Aristotle's Criticism and Transcendence of Plato's Friendship Theory

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Abstract: *Friendship (φιλία) is an important part of the spirit of ancient Greek society and an important concept in ancient Greek ethics. In Plato, friendship was born from eros (ἔρως). Eros itself has a threefold meaning, as physical sexuality, as friendship with others, and as the love of man and God in the pursuit of wisdom. Friendship is thus linked to the highest purpose of the soul. Aristotle inherited and developed Plato's theory. According to Aristotle, friendship was not born from eros, but on the contrary, eros is a special form of friendship. Friendship is not an impulse of desire, but part of the good life of practicing reason.*

Keywords: Friendship, Eros, Wise, Aristotle, Plato.

1. Introduction

The word friendship (φιλία) had a completely different meaning in ancient Greece than it does today. In ancient Greek, the original meaning of φιλία referred to the active, willed, and habitual practice of a person with some living thing or activity as the object. Over the course of history, the term φιλία has come to refer specifically to the love of another person, rather than to the love of an object or activity. But at this time, the word φιλία also has a very broad meaning, which includes love for relatives, love for friends, and pure sexual love. The emergence and development of friendship was inextricably linked to changes in the social structure and political system of ancient Greece, as well as to the development of the spirit of ancient Greek society. Plato saw friendship as born out of eros, both as a quest for good relationships and for ultimate wisdom. Friendship fills the soul's lack. Aristotle inherited and criticized Plato's theory of friendship, which, in his view, was not born out of desire, but is the nature of man's quest for wisdom, and is an important part of the quest for the prosperity of the soul.

2. The Basis of Friendship: Ancient Greek Social Structure and Social Thought

2.1 The Changes of Social Structure in Ancient Greece

Family played an important role in ancient Greek society. The family in ancient Greece was not only the living place of individuals, but also the religious place of family members. The most important part of the family in ancient Greece was the fire in family which was a sacred thing. "They saw in the fire a beneficent god, who maintained the life of man; a rich god, who nourished him with gifts; a powerful god, who protected his house. " "The ancient Greek language has a very significant word to designate a family. It is ἐπίστιον, a word which signifies, literally, that which is near a hearth. A family was a group of persons whom religion permitted to invoke the same sacred fire, and to offer the funeral repast to the same ancestors. " For the ancient Greeks, the fire in family was undoubtedly a personal god, and the family was essentially a religious place to sacrifice fire in family, so the family acquired sacred attributes that other communities did not have.

With the development and expansion of the polis, more and more polites entered the polis, constituting the majority of the polites of the polis. In order to participate in the political life of the polis, the emerging polites class urgently needed to obtain political identity, which led to the reform of Cleisthenesis. Cleisthenesis transformed demos (ὀδῆμος) and took it as the starting point of the political democratization of the polis. Demos was endowed with at least four functions by Cleisthenesis. Firstly, demos represented a certain region, which was the basic unit of administrative division. Secondly, demos was the basic unit of politics of polis and the basis of democratic politics. Thirdly, demos was a community composed of common people, which embodied the will of all polites in a certain region. Therefore, demos could also be regarded as the polites' assembly in this region. Fourthly, as the collection of polites' will, demos was the democratic political system itself. Thus, ancient Greece formed a social structure of "Demos- Trittyes- Phylai- Polis". Cleisthenesis' social reform made the polites of the polis get rid of the personal bondage to the family, and the personal political identity changed from blood relationship to geographical relationship, becoming demote (ὀδῆμοτε), whose identity was fixed and hereditary. The democratic system eliminated the identity difference among different polites and made it possible for the equal communication among the members of the polis. In addition, demos was also in charge of the religious affairs of a region, and a region had its own independent temples and sacrifices. As a result, the family completely lost its political and religious role, and the polis occupied all the social life and public space of its members, while the family completely retreated to the private space, becoming the domain of private affairs such as wealth management and fertility.

The process of social change in ancient Greece is essentially the process of the polis community replacing the family to occupy the public sphere. The family gradually retreated from the central role of society and finally retreated into the private sphere of life. And the significance of this process lies in the transformation of personal identity and the equalization and expansion of social interaction. The continuous enrichment of forms of social interaction gave social members more opportunities to participate in social interaction, so that in the time of Aristotle, man had become a "political animal", relying entirely on social activities to confirm his existence. In the process of social change, friendship gradually germinated

and occurred, and also promoted the reform of social structure to a certain extent. The equal social identity provided the necessary foundation for the establishment of the relationship of friendship, and the continuous connection and development of the relationship of friendship in the social interaction finally promoted the social community to further break the imprisonment of the original social relationship, so that the Greek society continued to advance towards democracy.

2.2 The Transformation of Ancient Greek Social Spirit

Homer's Epics has established a whole set of heroic ethics around honor, which is a kind of individualistic moral theory based on the hero's pursuit of honor. The virtue of the hero determines that the hero must be in the position of a hero and do the heroic thing, that is, be willing to participate in the fight and win, and make achievements in the war. Honor must be fought for through competition, and honor can only belong to the final winner, this is the justice of honor ethics. Therefore, the heroes in Homer's epics do not have friendship. The root of this problem is that the struggle embodied by heroes and friendship are relative to each other. The essence of the hero is the pursuit of honor, struggle and their own "most" display. Firstly, the hero does not take pleasure in any quality of his opponent; the hero takes pleasure only in his own victory. Secondly, the hero may associate with a person because he is beneficial to him, but such a material benefit is actually dispensable for the hero. What the hero pursues and needs most is honor, which cannot be given or deprived by others, and the benefit he needs is not given by people. Finally, the hero's pursuit of the "most" makes it impossible for him to love and expect good from each other because of their virtue. The hero's nature makes him must put himself in the highest position. A hero will not like a coward, and the hero does not need a coward to neutralize his blood; In the same way, the hero is the best embodiment of all virtues, although he may be slightly deficient in some aspects but on the whole is better than the average person. Thus, the hero is alone.

However, with the development of ancient Greek society, the heroic ethic with honor as the core described in Homer's Epics was eventually eliminated. This change occurred, perhaps inextricably linked to the collapse of the monarchy due to the turmoil of ancient Greek society. The division of the monarchy led to the sectorization of social functions, and the different functional departments were "fraternal" to each other because they were separated from the unified monarchy of individual despotism. Although the inequality and imperfection of division of power made fighting and competition still recognized by people, people paid more attention to the value of the overall unity and harmony of society.

Unlike honor, which has "fight" at its core, friendship has "love" at its core. In ancient Greek, the original word for love was "ἔρως" or sexual desire. But the ancient Greeks generally believed that true love should be separated from the level of sex, and seek higher ideal things, such as beauty and goodness, through spiritual love. Lust is often possessive and predatory, and hence accompanied by struggle and disorder. The love of the soul should be superior to lust as the love of the flesh. Friendship symbolizes the beauty and goodness of the relationship. The ancient Greeks endowed friendship with value orientation and moral orientation. Friendship is not only a kind of interpersonal relationship, but also symbolizes the pursuit of good, the maintenance of order and morality, and even the description of divinity. Friendship has become the most noble external good.

In short, the generation of friendship is a by-product of the reform of ancient Greek social structure and the generation of politics of polis. The ultimate goal of friendship is to make the whole polis united and reach the state of group prosperity. The rationality of friendship ultimately points to a kind of political rationality, which is the collective pursuit of the community. The emergence of friendship is accompanied by the process of Greek democratization, and the democratic spirits such as equality, order, freedom and unity are integrated into the core of friendship, which makes the morality of friendship born from love become the highest spokesperson of moral law in the external world of human beings.

3. Plato's Theory of Friendship

Plato's discussion of friendship focuses on Lysis, Symposium, and Phaedrus. The core issue discussed in Lysis is the cause of friendship, that is, the question of "why people love others". Plato's analysis of this problem is as follows: firstly, there is no friendship between the same people, especially between two bad person, because two bad person can only hurt each other by their nature; secondly, there is no friendship between two good person, because good person are perfectly self-sufficient in their own virtue, they have no need of anyone else, so there is no friendship between two good person; finally, there is no friendship between the good and the bad, not only in accordance with the empirical observation of everyday life, but also because the good person does not need friends in his own fullness. Plato believed that the cause of friendship is one's own inadequacy and the instinctive pursuit of the perfection of virtue. A person who is neither evil nor good can be friends with a good person, and because "for nothing, I am sure, can be friendly with evil". There is no love between a person who is neither evil nor good and a bad person. "Which is neither evil nor good is friendly with good on account of the presence of evil." Because a person who is neither evil nor good is not self-sufficient because of the presence of evil, he will love good person in order to eliminate the evil in himself and become a good person, just as the same sick person needs a doctor to cure his physical disease. Evil is the same disease that acts on our soul and makes it impossible for the human soul to be complete, so only those who have evil in them, and neither evil nor good, become friends with good person.

In Symposium, Plato argued that "all men always desire their own good" because the ἔρως are by nature the pursuit of beauty and goodness rather than beauty and goodness themselves. In Symposium, Plato proposed that the ἔρως should be regarded as the lover and not the beloved, that every lover seeks these because of his own lack of beauty and goodness, that this "lack" is the nature of ἔρως, and this is not an evil, because evil arises from the occasional, and the lack is a state of nature. Therefore, person who are neither evil nor good are not good and evil by nature, but person who lack good. Their nature is to lack but not to be occupied by evil, and it is naturally impossible to say that evil is the reason why

they love good person. The ἔρως is similar to the demi-god between God and human, whose divinity determines his love for beauty and goodness, while his humanity leads him to be in a state of perpetual lack of beauty and goodness and can never become a true God. Friendship therefore does not end with person who are neither evil nor good receiving goods from a good person, but it can be said that the process is continuous and endless.

In fact, here Plato has completely elevated the "good man" of perfect virtue to God. Perfection of virtue is an end which cannot be attained by the common man, and which can be brought infinitely nearer only by the attainment of a realm common to man and God through the aid of an infinite ἔρως, and friendship is the filling of the unbridgeable gap between God and human. In Symposium, we can clearly see Plato's efforts to weaken the erotic nature of ἔρως's sensibility. Ἔρως here are not only the desire and impulse for physical possession, but also break away from the vulgar category of sexual love and pursue beauty and goodness, becoming the only bridge between human and God.

Phaedrus, following Symposium, further interprets ἔρως as "the obsession of lust". In the first half of this passage, Plato stated that the ἔρως is a kind of obsession, a desire to indulge in the pleasure of beauty without rational and impartial opinion. This obsession is not out of good will, but out of an instinctive possession, the lover will prevent the beloved from obtaining the perfection of virtue and will always be in a state of easy possession. Therefore, Plato believed that the beloved should choose the loveless lover. But in the second half, Plato made a very different argument. Though the ἔρως is the obsession of lust, it is not evil; it is the ecstasy of human by nature, the ecstasy and thrill of the human soul at the sight of something beautiful. The human soul is like a carriage drawn by two horses, of which ἔρως is the bad horse. The human soul has seen the essence of beauty and goodness in the world of ideas with God, but because of the stubbornness of ἔρως, the soul is attracted to the beauty of the lower world and forgets the essence of beauty. When the soul is infatuated with ἔρως in the pursuit of beautiful things, another good horse, reason, will remind the soul of the idea of beauty, and eventually the soul and reason will tame ἔρως so that it changes from obsessive possession of the object of beauty to reverence for the idea of beauty itself, and then the soul of the lover follows the beloved with reverence and awe. Thus, the beloved gradually responds to the lover, and this response is φιλία.

To sum up, the word ἔρως has at least three different meanings for Plato: firstly, ἔρως is the most natural physical desire of man, the obsession and possession of the beautiful body; secondly, this kind of obsession comes from the soul's own lack of beauty and kindness, which leads the soul to pursue the idea of beauty; finally, the search for the idea of beauty and goodness is actually a form of friendship between human and God, which fills the lack of virtue when the soul falls to the lower world, and ultimately returns the soul to the immortal world of ideas. The threefold sense of ἔρως gives rise to three different kinds of love relationships: the first is the sexual love for the physical possession of another, which is low and primitive and does not deserve to be called φιλία, which is dominated by the lover; the second kind is φιλία,

which is produced by the response of the beloved when the object of beauty pursues the idea of beauty. The key of this φιλία lies in the consciousness of the lover towards the idea of beauty and goodness and the response of the beloved, so this relationship is determined by the beloved; the third is the φιλία between human and God, which is achieved by the second φιλία between man and man, and is the final form of the friendship between the good and the neither evil nor good. This φιλία is the love of wisdom, which is the highest form of friendship achieved by the lover.

By analyzing the different levels of ἔρως, friendship in Plato's case is almost divorced from sexual love, and is associated with the state of εὐδαιμονία, all of which paves the way for Aristotle's theory of friendship. However, Plato's transformation of friendship on the basis of Ideology also left a lot of difficulties, not only in the unexplainable difficulties on the level of common sense and morality, but also in pulling the final form of friendship to the height of "God", which made it difficult to sustain friendship in reality. Moreover, Plato's theory of friendship is always concerned with the development of individual virtue. Friendship itself arose in the group political life of the ancient Greek polis, and Plato did not pay much attention to the political implications of friendship. Even in Republic, ἔρως, which guided the communication between human and God, was downgraded to one of the causes of social unrest, and this kind of theoretical fragmentation greatly reduced the credibility of Plato's theory of friendship, which required Aristotle's further transformation of the theory of friendship.

4. Aristotle's Development of the Theory of Friendship

Plato's systematic exposition of the concept of friendship laid the theoretical foundation for the further development of the theory of friendship. Since then, friendship has been linked to the ultimate goal of life on earth. Plato solved the problem of transformation from ἔρως to φιλία by delineating the triple meaning of ἔρως, answering the psychological origin and development process of friendship. In Plato's theory of friendship, friendship presents a forward route from the aesthetic love of the beloved to the rational love of the intellect, and the ultimate point of this route is Plato's theory of the soul, with the help of friendship the human soul is able to reach perfection from deficiency. It has to be admitted that Aristotle's theory of friendship basically follows Plato's line of thought, but through his practical rational transformation of friendship, it finally makes the theory of friendship abandon Plato's line and achieve the ultimate goal of prosperity of the soul in a new way.

4.1 Aristotle's Critique of Plato: the Relationship between ἔρως and φιλία

On the question of the relation between ἔρως and φιλία, Plato considered φιλία to be born in ἔρως, which is a special form of ἔρως depending on the object: when the object is merely physical beauty, it is only a ἔρως of mere carnal desire; when the object is the beauty and the goodness of the human soul, such a relation is a ἔρως of the lover and a φιλία of the beloved; and when the object is the pure form of the perfected "wisdom", it is a pure form of φιλία between man and God.

Thus, in Plato's view, when we refer to "friendship" it consists in reality only of the affection of the beloved for the lover because of the beauty and goods, and of a higher love of the wise, and both are the love of a virtuously imperfect to a virtuously perfect object. But as far as the relation of the so-called ἔρως and φιλία is concerned, it is only in the second sense that the two are an equal and two sides of the same coin.

Aristotle first rejected the exclusion of ἔρως from φιλία in the sense of purely sexual love. In his view, such a purely carnal desire for sex is nothing more than an extremely excessive form of friendship, and thus Aristotle effectively rejected the view that φιλία derives from ἔρως. The difference between the two is the intensity of the feeling and whether such a feeling is reciprocated in the same way, ἔρως as a strong feeling is not necessarily reciprocated in the same way, because "love is an impulse that arises in the heart, and when it arises it has to move and grow, and at last it reaches maturity. Once mature he brings with him the torment of desire, which increases in the heart of the one who loves". It is a unidirectional affection, ἔρως would require a strong response from the one who is loved and would limit the possibility of this relationship for other objects, whereas true friendship does not limit the object's relationship with other people. Furthermore, in Aristotle's view, Plato's second sense of friendship is merely a false friendship that involves a misunderstanding: one of the parties is more motivated by pleasure and the other is more motivated by virtue. Not only will it not last, ἔρως will not receive an equally strong response. Thus, in Aristotle's view, Plato is merely generalizing a particular example of the aberrations in such a friendship. Therefore, it is even more inappropriate for Plato to conclude that friendship does not contain beauty and goodness by arguing that ἔρως does not contain beauty and goodness, since ἔρως is merely an extreme form of φιλία, and since ἔρως in Plato's second sense contains in itself a quest for virtue, Plato's view is in fact self-contradictory.

In Aristotle's view, ἔρως should be more than a mere desire. On the one hand, Plato's second sense of ἔρως, if viewed from the perspective of common observation, is closer to "love" than to mere "sexual desire," and it is essentially an affectionate feeling rather than a mere desire for possession. If ἔρως is merely a desire, when the desire is fulfilled ἔρως disappears, and it will only be a strong, continuing affection between unfulfilled: just as sexual desire is only strong before sex and disappears at the end of it, it cannot even constitute the process of the relationship afterwards, since the desire itself has no need to exist after it is fulfilled. Thus, Plato's view of ἔρως as a desire tamed by reason is unjustified. ἔρως is not a reason-generated desire, and so reason can only harness it to keep it from going wild and out of order, but reason is never able to keep a desire that has already been fulfilled and form a relationship. On the other hand, if ἔρως is regarded as desire, it presupposes a state of scarcity, and Plato attributed such a scarcity to the natural scarcity of human, but this is also nonsense in Aristotle's view. If ἔρως comes from a natural scarcity in human's nature, then such a scarcity must be innate, and ἔρως should be innate, but the reality of common observation does not support this. Human does not begin with ἔρως, it can only come about through acquired social learning, and therefore ἔρως cannot be regarded as a natural desire in the same way as eating, drinking, or sleeping;

it can merely only be an emotion. In The Nature of Love, Singer argued that this Aristotelian comparison highlights the non-emotional, asexual, rationally colored emotion of friendship as opposed to ἔρως, an understanding that highlights the more rationalistic nature of Aristotle's theory of friendship as compared to Plato's. M. Nussbaum added to this view by arguing that the major difference between Aristotle's conception of friendship and Plato's ἔρως is that friendship is not driven by strong passions and desires like ἔρως. Aristotle's friendship emphasizes a state of mutual dependence, unmerited help and sharing, and a state of harmony between individuals and their spiritual feelings. Although Aristotle also recognized the possibility of sexual desire in friendship, this is not the core and origin of friendship.

4.2 Aristotle's Transcendence of Plato: The Love of Wise

It is undeniable that Aristotle's theory of friendship does not deviate completely from Plato's line, and both Aristotle and Plato are in agreement as to the supreme end of friendship, which is the εὐδαιμονία. And Aristotle and Plato are also in agreement as to the place of friendship in this process: they both saw it as a necessary path from the unwise to the wise. Σοφια has a rich meaning in ancient Greek, encompassing both knowledge in a general sense and the skillful use of all the products of cognition, including such knowledge and common sense morality, and the insight into things based on it. Both Socrates and Plato understood σοφια as a practical reason, where true knowledge necessarily leads to a good practice, and therefore "knowledge is virtue". Plato introduced this theory from epistemology to the theory of friendship, arguing that ἔρως is between unwise and wise, but that it is itself unwise and thus exhibits a desire for wise, and that therefore the ultimate target of human friendship is love of wise. Aristotle did not express an opinion on this statement of Plato's, but he clearly thought that Plato's setting of ἔρως appeared to be overly optimistic. In Aristotle's view, when the ἔρως is in a state of moderation and is subject to the dictates of reason, the ἔρως undoubtedly manifests itself as a quest for wise; but when the ἔρως is excessive it may turn away from reason and be directed toward lust. In Plato it is clear that desire cannot dominate ἔρως, and that desire is merely the tool through which ἔρως realizes the subject's own immortality. In fact, Plato's view is undoubtedly an inverse reasoning after presupposing the ultimate end of ἔρως, the love of wise, and this process of inverse reasoning has in fact become a purely metaphysical argument completely divorced from common observation, so that there is only the love of virtue and the further philosophical love. In Plato's view, there is no room for the greater love of pleasure and utility in everyday life.

Aristotle affirmed that friendship is between the unwise and the wise, but he did not think, as Plato did, that it is ungood and unattractive; in his view, friendship is a virtue, and one that is necessary in our quest for the εὐδαιμονία, and therefore true friendship is undoubtedly beautiful and good. But this quest for εὐδαιμονία does not come from the desire within the friendship; the desire merely provides an impulse, and it is up to reason to decide to whom this impulse is directed, for "the normal virtue of that which is by nature better is better, and that which is by nature fitter to rule and more authoritative is better, so that the soul is better than the flesh, and that part of the soul which has reason and thought in it is better. soul that

part which has reason and thought is better". Friendship should therefore pursue a rational target in the service of living a rational life, and this target is "wise". Aristotle distinguished between sophia (σοφια) and phronesis (φρονις), and it is clear that the "wise" that friendship should pursue is more of a practical rationality, that is, phronesis. Although in Aristotle's view theoretical wisdom is superior to practical wisdom, phronesis is, after all, a part of reason, it is wise in the realm of practice, and therefore to love phronesis is to love wisdom, i.e., "the love of wise"; on the other hand, if our love is always directed to the more beautiful and the better, then wise, as the highest part of the soul of human, the virtue of reason, is undoubtedly more deserving of love, and phronesis, as a part of wise, is much more intimate with us than theoretical wisdom, and therefore our love of phronesis is the love of wise itself.

According to Jaeger, with the help of "love of wise" we can clearly see the historical process of Aristotle's departure from Platonism: in the period of Portrepticus, Aristotle still applied "wise" in the Platonic sense, i.e., "wisdom" in the sense of "unity of knowing and doing" in relation to true knowledge and practical reason. While in the period of Nicomachean Ethics, "the meaning of all the theories of phronesis expressly distinguishes its sphere from that of the σοφια (Sophia) and the νους (Nous) ". Therefore, Jaeger believed that Aristotle realized the criticism and transcendence of Platonism in the process of Portrepticus to The Nicomachean Ethics. But in fact, Jaeger did not see that in the Exhortation Aristotle had already begun to talk about phronesis and philosophic wisdom as two parts of the soul's activity, where Aristotle had already attempted to distinguish wisdom as practical reason from the other "wise" and to examine the significance of theoretical knowledge in the context of its practical purpose. The least that can be said is that Aristotle was not a Platonist in the full sense of the word, even in the early days of his studies at the Platonic Academy.

Finally, we still have one last question: how to move from love of human to love of wise. Whereas in Plato this question is clearly stated: we have to resort to the forms of beauty and goodness in others in order to ultimately reach the highest wisdom. In Aristotle the way in is more hidden. In Book IX of The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle briefly mentioned that one should not have too many friends, but only a few true friends, firstly, because one cannot live with all of them because of one's limited energies and lack of time; secondly, because sharing too much with one's friends does not, in Aristotle's opinion, actually help us to realize the best of reason, because philosophical reflection requires leisure. From this we can see that the key to moving from the love of man to the love of wisdom does not really lie in whether the impulse to love is one of reason or of desire, but rather, above all, in a true relationship of friendship, that is, a friendship of virtue. If we had only pleasant or utilitarian friends, we would simply indulge in an outwardly materialistic carnal desire and have no time for the pursuit of the wise, a choice that comes not simply from desire but from something more in itself—that we are a pleasant or utilitarian person. In other words, only virtuous people (good people) pursue true wise. Thus, if we think of Aristotle's entire ethics as a list of personal development, "making a good friend" comes after "becoming a virtuous man", and "the pursuit of the highest wisdom"

comes even later.

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