

According to Aristotle, human beings are not the only social animals. They are not even the only political ones. But are they the only animals capable of friendship?

In the first part of the paper, I argue that, for Aristotle, friendship in the real sense of the term is indeed reserved for human beings. Non-human animals can have what he calls ‘utility-’ or ‘pleasure-friendship’, but not proper friendship, that is, ‘virtue-friendship’. This is not so much because they couldn’t be virtuous (it is controversial in the literature whether they could or not). More centrally, Aristotle conceives of proper friendship as a relationship between two individuals who value each other for non-instrumental reasons, i.e. simply on account of each other’s goodness, and I show that according to his conception of animals, they can’t value each other in this way.

Virtue-friendship (henceforth just ‘friendship’) is not just any old uniquely human capacity, however. Aristotle also claims it is a constitutive part of the good human life: in the beginning of *NE* 9.9, he imagines a person who has all possible goods except friendship, and he says that it would be strange to think of this person as living well. Intuitively, friendship is among the goods that are required for the good life – and required not just as a means to this life, but as a constitutive part of it (otherwise it wouldn’t be missed by a person who already owns all other goods to which it could potentially be a means). Given that Aristotle identifies the good life with the actualisation of one’s nature (*NE* 1.6), so that the good human life is the *fully* human life, what he is saying is that friendship is part of what makes us fully human.

In the second part of the paper, I discuss Aristotle’s arguments for this claim. I argue that the reason friendship is part of what it means to be fully human is that Aristotle takes rationality to be the mark of humanity, and having friends (in his sense of the term) is part of what it means to be fully rational.