

UNITED WISDOM

Friendship with different incomes

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

R-16-N02 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Friendship with different incomes

Epigraph

> *I never thought of the grandfather.*

Margaret Oliphant, *Phoebe, Junior*, XXI, page150. A separate complete sentence spoken by Ursula about her new acquaintance's background. This is a fictional character's voice within a conflict about social standing; the novel establishes no present rule for friends' expenses. The printing year of the electronic text's underlying edition has not been established.

What this article is about

In a fictional scene, Lena suggests celebrating her birthday with her friend Dasha on a weekend trip. She has found a lovely hotel, looked at photographs, and can already picture them having breakfast by the sea. Dasha is pleased to be invited but gives an uncertain answer. For Lena, this is a relatively small purchase; for Dasha, the expense would change her entire month. Both value the friendship. Yet they are discussing one attractive plan as though its price had the same place in two different lives.

Different incomes require neither identical budgets nor one person's appointment as a grateful recipient. They raise a more specific question: how can we choose shared activities without making the ability to pay a measure of closeness or a right to direct someone else? Here we distinguish the cost of meeting, willingness to participate, a gift, and an accepted commitment. A historical novel, philosophical discussion, and modern research abstract illuminate different sides of the question without guaranteeing that friendship will endure. This article offers voluntary reflection on an ordinary situation, rather than financial advice, diagnosis, or a duty to disclose personal information.

I. One price can represent two different decisions

Lena need not know Dasha's budget in advance, and Dasha need not guess everything Lena might offer. Difficulty begins when one's own measure quietly becomes everyone's measure. Someone regards a price as ordinary because their usual plans will remain intact after paying it. For another person, the same amount could mean giving up several important things. This difference is invisible in an attractive photograph of a room. The proposal is worded identically, but its consequences for each participant have not been established. Agreement to a trip therefore cannot automatically be taken as agreement to bear every associated expense.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

In our scene, Dasha may want to meet, without wanting this particular hotel. Her uncertainty establishes neither less love of the sea, inadequate taste, nor coldness towards her friend. Equally, she may truly not want the trip irrespective of its cost. Two questions should remain separate: whether the activity suits her and whether its conditions suit her. Immediately explaining every hesitation through money produces another form of inattention. Someone with a lower income also has preferences that cannot be reduced to a need to choose the cheapest option. They retain the right to be uninterested in a free invitation.

Clarification does not require a detailed financial report. We can name a limit on our participation or offer an alternative without proving the reason through every expense. It is enough to establish what is possible now. Lena may also say that she wants a particular place, rather than just any trip. They can then see a real difference without an immediate moral verdict. Sometimes they will find a shared option; sometimes each will spend that weekend separately. One purchase that never happened need not become a final judgment on the friendship. But a recurring way of choosing meetings deserves attention if one friend is constantly accommodating the other and withdrawing from participation.

II. Affordability includes more than the invitation's price tag

Suppose Lena finds a cheaper hotel and considers the matter settled. Yet a trip can include travel, food, necessary purchases, and time when Dasha cannot work. We are not calculating these expenses for the characters or claiming that every invitation conceals danger. The point is simply to avoid declaring something affordable through one convenient number. Another participant may notice a condition absent from the initial picture. Clarifying it does not spoil the gift of a future weekend. It concerns the actual option someone is about to accept, rather than a failure in their ability to enjoy themselves.

We can also consider conditions not directly connected with income. An evening meeting far from home may suit one friend, while the journey back or an early return matters to the other. A higher salary does not automatically establish more free time; a lower one does not establish willingness to spend an entire day following another's schedule. Different capacities meet within a friendly invitation. Distinguishing them prevents a financial difference from swallowing all other features of life. A breakfast convenient for both may replace an expensive dinner, but it does not become the universally correct format merely because it costs less.

Nor must a person list every circumstance to have their limit recognised as real. Information about debts, family, or work may remain private. A question about a shared cost differs from a right to inspect the reasonableness of someone else's spending. If Dasha does not choose the hotel, Lena does not automatically gain authority to examine her other purchases. We may not understand a priority while recognising that the decision about someone's own money belongs to them. Conversation becomes more specific when it clarifies an available plan instead of

gathering evidence of a participant's worthiness. Friendly curiosity should not quietly become an examination of whether someone is living correctly.

III. A social connection is not a recipe for personal prosperity

The authors' abstract for *Social Capital I*, by Raj Chetty and colleagues, distinguishes connections between social groups, network cohesion, and civic engagement. The study uses data about Facebook friendships and examines their relationship with economic mobility across US areas. Connections between people of different socioeconomic status have particular significance in this analysis. But socioeconomic status and the size of a current salary are different concepts. The abstract we read measures neither the quality of Lena and Dasha's friendship nor the approach to discussing expenses proposed here. This article does not reproduce the full methods or data.

It is easy to move too quickly from such research to advising people to befriend wealthy individuals for advancement. We draw no such conclusion. Connections in a large network, relationships across areas, and a specific personal invitation operate at different scales. We cannot promise one reader a higher income after meeting someone or appoint another as an instrument of their mobility. Even the social significance of connections between groups does not oblige a particular person to fund another's trip. Friendship allows interest in another's life; that interest changes when someone is assessed in advance solely as useful access to resources. A research topic does not cancel this ethical distinction.

A more modest point for our argument is that social connections cannot be described through a single characteristic. Being in the same company does not mean having equal capacities, while unequal capacities do not establish the quality of each connection. This is an editorial comparison, rather than evidence that inexpensive meetings work. Lena and Dasha can consider their circumstances without having to represent an exemplary friendship across social classes. Their task is smaller and more specific: to choose a suitable way of meeting, if both want to. The scientific scale helps retain the limits of personal generalisation, but it neither replaces the participants' consent nor turns an invitation into a social duty.

IV. Social rank may enter before the discussion of money

In chapterXXI of Oliphant's novel, Ursula wants to continue her acquaintance with Phoebe but worries about Phoebe's family background. Social standing, trade, and religious division all enter the scene. They cannot be reduced to today's salary differences. Ursula is distressed at the possibility of withdrawing friendliness she has already expressed; her father permits the acquaintance while keeping his own prejudices and separate reasons. The literary scene reveals the characters' contradictions. We present neither paternal permission as a model of adult friendship nor the historical hierarchy as a present norm. What matters here is the question of what changed in the treatment of someone after learning about their background.

Phoebe is not presented as free from social judgments either. She names her family connection in advance and wants to know whether the invitation stands afterwards. Her own unease and her family's attitudes complicate the meeting; the novel does not divide people into faultless poor people and heartless rich ones. That ambiguity is precisely what makes the reading useful. In our hypothetical scene, Dasha may feel ashamed of the amount available to her, while Lena may fear appearing arrogant. We do not assign these feelings by income. If they arise, they can be examined separately from calculations, without declaring them universal characteristics of a social group or evidence of the other person's hidden attitude.

The present comparison is limited: learning a financial condition does not establish someone's human worth. A friend may earn less, more, or irregularly and remain a complex person with their own strengths and difficulties. At the same time, expenses truly change whether meeting is possible; respect does not require pretending that material differences do not exist. The distinction preserves both sides: a person is not exhausted by their budget, but a budget does not vanish through good intentions. We thereby avoid both social ranking and an attractive denial of conditions. Friendship need not become a demonstration of how easily its participants can overlook the real cost of a shared activity.

V. A gift needs a defined subject and a free answer

Lena may offer to pay for the hotel. This is not necessarily concealed control: sometimes someone wants to share an available opportunity without keeping a later account. We should not accuse every gift in advance simply because the parties earn different amounts. But the offer should be understandable. Does it cover the whole plan or one element? Is repayment expected? Can Dasha choose another place or decline? These questions need not all be spoken as a list of conditions; the point is not to leave essentials in a fog that later turns a joyful gesture into an unexpected commitment. Accepting a gift concerns its understandable content, rather than endless future gratitude.

In VIII.13 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses different grounds of friendship and complaints arising around benefit and expectations. This is a historical ethical discussion, including ideas of hierarchy that are not adopted here. It helps pose a question about the grounds of an action without prescribing a present formula for splitting a bill. In particular, the practical distinction between a gift and expected repayment remains our editorial examination. We use the ancient text neither as a contract or economic instruction nor as scientific evidence that a particular division of costs will make friends happier. An old argument requires its own historical context even when its question feels familiar.

A free answer matters for the giver too. Lena may offer only what truly suits her, without proving kindness through an excessive amount. Dasha may accept, decline, or clarify without performing independence through mandatory rejection of every form of help. If accepting feels uncomfortable, a different meeting may be better. If it feels comfortable, she need not invent an equally priced purchase immediately. However, the right to choose does not give the recipient a right to demand a gift that has not been offered. The capacity to help differs from an obligation to fund another person. Otherwise, mutual freedom is replaced by two opposing expectations that nobody clearly accepted.

VI. A contribution need not match a financial share

After Lena offers to pay for the hotel, Dasha may wish to organise a walk. That contribution can be enjoyable if she truly likes doing it. But it should not automatically be appointed compensation for paying less. Otherwise, one person funds the meeting while the other must work off their participation through care, entertainment, or constant accommodation. Nobody in our scene has yet accepted those conditions. Organisation and the gift can be discussed separately. Friendly reciprocity takes different forms, but this does not permit each action to be converted into a hidden price of access to someone better off.

Sometimes expenses are split equally; sometimes each pays for themselves; sometimes one person hosts at their own expense. No arrangement, by itself, establishes the participants' moral maturity. Equal shares may be convenient or may impose a burden someone did not want. Unequal contributions may reflect both people's wishes or may be accompanied by humiliating reminders. We therefore examine specific consent, its subject, and its consequences instead of choosing one correct arithmetic forever. Conditions can differ even between the same friends at different meetings. A previously successful arrangement does not automatically acquire indefinite validity.

This also avoids making the lower-income person a perpetual recipient. Dasha can invite Lena to something accessible and interesting to her, without competing on price. Lena can take an interest without conspicuous condescension. Yet both retain the right to different tastes. A small gathering at home need not appeal to everyone, just as an expensive restaurant does not

inevitably become empty entertainment. The value of a friendly proposal is considered through participation and intention, but participants need not approve every activity to prove respect. Money stops being the only language of contribution without cancelling specific preferences and clear refusals.

VII. Shame need not be intensified by demands for openness

If Dasha feels embarrassed, Lena may want to help her speak freely. Yet an instruction not to feel embarrassed at all can add another requirement: now she must also experience the difference correctly. Someone need not instantly feel calm or recount every financial difficulty. We can accept a limit to the extent that it is named. The practical task is to choose a suitable plan rather than obtain the complete history of a budget. A conversation about friendship should not become a trust examination in which declining to name an amount proves inadequate closeness. Wanting to understand a friend retains a boundary around their personal space.

Our own unease does not prove someone else's contempt either. Dasha may expect judgment when Lena has expressed none. Lena may fear causing offence when Dasha gladly accepts an invitation. These possibilities matter precisely as possibilities. We need not assign a psychological cause to every pause or confidently read a friend's mind. We can notice our assumption and clarify only what concerns the proposal: for example, whether another format remains possible. Sometimes the answer will clarify conditions; sometimes something remains unknown. Incomplete clarity does not entitle us to fill the gap with the most painful version and treat that version as established fact.

A more definite boundary also exists. If personal information becomes grounds for mockery, pressure, or disclosure to others, the issue is no longer only a difference in amounts. Respectfully choosing a format does not require enduring humiliation. The article suggests neither deliberately testing another through a dangerous conversation nor promising that a polite remark will stop pressure. We may withhold details, decline a gift, and avoid continuing the discussion now. Support depends on circumstances; immediate danger calls for available local emergency services. This is a limit of ordinary voluntary reflection, rather than a description of every friendship with unequal incomes as dangerous.

VIII. A familiar shared format may stop working

Incomes and available amounts do not stay identical forever. Our discussion forecasts neither the characters' careers nor a financial plan. It is enough to allow that a familiar meeting may later become inconvenient for either of them. If friends have always celebrated events over expensive dinners, changed conditions need not reject the history they share. They can retain a wish to meet and reconsider the way. But a new arrangement does not arise automatically from remembering the old one. The old format should not be treated as mandatory simply because it once suited both and seemed part of friendship itself.

Nor is the higher-income person instructed to live entirely within a friend's smaller budget. Lena may sometimes go to her chosen hotel with other people or alone. The question concerns whether accessible forms of participation remain between the two friends, rather than prohibiting her spending. Dasha may also dislike having every proposal adjusted in advance to an assumed shortage of money. Here, a proposal and an accepted decision should be distinguished. We can offer an option and calmly hear the answer; difficulty arises when the right to propose becomes a demand to agree, or when each refusal is accompanied by a comparison of human worth.

If shared formats keep disappearing, that deserves recognition without an attractive substitute. Perhaps the friends want different activities and rarely find a suitable meeting. Perhaps they maintain conversations and walks but not travel. Neither possibility establishes a universal outcome. Revisiting money does not guarantee closeness, while different incomes do not prove friendship impossible. The result may remain limited: this kind of participation works, another currently does not. The relationship's history then becomes neither a promise of complete compatibility nor a compulsory break. Participants retain the right to consider whether the form actually available is enough for them.

IX. Support differs from directing another's life

Friendly help sometimes goes beyond recreation: someone needs a practical resource during a difficult period. We establish no rules here about loans, taxation, or other legal obligations. Those questions require suitable information for specific circumstances. In ordinary conversation, it matters to distinguish a request, one's capacity to help, and agreed conditions. Declining help does not always mean rejecting a person, but accepted promises do not disappear through a general declaration of freedom either. If Lena agreed to pay for a particular purchase, Dasha can expect that named action until its conditions are reconsidered in an understandable way.

Help does not automatically transfer authority over the rest of a budget, a circle of friends, or decisions about work. We may wish a resource to be used for its agreed purpose without

declaring every preference of its recipient subject to our authority. At the same time, the giver need not endlessly support an arrangement that does not suit them. The next request is considered separately. Being able to state a limit does not mean having a right to humiliate; being in need does not mean having a right to demand another's limitless availability. Both boundaries allow a specific action to remain specific instead of becoming an indefinite role of patron and dependent.

When help is tied to obedience or payment is constantly presented as evidence of superiority, it is useful to identify that arrangement itself. We need not first determine which income is large enough for such behaviour or which amount makes dependence real. Conditions of participation become the subject, rather than financial rank. Yet we diagnose neither character through a single gift nor replace circumstances with a ready label. An ordinary conversation may be appropriate where refusal and revision are allowed. Where they bring a threat, the article prescribes no compulsory joint discussion as a first step and does not guarantee a safe outcome.

X. Return to the invitation with two visible lives

At the beginning, Lena could already picture breakfast by the sea while Dasha did not yet know what to answer. Now the proposal has separate parts: wanting to meet, preferring a place, actual expenses, and a possible gift. The friends need not discuss everything at once. They can first establish whether uncertainty concerns the format or its conditions. Lena can offer payment without expecting obedience; Dasha can name a convenient option without reporting her financial history. None of these steps guarantees agreement. It simply makes the subject of choice clearer, if both want and are able to examine it.

Suppose Dasha chooses a walk in the city in this fictional scene and Lena leaves the trip for another occasion. This is a possible outcome, rather than a model a reader must follow. They may also accept the gift and travel, postpone meeting, or discover a broader difference. One answer should not be made evidence of an entire personality. Dasha does not become more independent solely because she declined, nor Lena more generous solely because she paid. An action takes its meaning from actual conditions and intentions, insofar as they are known, rather than from a single attractive social role.

Friendship with different incomes requires neither erasing the difference nor always choosing identical shares. It calls for attention to what specific participation means for each person, if they wish to keep it voluntary. Respect does not replace money, but money does not determine a person's worth. A shared option may be simple or may not be found. Possibility and limits can be recognised without a mandatory display of selflessness. A friendly day in our story begins neither with the perfect hotel nor the correct amount, but with an invitation that has room for two answers and two different lives.

Another question arises if expenses have already been incurred. Changing the plan then concerns an action already taken as well as a future wish. An understandable promise should not be silently cancelled, nor another's loss declared insignificant because the friend earns more. We can discuss the specific consequence of a change without presenting a legal ruling or promising that conversation will remove disappointment. The financial difference remains, but it does not cancel attention to participation already accepted.

What this means in practice

If you wish to apply the discussion, you can choose one small invitation that allows calm examination. This is voluntary editorial reflection, rather than financial advice or a validated way to preserve friendship. You need not begin with the most painful history, disclose a budget, or persuade another to participate. Where threats, punishment, or disclosure of personal information are expected, the joint step can be skipped. Immediate danger calls for local emergency services rather than this practice.

Mentally separate wanting to meet from the chosen activity and its conditions. What is known about price and time, and what is assumed? What limit are you prepared to name without explaining every reason? Then consider one possible option: another format, clarifying expenses, an understandable gift, or declining this particular invitation. You need not find the cheapest possible arrangement or equal compensation. If offering payment, consider whether you are truly ready to accept refusal and let the other have their own preferences. If accepting help, consider whether its content is clear.

An available step can be taken, postponed, or left as reflection. Afterwards, notice the actual result: whether the proposal became clearer, a suitable format was found, or a difference remained. A calm tone does not prove all difficulties resolved, nor disappointment a mistake in choosing. The practice does not guarantee agreement, safety, or future closeness. Its modest outcome is a more precise understanding of one invitation. That understanding need not become a complete revision of the relationship or a report on your ability to be a good friend.

Key quotation

> *If you ask me after that...*

Margaret Oliphant, *Phoebe, Junior*, XXI, page154. The beginning of Phoebe's conditional sentence, with the continuation explicitly omitted. The character names her family background and clarifies whether the invitation stands; the literary context includes social and religious division, rather than income alone. This is not the author's instruction to disclose personal information.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	What it helps distinguish	Difference and limit
Oliphant's novel ↔ a present invitation	A person and their assigned social rank	A nineteenth-century fictional scene does not establish present practice efficacy
Aristotle ↔ a gift	Grounds of participation and expected repayment	Historical hierarchies are not adopted; no payment formula is derived
Oliphant ↔ Aristotle	Friendship's name and a meeting's conditions	A character's experience and normative classification form no single theory
Chetty and colleagues ↔ editorial reflection	A social network's scale and particular consent	An association across areas promises no reader income and appoints no useful friend
Historical texts ↔ voluntary practice	Conditions and human dignity	This is editorial comparison, rather than agreement of all traditions or a validated method

Primary sources

• Margaret Oliphant. Phoebe, Junior, XXI, pp.148–155. Gutenberg28629, updated2021-01-05; the underlying print edition's year is unestablished. Edition information, all of XXI, and returned neighbouring context read; not the whole novel.

• Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, VIII.13, W. D. Ross. Translation information, the complete selected section, and neighbouring context read. Printing year unestablished; an ethical argument rather than a present financial protocol.

• Raj Chetty et al. Social Capital I: Measurement and Associations with Economic Mobility. Authors' Opportunity Insights page: Nature608,108–121, August2022. Complete abstract and metadata read; full methods, data, and supplements neither read nor reproduced.

Tags

friendship, different incomes, money, expenses, invitation, shared activities, gift, help, reciprocity, choice, dignity, boundaries, personal information, budget, social standing, expectations, consent, refusal, affordability, time, preferences, respect, support, obligations, independence, conversation, social connections, Margaret Oliphant, Phoebe, Aristotle, Raj Chetty, United Wisdom

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, unity across traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a coauthor of United Wisdom. Alongside research, she seeks to examine these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.