

Can States be Friends? The Relevance of Friendship to International Relations

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Abstract. The present article claims that friendship has a more important place in the relations between states than previously ascribed. Yet, it attempts to show that the ability of states to establish true friendships constitutes a complex problem. The solution proposed is to not to view friendship as a form of emotion as proposed by Aristotle, but as a social role. For a state to recognize its obligations toward another state it must hold a double perception: first, that a relationship it may have with another state is one of friendship; second, that friendship is relevant in International Relations at all.

Keywords: Friendship, International relations, Emotions, Duties.

1. Introduction

Friendship is not rare in the discourse of international relations. The term 'friendly state' is quite widespread. Allies often tend to treat each other as friends. Neighboring states which have regular relations are often described as old friends. In the context of current political discourse, the concept of a 'friendly state' is now in fact assigned to any state that does not have a particular conflict with a second state. Friendship treaties with or without any actual content are common practice in the diplomatic world. In view of the above, the almost complete lack of research on the phenomenon of friendship in international relations is quite surprising. The article attempts to show that the ability of states to establish true friendships constitutes a complex problem. The solution proposed here is to not to view friendship as a form of emotion as proposed by Aristotle, but as a social role. The first part of the article presents the concept of friendship as Aristotle defines it. The second part examines social perceptions regarding the duties imposed on friends. The third part presents the two main problems facing the relevance of friendship for international relations. The fourth and fifth parts handle each problem separately trying to show that despite these difficulties, friendship may play a role in the relations between states.

2. Friendship in Aristotle Philosophy

In order to understand the extent to which friendship influences international actors, one must thoroughly clarify this concept by examining its philosophical roots. Aristotle was one of the first people to examine the concept in a methodical way, and he devoted some of his writings to the subject. He identifies three types of friendship: friendship of utility, friendship of pleasure, and friendship of value. Friendship of utility is the kind of friendship that connects people who want to attain a common goal. This is often the form of business friendship, or friendship between members of an ideological movement. Friendship for pleasure is friendship that connects people for an activity that brings pleasure beyond the pleasure of the friendship itself. Friendships between bridge players or members of a golf club exemplify this type of friendship. What friendship of utility and friendship of pleasure share is that the friendship is instrumental, in other words, it is depended on the common goal of the individuals. Should the goal be removed the friendship will disappear. This type of friendship, whether intended to achieve utility or pleasure, is therefore an instrumental friendship. By contrast, friendship of value is a friendship enjoyed by the actors for its own sake, the friendship not being a means to attaining another goal but a goal in itself. It is based on one friend's love for the other friend for what he is rather than for the profit he offers. A friendship of value, which is a true

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friendship, is not based on an external goal for that friendship, but on the satisfaction derived from its very existence; it is more resilient than the instrumental form of friendship.

Aristotle identifies two essential elements of true friendship. The first is the mutual feeling of love between the friends, which forms the real basis for the friendship. This love is defined as a sense of intimacy, an honest concern for the wellbeing of the friend, and an identification with him. Without the feeling of love, the friendship cannot be considered authentic, but at best instrumental. Emotion is thus an inherent component of friendship and cannot exist without it. Aristotle also points to a more overt feature of the friendship, namely how friends express their emotions through their behavior. This is the second element of friendship, which is no less important than the existence of mutual love. Friendship cannot exist without practical expressions that express the friends' love for each other. For how can friends learn of each other's feelings without those expressions? Mutuality (equality), trust, and openness, appear in Aristotle's theory as the three characteristic expressions of friendship.

3. The Relevance of Friendship to International Relations

Utilitarian friendship is very common in international relations. It is typical, for example, of neighboring countries that have a high level of interaction and mutual interdependence. It can be used to describe allied states faced with a common threat, and patron states and their clients which supply each other with important services. In all these cases, the states benefit from each other and the close ties formed between them as a consequence lead to the creation of a form of friendship that attracts a certain kind of rhetoric. In fact, neighboring countries, allies, and countries with a patron-client relationship, frequently refer to each other as "friendly states". To some degree, this cloaks the self-interest on which the relationship is based, providing an illusion of moral respectability. It also removes any psychological difficulties that may arise in unequal relations. Thus, Saudi Arabia is not the United States' client but its friend, and this makes it easier for both countries to continue to enjoy the reciprocal ties that benefit them. Even the relationships between an empire and its colonial protégé usually merit a façade of friendship. It may be remembered that Poland was called the "friend" and even "sister" of the USSR. during the Cold War.

But, can the relations between states be characterized as true friendship that constitutes an end in its own right? There are many reasons to question whether this is so I will suffice with the two main arguments against it. True friendship between individuals is based on the strong feelings they have for one another, feelings described by Aristotle and Kant as a kind of love. Without emotion, the friendship of value becomes meaningless, since it is defined in these terms. Can a state, as a collective body, have any emotions? Moreover, even if we assume such a possibility for a moment, there is still another problem. It is customary to perceive moral obligations as context-dependent. Friends are supposed to act according to the duties of friendship as long as the environment in which they operate allows this, but under certain circumstances they are absolved of their duties. As Felix Berenskoetter maintains, the way the international system is framed defines the relevance of friendship as a relationship that connects states. However, contrary to Berenskoetter, I do not think that the source of the problem lies in the conception of the state as an autonomous entity and the emphasis on its survivability. The problem lies in the functional conception of the state, or in other words, the view that the supreme goal of the state is to further the material needs of its citizens in the form of personal and national protection, economic affluence, ecological security, and more. In an international society where states are perceived as business corporations operating within a market economy, there is little room for relationships that are not based first and foremost on utility. Therefore, in order to show that friendship can exist between states in the context of international relations we must overcome two difficulties: first, we must show why the fact that a state cannot feel emotions does not from the outset doom any possibility of it enjoying true friendships with other states, and, second, if we can show this, we must also demonstrate that the construction of international society, such that relations between states are purely instrumental, is not hegemonic.

4. Can States Feel Love?

The most straightforward way to deal with the problem of the ability of states to feel emotions of friendship is to claim that states have emotions. Wendt convincingly argues that states are actual persons with intentionality. If this is so, would it then be unreasonable to assume that states also have emotions? Wendt does not reject such a proposition out of hand, but points to the difficulties involved as such an assumption requires that states have cognition. At the same time, Wendt raises the possibility that individuals within the state may experience emotions for it. These are not personal emotions, but rather emotions that arise within individuals, including decision makers, based on a certain perception of the state and identification with it. Thus, states may feel humiliation, anger and a desire for vengeance. Would it not be possible to argue similarly regarding their ability to feel the love of a friend? I believe not. Unlike the other emotions discussed above, love is far more deeply connected to human experience. Consider romantic love for a moment. It would be ridiculous to claim that states are capable of falling in love with other states, because romantic love is connected to biological factors that are only relevant to organisms capable of procreation. Therefore, individuals will never experience romantic love in the name of their state. To some extent, a friend's love resembles romantic love. It develops from the intimacy formed based on common experiences over the years and out of a deep acquaintance with the soul of the friend. It differs from such emotions as fear, anger, and a desire for vengeance, whose trigger does not require such a special and intensive relationship. It is for this reason that individuals within a state cannot really feel a sense of love on behalf of their state, as they are capable of feeling fear, anger, or a desire for vengeance. Individuals may feel affection for another state: for its past enterprise, present qualities, and what it represents. But affection and appreciation are not the love of a friend. Nevertheless, it seems that the analogy between individuals and states as regards friendly relations is not invalid. Like individuals, and perhaps even more so, countries share a common history and common collective memory (for example: France-Germany and the US-Britain). They may know each other well, and share a common worldview and common values. They may support each other regularly in international forums, and enjoy an intense, varied, and close bilateral relationship. Thus, even though individuals are incapable of feeling the love of a friend on behalf of their state, they may believe that it would be proper to feel this way.

A second solution to the problem of emotion may be the claim that friendship of utility often includes elements of friendship of value. Therefore, in the context of such friendship too there may be friends who feel bound to act according to the duties of friendship, out of moral rather than utilitarian motives. On several occasions in his book, Aristotle himself hints that instrumental friendship (utility or pleasure) also possesses some of the characteristics of friendship of value. This has led various researchers to point to the possibility that some form of true friendship may indeed exist among business companies or among the citizens of a state. This view does not regard the love of a friend as a necessary condition for the existence of true friendship; the latter may rather emerge from a form of well-wishing that obtains between the parties and elevates their friendship of utility to a higher level than simple cooperation for profit. In instrumental friendship of this type, the parties trust each other and display loyalty to each other. Even though they expect a reward for the goods they give the other, these expectations are not based on any binding legal contract between them but on the recognition that the other party does, or should, expect a reward. The latter conceptualization provides a certain solution to the problem of feelings of friendship in international relations. It raises the possibility that states that establish a friendship of utility may act according to the dictates of the duties of friendship, not out of actual love, but through a sense of well-wishing, trust, and justice towards the other. That being said, it does not really manage to elude the Aristotelian dichotomy. The attempt to point to a true friendship not based on love of the friend cannot be implemented through a synthesis between friendship of instrumentality and friendship of value, since what defines these two types of friendship, and is the root of the difference between them, is precisely what such an approach cannot dispense with: the basic motive for fulfilling the duties of friendship. What distinguishes friendship of value as such is that one friend acts to further the interests of the other friend out of a sense of identification. In other words, one party assimilates the other party's interests into his own set of interests. On the other hand,

where friendship of instrumentality is concerned, the friend fulfills his duties in the expectation of receiving similar treatment. The significant factor is not the external form of the friendship. Friends of value may also maintain utilitarian relations between them. Aristotle himself recognized this explicitly. Friendship of instrumentality itself may also include many of the features of the friendship of value, such as trust, loyalty, and mutual assistance. What determines the nature of the friendship is the motive that drives the actor to project trust, display loyalty, and provide assistance. If he mainly does this out of goodwill, then it is a friendship of value even when the friends interact in a utilitarian fashion. In this case we are left with the problem of explaining this obligation in terms other than the love one actor feels for the other. If he does this because he trusts the friend to respond in kind, then it is a friendship of utility, even if it is particularly heartfelt and close.

A third approach, derived from the domain of social psychology, proposes a different perspective on friendship, which allows this condition to exist. Identity theory focuses on how agents fulfill a certain role and internalize the implications and expectations stemming from that role. This leads them to act in a way that corresponds with these expectations. The implications and behavioral expectations of a role are not subjective - they are part of the social structure within which the agent is acting. Social structure and context also define the hierarchy of the roles assumed by the agent and hence also his tendency to act according to the dictates of a specific identity under given circumstances. To a great extent, the "success" of the agent in conforming to standards related to his role defines the way he perceives himself. Such success is not just a function of his own behavior but also depends on the behavior of other agents related to his role. Their mutual behavior validates one another's identity. A "friend" constitutes such a role, just as do the roles of "teacher", "husband" or "worker". An agent's success in filling this role is judged by the extent of goodwill, care, and mutual interdependence that he establishes with his friend. Such success significantly influences the ability of an actor to persist in maintaining a positive self-image. Thus, Identity Theory offers an alternative way of looking at friendship. Above all, friendship is a social institution. An agent who defines himself as someone's friend is caught in a web of behavioral expectations (norms) that arise from the social interpretation of the friend role. An agent feels the need to act in a way that will validate this identity, for this has implications for his positive self image. The friend is driven to fulfill the duties of friendship, not because of any feelings he has, but because he has internalized the expectations towards him and the connection between success in fulfilling his role and perception of himself. This makes it possible to disengage friendship from its total identification with emotion. It does not imply that emotion is no longer relevant to friendship. The tendency of those who perceive themselves as friends to act according to the expectations arising from their identity does not teach us anything about the conditions under which such an identity is acquired. What brings actors to perceive themselves as friends? One possibility is the authentic feeling of love that one actor feels towards another. However, this is also connected to the narrative that the actor constructs for himself regarding his relations with the other actor, the scope and depth of the interactions that they maintain, their common past, mutual appreciation, and perception that the other feels friendly emotions towards them and assumes that he harbors similar feelings too. The perception of friendship thus hinges on a whole set of internal (love, esteem) and external (behavior of the other, common past, scope, and depth of interactions) signals, to which the agent has been exposed. This provides broad scope for the entry of friendship into international relations. A state that perceives itself as the friend of another state will feel obligated to fulfill the duties arising from the institution of friendship, regardless of the material benefits it stands to gain. The existence of such a perception depends, in turn, on a series of internal and external signals regarding the nature of its relations with the other country: common history, similar values, varied and frequent interactions, mutual esteem, and more. However, above all, the state must believe that "states can be friends" and that the identity of "friend" occupies a central place in the totality of identities that comprise it. This brings us directly to the second difficulty that faces the relevance of friendship to international relations: The framing of international society as instrumental.

5. The Problem of Framing

The framing of the international arena as a place where states fulfill functional roles probably constitutes the most serious obstacle facing friendship in international relations. The willingness of governments to act according to the duties of friendship is conditioned, first and foremost, by their recognition that this institution is relevant to international relations. However, that is not enough. They should also perceive the friendship identity of their state as central enough to overshadow another identity: that of a cooperative supposed to provide for the material needs (security, welfare) of its members which therefore acts on the basis of *Raison d'Etat* logic. The foreign ministries of states are usually the most strongly fortified bastions of such perceptions, but they are not the only ones. Such perceptions are common among the political elites of states and thus among decision makers. This constitutes a serious barrier to the formation of true friendships in international relations. The question of whether conditions allowing friendships between states exist at a given moment in history is an empirical question worthy of investigation. The present article does not purport to show that friendship between states actually exists today, just that it is possible. However, I would like to make two speculations regarding an environment that would be more conducive to the relevance and centrality of friendship in international relations. The first is public opinion. The general public is perhaps more open to belief in the relevance of idealistic factors, such as moral imperatives for foreign policy. Decision makers may respond to such perceptions and the more sensitive they are to public opinion and the more dependent on public support the more they will take the matter seriously. This suggests that democracies have a greater tendency to behave according to duties of friendship, a hypothesis that needs to be tested. Another possibility for the rise of an ideal framework that sees friendship as a relevant institution in IR may be found in the process of globalization. Globalization reduces the ability of states to undertake traditional functions such as security and economic welfare. If this process continues, states in future will lose a great deal of their functionality and become primarily a subject of identification (exactly as we feel today toward our hometown or county.) At the same time, transnational bounds will intensify, mostly between neighboring states or states that share a common language and culture. These two processes, both connected to globalization, may overcome one of the main obstacles to the perception of friendship as relevant in IR, namely: states as rational associations whose existence is related to the supply of services.

6. Conclusion

Friendship may be significant in International Relations, or stated differently: states may sense that they must behave according to the ethical obligations of friendship. The inability of a state to feel love does not negate the possibility of friendship in IR since friendship is primarily a social role. For a state to recognize its obligations toward another state it must hold a double perception: first, that a relationship it may have with another state is one of friendship; second, that friendship is relevant in International Relations at all. It is the latter of these perceptions that is more fundamental since it is a precondition for the first. Also, unlike the first, it is an inter-subjective perception shared by the other members of the community although not necessarily by all of them. Finally, the latter perception is the hardest to take root due to the dominance of a contradictory perception which can be summarized (to paraphrase Lord Palmerston) as: "states have neither eternal friends nor enemies, just eternal interests." This perception is deeply entrenched in the halls of foreign ministries and has a wide resonance. Therefore, the development of a collective perception that accepts the institution of friendship to be relevant in IR is possible but will not emerge in the near future.

7. References

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- [6] T. Jollimore. *Friendship without Partiality?* *Ratio* 2000, 13 (1): 69-82.
- [7] Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. p. 1155.
- [8] However, in this case, one cannot even speak of utilitarian friendship as the relations were forced, and one party was the main beneficiary of the relationship status quo.
- [9] Kantian deontological morality, which requires obedience to a moral obligation under all circumstances, does not reflect actually prevailing moral standards. Kant's famous example of a person, who hides a man in his home from pursuers wishing to kill him, makes this very clear. Kant considers that the person providing the sanctuary should not lie to the murderers regarding the presence of the fugitive in his home, because of the categorical imperative not to lie. However, in any human society lying in such a case would be considered morally legitimate.
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