

of friendships not grounded in anything beyond convenience: “The ending inevitably matches the beginning: a person who begins to be your friend because it pays will similarly cease to be your friend when it pays him not to be a friend.”

Friendships based on pleasure are pointed to by Aristotle as friendships formed between young people, because their lives are largely regulated by their feelings. And, since feelings are prone to change, these types of friendships are often ephemeral and short-lived. But adults also enjoy friendships of this type: Some examples might be your tennis partner, the members of your local hiking club, the guys you play poker with on Friday nights. And there is nothing wrong with these relationships, for we all need time for fun and relaxation in our busy lives. But we should remember that such friendships can quickly come to an end when one or the other party no longer derives pleasure from the association. And that, in fact, is often what happens.

Friendships based on goodness, according to Aristotle, are the ideal type of friendship. They are based not on utility or pleasure, but on mutual goodness. And by goodness, Aristotle is referring to the classical virtues of character: courage, compassion, generosity, steadfastness, loyalty, sympathy, and so forth. Friendships of this type tend to last a long time. As Theosophists, we might say for lifetimes. This is the type Cicero was talking about when he referred to friendship as “the greatest of all possible gifts.”

At this point, a skeptic might ask if it is even possible in this day and age to find a friendship that lives up to ideals set forth by philosophers such as Emerson, Montaigne, and Aristotle. In this increasingly fragmented world, is such a friendship possible? Is it realistic? Perhaps the best we can hope for are specialized but limited types of friendship, such as your workout partner at the gym, a co-worker with whom you often go out to lunch, your friend on the softball team, your neighbor from the local PTA.

Maybe a friendship based on noble qualities of character is no longer feasible in these fast-paced times. But this much is certain. You cannot create a friend simply by adding another contact to your Facebook page. You cannot maintain and nurture a friendship by simply “texting” at your convenience, while expecting the other person to drop everything and respond immediately.