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“Friendship”
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What better place to think?

Disclaimer

The ideas that follow are far from risk free.

For a proposed course of action: define "common sense" as the ability to predict and avoid secondary and tertiary catastrophes, and define "judgment" as the ability to predict and achieve secondary and tertiary benefits. Any particular course of action may be seriously deficient in both "common sense" and "judgment". (The present world-financial-system-meltdown illustrates the point.) Include both common sense and judgment in considering the ideas presented here, and how, and where, and in what context they might be applied. In particular, "efficient techniques" (skills) not tied to common sense resemble "loose cannons rolling around the deck"... purely destructive power.

The flip side is that humanity faces grave dangers if socialization doesn't become much more peaceful; this is an attempt to help the transition.

Introduction

Perhaps you think that the behavior of human beings in a social context is too complex to improve. But consider the myriad of inter-related considerations, decisions and details associated with designing, building, equipping, and utilizing a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the various aircraft of its air arm, and its weaponry. I assert that even figuring out "world peace" would be less complex! Professionally, I'm a technologist. In that capacity, I have solved, and have seen others solve, many problems. From my viewpoint, social problems (e.g. how individuals relate) look like 'just another problem'. I'm optimistic that solutions of social problems can be found. Social English words are an unnecessarily messy piece of work. And "higher education" has provided no relief - for example: President Clinton and the U.S. Senators publicly disagreed over the meaning of a few social English words connected by the verb "is" during his impeachment.

Friendship is an interesting area to consider. Most of us would like to be friends with one or more other people. Bountiful supplies of memories are on hand. Immediate access to the laboratory of life provides endless experimental opportunities. Experimental results tend to be easy to assess as successes or failures (though the causes of the results may be difficult to assess). In the title, "friendship" is in quotes because the word will be *redefined* herein.

A Candidate Definition

The definitions of scientific words are both "useful" and "instructive". Presently, the definitions of humanities words tend to be neither useful nor instructive. I suggest that this *redefinition* of "friendship" is an example of applying the spirit of the scientific approach to the world of humanities words. The elements of the definition are meant to be improved over time. Other words can be synthesized to usefully and instructively describe other social relationships. Seek efficient means of transition to relationships which are mutually pleasant for most of the people involved, most of the time, while minimizing the number of "victims".

I offer the following multi-element definition, and associated benefits for each:

ELEMENT	BENEFIT(s) & <i>Example(s)</i>
1. Non-standard touch is the dividing line between acquaintances and friends.	Awareness: The people that you "can't", "won't", or "would prefer not to" touch are acquaintances, rather than friends.
2. "We", not "you and me (babe)."	Affirmation, restraint, & relational redundancy (i.e. not single-point-failure) <i>"If you don't 'own' your friends, then you're not responsible for maintaining them."</i>
3. Have "Valid Excuse Activities" in which to participate.	Constructive use of time. <i>"Yes, John and Suzie, you can go out if you have a valid excuse activity in mind."</i>
4. "Offering" and "requesting" are acceptable. "Taking" is not.	Freedom from obligation
5. Be skilled at peacefully communicating "No".	Enable/facilitate shared activity & redundancy to #4.
6. Criticize sparingly.	Encourage independence.
7. Evolve from self-defense to shared rules and self-restraint.	Peaceful togetherness. Shared rules allow self-restraint to be defined. (e.g. 10 commandments)

Clarifications

1. Non-standard touch is the dividing line between acquaintances and friends.

This is a conjecture, based on my experience. The people that you "can't", "won't", or "would prefer not to" touch are acquaintances, rather than friends.

In the USA, handshakes are an example of a standard form of standard touch - & hence don't count here. Experiencing someone touching you lightly on the arm is a great example of non-standard touch; what's your reaction? If you prefer that you hadn't been touched by the other person, then the other person is no-more-than an acquaintance of yours. Interestingly, words aren't necessary - which means that obligation isn't an issue, because obligations are built on words. If you're comfortable with non-verbal friendships, you're there - nothing else matters. Be happy. (Three or four seconds of peaceful eye contact suffices to communicate mutual acceptance.)

The English language has been abused by so many scoundrels for so many centuries that it's difficult to avoid being shunned for attempting serious social communication using English words. Elements 2 through 7 of the definition concern peaceful extension of the concept of 'friendship' into the world of words. (Furthermore, the elements somewhat constrain the options available to scoundrels.)

2. "We", not "you and me (babe)".

Having just one friend puts all the eggs in one basket - creating a single-point-failure social situation, obligates both individuals until the time that the relationship ends or fails, and reduces - by two - the total number of people who are available to be friends. Jealousy is not a part of friendship. Use another word to describe a "you and me (babe)" relationship.

3. Have "Valid Excuse Activities" in which to participate.

Two or more people getting together for a sustained period of time with no explicit valid purpose in mind doesn't bode well for the wise use of their time. Hence being able to create "valid excuse activities" is a worthwhile social skill. Exercise is an option; as the pregnant ballerina said: "I should have danced all night." Being useful can be more pleasant than simply being occupied; being efficiently and peacefully useful offers additional personal satisfaction.

4. "Offering" and "requesting" are acceptable. "Taking" is not.

Some people assume that obligation is a part of friendship; other people think not. But the net result is that being asked to "be friends" can be very stressful because of the indeterminate scope of the obligations that might follow. Recognize that "offering" and "requesting" are acceptable. "Taking" is not. Not all things that might be "given" are perceived as gifts. People have both needs and desires, some of which can be met cooperatively with other people, to the net benefit of all. Obliging another person is a form of "taking", and if unsuccessful, a source of personal disappointment.

5. Be skilled at peacefully communicating “No”.

Would anyone care to keep track of all the opportunities that are lost because individuals are “afraid to ask”? Many (perhaps most) of us are socialized such that saying “no” is stressful; including saying no to people who are commonly acknowledged to be complete nuisances, such as telemarketers (who’s job is to take other people’s time and attention). When a peacefully communicated “no” is recognized as part of normal discourse, then the fear of asking will be reduced. This skill also provides the (low stress) first line of defense when other people seem intent on taking things without asking. (The people who have taken things without permission are not "friends".)

Common sense suggests: Consider the adverse impact that this element will have on instilling "loyalty" in people's minds. Question whether parents want children who are practiced at peacefully saying "no". On the other hand: Under the sway of both political and religious leaders, "unconditional loyalty" has repeatedly produced dreadful consequences for humanity. Saying "no" to drugs might be much easier, particularly if the children have real friends with whom they regularly participated in "valid excuse activities".

6. Criticize sparingly.

Allowing friends to be of independent spirit relieves one of responsibility for their choices and their consequences which result from their choices. Use a peaceful "no" to avoid the consequences that would affect you. Sometimes alternatives can be demonstrated by setting personal examples; in other cases, by identifying counter-examples. In the case of sharp disagreements, ceasing to be friends is another peaceful option.

7. Evolve from self-defense to shared rules and self-restraint.

Shared rules allow self-restraint to be defined. Beware: "no rules" implies no scoundrels, no matter how the other person behaves. The elements above are a minimal set of rules; a broader set of shared understandings may contribute to peaceful togetherness. Self-defense may be a necessary use of brain space, but it isn't a productive use of brain space.

There are other related ideas that facilitate & embellish the elements herein, like the assertion of one of the Eastern European religious traditions that, at Heaven's Gate, "We will be held accountable for the permitted pleasures not enjoyed."

Revision 0.9 reflects the fact that there will always be room for improvement in our understanding of social concepts, and reflects my assessment of the maturity of the content, compared to other documents that I have written. (Roughly speaking, my "revision" numbers increment by +.1 per year with respect to issues that are resident in the back of my mind.)

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