Friendship as a Model for Professional Care

Frans Vosman

The Example of vriendstap.nl

The young psychiatrist from Eindhoven, Hetty Pronk, has realized her idea of enabling psychiatric patients to support each other. It is not the psychiatrist who helps the patient, nor is the professional relationship central, but rather the relationship between what she calls *fellowship of fate*. Pronk's idea has taken on a unique form. Since January 2004, the Dutch website vriendstap.nl has been operational. People with a psychiatric background can connect with each other via the website and email to engage in activities together, ranging from spending time with one another, having sex, to forming relationships. They have a password to ensure their privacy is protected. Personal contact, based on equality—namely, equality in fate—is the primary focus. According to Pronk, this kind of contact builds self-confidence, and fostering self-confidence is the goal of this psychiatrist.

Why seek something like friendship through a website? Because psychiatric patients often live in isolation and loneliness, and the internet allows them to communicate with peers at a time that suits them—without interference from others, Pronk adds. This is how social interaction is established. What is remarkable is that this psychiatrist recognizes the importance of equality in relationships and the risks associated with care and bound by professionalism. In her case, as a psychiatrist, this involves highly qualified professionalism. Pronk builds upon two key aspects of friendship: equality between two individuals and shared interests. Rather than pairing a patient with a "healthy" buddy—a term commonly used for a companion—she does not seek to promote companionship between people with shared experiences and interests, but rather friendship between people in an equal position. She calls it *fellowship of fate*: fate has placed you in the same position, namely being a psychiatric patient and experiencing loneliness.

Her reasoning also includes ideas about independence, autonomy, and not least about utility: self-confidence arises through independence. The psychiatrist aims to achieve something—helping people move from point A (loneliness) to point B (social interaction and self-confidence). This connection between these fellows resembles a form of friendship that holds something beautiful and desirable.

Professional Care and Ethos

With the example of vriendstap.nl, we find ourselves at the heart of the issue I want to address: how do professionals such as doctors, nurses, spiritual caregivers, and others develop an ethos—a way of acting in the best interest of the "care recipient" that aligns with their profession (1)?

By ethos, I mean the ways of acting and behaving that exist within a specific group—such as doctors or social workers—in which comes to expression what they, as a professional community, consider to be morally right, good, or unacceptable. Ethos thus also

involves reflection. Can the good of the "care recipient" truly take center stage along with that? And how can (and does) the professional remain close to this good?

We know that caring and helping inherently hold the potential for goodness—such as healing, regaining stability, moving forward, and reconnecting with one's own life. However, we also know that caring and helping are ambivalent. Personal benefit or gratification—whether consciously recognized or not—can take precedence. It is also clear that professionalism in care carries great positive values, such as the expertise that defines the profession (for example, the formidable know how of a nurse), achieving the continuity of care, and the possibility of striving to treat all individuals as equals. Yet, we also know that professionalism brings its own constraints, which can turn into a form of violence. The professional caregiver starts using the client as a means to their own end. The client, in turn, is essentially forced to conform to the model that enables them to receive care.

Contrary to common belief, professional care does not find its course simply by appealing to moral principles and codes of conduct (duties) or manners (etiquette). Principles in this context include concepts such as doing good and respecting the autonomy of the client. At the very least, these principles require continuous and intensive inquiry into what they actually mean in concrete situations, as well as an ongoing search for a balance between different principles. However, an ethos based on principles always assumes certain predetermined notions or rules—for example, "the client *is* autonomous", even though we all know this can be pure nonsense. In other words, an ethos based on principles is built on fictions. Even when moral reality clearly contradicts these fictions, everything is done to sustain them. If someone is no longer autonomous, another person—a loved one or proxy—must step in to fill that autonomy. The principle and fiction remain intact. The principle of autonomy never seeks to replace itself with another principle—such as "respect for the other, come what may".

Professional care does involve principles, but it does not find its own course or true meaning through them (2). Etiquette, literally *the little ethics*, is of great importance and may contain possibilities for a professional ethos for caregivers (3). Building an ethos *based on* etiquette could be highly valuable. Such an ethos would represent a radical approach, as it would begin with the most practical level—the question of what is appropriate here and now when determining what is good or bad. The daily interactions between professionals and "clients", the everyday practice, and *what can be discovered from it regarding what is appropriate*, provide a powerful opportunity to establish an ethos.
However, if etiquette merely becomes the application of principles, or something like decency or a traffic regulation in the chaos—rules for engagement that one simply learns—then the searching nature of such an ethics is already lost.

Article outline

In this article, I aim to explore an alternative possibility for a professional ethos.
Can friendship, in some way, serve as a model for professional care? After all, in friendship, the good of the other is central. For one's friends, one desires the good—whereas for others, this is not always certain.

First, I will further analyze what professionalism implies in a moral sense. Then, I will take a closer look at the concept of friendship. It is certain that the friendship model can suffer from idealized romanticism, in which case it must be discarded. I will argue that the concept of friendship implies equality and inherently involves a desire for the good of the other, but also that it has always allowed for imperfection (such as wanting something in return from the other), as well as the possibility of temporariness in the relationship.

I will develop a proposal using the ideas of the American phenomenologist Robert Sokolowski on friendship and the good. I call this proposal: adopt the position of friendship and work professionally from that position. The element I previously highlighted in connection with principle-based ethics and an ethos rooted in etiquette—namely, the search in daily practice for what is good for this particular person, whether self-sufficient or not—returns here as a prominent feature.

Professionalism

The word *professio* literally means publicly declaring what one stands for in their actions. This inherently implies an ethos—a way of acting and speaking for the good. However, in practice, professionalism is strongly shaped by the pursuit of increasing technical expertise. This can certainly benefit ethos.

At the same time, a dynamic can emerge in which new moral assumptions—different from those embedded in the craft itself—become dominant, eventually shaping and even taking over the profession. Care, as a field, is characterized by ongoing professionalization, which is largely defined by protocolization or standardization. This inevitably affects the relationship between caregiver and care recipient—both positively and negatively. Rule-based action ensures that the best possible method is consistently applied, even to this specific individual in need of care. However, the ability to perceive someone as a person and to continuously engage with them as such is not necessarily enhanced by rule-based action.

Samuel Weber wrote a provocative article titled *The Limits of Professionalism* (2001). He highlights key aspects of professionalism that are crucial in relation to the ethos of professionals. *"A professional was—and still is—a specialist who makes a living from their work. They have undergone extensive training at a recognized institution (a vocational school) that certifies their competence in a specialized field; this competence is derived from mastering a specific discipline".* This professionalism is rooted in useful knowledge, incorporating systematic theory and general principles. A professional provides something that only he or she can provide—the layperson cannot. This exclusivity is the source of the professional's authority and status. Specialization is thus a defining feature. However, this also creates a divide between professionals and laypeople. In other words, professionalism is inherently based on inequality—inequality in position, knowledge, and skill, but also inequality in needs and distress.

The psychiatrist from Eindhoven, as we have seen, was aware of this reality. This is an element we must reconsider when reflecting on an ethos of good care—but in a way that is not morally naïve. Professionalism creates inequality—not care. Professionals, as a group,

stand opposite laypeople and have increasingly defined their identity *"in the presence of an exceptionally dynamic, unstable, and powerful reorganization and transformation of society"*. According to Weber, identifying the rules by which one must act plays a crucial role in this self-isolation (4). In my view, he points to a critical issue that anyone seeking an ethos for professional caregivers must take seriously: professionalism itself contains a dynamic that generates tension with ethos—professionalism depends on identifying and adhering to rules.

Moreover, another crucial consideration is that professionalism is tied to systemic structures in society. It is subject to systemic influences. Simply establishing and enforcing moral codes or merely *doing good* in a human-to-human way, are too simplistic as solutions. Simply doing good means stepping out of the ethical dilemma within professional care, thereby abandoning the problem to its fate. In the meantime, one may still enjoy their own "goodness". Establishing moral codes inherently means attempting to restrain an already rule-oriented way of acting with new rules. But one can ask, can this truly set care on its own ethical course?

In the Netherlands, the professionalization of care is also accompanied by the partial implementation of a market model. The care recipient is seen as a client, and the caregiver as a provider or retailer. This is combined with a strong emphasis on autonomy—the assumption that, with the right information, the adult citizen will independently choose which care to receive. The citizen is expected to self-manage one's own life course. However, it is worth noting that this market model is only applied *to a certain extent*—because professional caregivers do not fully accept the discipline of the market. If they did, clients would penalize unwanted behavior from caregivers—such as rude doctors or home care managers who speak in jargon—simply by taking their business elsewhere. But for many reasons, that kind of market freedom does not exist.
This raises a serious concern: why continue adhering to a model that clearly does not fit? Ethicist Frits de Lange observes that the current concepts of professional care and the assumption that citizens are capable of making and enforcing their own choices fail to address key aspects of moral experience: *"Too many facets of the moral reality experienced by too many people are […] being ignored or are not given the emphasis they deserve […]"* (5). Exactly this observation—that professional care filters out exactly what is morally most relevant—is essential for anyone seeking an ethos of good care. It sharpens the focus of our inquiry. As we have seen, professionalism itself contains forces that pull away from solutions: rule-oriented action, isolation, and constructed inequality—none of which are natural or inevitable realities.

Professionalism and Friendship

Can friendship, which is *eo ipso* based on equality, provide a model to steer the professionalism of care onto a moral course? Given the characterization of professionalism outlined earlier, this now seems unlikely. Something so deeply structured cannot simply be realigned through something personal. On the other hand, if I can substantiate my claim that friendship offers a model for an ethos of good care, then this must be done with a realistic understanding of professionalism in mind.

As mentioned, in this article, I argue that for the professional caregiver, it is possible to adopt the position of friendship without introducing a multitude of preferential friendships based on personal affection. However, friendship can only serve as a model if we deliberately move away from a romanticized and idealized view of friendship and incorporate some critical, highly relevant ideas about it.

Friendship means that two people enjoy each other's company. This implies preference: I choose to spend time with this person; I enjoy being around him or her. Friendship also involves sharing life—wanting to spend time together and being physically present with one another. Friends do so based on equality, shared interests, and mutual engagement in one or more matters. Friendship is characterized by reciprocity; it cannot be one-sided. Finally, friendship involves sharing intimacy, a certain separation from public life. Put more classically: friends share their secrets. These characteristics of friendship are found in Aristotle and the Stoics. Aristotle and Cicero sought to define and delineate equality between persons and shared interests as key elements of friendship. The last characteristic—the sharing of secrets—was further developed in the 13th century by Thomas Aquinas (6). Aquinas built upon Aristotle's concept of friendship, stating: *"Above all, a friend wishes to be in the company of his friend and to share life with him. Furthermore, a friend wishes for what is good for the other and acts accordingly. He rejoices in his friend's presence, his heart is with the heart of his friend, they share in each other's joys and sorrows"* (7).

These five characteristics distinguish friendship from all kinds of other relationships. Aquinas adds a sixth element: one shares secrets with their friends—those things that should not be made public. Secrecy implies trust. These six characteristics serve as a benchmark for friendship: without them, a relationship cannot be considered true friendship.
The philosophical discourse on friendship did not stop there (even though it faded as a central theme in ethics). In modern thought, particularly Romanticism, additional defining characteristics were introduced that shape our contemporary understanding of friendship.

**Friendship as Intimate Emotionality**

To Romanticism we owe the emphasis on the intimate feeling of friendship (8). While Aristotle, in two chapters ("books") of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, speaks of the awareness (*aisthèsis*) that arises from the presence of a friend, Romanticism speaks of the deep emotion that emerges. In the eighteenth century, much thought and enthusiasm were devoted to friendship. Diderot writes to his friend Sophie about his meeting with his friend Grimm during a dinner: *"How delightful it was to see him again and have him back. With what warmth did we embrace! My heart overflowed. I could not say anything to him, nor he to me (...). He sat down, I believe he dined poorly. As for me, I could not unclench my teeth, neither to eat nor to speak. He sat next to me. I held his hand and looked at him"* (9).
Here, emotion, spontaneity, and intensity are at play; when we, with our contemporary preoccupations, assign romantic or even sexual meanings to such passages, we fail to grasp what it was truly about at the time.

Montaigne's friendship with the nobleman Étienne de La Boétie, immortalized in chapter 28 of his *Essays*, is another example of how the focus in the concept of friendship has shifted.

According to Montaigne, the intimacy of friendship is an inexplicable reality. This intimacy is understood in the most radical sense: *"We held nothing back from each other, nothing that belonged only to him or only to me"* (10). Friendship is not only intimate but also unique—so unique, in fact, that one can have only one true friend (11).

This sentimental notion of friendship was also visually depicted. In Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht, there is a *friendship cup* from 1780 (12). It features two archetypal friends, David and Jonathan. This biblical pair (1 Samuel 20:41-42) is now frequently referenced in LGBTQ+ circles to highlight the value of love between two men who deeply care for each other. However, this was not the case in the eighteenth century. Without homosexual connotations, the shepherd boy David and the king's son Jonathan were seen as icons of intense friendship. They are depicted *in kuras* and turned toward each other. They are deeply attached to one another, loyal, and committed to the good of the other. The biblical books of 1 and 2 Samuel recount the sweet and bitter fortunes of their friendship. As eighteenth-century literature repeatedly describes, their friendship, as portrayed on the cup, consists of mutual devotion and togetherness—an ancient characteristic of the friendship concept. Yet, and this is where the eighteenth century speaks, it also embodies emotional intimacy. The idealization of friendship had already begun earlier; the emotionalization took shape during Romanticism (13).

By the mid-eighteenth century, the word *passion*, which meant *being affected* or *acted upon*, was replaced by the word *emotion* (14). From Aristotle to Descartes, passion referred to the movements and affections of the soul (*les passions de l'âme*). Emotion, however, is something entirely different. This is not merely a semantic shift; the very conception of what it means to be human had changed. A new idea of interiority emerged, replacing traditional reflections on the soul and *passions de l'âme*. The subject was now imagined as a being with a profound inner life. This was the era when the friend became an *alter ego*—but in the sense of being a double of oneself rather than simply *another* I-speaker. It was also the time when friendship shifted into the private sphere. No longer was it seen as a public relationship, though some thinkers, such as Spinoza, still associated friendship with civic and public life.
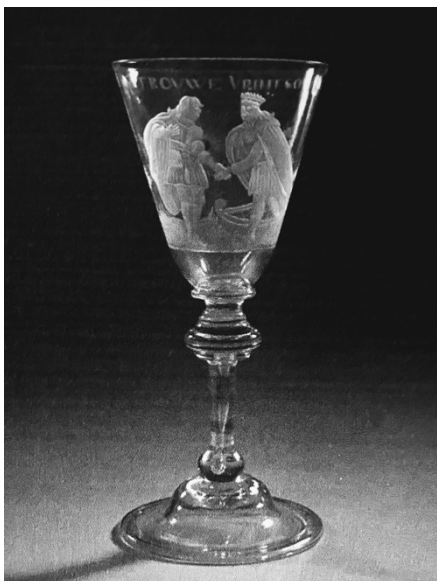
Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht, 18th-century friendship cup with depictions of the two archetypal friends, David and Jonathan.

These characteristics of friendship—emotionality, interiority, privacy—continue to shape our modern understanding of friendship. In order to break free from this emotionalized conception, I will return to the ancient roots of the friendship ideal: to Aristotle's concept of *philia*, as developed in chapters 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In his view, friendship covered a much broader and therefore partly different range of relationships than what our Romantic-influenced idea of friendship suggests.

Friendship and the Intersection of Public and Private

Aristotle describes what is friendly (that which belongs to a friend) as something pleasant and welcome, and he defines friendship as the course one maintains in a relationship, navigating between the extremes of flattery and quarrelsomeness (15). He sees friendship as the continuous maintenance of a relationship, not as a feeling, but as an active disposition. Aristotle describes friendship-in-act as *koinonia*: engaging with one another.

A key sentence in this regard is the conclusion of Aristotle's treatise on friendship: *"Friendship is a participation in each other's life (koinonia). Just as a person relates to themselves (hoos pros heauton echei), so too do they relate to their friend (houtoo kai pros ton filon). The consiousness (aisthèsis) of one's own existence is desirable (hairetè; something one eagerly grasps with the hand). Likewise, the consiousness of the existence of one's friend is desirable. This consiousness arises when friends engage with one another"* (16). This joy is a sign that one perceives *a good*: through *"he lives"*, I realize that I live. I describe this good in my own words as *liveliness*. Aristotle characterizes friendship here as *consiousness within a relationship*, namely, joy in one's own liveliness as such and in the liveliness of one's friend. The friend is not merely another self or an *alter ego* in a direct sense, but in an analogous way. Just as I relate to myself, so too is the relationship between me and the other (17) (18). For Aristotle, friendship is not about the merging of two entities but about the way in which they relate within a relationship. I can rejoice when I witness my friend's liveliness because, in my relationship with myself, I experience joy in my own liveliness. However, the friend reveals his liveliness by reaching out, by expressing what matters to him. By wanting to engage with me, he, too, is alive. Friends act towards each other and thereby establish a long-term disposition—hence, friendship is a virtue. Through action, a human capability, a potential (*dunamis*), is brought to fulfillment. Time and again, friends take the initiative to share what matters to them at that moment and offer each other companionship.

The characteristics of a friendship are that it exists between people who *resemble each other*. Furthermore, this relationship is characterized by *reciprocity*. Another key feature of friendship is that friends *consciously* wish each other *well* (19). Thus, there are three defining elements.

Aristotle identifies three types of friendship. By *types*, he means *friendship taken as by him …* The first is friendship based on utility or advantage, such as those found in business and politics. The second is friendship based on pleasure, where enjoyment is shared (for example, when two people only meet at the pub and their contact is limited to that—bar companions). The third type is friendship between people who are good and who are equals in virtue. *"For these wish each other well insofar as they are good, and they are good in*

themselves" (20). Aristotle thus defines perfect friendship in terms of friendship between virtuous people. The standard of friendship between virtuous individuals indicates what complete friendship is: those who, through action, mutually wish each other well for the sake of the other (21). This third type is the most excellent, but the other two types are still forms of friendship. There is friendship based on pleasure, utility, and goodness. To put it in more modern terms: it is not only the ideal that matters; the other, more common forms of friendship also fully count, even if they are not perfect. They are not perfect because, in a friendship based on utility, one does not accept the other as they are. That is what defines excellence.

Within the framework of the (idealized by him) Greek *polis*, Aristotle also positioned friendship at the intersection of private and public life. Luck, human happiness within the political community is central to Aristotle's ethical design. Friendship plays a vital role in enabling happiness within the polis. I emphasize this because, in this context, friendship is not a private relationship (a bond that exists in isolation) but a public relationship, even a political one, since friendships uphold the organized society. Ultimately, friendship is something pursued for its own sake: a state of living, of being present with friends, a state of life that is self-sufficient. This desire to be present with one another extends to intimacy but is not limited to it.

Thomas Aquinas further develops Aristotle's idea of interaction between friends. Equality between friends is not only the foundation upon which contact begins. I am drawn to someone who, in some way, resembles me (for example, in terms of education or interests). But similarity is also created through interaction. Friends *develop likeness* in that they are oriented toward the same good (22). For example, two courageous people grow more alike as friends as they engage in courageous acts: they may both openly discuss their struggles with addiction, their fear of strangers, or take the initiative to protest against discrimination. Their friendship deepens through this shared direction. Two or more individuals voluntarily commit to one another. They become friends by *acting as friends*. This forms one of the threads that contribute to a broader theory about adopting the position of friendship and the practice of forming bonds. The characteristics of friendship can be modulated—they are not rigidly the same in all types of friendships. And: friendship is action, not merely a fixed state.

Friendship in Political Ethics

For more than one reason, these ideas cannot simply be transplanted wholesale into the late-modern 21st century. One reason in particular stands out: the infinitely more complex communities and states of today. The relationship between public and private, the transition from direct lived experience to structure and system, requires constant critical attention; otherwise, we risk designing an ethics that is unrealistic and therefore no ethics at all.

However, can we now find a place for the possibility that friendship is not merely a purely private, personal relationship? The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur sees potential in this "difficult legacy". Ricoeur situates friendship at the intersection of public and private (23). Friends are equals who wholeheartedly give each other what is due. Here, friendship and justice intersect like crossing lines. Ricoeur, as it were, reclaims the political aspects of

friendship from a romanticized, privatized conception of it. At the same time, he avoids reshaping contemporary public-political life to fit the scale of the ancient *polis*. The idea of *equality* in friendship puts a tension to the notion of equality in the political arena; the idea of *the good* as conceived in friendship puts a tension to *the good* as conceived in politics, where it is often reduced to adequately serving individual interests. These tensions are productive, as Ricoeur refuses to dismiss the political sphere as loveless or fundamentally inhumane (as if only direct, personal, intimate relationships were truly meaningful) (24).

Another contemporary philosopher, Nigel Biggar, contributes another crucial insight regarding the place of friendship at the intersection of personal and structural realms. He develops the idea of a *weak form* of friendship. This leading English ethicist is one of the few who incorporates friendship into political ethics. Biggar sees the roots of an ordered community in friendship while explicitly distancing himself from communitarian ethics (25). He critiques the "friendliness" of managerial thinking, pointing out an underlying utilitarianism that he considers incompatible with true friendship. Ultimately, there is no genuinely reciprocal utility; what appears as friendliness often masks a power dynamic. Applied to our context: the care manager ultimately uses the caregiver as a means to an end. Biggar concludes that some form of friendship is, nonetheless, necessary for structuring a community. *"Friendship is basic to all forms of community"*. Citizens—meaning individuals in the structured public life—are not necessarily full friends with one another, nor do they need to be. However, they do participate in a weak form of friendship; they must maintain a certain degree of friendship. They do not know each other intimately, but they do recognize a sense of mutual obligation (26). Rightly so, in my view, Biggar does not assume clear-cut relationships within a stable democratic order but instead focuses on anonymous, *long-term* relationships between citizens and emphasizes the need to *build* these relationships. It is precisely in this context that *"a certain degree of friendship"* is necessary, as he puts it. *Friendly virtues* such as honesty, trust, and the ability to reflect openly on human vulnerability are essential. In other words, In other words, Biggar speaks of the capacities required to build relationships in an environment of resentment. Far from a utopian vision of an orderly society, he insists that we must nonetheless engage in discourse about living together. Biggar takes one particular aspect of friendship as his focus: friendship is a relationship that involves personal engagement. However, this relationship is not purely private. It is a relationship—such as that between a "professional caregiver" and a "care recipient"—that exists at the intersection of public and private and can be understood through the lens of friendship. The relationship between caregiver and care recipient has personal aspects and can even be considered intimate. Caregivers often come physically and emotionally closer than one's own family. At the same time, this is not a private relationship; it is not an interaction that takes place within the private sphere. The care relationship— such as that between a doctor and a patient or a community nurse and an elderly widower— can be situated at the intersection between public and private life. I would like to refine this point: it is a relationship in which one *adopts the position of friendship*.

To conclude, I will briefly outline this final idea. Here, we must bring together the elements we have discussed: the understanding that professionalism is rule-driven and produces inequalities, the idea that friendship exists in the overlapping realm of public and private (rather than being purely private), a de-romanticized conception of friendship, the notion of

weak yet real friendship, and the recognition that friendship has features such as reciprocity and equality—features that, however, can be modulated.

The Position of Friendship

The contemporary phenomenologist Robert Sokolowski reflects on the intelligence inherent in friendship, in that type of relationship. Friendship has its own intelligence. When one starts viewing as a friend, one sees possibilities that would otherwise remain unseen. From the position of the friendship, it becomes clear whether a moral action is a good action. Sokolowski's reasoning unfolds in several steps.

The first step: I wish something for you that I perceive as good for you and also judge to be a good for you. Then follows the second step in this line of thought: as such, as something good for you, and insofar as it is good for you, I also want it and see it as good for myself (27). I see it as good for you that you can find rest or receive care now that you are gravely ill. The fact that I see this as a good and desire it for you, I also take as a good for myself. Not as utility, advantage, or pleasure for myself, but as a good. Your good may very well be unpleasant or disadvantageous for me: I lose my free time arranging for the doctor's visit, having to navigate through a maze of regulations. What matters to me is that you receive care; I do not want to live in a world where you are not given what you need to live and to be happy. This position, precisely, is that of friendship.

If we wish to apply this to various types of relationships, including business- or performance-oriented relationships, it is not about having a personal, preferential friendship with everyone. However, in all possible relationships, we can adopt the stance of friendship to discern what is good in our actions toward these people. One can adopt a position and develop a practice from the standpoint of friendship. The professional temporarily occupies this position for as long as the interaction lasts. This, I believe, is vital for an ethos of good care. It seems to me a strong foundation upon which to graft the ethos of the professional caregiver. In the many types of relationships with others in which I find myself and which I actively engage in, I can assume the position of friendship (28). The municipal officer in relation to the neighborhood resident, the head nurse in relation to the geriatric patient, and so on. The doctor or psychologist, for example, has a distinct way of acting in which they strive to help restore health, alleviate pain and discomfort, and fend off death. They do not need to have a personal friendship with all patients. They must perform their work skillfully. If the doctor wants to determine what is morally good to do, they can adopt the stance of friendship: Is this treatment a good for this patient? Can I see it, not in a general sense, but in its concreteness, as a good for them? And can I say that I want this treatment insofar as it constitutes a good for this human being? Finally: Can I take it as a good for myself that I commit to their good?

Whoever follows these stepping stones will discover what is good, will encounter what proves to be good, even in defiance of preconceived (and sometimes entrenched) notions about what we initially thought was good. The position of friendship makes it possible to see something that, before turning the corner, was entirely invisible. This idea provides a way to figure out what is good for the "caregiver" to do. However, this presupposes certain preconditions.

First, one must not see oneself as a technician but as a citizen possessing and applying professional knowledge in a profession, in a relationship that is neither purely public nor purely personal. This entails a *political* vision of professionalism.

Ricoeur pointed out that there is a unique sphere, the intersection between the private and the public, between the personal and the political. It is a domain that partially overlaps with the other two spheres. The profession of the "professional" caregiver lies within this intersection.

Biggar noted that *civic friendship* may rightfully be considered a form of weak friendship. A *long-term* relationship does not need to be turned into a *short-term* one; the caregiver is connected to the care recipient through an institutional framework, and there is nothing wrong with that indirect connection. A preferential friendship does not need to be established with everyone before a good ethos can be possible.

Samuel Weber, in a way, places a permanent constraint on the ethos of the professional caregiver by recognizing that professionalism itself, within its societal context, produces inequality. This cannot be remedied with an beautiful ethical mantra. His argument brings forth the uncomfortable realization that the professional caregiver must engage in a political struggle to have their profession (and also institutions like nursing homes) recognized as part of the common good, rather than as a component of the market or (social) technology.

Second, it is assumed that equality between the "caregiver" and the "care recipient" is always put first, within which the inequality in position and knowledge is managed. The notion that the asymmetry between "caregiver" and "care recipient" should determine the ethos of the "caregiver" is short-sighted. There is asymmetry, but it rests on an underlying equality. Ignoring the moral significance of this foundation removes the possibility of developing an appropriate ethos concerning asymmetry (which must also be acknowledged, albeit in a secondary position) (29). Similarly, only then can we speak of the *position of friendship*, which is after all based on equality.

A third assumption is that the professional caregiver is willing to become and remain actively engaged in a continuous practice of self-examination (Can I see this as a good? etc.). An ethos of applying principles or etiquette may seem easier. In my view, principles and etiquette are crucial but should not serve as the structuring foundation of ethos. Those who develop the practice of adopting the position of friendship do not settle for filtering out moral considerations. On this position, one actively seeks them out. Uncertainty is accepted in the pursuit of what is morally relevant in concrete situations.

Assuming that one can recognize weak forms of civic friendship as a possibility, there remains one final presupposition. Equality makes it possible, at a certain level, to relinquish reciprocity, which is characteristic of friendship. The care recipient does not reciprocate what they receive; as a patient or client, he does not necessarily wish the "caregiver" well. But as a citizen, he can. Not from "human to human" (a trite ethical platitude) but as a figure within an organized society, from citizen to citizen. The relationship does not become equal, for example, between the highly trained psychiatrist and the psychiatric patient. Yet, within a limited timeframe (as long as the contact lasts), both can indeed develop a practice of meeting each other in their respective capacities. That is, they discover what matters to each of them.

I provide an example of this, which also illustrates that the "care recipient" does not need to go so far as to wish the "care provider" well or to take such a wish as something good for himself. There is friendship, in a weak form, but no reciprocity. An experienced nursing home doctor provides a so-called palliative consultation to a very elderly woman who is gravely ill at home and to her family. The doctor does this despite the absence of financial compensation (unlike euthanasia consultations by certified physicians, which are still funded by the Dutch state). In other words, the doctor also relates to existing structures. The doctor offers medical *expertise* and carefully probes about the greatest goods for the woman and her family at this moment. In all their suffering, they identify these as: having contact, touching each other, experiencing every moment. The doctor can, solicited or unsolicited, express what matters to him or her personally in palliative care. The doctor to the patient: *"I do not want anyone in my care to be gravely ill without receiving the best pain relief we can possibly provide for her… As far as I can see, death is approaching quickly, and we should not burden you with inserting a line for fluids and nutrition"*. It is not about exchanging feelings or revealing secrets that are irrelevant here. This weak form of friendship has a single focus: the good of this woman. The sick woman does not engage in reciprocity. Perhaps there are few of these doctors. Few ask themselves what is the good at stake for them as doctors. *Civic friendship* requires a form of courage—*civil courage*—not only in relation to politics but also toward the "care recipient". The few who embody this show that it is possible to adopt the position of friendship.

In this outline, I position professional care within a domain that covers both the personal and the political spheres. At the same time, I have illustrated how friendship can exist within a limited but real bandwidth—one that the professional must actively seek out and establish. The characteristics of friendship, such as equality, mutual engagement, reciprocity, and intimacy, remain intact, though at a specific level: that of citizenship.
Intimacy, too, is preserved. We encountered it as the closeness that Aristotle acknowledged within friendship, though he did not equate the two. We also found it in Thomas's refinement of the concept, where he spoke of actively granting each other access to what is otherwise kept separate (secrecy).
The "care provider" does not initially feel trust but builds it through practice. In Romanticism (and beyond), intimacy was seen as the specific emotional core of friendship. Intimacy can exist for those who assume the position of friendship—not by sharing everything with one another but by communicating whatever is deemed appropriate, so that the good at stake can emerge. A feeling of intimacy is not the goal in itself; rather, it may accompany the adoption of a moral stance. And if the feeling does not arise, there is nothing wrong with that.
Within this defined domain of professional care and the corresponding bandwidth, there is room for and a need for the highest level of technical and craft-based expertise.

Prof. Dr. Frans Vosman (1952-2020) studied moral theology in Nijmegen and Rome and was a professor of moral theology at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht. Together with the Dutch professional association of spiritual caregivers in healthcare institutions VGVZ, he and Andries Baart conducted research into the moral knowledge of experienced spiritual caregivers.

Notes

1. I use "he" and "she" to avoid the constant repetition of he/she and his/her. However, this does not mean that I refer exclusively to men or women. I place "care recipient" and "caregiver" in quotation marks to emphasize that these commonly used terms should be subject to thorough critique. Care and giving/receiving are imprecise terms for what actually happens, and in ethics, precision is essential.
2. Here, I suffice with referring to the critique of principle ethics by T. Beauchamp and J. Childress, as well as the critique of the much more precise theory of reflective equilibrium by N. Goodman, N. Daniels, and J. Rawls (which considers not only principles but also emotions and intuitions).
3. A. Comte-Sponville, *Petit traité des grandes vertus*, Paris: PUE, 1995, p. 19: "La morale commence donc au plus bas – par la politesse – et il faut bien qu'elle commence."
4. Included as Chapter 2 in: S. Weber, *Institution and Interpretation. Expanded Edition*, Stanford CA, 2001, pp. 18–32, here: 25–27; originally published as an article in 1982. See the review in *Ephemera*, vol. 2 (2002), no. 4, pp. 357–371.
5. F. de Lange, "De burger als manager," in: *Filosofie en Praktijk*, vol. 23 (2004), no. 2, pp. 4–18, here: p. 17.
6. See F. Vosman, "Vriendschap in de stad – een moraaltheologische beschouwing," in: E. Hulsens et al., *Vriendschap, een zone zonder gevaar?*, Baart, 1997, pp. 27–55.
7. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 25, art. 7, *Responsio*.
8. V. von Schenk, "L'ironie de l'ironie: l'amitié selon les Romantiques d'Iéna," in: Sophie Jankelévitch & Bertrand Ogilvie (eds.), *L'amitié dans son harmonie, dans ses dissonances*, Paris: Autrement – Série Morales no. 17, 1995, pp. 32–42.
9. Quoted by Eric Hulsens, "Wat vrienden doen. Amicale relaties in Frankrijk (1700–1900)," in: *Streven*, May 1996, pp. 419–431, here: p. 421.
10. Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* (translated by Frank de Graaff), Amsterdam, 1993, p. 231.
11. Fr. Gerson, *L'Amitié au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1974. A similar concept of friendship can be found in Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim. Their correspondence is available in a Dutch translation.
12. See the image of the glass cup in Vosman, F. (2004). Vriendschap als model voor professionele zorg. *Tijdschrift voor Humanistiek*, *5*(2), 62-73.
13. R. Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature*, Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill, 1994.
14. Ph. Fisher, *The Vehement Passions*, Princeton/Oxford, 2002, p. 6.
15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1108a.
16. In Aristotle, *aisthèsis* refers to something like the event of perception and the activity of sensory perception and naming.
17. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, 1166a: *esti gar ho filos allos autos* ("For a friend is another self"). Also, Book IX, 1170a 25 and IX, 1170b 1–5. See also Paul Ricoeur's reflection on this in: *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris: Seuil, 1990, p. 217.
18. In Aristotle, *to kalon kai agathon* ("the beautiful and the good") belong together: for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, viii. 13. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 27, art. 1, ad 3: The beautiful is the same as the good, differing only in one aspect. This precedes the modern separation of aesthetics and ethics, a distinction introduced by Kierkegaard in the 19th century. In the 19th century and beyond, beauty and goodness

came to be seen as separate dimensions, but not for Aristotle. What is good is also beautiful and attractive; one is drawn toward the good.

19. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 1155a (end): similarity; 1155b (end): reciprocity. Also, 1158b. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1157b on reciprocity and equality.

20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated and annotated by Charles Hupperts and Bartel Poortman), Amsterdam: Kallias, 1997, p. 246.

21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 1156a 15 and 1157a 25 on friendship based on utility or pleasure as a *homoiotèta* ("likeness") of complete friendship; 1156b 7 ff on friendship between virtuous people as the perfected, flourishing friendship: *teleia philia*.

22. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 27, art. 3 on whether similarity is the cause of love in friendship.

23. P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, pp. 214–216, pp. 227–236.

24. The theme was already relevant for Ricoeur in 1958, but he revisited it in *Amour et Justice* (1993). Published in parallel French original and German translation: *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1993.

25. N. Biggar, *Good Life*, London: SPCK, 1997, pp. 94–101.

26. N. Biggar, *Good Life*, pp. 99–100: "Citizens are not fully-fledged friends, but they do participate in a weak form of friendship. They do not know and love each other intimately, but they do feel that they owe their fellow citizens, and are owed by them, a measure of care."

27. R. Sokolowski, "Moral Thinking," in: R. Sokolowski, *Pictures, Quotations and Distinctions*, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992, pp. 245–260, here: p. 250. See also the articles by Richard Cobb-Stevens and Guy Mansini on Sokolowski's concept of friendship in: G. Mansini & J.G. Hart (eds.), *Ethics and Theological Disclosures*, Washington DC: CUAP, 2003.

28. See R. Sokolowski, *Moral Action*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, Chapter 7, "The Being of Human Agents," especially pp. 162–174.

29. I have elaborated on this in: F. Vosman, "Macht en geweld in het pastoraat: Een bijdrage aan theorievorming over normatieve professionaliteit" in: *Praktische Humanistiek*, vol. 8 (1999), no. 3, pp. 33–49.