

DIALOGUE AND UNIVERSALISM

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FRIENDSHIP—AROUND MICHAEL H. MITIAS' *FRIENDSHIP:*
A CENTRAL MORAL VALUE

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Editorial

FRIENDSHIP—AROUND MICHAEL H. MITIAS' *FRIENDSHIP:* A CENTRAL MORAL VALUE

The main theme of this *Dialogue and Universalism* issue is friendship. The object of investigations and/or inspiration the here presented papers on friendship is Michael H. Mitias' book *Friendship: A Central Moral Value*.¹ In this very modest way *Dialogue and Universalism* would like to honour Professor Mitias—by paying attention to one of his many, though interrelated, fields of research. We have decided to follow Mitias' interest in friendship also because this virtue plays such a significant role in human life—in its individual as well as in social scale—that it repeatedly must be given attention it merits. Although—as one of the authors, Ruth Abbey, informs—some books on friendship have been published in the last years friendship is still a neglected issue, mainly because philosophy has rarely addressed the alarming condition of friendship in recent times. And it is Mitias who restores friendship in the variant that has been rooted in the human world over the centuries, reactivates it and postulates to assign it the role of a founding item of postmodern morality; Necip Fikri Alican elucidates this in detail in his paper. This recent period has abandoned many basic traditional values apparently “for the sake of modernization” as many ideologies try to convince us, in fact imposing or sanctioning our world order run by economic interests and benefits.

The *Dialogue and Universalism* editorial team is pleased to present here three extensive essays on Mitias' conception of friendship and his deep-going deliberations on this subject. The essays include analyses, discussions and trace the grounding of Mitias' conception in philosophical traditions. Also, the collection includes two other studies that do not refer directly to Mitias' book but are thematically closely related to it.

Following Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book VIII), in philosophy friendship is commonly treated as an ethical issue and as lying in the individual

¹ Mitias, M. H. 2012. *Friendship: A Central Moral Value*. Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi.

subject's sphere. However, like the majority of ethical issues, also the question of friendship inevitably extends to philosophical anthropology, especially to the problems of human being's nature, natural, primitive features, needs and aspirations as well as those imposed from outside, issues of individual identity, freedom and autonomy in the face of friendship, and individualistic tendencies versus togetherness.

Today the necessary extension of the scope of friendship goes farther on, namely to the sphere of society, culture, and civilization. Friendship is becoming a serious problem in all those domains, and cannot be viewed any longer only as an intimate relationship between two persons, a relationship devoid of socio-cultural influence and commitment. Recent socio-cultural phenomena have among others things led to the collapse or distortion of authentic human togetherness. We are witnessing the frightening disappearance of authentic friendly relationships. The very idea and value of friendship has been devalued and is currently turning into its own caricature or an empty illusion.

Paradoxically, new communication media are taking part in this degradation. Facebook and other social networking websites and services are changing the intimate, private relation of being friends into collecting "likes." Mobile phones' texting extremely shallows conversations, and also—if they become the dominating form of communication—intimate contacts and exchange between humans.

However, the degradation of friendship is mainly caused not by the flaws or side-effects of technical innovations. It is first of all a result of social changes, of changing social goals, needs, and lifestyles. Societies around the world are more and more strongly controlled by the rules of the Darwinian struggle for life, by selfish interests, by the continuous state of competition between people, by hostility toward the Other. One serious and pressing modern-day misery—in fact a widespread social disease—is loneliness, which is among other things an effect of the waning of friendship on the global scale (Mitias says a lot about loneliness and exclusion in his works, also Manjulika Ghosh writes about this phenomenon in her essay). People are lonely in the overpopulated world, in crowds, in societies, even in their families, because there are two dominant forms of human contacts: in the process of realising common interests, and in leisure. People are losing the ability to live authentically together, to be in selfless and emotionally involved relationships. The minimal and at the same time crucial benefit of friendship is avoiding loneliness.

Till now the postmodern "friendship"—or, in fact, friendship in the era of late capitalism, an era in which millions were excluded, baffled and beaten, an era of the collapse of solidarity (with people seeming to unite only against an enemy or for the sake of common interests)—has not been considered by ethicists and anthropologists with attention it deserves. The threat of a human world wholly devoid of friendship, togetherness, empathy, in other words, a human-kind consisting of isolated strangers, opens a new path of philosophical investi-

gation. It seems that friendship is not only an ethical value embracing two individuals, but also a social value and dependent on socio-cultural factors. As such it also could be an object of investigation in social philosophy. This should examine why friendship changes for worse in this world, which frequently speaks of itself as the best and most civilised world in human history. Philosophy should also study obstacles to friendship in today's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious world. In general, new conditions, situations and phenomena in the human world, which is in a constant state of flux, inspire philosophy—by founding new philosophical questions, followed by ideas, research, and conceptions.

The second part of this *Dialogue and Universalism* issue, entitled *IDEALS UNIVERSAL VALUES, DIALOGUE*, includes papers on the main topics discussed in this journal: the ideals and values underlying the praxis of the human world. And as for dialogue—this time we present two entirely different instances of dialogue: a dialogue between Christianity and Judaism (Shoshana Ronen), and a dialogue between philosophy and physics (Hisaki Hashi and Herbert Pietschmann).

Małgorzata Czarnocka
professor of philosophy

Necip Fikri Alican

**ANGELIQUE:
AN ANGEL IN DISTRESS, MORALITY IN CRISIS**

ABSTRACT

Michael H. Mitias argues that friendship is a central moral value constituting an integral part of the good life and therefore deserving a prominent place in ethical theory. He consequently calls upon ethicists to make immediate and decisive adjustments toward accommodating what he regards as a neglected organic relationship between friendship and morality. This is not a fanciful amendment to our standard conception of morality but a radical proposal grounded in a unifying vision to recapture the right way of doing ethics. While the assessment is compelling, and the plea well-placed, neither has been fully understood in the scholarly reception of Mitias. This paper clarifies both. What sets it apart from other reactions to Mitias is a holistic approach drawing on literary considerations as well as philosophical ones. The combined aim is to demonstrate that Mitias is not seeking simply to restore friendship to its rightful place in normative ethical theory, which is indeed the full extent of his formal mission, but that he is seeking to do so specifically within virtue ethics. This interpretation rests on a broad engagement with Mitias's publications beyond the recent treatise often taken understandably yet erroneously to be his only work on the subject.

Keywords: friendship, Humanism, moral theory, virtue ethics, ontology of value.

*I'm afraid we've fallen in with arguments about
friendship that are no better than con artists.*

Plato, *Lysis* 218d

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a comprehensive study of Mitias's philosophy of friendship. The approach is analytic, exploratory, and interpretive. The inspiration binding these perspectives together is the impression that Mitias's campaign to have ethicists acknowledge friendship as a central moral value with a definitive role in ethical theory is a drive toward virtue ethics conceived from within virtue ethics. This impression originates in two principles of interpretation common and peculiar to the works of Mitias: (1) Anything Mitias writes on friendship or love is always at the same time on morality and ethics. (2) Everything Mitias writes is on friendship or love and therefore also on morality and ethics.¹

The focus is largely, though not exclusively, on *Friendship: A Central Moral Value* (2012a). That book is commonly taken to be Mitias's only work on friendship. It is not. It is his only treatise on the subject. Including that one, his last six books are all either on friendship or on love, most of them on both, given that there is no friendship without love.² In accordance with the two interpretive principles above, all six books are also on morality and ethics.³ This is not something I aspire to prove here severally for each book. The collective evidence will come out naturally in the course of defending the central thesis that the expectations of Mitias regarding friendship are best met through virtue ethics, perhaps solely through virtue ethics, though I will not press the latter issue.

As is the case with all his recent publications, his only treatise on friendship is grounded firmly in virtue ethics through an attempt, explicit there, implicit in his other works, to establish friendship as a central moral value. The title alone shows immediately that Mitias is after both, with the main title invoking friendship and the subtitle adding morality. The book devotes ample attention both to friendship and to moral philosophy, making a compelling case for why the first is indispensable for the second, while showing us along the way that the reverse is true as well. Yet the focus on restoring friendship to its rightful place as a central moral value leaves virtue ethics in the background despite its being the very place the restoration is to be made. I aim to bring it out into the foreground through a combination of literary and philosophical considerations.

¹ The scope of consideration, deliberately limited in order to isolate a significant pattern, is books published over the last ten years. I do not mean to ignore the work of Mitias in the field of aesthetics or to overlook his status as a preeminent Hegel scholar. Those contributions are simply outside the frame of reference. As for the interpretive principles presented above, they are both perfectly accurate within the scope of consideration. The first one is just as accurate without limitation or qualification.

² The other five books are: *Love Letters: The Abyss of Loneliness* (2009); *Seeking God: A Mystic's Way* (2012b); *My Father the Immigrant: In the Light of Love* (2013a); *Love Poems from a Mystic* (2013b); *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017).

³ A seventh book of the same nature, further corroborating the two interpretive principles above, was published concurrently with the present volume, though it was not available for inspection at the time of writing: *Tears of Love* (2018).

The reason for employing literary considerations alongside philosophical ones is that Mitias himself is a literary artist as well as a professional philosopher. While his latest book on friendship is a treatise, and not a work of literature, that is a verifiable departure from the *modus operandi* of Mitias, whose recent contributions have otherwise all been literary works, mostly philosophical novels.⁴ True to that trend, and reflecting the habituation therein, the key to unlocking the full impact of his treatise goes through a literary device deployed with passion near the beginning of the book, an apparently personal anecdote concerning Angelique, an angelic heroine whose *raison d'être* seems to have escaped the attention of commentators, at least judging by the absence of a reference to her in their reactions.⁵ My suspicion is that this supposedly veridical story, capturing as it does the very crisis troubling Mitias in regard to both morality and moral theory, is a metaphor he invents and interjects as a map to the corresponding thesis, defense, and conclusion. And that map, as I intend to show, plots a course through virtue ethics.

As for philosophical considerations, they bear the main burden of demonstration, since interpretive authority in a disquisition cannot reasonably be assigned to symbolism ahead of argumentation. Even so, I am convinced that there is more to be gained here from literary analysis than from an expository and critical review of the arguments, which are clear enough on their own. This appeal to clarity is not intended to beg the question of the tenability of Mitias's thesis. My claim is not that his position is unassailable, or his arguments infallible, but that both are easy to follow. Indeed, the critical reception to date has been one of agreement or disagreement, not confusion or perplexity.⁶ This is why I believe that exploring the literary perspective, since it affords direct insight into highly relevant material that would otherwise be ignored, might be particularly rewarding.

A philosophical appraisal is, of course, still necessary. But it should ideally expand our understanding of what Mitias has already accomplished. In an effort to add something new to the reactions currently in circulation, I offer not just an exposition and evaluation of the main arguments but also an exploration of how to go about restoring friendship to its rightful place as a central moral value in ethical theory. What this amounts to is a philosophical appraisal that builds up to a judgment on what can and must be done if Mitias is right about friendship as opposed to an appraisal concluding merely with agreement or disagreement on whether he is right about it.

I submit, and aim to demonstrate, that the best way to meet the demands Mitias places on normative ethical theory in regard to friendship, given the nature of his position as reflected in his observations, inferences, and conclusions,

⁴ See the references in note 2.

⁵ See Abbey (2013), Gehrman (2014), Lynch (2014), and Mulvey (2013), each discussed separately below in section four of the paper.

⁶ See the references in note 5.

is through virtue ethics. This reading has the advantage of exposing the most promising path for carrying out the revival project Mitias has been promoting, while also removing some of the obstacles that have already been laid out in his path by critics. Complementing this effort, the final portion of the paper takes up specific objections, especially those that are not met obviously or decisively either by symbolism or by analysis, to make sure Mitias is understood as intended even where his ideas are rejected as presented.

The remainder of the paper is organized in three sections as follows: Section two explores the literary perspective, dissecting the anecdotal metaphor mentioned above as a precursor to the central thesis and supporting arguments. Section three reviews the rationale behind Mitias's position in an effort to determine our best option for dealing with the problem he describes and for implementing the solution he recommends. Section four surveys the critical reception to clear up misunderstandings and to weed out polemical objections so as to expose the philosophical dialectic underneath. The combination shows that Mitias's *Friendship* (2012a) is better understood as a call to respond specifically through virtue ethics to a crisis in moral philosophy than it might be as a methodologically indifferent survey of friendship as a central moral value.

2. LITERARY INTERPRETATION

Mitias writes from the heart. He bares his soul, not just as an inamorato drafting *Love Letters* (2009), or a troubadour composing *Love Poems* (2013b), or a mystic *Seeking God* (2012b), or a prisoner defending *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017), but also, and perhaps most passionately, as a philosopher reflecting on the human condition. His approach to *Friendship* (2012a) is no different. In a pivotal section of the very first chapter, just as he is laying out the analytic tools he intends to use throughout the book, Mitias interrupts his methodological exposition to tell a story. With the basic model barely set up, this seems to be no place for a digression, especially not for a peripheral narrative. But it is the perfect place to emulate Plato in resorting to storytelling to make sure the gravity of the point is appreciated even where the rationale may not be accepted.⁷

The story is about Angelique, a student of Mitias, who attempts to kill herself but winds up in the hospital instead. Having been summoned to the hospital

⁷ The eschatological myths of the *Gorgias* (523a–527a), *Phaedo* (107c–115a), and *Republic* (614a–621d) come to mind. The central myth of the *Phaedrus* (246e–249d), with the imagery of the chariot, is no less memorable. The *Symposium*, of course, is basically one story after another until Alcibiades shows up uninvited and ends up contributing the most personal story of all. And the bulk of the *Timaeus*, in fact, the entirety of the cosmology there, is identified explicitly as a “likely story” (*eikōs muthos* [εἰκὼς μῦθος]) or “likely account” (*eikōs logos* [εἰκὼς λόγος]) (29b–d ff. *passim*). All references to Plato are by Stephanus number. Any quotations in English are from the Hackett edition of his complete works in translation (Plato 1997).

through a phone call from the young woman's mother, Mitias rushes to Angelique's bedside just as she is being wheeled out of the emergency room and into a regular room (2012a, 21–22). The message is about compassion, empathy, and goodwill, no doubt prevalent among friends, but also expected to some extent as a human response in relationships short of friendship.

The tone is set by the nurse, a competent and efficient man tending to Angelique.⁸ He is a true professional in the primary sense of the word, which he demonstrates in response to the gratitude Mitias expresses for his kindness toward Angelique: "I am paid to be kind to my patients" (2012a, 21). He also demonstrates considerable enthusiasm for the possibility of a formal commendation: "I hope you can give a good evaluation of my work to my superior" (2012a, 21). This dispassionate demonstration of professionalism in what is otherwise a moral context disturbs Mitias, not just as the story's protagonist but also as its narrator.

Mitias introduces the anecdote as a true story: "I shall illustrate what I mean by a brief description of an experience I had a few years ago" (2012a, 21). What he is offering to "illustrate" here, as he puts it, is a growing tendency he observes in people to appear moral without being moral. The story he recounts indeed illustrates that observation. Yet Mitias communicates the same observation so clearly in the first place that his exposition requires no further elaboration for intelligibility, not even an illustration. The anecdote that follows does not actually prove that there is a growing tendency in people to feign moral behavior. It merely illustrates the assertion. Mitias himself admits as much. So, why follow a perfectly clear statement with an anecdote that adds nothing to the clarity, let alone proving the reality? The most plausible explanation is that the story is a purely rhetorical device, a fictional account symbolizing the thesis to be demonstrated. It even serves as a roadmap for what is to come, though plotting the directions requires an affinity for metaphors and some patience for interpretive reflection.

This is the artistic calling card of Mitias. The assignment of a representative role to a passage which then illuminates the rest of the book is a literary prefiguration technique he has been cultivating with flair. One example is in *Love Letters* (2009), where opening ruminations on a family tradition revolving

⁸ Why is the nurse a man? While there is nothing strange about a male nurse, female ones are still more common. If Mitias were relating a true story, the nurse's gender would have been whatever it happened to be, irrelevant in either case. But because he is making it up, as I argue below, one may be inclined to wonder whether there is a special reason why he is inviting us to imagine a male nurse, perhaps bearing a structural if superficial resemblance to what crime novelists do with left-handed killers in murder mysteries. In this case, however, there is no hidden message. Mitias makes the nurse a man simply to differentiate the pronouns in a passage where there are already two women interacting with the narrator who doubles as the protagonist. As the nurse is the only man present besides Mitias the character, the reference is perfectly clear in every "he," "him," or "his," because Mitias is also the narrator. The clarity would have been diluted with a female nurse in the company of two other women.

around a box handed down from generation to generation blend into the main storyline as a young nephew is entrusted with a mysterious box left behind by a dying uncle, whose deeply mystical love letters making up the contents of the box determine both the contents and the structure of the book, stringing together sixteen of those letters, out of a total of seventy, some of which mention and quote other letters, where philosophical messages thus become twice removed from the level of narration at the beginning, epitomizing the spirit in which Plato famously declares art twice removed from reality (*Republic*, 597e, 599d).⁹ Another example awaits in *My Father the Immigrant* (2013a, 1–2), where the first chapter, titled “A Short Story,” indeed tells a short story disconnected from the novel itself, but it actually serves as a literary and philosophical map to the novel in the guise of a foreword by its protagonist.

As for the methodological counterpart of these in the personalized anecdote motivating his treatise on friendship, Mitias is not relating a story he just happened to recall in a stream of consciousness but inviting the reader to share his indignation with false morality. What better way to protest false morality than through a fake illustration of it? People pretending to be moral without actually being moral, specifically the nurse in the story, is a metaphor for normative ethical theories purporting to capture the essence of morality without uncovering the nature of humanity. This is, again, a nod to Plato, as the pretense to morality (*Republic*, 358e–367e) goes hand in hand with the vacuity of rhetoric (*Gorgias*, 462c–466a), both schemes depicting a knack for pandering to expectations without meeting specifications.

The message is a rejection of ethical theories that set out to systematize morality without devoting adequate attention to the highest good as the source of moral obligation. Mitias is opposed to moral codes that are out of touch with what it means to be a human being: a bundle of potentiality in the process of actualization toward human excellence. Even as a crude filter, the Angelique narrative immediately eliminates, among others, divine command theory and deontological ethics. Virtue ethics quickly emerges as the most likely candidate to survive the filtration process.

While this is merely an inference to the best explanation, it is unlikely to be contradicted by further study. What purpose would the anecdote serve otherwise? What good would it do, if there were no message, to bring up the matter of people pretending to be moral without being moral, given that the book is not aiming to reprimand moral agents for not doing their part but to recruit moral philosophers to show everyone what that part is. Just as the nurse doing his job was acting out of a sense of duty but not out of a sense of goodness, both the

⁹ The love poem coming before all this, even before the literary prologue laying out the philosophical messages, and thus before any of the letters, suggests that love precedes all. This is a reflection of how philosophy itself begins with love, at least from an etymological standpoint, but arguably also from an existential perspective. It is at the same time a reminder that both literature and philosophy are put to their best use through love.

word of God and the categorical imperative lay out a course of action in a stipulative manner, not without the possibility of justification but without the benefit of explanation. As a result, compliance with either one, while it may in fact be the right thing to do, lacks enlightening engagement with moral value and corresponding obligations, especially with what makes anything good and why we ought to do what we ought to do. Mitias is thus issuing an invitation to virtue ethics because he sees it as the most insightful and comprehensive answer to how we ought to live as human beings, especially in contrast to a rigoristic response to what we ought to do in various circumstances, each determined in accordance with a generic formula for appraising the morality of the situation without appreciating the humanity in it.

What Mitias wants, deep down, is for the nurse to hold hands with the mother and with the friend of the family (Mitias himself) to commiserate, if only for a minute, before tending to his other duties. He is willing to settle for any sort of cordial or sympathetic response liberated to any degree from the contractual requirements of the nurse's job description. But what he is really looking for is that extra step to acknowledge the existential reality of the situation and to respond sincerely as a human being rather than strictly as a professional.

Finding symbolism where none is intended is the most common illusion in literary interpretation. But the insight is almost always worth the risk. If there is any suspicion that I might be reading too much into a brief anecdote, strangely out of place in a philosophical treatise, I invite the reader to reflect upon the same assessment by the same author in a different book already mentioned above, *My Father the Immigrant* (2013a):

“Most of the time, what they [patients] need more than anything is a warm smile, a gentle touch, or a kind word. It is a shame that we cannot always satisfy that need. It is actually an essential part of nursing, but there is never enough time for it, especially since affection does not come with a prescription; you can always provide more. If there is not enough time for that, we must at least be gentle and tolerant. Nursing is a vocation, a way of life, not merely a career or an occupation. We have a competent staff here, but only a few demonstrate genuine human feeling. I honestly do not know why. When you deal with human beings, especially as a health care provider, you first have to show that you're a human being, too. Patients should be treated with the dignity they deserve as human beings” (Mitias 2013a, 3).

This assessment is delivered in the form of an unrehearsed speech by the head nurse at the cancer ward of the Baptist Hospital in Southaven, Mississippi. The words come out spontaneously during a private yet informal orientation session for the protagonist, who has just started her job as a nurse at that hospital. What makes this Mitias's own assessment rather than just a few lines spoken by one of his characters is that Mitias habitually addresses his readers

through his characters. But anyone reluctant to trust this generalization, especially in the form of an unsubstantiated declaration, may rest assured that the work just quoted is an autobiographical novel, where the protagonist is the daughter of Mikha Midas, who is himself a patient at the hospital in question.¹⁰

The implication for the drama unfolding around Angelique is that Mitias, as the author, expects the same thing from the nurse tending to Angelique that he expects from his own alter ego, the friend of the family already there for comfort and support. His expectations from the nurse may be lower in degree, but they are the same in spirit. He does not require the nurse to be a full-fledged friend to Angelique, but he does expect him to show some compassion, and perhaps for a moment, to be a selfless companion, which is the beginning of friendship. Either way, though, whether it is compassion or friendship that the nurse is expected to show, we are drawn into the territory of virtue ethics. Mitias reveals his hand clearly in the only line he delivers through the nurse, who attributes every benefit he has conferred upon Angelique to the requirements of his job, thus reducing a moral good to a formal duty, not even to his patient but to his employer, as he proceeds to give back in effort what he had received in wages. In the briefest of passages, then, Mitias manages to paint the nurse as a deontologist and to reject the approach in its entirety.

The man was doing his job, and thus performing his duty, but he was not, as far as Mitias is concerned, doing the right thing. And this is not just because he asked for something in return for his assistance, not, that is, because he asked for a positive review of his performance to be brought to the attention of his supervisor. He would have still failed to satisfy Mitias even if he had simply said “You are quite welcome. I was only doing my job.” The demands Mitias places on morality go beyond duty: “Moral behavior [...] is an expression of our conscience, of our moral heart. It is a way of actualizing the moral dimension of our being” (2012a, 22). Even if he had not asked for a favorable review in return, the nurse would not have been “actualizing the moral dimension of his being” by merely performing his duty, which here happened to be his job, showing no awareness that there is more to morality than duty, or put differently, that morality is not exhausted by duty. He was not being moral, because he was not living up to his own potential toward excellence, human potential toward human excellence. Both the potential and the excellence, and along with them the humanity, were forsaken in this one act.

The joint protagonists of the story, Mitias and the mother of Angelique, are not merely opposed to the moral code demonstrated by the nurse but also appalled and astonished by its implementation. This is not just ethical disagreement or philosophical conflict. It is moral indignation and human outrage. To be

¹⁰ Mikha Midas (= Michael Mitias) turns up again in *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017), which also brings back his daughter Amy Wright, who pens a “Note to the Reader” preceding the main text. Not only is Mitias always present in his work but he is also prepared to make that presence explicit and unmistakable when the message is dear to his heart.

specific, Mitias reports shock for his own part, while observing anger and disappointment in the mother:

“Upon hearing this response a quiet shock streamed violently through my veins. My cheeks suddenly became red. Frankly, I was dumbfounded. I slowly moved my eyes toward Angelique’s mother. Her face radiated vibes of anger and disappointment” (Mitias, 2012a, 21–22).

This is the moral epicenter of the book. The clue is the tension between quiet and violence, together spotlighting a Mitias trademark: silent communication. Righteous indignation comes out in utter silence through the briefest glance conveying the deepest emotions straight from the heart and right through the eyes. This is the standard mode of communication in Mitias’s literary treatments of moral approval or censure and in his various depictions of the purest exchanges in empathy or sympathy. Even a cursory survey of his recent works will confirm that Mitias places great emphasis on silent communication, where not one word need be uttered to convey the full range of human emotion, covering not just positive moods such as elation and compassion but also negative ones such as sorrow and anger:

- *Love Letters* (2009, xii): “I remained silent the entire time. I felt certain in my heart that he understood my silence. Do you know, dear reader, that silence, human silence, can sometimes speak more, much more meaningfully, than words, even more than poetry?”
- *Seeking God* (2012b, 134): “Moments later they faced each other silently, but their silence was a dialogue, and the medium of the dialogue was their sparkling eyes.”
- *My Father the Immigrant* (2013a, 189–190): “Our eyes were locked in a short moment of silent dialogue; silent, because both of us understood the meaning and message of the nasty smell that was floating in the rooms and corridors of the hospital.”
- *Love Poems* (2013b, 60, 69, 121): “My Friend does not speak—not my language, nor yours. / His Presence is his speech, and his meaning is his light” (from “You are the Alpha and the Omega,” 60). “Always remember: The language of reality is silence, / Not the silence of nature, of this woman or that man, / But of the kind that speaks the language of The Light, / That speaks the unspeakable without speaking!” (from “Before the Maple Tree,” 69). “Silence was the only language I spoke, / And he was a master speaker in this art” (from “The Only Air Worth Breathing Is the Air of Love,” 121).
- *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017, 27): “I consciously replaced the blank gaze that emanated from my eyes in the direction of my torturer with a gaze of understanding silence—yes, understanding silence.”

Such consistency across such variety—a handful of examples representing a storehouse of relevant passages—suggests that it is not just the characters Mitias creates that communicate in silence but also Mitias himself. This is actually far more than a suggestion. The confirmation is, again, in the autobiographical novel, *My Father the Immigrant* (2013a), where the character of Mikha Midas is developed as a silent communicator par excellence:

- “He does not look with his eyes but with his soul; he does not speak with his lips but with his heart” (2013a, 3).
- “I never take his facial expressions lightly. They communicate warmth and depth” (2013a, 4).
- “Mikha did not speak, except with his eyes” (2013a, 192).
- “I simply gazed into Mikha’s eyes, those eyes that communicated more love than I could express” (2013a, 202).

What is it, then, that this silent communicator is telling us with a hospital metaphor in a treatise on friendship? Is it just the central character that is having an existential crisis or is it all of humanity in her person? Love and friendship, above all, require no words for Mitias, as they fully transcend the need for verbal communication, though certainly remaining amenable to it. What he is demonstrating here is the urgency of restoring both to their proper place in our personal encounters with one another, which we ought always to carry out as human beings simpliciter, hence as beings with the same basic needs, desires, fears, and frustrations, any imbalance in which is liable to place any one of us in distress.

The nurse’s display of professionalism devoid of humanism is not the only sign of opposition to deontological ethics. The symbolism of the anecdote runs much deeper than that. And the same factors against deontological ethics are aligned just as strongly against divine command theory. We are invited not merely to join Mitias and Angelique’s mother in their resentment of the morally hollow professionalism of the nurse but also to reflect upon what brought Angelique in need of the nurse’s services in the first place: She tried, unsuccessfully, to take her own life. This is a transgression of duty in deontological as well as theological terms, as suicide is forbidden both by the categorical imperative and by the will of God under any interpretation. Had the focus of the story been the cold and calculated response of the nurse, we could have done without the suicide storyline. Angelique could have just slipped and fell, been hit by a car, or been assaulted by a mugger. She could have encountered any number of misfortunes to place her in the hospital, but no, she tried to commit suicide. Why? This is Mitias’s story. He could have picked any crisis at all for the character he created. Why did he have her attempt suicide?

The answer is that Mitias is determined to get us to reflect upon the formalism and rigorism of both deontological ethics and divine command theory, specifically through the perfect duty one has toward oneself in the former and to-

ward God in the latter, neither of which evidently had any effect on Angelique—an otherwise “highly intellectual, articulate, kind-hearted, and cultivated young woman” (2012a, 21). The message is that duty, rational or divine, is either vacuous or altogether meaningless, and most certainly otiose, unless we recognize and appreciate the humanity sanctioning that duty. We know that either the recognition or the appreciation, or possibly both, are lacking in the given context, as Angelique tried to destroy a human being in the making: herself. And we know that she was, and still is, a human being in the making, a bundle of potentiality in the process of actualization. We know the latter because we have all the telltale signs: intellectual, articulate, kind-hearted, cultivated. The list covers both reason (intellectual, articulate) and virtue (kind-hearted, cultivated). What Angelique needs the most, then, is not a specialist performing his duty (doing his job) but a friend inspiring and encouraging her to combine and cultivate her own reason and virtue better than she has been able to do on her own. This is not to say that, having been brought back to life from the clutches of death, Angelique requires no medical attention, but that she requires more than that, some portion of which could easily be provided by the same people providing the medical attention, evidently even through the briefest glance conveying goodwill.

Mitias is at pains to infuse the anecdote with apparently superfluous details that actually highlight the morality of the situation. While this is clear from the suicide attempt alone, given that it is forbidden not just by the categorical imperative but also by the will of God as recognized in any version of theism, he adds layer upon layer of detail to the story to make sure we get the message, particularly the religious dimension. Why else would Mitias the character be summoned to Angelique’s bedside through a phone call taking him to the emergency room of a hospital with a religious affiliation? Why are they even at the hospital? Could Mitias not have been comforting Angelique at her own home after the suicide attempt?

No, Mitias the author strategically conjures up a desperate phone call taking Mitias the character, together with the audience of the book, to the emergency room at St. Mary Hospital, not just any hospital but St. Mary Hospital, and not just the hospital but the emergency room. The phone call symbolizes a human plea, the emergency room represents the urgency of the situation, and the name of the hospital introduces a religious dimension. Angelique is already at St. Mary, with Mother Mary and thereby within reach of Jesus, yet the grace of God is not enough. Neither the Kantian perfect duty to oneself nor the religious inculcation regarding the sanctity of life has proven sufficient to keep Angelique from attempting suicide.

Her name is no accident either. It is a reminder that mortal problems do not come with divine solutions. Angelique is an angel—an angel in distress. She has fallen from heaven. What she needs is a human touch, which her mother recognizes and attempts to secure with a phone call to a trusted and valued

friend, Mitias the character. This is the same call that Mitias the author is issuing on behalf of humanity and in the name of reason and morality. He finds the state of moral discourse in just as much need of attention as he does Angelique.

The crisis is so urgent for Mitias that he abandons his firmly established mode of expression as a literary artist exploring the mystical experience, reverting here in this book, if only temporarily, to his roots as a professional philosopher pursuing the truth in a dialectical effort to make it accessible to others. This is the morally obligatory return to the cave for Mitias, who started out as an academic philosopher with a steady output of scholarly books and articles on topics ranging from ethics to aesthetics to social and political philosophy, thus with a broad range within value theory, moving on afterwards to a more personal contemplation of life in general, and the good life in particular, explored through philosophical novels complemented by a book of poetry. This period of enlightenment, following the earlier period of development, is the culmination of a process of self-actualization for Mitias, compelled thereby to return to the cave to share his own insight in language more fitting for those who have not yet seen the sun.¹¹ This is the reason for his temporary departure from philosophical fiction, promptly resumed with *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017), followed by *Tears of Love* (2018).

His immersion in literature should not be confused with a departure from philosophy. The difference is only in the mode of expression. It is all philosophy. And it is all specifically value theory, always with an eye to uncovering the human perspective. This book, *Friendship: A Central Moral Value* (2012a), has been underway for a long time, both before and after its publication. A more literal way of looking at this deliberate contradiction between before and after is that Mitias has been promoting the ideals in this book for a long time. But the best way of putting it, though more literary than literal, perhaps even Borgesian, is that this book has been, and continues to be, written over and over. This is all Mitias ever writes about.

Everything Mitias writes is on friendship, or on love, which is the foundation of friendship. And everything Mitias writes is on morality, which is built on both, or at least ought to be. That is the central message of this book as well as others coming before it and after it. Page after page of his recent works will attest to his dedication to seeing and bringing out the best in humanity:

- *Love Letters* (2009, 185): “‘The basis of true friendship,’ she asserted, ‘is moral goodness, not material advantage. Moral goodness is what makes friendship a spiritual relationship’.”

¹¹ His sensitivity to his own actualization (thus to his self-actualization) and his sense of responsibility toward promoting the same in others reflect his devotion to the Aristotelian principle of the actualization of potentiality as the essence of excellence (both in general and in human beings).

- *Seeking God* (2012b, 160): “He exemplified the noblest qualities of friendship, the true spirit of giving and sharing, not from a selfish motive but from good will.”
- *My Father the Immigrant* (2013a, 176): “A wise man once said that the glory of friendship lies not in the fact that my friend will sit by my side when I am sick and lonely, but in the fact that I can sit by his side when he is sick and lonely.”¹²
- *Love Poems* (2013b, 45, 60, 88): “Your beauty is a sun to my eyes, / Goodness to my heart, and power to my will” (from “At the Altar of Your Radiant Beauty,” 45). “How can there be life without you, my Friend?” (from “You are the Alpha and the Omega,” 60). “Do not believe them, please, / But love them and hug them, anyway” (from “How Was the Sun of the Human Heart Eclipsed?” 88).
- *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017, 49): “Two persons love each other and grow in their friendship, not from a selfish motive, and not because of some advantage, although friendship is a most advantageous relationship, but from good will.”

These passages reflect variations on a theme. They repudiate personal advantage and embrace goodness, or the good, particularly in the form of goodwill, predicated upon and emanating from a good will, which Kant was not wrong to emphasize but perhaps hasty to codify as the only thing that is good in itself (good without qualification), leading him to neglect other essential aspects and attributes of the humanity in which it originates. And it is this same emphasis Mitias places on goodwill grounded in a good will that makes divine command superfluous in the sphere of moral justification and therefore in the whole of ethical theory (another nod to Plato, this time, to the *Euthyphro*).

The two works of fiction corresponding to the first and last entries in the preceding list both build up to a formal address, a soliloquy of sorts, by a protagonist engaged in a scholarly presentation on the nature of friendship, much like the one by the author himself in the treatise on friendship under discussion here. The one in *Love Letters* (2009, 184–187) is an artless yet erudite delivery by a character initiated in the mysteries of love and friendship. The one in *Justice under the Ax of the Absurd* (2017, 49–51), constituting part of the second chapter, appropriately titled “In Quest of a Genuine Human Being,” is an outgrowth of the presentation in *Love Letters* (2009, 184–187). The fifth chapter of this recent novel of Mitias is, in fact, titled “Friendship Sprouts in Mikha’s and

¹² Arguably more telling than specific quotes is the fact that one of the entries in this anthology of love poems is entirely about friendship: “Between Friends” (2013b, 53–54). This reflects the ontological and axiological relationship Mitias sees between love and friendship, while the clear indication that the friend (“Friend”) is God, expressly verified at the outset to make sure the association is not missed (2013b, 5), confirms the ultimate value he assigns to friendship. This is no accident, or fleeting fancy, as it is complemented by several other poems that persistently invoke the “Friend” as God and vice versa.

Dr. Tareq's Hearts." But Mitias waits no further than the second chapter to bring out the connections between love, friendship, and morality:

"Goodness is the origin and aim of the love that unites two persons in the bond of friendship; and it is also the glue that cements it and makes it lasting" (Mitias 2017, 49).¹³

This quotation captures the spirit and rationale of everything Mitias has ever written on the subject and can be found in different words expressed by different characters in all of his recent works. The point it makes is that friendship is a moral good, and conversely, that morality is incomplete without love and friendship. His only treatise on the subject, analyzed more fully in the next section, is dedicated to demonstrating this relationship through a dialectical approach complementing all the artistic ones preceding and following it.

3. PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

The premise of the book is that friendship as a central moral value has been neglected in the western philosophical tradition for sixteen hundred years, roughly between the fourth and twentieth centuries, extending from the end of the Stoic era to the present (2012a, 1). The deficit of attention starts specifically with the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire in AD 380, with the other end remaining open except for a revival of interest in the last few years (2012a, 3, cf. 217, note 4). It thus covers the medieval, modern, and contemporary periods, allowing for exceptions in recent scholarship. The thesis is that this neglect is both unjustified (without good reason) and unfortunate (productive of bad results) and therefore in need of full and immediate correction.

The neglect here is academic rather than general. Mitias is not protesting the absence of friendship among people but the absence of the concept from moral discourse, as conducted mostly by philosophers but also by theologians. He does touch upon approaches to friendship among ordinary people as he tracks social patterns and sociological developments throughout the periods under consideration. But that effort is largely in support of his primary appeal to professional philosophers. The call he ultimately makes for the restoration of

¹³ Among the numerous counterparts of this statement in *Friendship: A Central Moral Value*, two in particular stand out: (1) "We are not amiss at all if we say that the foundation of harmony between friends is the fact that they are good and that the pursuit of the good is the ultimate principle of their lives" (2012a, 69). (2) "This insight underlies the argument I have advanced in this, final chapter: namely, friendship is an ontological need, primarily because it is an essential element of human nature. Goodness is its source, and goodness constitutes the structure of the relation which makes it possible!" (2012a, 215).

friendship to its rightful place in moral discourse addresses ethicists, or at most philosophers and theologians in general, not laypersons. Strictly speaking, Mitias is opposed to the neglect of friendship both in scholarly contributions to normative ethics and among moral agents in the general population, but his thesis in the book is exclusively about the relevant scholarship.

His objection regarding the scholarship is not that friendship has not been receiving any attention at all in academia but that it has not been receiving any where it counts the most, moral discourse. The difference is important: Mitias has no problems with either the quantity or the quality of academic output on friendship in the periods under investigation. Quite the contrary, aiming to preclude potential misunderstandings in that regard, he makes a special effort to acknowledge the existence of a plethora of works on friendship in all the periods in which it was otherwise neglected as a central moral value in ethical theory (2012a, 2–3). What he does object to is the absence of friendship from scholarly discussion in moral philosophy, particularly where the aim is to determine the first principle of morality, or as Mitias puts it, the “principle of moral distinction,” to wit, the philosophical delineation of the difference between good and bad, and right and wrong. His concern, therefore, is with the locus of omission: normative ethics.

His objective is to demonstrate that friendship has been neglected exactly as specified, that the neglect has been unjustifiable as well as detrimental, and that it is therefore in need of immediate attention toward restoration. This creates two tasks, one of documentation, the other of substantiation. Mitias approaches both at once through a historical survey, which he conducts not just with an expository aim but also with a critical eye. He thus proceeds to document the omission from each of the periods in question—medieval, modern, contemporary—while also substantiating the charge of neglect as wrongful omission.

The survey begins with the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods to establish a baseline for the neglect to be diagnosed in subsequent periods (2012a, 33–59, 61–86). The first two periods represent acknowledgment, or rather out-and-out advocacy, of friendship as a central moral value essential for the good life. This is why Mitias studies them so closely in his initiative to expose and illustrate exactly what is missing in later periods. The Hellenic period (2012a, 35–44), observes Mitias, is characterized by a metaphysical orientation, a teleological worldview, and a humanistic cultural temperament. The Hellenistic period (2012a, 44–59), in comparison, exhibits individualism, cosmopolitanism, and realism. Both emphasize the prominence of reason in human affairs, especially its role in human inquiry, with humanism serving as a common denominator as it becomes even more inclusive. The human in “humanism,” exclusively Greek in the Hellenic period, where the polis is the center of the world, becomes anonymously human in the Hellenistic period, where the polis is replaced by the cosmopolis. This is a response to the imperial expansionism bringing an end to the city-state, originally with Philip II of Macedon and irreversibly with Alexander the Great.

Despite their differences, the two Greek periods jointly inaugurating western civilization agree on two fundamental points that bring them together on the nature and value of friendship: (1) They both see the essence of humanity as natural, that is, as part of the natural world, and therefore as intrinsically valuable, something to be cherished and nurtured in and of itself. (2) They both take the task of moral theory to be the study of the good life. The main difference between the two periods is an expanding cultural frame of reference, which the demise of the city-state as an independent political unit, together with the correlative rise of imperialism, transforms from a tribal orientation to a global configuration. Yet friendship as a central moral value survives that transition, as the superlative value attached to the meaning of life as a human being, a bundle of potentiality to be actualized through the good life, continues to inform their moral outlook (2012a, 66–75, 76–86).

The medieval period (2012a, 87–119) represents the first break with the ancient conception of friendship as a central moral value. The break is anchored to religious developments, namely to the growing popularity of Christianity, which came to control the strongest empire in the world with the Roman Catholic Church establishing itself as one of the most influential institutional forces in history. Legalized in AD 313 and adopted in AD 380, Christianity quickly harnessed reason as the handmaiden of faith, while simultaneously replacing the worldly outlook of the Greeks with the otherworldly outlook of the Kingdom of God. Among the most salient results, two in particular encapsulate the medieval mindset: (1) the supreme authority of the Church on all questions in all matters, and (2) an exhaustive emphasis on the love of God, including the love of all people for and through God, which is to say, in the name of God. This came at a great human cost manifested both as the restriction of reason to matters of faith and as the rejection of the classical love relevant to friendship, the latter a preferential relationship between human beings as human beings, swiftly supplanted by a generic and derivative connection through the love of God.

The modern period (2012a, 121–164), duly restoring both the role of reason and the spirit of humanism to their former glory, was unable to do the same for the place of friendship in moral theory. While effectively ending the hegemony of the church as the arbiter of truth, the burgeoning emphasis on rational inquiry, and its growing rate and scope of application, inspired philosophers to focus their efforts on grounding morality in reason, invariably at the cost of ignoring what it means to be a human being, that is, to be a rational agent with inherent human needs, which in part make up the necessary conditions of the good life. As rigorous deontological and consequentialist approaches set out to reconsider the first principle of morality with a view to articulating it in formal terms, something of the humanity was lost along with the role of friendship as a central moral value. The return to humanism was, at least in this way, partially eclipsed by the revival of reason.

The contemporary period (2012a, 165–196), essentially an extension of the modern period, did not, in the main, reject the defining characteristics of the modern period. In fact, it did just the opposite, assimilating those characteristics even more fully as part of the cultural fabric of the times. The scientific method continued to reign supreme and eventually redefined the role of philosophy, which being unable to compete with the emerging sciences, instead sought and developed ways to complement them. Yet none of these philosophical responses, including pragmatism, existentialism, and logical positivism (and analytic philosophy in general), sought to redefine or reconstruct the grounds and dictates of morality from a fresh perspective, nor therefore did they restore friendship to its rightful place in moral deliberation.

Mitias submits that thinkers in the medieval period were diverted by religious considerations, those in the modern period by philosophical considerations, and those in the contemporary period by metaphysical ones. These deviations are what he calls cultural paradigm shifts, which themselves come with moral paradigm shifts. This terminology and the associated ideas make up the first chapter, devoted in its entirety to explicating the notion of paradigms, both cultural and moral, though the chapter itself is titled “The Concept of a Moral Paradigm.” A cultural paradigm is the set of shared beliefs, values, and behavior patterns collectively and completely delineating the cultural profile of a community, including its customs, morals, politics, economics, educational system, and religious orientation, among other things, all fully reflected in its art, music, literature, and philosophy (2012a, 7–32, especially 7–14). A moral paradigm is the moral component of the corresponding cultural paradigm (2012a, 18–22, 28–32), embodying the relevant community’s conception of the highest good, including the principal values and ideals that are either ingredients of that good or conditions of its realization. This is where friendship comes in, as it is a necessary condition for happiness, which, in turn, is the highest good, explicitly so for the Hellenic and Hellenistic cultures, and according to Mitias, at least implicitly so for everyone else, whether they realize it or not.

The various aspects and constituents of cultural paradigms, including moral paradigms but also others, are so interdependent as to react together in response to internal developments as well as external influences. The process is not minutely and rigidly synchronized across all dimensions, but any development in one element reverberates throughout the cultural paradigm until the momentum either subsides on its own (in the event that it does not prove compelling) or restructures the whole. The task of moral philosophers is neither the slavish promotion of established values nor the culturally insensitive rationalization of ideal ones. The ethicist, according to Mitias, must tend to both properly, thereby examining, exposing, defending, and criticizing every aspect of the prevailing moral paradigm, while at the same pursuing the dictates of reason to their rational end. The ethicist is the champion of his or her moral paradigm but not a servant of it. The moral paradigm is a point of reference and inspiration, not

a conceptual prison of sacrosanct parameters. The ethicist may and indeed must go beyond the moral paradigm, correcting it if necessary, wherever reason and new developments suggest a need for intervention.

Mitias captures this dual obligation perfectly in his metaphorical assignment of a Janusian mind to the ethicist (2012a, 29, cf. 63–65, 149). This is precisely the problem in the medieval period, where the moral paradigm, along with the cultural, promoted faith to the level of a complement to reason, not displacing reason entirely but enslaving it effectively as a tool reserved for the elucidation of faith (though not for its justification, as faith never needed any justification, only commitment). The ethicist went along with this, submitting to assimilation in the new paradigm. And that same dereliction of duty sustained generations of moral philosophers complying with an otherworldly cultural and moral outlook as the growth of Christianity shifted the focus of attention from this world to the next, hence from humanity to divinity, from the natural to the transcendent, and from existential fulfillment to eternal salvation. As mentioned above, despite a recovery in the modern period, with reason restored to its previous prominence and humanism re-emerging as a shared value, friendship was absent from moral discourse as a central value in that period as well, and also from the next one, the contemporary period, excluding a recent revival of attention by ethicists.

The final chapter of the book, titled “Friendship as an Ontological Need” (2012a, 197–216), is a dialectical instantiation of the hospital metaphor prefiguring it through the symbolic events surrounding Angelique, our angel in distress. The crux of the argument there is that friendship is a need we have as human beings for no other reason than that we are human beings. It is an existential and essential need. This is the sort of need that arises simply by virtue of the fact that we exist, which we cannot help but do in conformity with humanity as our essence. Our ontological status as human beings thus comes with friendship as a basic need. That is what makes it a necessary condition of human excellence (*arete*), and *ipso facto* of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), which, in turn, is the greatest good (*summum bonum*) and therefore the principle of distinction between right and wrong. And this is what, according to Mitias, makes friendship a central moral value, long neglected by ethicists and urgently to be restored by them to its rightful place in moral discourse.

But what is that rightful place? Where exactly does friendship belong in moral discourse? Assuming that Mitias is right, what are we supposed to do to set things right? Given that the call is for the restoration of friendship as a central moral value—not necessarily in our personal affairs, which may also need serious reconsideration, but specifically in ethical theory—we must figure out how to rehabilitate moral philosophy accordingly. That much is clear. We also know that the call is neither for more nor for better studies of friendship from a moral perspective in general. It is instead for a revival within the sphere of normative ethics in particular, preferably in a capacity where friendship as a moral value has some sort of impact on our conception of the difference

between good and bad, and right and wrong. That, too, is clear. What we need, if we are convinced, is implementation. Just how would this restoration project work?

We have already seen that divine command theory, to begin with the original break with the common core of the moral paradigm in the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods, is hostile to the notion of friendship as valuable in any way outside the love God already requires us to show in his name and through his will to everyone. The preferential nature of the relationship in friendship is inconsistent with the love of humanity through the will of God, where any excess of devotion to a friend over and above what God already requires us to show others is as good as a heretical declaration that we as human beings have a say in this no less than God. How can we possibly acknowledge friendship as a central moral value in an ethical system grounded in divine command theory? This would make a good rhetorical question at this point, but it deserves and requires an actual answer.

I submit that there is no way to introduce such a modification without undermining the system. The incorporation of friendship as a central moral value would alter the nature of any divine command, where the word of God is both final and complete, neither allowing nor requiring revision. Moreover, it would also change the nature of friendship as a concept. To see why the latter is so, imagine that we are able to tweak the system so that the preferential nature of friendship is no longer inconsistent with God's will, and is, in fact, commanded directly by God as an obligation to love and honor close personal friends over and above the standard amount and kind of love we owe everyone else. There might then seem to be ample room for friendship in divine command theory so long as God wants it that way. But this will not work, as it is antithetical to the concept. Being good to someone, namely to putative friends, merely to appease God, precludes friendship as the nature of the corresponding relationship, even if obedience to God's command to be good as ordered were to count as moral behavior. There is no compulsory friendship.

Divine command theory, then, would be a poor choice for the restoration project. Would secular alternatives fare any better? To continue with an obvious example, where might friendship as a moral value go in the categorical imperative? Here is what I mean: What if we were to accept Mitias's thesis regarding friendship, asking him to help us restore it as a central moral value in any formulation of the categorical imperative? In other words, what if we were to ask Mitias to show us how to reformulate the categorical imperative to make room for friendship as a central moral value? His immediate reaction would, no doubt, be to ask why we are pursuing such a fruitless project. Suppose we were to respond that we find his position on friendship compelling and simply want to implement it in a normative ethical theory we find compelling as well. His next response would assuredly be that we do not understand his position on friendship, let alone finding it compelling, if we insist on implementing it in the categorical imperative.

This is not because he has arbitrarily rejected deontological ethics as a guide for sorting out moral problems or for leading a morally respectable life. It is because there is no room for friendship in any formulation of the categorical imperative. Consider the main one, the formula of universal law: “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*” (Ak. 4:421, cf. 4:402, original emphasis).¹⁴ Now try to incorporate friendship into that sentence. It can be done, of course, but the result would hardly be useful and would certainly look contrived: “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*, and, in addition, make sure you surround yourself with good friends, who are, being good, liable to facilitate your adherence to the first part of this imperative.” This is quite a stretch. Perhaps the gimmicky exhortation can be replaced with candor and clarity: “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*, always keeping in mind that friendship, no matter how irrelevant it may be to bring this up right now, is a central moral value.” This one is straightforward, by any measure, but it is also monstrous. Neither one works. Nor will anything else. There is simply no meaningful way to append the concept of friendship to a statement of the categorical imperative.

The problem is not peculiar to this particular formulation. Consider the formula of the end-in-itself: “*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*” (Ak. 4:429, original emphasis). Here, too, any interpolation to acknowledge the value of friendship would be disruptive: “*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*, sparing no effort to treat your close personal friends especially well, because friendship is a central moral value.” Unlike the previous attempts, the addition here may appear to be thematically relevant to the original, given the common emphasis on conduct toward others, but it actually detracts from what is said in the original without adding anything of significance, as it seeks to introduce and regulate a privileged relationship, namely friendship, in a universal directive on how to act toward everyone. The preferential demands of one contradicts the egalitarian restrictions of the other. As a result, this experiment works no better than the operations considered in the first formulation. And the same outcome awaits any other attempt with any other formulation. We need not repeat the exercise for each one, especially since Kant himself announces that there is only one categorical imperative, all variations being merely different formulations of the same principle (Ak. 4:436, cf. 4:436–440).

¹⁴ Page references to Kant are to the Akademie edition of *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785). Quotations are from the translation by Mary Gregor (1997), always including italicization where present, though never introducing it otherwise.

The reason that there is no meaningful room for invoking the concept of friendship in any of its formulations is that the categorical imperative is the culmination of Kant's initiative, as articulated in the preface to his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, to seek out and establish the supreme principle of morality through pure reason, that is, completely independently of any input through the benefit of experience (Ak. 4:391–392). This automatically excludes friendship, which is a patently existential phenomenon, at least because it is a relationship, which then calls for interaction, and therefore experience. Impossible to establish *a priori*, and inseparable from experience, particularly from experience as a human being, friendship cannot be incorporated into the supreme principle of morality from Kant's perspective.

A tempting objection may be that the point is not actually to mention friendship right there in the categorical imperative, nor to do so in any other candidate for the supreme principle of morality, but simply to acknowledge friendship as a central moral value somewhere in the corresponding normative ethical platform. The objection would, if valid, require a revision of our original appeal to Mitias, changing it from a request for assistance in reformulating the categorical imperative to account for friendship, to a request for assistance in doing the same thing in the broader ethical theory without necessarily modifying the categorical imperative itself. There are two problems with that strategy. First, the nature of the broader revision suggested is nebulous, with little hope of clarification toward a meaningful request, to say nothing of the possibility of successful implementation. Attempting to make room in the categorical imperative for mentioning friendship in passing may be a fool's errand, but the fool there at least has the benefit of a clear goal. Attempting to make room in deontological ethics for recognizing friendship as a central moral value is not even meaningful enough to be foolish.¹⁵ Second, even if friendship as a central moral value could somehow be incorporated into Kant's ethics, it would very likely still be open to the original charge of neglect, given that the categorical imperative dominates Kant's moral theory, with everything else, if there is anything left at all, remaining obscured by the oppressive ubiquity of his supreme principle of morality, particularly where normative ethics is concerned. Accordingly, while ending and reversing the neglect of friendship in moral philosophy requires its inclusion as a central moral value in ethical theory, this is out of the question in Kant's ethics, simply because the central spot there is reserved for the categori-

¹⁵ One critic has warned me that this sounds dismissive. It is not meant to be. To clarify, all I am saying is that it is not enough to assert that deontological ethics, broadly construed, might be able to accommodate friendship as a central moral value even where the categorical imperative as its first principle cannot. This may well be true. But it may just as well be false. The bare assertion is an empty declaration that lacks not just evidence but meaning and essence as well. One must elucidate and illustrate the presumed possibility, so that we can see at least what it entails, if not also whether it is real, just as I have done in ruling out the same possibility in the case of the categorical imperative.

cal imperative. Any other spot, even if one could be claimed for friendship, would not be central, nor anywhere near the center, and would therefore not count as the acknowledgment of friendship as a central moral value.

This does not mean that friendship is incompatible with deontological ethics. It does not mean, for example, that the categorical imperative is against having friends, instead classifying friendship as a morally unacceptable pursuit. But it does mean that deontological ethics has no use for friendship. It can reach all the conclusions it needs to reach without any help from friendship as a moral value. Friendship is simply irrelevant.

What about other normative ethical theories? Is friendship irrelevant everywhere? While going through the whole of normative ethics may not be a practical endeavor within the space of a single article, it might still be useful to take a look at consequentialism, at least briefly, through its most popular version, utilitarianism. Consider the classical rendition of the principle of utility, avoiding variations and distinctions that may be important in themselves but extraneous here (such as act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism, preference utilitarianism, negative utilitarianism, and so on): Actions are right insofar as they tend to promote happiness, wrong insofar as they tend to do the opposite, where happiness is defined as pleasure and the absence of pain.¹⁶ As with the categorical imperative, any interpolation here to introduce the concept of friendship will be somewhat messy: Actions are right insofar as they tend to promote happiness, wrong insofar as they tend to do the opposite, where happiness is defined as pleasure and the absence of pain, a net pleasurable balance in which is facilitated, among other things, by friendship, which is, in fact, both a means to happiness and a part of happiness, thus confirming its status as a central moral value in our lives. Unlike the modifications to the categorical imperative, however, this interpolation in the principle of utility does not seem entirely out of place. Notwithstanding the clutter, the friendly amendment, so to speak, is at least consistent with the original principle.

This is substantiated to a certain degree, perhaps to a convincing degree, in Mill's acknowledgment that happiness has various ingredients that are desired

¹⁶ This formulation of the principle of utility, paraphrasing Bentham and Mill together, is consistent with the spirit of both. While the wording is a bit closer to Mill, the meaning is no further from Bentham. Bentham's version is in the second section (= second numbered paragraph) of the first chapter of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*: "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness" (Bentham, 1789, 2; *Collected Works*, 1970, 11–12). Mill's version is in the second paragraph of the second chapter of *Utilitarianism*: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure" (Mill, 1861, 394; *Collected Works*, 1969, 210).

and desirable for their own sakes albeit as parts of happiness.¹⁷ Further corroboration is available in his initiative to place a premium on the quality of pleasures, as opposed to focusing solely on the quantity, thereby carving out room for traditional values, which can reasonably be expected to include friendship.¹⁸ While Mill does not provide an itemized list of such values, he does try to distance himself from the radical fungibility of pleasures in Bentham, who considers the game of push-pin as valuable as the art of poetry so long as they both provide the same amount of pleasure.¹⁹ This would seem to suggest that there is room in utilitarianism, at least in Mill's version, to recognize friendship as a moral value in its own right.

Hence, even if the principle of utility itself, because it is the first principle of morality, is not an appropriate or convenient place to acknowledge the value of friendship, the ethical system founded on it may be open to that possibility. This is one reason I have refrained from claiming that the expectations of Mitias can be met only through virtue ethics, settling instead for the weaker claim that they can be met best through virtue ethics.²⁰ At the very least, neither Bentham nor Mill ignores empirical considerations, whereas ignoring them is exactly what Kant sets out to do in fulfillment of his overarching methodological constraint. That is also why Mitias himself is more critical of deontological ethics than he is of utilitarian ethics. He may resist utilitarian calculation, but he resents deontological deliberation.

¹⁷ The relevant passage is in the fifth paragraph of the fourth chapter of *Utilitarianism*, where Mill submits that the “ingredients of happiness are very various, and each of them is desirable in itself, and not merely when considered as swelling an aggregate,” adding that these ingredients “are desired and desirable in and for themselves; besides being means, they are a part of the end” (Mill 1861, 531; *Collected Works* 1969, 235).

¹⁸ Mill devotes a total of eight paragraphs, immediately following the first two paragraphs of the second chapter of *Utilitarianism* (Mill, 1861, 395–398; *Collected Works*, 1969, 210–214), to the articulation and establishment of a qualitative distinction between higher and lower pleasures. His attempt, still controversial, is best remembered for a colorful comparison: “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides” (Mill, 1861, 396; *Collected Works*, 1969, 212).

¹⁹ Bentham expresses his indifference, to the type of pleasure in any given amount of it, in the first chapter of the third book of *The Rationale of Reward*: “Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either” (Bentham, 1825, 206). While Mill takes up Bentham's push-pin analogy in an anonymous review (Mill, 1838, 504; *Collected Works*, 1969, 113), he later avoids any reference to it in *Utilitarianism*, where he distances himself from the commensurability of pleasures, without explicitly contradicting Bentham, evidently because, at that point, their common understanding requires greater emphasis than their differences, owing to the nature of the work as an attempt at explaining, defending, and promoting utilitarianism.

²⁰ Another reason is that I have not surveyed the full spectrum of normative ethical theories, limiting myself to a few that have traditionally received the most attention. The same logic would seem to caution against making even the weaker claim I have made, but the evidence is compelling, as Mitias himself demonstrates in his third chapter (2012a, 61–86).

A nagging problem with utilitarianism, however, is that no room that might conceivably be staked out for friendship as a moral value can be a “central” position as urged by Mitias. Friendship can at best be counted among the generic “means to” or “parts of” happiness mulled over by Mill in one fell swoop without itemization, the whole kit and caboodle being designated “ingredients of happiness,” evidently in anticipation of potential protests that his exclusive focus on happiness may be leaving out other morally relevant considerations. While that is more than anything Kant would ever concede, it still does not seem enough. Assenting to friendship as a good, especially by implication and without specification, is a far cry from embracing it as a good. Even affirming friendship as a moral value is not the same as acknowledging its place as a central moral value to be reckoned with as a matter of course in moral discourse.

Moreover, the very essence of the hedonic calculus, despite Mill’s emphasis on the quality of pleasures, seems antithetical to the spirit of the call Mitias is making for the restoration of friendship as a central moral value. The give-and-take of friendship is a process grounded in love, where there are no ledgers of who owes whom a favor, the balance being forever fluid and never questioned.

The process of elimination points to virtue ethics. That is not enough just yet to confirm that virtue ethics is the best platform for friendship as a central moral value. We have considered only a few alternatives, too few to entrust the matter entirely to a process of elimination. But the reason that the process of elimination, incomplete as it is, persistently favors virtue ethics is that the elimination of virtue ethics is out of the question since it is the origin of the value we are trying to recover. Virtue ethics promises a perfect fit for the restoration project simply because that is where friendship was originally acknowledged as a central moral value, disappearing rather “abruptly,” according to Mitias (2012a, 87–88), after which the ethical system itself was replaced with successive substitutes, starting with divine command theory.

Although divine command theory eventually lost its monopoly as the ultimate source of moral guidance, explanation, and justification, emerging alternatives were alternatives to virtue ethics as well. Deontological ethics and utilitarian ethics, along with any number of other approaches, were inspired by the success of the scientific method, whereby reason and observation reclaimed their role from divine revelation as reliable tools for the acquisition of knowledge. Their aims and methods were radically different from both virtue ethics and theological ethics. What they neglected was not friendship in particular but the virtues in general.²¹ More accurately, they did not neglect the virtues

²¹ Everything Mitias says about friendship holds for anything that is intrinsically valuable, especially from a moral perspective. The problem with the ethical theories he criticizes is not simply that they neglect friendship, or any other value in particular, but that they neglect what it means to be human. None of the virtues taken up by Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle, for example, is under consideration as a central moral value in any theory Mitias discusses in the book. Recall where temperance (*sōphrosynē*) is mentioned in the categorical imperative, or where courage

but abandoned the process of starting with the virtues as given, attempting instead to discover a first principle on which to ground a moral system. This is largely why friendship, having once lost its place as a central moral value, never recovered it. Many of the moral theories springing up in the modern period were not formulated in a way amenable to its recovery.

Virtue ethics itself eventually recovered—though perhaps not exactly as formulated by Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle—but friendship as a central moral value never did. That is why Mitias finds it “really surprising” (2012a, 4) that friendship is still missing from recent and current scholarship in virtue ethics. While he acknowledges that friendship is now receiving some attention as a moral concept, and hence is not altogether absent from ethical discourse, he notes that it is still not recognized as a central moral value. The primary reason friendship never recovered, while virtue ethics did, is that the momentous displacement of the Greek *philia* by the Christian *agape* was never reversed in moral theory (2012a, 206–211), because the switch was never perceived as an obstacle to progress in ethical theory. Love is love, after all, and there is no reason to suspect one kind as standing in the way of another, even when it does.

Mitias urges theologians to make room for friendship as a central moral value, which he insists is consistent with both the love of God and the love God wants us to show one another. As a matter of fact, the rise of Christian morality in the medieval moral paradigm was not so much a substitute for virtue ethics as it was a continuation of it with a different set of virtues. Virtue ethics and theological ethics are not grounded in two different methodologies, with the first abandoned for the second, but in two different value systems, with a single methodology recalibrated to accommodate new values, specifically those emerging through the paradigm shift effected by the growing popularity of Christianity.

Nevertheless, the plea Mitias makes for theologians and adherents alike to acknowledge the inherent room in religion for friendship is not an endorsement of theological ethics but a suggestion for its rehabilitation. There is no room in Mitias for what has no room in the *Euthyphro*: “Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?” (10a). Recall the immediate response of Euthyphro: “I don’t know what you mean, Socrates” (10a). Euthyphro is neither ignorant nor obtuse. The reason that he does not know what is meant is that he does not see how the value of anything dear to the gods could possibly require any further explanation in regard to the source of that value. He sees no difference between the alternatives presented, which collapse into the same explanation, just as the major monotheistic reli-

(*andreia*) is invoked in the principle of utility: Nowhere. The classical virtues, and indeed all moral values, stand or fall together, except in cases where one of them is declared supreme, whether as being more important than the rest or as subsuming all the rest as conditions or constituents. Either they are all reasonably and usefully close to the center of attention in moral discourse, or they all disappear together as morality itself is pursued from a different angle where virtue is at best a result and not an input.

gions, including Christianity, acknowledge no difference between moral explanation and divine command (or divine revelation) and none again between being good and doing God's bidding.

Secular theories are invariably sensitive to that difference, but most of the leading ones are not particularly sensitive to the classical virtues, or to traditional values in general, be it friendship or anything else, none of which is rejected, though none ever seems to come up either. It is only natural that restoring friendship as a central moral value should best be accomplished within virtue ethics, not only because that is where it was recognized before it became neglected, but also because the recognition of such values, including friendship, but also others, is the basic operating mechanism of the theory. To borrow a mode of expression relished by Mitias: "I do not exaggerate when I say" that friendship as a central moral value can best be accommodated in virtue ethics, because friendship is a basic human need, and because virtue ethics provides the greatest insight into what it means to be a human being, namely a bundle of potentiality to be actualized in reference to qualities representative of human excellence. And again in the style of Mitias: "I would not be far amiss" in suggesting that Mitias himself is pleading for a return to virtue ethics through his plea for the restoration of friendship to its rightful place as a central moral value in ethical theory.

4. CRITICAL RECEPTION

The critical reception of Mitias on friendship consists so far entirely of book reviews. I am aware of four such treatments to date. Many of their expository highlights and several of their critical insights overlap with some of what I have already covered here. There is no point in revisiting all of it with each critic, but going through the strongest objection of each may help highlight disagreements on matters that are of importance to the community of scholars addressed by Mitias. Given that he is appealing primarily to professional ethicists in his call to restore friendship as a central moral value to its rightful place in moral discourse, a mutual understanding of significant differences between the two parties, preferably with some notion of how they might be resolved, is of the utmost importance to both.

4.1. Ruth Abbey: Methodology

Abbey (2013) does not challenge Mitias on philosophical grounds. That is to say, she does not object, in principle, to the plea Mitias is making in regard to friendship. She does not endorse it either. She instead offers two objections regarding methodology: first, that Mitias does not engage adequately with the literature; second, that he does not clarify what he means by friendship. She also

makes a couple of substantive points, but those are not objections to the thesis itself, just to the logic of certain moves in the process of defending that thesis. They are best taken up after addressing methodological concerns, since it is difficult to sort out possible errors in reasoning without agreement on how the reasoning proceeds.

The first objection regarding methodology, implying either ignorance or neglect of the relevant literature, is repeated by another reviewer, Sandra Lynch (2014, 786), which adds to the gravity of the charge, at least as a perceived weakness, and thus merits an apology in the classical sense. The objection is justified if the standard scholarly requirement to engage with the relevant literature is not satisfied by relentless references to Aristotle, Bacon, Bentham, Cicero, Descartes, Dewey, Epicurus, Hegel, Heraclitus, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Locke, Marcus Aurelius, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Plato, Pythagoras, Rousseau, Socrates, and Spinoza, among others. One wonders whether a valid point cannot be made without expanding on what is surely a fairly representative list of references to begin with. It is, no doubt, a crime against scholarship to write about any one of these philosophers without dealing with the secondary literature on them, and in Aristotle's case, without consulting the tertiary literature on the secondary literature. Yet it is not altogether fair to look for these extra layers where the work in question is not on one of these philosophers but on all of them, or rather on something that concerns all of them.

The main methodological tool Mitias uses here is nothing short of a survey of the history of western civilization, including not just its philosophy but also its art, literature, and science. While he does not deal directly with the current state of scholarship on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and so on, that is only because he does not aim to establish a novel interpretation of their philosophy or seek to challenge any of the ones currently in favor. His otherwise meticulously documented and sweeping study of western culture brings out points that are not in contention but neglected. Additional citations from current literature, whether on western civilization in general or on friendship in particular, would certainly not have compromised anything accomplished by the initiative, but neither does the present absence of a pedantic pretension to exhaustive coverage of the scholarship, especially since none of it deals at any length with the thesis Mitias presents and defends.

Neither Abbey (2013) nor Lynch (2014) adduces any examples of recent scholarship ignored by Mitias yet relevant to his thesis. Lynch seems to think she does in bringing up the relatively recent identification of a gap in philosophical work on friendship "between the writings of Emerson [1841] and the contemporary work of Telfer [1970]" (Pakaluk 1991, vii, quoted by Lynch 2014, 786). The period indicated is, as Lynch rightly notes, considerably shorter than the sixteen hundred years in Mitias. Yet the apparent discrepancy is not relevant to his thesis. Nor is there any actual discrepancy. The period in Mitias does not cover the absence of friendship from all scholarly discussion, not even from all

philosophical discussion. It only concerns the absence of friendship as a central moral value from ethical theory, the specificity of which is emphasized throughout his book. Mitias even acknowledges up front an abundance of publications on friendship, including philosophical ones that do not contradict his thesis of its absence as a central moral value from moral discourse:

“The assertion that theorizing on friendship as a central moral value has been absent from the major philosophical systems of the past sixteen hundred years does not at all imply the absence of writings on friendship. On the contrary, philosophers, theologians, and essayists have left a large number of discussions, articles, essays, and even books on friendship. Many of these writings are interesting, insightful, and instructive, but they do not treat it as a central moral value and they do not view it as a condition of the good life” (Mitias 2012a, 2).

The second objection regarding methodology challenges the clarity of what Mitias means by friendship: “it is unclear what friendship really *is*” (Abbey 2013, 90, original emphasis). This is a standard methodological complaint dating at least as far back as Plato. But even Plato’s Socrates was in the habit of hounding interlocutors for a precise definition only when the context called for it, that is, only when interlocutors insisted on discussing something which they did not understand well enough to reach accurate or meaningful conclusions. Recall how Socrates presses Meno for a definition of virtue before addressing whether or not virtue is teachable (*Meno*), whereas he does not pester Simmias or Cebes for a definition of the soul before moving on to a series of arguments on the immortality of the soul (*Phaedo*). The nature of what Mitias is trying to accomplish places his initiative closer to the case of the *Phaedo* than to that of the *Meno*. He is not claiming that we have so far misunderstood what friendship is. On the contrary, he is telling us that, because we all know very well what friendship is, he is astonished that we have lost sight of how valuable it is, as evidenced by its disappearance from moral discourse.

More importantly, Mitias does, in fact, offer a core conception of friendship, which he both invokes and explicates throughout the book. Not only does he define friendship himself (e.g., 2012a, 1–2) but he tells us how several of the most relevant philosophers define it as well (e.g., Aristotle in pages 66–70, Cicero in pages 75–77, 77–82). Curiously, while Abbey acknowledges his attempt at definition, she reduces it to a matter of looking it up in the dictionary: “The last chapter offers a definition from the *Webster New College Dictionary* (p. 205)” (2013, 90). This is true. The last chapter does quote that dictionary. But the chapters before that do a whole lot more which Abbey conveniently ignores in presenting Mitias as giving us no better an account of friendship than we may find in the dictionary.

The truth of the matter is that Mitias goes far beyond a lexical definition of friendship far sooner than Abbey has him quoting the dictionary. He certainly

does not wait until the last chapter. He does not even wait until the end of the first chapter. In the first couple of pages alone, he tells us that “friendship is a mode, or type, of human experience” manifested as “a type of behavior” in “a profoundly important relation” that is “rooted in the depth of our humanity as a basic need,” adding that this experience is “a *moral* type of experience,” and that, “as such, it implies a moral value,” which, in turn, makes it “an essential ingredient, and therefore a condition, of the moral life” (Mitias, 2012a, 1–2).

It is only later that Mitias, having already established the nature of the concept, offers an excursion into the etymology of the word, both giving and critiquing the lexical definition in the dictionary mentioned (2012a, 205 ff.). He then goes on to consider its Old English and Germanic roots, using that as a segue into a discussion of *philia* (2012a, 206–211). It is especially unfair to accuse Mitias of not defining friendship when he dedicates several sections of the third chapter to exploring what friendship is, even titling one of those sections “What is Friendship?” (2012a, 77–82). While that particular section is an exposition and exploration of Cicero’s perspective, the author’s open approval of that perspective makes it his own as well.

As for Abbey’s (2013, 90) reservations regarding the logic of the argument, they seem to be facilitated by the same methodological gap she sees in Mitias between definition (or clarification) and argumentation. Her first substantive point is as follows: “Humans are social creatures and from this Mitias jumps to proclaiming our need for friendship” (2013, 90). The reason her substantive remark on reasoning recalls her methodological one on definition is that the “jump” Abbey mentions is a jump only if one takes Mitias to leave readers with a definition of friendship straight from the dictionary, moving immediately afterwards, without any further development or argument, to an elaborate conception where friendship appears at the end as nothing like what was said at the beginning. This is to ignore a great deal of explanation and argumentation in between.

Abbey’s point is contradicted by another reviewer, Kristina Gehrman (2014), who also happens to disagree with Mitias but with Abbey as well. Gehrman accepts the move from creatures who are social to creatures who need friendship, while objecting that this establishes only that friendship is a basic human need and not that it is a moral one, or in her own words, not that “friendship as a *moral* relation” (her emphasis) is “a basic human need” (2014, 544). Mitias would agree with this, as he never argues that “friendship as a *moral* relation” is a basic human need, just that friendship is a basic human need and that friendship is a moral relation. The combination Gehrman attributes to Mitias is not a single inference Mitias makes from the simple observation that humans are social creatures.

Abbey’s second substantive point is that Mitias “begs the question of how the human is construed” where he announces that “no matter what categories of people it unites, ‘*philia* is a *human* relation’ (p. 206, emphases original)” (2013,

90). This is not far from the logic of the alleged “jump” in the first substantive point. Just how does it beg the question of human nature to say that friendship is a human relation? It is not even an argument. It is merely an observation submitted for approval. One may reject the observation, preferably while correcting it, but construing it as begging the question is both captious and hyperbolic, especially since we all know that it is, in fact, not just true but obviously true.²² The alternative is that friendship is not a human relation, which means either that it is not a relation at all or that it is a relation but not between humans. If Abbey rejects the original observation, she is committed to one of the patently false alternatives. If she rejects both alternatives, she must accept the original observation.²³

4.2. Kristina Gehrman: Pluralism

Gehrman (2014) is the most constructive of the commentators reacting so far to Mitias on friendship. Her main concern is with a pluralism she observes in the contemporary cultural paradigm, which she then submits as differing in a potentially important way from the modern cultural paradigm, thus contradicting Mitias’s position that these two paradigms are essentially the same, with one being a smooth continuation of the other: “modern ‘beliefs and values remain, so far as I know, the basis of the contemporary cultural paradigm’ and ‘the modern moral paradigm remains the framework within which moral analysis of any kind is done, directly or indirectly, by both the normative and the metaethical philosophers’” (Mitias, 2012a, 182, quoted by Gehrman, 2014, 545). Gehrman maintains that this description applies reasonably well to academic philosophers operating in the twentieth century but not to ordinary people shaped by contemporary western culture: “I especially doubt it is true of today’s undergraduate students, who are mostly in the grip of a pluralism so confounding that they really do not know whether it is ever justified for a person to have moral convictions and act on them” (Gehrman, 2014, 545).

Gehrman’s objection is both relevant and pressing. It presents a challenge that Mitias must confront in his critical survey of cultural and moral paradigms. The challenge, specifically, is this: “if pluralism is a deep feature of the contemporary moral paradigm, as I believe it is, then more must be said to establish

²² There may be exceptions, including but not limited to sociopaths who need no friends, but statistical outliers hardly undermine established patterns in human nature.

²³ Note that Abbey is not accusing Mitias of restricting friendship to human beings, and thereby of ignoring the possibility of friendship among other creatures, whether terrestrial or alien. Mitias never rules out such prospects. And Abbey never says he does. But even if he did, and she said he did, he would not be begging the question of “how the human is construed,” since his error would then be about how all other creatures are construed. Hence, what Abbey objects to as begging the question of human nature is not that friendship is exclusive to human beings but that it is essential to human beings. Yet everything in our experience shows that it is indeed essential to human beings. Pointing that out is not begging the question.

Mitias's claim that friendship must be treated as a central moral value by contemporary moral theorists simply in virtue of the moral paradigm in which they operate" (Gehrman, 2014, 545). Indeed, the contemporary paradigm cannot be both a smooth continuation of the modern one in every relevant way and significantly different from it in any relevant way. Either Mitias is right or Gehrman is right but not both. Nor can both be wrong.

The question itself, however, particularly if the point is to come up with a definitive answer, belongs somewhere in the social sciences rather than anywhere in the humanities. Both Mitias and Gehrman seem, on the whole, to be reporting their own impressions formulated through their personal and professional experiences fortified with scholarship in philosophy. But ascertaining what is really going on in contemporary culture in regard to the paradigmatic features in question, especially where scientific precision is required, seems to be a task better suited for sociologists, cultural anthropologists, and social psychologists, to invoke just a few areas better equipped to settle the question than is philosophy.

That said, scientific precision is not a necessary condition of disagreement on the matter. Not every social phenomenon or cultural trend requires confirmation by a social scientist. Some are obvious, perhaps not in every detail but sufficiently so in essentials. As a colleague of both Gehrman and Mitias, and as an observer at least as unqualified as they are to bring any scientific precision to bear on the matter, I find myself in agreement with both: There does seem to be a strong continuity between the modern and contemporary paradigms, just as Mitias proposes, and there does seem to be a broadly generalized subscription to pluralism in the latter that was lacking in the former, just as Gehrman observes.

What makes only one of them right or wrong is whether the pluralism contradicts the continuity. This, in turn, depends on whether the continuity is supposed to be categorical. It is not. If it were, it would not be continuity but identity. I doubt very much that Mitias would oppose Gehrman on pluralism as a real phenomenon with a prominent role in shaping the contemporary cultural paradigm and consequently also the corresponding moral paradigm. He would not only concede the point, I suspect with gratitude, but also seek to join forces with Gehrman to come up with a strategy to overcome the obstacles such pluralism presents to the recognition of the constituents of a good life.

While Mitias indeed calls upon ethicists to pay attention to their respective cultural and moral paradigms, he calls upon them just as urgently to rock the boat where the masses need help in actualizing their full potential as human beings:

"Any attempt to formulate such a principle ['a normative principle of moral evaluation'] without grounding it in the community's actual, living moral sense would constitute a flight into sentimental idealism or sentimental utilitarianism, hence rendering the principle irrelevant to the life of the commu-

nity; and any attempt to formulate this principle without regard to the actual possibilities potential in the moral vision and aspirations of the community with an eye on social reform and organization would constitute a surrender to a stagnant moral *status quo*, hence reducing the principle to a descriptive, scientific statement of the community's sense of moral value or way of behaving morally" (Mitias, 2012a, 29).

This is what Mitias refers to as the "Janusian mind" of the moral philosopher (2012a, 29, cf. 63–65, 149), discussed above in connection with the medieval period in the course of the philosophical appraisal in section three. What this means in the context of pluralism is that the ethicist must respect the pluralistic mindset while articulating normative principles with a view to exposing the constituents of the good life in a way that even pluralists can recognize. Gehrman herself obviously agrees with this as she brings pluralism to our attention not as a universal truth in metaethics or normative ethics but as a cultural phenomenon, ostensibly one embraced largely by millennials. She not only agrees with this but identifies it as a challenge to be met in her own professional capacity as a philosopher and teacher, particularly of ethics: "That makes the challenge of pluralism, in my view, one of the most fundamental challenges of the contemporary moral period. It is certainly one of the most basic and interesting challenges of teaching ethics" (Gehrman, 2014, 545).

As difficult as it is to negotiate the line between pluralism and relativism, especially with undergraduates who may confuse respect for the beliefs of others with assent to the truth of those beliefs, and thereby with acknowledgment of the relativity of all beliefs, friendship is probably not among the most difficult concepts to sort out in that regard. And this is precisely how Gehrman concludes her commentary on Mitias:

"I never met an undergraduate who came into the classroom already concerned about internal versus external reasons, or worried about whether ought implies can, even if many of them can be brought to care about these things. But *friendship*—friendship is something they are intimately acquainted with; something they already care about deeply. The deep human value of good relationships is something they have a live appreciation for. This text [*Friendship: A Central Moral Value*] connects something that every student knows and cares about with the full rich history of the Western philosophical tradition" (Gehrman, 2014, 546).

Even pluralists and relativists, after all, have friends. And if they have friends, they are themselves friends (to someone or other). This being so, not only do they have friends and are themselves friends but they also evidently appreciate the value of such relationships. The remaining task, then, is to impress upon them, if they do not yet see it, that the value they already recognize in friendship is a moral value.

4.3. Sandra Lynch: Consistency

Sandra Lynch (2014) is, like Mitias, a prominent scholar on friendship. Had Mitias not limited himself largely to the classics, instead engaging more with recent scholarship, he would have done well to consult the work of Lynch.²⁴ She says so herself: “Other contemporary commentators with whom Mitias might have engaged are Mark Vernon, Lorraine Smith Pangle, and myself” (Lynch 2014, 786). This is a legitimate claim. It is at least as legitimate as the competency asserted in the hospital metaphor where Angelique’s nurse campaigns for formal acknowledgment of a job well done (cf. section two above). The nurse’s reaction is Mitias’s reminder why our angels remain in distress, our morality in crisis, our philosophy off course. Let Lynch’s reaction be mine.

This is not to suggest that recommending one’s own work is a transgression of morality but that preoccupation with oneself is a reflection of why we have not, with each of us admiring and promoting our own value, been entirely successful in recognizing it in others. Meanwhile, a morality in crisis and a philosophical enterprise off course await cooperative intervention.

Lynch does, to be fair, mention quite a few names other than her own, eleven in all, but when the list ends with hers, the other ten look like a means to that end. Especially suspicious in that regard is the special effort to dig up eight of those names from the bibliography of a book (Pakaluk 1991) already cited by Mitias (2012a, 217, note 1), just to admonish him for neglecting the eight he left out (Lynch 2014, 786). Note that this is not a failure by Mitias to discuss items in his own bibliography but a failure by him to discuss those in someone else’s bibliography. We would be hard pressed to get anything done if we had to discuss every work cited by every work cited by us. And even if we somehow succeeded in covering all of that, we would forever remain open to comparable charges regarding further references in a never-ending chain of entries: those in the bibliographies of the entries in the bibliographies of the entries in our own bibliography, *ad infinitum*.

Aside from her misdirected reaction to his bibliography, Lynch is the most formidable of Mitias’s critics. This is because her main objection, if valid, is the most damaging. Yet I do not believe it is valid. Lynch charges Mitias with a mutual inconsistency in his conceptions of friendship and slavery as cultural phenomena, which she adds is indicative of the strategy of the book to compensate for internal contradictions through selective emphasis. There are two aspects to this charge. The first is the inconsistency of being a universalist on the moral value of friendship as a human relation while remaining a relativist on the moral status of slavery as a social institution:

²⁴ Mitias would probably still not have found a suitable occasion to cite Lynch, however, as her work on friendship does not affirm or contradict his thesis concerning the longstanding neglect of friendship as a central moral value in ethical theory.

“In the context of Mitias’ argument for the superiority of cultural paradigms which recognise the moral worth of friendship, the argument for the relativity of the justice of slavery appears contradictory and undermines his claim that the medieval, modern, and contemporary paradigms are inferior because they fail to recognise friendship as a central moral value” (Lynch, 2014, 787).

The second is the selective emphasis concealing any and all such inconsistencies, as in the questionable room allegedly created thereby to advocate friendship but not slavery, both permanent fixtures of Greek life (Hellenic and Hellenistic):

“Mitias’ argument is unconvincing because of its commitment to the totalising narrative noted above, a narrative which assigns different moral visions to competing cultural paradigms, criticising those which on Mitias’ view fail to recognise friendship as a central moral value in human life” (Lynch, 2014, 787).

Regarding the first aspect of the charge, the response is that Mitias never claims the morality of slavery to be a relative matter. To put it in Lynch’s terms, Mitias himself has no “argument for the relativity of the justice of slavery” (Lynch, 2014, 787). Here is what Mitias says:

“A certain action in our society may seem to us unjust, but in a different society the same action may seem just to the members of that society. For example, in our society it is unjust to enslave human beings, but in ancient Greece, indeed in most of the ancient world, it was just to enslave human beings. Slavery was viewed as a natural human practice. Thus it is reasonable to say that moral values define the domain of moral action, or behavior. They, moreover, constitute the ‘morality’ of a society, or a culture” (Mitias, 2012a, 19).

And here is how Lynch interprets it: “The view which Mitias expresses here is an example of moral relativism” (2014, 787). It is not. It is an example of cultural relativism about morality, which then lends credence to its nomination as descriptive moral relativism but not to its classification either as normative moral relativism or as metaethical moral relativism. These are defining distinctions, marking off entirely different conceptions and positions, but Lynch mentions none of them. If the relativity here, admittedly a kind of relativism, needed any comment at all, why leave it at “moral relativism,” as if that were a neat and tidy category? Why not go ahead and say, if anything at all, specifically that this is an example of descriptive moral relativism, given that it is obviously free of any normative or metaethical undertones? Mitias qualifies what he says here,

twice with “may seem,” once with “viewed as,” making sure, for good measure, to wrap scare quotes around the word “morality” at the end. The entire report is descriptive, containing no hint of assent, approval, or recommendation.

This tentative description, peppered with qualifications as if treading on eggshells, is hardly the approach Mitias subsequently follows in his forceful claims regarding friendship. Lynch nevertheless launches her critique as if Mitias himself considered the morality of slavery a relative matter, or applauded the Greeks for doing so, while declaring friendship a universal moral value. Why would anyone passionately championing the intrinsic value of being human, as grounded in nothing other than being human, consider it a relative matter whether it is morally right or wrong for human beings to enslave one another?

Since Lynch is also opposed to rhetorical questions, particularly when they are “overused” (2014, 788), let me at least answer that one: I do not know why a humanist would not reject slavery outright, as I was merely fishing for agreement to rule out that likelihood in the first place. I do know this, however: It is not a contradiction to praise the ancient Greeks for recognizing a universal moral value (friendship) without condemning them for failing to recognize another universal moral value (freedom).²⁵ This is not the same as affirming the universality of the first and denying that of the second.

It is interesting to note that Mitias is careful to distance himself explicitly not just from moral relativism but also from cultural relativism:

“This does not necessarily entail an espousal of cultural relativism, nor does it entail a denial of individual conscience, the ability of the citizen to criticize the laws and practices of society, or the ability to grow in the capacities of knowing, feeling, and acting. Human beings can actualize themselves in their culture and at the same time grow autonomously as human beings” (Mitias, 2012a, 55).

But even if Mitias does not, strictly speaking, contradict himself, does he distort, or obfuscate, the evidence? That is the second aspect of Lynch’s objection. She accuses Mitias of manipulating cultural paradigms to emphasize or promote cultural indicators favorable to the conclusions he intends to draw, specifically with respect to their morality, while ignoring or downplaying any indicators that might be inimical to those conclusions. Her prime example of this—as evident in her reference to “the totalising narrative noted above” (2014, 787)—is that Mitias privileges friendship but not slavery (the latter of which may, incidentally, be adduced as evidence of agreement by Lynch herself that Mitias does not consider the morality of slavery a relative matter) despite comparable Greek affinity for both.

²⁵ What the Greeks failed to recognize, of course, was not the value of freedom but the universality of that value. Freedom was good, to be sure, just not for everyone.

Yet Lynch ignores a crucial difference between the concepts of friendship and slavery as discussed by Mitias in the context of cultural and moral paradigms. Friendship is a central moral value, not just for this or that culture but for any culture, because it is an ontological need: a need that arises from our existence, and defines our essence, as human beings, which therefore makes it a condition of human excellence. Slavery, in contrast, does not come with a comparable ontology. Hence, when Mitias protests the absence of one but not the other, he is not doing so arbitrarily, or manipulatively, but in accordance with an objective appraisal grounded in values he deems universal. It is one thing to reject the underlying ontology of morality (which Lynch does not even address), quite another to ignore it altogether in finding a contradiction or manipulation where neither exists (which Lynch manages to find anyway).

Given that Lynch repeatedly emphasizes (within the space of three pages and not in admiration) a tendency she reports in Mitias to “repeatedly emphasise” (2014, 787–788) claims he considers important, the irony of her missing a rather important one, besides the one in the preceding paragraph, seems to bear repeated emphasis here: Mitias’s thesis regarding the absence of friendship as a central moral value concerns its neglect by thinkers (primarily philosophers and theologians) engaged in moral discourse. Such neglect may perhaps have been culturally ubiquitous in the medieval period, when *philia* was firmly displaced by *agape*, not just among scholars but also among ordinary people, but Mitias makes it clear that friendship was, as far as he can tell, an integral part of the cultural paradigm of the modern period, enjoying a comparable presence in the contemporary period as well. He, in fact, blames philosophers for their failure to tap into their own cultural paradigms to bring out the value already attached to friendship there.

However, in spite of all indications to the contrary, including explicit statements by Mitias himself, Lynch misconstrues Mitias as declaring friendship absent from the cultural and moral paradigms of the modern and contemporary periods. She then doubles her error by misconstruing him as finding such paradigms superior or inferior relative to his predilection for what is and is not included. This comes out in her references, quoted in full above, to “Mitias’ argument for the superiority of cultural paradigms which recognise the moral worth of friendship” and to “his claim that the medieval, modern, and contemporary paradigms are inferior because they fail to recognise friendship as a central moral value” (Lynch, 2014, 787). Mitias has no such argument, makes no such claim. His point is not that one paradigm is superior to the other but that philosophers must be aware of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the paradigms of their respective cultures.

Mitias is particularly critical of moral philosophers, saddling them, as touched upon in the preceding section on Gehrman, with the dual obligation to be sensitive but not slavish to their own cultural and moral paradigms (as in the Janus metaphor, 2012a, 29, cf. 63–65, 149). What Lynch misses here is that

Mitias takes ethicists to task for two different things: (1) for being slavish to their own cultural and moral paradigms in contradiction of the demands of reason and observation, as in the medieval period, where friendship as a preferential relationship between human beings in an existential association was largely displaced by one's relationship with God through a divine and eternal bond; (2) for being out of touch with their own cultural and moral paradigms, as in the modern and contemporary periods, where friendship was included in the paradigm but neglected by philosophers engrossed in and therefore distracted by the prospects of drawing conclusions as reliable as the results achieved by scientists through the newfound emphasis on reason and observation facilitating breakthroughs in science and technology. The first is the problem with philosophers in the medieval period, the second with those in the modern and contemporary periods. Lynch reduces both to a matter of arbitrary affinities Mitias has for whatever he considers present or missing in the relevant cultural and moral paradigms.

4.4. Ben Mulvey: Big Picture

Mulvey (2013) offers the briefest commentary of all. It is largely expository and entirely accurate. He identifies the thesis and the strategy and proceeds from there to an outline of the establishment of the former by the latter. His exposition of Mitias is preceded by an overview of the subject matter. Beginning with his own observations on friendship and moral theory, Mulvey reports a growing scholarly interest in the concept of friendship and suggests that the trend may be linked to “a renewed interest in the sort of ethics of virtue developed by Aristotle among contemporary philosophers” (2013). The association he makes between friendship and virtue ethics in general is precisely the connection I have been trying to expose and illustrate in the approach followed by Mitias in particular, not just in his treatise on the subject but throughout the last ten years of his scholarly output, independently of style or genre.

The main evaluative judgment Mulvey offers is that the unjustifiability of the absence of friendship from moral discourse in the medieval, modern, and contemporary periods “only makes sense within the context of Mitias's understanding of the nature and task of moral theory” (Mulvey, 2013). This mirrors my own thinking in bringing together literary and philosophical considerations toward a proper evaluation, an initiative which represents a comprehensive approach to Mitias's moral philosophy, which he is keen on expressing more often, and most vividly, as a storyteller. One reason for all the novels and poetry alongside the recent treatise is that, as Mulvey notes, “Mitias has decisive, though controversial, ideas about just what he thinks philosophers ought to be doing and how they ought to conceive of their primary task” (2013). The variety, no doubt, helps him expand his options for reaching the right audience.

The target audience, at least in the case of *Friendship: A Central Moral Value* (2012a), is professional philosophers, especially ethicists, on whom Mitias

relies to reach out to a broader audience to help correct a problem that concerns everyone. Mulvey turns out to be one of the links in the chain as he receives and delivers the message exactly as transmitted:

“Those who count themselves fortunate when they have accumulated many Facebook ‘friends’ would do well to consider Mitias’s insight that friendship ‘is not founded in advantage but in love, the kind that fosters human development’ (201) and that ‘mutual understanding, respect, and trust [...] are necessary conditions of friendship’ (202). This sort of love, of course, is not easy to find. But, as Mitias, shares, ‘from the assumption that it is hard to attain it does not necessarily follow that we can afford to neglect it, ignore it, or belittle its significance’ (202)” (Mulvey, 2013).

What is particularly telling in this regard is Mulvey’s personal choice in addressing a community whose conception of friendship has gradually been reduced to remote relationships through social media. That decision both reflects and reinforces his intuitive vision of the social psychology responsible for growing scholarly attention to friendship: “Perhaps current books on friendship are like *SOS* signals for desperate cultures” (Mulvey, 2013). Indeed, Mitias himself is desperate to attract our attention to anonymous angels in distress, hoping to inspire us to realize the full potential of our humanity. Nothing less can save a morality in crisis or a philosophy off course.

5. CONCLUSION

Neither the literary nor the philosophical considerations taken up here are decisive on their own. The literary perspective brings out a comprehensive moral outlook common to everything Mitias stands for, but it offers no justification for why that moral outlook itself is worthy of consideration. The philosophical perspective supplies the justification but remains disconnected from the whole, as the focus is exclusively on exploring friendship as a central moral value. Despite their individual limitations, however, they work well in combination. The first reveals the true extent of what the second accomplishes, while the second shows why the first is tenable, perhaps even compelling.

To elaborate, the literary interpretation illustrates how and why everything Mitias writes, at least within the relevant scope of consideration, is an invitation to virtue, specifically through love and friendship. That illustration is not sufficiently indicative for the principal work under consideration, his only treatise on the subject, where the mode of treatment calls for an analysis of the assumptions, observations, and arguments in the corresponding position. This is where the philosophical appraisal comes in, demonstrating that the recognition of friendship as a central moral value is best achieved through virtue ethics, the

point proven being not necessarily that Mitias is right but that we ought to embrace virtue ethics if he is.

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