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## REVIEW

**Sandra Lynch, *Philosophy and Friendship* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005) ISBN 0 7486 1727 2.**

Sandra Lynch's book is something of a hybrid. On the one hand, it surveys various philosophical views of friendship, from Aristotle down through postmodern writers such as Derrida and Lacan, stopping along the way to discuss Cicero, Montaigne, Kant and Hegel on the master-slave relation, Buber's I-Thou, Sartre on love (since he "does not specifically discuss friendship," 69), Bataille, Blanchot, Colin Turnbull's *The Mountain People* (1971), which narrates the dysfunctional society of the Ik tribe of Uganda, and many others. She also devotes several pages to Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Sándor Márai's *Embers*, and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, among other texts, thereby taking account of literary treatments of friendship as well as formal philosophical analyses.

On the other hand, Lynch has a thesis of her own to defend on the nature of friendship, which her survey is designed to support. The following quotations illustrate the main idea of her argument.

Nietzsche, Blanchot and Derrida are theorists of friendship who appreciate the place of uncertainty in relations between friends. By comparison with these modern theorists, Aristotle avoids the discomfort of uncertainty by aligning the socio-political structures of the polis with his ethical prescriptions: the free male citizens of the polis are good men united by virtue in the communal civil life of the polis. However, the nexus created between the ethical and the social-political spheres of life determines that Aristotelian civic friendship obscures the demand for indirection in friendship as well as the recognition of difference between friends (101).

More specifically, "Aristotelian civic friendship simply conceals the possibility that citizens may have differing conceptions of what constitutes the good for the community of which they are members" (107). The ancient view of friendship, represented by Aristotle, Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Montaigne, and others, put the emphasis on social unity, and hence treated friendship as primarily a relationship among the better class of people, who held a common view about the society and the nature of the good. Modern, or at all events postmodern views, on the contrary,

stress difference and the ultimate uncertainty that inhabits friendship. According to the modern view, which Lynch evidently shares, "friends have the potential to respond to one another in unreserved and inventive ways" (145). Allying herself with the approach of object-relations psychologists such as Donald Winnicott and Heinz Kohut, Lynch affirms that "the process of constituting a self is a precarious one which places us in an ambiguous relation to the other" (151). But we need others, nevertheless, to achieve selfhood as it is understood by thinkers such as Jacques Lacan: "the ability to take account of the perceptions and expectations of others is crucial to the development of a coherent or stable conception of self". Lynch uses "psychoanalytic perspectives on the formation of identity and the constitution of the self ... to emphasise the creativity that is implicit in relations between friends. Friendship emerges as a creative and uncertain synthesis of the play of forces that create identity and difference between friends" (165). This, finally, is Lynch's strategy for defeating Derrida's insistence on "the impossibility of any complete or sustained connection between friends" (95), given that "the possibility of friendship rests on our acceptance of a fiction ... of connection" (93). For "the connection between friends can be seen as one that is intersubjectively created and nurtured" (187)—it resides in a process of maturation and self-formation, and if the result is a "fragile connection," it is friendship for all that.

Such is the gist of Lynch's argument. The ancient or classical view, associated principally with Aristotle, serves as a foil to the modern: whereas Aristotle stresses identity among friends, and obscures "the recognition of difference between friends" in the service of a larger ideal of civic solidarity, the modern view acknowledges and indeed relishes difference, both on the personal and the social level: Lynch adduces Georg Simmel for the view that "modern culture, society and personality are by nature fragmented" (166). But if ancient and modern societies are indeed so different, and so too, correspondingly, the dominant conception of friendship in each, it is legitimate to ask whether Aristotle, Derrida, and Winnicott are talking about the same thing when they speak of "friendship". The very decision to translate a term into another language as "friendship" already presupposes a view about what the idea means for the speakers of that language. The Greek term *philia*, which is often translated as "friendship," basically means "love"; it only signifies "friendship" in contexts in which love obtains among those designated as friends (in Greek, *philoî*), as distinct from kin, spouses, or amatory (including pederastic) relations. Latin *amicitia*, however, specifically means "friendship." Love of all sorts, whether familial or erotic, was *amor* in Latin; in Greek, however, passionate love was designated by the term *erôs*. Thus, when Lynch equates *erôs* with *philia* (12-13), I see a red flag: although Aristotle says the erotic passion an adult man feels for a boy may turn into friendship when the boy matures, provided he has a suitably virtuous character, the two categories were distinct in classical Greek.

Leaving aside technical points of philology, one may inquire whether earlier

views of friendship, which are predicated upon such disparate conceptions of the self and society, can have anything to offer us moderns. Lynch affirms, rather surprisingly: "Putting aside the criticisms of Aristotelian and Kantian accounts of friendship, my argument is that both philosophers provide a theoretical structure for the maintenance of relations in the broader social context within which intimacy develops" (108). Very possibly, but this idea is not (so far as I can tell) put to use in Lynch's discussion of modern friendship. Indeed, if ancient and modern societies are as different as Lynch says, it is difficult to see how Aristotle's or Kant's theories concerning social relations can be of much help, or how such disparate views of friendship can illuminate one another; I had the sense, as I followed Lynch's discussion, that they simply pass each other by, as though Aristotle and Derrida were speaking different languages (which of course they are).

I believe that Lynch is broadly right to hold that Aristotle's conception of friendship was conditioned, at least in part, by his vision of a society run by virtuous men, and that postmodern notions of friendship are, on the contrary, disposed to celebrate difference, although I do not share Lynch's view that developmental psychology can help resolve the paradoxes of friendship that Derrida identifies. Nevertheless, I am afraid that she sometimes misrepresents the classical view, and more particularly that of Aristotle and Cicero, which allows more scope for difference, intimacy, and self-development than Lynch concedes. In what follows, I shall concentrate on these two thinkers, but before proceeding, I must indicate a certain *parti pris*. I am the author of a book entitled *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997), not mentioned by Lynch, in which I discuss friendship in a wide context, including philosophical treatments. What is more, my views, while respectable enough, are not universally shared. Some of Lynch's comments on ancient friendship reflect interpretations advanced by other scholars with which I disagree. I cannot in the space of this review present all the arguments on either side of these disputes, but the reader should be alert to the fact that such differences exist, and deserve to be recognized.

To take an example from a non-philosophical text: I do not agree with Lynch's claim that in Homer we find "a relatively unquestioning depiction of friendship as a formal relationship" (7), and that "relations between warrior-chieftains did not involve ties of an emotional kind" (9). The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, the principal friends in the *Iliad*, is intensely emotional, as Lynch herself observes (11). Lynch is here following a conception, which I regard as dated though many scholars still subscribe to it, according to which Greek *philia*, whether in Homer or later, had an objective, quasi-contractual character. So too, when Lynch avers that "*amicitia* was once used interchangeably with *factio* to refer to a band of friends" (55-56), but that it degenerated into the sense of mere political faction, she is appealing to the view promoted more than half a century ago by Lily Ross Taylor, but decisively refuted (as I believe) by Peter Brunt, who demonstrated that party loyalties

seem to have had virtually no impact at all on the formation or dissolution of friendships in ancient Rome.

Proceeding now to philosophical treatments, Lynch observes that Aristotle identifies three types of friendship, predicated on recognition of virtue in the other, or else "motivated by the friend's usefulness or pleasure to me, rather than by concern for the friend's good" (16). I maintain, however, that for Aristotle all three kinds of friendship involve concern for the welfare of the other. Indeed, in the definition of friendship that Aristotle provides in the *Rhetoric* (2.4), as opposed to his ethical treatises, he affirms: "Let to *philein* [loving] be wishing for someone the things that he deems good, for the sake of that person and not oneself, and the accomplishment of these things to the best of one's ability"; and he adds: "A *philos* is one who loves and is loved in return". This is a description of love generally, not just that based on appreciation of virtue. The affection that arises as a result of mutual commerce, for example, is still a kind of love; to be sure, it is less durable than virtue friendship, but while it lasts it entails (in my view) caring for the friend, just like friendships formed in the workplace today. Lynch observes: "Modern individuals might feel a degree of affection for business associates or work colleagues and yet not regard them as friends" (17); true enough, but so too might ancient Greeks. Aristotle nowhere suggests that *all* persons who are useful to each other are, by that token, friends.

Was Aristotle's conception of friendship conditioned by the social world of the classical city-state, which he saw, according to Lynch, as "an arena of like-minded citizens who agree about their interests, adopt the same policy and act on their common resolutions" (24)? There is no doubt that Aristotle valued concord or *homonoia* among the citizen body, and that he believed that a kind of communal affection or friendly feeling went a good way toward securing civic solidarity. Lynch supposes that such an ideal, involving "a harmony of interests, ideas and activities," is one that "we today would regard as impossible" (*ibid.*). It is true enough that we do not typically speak of friendship as the bond between fellow citizens, but we do refer to brotherhood in this connection, precisely in order to emphasize equality of rights and a kind of familial warmth of feeling. Lynch also finds problematic Aristotle's emphasis on regard for virtue as a basis of friendship or love: "From the perspective of the modern reader it seems that in Aristotle's highest form of friendship we like our friend for the sake of his goodness—rather than for himself" (27). Lynch notes that any account of why we like someone "suggests liking for the sake of something else"; this is in contrast with what she identifies as the modern view, "that friends are loved for what it is that makes them unique" (28), a fuzzy concept that hardly lends itself to analysis at all. I agree on the latter point, but Aristotle makes it clear that, for friendship to arise, one must have intimate knowledge of the other, deriving from long acquaintance; he also specifies that one can have only a very few friends, whereas, were regard for virtue the only factor, we should be friends with all the virtuous people we know.

Finally, I differ with Lynch's interpretation of the role of maternal love in Aristotle (32): this love is, according to Aristotle, natural (he uses the term *phusei*, "by nature"): animals too experience it, whereas they do not form friendships based on regard for virtue or utility. Whether parental love "provides the child with a sense that she is loved for her own sake" (34) is perhaps questionable, but it does offer a model of unconditional affection, in which respect it differs from friendship, which responds to causes.

Turning briefly to Cicero, it is true that Cicero recognized that politics could divide friends, at least if it came to the point of seriously endangering the republic, for example participating in or covering up a conspiracy out of loyalty to one's comrades; but this does not mean that Cicero shared the Epicurean credo of abstentionism in regard to politics (54). On the contrary, Cicero was both active in politics and maintained friendships with people of all political stripes, even in the dire conditions of civil war. Nor would I say that Cicero's ideal of *concordia* was "based on a similarity of rights" (55): it is debated whether there existed a concept of "rights" in classical antiquity, but for Cicero, at all events, *concordia* was first and foremost a relationship across class lines. The *concordia ordinum* that he sought to foster was hierarchical rather than egalitarian.

Lynch covers, as I have indicated, a great deal of territory in this book, with the result that the argument sometimes races over points that in my view deserve more attention. Treating the various conceptions of friendship from Aristotle on down as the prolegomenon to an argument about the nature of modern friendship further complicates the presentation. Whether modern friendship is predicated on an acknowledgment of difference and the development of a stable self through mutual exchange and recognition is in my view moot, but more could have been done to historicize this notion, which is very much a product of our own culture. While it is not for me to dictate the book that Lynch should have written, I could have wished that she had conceived her task in this more critical vein.

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