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Social Media and the Virtues:

Could social media be an obstacle to an individual's ultimate happiness?

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ABSTRACT

Svenska: Arbetet använder Aristoteles omfattande dygd-teori från *The Nicomachean Ethics* för att undersöka hur sociala media kan påverka en individs potentiella lycka och välmående. Uppsatsen presenterar och diskuterar närmare ett par dygder; måttlighet och vänskap och dess relation till lycka och sociala media. Den diskuterar även empirisk forskning på ämnet samt innehåller en ingående diskussion om Aristoteles teori. Avslutande sägs det att detta är ett ämne med många nyanser, men trots detta kan man dra slutsatsen att sociala media kan ses som ett hinder för individuell lycka.

English: The work is a theory application thesis specifically applying Aristotle's virtue ethics to evaluate and discuss the potential implications that social media pose on the individual's potential to achieve happiness as it is understood through the virtue ethics. It includes a close discussion of the virtues temperance and friendship, as well as empirical studies on the subject and critical discussion incorporating the Aristotelian theory. It concludes that although a subject with many nuances, it is possible to argue that social media might be an obstacle to an individual's happiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every person in the world can be expected to wish for the best life they can possibly have. It seems to be something that is a collective goal for human beings – that we do our best to make ourselves a happy life. In this thesis, I investigate what accounts for a good life and more specifically what role social media has in the modern-day quest to attain it. As will be seen throughout this paper, it seems that social media might be debilitating to our inter-personal skills, our self-image and possibly our motivation based on how we choose to use and interact with it.

There are of course many accounts of what happiness is and how to attain it. Aristotle explored it in relation to ethics and judged the two to be closely connected. He discussed the good life in relation to certain ethical virtues which an individual can develop and he thought that a person with virtue will attain the best life. This essay will explore Aristotle's virtue ethics from a contemporary point of view. It is a testament to how Aristotle's works are still relevant today and how his thoughts can aid us in philosophical discussion on modern-day issues. It centres on an investigation on how social media might impact human beings' ability to live their best

life and hence answer the question if social media could pose as an obstacle to our ultimate happiness. I will apply Aristotle's thoughts from *The Nicomachean Ethics*¹ (the Ethics) to the very current topic of social media use. I aim to present and discuss a couple of Aristotle's virtues and how they connect to contemporary life, as well as to investigate what they might teach us about the way we use social media today. As a vital part of this topic comes Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia, understood as *the ultimate good, happiness* or *the best thing*, to name a few (Pakaluk (2005) pp. 47-8). A concept which is closely associated with his virtue theory. Aristotle's ethics provide an interesting point of view because it is very comprehensive and unlike many other ethical theories, does not come with a strict set of guidelines, which leaves it more open to discussion and interpretation. This means that, while I believe and will show that it is indeed possible to make out some certain guidelines in Aristotle's theory, he leaves the actual work of gaining moral insight to each individual. I find this approach refreshing and clever and I believe that it motivates a more nuanced and deeper discussion to the topic at hand.

Could social media be a tool for developing a happy life, or could it rather be an obstacle to developing virtue? Zeiser and Beasley (2015) briefly discuss the experiment conducted by Facebook in 2012, where they tweaked the newsfeed of 689,003 users over the period of a week. These users were exposed to either more negative or positive words over this period and the response to the exposure was monitored by examining their following posts and updates. The experiment showed that they would use either more positive or negative words in their posts and status updates depending on what they had been exposed to. While the experiment in question is at least ethically questionable (and did cause an uproar from users), it proved that social media most definitely affect our psychological states and hence, our well-being (Zeiser and Beasley (2015) p.46-7). This example shows that an exploration of social media's impact on our overall happiness should prove to be both educational and interesting.

Aristotle's virtue ethics provides an interesting perspective from which we can explore social media use and the potential harm it might cause to the individual's well-being as well as perhaps society's. Through his virtue ethics we can investigate this question and perhaps also find out in what ways social media might aid virtuous development, as well.

¹ as interpreted by Michael Pakaluk

1.1. CLARIFICATIONS

In anticipation of the analysis and argumentation to come, there are certain terms and positions that need to be clarified. Firstly, Aristotle's eudaimonia have been translated in many different ways. I hope it will be clear to the reader when I am referring to this term, but as a precaution I shall mention that I will be referring to this state as 'the ultimate good', 'the good life' and 'happiness'. If I am referring to anything other than eudaimonia this will be explicitly mentioned. Secondly, when discussing social media, I am referring to apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter but I also include virtual reality (VR) chatrooms and online video games where players often interact with each other. I understand social media as a collective to be the types of apps, programs and websites where one is sharing contents or information about one's own life and meanwhile following, listening and viewing others' content and hence ending up interacting with other people through these mediums.

Further, it is worth clarifying that to begin to pursue the Aristotelian form of happiness, one would firstly need to have one's most basic needs met. This would include relatively good health as well as financial and social security. I believe this to be a safe assumption based on Aristotle's thoughts that to become virtuous, you need certain pre-requisites. Not anyone can simply choose to become virtuous, the reason being that developing virtuous character takes time and work. A similar understanding might be connected to the practice of self-development such as mindfulness, spiritual practices and the like. Those who get the chance to carry out these practices already have an advantage, because they have the physical and mental ability of showing up for it. It can therefore be assumed throughout the essay that I am discussing people who live in well-functioning, democratic societies and have all their basic needs met. The societies where, for the majority of the people, the necessary needs of well-being are fulfilled and where the majority of people are in a position to attain Aristotle's virtues.

2. EUDAIMONIA

Aristotle defined the greatest thing in life as eudaimonia, the ultimate good, which he argued was "activity in accordance with virtue" (Pakaluk (2005) p. 4). Aristotle's theory builds on the thought that each thing that exists has a certain aim, goal or highest good, which that thing does better than it does anything else. As an example, one can think of a knife. The central purpose of a knife is to cut. So, for a knife to be a good one, it should be good at cutting, this is the

purpose or the function of the knife, it is what it does best. Therefore, a good knife has certain characteristics that makes it good at cutting, the most important one probably being a sharp blade but also having a handle and so on. These characteristics are the knife's virtues – they are the characteristics that enables the knife to fulfil its purpose well (Pakaluk (2005). pp. 74-5). After presenting this 'Function Argument', Aristotle uses it to further argue what happiness for a human being is. He means that what human beings do best is ultimately using our rational mind for thinking and contemplating. Therefore, this is our ultimate purpose and hence, our ultimate happiness. He settles on the conclusion that philosophical contemplation (the virtue of wisdom) is the greatest of virtues and the one that all the other virtues come together to strive towards (Ibid. pp. 207, 318). To fulfil our purpose and be good human beings then, there are virtues that we need to attain. These are the virtues that enables us to carry out philosophical contemplation well (Ibid. pp. 75-7).

Aristotle's conclusion stems from one of his first claims, which is the idea that the ultimate goal for an individual resides in some activity in accordance with virtue. As we have seen, he much later concludes that this particular activity is indeed philosophical contemplation but, I'd like to entertain the idea that this is not Aristotle's *only* conclusion. Michael Pakaluk means that Aristotle also seems to conclude that those persons who do not reach or strive towards the ultimate virtue of wisdom (philosophical contemplation) still can live happy and virtuous lives (just not *ultimately* happy and virtuous) (Ibid. p. 319). These people would instead strive to evolve the slightly lesser but more easily attainable virtues (some of which we will discuss later on). This is where I will keep my discussion – since it is not particularly plausible to assume that philosophical contemplation should be a common goal for the modern-day individual, I will instead be assuming the somewhat less restrictive position that a good life is a life lived in accordance with virtue (not only the virtue of intellectual wisdom). Meaning, a life lived in accordance with a selection of virtues such as courage and temperance among others. But why should these virtues necessarily contribute to a happy life? It is Aristotle's understanding that the virtues together make us happy, and so one can look at it from the other end, as well: a happy life comes from uniting the various virtues. This is one of Aristotle's more criticised arguments, but I would like to argue that when one explores the virtues further it could be generally agreed that someone who inhabit the virtues would be assumed to be fairly happy. There might not be a satisfying way of strictly proving that the virtues will guarantee a happy life for every person, but it is at least possible to argue that living in accordance with virtue

should bring about a life where we are not engaged in such things that might make us unhappy. I will unpack this standpoint further below.

Before looking into the argument that the virtues should be considered to bring about a happy life, there needs to be an understanding of Aristotle's concept of the Golden Mean. Firstly, Aristotle argues that a virtuous person will know what is right and what is wrong in each situation. There are virtues that we ought to be striving towards, where each virtue is a characteristic in-between two vices, one of deficiency and one of excess. What action is to be regarded as the right one depends on the situation at hand. The right action to be taken in any given situation, depends both on the situation and on the degree to which one needs to apply a certain virtue. A person is applying the golden mean when they are able to find this middle ground. So, considering firstly the virtue of courage, which is the golden mean between rashness and cowardice we will see that if a person is courageous, they will not be rash nor cowardly but will have just the right amount of courage in a situation. Say Person A is walking home one evening and come across a group of people attacking Person B. If Person A was rash they may not think before they act, jump into the fight and get hurt themselves. On the other hand, if they are cowardly, we wouldn't expect them to act at all. A courageous person, means Aristotle, would do what they are *able* to do in the situation (Pakaluk (2005) p. 108-9). This means, if Person A have a lesser physique they may simply hide, call the police and try to keep an eye on the attackers so that they can provide the information needed when the police arrive. Or, if they are able Person A might even after making the call step in and stop the attack. The Golden Mean says that having the virtue of courage is being able to discern which action is right depending on who is in the situation. Either of these scenarios would leave Person A feeling like they have done something good as they have helped a fellow human being in need while in the scenarios where they do not have the virtue, they are not feeling so good. Other examples of courage could be being brave enough to follow our dreams and to go out of our comfort zone. In general, I'd like to think that people who push themselves and show courage in life tend to seem happier than the ones who don't.

Another virtue, which will be discussed again in more detail further down, is temperance. The vices of temperance are self-indulgence and insensibility. Temperance relates to treating ourselves to pleasures in life. Self-indulgence, then, involves taking too much and insensibility taking too little. This might look like something as simple as eating or drinking too much or too little. The excessive self-indulgence would be to not be able to stop ourselves, perhaps over-eating to compensate for negative emotions or drinking to numb ourselves, and

insensibility being denying ourselves all pleasures, leaving us not feeling much at all. Neither of these extremes would be representative of someone who is living happily, whereas temperance represents the balance in-between and hence someone who does allow themselves to enjoy life, food and drink in a healthy way. As we consider these examples there are other virtues that are a little more difficult to weed out how they directly impact a persons' happiness. One example is the virtue of having a sense of shame where the excess is nervousness and the deficiency is being shameless. Of course, having an excessive sense of shame doesn't sound very nice. It could create many obstacles for the person in question such as not believing in themselves, speaking up for themselves or just not having a good confidence. Though considering shamelessness, it's not the same story. Someone who is shameless might not actually care that they don't have shame. They most likely aren't the ones who have to deal with the direct consequences, but it might rather be the people around them, who are having to deal with the person's behaviour. From an ethical perspective this might of course be an issue, being shameless might create bad experiences and is of course something we consider as bad, but in terms of living happily it doesn't seem to create that much of an issue for the individual. I would like to interpret Aristotle's thought, though, as being, in this case, concerned with not just each individual action but the long-term effects of a person's behaviour (we will be returning to this point as well). Having a sense of shame is a virtue because in the long term someone who is shameless will burn all their bridges, and a lonely person would be much less likely to develop virtue. As we shall see, Aristotle considered friendship to be paramount for reaching eudaimonia. Further, social interaction and connection are important for our well-being, this is a fact according to social scientist Brené Brown (Brown (2017) pp. 140-1), and in the long run there would certainly be a risk for shamelessness to drive people away, leaving the individual with less social interaction and we can expect, a less happy life.

Considering this discussion on the virtues and how they may apply in our every-day life I think it is now safe to assume that living in accordance with virtue would lead an individual towards the good life. This is the position I will be holding as we move on to considering the central concern of how social media might impact it.

3. ARISTOTLE AND THE VIRTUES

Aristotle thought that the good life is a life of fulfilled happiness. He also thought that one needed to attain and develop all the human virtues to be able to reach eudaimonia. True happiness is gained by fulfilling all virtues² which are separated into two categories of higher and lower order. The lower order virtues are those of “worldly matters” such as social standing, health, strength and wealth. These also include pleasures such as eating good foods, sex and simple enjoyments (always to a degree, never too much or too little, as we have seen). The superior virtues are those of the intellectual kind – wisdom, understanding and pleasure in the intellectual sense, such as questioning life and politics, amongst others (Kenny (2007) pp. 224-6).

Before moving onto the more detailed discussion on some specific virtues, I want to address a common critique that Aristotle’s ethics has received. Many have thought that the ethics aren’t able to give direct guidelines in terms of permissible ethical action, but I argue that Aristotle is simply choosing to take a road less travelled. Firstly, he is saying that each person needs to learn from those who are wiser, such as their parents and other authorities. Then, he is saying that we need to examine ourselves to see towards which vice we tend to stray on the pendulum of each virtue and that we should apply ourselves to act more towards the other extreme, the other vice, to get closer to the golden mean and hence the virtue. Maybe these are enough as guidelines – there certainly is something in what Aristotle has created; he is expecting each person to do their own work, which continues to be a theme throughout the Ethics. It is Aristotle’s opinion that to have virtue is to have knowledge, and it is only in ignorance that one would keep his vices (Pakaluk (2005) pp. 111-13; 98-104). I agree with this view. Comparing it to Kant’s categorical imperative, or to utilitarianism where there are strict and set rules, we might want to flip it on its head. Why should we expect human life and understanding to be reduced to certain rules? It might be too complicated for such an outlook. Further, to become a good person we *should* need to apply ourselves. I find that through the ethics we can genuinely learn about ethical action – if we want to embody the virtues and use them as guidelines, then we can safely practice our mental capacity for moral decision-making. I’d like to think that the virtue ethics could work as a safety net for each person to develop morally all the way into the core and hence permanently change the way we think and act (I’d also like to think that Aristotle thought something similar). Other perspectives are simply handing us the

² There are varied understandings of eudaimonia being a combination of all virtues, or gained only through fulfilment of the virtue of contemplative wisdom

cheat-sheet and ask us to follow. Therefore, I would like to suggest that where many have seen issue there might be strength. I argue that there is good reason to use the virtue ethics as a moral theory *because* it is asking more of the individual than to follow rules and as shall be shown below, the theory serves very well as a framework to examine ethical questions.

An example of how the Aristotelian view is helpful in ethical analysis, in comparison to rule based theories, is given by Shannon Vallor in her article “Flourishing on Facebook”. She presents empirical studies focusing on individual goods such as life satisfaction and self-esteem in relation to social media use. Vallor highlights that while social media use indeed can improve feelings of life satisfaction and self-esteem, such feelings gained in such a fashion may not have any certain value in the Aristotelian sense (Vallor (2011) p. 187). To put value to these emotions could rather be characteristic of a classical form of utilitarianism (such as Bentham for example), which is focusing more on shallow gains in well-being and pleasure compared to the Aristotelian perspective. Such forms of utilitarianism might look at the use of social media and argue that it is a positive force because it enhances social goods such as perceived life satisfaction and self-esteem (at least in the short term). Vallor means that in empirical research of social media and IT use, this utilitarian perspective is often used, and it might disregard the deeper and more long-term effects of social media use. Which she means can be better understood through the Aristotelian perspective. Therefore, Aristotle becomes a well-needed complement to such studies and can be used to explore the issue more deeply (Vallor (2010) p. 158). The Aristotelian ethics doesn’t understand such emotional rewards to be connected to eudaimonia, because they may only be shallow and short-lived. Aristotelian ethics are focused on the presence of virtues and how they will influence the agent towards an ultimately good life, writes Vallor (Vallor (2011) pp. 186-7). She argues that the goods present in social media are shallow measures of the good life, and the pursuit of these goods could rather mean a loss to one’s moral character. She means that shallow gains such as perceived life satisfaction or heightened self-esteem gained through social media use might be goods that one would have to sacrifice in order to gain better, more stable and lasting goods. There are two possible gains with this Aristotelian perspective. If social media provides only a shallow and short-lived experience of life satisfaction, then the agent will end up losing these perceived gains within a limited period of time. If one on the other hand pursue a virtuous life it seems that according to Vallor, the agent will not only find a more stable source of happiness but will also develop their moral character. As a note, perceived psychological well-being and virtues should hence be understood differently. The former are social goods that an individual can

enjoy (sometimes only in short bursts of gratification) while the latter is a form of reliable action pattern to ensure the stable and good character of a person (Vallor (2011) p. 187).

What Vallor seems to be concerned with in relation to the utilitarian perspective in empirical research is the potential view of the instant gratification on social media as a positive force in our happiness and well-being when in the long term it might not be. It is of course important to consider and be sensitive towards one's feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, but I take Vallor to mean that taking social media to be conducive to a *real* sense of self-worth and self-esteem might be taking it a step too far (take *real* self-worth and esteem to be long-lasting and stable forms of the same). Because of the utilitarian focus in the research on shallow results of an action, social media use and its positive effect on a persons' emotions would lead one to the understanding that social media seems to be a social good and helpful to psychological well-being. But entertaining such an argument would be to ignore the actual potential harm that social media do pose on the individual and society, especially perhaps in the long term. This is a classical issue one might encounter with utilitarianism and hence shows how an Aristotelian perspective is helpful to evaluate the issue further.

While discussing self-esteem and life satisfaction it is worth presenting the role that these play in Aristotle's ethics as well. It is certainly not the case that these goods aren't valuable, in fact, they enable an individual to pursue the virtues. They are what first needs to be fulfilled in order for someone to practically be able to develop virtuous traits, although they are not representative of the good life. It is only through the virtues that one can truly live well, according to Aristotle. It is described well by Vallor when she writes:

"[...] Aristotle tell us that it can never be the goods of fortune, but only the presence or absence of virtue, that determines the quality of a life" (Vallor (2011) p. 187).

A sign of a virtuous individual is that she can face great losses in social values without losing herself. This is because when a person is virtuous, they have already gained all the knowledge and the character that they need. Aristotle means that while we build towards a virtuous character, our chances will greatly increase if we have a certain social and financial standing, but as we have become virtuous he then means that we will no longer have a need for much material things because we have then reached our ultimate happiness and are in need of nothing (Pakaluk (2005) p. 84). If we have reached the most ultimate happiness that is possible for a human being, then material goods will not add to our life experience, they will become irrelevant. It should therefore not be assumed that a person is in *need* of external goods to live

a good life. Although, as mentioned, there is also a clear implication in Aristotle's theory that to be able to achieve a virtuous state, the person in question needs to live a certain kind of life with certain privileges. The life in question will include social goods such as a good standing in the community, friends and emotional support without which our chances of becoming virtuous would be decreased (Vallor (2011) p. 187). These goods, together with material ones will enable a person to become virtuous. Without having life satisfaction and self-esteem, of course, a person would be rather depressed and perhaps barely interested in virtue. Furthermore, let's not forget that friendship is one of the most important aspects, for Aristotle, to gain virtue. In discussing this topic, though, what Vallor points at is that while social media might temporarily help us *feel* better, there is in the meantime a risk that it is negatively affecting our character. Moreover, sometimes it might even be worth temporarily losing some of these goods for the sake of building a better character, she argues. This does not mean that these goods aren't important but simply that it is not worth losing one's character for the sake of a short and shallow feeling of gratification. In saying this, then, one who have gained virtue do not necessarily need social and financial goods to stay virtuous but external goods are indeed important in the development of virtue.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA, WELL-BEING AND THE VIRTUES

Moving on to the main topic at hand, there are many perspectives one can pay attention to when it comes to social media and well-being. As Shannon Vallor points out in her article, there are many empirical studies focused on this topic. One might find it counter-intuitive, but the fact is that many of the studies carried out researching the connection between social media and well-being, have showed that social media indeed seems to have a positive impact on people, rather than a negative one. This especially seems to be the case when researchers have focused on studying feelings of life satisfaction and self-esteem. Though this said, there certainly are varying results in the study of social media's impact on general well-being and of course, it is possible to classify well-being in several different ways. With this in mind, I am going to present and discuss a few different studies and their results. Chloe Berryman et. al. (2018) have published a study where they present their research on the risks of impaired mental health in correlation with social media, in which they report they found none. In the article they discuss empirical research which have indeed found negative correlations between social media and mental health, but they argue that these studies have been faulty or lacking in one way or

another. They further argue that the view of social media being harmful to our mental health is a result of a general media hype around social media use and overstated empirical results. They point out an important view which is that there must be a certain middle-ground when it comes to social media use and perhaps it is the use of every individual that is most important (Berryman et. al (2018) pp. 307-8). The authors conclude that they did not find any correlation between social media use and feelings of loneliness or loss of empathy, for example (Ibid. p. 312). There is of course difficulty in knowing exactly in what way social media does affect our well-being, and as many different researchers have noticed, results vary. Knowing this, we should not assume that social media use is or isn't harmful. Rather, we might consider the results and arguments from different points of view to begin with. Berryman et. al. says that *extended* social media use did not correlate with negative emotions (Ibid. p. 311), but a big problem with the article is that the authors doesn't specify what they have assumed 'extended use' to be. Does this imply two hours or six? In their study they asked participants to estimate their time spent on social media. Can we expect undergraduate students (or anyone) to know how many hours they spend on social media? If we don't monitor our screen time, it might be difficult to know how much time we in reality spend on our phone in a day. It might even be valid to expect that we would estimate a shorter amount of time than our actual time spent, given that the feeling of spending 30 minutes on Instagram rarely feels like 30 minutes and it is fair to say that it is hard for anyone to estimate time when we are distracted by something that is entertaining to us. When we are spending our time constantly being fed with stimuli it is very easy to lose ourselves in the activity and time is after all relative. Considering this, I think it is at least fair to say that taking only Barryman et. al.'s study into consideration, we cannot assume that their statement is correct, and social media may still affect our emotions in a negative way.

Yokfah Isaranon also discuss phone, app and internet use. In his article, he presents results saying that Facebook Affirmation (a phenomenon central to his thesis which claims that by projecting an ideal self to the outside world via social media and receiving positive affirmation, users might be encouraged to adopt the characteristics of the ideal) helps users improve their self-esteem and even to strive towards a projected ideal self. On the other hand, though, he also shows studies where researchers have found that extended social media³ use results in lowered life satisfaction, self-esteem and increased risks of depression, anxiety and eating disorders (Isaranon (2019) pp. 46-7). Isaranon presents various studies which show that the moderate

³ Isaranon specifically focuses on Facebook

user seems to benefit from social media use, which he also confirms in his own study. Neither is it possible here to see how these various referenced studies have defined moderate use, but in Isaranon's own study the participants were asked to choose one of a few options estimating their Facebook use, ranging from less than 10 minutes each day to up to more than 3 hours, he was then able to make out who was a light, moderate or heavy user (Isaranon (2019) p. 51). This is helpful because we are then not facing the same issue as I have noted on the Berryman et. al. article because here we know what is regarded as a moderate and heavy user and we also know that the participants were able to choose a rather large time frame of their estimated use and hence we can expect that their estimates were at least fairly accurate. In the study, Isaranon finds that moderate users seem to be gaining the most from Facebook affirmation. These moderate users were also found to engage less in self-comparison on social media than the heavier users (Ibid. pp. 55-6). Isaranon means that in using Facebook affirmation, one can become more motivated and feel more supported to strive to achieve this ideal self. Further, even though users may be projecting traits that they do not yet have, they tend to feel closer to their ideal self through others affirming it and they become motivated to become more like their ideal self (Ibid. p. 48). These findings are certainly very interesting, and while we are still somewhat standing in the problem of knowing what is exaggerated and what is moderate use of social media, we can still discuss how these results might be interesting to virtue ethics and our topic at hand. For the sake of clarity, I will in the upcoming discussions use Isaranon's classifications of users and will assume that a heavy user is one who is using social media for more than 3 hours a day, a moderate user for 31 minutes to 2 hours a day, and a light user for 10 to 30 minutes per day.

Slightly different results from the ones found by Isaranon have been found by Te'eni-Harari and Eyal (2016) in their article on adolescents' use of social media. They discuss the possibility of younger users being negatively affected by following their idols online. The article focuses on the risk of adopting a negative body image and suggest that teens are using social media as a way to grow into themselves and establish their individual personalities. It has become evident through empirical research that fame valuing is very common in adolescents and through social media, teens have a chance to connect with their idols and consume their content more or less all the time. The article states that "adoration of celebrities has long been recognised as an integral part of identity development in adolescence" (Te'eni-Harari & Eyal (2016) p. 948). The article continues by describing the thin-ideal which is the well-known ideal of the attractive person being slim and fit. The concern here being that these ideals are presented

not only in the general media but through famous icons on social media, as well. This type of message is hence reaching teens without giving them tools to assess the content critically and learn how to develop an informed opinion about the content that is being shared with them. The authors express a worry that kids grow into feeling bad about themselves and their bodies (Te'eni-Harari & Eyal (2016) p. 949). This topic is briefly mentioned by Isaranon, as well. He highlights that young adults (18-30 years old) have a heightened interest in physical appearance, compared to other age groups. Therefore, one could imagine that a large part of what is one's ideal self is connected to one's physical appearance in these ages. Isaranon expresses that his results could be mainly representative of an ideal self-image that is representing physical appearance and self-dictated personal presentation. He means that the results he found on Facebook affirmation may in large part be regarding positive self-description and physical appearance, since these are the traits that participants mainly have shared with others online. What follows is that one may not be able to assume that Facebook affirmation is true in other aspects and regarding other ideal self-characteristics (Isaranon (2019) p. 56). Based on the above, I think that Te'eni-Harari and Eyal may have valid concerns regarding the well-being of young adults on social media. Because they have a natural high interest in physical appearance, it seems to me that both good and bad can easily come from social media use. It seems easy to adopt the wrong kind of self-ideals, being affected by the content that idols and peers share online.

Meanwhile, one could also imagine that the "positive self-description" could form as a way of adopting good values, such as ethical or virtuous ones. In dictating their own self-description, it would be possible for users to present their virtuous values and receive a positive response from their online friends. This shows the potential of social media to be a positive force for virtuous development. What might make this development difficult is the lack of authenticity that trends in social media apps. This is specifically mentioned by Te'eni-Harari and Eyal and agrees with Isaranon's results, as well. It is very easy to portray an ideal image of ourselves online and hence we might hide our authentic self to various degrees. So, while this could be helpful in developing into our ideal self, it also seems easy for users to become caught up in the idea that they need to be perfect in all areas of life. A further risk we could imagine comes with the number of bloggers on social media apps such as Instagram and the like who become *Influencers*. Here, users aren't just watching a new type of advertising but it seems they may very well run the risk of comparing themselves to these seemingly happy people who look great and seem to have it all, including thousands of followers and hence, seems to have

something that is worth admiring such as their physical appearance, for example. While there certainly are various types of influencers to follow and many who do encourage a very healthy body or self-image, there are also many who are on the other side of the spectrum. In the discussion on fame valuing, it seems that young users may easily fall prey to whoever they look up to and may not yet have the tools developed to judge what content is healthy and positive and what content might be harming to their self-image. As seen in Isaranon's study, when users fall into the trap of spending too much time on social media, they tend to become more depressed and their life satisfaction tends to decrease. It seems to me that a rational expectation would be that the perfection ideal on social media might be a significant contributing factor to these emotions. Perhaps if the social environment changed on social media, there would be a greater chance of it being helpful in virtuous development rather than potentially harming to users' self-esteem. It seems that at least there is reason to be cautious of spending too much time consuming other people's content as this is where it seems most of the negative effects of social media might appear.

Te'eni-Harari and Eyal concludes by suggesting that perhaps there are ways to teach adolescents critical thinking when using social media and give them tools to critically assess the content they are faced with online. In this way, they would be able to become advocates for a healthier body image online and most importantly, hopefully be saved from critically judging their physique and physical appearance (Te'eni-Harari & Eyal (2016) pp. 952-3). Perhaps such a solution could become part of the school curriculum where ideals spread through social media are addressed along with perhaps other similar issues such as the importance of self-value and respect.

I would expect that most people who themselves use social media know how the sharing and receiving response online can bring positive feelings and a sense of validation. The same is mirrored in the research, writes Zeiser and Beasley in their article "For Better or For Worse". But while sharing our own content can bring us a sense of belonging, they mean that consuming the content of others can increase feelings of loneliness and decrease our sense of belonging, similarly to what we have already seen in previous articles (Zeiser and Beasley (2015) p. 46). This is an effect that keeps showing up in the research, and as mentioned above seems to be extra potent in heavy users. A potential problem with using social media, then, becomes apparent when considering this risk. Social scientist Brené Brown has shown through research how important our sense of belonging is and how deeply it connects with our human biology. In a recent book "*Braving the Wilderness*" she discusses how feelings of loneliness are a sign

that we are in need of human connection and that the lack of it is physically dangerous. Brown is telling us about the research performed by Julianne Holt-Lunstad et. al. which showed that while living with excessive drinking for example increases our odds of an early death by 30 percent and living with obesity by 20 percent, living with loneliness increases the odds of an early death by 45 percent (Brown (2017) pp. 54-55). We shouldn't assume that social media use will affect us so dramatically, but Holt-Lunstad et. al. shows why the results from the above research is important to acknowledge. Feelings of loneliness caused by exaggerated social media use could indeed be harmful to our well-being. As I will discuss further down, there are of course ways in which social media can aid people living with loneliness, too. But when concerning exaggerated use by the regular, healthy person, the point stands.

Considering these scientific results together, it is clear that social media use might have some significant impact on our well-being; emotional and physical. Vallor makes an interesting point in relation to this, which is that this new technology of social media and mobile phones is so relatively new, that there is very little research on the long-term effects of their use, especially from a societal point of view. It seems that we are moving quickly into a certain way of living of which we might not have much knowledge on how it actually does affect us. From the research I have already discussed there seems to be inclinations that these technologies aren't doing much to improve our overall health, but the point Vallor interestingly makes as well is that very few empirical studies have researched the impact our social media habits might have on our well-being and character both as people and as communities, as well (Vallor (2011) pp. 185, 187). Therefore, while perhaps the individual health and well-being is of most interest to us here given our main focus, it is also interesting to consider this long-term perspective briefly. If social media has the ability to affect the individual negatively, then we should expect that we would see a slippery slope effect into long-term consequences for society, too. It is of course difficult to say exactly how such consequences might look but perhaps it is worth keeping in mind that it nevertheless is a possible outcome. In a heavy user who does experience the negative health effects we have considered, social media might be standing in the way to even begin to develop virtue. As we have seen, Aristotle thought that well-being such as health is important and one of the basic virtues to be able to continue one's development.⁴

⁴ There are other factors that of course might negatively affect some users such as trolling and online bullying. These are external factors which the individual doesn't have control over and hence aren't fully relevant to the current topic though they do of course impact individual self-image and self-esteem and might prevent the possibility of virtuous development.

There are, as we have seen, also ways to use social media as a tool for positive development. The idea of Facebook affirmation is certainly very interesting from the Aristotelian perspective. We could imagine that this phenomenon could be used as a way to improve virtuous character with social media users. If there is an interest in developing virtuous traits and it is projected onto the ideal self, then social media seems to be a great place to gain motivation in continuing to pursue such an interest. To further look into this topic, I will present and discuss it in relation to Aristotle's virtue of temperance.

4.1. TEMPERANCE

Temperance, or self-mastery is one of Aristotle's basic virtues. He argued that temperance is one of the cardinal virtues, meaning they are the virtues on which all others depend (Pakaluk (2005) p. 167). Self-mastery concerns above all controlling one's desires and actions. Aristotle discussed temperance in relation to our basic needs such as food and sex and meant that to overcome the vice of self-indulgence we would need to develop self-mastery. It seems that Aristotle thought that without self-mastery we are not fully in control of ourselves and hence not fully in our right mind because our desires are ruling us, and we remain merely slaves to our sensory pleasures (Ibid. pp. 168-9). Aristotle's thought on self-mastery involved as a major point to have mastery over one's bodily pleasures. He made a distinction between different types of pleasure and meant that enjoyments such as music or art should be judged as positive ones and that pleasures of the body on the other hand should be regarded as pleasure that one can simply have too much of, to the point of self-indulgence. If someone has a great interest in music or is even fanatic about it, we might say that he is obsessed with music, but would seldom judge the obsession as something bad, means Aristotle (Ibid.). I understand Aristotle to mean that the enjoyment of music is an intellectual kind of pleasure, it is connected to discipline and intelligence because creating music takes concentration and dedication, and understanding music is an intellectual experience, as well. Aristotle therefore makes a difference between an intellectual kind of obsession and being self-indulgent in bodily pleasures. He further argues that the self-indulgent person will be one who seeks pleasures for their own sake and not as a by-product of a regular, not directly pleasurable action (Ibid. pp. 166-70). Here we can see again why he makes a distinction between bodily and intellectual pleasures. A music obsession might be less frowned upon because when listening to music we learn about something that is valuable to us and to all of society. To thoroughly enjoy music is to get pleasure as a by-product in a sense, because music is first and foremost an intellectual experience and it certainly can for many be almost a religious one. While food or sex is experienced by the body; music or art

for example is experienced and interpreted by the mind before it becomes a direct pleasure, but when it has, these pleasures can of course also sometimes become bodily experiences.

Katherine Brittain Richardson discuss this topic in her chapter in *Social Media and Living Well*, “Eudaimonia or Eudaim[ania]?”. Here she explores the connection between temperance as a virtue and social media use. In Aristotle’s case the discussion is centred around self-control in relation to pleasures such as food and sex as we have seen, but Richardson means that the same discussion can be extended to the self-fulfilling and rewarding feelings one gets from social media use, as well (Richardson (2015) p. 15). This pleasure involves not only sharing our own content, but Richardson also means that consuming content provides us with the same direct pleasure. In this context, the distinction between direct and non-direct pleasure becomes even more interesting. If one receives pleasure as a by-product, we can imagine it to be because of doing something that is worthwhile such as working, studying or creating, for instance. It would be gained by furthering ourselves in some way, by learning or creating something or through acts of compassion and kindness. Considering the difference between pleasure as a by-product and as a direct goal makes a very clear distinction of what we can understand Aristotle to mean self-mastery to be. I understand it as a person who makes choices and actions that reflect what they perceive to be the right and most responsible ones. Hence, they receive a non-direct pleasure from these actions, even though perhaps some of them doesn’t show to be pleasurable or rewarding until at a later time. When considering social media in this same manner, as Richardson does, we can see that using social media to further our ideal self-image would be a good thing. In a non-direct way, we would get pleasure from rationally using social media as a tool for our own development. We would not only receive the gratification from likes and comments but would in the long run also receive the gratification of moving closer to our ideal self and hence feel proud or happy with our efforts. The same would go for using social media as a professional platform to grow our business, for example. Both in our personal and professional lives it is possible to use social media as a rational, self-mastering tool. On the other hand, using social media to share content that is compromising our values or our self-worth simply for the sake of getting the instant gratification of likes and comments clearly seems to be questionable behaviour both for our well-being and our character. The same would be true for consuming other users’ content without aim or particular awareness. We do receive some sort of short-term gratification and entertainment, but it is not an action that in any way further our own development or can lead to second-hand pleasure.

It might be valuable for the discussion to briefly consider how badly social media and technology dependence can influence us. Hui Jun (2016) has published an article on internet addiction, where some extreme cases of internet obsession is presented. The article discusses several cases of physical harm made to oneself or another as a result of this obsession. Jun describes, amongst others, a case where two parents in South Korea got so caught up in an online video game where they, amongst other activities, were taking care of a virtual infant that they un-intentionally neglected their actual real-life infant to the point where the child passed away. Other cases are described where persons have failed to properly care for themselves and have ended up in hospitals or dead (Jun (2016) p. 210). Many of the examples given by Jun are regarding users playing video games rather than using some form of social media, and this should not be ignored in the discussion. Even though there certainly are social media elements to many video games and virtual realities today, such as World of Warcraft for example, they may not be as similar so that we should expect to see these same kind of obsessions and outcomes with social media use. Still, Jun's examples show our capacity to become deeply immersed in a virtual reality that can seriously affect our way of thinking, being and acting in our lives both on- and offline. This brings us back to Vallor's concerns about the lack of research on long-term effects of social media use. Since we are still catching up to these new ways of living and hence don't have much research into long-term consequences, these risks become even more important to take into account. Any kind of obsession would pose a risk to a person's well-being and life satisfaction so even if social media might not capture us for hours on end, making us forget to eat or take proper care of ourselves, social media might still pose a threat to our well-being. Considering that we all might know, or even are the kind of people who in company with friends spend most of their time on their phone, we might consider the risk of becoming obsessed enough that we lose things important to our well-being.

Both Anders Hansen's and Brené Brown's research points to the risks of allowing our phones to take up too much of our time and how that closely connects to our physical health. We might risk experiencing increased anxiety, stress and insomnia, as well as loneliness and lack of belonging. According to Anders Hansen it is no secret that social media is designed to be addictive and is optimised to hack our brains to release dopamine whenever we open the apps (Anders Hansen (2018)). According to Jun, research has shown that extended phone use also contributes to a higher tolerance, so considering heavy users in particular, there might be a risk for them to continually be increasing their tolerance and hence their use. A heavier usage of technology, research has shown leads to withdrawal from other activities and to physical

fatigue (Jun (2016) p. 216). Hence, even though we can't perhaps expect to see these extreme consequences to social media use, the research that is present today certainly gives us reason to consider how social media and phone use does affect us and our overall health. We might become less sociable, have an increase of anxiety and feelings of not belonging and increase physical fatigue as we move less and sit more.

As we have seen, we have reason to worry about the negative effects social media might have on people, perhaps especially in the long-term. The idea of temperance or self-mastery could help us with a healthy outlook on social media and phone use. Through understanding self-mastery, it is easy to see how social media certainly is concerned with instant gratification and why this might not be the best or most optimal way to use the apps. We could instead use social media as a tool for our personal and professional development, to learn new things such as new perspectives in politics or personal hobbies, to share with likeminded people and perhaps meet new friends, too. It does seem though, that we should be slightly wary when we use social media and Aristotle's ideas can give us a structure on how to tackle the usage issue. Perhaps by applying a rule of thumb inspired by the Golden Mean – we might imagine that between excessive use and obsession with our phones and completely disregarding them, we can find a middle ground – a balance that is just right where the phone and apps can be a tool for healthy and long-term rewarding activities. The virtue of self-mastery can hence help us think of our technology use in a different way and encourage long-lasting behavioural change.

5. FRIENDSHIP

The meaning of friendship, how it works and what real friendship is, plays a large part in Aristotle's ethics. He thought that friendship is integral to a person's ability to reach eudaimonia and therefore, it also becomes an important topic for myself in order to examine the central question in this essay. Friendship on the internet and on social media is often regarded as different to IRL⁵ friendships, but they may still be helpful in developing virtue. Before jumping into the discussion, I believe some clarifications of concepts will be helpful.

⁵ In-real-life

5.1. TRUE FRIENDSHIP

According to Aristotle, true friendship is an important (perhaps the most important) cornerstone in gaining and developing the virtues. Aristotle thought that it is important for friends to be spending time and living life together, and that friendship is at its best when friends are spending time in philosophical inquiry and each recognises that the other is thinking the same as he. It is only in the kind of relationship where one is spending time with another, that the relationship most accurately is mirroring the relationship one has with *oneself* (Pakaluk (2005) p. 260). That spending time with a true friend should be as spending time with oneself is an important detail which I will shed some light on. Aristotle namely argued that a friend is an 'other self', a friend is there to mirror one's own characteristics and to therefore, help one develop virtues meanwhile one would do the same for them. This is why Aristotle finds that the greatest activity of a good friendship is for two virtuous individuals (or individuals striving towards virtue) to simply be spending time together, thinking of the same things, as they are mirroring each other as other selves. Even though this definition of a true friendship is quite demanding, it is an interesting conclusion because it does seem that the best friendships are those where one is able to just simply spend time with the other, perhaps discussing the great questions in life. Michael Pakaluk concludes that from this argument, a few things become clear: since friendship is necessary for happiness according to Aristotle, and the best type of activity in a friendship is simply to spend time together, happiness follows from leisurely time spent with friends. What directly follows is that Aristotle valued friendship as a highly important factor to reaching eudaimonia. He thought that true friendship aids us in our virtuous development since true friendship is only possible between good (virtuous) people (Pakaluk (2005) pp. 260-1). If the virtues then are indications of a happy life as we concluded earlier, the friendships that Aristotle so highly valued should be as valuable to us, as well. This further supports my arguments so far and also shows why we should examine further how social media might impact friendship, as an important part of finding happiness. The true friendship is a rare, virtuous and reciprocal friendship where the friends recognise and enjoy the virtues in the other, means Aristotle (Ibid. pp. 258-9). Beyond this ideal kind of friendship, Aristotle argued that there are two other types of friendship, both of lesser value than the true friendship. Most relationships are rather in these simpler forms, where exchanges of pleasure or utility is the main characteristic, Aristotle argues. We might imagine that these types of relationships are more common today, and some are probably more similar to what we would call friendships, as well. A friendship of pleasure might be what we would call the standard type of friendship

where two friends are giving and receiving pleasure to and from each other and therefore continue to interact to continue receiving this pleasure. Friendships of utility are relationships that we perhaps wouldn't even call friendships today, but rather acquaintances. These relationships are such that they aim to practically benefit the people involved. This can be professional relationships for example, or even the relationship between any kind of service provider and their customer. Aristotle describes the "giving and taking" of pleasure and utility friendship as unequal. One is always in debt to the other. He means that it is not a case of spending time *together*, if the friends are simply taking turns in doing favours for each other (Pakaluk (2005) p. 260). A true friendship, rather, seems to be similar to one that people build over years of knowing each other and are hence not friendships that Aristotle thought comes around so often. They might be similar to relationships that we see between child-hood friends, or married couples. A true friendship is one where the parties are engaged in virtuous action and in striving towards achieving virtue together. It will incorporate a different kind of utility *and* pleasure, means Aristotle. This is because in a true friendship both persons will be virtuous and hence, will always be pleasurable to socialise with and further will provide utility since they are a source of knowledge and wisdom for each other, given their virtue (Ibid. pp. 266-8).

5.2. RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity is an interesting aspect of Aristotle's discussion on friendship. Reciprocity is present in any relationship, no matter what type of friendship it is regarding. Aristotle writes that reciprocity is present in any relationship between two people because he thinks that there will be a type of agreement between the individuals that each has the same kind of affection for the other. Affection in this sense, though, does not have the same meaning as we spontaneously understand it. Because Aristotle viewed friendship in a much wider sense than we do today, he used affection as a collective word for many types of interaction. In this sense, love or affection can mean having love for another *because of* something that he is or represent, and it can also mean having love for someone simply for who he is. Therefore, in a relationship of utility Person A might have affection for Person B not for the sake of B in her essence but rather for what B can provide for A, and vice versa. The "friends" are therefore gaining something from staying friends. The same would go for a relationship of pleasure (Ibid. pp. 261-4). While in the true friendship, of course, the persons have affection for each other purely for what they are, because of them having the virtues, not for what the one might gain from the other.

5.3. SHARED LIFE

The concept of a 'shared life' is connected to the type of reciprocation that is present in Aristotle's true friendship. The shared life, one can imagine comes naturally as a result of two friends having a true friendship because they will be spending time together and share each other's lives. As mentioned above, Aristotle thought that simply spending time together is the activity in which one person comes closest to being with someone else as they are with themselves. This is how the other person becomes another self and Aristotle thought that such a relationship is only attainable when the friends have a shared life. This life involves spending time contemplating together and sharing thoughts on the important aspects of life. It seems that Aristotle thought that it is from this point in a true friendship that someone is able to reach the ultimate happiness (Pakaluk (2005) pp. 260-1). We might consider a slightly different, more modern, definition of the shared life where we might think of it as being two friends who share every up and down and each detail of each other's lives and where they do spend a lot of time in conversation and have meaningful experiences together.

5.4. DISCUSSION ON FRIENDSHIP

Shannon Vallor discuss both reciprocation and the shared life amongst other aspects of Aristotle's true friendship in relation to social media. Vallor means firstly, that in social media, an experience of reciprocity is heightened and that it is available on both a separate *and* on an individual level, unlike the reciprocity available in regular friendships. In the form of likes, friendship requests and other interactions on social media, a person is experiencing more reciprocity than they would if they weren't active users. She argues that through pleasure and utility, it is clear that users have a positive experience with social media. They can easily receive self-affirming pleasure such as we have discussed previously, and also receive utility in forms of helpful advice, job opportunities and the like. It is therefore easy for social media users to build relationships online that will provide them with sufficient social interaction. It seems that one might argue that there actually wouldn't even be a need for actual physical, real-life friendships for someone to get their serving of pleasure and utility, if we weren't concerned with any 'true' kind of friendship. Vallor questions if social media may make us forget the time and effort that needs to be put into real friendships. She asks if we are using social media as a remedy for our loss of social interaction in real life, being pre-occupied with long working hours and the like. Instead of spending any quality time with each other, we reach for our phones as a quick fix in our need for social connection (Vallor (2011) p. 198). These 'lesser' types of friendships seem to be thriving online, though it seems questionable if we are

able to achieve the deeper connection associated with Aristotle's true friendship. Vallor argues that portraying a true image of ourselves online, and through that connect with another person who is so similar to us that a potential true friendship would be possible, have very slim chances of actually happening (Vallor (2011) pp. 194-5). Social media seems helpful in connecting us with many people to create more shallow relationships, while Aristotle rather favoured few and much closer ones. So, to connect with others as 'other selves' online, will result in a user sharing content that reflects their likes and dislikes, their interests and perhaps also any marginalised groups that they're a part of. From there, they can connect with others who might identify with one or two of these categories each, rather than with many of them. The result becomes connections that aren't involving Aristotle's idea of another self, but rather they will contain small parts of one user's entire self in each online friend. Hence, the connections made on social media does not seem to be enabling any form of 'other self' relations and therefore aren't assisting the user in coming any closer to virtue, means Vallor (Ibid. p. 195).

What we are searching for in online relationships, for them to be of value in an Aristotelian perspective is for them to at least hint at the possibility of an ultimate type of friendship, which not only involves pleasure *and* utility, but which is also enabling virtue. In our previous discussions we have seen that pleasure and utility are major reasons to why we are attracted to social media in the first place. The activities that many of us engage in online are providing us with instant gratification that feeds the dopamine release into our system. Therefore, it is interesting for us to discuss if online friendship and interaction can go beyond these simpler relationships and consider if there is a possibility of the virtuous friendship being instigated, nurtured or at the very least maintained online.

5.4.1 VIRTUE FRIENDSHIP ONLINE?

As we have previously seen, Aristotle had an idea of the virtuous friendship needing reciprocation and shared time to be possible. The reciprocation in this instance is more than just pleasure or utility. Reciprocation in a virtuous friendship is a deeper connection and a love that is mutual between two friends. Further, the pair will need to spend time together or live life together to fulfil this friendship. So, is there a possibility to connect such a friendship to the online world? There certainly are ways in which people seem to deeply connect with others online, in some cases it even seems possible for some to connect with their online friends in ways they may not do with the people they are surrounded by in their real lives. Maybe a question here is if it is possible, on a sociological plane, to connect in the same way to someone who you cannot actually see and physically interact with. Are there nuances of interaction that

are understood and felt on a biological level and that therefore are not possible to re-create or imitate online, no matter how hard we try? To enter this discussion, I would like to discuss the view of Sofia Kiliarnta who does believe that true friendship indeed is possible online. Kiliarnta has written an article which is critically discussing several perspectives similar to Vallor's one, which are all regarding Aristotle's ideal friendship and how this relates to online friendships. She means that these authors have an idea of the offline friendship being a 'natural way of things' and so they are restricted in their views. Kiliarnta responds to a few different arguments in her article but to begin I will be interested in the discussion related to my current contemplation. She meets an argument which is saying that one significant difference between online and offline friendships is that experiences that offline friends will spontaneously have together weighs heavily into the quality of the relationship. These experiences that offline friends will have is enabled by them having the opportunity to the 'shared life', says the argument, and contribute to their moral development and to the friends getting to know each other's character in a real way (Kiliarnta (2016) p. 71). The argument says that this is one reason why online friendships, which do not have the same opportunity to the shared life, cannot become virtue friendships. Several philosophers have made similar arguments where they state that friends who spend time together in real life will experience a wide variety of situations together and will therefore have more to contemplate, and that through offline interaction we get a deeper understanding of each other's character. Kiliarnta responds by arguing that in multiplayer games such as World of Warcraft, for example, users get the same kind of experience as is referred to in the mentioned argument. The players need to work together and communicate to finish their missions with success. She refers to an article which describes players in online video games who go through these types of online experiences and grow as friends over a period of time (Ibid. p. 72). She then argues that through the development of new games that are becoming more and more life-like, the potential to replicate the same experiences in a virtual reality is becoming more and more likely. My first issue with Kiliarnta's argument is that even though technology can create very life-like experiences, they will always remain *life-like*. Friends who spend time in reality will be able to have experiences that are a lot more varied and which can include a larger variety of feelings, one example could be genuine fear. In any virtual reality, it will never be possible to replicate a situation where two friends are genuinely fearing for their lives. This is not possible because in a virtual reality you never have a risk of actually losing your life, you are never in actual danger. My point is that in real life, two friends can find themselves in a fatal or seriously dangerous situation together and can move through that experience, coming out at the other side feeling much

closer and trusting of each other having gone through such a serious event together. Such an experience, as just mentioned, will never be possible for two online friends. While this is not describing a desirable situation, it is nevertheless a situation that would bond friends and be a clear testament to their characters and their friendship. Of course, it is rare for a pair of friends to experience something so serious offline as well, but I think that the line of thought points to a weakness in Kaliarnta's argument. Online experiences do seem to lack some dimensions central to the offline experience. This thought leads me into my main consideration on this particular topic.

In an attempt to defend the online friendship, Kaliarnta describes how users of multiplayer games have stated that they have made very good friends and even romantic partners online (Kaliarnta (2016) p. 72). While I do not myself know who these people are and what their relationships look like I imagine that while the relationships may have started and grown online, they have subsequently moved on to be offline friendships and loving relationships, as well. I would not consider myself to be in a position to assume one thing or another and the author is not explicitly clear with what the relationships that are being referred to looks like. But I think that for one to discuss the possibility of online relationships to become virtue relationships, one need to argue from the point of view that the online relationship will remain only online and on this point I do want to argue that there will always be a difference between an online and offline relationship. My reasoning for this argument is fairly simple. I think that the difference becomes clear when we consider a close online relationship where the friends decide to meet for the first time. If there wasn't a difference between an online and offline friendship, then meeting IRL would be just like any other event in the friendship so far. It would not instil any particular excitement or anticipation in the two individuals other than that they are hanging out, as usual. For all that I know about online friends meeting for the first time, this scenario seems very implausible. The reason why it is implausible is simply because online and offline relations are different and offline friendships simply seems to be more profound than those that we create online. Again, it seems that there are certain human interactions that are only experienced in real life. If this has to do with our biology or psychology or something else, it is not my place to say. I imagine that even as we build and develop real, deep and intimate relationships online, we are always protected by the screen and I believe that this is a wall that we cannot break down without actually meeting, seeing and touching each other. I further would like to muse that there would be something in our bodies and energy that communicate on a subconscious level when we interact with each other IRL.

Therefore, when two people meet for the first time, there really should be excitement and anticipation because it is a big step in the relationship, as if we suddenly know each other more fully simply by sensing the energy of the other person. When people in any situation meet each other for the first time, they usually speak about the vibe of the other person as something that has to do with chemistry between two people. I don't believe it to be possible for this same energy or vibe of a person to come across online. Further on this, perhaps we can imagine that those people who trick other users into believing they're someone they're not, just to meet them to rob or assault them (for example) wouldn't be so successful if online and offline relations weren't different in this way. If someone meets a person like this offline, they will be likely to get a gut feeling that something might be a bit off with the person in question. When we're online it is much harder to get this inclination, and perhaps that is what makes it a lot easier for some to trick people online.

5.4.2 KNOWING EACH OTHER FULLY

Following the above discussion, it has been established that online and offline friendship certainly is different, but does this mean that virtue friendship is not possible online? Kalliaranta presents many philosophers who simply think that *the shared life* is not possible online and therefore, virtue friendship is also not possible online. I will argue differently on this matter. As Kalliaranta writes, it is possible today for online friends to experience 'the shared life' (Kalliaranta (2016) p. 72). They can spend all day, every day with each other online, if they wanted to. They can be with each other everywhere, on their way to work, in the grocery store and at dinner, too. In a sense, one could even argue that online interaction *enables* a shared life between offline friends. They could theoretically go anywhere together and so I would judge this as sharing their lives with each other. The potential problem, I argue, comes in when we consider that which I have mentioned above. Namely, there are certain experiences that we cannot replicate online and therefore, there are experiences that online friends will never share. Are these experiences necessary for judging that the friends are having a 'shared life'? Perhaps not, but it will rather be an obstacle to knowing each other fully and knowing each other fully, I argue is an important building block towards virtue friendship.

As we have seen, our friend should be like another self in order to be a true one, and if online friends can't share crucial experiences such as those where we spontaneously need to be brave for the other person then it might not be possible to know the other fully through an online relationship. There is firstly the already mentioned thought that going through certain experiences IRL can be meaningful in bonding two friends together. Further, such experiences

will also clearly show the character of a person and perhaps it is not possible to replicate online. An objection to this view, though, might be that even if experiences on life and death aren't possible in virtual reality, there are people who treat their online activities and lives as so important that they come very close to valuing online and offline experiences as basically the same, at least perhaps emotionally. So, to for instance give up all their XP to help a friend in need would be very similar to protecting a friend in real life. I believe it to be possible for some to have such a strong experience of online gaming and relationships, especially based on what we have previously seen on internet addiction. Perhaps such an action would show the friend in need that this person is someone to count on and hence be a testament to their character. Even though this is not an IRL experience, to some this would truly be an honourable action and would allow a friend to know the others' character more fully. Based on this, I'd like to settle on the conclusion that online friends have *the possibility* to know each other's character fully, which enables the possibility of a virtue friendship. Of course, the issue stands that even if one can know another's character from engaging in online games with them, the physical interaction is still lacking. I will explore how this affects the chances of a true friendship now.

5.4.3 OTHER SELVES

There is still uncertainty towards if that which differ online and offline friendship from each other is necessary for virtue friendship. As we have discussed, it seems possible for one person to perhaps know someone else's character fully online and it also seems possible for online friends to have something close to a shared life, too. Though, knowing someone's character I argue is only one part of relating to someone as another self – something we have seen is pillar in the true friendship. We can consider a person to be another self if it is someone that we can spend time with as we do by ourselves.

Let's assume for the sake of argumentation that it certainly is possible to spend time with a friend in the same way online as it is offline, at least to the extent that we judge the friends as having a shared life in the Aristotelian sense. We can imagine this since these days we have so many different types of social media, amongst others there are virtual reality (VR) chat rooms where users can go and spend time in their virtual body (their avatar). In these chat rooms, users meet friends who they speak with and who they share their concerns and worries with and who they eventually seem to consider as friends, close friends and partners (another example of this is the World of Warcraft example already discussed). Can we imagine that these friendships are true and deep enough to be considered as the parties spending time as other selves? I will argue, no. Again, the breaking point comes down to that slightly abstract

idea of the chemistry between people that seems to be felt on an energetic or biological level when people are physically with each other. When meeting in VR or on social media, users are somewhere between really being with a person and being behind their computer or phone screen. When we are on our phones, we seem to have a much easier way of saying what we really think and to act braver than we do when we are face-to-face with the same person. One reason for this we can imagine comes down to our awareness of the consequences of our actions which we have to face immediately when we are physically interacting, but which we are relieved from when we are behind the screen. So, when someone spends time and gets to know another in VR, it seems that they still have a layer of personal security available to them. The users are emotionally protected by the fact that they are not physically together with the other person. Hence, they have the security of being able to log off instantly should they get rejected by their potential friend. What this means to me is that opening up and being vulnerable becomes easier online, and while this clearly can be a very positive thing, I argue that it becomes the fall for the potential of an online virtue friendship.

Spending time with someone as another self implies being so comfortable with a friend that there is nothing in the way to simply be. This kind of profound sense of connectedness and comfort, then, is only possible with someone that we spend time with in real life because it is only after being that vulnerable and risking rejection IRL that we can be with that person as another self. Therefore, vulnerability is crucial for true friendship. If one is not able to be fully vulnerable with a friend, one cannot fully show one's true self, without being able to show one's true self, one cannot let another mirror this self and so, the friends cannot 'spend time as other selves'.

The above does not mean that social media and other online activities can't be used as tools for moving towards the true friendship. It seems that the VR chatrooms and other social media platforms can be an aid for some people who might be shy or are dealing with social anxiety and who might find solace in spending time online. Perhaps they find it easier to connect with others in this way. In this aspect, social media seems to have the potential to be a great tool for building a sense of belonging amongst new friends and building towards the level of vulnerability just discussed. As we have seen previously in Brené Brown's research, feeling connected to the people around us is extremely important to our well-being. And not only is loneliness dangerous to our physical health but it will hinder our potential for virtuous development, too.

Although I have argued that virtue friendships aren't fully possible online, I'd like to consider the possibility for *development* of virtue between friends online. Aristotle thought that in true friendship, both friends need to be virtuous or interested in developing virtue, as we have seen. Shannon Vallor mentions the idea that perhaps two online friends may gain virtue separately while maintaining a friendship, but thinks that this, then, would not count as a virtue friendship as they have not lived a shared life and developed their virtue together (Vallor (2011) pp. 196-7). I would argue that it does seem possible for friends to have virtue, and to develop and maintain it together, online. In relation to virtue friendship, we have to assume the parties involved to be good, virtuous people separately. It is a requirement for a virtuous friendship that both parties are virtuous, otherwise it would not be possible for the friends to engage in the highest form of activity namely, philosophical contemplation. But does Aristotle ever claim that the friends in question have to develop each virtue up until that point together? To my knowledge, he does not. If two (already) good people then meet online, it seems that they can share in intellectual conversation and contemplation, hence, practicing at least *part* of a virtuous friendship. They can receive both pleasure and utility from each other in this relationship and perhaps they can help each other in their development towards the highest virtue. It seems then that a development of virtue in some form is possible online.

Ending this discussion, I have found that online friends can have meaningful and deep relationships even if the relationships aren't on par with Aristotle's idea of the true friendship. They can have a shared life and they can assist each other in virtuous development. They cannot on the other hand reach the level of vulnerability that I have argued is possible offline and which is needed for being part of a true friendship. Further, I have argued that there also seems to be a certain important connection that humans make when they physically meet each other that I believe is important in the deep connection between true friends.

6. SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have so far explored how social media might affect individual development. Before we close, I'd like to briefly touch on further ways in which social media affects our society. There are ways in which one clearly can see how social media negatively affects society such as how it's become easier to stalk and harass people, how online bullying seems to be a growing issue for kids, the spreading of private photos or information, spreading of fake news or fear

propaganda. There certainly are many ways in which harming content circulates online though this said there are also positive forces that's come from the social media boom.

Zeiser and Beasley writes about how social media has been used in developing countries to improve certain common issues. One example they describe is how an app has been created and used in Kenya to make water not only more accessible and easier for people to find for buying, but which has also brought prices down and made sure the water sold is of proper quality (Zeiser and Beasley (2015) p. 49). This is a great example of where social media has been used to improve society and of course this is not the only example. Social media is bringing people together all over the world, from oppressed societies to marginalised groups. The younger generations that are growing up with social media have greater opportunities to choose what they learn about. They have access to people who spread other information than what they are shown on TV. It is through the internet, and a lot through social media that various revolutions have been started in recent years. But also, movements of different kinds: human and animal rights movements, support for the environment and veganism amongst others. We can't expect that these positive changes would have expanded so quickly and to the extent that they have was it not for social media.

It might be worth considering if social media is doing more good in developing countries than it is in industrial ones. Perhaps when we get to a certain standard of living, and we have certain selected needs taken care of the tendencies for exaggerated use are more likely. Either way, it seems that on a societal level social media seems to be much more valuable as a tool for bringing people together in countries that are moving through some sort of obstacle or difficulty. It is through social media that disasters or human rights crises seems to spread more quickly to the rest of the world and it is a way for people inside country borders to come together in action.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have explored Aristotle's major work the Ethics, and have dove deeper into a few of his virtues while discussing and reflecting on how they might guide us in considering social media use and how it stands in relation to eudaimonia. What we have found is certainly not a black and white answer but rather we have seen that there is reason, firstly, to be cautious of our social media and phone use in general since it could prove to be harmful to our emotional

and physical well-being. This risk seems more potent if we are heavy users of social media and perhaps technology overall. This is because we tend to become immersed in other people's shared contents and we also tend to move and interact less with heavy use. None of these deficiencies are helpful in developing virtue. Considering the virtue of temperance, I have argued that this virtue could pose as a guide to a healthy relationship to social media – namely, we should approach it with an attitude of 'just enough' is best. We have seen that social media when approached in this way can be a great tool for both furthering ourselves and our professional lives and that it is best when we take a step back from the instant gratification that social media offers and instead focus on the more delayed kind of gratification that we can get from the healthier perspective. So, we saw that through self-mastery social media can be used as a tool to further our happiness and our potential development towards virtue.

Further, I have argued that true friendship is not fully possible to achieve online without physical interaction, although there are parts of the true friendship that we certainly can build and maintain online. Social media can be a great tool for keeping in contact with good friends and it can help individuals create connections that might develop into offline relationships. Hence, in this way social media could be a tool for *developing* a true friendship and it can therefore be regarded more as a help than an obstacle to virtue even if I have argued that true friendship isn't possible in an online environment only. In addition, the online platforms can also prove to be a tool for developing required or desired social traits such as vulnerability, to a certain degree. Which in turn is important for the Aristotelian sense of true friendship and hence, for becoming virtuous.

So, is social media an obstacle to an individual's ultimate happiness? Not necessarily, but it could be. I'm concluding that how much of an obstacle social media poses to our happiness is first and foremost down to each individual. As we have seen, the virtues could be a helpful guide to let each person see how social media might be harming their well-being and how it can enable happiness, too. Therefore, staying true to Aristotle I'd like to claim that everyone has a chance to create their own happiness or misery in relation to social media. It could become quite the obstacle if we cannot bring ourselves to control our social media use and if we become addicted or obsessed with it. One of the more striking issues I think is the affect social media potentially could have on younger generations through fame valuing. An important conclusion that I think should be considered further is how we might help children and teens to deal with the content they consume, and the impacts it might have on their self-image both external and internal. I suggest that these topics are covered at length in school and perhaps also at home.

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