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Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons

Bennett W. Helm

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Recent Western thought has consistently emphasized the individualistic strand in our understanding of persons at the expense of the social strand. Thus, it is generally thought that persons are self-determining and autonomous, where these are understood to be capacities we exercise most fully on our own, apart from others, whose influence on us tends to undermine that autonomy. *Love, Friendship, and the Self* argues that we must reject a strongly individualistic conception of persons if we are to make sense of significant interpersonal relationships and the importance they can have in our lives. It presents a new account of love as intimate identification and of friendship as a kind of plural agency, in each case grounding and analyzing these notions in terms of interpersonal emotions. At the center of this account is an analysis of how our emotional connectedness with others is essential to our very capacities for autonomy and self-determination: we are rational and autonomous only because of and through our inherently social nature. By focusing on the role that relationships of love and friendship have both in the initial formation of our selves and in the on-going development and maturation of adult persons, Helm significantly alters our understanding of persons and the kind of psychology we persons have as moral and social beings.

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