

From the Budapest School to Intellectual Friendships: Reflections with Ágnes Heller and Immanuel Kant

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Abstract: Rather than considering those thinkers identified with the Budapest School in institutional terms, this paper suggests that the notion of friendship is a more appropriate way to consider the thinkers formerly associated with such a “school.” This paper explores the condition and disposition of friendship through the works of Ágnes Heller and Immanuel Kant, especially, to throw light on the notion and practice of modern friendship in the context of the historical dissolution of philosophical schools, including the Budapest School. This paper explores how modern friendship – its cultivation and dispositions – might be understood.

Key words: Budapest School, Budapest friends, Ágnes Heller, Immanuel Kant, friendship

1. Introduction

Rather than considering those thinkers identified with the Budapest School in institutional terms, this paper suggests that the notion of friendship is a more appropriate way to consider the thinkers formerly associated with such a “school.” This paper explores the condition and disposition of modern friendship through the works of Ágnes Heller and Immanuel Kant, one of her three main intellectual companions apart from Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. By drawing on their work (and viewing them as “contemporaries”) we can throw light on the notion and practice of modern friendship in the wake of the historical dissolution of philosophical schools, including the Budapest School.¹ This paper,

¹ In friendship to Peter Beilharz, Sergio Mariscal, Peter Murphy, and David Roberts. Thank you to Danielle Petherbridge and the anonymous reviewers for comments and suggestions that have strengthened the paper.

though, is not a biographical study of either the Budapest School or the friendships that continue after its dissolution.²

Whilst this paper is not biographical, some context gives the Budapest School its contours: the short-lived and failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution, their close ties to Georg Lukács, their exclusions from academic positions in the wake of the re-Sovietization afterwards during their time in Hungary, and their critiques of Soviet-type societies and migrations. Peter Beilharz provides a narrative of the School's membership and the drama of living under "really existing socialism" during the Budapest years, of exclusions and censorship. He also lays down an equally important second path by examining what happens to the notion and experience of a school when some of its members relocate, first to Australia and then in the case of Heller and Fehér in their subsequent move to New York. What remains of the Budapest School is in fact not a school at all, but something of equal importance – enduring deep friendships during ongoing intellectual innovation.³ In amongst this a movement occurs from the Budapest School to what might be termed "Budapest friends."

² The Budapest School was a group of intellectuals whose identity initially revolved around their association with Georg Lukács, and, at least in their native Hungary, of being oppositional and dissident figures. The core group included Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, and Mihály Vajda; Maria Márkus, Ivan Szelenyi, Andreas Hegedus were associated with the School; and János Kis, Sandor Radnoti, and György Bence were postgraduates at the time. Unlike the three generations of the Frankfurt School, which principally focused on Western European modernity, including Nazism, the Budapest School was also framed by their experience of an Eastern European totalitarianism of the Soviet type (what they came to call "the dictatorship over needs"). It was the latter to which their dissident, critical and oppositional work was directed while they were living in Hungary. See n. 10 for further details. See also the excellent paper by Katie Terezakis on Heller's use of Kierkegaard and the notion of "existential leap" in her *Existential Choice as Existential Comedy: Agnes Heller's Wager*, in: *Critical Theories and the Budapest School*, eds. J. Pickle, J. Rundell, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 217–238. See also S. Mariscal, *The Image of the "Good Friend" in Heller: A Bridge between Everyday and Transcendence*, in: *Critical Theories and the Budapest School*, eds. J. Pickle, J. Rundell, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 262–282. As indicated, the focus of this paper is not biographical. It is a textual reconstruction of what happens to schools once they dissolve, and friendships remain or take their place. As such, the paper asks the question "What is friendship?" through a meditation on the works of Heller and Kant. There is a vast scholarly literature in philosophy and sociology on modern friendship, including its digital forms and mass cultural representations, but for the purposes of this paper I will concentrate on Heller's and Kant's works. For a wonderful intellectual/biographical self-portrait, see Heller's *A Short History of My Philosophy*, Lexington, Lanham, MD, 2011.

³ See P. Beilharz, *The Budapest School: Travelling Theory?*, in: *Critical Theories and the Budapest School*, eds. J. Pickle, J. Rundell, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 15–33. See also n. 9.

2. School, Critique, Home

Ágnes Heller's own remarks on the Frankfurt School are instructive because they throw into relief not only the contours of schools in general, including the Budapest School to which she belonged, but also the relationships between members once a school no longer self-identifies as a school. They point to a movement from institutions of philosophical schools to enduring intellectual friendships, which also indicates something specific about the nature of friendship itself.

According to her analysis, modern philosophical schools are anachronistic. Premodern ones were orientated around the dynamic of the master–pupil couplet, the pursuit of truth, and/or the pursuit of a particular understanding of philosophy or science, and the pursuit of a particular style of thinking and even style of life.⁴ Schools share some common characteristics: “reflective isolation, opposition, a sense of superiority, knowing things better or entirely different to the rest, being the repository of truth.”⁵ In summary, then, a philosophical school is a self-instituting body, often organized around a charismatic (philosophical) personality, and this body can function as either an institution or a community, or both.

According to Heller, the truth of the Master is no longer passed down in the context of the formation of modern systems of knowledge. Rather, instead of a textual-interpretative transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next that preserves the “truth” or the Master and/or the School, the intergenerational as well as extra-generational sense for the moderns is one of critique and thus an internal dynamic of destruction, rather than preservation, of the Truth (of the Master).⁶

Notwithstanding the disintegration of schools and a distaste for them in the modern period (and for schools of aesthetics from the Renaissance onwards), Heller notes that, nonetheless, the Frankfurt School (and by implication, the Bu-

⁴ A. Heller, *The Frankfurt School*, in: *Rethinking the Frankfurt School: Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique*, eds. J.T. Nealon, C. Irr, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2002, pp. 211–212. For the most comprehensive account of the Frankfurt School, see R. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, MIT, Boston, MA, 1995. Heller's own analysis begins and ends with the question “What is a school?”

⁵ A. Heller, *The Frankfurt School*, op. cit., p. 211.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 213, 217. The formation of *professional* schools within the Academy, if they occur at all, follows the modern specialization and differentiation of knowledge.

dapest School) had two qualities that marked it as a school: its commitment to a cause and a sense of solidarity. In Heller's view, the cause and sense of solidarity was centred around the practice of critique, and this is what made it modern. For the Frankfurt School at least, critique took the form of an imminent critique of both theory and practice, which led its members to a politico-theoretical critique of practice, and a theoretical critique of theory itself – that is, a critique of basic concepts of not only “traditional” theory, but also of “critical theory.” For Theodor Adorno, for example, Heller suggests, this cause of critique sublated friendships (and antagonisms) between individuals who were extremely creative and productive. Neither taste nor mutual sympathy could be the basis of friendship within the “hothouse” of critique, critical subversion and even resistance. Heller notes: *“the cause was substituted for truth. Sure, the cause has to do something with truth, because the conviction ‘we know better’ can also be read in a way that we are the ones who know the truth. Yet not quite. For in a modern school the truth is not something we receive from the hand or the mouth of the master but is understood as the avenue whereon we need to tread in order to arrive at the truest insights.”*⁷ In addition, the road travelled – the cause *qua* critique – also produced a sense of solidarity, of “us,” which could speak with one voice, rather than individualized voice of the “I.” This also meant that a distinction between “us” and “them” could emerge.⁸

Heller suggests that the slow demise of the Frankfurt School began when Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno returned to Germany, the institution of the University, and took their own paths of intellectual work and curiosity (especially on the part of Adorno, whom Heller views as the preeminent intellect). What waned was the sense of “the cause,” and Horkheimer's commitment to it (whom Heller views as a central organizing figure). This sense of “cause” *qua* critique, although passed to the succeeding generations, became loosened and individualized, which meant that the main successor figures, especially Jürgen Habermas and later Axel Honneth, followed their own paths.

Something similar could be said about the Budapest School. It was self-created around the figure of Georg Lukács, and motivated by both a deep sense of loyalty to the figure (if not the work) of Lukács, and a critique of really existing

⁷ Ibid., p. 213. Italics in the original.

⁸ Ibid., p. 209.

socialism.⁹ However, there were not only loyalties but also intellectual divisions within the Budapest School that are partly framed by the Lukácsian and Soviet contexts that reflected on the critiques of the theoretical paradigms the participants drew on and developed to explain them. As Waldemar Bulira and János Kis separately explain, after Lukács' death the Budapest School was in crisis driven by the theoretical divergences among its principal members, as well as between the older and the younger generations. In part, the disagreements concerned the realizability and form of democratic socialism and renewing what the School saw as an ethical core of Marxist philosophy, that is, in continuing the project of humanizing Marxism. The latter also involved continuing critical reflections on core categories within Marxism and historical materialism, such as labour, production, need, objectivation, culture, reification and alienation.¹⁰

In 1978 Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, and Maria Márkus emigrated to Australia – Heller and Fehér to Melbourne and then to New York before returning later to Budapest; the Márkuses to Sydney. Their migrations are not only geographic; they are also narratives about intellectual journeys from humanist Marxism to post-Marxism that incorporated insights from competing theoretical traditions in ways that result in arrivals, reflections, contours

⁹ The group (rather than School) around Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort and the journal “Socialism or Barbarism” was also concerned with the critique of orthodox Marxism and Soviet-type societies as well as capitalist modernity. Parenthetically, one can suggest that it is not Fehér, Heller and Márkus's *Dictatorship Over Needs* that could provide a continuing legacy of geopolitical critique of our current period, especially the war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine. Unexpectedly three texts by Heller and Fehér, especially, leap out and form an interpretative arc – *Hungary 1956 Revisited*, *Doomsday or Deterrence*, and *From Yalta to Glasnost*. When read as a series of interconnected texts regarding the geopolitics of Eastern, Central and Western Europe, the key event of the 1945 Yalta agreement between the USSR's Stalin, the USA's Roosevelt and the UK's Churchill again gains prominence as a hermeneutic key to understanding the current events of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Yalta's key moment of organizing central and outer Eastern Europe as part of a Soviet satellite system is revisited by the Putin regime from a position of an enclosed re-statement of Russian internal historical self-understanding without a sense that the world has changed. Russia under the “new” regime (really the old regime that reaches back to Peter the Great if we also follow the work of Richard Pipes) means continued mobilization of state security services, oligarchies, and imperial power.

¹⁰ W. Bulira, *The Budapest School on Totalitarianism: Toward a New Version of Critical Theory*, in: *Critical Theories and the Budapest School*, eds. J. Pickle, J. Rundell, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 65–81; J. Kis, *Preface*, in: G. Márkus, G. Bence, J. Kis, *How Is Critical Economic Theory Possible?*, Brill, Leiden 2022, pp. xi–xxiii. See also F. Fehér, A. Heller, G. Márkus, *Dictatorship Over Needs*, Blackwell, Oxford 1983; F. Fehér, A. Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986.

and departures. They confronted new languages and intellectual vocabularies that included their own “critical criticism” of all “isms” as an expression of their continuing commitments to the values of freedom and life. Once held together as a coherent entity by the intellectual presence of Lukács, and of critique and dissidence, the sense of a school weakened with migratory distance, changing intellectual orientations, including postmodernism and the later post-1989 experiences.¹¹

However, their migration was also more than “intellectual.” It was also existential. Finding home, being at home and returning is difficult. The contingent fracturing of the modern condition and its often temporary nature makes it dif-

¹¹ For Beilharz, the crucial part of the history of the Budapest School is found neither in Budapest nor in New York, nor even now arguably in China where a new reception is gaining traction; rather it is found in Australia where cultural traffic and transmission always occurred unexpectedly, quickly and continuously, which allows for intellectual innovation not indebted to an Eastern European context. For Beilharz, the cultural traffic and cross-fertilization of intellectual currents via the Budapest School’s Australian migration is now multi-generational. It is also multi-thematic, which points well and truly beyond the Eastern European origins of the school to explore topics central to contemporary critical theories, such as contours and imaginaries of contemporary modernity and the comic rather than tragic condition as central to critical perspective and critique. There are also reflections on something that goes to the heart of any human condition worth its name – friendship. It should be pointed out, though, that there is a continuing interest in Lukács’ philosophical legacy by Heller, Fehér and Márkus even during this period of migration. To be sure, they would side with Adorno’s criticism of Lukács in *Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács’ Realism in Our Time* and would not view Adorno as residing in “Grand Hotel Abyss.” For them and notwithstanding the Romantic and redemptive currents in his early work, the young Lukács’ so-called Heidelberg aesthetics period, which includes *Soul and Form* and *The Theory of the Novel* and precedes his turn to Marxism and *History and Class Consciousness*, is the point of reference and of continuing interest and inspiration. Lukács’ Heidelberg aesthetics enables Fehér, Heller and Márkus, in their own ways, to develop different versions of modern aesthetics than either the later Lukács (of which they are very critical) or Adorno (of whom they are less so). See P. Beilharz, *The Budapest School: Travelling Theory?*, op. cit.; A. Heller, ed., *Lukács Revalued*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983; F. Fehér, A. Heller, eds., *Reconstructing Aesthetics*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986; A. Heller, *A Short History of My Philosophy*, op. cit.; F. Fehér, A. Heller, *The Grandeur and Twilight on Radical Universalism*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NY, 1991; G. Márkus, *Culture, Science and Society: The Constitution of Cultural Modernity*, Brill, Leiden 2011; J. Rundell, ed., *Aesthetics and Modernity: Essays by Agnes Heller*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011; P.U. Hohendahl, *The Theory of the Novel and the Concept of Realism in Lukács and Adorno*, in: *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, ed. M.J. Thompson, Continuum, London 2011, pp. 75–98; B. Szabados, *Georg Lukács in Heidelberg: A Crossroads between the Academic and Political Career*, “*Filozofia*” 2020, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 51–64; F. Qilin, *On Agnes Heller’s Aesthetic Dimension: From “Marxist Renaissance” to “Post-Marxist” Paradigm*, “*Thesis Eleven*” 2014, Vol. 125, No. 1, pp. 105–123.

difficult to imagine a home across a lifetime and in one place. Being a member of the Budapest School with its own activity of critique provided such a home. For Heller, though, there was another home – that of culture in which intellectual friendships could be welcomed and find their place, despite geographical dislocation.¹² In Heller’s view, friendship is beyond the logics of *technè*, function, political power, the polis and its publics. The public worlds of work and politics do not portray the sense of where modern friendship might reside. In addition, modern friendship under the differentiating conditions of autonomy and distancing relinquishes the presumption of solidarity, the “us” and the combination of cause and truth, which are some of the hallmarks that also indicate the attributes of schools. The home for friendship is highly personal and yet it is also not identified by Heller with the private sphere.

In addition, friendships can range between acquaintances and friends. Acquaintances are often contextualized and characterized by context, role, occupation (professional or otherwise), and even the valour and mateship of “brothers in arms” in times of war. Friends, though, are characterized by density, ethicality, endurance, and emotional, “spiritual,” and intellectual affinities. This latter grouping (including emotional, “spiritual” and intellectual friendships) is sometimes included under the more general terms of intimate friends, and it is this that makes them more than mundane – they are extra-ordinary.¹³

For Heller, the cultivation of friendship is a cultural activity. For her, friendships and “home” coalesce in a world of culture, rather than in a school, work, politics or even in everyday life, although she never discounted the latter. To be sure, there are contingent strangers who are creatively productive, and may or may not form friendships. But the formation of friendships, especially between

¹² A. Heller, *Where Are We at Home?*, in: *Aesthetics and Modernity: Essays by Agnes Heller*, ed. J. Rundell, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011, pp. 203–222. For Heller, home is not identified as a private space or the private sphere. It is more than that and includes not only the space of culture but also the space of politics, although her preference is ultimately for the former. These two spaces are quite different and cannot be collapsed into one another, for Heller. On forms of modern friendship, see M. Márkus, *Lovers and Friends: “Radical Utopias” of Intimacy?*, “Thesis Eleven” 2010, Vol. 101, No. 1, pp. 6–23; H. Blatterer, *Everyday Friendships: Intimacy as Freedom in a Complex World*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015; P. Johnson, *Images of Intimacy in Feminist Discussions over Private/Public Boundaries*, in: *Modern Privacy: Shifting Boundaries, New Forms*, eds. H. Blatterer, P. Johnson, M. Márkus, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, pp. 39–58.

¹³ See F. Alberoni, *Friendship*, transl. H. Blatterer, S. Magaraggia, Brill, Leiden 2016.

those who are creatively productive, requires cultivation and a disposition to practise the art of friendship. This makes friendship more than mundane; it is extraordinary—in a world of difficulties and difficult contingent strangers who are no longer united and formed through a cause.

Friendships, especially extraordinary ones, require cultivation and disposition through which their nuances, joys and disappointments can be reflected on. For Heller, and to extrapolate further, culture provides the model for a different type of home and homely experience in which intellectual and intimate friendships come to the fore. Intellectual and intimate friendship and culture combine in a way that is conversational rather than argumentative. As Maria Márkus also notes, it is derived from “a lived experience not because it necessarily comes from ‘experiencing together,’ it is also lived by recollecting together and exchanging memories.”¹⁴ A cultural ethos is important as a place of homeliness, for Heller, because of its hermeneutic, heterodox sensibilities that combine constant interpretation with creativity in the form interpretations and perspectives. It is this combination of interpretation and creativity that is important here, for, as Heller notes, the density of intellectual friendships is constituted through sensuous satisfaction and not only the cognitive reward of intellectualization.¹⁵ In this way, Heller can further argue that even in the condition of contingent modernity social life and action has not been emptied of relational content, concrete orientative practices, depth and meaning, because friendships matter and continue across both a life time and the distance of space.

In other words, for Heller, the homely spaces for creative engagement are not only ones of the metropole, of aesthetic experience, or of publics. There is also the space of culture through which the formation, continuity, and practice of modern contingent intellectual and intimate friendships can occur, including those between highly creative individuals. In this way, friendships remain, new ones can be formed, and each friendship can be cultivated, not in the manner that a school cultivates a cause, but in the manner that competing perspectives can be explored in ways that sensibilities can be looked after – through cultivation in ac-

¹⁴ M. Márkus, *In Search of a Home: In Honour of Agnes Heller on Her 75th Birthday*, in: *Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy*, eds. J. Rundell et al., Brill, Leiden 2004, pp. 391–400. Homeliness can also be a cause of anxiety and disruption. See D. Petherbridge, *Exile, Dislocation, and Home-Spaces: Irish Narratives*, in: *Philosophical Perspectives on Contemporary Ireland*, eds. C. Fisher, Á. Mahon, Routledge, New York 2019, pp. 195–212.

¹⁵ A. Heller, *Where Are We at Home?*, op. cit., pp. 210–214.

commodating contexts and the practice of friendship itself. To paraphrase Kant, rather than Heller in this context, one way of enjoying friendships and establishing new ones is to cultivate them and ourselves.¹⁶

3. Cultivating Friendships: Kant's Luncheon

As indicated above, in Heller's view "common causes" are no longer the bases of friendships, not "the kinds that are significant enough to cement the friendships of [people] of high creativity, to make them endure censure, occasional injustice, and constant interference. Yet, there are still friendships, and since they exist they are possible."¹⁷ We can go on to ask: how are friendships possible? How do they exist?

I will address these questions by not only drawing on Heller's work, but also, and not unexpectedly, on Kant's. Heller and Kant provide a way to reflect upon the "Budapest friendships," as intellectual friendships within the sphere of culture with its intellectual conversations, which are different in nature to the ones of a "school" and even a "public sphere." Both writers address the possibility of friendships and their conversations in the modern world. Indeed, Heller construes a witty and highly imaginative setting for conviviality when she "accepts" Kant's "invitation" to lunch in her *Culture, or Invitation to Luncheon by Immanuel Kant*. This essay is instructive as it outlines the cultivation of friendship alongside her commitment to a "home" of culture, as well as alerts us to her warmth and debt to Kant's work and its legacy, which occurs throughout her work as a whole.

Surprisingly – but not trivially – a model for the cultivation of modern contingent, yet intellectual and intimate or extra-ordinary friendships is the luncheon (or dinner) for both Kant and Heller.¹⁸ The luncheon is not so much a context for the

¹⁶ See I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, transl. and ed. R.B. Louden, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 132.

¹⁷ A. Heller, *The Frankfurt School*, op. cit., p. 208.

¹⁸ I. Kant, *Doctrine of Virtues*, in: I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 2nd ed., ed. M. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 254, §37. The following discussion of Kant draws on my *Kant: Imagination, Anthropology, Freedom* (Routledge, London 2021). As I will indicate below, Kant, in similar vein to Heller, is anything but the cold rationalist or philosopher of moral duties. He is concerned about the "width" (or really the depth) rather than the narrowness or shallowness of the subject. The orientating and indeed bridging category between Kant and Heller, and within their respective works, regarding the problem of sociable sociability, is that of

cultivation and practice of friendship; it is a stand-in for a cultural model, the other one for which was the eighteenth-century salon.¹⁹ The luncheon can be viewed as a paradigm for Kant's idea of friendship, as distinct from the activity only of argument in the salon, the public sphere or politics. It is a specific space in which the contours of friendship and its cultivation can be explored. On one level the luncheon appears to be an overly constrained setting to explore the complexity of modern contingent friendships, especially intimate ones.

Yet, this impression trivializes it. The luncheon also stands in the wake of a great classical, philosophical discursive tradition of Greek and Roman antiquity, especially that of Plato's *symposia*. The luncheon is where friends – the Budapest friends, for example – meet around the table and not in a public sphere where they simply argue. In addition to political matters, the luncheon guests discuss matters of intellectual interest and cultural taste and can argue about these as part of the cultivation of culture more generally.²⁰ But it has a greater significance.

To be sure, in her essay Heller points to the empirical difficulties of the luncheon as a model for friendship (in *Beyond Justice* she had privileged Jean-Jacques Rousseau's depiction of a group of friends in the garden of Clarence in his *Nouvelle Heloise*). As she notes, among the 1003 "sociological" impediments to using the luncheon as a model for friendship there are the compatibility or otherwise of the guests in the midst of modern contingency – we all have different jobs and perform different roles; we have different tastes; we have different personalities. A dinner can also be prestigious; a status; strategic "business" where deals and donations are made.²¹ It can be utilitarian or commercial.

Nonetheless, for both Heller and Kant the luncheon is a paradigm for modern contingent friendships through which we also can learn more than simply the

friendship. For both Kant and Heller friendship can provide a bridge between the phenomenal and the transcendental (Kant) or the everyday and the historically created values of freedom and life (Heller).

¹⁹ See J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, transl. T. Burger with the assistance of F. Lawrence, Polity Press, Oxford 1989; H. Arendt, *Rahel Warnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, ed. L. Weissberg, transl. R. Winston, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2000.

²⁰ Heller takes Kant's lead here too. See her *Culture, or Invitation to Luncheon by Immanuel Kant*, in: A. Heller, *A Philosophy of History in Fragments*, Blackwell, London 1993, pp. 136–175. Jonathan Pickle highlights the aspect of the cultivation of culture in his unpublished *Diderot as Heller's Guest to Kant's Luncheon: Bringing A Spiritual Attitude for Justice to Cultural Discourse*.

²¹ See A. Heller, *Culture, or Invitation to Luncheon by Immanuel Kant*, op. cit., pp. 160–161.

departments of being civil in modern civil society. As Heller notes as she unequivocally accepts Kant's invitation, "before joining Kant for luncheon, we need to become familiar with the four basic rules of such a meal set by our host. First, the subject matter for the discussion needs to be chosen in such a way that every invited person could contribute to the discussion and add his or her voice to the rest. Second the discussion can only stop for a very short time [...] one should not jump too quickly from one subject to another. Third, self-righteousness or showing off are entirely out of place in a good conversation. Fourth, during the serious contestation, our mutual respect and goodwill for the people whose judgements we contest should always shine through our words. The tone is as important as the content."²² In this way, Heller extrapolates the inner life of a cultural home for intellectual friendships, where the luncheon is the alternative cultural model to that of a school. "Budapest friends" (and they can be any friends) meet here rather than in a school or political/institutional setting, including the public sphere. The "luncheon" *qua* cultural model provides the space and a slower time for the cultivation of depth, meaning and personality beyond the worlds of roles, power and politics.

Let's follow Kant rather than Heller here, in order to draw up a "menu" for cultivating intellectual friendships between contingent strangers, including the "Budapest friends." According to Kant, friendship can be cultivated when one participates in a meal with others who are also autonomous persons and can be themselves. Kant muses that eating alone is unhealthy. He goes on to say, "the way of thinking characteristic of the union of good living with virtue in *social intercourse is humanity*."²³ He continues, "The good living that still seems to harmonise best with true humanity is a *good meal in good company* (and if possible, also altering company)."²⁴ One should savour the meal and the company and so cultivate taste in the double meaning of the word – of the cuisine and its subtleties and delights (as a synonym for culture more generally), of the company and their perspectives and insights. Cultivation of taste thus includes the development of conversation, laughter, wit and good judgment, according to Kant. For him, these are more than simply the development of aesthetic taste, or the arts of

²² See *ibid.*, p. 153.

²³ I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, *op. cit.*, p. 178, §88.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179, §88. His *Anthropology Mrongovius (1784–1785)*, in: I. Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, eds. A.W. Wood, R.B. Loudon, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 335–509, gives a more fulsome description of the importance of the paradigm of the meal together.

politesse and forms of dissembling. Rather they are deeply imbedded in friendship itself and its maxim of not using another as mere means and treating the other as an end in him or herself.

4. The Disposition of Friendship

Apart from the *cultivation* of the culture and spaces of friendship, one can also have a *disposition* towards its practice. For Kant, friendship *qua* conversation is not a monologue, but “moderates the egoism of human beings.”²⁵ According to him, it involves speaking about matters that might interest everyone, not – as Heller too has noticed – showing off, not allowing a deadly silence so that conversation can continue quickly, not becoming cantankerous or argumentative, and so when one argues one is mindful of tone of voice and choice of words.²⁶ Kant could have also suggested that one can learn to listen to other guests and even remain silent, paradoxically, in order to maintain the conversation. One can also be playful in conversation and by so doing one can also be witty, laugh and enjoy laughter, not at another’s expense and not to produce shame. Wit and laughter are different to being clever, ridiculing or being sarcastic to others.²⁷ Rather wit and laughter (comedy) can be aids to practical reasoning in that they can enhance the power of judgment by assisting “the power to connect representations.”²⁸ This enhancement can occur by bringing unexpected and even paradoxical representations to the fore and bringing the imagination closer to understanding. “Wit allows the mind to recover because judgment on its own is fatiguing.”²⁹

Conversation, wit and laughter, for Kant, are central dispositions for a successful and culturally rich social gathering. As he again surprisingly notes in deference to Plato’s symposia, “as one of Plato’s friends from his symposium said, a social gathering must be such that it delighted him not only at the time he enjoyed it, but also every time [and] as often as he thought about it.”³⁰

²⁵ I. Kant, *Anthropology Mrongovius*, op. cit., p. 462.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 387–394, 451–452; I. Kant, *Doctrine of Virtues*, op. cit., p. 258, §44.

²⁸ I. Kant, *Anthropology Mrongovius*, op. cit., p. 387.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 388–399.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 390. In His *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* Kant summarizes his sociable sociability of the dinner party as composing three stages/courses: narration, arguing, jesting; see p. 181, §88. See also P. Murphy, *The Comic Political Condition: Agnes Heller’s Philosophy*

As Kant also suggests, luncheon guests *qua* intimate friends can also reflect, when needed, on moral matters and concerns. Here one combines one's silent (or soliloquized) inner voice, one's spoken voice and the voices of others to consider and contemplate the most difficult and disturbing moral matters. What is of equal importance is a deportment and disposition that welcomes and enables such reflections in a way that deepens the friendship. The generosity of mutual friendship and mutual respect enables mutual confidences to be exchanged and kept. There is a mutual trust between friends which is different to the trust between contingent strangers who are kept further apart because of a necessary indifference. This mutual trust means that one keeps one's word and does not disclose confidences or dissemble. Friendship, for Kant, calls for mutual self-containment rather than either gossip or mergence.³¹

Kant's and Heller's concerns are quite different to the political character of the literary salon (which for Habermas, for example, was a precursor of the public sphere) and even the symposium. For Heller and Kant, the luncheon is beyond the political. It is here that intellectual friendships can be viewed as intimate ones that are more open, do not dissemble and continue the deep and enduring personal ties that have been built over many years. It is the union or conjunction of respect and benevolence or mutual love. The conjunction entails that love draws two people together and respect keeps them at a proper distance. There is neither mergence nor repulsion; nor mutual self-interest nor advantage or disadvantage. Friendship is not strategic but moral, generous and mutually trustworthy.³²

There is a necessary and sensitive balance between involvement and indifference or distance, between semblance and disclosure, between holding back or stating that which then becomes a confidence, something that is intimately revealed. Yet, there is, for Kant, a limit to friendship as one should not disclose everything, and thus one lives with a tension about what one can reveal and what should remain one's own. As Kant indicates, everyone has his or her own secrets and "dare not confide blindly in others, partly because of a base cast of mind in most [people] to use them to one's disadvantage and partly because many people

of Laughter and Liberty, in: *Critical Theories and the Budapest School*, eds. J. Pickle, J. Rundell, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 239–261.

³¹ I. Kant, *Doctrine of Virtues*, op. cit., p. 263, §47.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 261–264, §46–47; I. Kant, *Anthropology Mrongovius*, op. cit., p. 482. See A. Heller, *The Beauty of Friendship*, "South Atlantic Quarterly" 1998, Vol. 97, No. 1, pp. 5–22.

are indiscreet and incapable of judging and distinguishing what may or may not be repeated.”³³

Complete revelation paradoxically increases the tension and places a burden on friendship itself. In other words, for Kant, there is a distinction between aesthetic friendship (mergence) and moral friendship. One can sympathize within the limits of practical reason rather than on the basis of passions or feelings. Complete sympathy and enthusiasm produce an excess of feeling and make bad or no judgment possible where good or cautious judgments might be called for. As Kant points out, friendships can be sacrificed on the altar of enthusiasm.³⁴

Importantly for Kant, friendship is the most open, deep, cherished but necessarily imperfect form of moral sociable sociability. To put it slightly differently, the cultivation of friendship and its disposition and practice go hand in hand. As Kant and Heller note, intimate friendships occur between those seeking a home so often against the grain and not necessarily at luncheons or dinner parties but in everyday settings where we can be momentarily “at home.”

5. Flowering among the Thorns: Friendships that Blossom and Endure

The culture and disposition of friendship belongs to the complex and unfinished condition of the human being and thus the possibility that there are manifold and competing dimensions to personhood. As we have seen through the model of the luncheon, friendship requires both time and even a special place within the

³³ I. Kant, *Doctrine of Virtues*, op. cit., p. 263, §47; I. Kant, *Anthropology Mrongovius*, op. cit., p. 481; I. Kant, *Anthropology Friedländer (1784–1785)*, in: I. Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, eds. A.W. Wood, R.B. Louden, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 75.

³⁴ I. Kant, *Doctrine of Virtues*, op. cit., p. 262, §46. As Kant states, “a completely perfect friendship, where one confesses to the other all his faults and shortcomings and as it were, reveals his whole heart, would not last long in the world. We must always be somewhat reserved. Fantasts in principle are enthusiasts” (*Anthropology Mrongovius*, op. cit., p. 404); see also *Anthropology Friedländer*, where he states: “such enthusiasm produces great excesses, so than one who is enthused by this idea [for example patriotism, for Kant – J.R.] sacrifices both friendship as well as natural connection, and everything,” p. 95; see also pp. 159–164. It is in the context of tensions, luncheons, conversations, judgments, friendships, saying and not saying that orientation to practical reason comes to the fore. Orientation and good judgment require the work of faculty of reason. But they also require the work of the creative, productive, non-functional schematizing imagination, even more so.

everyday and outside professional life to be cultivated. It also requires a disposition and practice that takes us beyond ourselves. Like Kant, for Heller, we too are flawed creatures and (modern) friendships can stand alongside the flaws and even outshine them. As indicated above, peoples' lives in modernity exist in the context of many contingencies that are dissimilar. Modernity is pluralistic, and this pluralism and dissimilarity changes rather than disables or dismantles the paradigm of friendship. In Heller's view, it is no longer necessary to make a classical choice between truth or friendship *à la* Plato or Aristotle. For Heller, both Plato and Aristotle are outmoded and do not speak to moderns. Modernity is grounded on difference rather than similarities and this is nowhere more so than in the friendships that moderns have and make. In addition to being an enthusiastic guest at Kant's luncheon, Heller embraces Horatio's friendship with Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the other modern example, and argues that "the more modern life unfolds, the more likely it becomes that differences, sometimes grave differences of opinion and judgment, will develop between even the best of friends. Truthfulness requires us to speak such differences freely, and friendship requires the perseverance of absolute mutual trust. One need not choose between justice and friendship, for friendship not only allows justice, but encourages it."³⁵ For Heller, friendship is combined with truth, differences, depth, appreciation, and emotional attachment. It is more than an intellectual friendship with its affinity between a perspective and a "cause," and its agreements and disagreements, loyalties and betrayals.

For Heller and Kant, friendship is beautiful; it is also reflexive and limiting.³⁶ One could also term their type of friendship "spiritual" in the way that Francesco Alberoni conveys this term. They could also be termed extra-ordinary whereby friends remain distinct personalities and the friendship serves to enhance each personality and helps to complete the process of individuation. As Alberoni goes on to note, with the intimate or extra-ordinary friendship "none was superior or inferior,

³⁵ A. Heller, *The Beauty of Friendship*, op. cit., pp. 5–22; A. Heller, *My Best Friend: For György Márkus*, "Thesis Eleven" 2015, Vol. 126, No. 1, pp. 123–127.

³⁶ A. Heller, *The Autonomy of Art or the Dignity of the Artwork*, in: *Aesthetics and Modernity: Essays by Agnes Heller*, ed. J. Rundell, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011, pp. 47–64; A. Heller, *My Best Friend*, op. cit.; A. Heller, *György Márkus' Concept of High Culture: A Critical Evaluation*, "Thesis Eleven" 2015, Vol. 126, No. 1, pp. 88–99.

there was no disequilibrium of power. They preserved a freshness and creativity of spirit. They renewed each other, invented new [philosophical] formulas.”³⁷

This paradigm of friendship, its cultivation and disposition, emotional richness and endurance, is well illustrated by Heller in her very personal tribute to György Márkus and her astute and sensitive reading of Márkus’ work.³⁸ In the former text Heller makes it clear that the Budapest School dissolved. In its midst and in its aftermath – or after school – is friendship. As she says, friendships are unique, and they can even add new colours and new leaves over time. For her there was always György – her fortress, her rock, her certainty.³⁹

In Heller’s view, the School and its “cause” have been replaced by friendships. Modern intellectual and intimate friendships are deep and can reside within a cultural household that can be cultivated irrespective of where we reside. Moreover, because friends connect a sense of time, they also connect a sense of modern lives that have become fragmented. They not only endure the differences of personality, judgement and opinion but also differences caused by diremption of time and space. Intimate and intellectual friendships, like those of the Budapest friends, continue, and new ones are formed regardless, and not because of modernity’s complexity.

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³⁷ F. Alberoni, *Friendship*, op. cit., pp. 118–119.

³⁸ See A. Heller, *My Best Friend*, op. cit.; A. Heller, *Gyorgy Márkus’ Concept of High Culture*, op. cit.

³⁹ A. Heller, *My Best Friend*, op. cit.; A. Heller, *Gyorgy Márkus’ Concept of High Culture*, op. cit.

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