

Advanced 3

Unit 2 Reading

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Invisible Thread

A

It lifts hearts and lengthens lives. It has been hailed as the ultimate good by philosophers and promoted by major religions. The wondrous good in question is friendship. Aristotle's highest goal for men and the third plank of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—friendship is as old as humanity and as important as love or justice. But while bookstore shelves groan with self-help books on finding the perfect partner and philosophical texts on the nature of freedom, friendship barely gets a mention among academics or policy-makers.

hail = to publicly praise or show approval for a person or an achievement

The conference was hailed as a great success.

Teenager Matt Brown is being hailed a hero for saving a young child from drowning.

promote = to encourage people to like, buy, use, do, or support something

Aristotle /'ær.ə.stɑː.təl/ = an ancient Greek philosopher (= a person who studies the meaning of life) and scientist

Most people, as Aristotle said, agree that happiness is the greatest practical good.

wondrous = wonderful

It was a wondrous thing to see the sea for the first time.

plank = an important principle on which the activities of a group, especially a political group, are based

Educational reform was one of the main planks of their election campaign.

The party's policy is based on five central planks.

fraternity = brotherhood

justice = fairness; the fair treatment of people

She spent her life fighting for social justice and equality for women.

barely = hardly ever; scarcely; rarely; occasionally

academic = someone who teaches at a college, or who studies as part of their job

B

Friendship is the invisible thread running through society, yet its significance in our lives is, if anything increasing. While the claim that "friends are the new family" is an overstatement, it is certainly the case that friendships figure prominently in both the lives people actually lead and the ones to which they aspire. Some television series portray a world in which close friendships define the contours of the participants' lives: parents and children are allowed, at least, at best, walk-on parts.

thread = string; a thin rope

significance = importance

overstatement = exaggeration

figure (verb) = to be part of a process, situation, etc. especially an important part

My feelings about the matter didn't seem to figure at all.

The question of the peace settlement is likely to figure prominently in the talks.

Do I still figure in your plans?

prominently = noticeably

aspire = to have a strong desire to achieve or to become something

She aspired to a scientific career.

He aspired to be their next leader.

portray = show

contour /'kɑ:n.tɔr/ = outline

She traced the contours of his face with her finger.

walk-on part = a secondary role

C

One of the reasons why thinkers struggle to recognize this trend may be one of definition. After all, I am a friend to someone I have known and loved for twenty-five years. but I am also a "Friend of The Earth." Friendship is a slippery category. This, however, is where philosophers are supposed to help. Aristotle divided friendships into three types: friendships for usefulness, friendships for pleasure, and friendships of virtue.

struggle = to experience difficulty and make a very great effort in order to do something

slippery = (of a word, an idea, etc.) difficult to define (= to say what its meaning is) or to understand completely

Realism in art is a notoriously slippery term to define.

The lawyers argued that the word "intended" is a decidedly slippery one.

They agreed that finance is a particularly slippery domain.

virtue = a good moral quality in a person, or the general quality of being morally good

D

The first kind of friend is the one who will get you a job or membership of an exclusive club; the second makes you laugh. But in both cases the point of the friendship is that they provide something of separate value to you. True friendship, the third kind, is valued for itself. There are few numerical limits on the first two kinds—I can have a vast business network and hundreds of agreeable acquaintances—but true friendship is, by definition, a limited field: if someone has many friends, they have none.

exclusive = only to be used by one particular person or group; only given to one particular person or group

The hotel has exclusive access to the beach.

exclusive rights to televise the World Cup

His mother has told 'The Times' about his death in an exclusive interview (= not given to any other newspaper).

point = an opinion or fact that deserves to be considered seriously, or that other people agree is true

Yes, I can see your point/you've got a point there.

OK, you've made your point (= told us your opinion) - there's no need to go on about it.

agreeable = enjoyable; pleasant

acquaintance = a person whom you just know

E

Virtuous friendship is long-term and committed and brings great psychological benefits, and there is plentiful research evidence showing that having at least one close friend is associated with a range of health benefits, from recovery times from cardiac illness to reduced incidence of mental health problems.

virtuous = morally right

cardiac = related to the heart

incidence = occurrence

F

However, friendship is not always an unalloyed good. Its benefits are unevenly spread and its impact on traditional liberal values, such as equality, diversity, and mobility is mixed. The first problem is that men are worse at friendship than women. It is now widely acknowledged that women do more of the "social" work than men and have better-developed friendship skills, which leaves men at a disadvantage.

unalloyed = pure

mobility = the fact that it is easy for someone to change their situation, for example by doing different work, becoming part of a different social class, or moving to a different place

acknowledge = recognize; understand

G

Secondly, friendship has political down-sides for governments committed to social inclusion: it is by definition, exclusive. People from a particular social class or educational background are highly likely to form friendships or romantic relationships with people from the same background. Given that friends help each other, the danger is that the friendships of the affluent and successful hoard social advantage to the detriment of social mobility.

downside = disadvantage

given that = *considering the fact that*

affluent = rich and powerful

hoard = collect; gather

detriment = the act of causing harm or damage; something that causes harm or damage

Wood accounts for 90% of energy production in some countries, with consequent environmental detriment.

Too many tests are a detriment to good education.

H

Friendship is seen—with some justification—as a private matter, but the strong links between friendship and other social goods—including better health, more effective careers, and higher life satisfaction—should be enough to merit greater attention from decision-makers. So what are the political implications of these observations? Perhaps the best politicians can aim for is not to make things worse for friendship. But political institutions can improve or worsen the conditions in which friendships are formed.

justification = a good reason why something exists or is done

I can see no possible justification for any further tax increases.

I could find no real justification for the proposed reorganization.

He was getting angry—and with some justification.

She was arrested entirely without justification.

merit = deserve

He claims that their success was not merited.

The case does not merit further investigation.

institution = a large and important organization, such as a university or bank

I

First of all, the issue of time needs to be considered. Friendship requires time to flourish: Aristotle reckoned one and a half bushels of salt needed to be consumed together before a friendship became solid. At the present time, many people regard non-working hours as family time, but little allowance is made for the time needed to build friendships. Ironically, for politicians to discourage people from working long hours could be counter-productive, since a third of us make most of our friends through work. What the decision-makers could do, however, is discourage the drive for commercial gain that squeezes conviviality out of the workplace.

flourish /'flɔː.ɪʃ/ /'flʌr.ɪʃ/ = thrive; prosper

bushel = a unit for measuring grain and fruit (equal in volume to 8 gallons)

make allowance for = to prepare for the possibility of; consider

We should make allowance for bad weather and have plenty of umbrellas available.

counter-productive = having the opposite effect to the one that was intended

drive = an organized effort by a group of people to achieve something

conviviality = friendliness

J

There is also a case for encouraging spaces in which people from different backgrounds meet and interact in order to increase the chances of cross-class friendships. Given the increase in geographical inequality with rich people increasingly living in neighborhoods of rich people, only hospital wards and places of religious worship are sites of genuine social mixing.

interact = communicate

Teachers have a limited amount of time to interact with each child.

He interacts very well with other children.

The only thing he interacts with is his computer!

genuine = real, original, authentic

K

Friendship is a virtue with some of the appearances of a social vice. It can promote or demote social mobility; underpin tolerance or bolster discrimination; erode or sustain hierarchies. Society could be composed of strong friendships between people of identical social backgrounds who treat everyone else with contempt, intolerance, or fear. The true test of the friendliness of a community is not simply the way its citizens treat their friends, but whether they behave generously toward the broader social world. We need not only the care of friends, but the kindness of strangers.

vice = a moral fault or weakness in someone's character

Greed, pride, envy, and lust are considered to be vices.

promote = increase; raise

demote = decrease; lower

underpin = support

bolster /'bɒl.stə/ = strengthen

hierarchy /'haɪ.rɑːr.ki/ = a system in which people or things are arranged according to their importance

Full Text:

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