies or simply spend time together) and have joint pursuits (we belong to the same book group, synagogue, community organisation). These shared activities, she believes, while necessary conditions are not sufficient. In addition to doing certain things, we must also perform them out of certain desires. For Telfer, these desires are the '*passions* of friendship' (Telfer 1991, p.251). In other words, 'friends must have affection for, or be fond of, each other' (1991, p. 251). Telfer goes on to define affection 'as a desire for another's welfare and happiness *as a particular individual*. This desire is thus to be distinguished both from sense of duty and from benevolence' (1991, p.251). In addition, she argues that in a friendship, this affection is not connected to character (unlike what Aristotle saw as necessary in the most complete form of friendship). The characteristics of an individual may stimulate affection, but affection, at bottom, is irrational. Consequently, friendships are able to survive changes in character. It is difficult, she argues, to put our finger on why we like someone. It is not simply a matter of adding up a set of characteristics. Rather, it is something about the whole package that draws us to them (1991, p.253). In addition to having affection for the person, Telfer argues that friendship is defined by a desire to be with our friends, to be in their company and not just 'a desire for company as such' (1991, p.252). Finally, Telfer argues that friends must not only have the passions of friendship, they must also choose to act on those passions (1991, p.256). But the choice must be mutual. A friendship requires a kind of meeting of the minds. Hence, one cannot 'choose to be a friend of just anyone' (Telfer 1991, p.256). As she notes, what is also necessary is that 'the existence of the passions of friendship in both parties, and the practice on both sides of acting on them, once established be *acknowledged* by the parties' (1991, p.257). Or, in terms that will be used here, friendship requires the *mutual recognition* of the motivations of friendship.

In a broad way, Telfer's focus on shared activities and the passions of friendship fit nicely into the formal structure of practices that includes both motivations and actions. The question now becomes whether *these* passions and *these* kinds of activities are necessary for friendship. Undoubtedly, in some friendships, the elements discussed by Telfer are indeed essential. In such cases, if these conditions are absent then the particular friendship would dissolve. Whether they are necessary for all friendships is not as clear. For example, Telfer claims that friends must have affection for one another, engage in reciprocal services and joint pursuits. Of these conditions, the essential motivating role of affection seems undeniable (the other two conditions will be discussed below). What would a friendship mean if there was no affection? Telfer admits that 'To some extent, of course, I am stipulating, rather than reporting, that the presence of the inclinations is a necessary part of friendship' (1991, p.256). In terms of how other thinkers have conceived of friendship, Telfer's stipulation would not qualify as an accurate report. For example, it is not at all clear that affection is a necessary condition for all of Aristotle's conceptions of friendship (Grunebaum 2003, p.38). In his account of utility friendships between old people, he notes that they may even 'find each other pleasant' (*NE*

1156a25-1156a30). Nor is it clear that affection is essential to Kant's conception (Kant 1991, p.216), or perhaps even C. S. Lewis's conception of friendship (Lewis 1960, pp.70-72).

If affection does not appear to be necessary to these other conceptions of friendship, then what else motivates individuals to become friends? An alternative motivation that is frequently mentioned is that of desire. But is not desire the same thing as affection? While the two ideas are frequently used interchangeably, it is possible to distinguish a form of desire that is not the same as affection in a way that is useful for understanding different kinds of friendship. Very generally, affection tends to be directed to the particularity of the object of affection. Kim-Chong Chong notes that,

In the case of material objects, the object is valued in such a way as to express its uniqueness and irreplaceability. In the case of persons, one does not have an affection for another simply because he possesses certain qualities - someone may possess the most appalling qualities, and yet one may still have an affection for him. Similar qualities in another might, on the other hand, arouse dislike. Granted that the reason for this could be described, by pointing to more detailed differences, but this does not obviate the fact that not all that goes by the name of 'affection' can be so described (Chong 1984, p.354).

In contrast, desire can be focused, not on the particularity of the object of desire, but on the qualities of the object that fit it into a given class. On this view of desire, what matters are those qualities and if another object or person possesses those attributes then they can replace the original object or person.

Given such a distinction between affection and desire, it is easy to see how affection for another can serve as a motive for friendship. Indeed, for Telfer and, at least initially, for Chong, there is a sense in which the particularity associated with affection is the *sine qua non* of friendship. After all, one friend cannot be replaced by another. What is lost when a friend is lost is something that is gone for good. For Chong, 'unless there is or comes to be a care and concern for the other person in himself, there can be no close personal relationship to speak of' (1984, p.355). It would seem, then, that affection is necessary for the kind of close personal relationship that defines friendship.

Despite these claims, however, Chong does not go so far as to claim that relationships that are desire-based cannot be friendships. For she also notes that, 'There are friendships which are not friendships in the full sense of the word, as we have described it. One may have a friend whose company one enjoys, but for whom one cares little or not at all, and some friends are friends whose companionship it would be advantageous and pleasurable for one to have. An egoist is not precluded from friendships of these sorts' (1984, p.355). What Chong is saying of the ethical egoist can be said of those for whom friendship is based on desire. What is being presumed in this discussion is that while these friendships may not encompass the 'full sense of the word' they could still be understood as friendships. But why do they not qualify as full friendships? For Chong, the claim may be intuitive or merely stipulative, namely that care, affection and commitment are essential features of friendship and that there is something lesser about 'mere' companionship. She may very well be correct that there is something inferior about

friendships motivated by desire as opposed to affection, but that does not preclude them from being friendships of some sort.

To further clarify, it might be helpful to put this in an Aristotelian tripartite framework of friendship. Of friendships of pleasure, utility and virtue, friendships of pleasure could be understood as friendships that are motivated by desire. These are friendships in which the parties see one another not as individuals in their particularity, but as persons of a certain sort - for example, they are good skiers, they enjoy partying, they are entertaining to be around, or they can tell a good story. Friendships of this sort are less a function of attending to the unique characteristics of the individual and more focused on the qualities that they happen to possess. In these kinds of friendships, the relationship is subject to the vicissitudes of those qualities. When they change, then the motivations for maintaining the friendship may disappear. Going fishing with George can be the basis for a friendship with Bill, but if Bill no longer enjoys fishing then the friendship may fade. There is something, as Aristotle notes, short-lived or unstable about friendships of pleasure. For our concerns here, whatever one may think of these friendships, they are still friendships, despite the fact that they are not motivated by affection. Desire, when distinguished from affection, can also serve an appropriate motivation for a friendship.

Even if one is unconvinced by a distinction between affection and desire, there are other motivations for friendship. A third possible motive for friendship is respect. In what Marilyn Friedman calls particularised respect, 'someone is admired specifically for her worthwhile qualities, her excellences. . . . It may involve affection or fond feelings, but it need not' (Friedman 1993, p.194). In this sort of friendship, the friends are drawn to one another because they are excellent musicians or tennis players, bridge players or just because they are smart. Perhaps through one's association with the other individual one is challenged and made a better tennis player. This association may be enjoyable, but it may also be difficult and demanding. It does not require the kind of vulnerability in which one's secrets are brought to light, but rather a vulnerability in which one's weaknesses are potentially revealed. Perhaps a version of this motivation is implied by an older conception of being drawn to the nobility or virtuosity of another. In this regard, it could be expressed in the kind of friendship between Aristotle's great-souled individuals. Obviously, respect can be understood in a variety of ways. In this case, it is not the sort of generalised respect owed to all human-kind, but a respect for excellence.

A fourth possible motivation for friendship that could be seen as a shade different from respect is presented in C. S. Lewis's work. In his essay on friendship, Lewis places great weight on friends acting in a particular way and sharing activities. Nevertheless, he is also quite clear that friendship is a love. In fact, it is a love that requires a fairly high degree of self-cultivation and restraint. It is not a love that is subject to jealousy (Lewis 1960, p.67), and it is 'is utterly free from Affection's need to be needed' (1960, p.69) and tends to eschew gratitude (1960, p.70). Rather, the love that motivates friendship is admiration, or what he calls 'appreciative love' (1960, p.71). He writes, 'In a perfect Friendship, this Appreciative love is, I think, often so great and so firmly based that each member of the circle feels, in his secret heart, humbled before all the rest' (1960, pp.71-72). While Lewis is adamant that friendship must be about something, in the sense that the friends share some truth or purpose, the motivation of appreciative love is distinct from affection, eros, and gratitude. To the degree that it is driven by a sense of humility (perhaps the Christian virtue of humility) it is also distinguishable from the notion of respect

discussed above. It may very well be a conception of friendship that is unique to early to mid-twentieth century Oxford Dons, but it is still a conception of friendship.

A fifth motivation for friendship that may be distinguishable from these other motives is what Blum calls ‘deep caring and identification with the good of the other’ (1980, p.70). In many cases, we care for someone because of other feelings that we possess. We care for a friend because we love her or have affection for her. But it may be possible to conceive of care as a free-standing feeling which can be mutually felt and recognised by friends. In Blum’s formulation, ‘caring means that if trouble arises between . . . [the friends], they will try to work it through’ (1980, p.70). On this account, it is because the friends care so deeply for one another that they experience comfort and joy. Moreover, this sense of caring for the other is moderated by one’s sense of separateness from and knowledge of the friend (Blum 1980, p.70). Caring for someone as a motive is distinguishable from simply liking or having affection for them.

There may be other motivations for friendship that have existed, do exist, or will exist that are different from affection, desire, respect, care, and appreciative love. Kant, for example, thought that need is presupposed in every friendship (1991, p.213). The need here is not mere material, but a need for confidence in the other. The larger point of this discussion is not simply to multiply the possible motivations, but to suggest that affection is not the only motivation for friendship. In fact, there may be no essential passion or passions of friendship. It may be more helpful to argue that in any given culture there is a repertoire of motivations (both reasons and sentiments - if one wishes to make that distinction) that are understood as necessary elements for interpersonal friendship. Within that repertoire, any single motivation, if it is mutually recognised, can meet the motivational requirements of the relationship. But these motivations can be present in various combinations and to various degrees. One may respect, have genuine affection for, and care for a friend. Alternatively, one may have a friendship in which one simply desires to be with him because he is fun. Moreover the motives for a friendship can change over time. What began as a friendship based on desire could become one based primarily on affection or appreciative love (or some combination of motivations).

An element that does appear necessary (although not sufficient) for interpersonal friendship involves Telfer’s claim that the motivations of a friendship must be mutually recognised by the friends themselves.⁴ Friendship is situated in a social context that sets out the repertoire of appropriate motivations. If individuals do not possess the appropriate motivations or fail to recognise them, then the friendship cannot get off the ground or, in the case of an existing friendship, it will have to be re-thought or abandoned. Part of the practice of friendship involves the process of conveying and recognising something from that repertoire of motivations in others. If that capacity to read the sentiments and feelings of others is absent or disabled, as in the case of certain psychopathologies, then the possibilities for friendship diminish and perhaps disappear. Consequently, friendship requires that we are not entirely opaque to one another.

On the other hand, the mere recognition of such sentiments is not sufficient. A mutual announcement by Sue and Kathy that they respected one another would not be sufficient for friendship. At an interpersonal level, such an announcement would be strange and be probably seen as an empty performance or gesture. As Telfer notes, friendship is not merely about the mutual recognition of appropriate motivations, it is also about doing the sorts of things that friends do. In her account of friendship, the doings involve reciprocal services, mutual contact,

and joint pursuits. While important to some understandings of friendship, however, these activities are not necessary for all friendships. It is true that friendship does require mutual contact, but that is a condition for the existence of any relationship and is not a particularly helpful thread. Is it the case that friends must engage in joint activities? In the ideal form of friendship for Kant, individuals open themselves up to one another. This kind of relationship is perfectly intelligible as a form of friendship, but it is not one that requires joint activity. Must friends engage in reciprocal services? Once again, it is not evident that Kant thought this was necessary, nor for that matter Montaigne. In addition, when friends are unequal, it may be very difficult for one friend to reciprocate, which may encourage the friends to avoid being useful to one another, that is, placing the unequal friend in the embarrassing situation of having to reciprocate when she does not have the means to do so.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to think of friendship without friends doing something for or with one another. Could one distinguish friendship from other relationships based on certain categories of activities? For example, what do we do with friends that we do not do with strangers, acquaintances, relatives, teachers, or analysts? Moreover, can we distinguish different types of friendship based on different types of activities? In the former case, perhaps friendships create an expectation that one will share one's secrets with one's friends, but not with a mere acquaintance. In the latter case, perhaps some friends are for doing fun things, some are for doing useful things and others challenge us to be the best sort of person that we can be.

Focusing on the sorts of things that are done and not done with friends is a plausible way to differentiate friendship from other sorts of relationships and to distinguish among different practices of friendship. While plausible, this approach is not particularly parsimonious. The problem, of course, is that we can do many different things with the same friends without necessarily changing the character or quality of a friendship. Miles may be friends with Jack because they were college roommates years ago and because they occasionally go golfing together now. Miles's decision to take Jack wine tasting to teach him about the virtues of pinot noir need not transform their friendship. Alternatively, the activities that may define a friendship can also be done with non-friends. I may share the deepest secrets of my life with my friend, but I may do the same with an analyst, a priest, or a prosecutor. We may seek to be friends with those that are useful to us, not but everyone who is useful is a friend. The virtue and zeal of St. Joan may be admirable, but being her friend may be unbearable. Basing friendships on activities points to something important, but differentiating practices in this way will either result in an unwieldy number of categories or be untrue to the flexible character of our friendships.

The Adverbial Conditions of Friendship and Self-Disclosure

As we saw in Oakeshott's discussion of practice, it is possible to differentiate practices not on the basis of what is specifically done, but on the basis of how actors should interact. The adverbial conventions of friendship establish a kind of protocol to which the friends subscribe when they are acting as friends and distinguish their friendship from how they go about interacting with those who are not friends. For example, how Tony interacts with his therapist may be quite different from how he interacts with his friend Pauly. With his therapist, his interactions are governed by norms of professionalism. He may approach her deferentially (she is trained),

expeditiously (she is being paid), and inattentively to her welfare (he has no other interaction with her). In contrast, when he tells Pauly about a secret in his life, he speaks comfortably, easily, and attentively to how the secret may affect his friend.

A set of adverbial conditions may not only distinguish friendship from other relationships, but also distinguish different types of friendships. On this account, a specific practice of friendship does not establish whether one goes to a movie or reveals one's secrets to another but how one does those things. For some friendships, interacting intimately, honestly, and authentically is prized while in other friendships interacting usefully, consistently and reliably is seen as the norm. I may go to a movie with an old friend from college or with a friend from work, but how I (and she) will interact in that experience may be quite different (assuming these are different kinds of friendships). In both cases, while we may share a cab, buy tickets, and talk about the plot, how we go to a movie can be performed differently. With the friend from work we may act reservedly, speak carefully, and eat popcorn moderately. In the case of an old chum, our actions and words may flow more freely, wholeheartedly, and unconditionally. Alternatively, consider how we tell a friend about a personal trauma may differ depending on whether the friend is someone from a reading group or someone we have known for years.

It is also possible that different practices of friendship are dependent on gender, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. For example, perhaps the expectation of how talkative friends will be is a function of gender. Friedman notes that while friends generally talk to one another, this is not always the case. The friends, she writes, 'might be men, and might have been raised to avoid emotional expressiveness and intimate self-disclosure even in close personal relationships. Such patterns of non-communicativeness in close relationships seem not to be part of the cultural conception or idealisation of friendship but to derive instead from other contingently related social conditions, such as the practices of masculinity' (Friedman 1993, p.226). In contrast, I am suggesting it may be possible to describe the norms of masculinity as having been incorporated into the cultural practices of friendship. The question of the number of different practices of friendship and whether those differences are correlated with such things as gender is an empirical question.⁵

The adverbial conditions associated with friendship are not, of course, always enabling. Sometimes they disable and preclude forms of friendship. Class distinctions, for example, may limit the interactions between individuals. Gendered distinctions may be governed by practices that are incompatible with the expectations for friendship or they may limit the ways in which individuals can be friends. Alternatively, how one interacts within a friendship may be conditioned by sectarian divisions. Crossing the borders may entail grave risks for the friends. Derrida, for example, notes that the dominant ethico-politico-philosophical discourse on friendship excludes friendships between women and between men and women. 'This double exclusion,' he writes, 'of the feminine in the philosophical paradigm of friendship would thus confer on it the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality' (1988, p.642). On the other hand, if this is the theoretical world, the practice may be different. For example, Friedman writes that 'Friendship among women has been the cement not only of the various historical waves of the feminist movement but also of numerous communities of women throughout history who defied the local conventions for their gender and lived lives of creative disorder' (2003, p.248-249).

The idea, then, is that there are conventions for how we proceed with our friends that are different from how we proceed with acquaintances, strangers, teachers, police officers, and doctors that allow us to distinguish different practices of friendship. Our friends come to know us in terms of how we are friends; that is, how we go about living up to the adverbial conditions that define friendship (or a particular sort of friendship). It is, then, not inappropriate to use Oakeshott's description of this sort of activity as a form of self-disclosure. As used here, self-disclosure does not necessitate the opening of one's heart to another, the confession of one's inner-most secrets, the revelation of one's authentic self, or the finding of an individual who replicates oneself (although friendship could entail any of those actions). Rather, self-disclosure is much more prosaic. It is to be found in the choices made while acknowledging and subscribing to a set of adverbial rules that hang together in a manner that composes a social practice. Self-disclosure is achieved through the actions that we perform when living up to the conventions of friendship. It is judged in terms of quality of those performances and is frequently marked by such terms as whether one has been a good, bad or merely fair-weather friend.

A friendship, then, is a social practice in which the friends mutually recognised the appropriate motivations in one another and act in a manner that is consonant with expectations of how friends should act. Both action and motive are necessary, but the connection between the two is somewhat complicated. From one perspective, the connection could be seen as being very tight. If the motive is affection, then the friends should act affectionately. Similarly if the motive is respect, then they will interact respectfully and so on. Through our actions we disclose our motives, but in friendships it is rarely the case that we act in a manner solely to disclose our motives. We have desires to do things for and with our friends as well as speak with and to them. It is those ordinary actions that are structured by the adverbial conditions that define a particular practice of friendship. Of course, those conditions will structure how we seek to convey our motives, but more often than not they structure the particular desires and pursuits that we wish to fulfill when interacting with a friend. The actions of friends can certainly be directed towards seeking to convey the appropriate motivations when such assurance or reassurance is needed. In an on-going friendship, however, the motivations tend to be assumed and the focus of the friendship will turn to the particular interactions and fulfillment of desires that the friends happen to possess.

Friendship, then, is a rather complicated business - historically contingent, dependent on a range of mutually recognised motivations, and realised in a variety of adverbial forms of self-disclosure, all of which can define distinctive practices of friendship. These practices are not united by any one sentiment or reason, by any given substantive actions, or by certain essential adverbial conditions. Rather, the practices of friendship merely bear a family resemblance to one another. They share similarities that crop up and disappear. They do share the feature of being practices, but that feature does not distinguish them from other sorts of relationships. Seeing friendship as a family of social practices may help alleviate the temptation to close down or disparage different ways in which we can be and have been friends as well as open us to the meaningful use of friendship in other cultures and times. What distinguishes friendship from other practices is the repertoire of what are taken to be the appropriate motives and norms of self-disclosure that we recognise and enact as we more or less successfully make, lose, strengthen or weaken our friendships.

Notes

- 1 The attributes that appear common, such as friendship being a practice between agents who mutually recognise appropriate motivations and subscribe to recognised adverbial conditions do not differentiate friendship from many other relationships (e.g., relationships of romantic love). The content of the motives and the adverbial conditions associated with the actions of friends do differentiate friendships from other relationships, but no motive or set of actions is essential to friendship. In other words, the view of friendship as a family of practices does not require depriving friendship of all necessary conditions.
- 2 For a very different account of friendship, see Graham M. Smith (2011). Smith sees friendship as a concept that covers a broad set of bonds between persons including those associated with nationality, religious belief, ethnicity and allegiance to location (2011, p. 15). The account given here is meant to track much closer to common usage and hence yields a very different form of analysis.
- 3 The literature on friendship is replete in references to friendship as a practice. In many cases, however, when the word ‘practice’ is associated with friendship it is meant as a contrast to the ‘theory’ of friendship. The application of the word practice as it used here to friendship makes a brief appearance in Lynch (2005, p. 100), Allan (1989, p. 66), and King (2007, p. 142).
- 4 The necessity of mutually recognising the appropriate motivations may be largely dependent on a distinction that we make between mere friends (or friendly actions) and friendships. As long as we believe that it is important to differentiate friendship from being friendly (or befriending), then the mutual identification of appropriate motives or sentiments will be important, if not necessary for friendship.
- 5 For an alternative perspective that sees gendered distinctions as connected to other variables see Ray Pahl (2000, p. 126).

Note on contributor

P. E. Digeser is a Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Santa Barbara. She teaches political philosophy and has written on questions of power, identity, forgiveness, and international ethics. She is currently working on a book manuscript tentatively titled *Practices and Ideals of Friendship: Individuals, Citizens, Institutions and States*.

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