

<https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-0319.16.11>

**Katarzyna GŁOGOWSKA**

## **INSPIRING THOUGHTS ON FRIENDSHIP IN FABLES**

EINE INSPIRIERENDE SAMMLUNG DER GEDANKEN ÜBER FREUNDSCHAFT  
IN MÄRCHEN

Das Gefühl der Freundschaft wird manchmal sowohl mit Freundlichkeit, Respekt als auch mit Liebe gleichgesetzt. Im engeren Sinne bedeutet es zwischenmenschliche Intimität und Zuneigung, sein Gegenteil ist Feindseligkeit und Hass. Seit der Antike versucht man, die Frage zu beantworten, was eigentlich ein wahres Freundschaft ist, was seine Natur ist und warum es im menschlichen Leben so wichtig ist. Um diese Frage zu beantworten werden die Freundschaftsideen der alten Philosophen mit dem aus der literarischen Märchen kommenden Bild der Freundschaft konfrontiert. Die klassischen Konzepte der Freundschaft von Sokrates, Aristoteles und Cicero werden in Kürze vorgestellt. Unterschiedliche Arten von Freundschaft werden in einem kurzen Abriss bezeichnet sogar auch die notwendigen Voraussetzungen, die eine echte Freundschaft ermöglichen, werden genannt. Auf diese Weise werden wir die Zusammenhänge, die zwischen dem aus den philosophischen Konzepten auf tretenden Bilde der Freundschaft und der Vorstellung der Freundschaft in dem Märchen bestehen, sehen können. Die am Anfang zitierten Ansichten der alten Philosophen werden auf die in den zweiten Teil kommenden Analyse der literarischen Material, des Märchens, verweisen.

Key words: fables of Aesop, Polish fables, Krasicki, Rej, La Fontaine, friendship.

The feeling of friendship is often equated with good will, respect and love. In the narrow sense of this word, it also means intimacy and strong attachment to someone; its opposite is hostility or even hatred. Since antiquity, there has been a debate about what friendship actually is, what is its nature and what is the meaning of friendship in life of every human being. A literary investigation of ancient philosophical writings confronted with the image of friendship found in miscellaneous fables, will be an attempt to answer these questions. This paper will shortly present concepts of friendship created by ancient philosophers, such as Socrates, Aristotle and Cicero. Furthermore, we will also discuss both the kinds of friendship as well as the necessary conditions that allow real friendship to grow and develop. This will allow us to see the correlations that occur between the image of friendship emerging from the philosophical concepts, and the way it is shown in the literary fables. The quoted views of philosophers in

the first part of this study will be a reference point to the second part of the work containing the literary analysis of the fables.

Socrates has already made some reflections on the essence of friendship. Although he has never written down his thoughts, his ideas and opinions have survived until today in the works of other authors, such as Plato<sup>1</sup> or Xenophon. Despite a number of significant discrepancies in their descriptions of Socrates' theory of friendship, in both authors, there are also many common features which allow us to partly reconstruct Socrates' views on friendship. He perceives a friend as a great good. Furthermore according to Socrates it is an obligation to be a good man in order to have good friends, because only good people are able to share such feelings as friendship. He also shares the view, that "all true friendships are founded, not on external usefulness, but on spiritual value"<sup>2</sup>. Dishonest people can only be enemies, therefore it is not possible for an honest man to make friends with an evil one, moreover "to be an enemy to one's friend and a friend to one's enemy is impossible"<sup>3</sup>. Socrates explicitly identifies the concept of friendship (φιλία) with courage (ἀρετή)<sup>4</sup>.

This courage is a common point in concepts on friendships found among many different ancient philosophers. Also Aristotle identifies the concept of friendship with ἀρετή. In his view, the idea of having friends not only adds a great value, but also it is the most necessary, morally beautiful and crucial thing in every human being's life<sup>5</sup>. He also says that having a friend helps young men to avoid making mistakes. Friendship takes care of the elderly people and helps them in their work when they are physically weak, inspires people to do their best and to achieve more<sup>6</sup>. Aristotle points at certain conditions under which friendships can be made: people must be warm-hearted to one another

<sup>1</sup> His views on friendship are presented in: T. Penner, Ch. Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, Cambridge 2005; *Platon – Lizys, O przyjaźni*, trans. by J. Sowa, "Collectanea Philologica" 12 (2007).

<sup>2</sup> W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. II: In Search of the Divine Centre*, trans. by G. Highet, Oxford 1986, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the "Lysis", with a New Translation*, New York 1989, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej. I: Od początków do Sokratesa*, trans. by E. I. Zieliński, Lublin 1994, pp. 346–347.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (Etyka nikomachejska)* 1155a, [in:] *idem, Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 5, trans. by D. Gromska, Warszawa 1996, pp. 236–237 (hereon as *Eth. Nic.*). The perception of friendship in antiquity, especially the one showed in the works of Plato or Aristotle, is illustrated in the research of Joanna Sowa (UŁ). This is not only showed in numerous publications, but also widely analyzed. The most important works on this subject are: J. Sowa, *Między erosem i arete. Przyjaźń w etyce Platona i Arystotelesa*, Łódź 2009; *eadem, Czas jako budowniczy i niszczyciel związków przyjaźni w "Etyce nikomachejskiej" Arystotelesa*, "Collectanea Philologica" 12 (2009); *eadem, Pojęcie przyjaźni u Arystotelesa a filia w platońskim dialogu "Lizys"*, "Collectanea Philologica" 3 (1999), pp. 155–159; *eadem, Problematyka pojęcia filia w platońskim dialogu "Lizys"*, Ph.D. thesis, Łódź 1996.

<sup>6</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1155 a, p. 237.

(εὐνοεῖν ἀλλήλοις), they must wish themselves well (βούλεσθαι τὰγαθά) and be aware of this (τι τῶν εἰρημένων)<sup>7</sup>. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendships: friends for benefit (κατὰ το χρήσιμον), friends for pleasure (κατὰ το ἡδύ) and true friends (κατ' ἀρετήν). He underlines however that the first two types are fragile and require much care<sup>8</sup>. In his opinion, “friendships of pleasure and those of virtue aim at pleasure and truly achieve it, although the perfect friendship does this in a more stable and reliable way and brings other benefits in addition”<sup>9</sup>. The age of friends have a great influence on the longevity of their friendship. Aristotle says that young people make and break friendships very quickly<sup>10</sup>. He also points out, that friendship for benefit or friendship for pleasure can only be established between dishonest people. True friendship can only be established between ethically courages people, which means it can only be established between good people (ἀγαθοί)<sup>11</sup>. This sort of friendship evolves very slowly<sup>12</sup>. Because of a shortade of a decent individuals available, true friendships are very rare. However, once they are made, they usually last a lifetime<sup>13</sup>. According to Aristotle<sup>14</sup>, no one can be a real friend to many people, but every man can have many colleagues<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the distinguishing features of a true friendship are equality, similarity, utility and durability.

Cicero writes about friendship in one of his philosophical dialogues, i.e. *Laelius de Amicitia (On Friendship)*. It praises friendship, shows how a real friendship can be made and it also gives extremely valuable tips on how maintain, strengthen and look after it. On one hand in this work, Cicero refers to both Aristotle and Plato, whose thoughts appear in dialogue, and on the other, he polemizes with Epicurus<sup>16</sup>. Cicero esteems friendship as the best thing on Earth, he believes that friendship has its origins in nature and there is nothing more useful in happiness and in misfortune<sup>17</sup>. In his opinion, only honest<sup>18</sup> people can

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem* 1155 b, p. 239. Greek words meaning ‘being warm-hearted to one another’ (εὐνοεῖν ἀλλήλοις) and ‘wishing ourselves well’ (βούλεσθαι τὰγαθά) are difficult to translate into the English language which does not encompass the diversity of meanings of the Greek originals.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem* 1156 a, pp. 238–239. Interesting remarks about the relationship between these three kinds of friendships were made in S. Benetatos, *Aristotle’s Notion Friendship*, [in:] *Thinking about Friendship: Historical and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. D. Caluori, Basingstoke 2013, pp. 12–17.

<sup>9</sup> L. Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*, Cambridge 2003, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1156 a, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem* 1157 a, p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem* 1156 b, p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> More about the grounds of friendship in Aristotle can be found in D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 72–77.

<sup>15</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1158 a, p. 244.

<sup>16</sup> Cicero, *Leliusz o przyjaźni*, trans. by J. Korpanty, Kraków 1997, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem* 17, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* 18, p. 20.

become true friends who have some moral virtue<sup>19</sup>. True and sincere friendship combines good will, affection and consensus in all things regardless whether divine or human<sup>20</sup>. Cicero defines the origins of friendship in nature<sup>21</sup>, and since the latter is unchangeable, thus also “true friendships last forever”<sup>22</sup>. The philosopher knows how difficult it is to find a true friend<sup>23</sup> and, that is why according to him everyone should make effort to properly care for and maintain a friendship.

At this point, it becomes clear that these philosophical ideas will provide us with material, which will allow us to accept a comparative approach in the analysis of friendship both in philosophy and fable. The concept of friendship, originating in classical antiquity, which has been much modified over the centuries, became a source of inspiration for many generations of writers. Literary material contains comprehensive examples defining the character of a true and a false friend. Moreover it also gives advice, warning and caution about cherishing a friendship. A wide range of materials used for this investigation contains fables of different authors, such as: Aesop, Biernat of Lublin, Jean de La Fontaine, Ignacy Krasicki, Ivan Krylov and Adam Mickiewicz. This collection of texts allows us to follow the evolution of the idea of friendship, its concept and function in the works of the above mentioned authors.

First of all, a true, sincere and unselfish friendship is a relationship connecting good people – it is not only present in the works of the three ancient philosophers. A similar thought also appears in the fable of Krylov, *The Wolf and the Cuckoo*, where the author explains that it is very difficult for angry people to befriend anyone, because their anger does not allow them to agree and live well with others<sup>24</sup>. Aristotle notes that elderly as well as those who became bitter rarely make true friends, because they are very difficult to live with and they do not seem to enjoy the company of others<sup>25</sup>. Cicero indicates that only after several years of being friends are we capable of knowing if the friendship made in the early stage of our lives is a true one<sup>26</sup>. Socrates is the first one to acknowledge that bad people are most likely to have enmity for each other<sup>27</sup> and that is why, it is impossible for friendships to flourish between such unjust

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem* 18, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem* 20, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem* 27, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem* 32, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem* 79, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> I. Krylov, *Wilk i kukułka*, [in:] *idem, Bajki*, Wrocław 1961, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1158 a, p. 244.

<sup>26</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 74, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. G. Reale, *op. cit.*, pp. 346–347.

people<sup>28</sup> or even between those good and bad. Also, according to Cicero, friendship, or its lack, is the greatest of possible gulfs separating good and bad people<sup>29</sup>. Aesop advises us to avoid people who are two-faced<sup>30</sup>. Józef Minasowicz warns in his *Ploughman and the Stork* about befriending unjust people explaining that if someone supports our enemies, he is not worth being called a friend of ours<sup>31</sup>. People who favour the opponents of their friends are not true friends. This kind of thought occurs also in other fables, e.g. in Aesop's fable no. 208 *The Fowler and the Stork*<sup>32</sup>, in Babrios' fable no. 13, in Biernat's of Lublin fable no. 43 and Jean la Fontaine's fable no. 15 from the sixth book of *The Fables* entitled *The Fowler, the Hawk and the Skylark*<sup>33</sup>.

There are many determinants of friendships, however, according to Aristotle<sup>34</sup>, one of the most important features of a true friendship is the ability to treat everyone equally. Correspondingly, Cicero mentions equality as an essential attribute of a lasting friendship<sup>35</sup>. A similar belief is also presented in the fable *The Cauldron and the Pot* by Krylov, where the author emphasizes the importance of equality not only in friendship, but also in love<sup>36</sup>. The second quality of a true friendship, albeit not less important, is reciprocity. Only those people who are able to behave with amiability towards someone and give somebody all their best are ready to befriend truly<sup>37</sup>. According to the fable *The Fox and the Donkey* by Krasicki, only those who have all the ingredients of good friend, can hope to find a real friendship<sup>38</sup>. There is no doubt about the importance of honesty in friendship. Cicero explains that a true friend never lies and does not pretend to be a friend<sup>39</sup>. True friends should always be ready to help each other in any circumstances. Aesop in his fable no. 116 *The Doctor and the Patient* focuses on the issue of helping friends emphasizing, that for help to be successful, it should come from the right source and at the right time<sup>40</sup>. In his fable *The Peasant in Trouble*, Krylov gives an example for ineffective help,

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1157 a, p. 242.

<sup>29</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 74, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Aesop, 35. *Człowiek i satyr (ἄνθρωπος καὶ Σάτυρος)*, [in:] *Bajki Ezopowe*, trans. by M. Golias, Wrocław-Kraków 1961, p. 18. The Greek titles are given according to *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum*, vol. 1, fasc. 1–2, ed. A. Hausrath, Lipsiae 1957.

<sup>31</sup> J. Minasowicz, *Oracz i bocian*, [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Aesop, 208. *Ptasznik i bocian (ὄρνιθοθήρας καὶ πελαργός)*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> J. La Fontaine, *Ptasznik, jastrząb i skowronek*, [in:] *idem, Bajki*, trans. by P. Komar, Wrocław 1950, pp. 156–157.

<sup>34</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1158 b, p. 245.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 69, p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> I. Krylov, *Kociol i garnek*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 201.

<sup>37</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1156a, p. 239.

<sup>38</sup> I. Krasicki, *Lis i osiel*, [in:] *idem, Bajki*, Wrocław 1975, p. 112.

<sup>39</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.*, 26, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Aesop, 116. *Lekarz i chory (ιατρός ἄτεχνος)*, [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 48.

where many people give their so-called friend a good advice, but no one actually helps the poor man. Aesop warns that we should always act with prudence when accepting help from other people, because not all men who offer us help will do it generously and without any hidden agendas<sup>41</sup>. However, helping others presents a great value itself. Cicero adds that we should never ask our friends for an indecent favour and never do anything unjust when we are asked to do so<sup>42</sup>. Although friends should take care of their common good, however, there may be some exceptions when you can refuse to help your friend. For example, Aristotle points out at the matter of borrowing money<sup>43</sup>. Also Krylov in his fable entitled *The Cask* explains that you should not feel ashamed when refusing lending some money to a friend<sup>44</sup>. Like in every other part of human life, so in friendship, it is very important to put the emphasis on the quality and not the quantity of your friends. Also in *The Lioness* Aesop shares the opinion that there is more value in the quality than the quantity of friends<sup>45</sup>. Aristotle goes further saying that it is impossible to have many true friends at once<sup>46</sup>. Considering someone a true friend is a very serious matter, thus, one should never rush when searching for new friends. The old fable of the Nenets people *The Dog* admits that you have to look for a very long time before you will find a true friend<sup>47</sup>. Also Cicero warns that one could be very sorry when one will choose a wrong person to make friends with<sup>48</sup>. The philosopher adds that you should not care more about a new friend, than you do about your old one<sup>49</sup>. Aesop also warns against making friends with such people, because they will shortly forget about their old friends<sup>50</sup>. A bad person may not only bring harm, but also become the cause of a misfortune. The difficulty in finding a true friend is showed by numerous warnings found in fables. Aesop states that people who have unwise friends, have more harm than good<sup>51</sup>; La Fontaine claims that it is not good when your friend is a fool; Mikołaj Rej says that an insincere man is not a good friend<sup>52</sup>, whereas Krylov mentions in one of his fables how one man helped his friend, who then never thanked him and even more so, was disgraceful towards him<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Aesop, 17. *Lis bez ogona* (ἀλώπηξ κόλουρος), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 40, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1165 a, p. 261.

<sup>44</sup> I. Krylov, *Beczka*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Aesop, 167. *Lwica i liszka* (λέαινα), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.* 1158 a, p. 244.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Bajki ludów północy*, trans. by J. Brzechwa, Warszawa 1986, pp.10–11.

<sup>48</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 85, p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibidem* 68, p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Aesop, 6. *Dzikie kozy i pasterz* (αἴγες ἄγριαι καὶ αἰπόλος), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Aesop, 336. *Chory jeleni* (ἐλαφος νοσοῦσα), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> M. Rej, *XL. Nie wierz złemu nigdy*, [in:] *Antologia bajki polskiej*, Wrocław 1983, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> I. Krylov, *Pies, człowiek, kot i sokół*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 141.

He who cheats on his friends can never sleep well<sup>54</sup>. Even if they will escape the anger of victims, they will be punished by the gods<sup>55</sup>. Aristotle notices that it is quite natural that true friendships are rare<sup>56</sup>, and this is mainly the reason why so many authors share common reflections about false friends. In the view of Krylov, nowadays, true friends who seem to be one soul inhabiting two bodies, almost kill each other for money<sup>57</sup>. This is what happens when friends are not equal, for then conflicts occur. According to Aristotle, this is the end of a friendship<sup>58</sup>. Also Cicero indicates that sometimes a long friendship can fall apart. In his opinion, there is nothing more difficult than to make a friendship last a lifetime<sup>59</sup>. If it is impossible to save the bonds of friendship, it is recommended to cut them slowly rather than suddenly, unless someone has committed an unforgivable crime<sup>60</sup>. The philosopher also quotes Ennius, who thought that a “friend in need is a friend indeed”<sup>61</sup>. These words refer to Aesop’s fable no. 66, *The Bear and the Travelers*, where we read that only in a situation of danger you may discover who your real friends are<sup>62</sup>. This view has also been taken over by authors such as Mickiewicz and Krasicki in their respective fables entitled *Friends*<sup>63</sup>. Aristotle lays emphasis on the importance of a true, hence perfect<sup>64</sup> friendship. The philosopher underlines the irrefutable value of friendship as he states that even in misery and poverty true friends are something positive<sup>65</sup>. He is aware that finding a true friend is very difficult, because all things which are beautiful are extremely rare<sup>66</sup>. An example of this point of view may be found in the fable of Cyprian Godebski, *The Oak Tree and the Small Trees*, in which the author confirms that it is easier to endure a cruel stroke of fate when you have true friends<sup>67</sup>. Cicero wonders if there is anything more pleasant than having a friend with whom you could talk about everything<sup>68</sup>. La Fontaine admits that it is a sheer pleasure when two people are true friends<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Aesop, 205. *Ptasznik i kuropatwa* (ὄρνιθοθήρας καὶ κέρδις), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Aesop, 1. *Orzeł i lis* (ἀετὸς καὶ ἀλώπηξ), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1156 b, p. 241.

<sup>57</sup> I. Krylov, *Psia przyjaźń*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p.43.

<sup>58</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1163 a, p. 257.

<sup>59</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 33, p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, 76, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, 64, p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> Aesop, 66. *Podróżni i niedźwiedź* (ὁδοιπόροι καὶ ἄρκτος), [in:] *Bajki...*, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. A. Mickiewicz, *Przyjaciele*, [in:] *Antologia...*, p. 434; I. Krasicki *Przyjaciele*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 351.

<sup>64</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1156 b, p. 240.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem* 1155 a, p. 237.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem* 79, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> C. Godebski, *Dąb i drzewka*, [in:] *Antologia...*, p. 330.

<sup>68</sup> Cicero, *op. cit.* 22, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> J. La Fontaine, *Dwaj przyjaciele*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 217.

It is a great happiness for everyone to make a sincere and timeless friendship and a true friend is the greatest treasure, albeit rare<sup>70</sup>.

It becomes apparent from the analyzed material, that there are some common points in the perception of friendship within both philosophy and literature. Not only the fabulists but also ancient philosophers seem to have searched for the definition of a friend, or maybe even for one for themselves, after trying to depict its ideal image. Over the centuries, or should we say millennia, the qualities of a sincere and a true friendship have not significantly changed. The features of a true friendship observed by ancient philosophers and represented in fables are equality, similarity, utility and durability all of which, till present day, remain the landmarks of friendship. As we make friends, take care of them for many years or even a whole lifetime we become better people, or in philosophical terms, we become morally beautiful. Therefore, a true friendship seems to be the greatest and most beautiful thing that may happen in ones life, whether he is a philosopher, writer or an ordinary man.

---

<sup>70</sup> J. La Fontaine, *Słowo Sokratesa*, [in:] *idem, Bajki...*, p. 112.