

Friendship, Security and Power

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to outline the analytical value of a friendship perspective through two of IR's core concepts: security and power. It first discusses the relevance of friendship as a process providing ontological security to actors, including states, and differentiates this from the function of both strategic alliances and security communities. Building on this reading the paper explores the ways power operates in and out of friendship relations. Specifically, it looks at the power operating 'internally' that is, among friends, and 'externally', that is, how practices of friendship affect third parties and international order. It suggests that friends (can) exercise power in two basic ways, namely through mutual empowerment and through agenda setting in building international order, and that this power is both creative/transformational and exclusionary/subversive and may also be violent in character. Overall, this discussion also serves to make the point that friendship is not necessarily a *lovefest* and must be understood as a political relationship.

Introduction

Claims of 'friendship' and 'special relationships' are found regularly in the political discourse, and 'the friend' is a commonly used term in the International Relations (IR) literature. And yet, this literature still contains very little substantial thinking about the meaning of friendship. Indeed, with the understanding of friendship in IR still in its infancy, we have difficulties seeing it even when looking at it. The reason is that most thinking in IR continues to build on the liberal ontology of actors as autonomy-seeking entities and is reluctant to conceive of them as social-psychological phenomena.¹ Even among scholars emphasizing a social ontology, the Other tends to take on the form of an enemy. Where friendship is discussed it is done thinly, portraying it as either a mere opposite of enmity or as a label for states forming a 'security community' (Adler and Barnett 1998; Wendt 1999). Yet friendship is much

¹ Indeed, modernity's concern with individualism poses the greatest challenge for conceiving of friendship across disciplines (King and Devere 2000).

more than a relationship in which disputes are settled by peaceful means. Thinkers on the topic going back to Aristotle provide us with a rich understanding of friendship as a relationship characterized by trust, openness, honesty, acceptance, reciprocity, solidarity and loyalty (Fehr 1996: 3-16). In line with the overall objective of this volume, this chapter attempts to make friendship conceptually intelligible for students of international politics.

Given that friendship is generally considered a personal and private affair, one would be excused to assume that the concept is irrelevant for the collective level and lacks political relevance. And yet it is not too difficult to locate phenomena like trust, reciprocity, or morality in the political arena and recognize them as long-standing concerns of actors and as structuring international relations. Taking these phenomena into account, I build on my earlier work to pursue the view that friendship does exist on the international level and that, moreover, it significantly affects two core issues IR scholars have traditionally been concerned with, namely security and power. To put it the other way around, the claim made here is that phenomena of security and power in international relations cannot be fully understood without taking into account dynamics of friendship.

This claim does not cater to one particular theoretical tradition. Security and power are traditionally the concern of realist scholars, who view them as basic human interests explaining political behaviour and interaction in terms of both conflict and cooperation. Yet my suggestion that friendship deeply affects issues of security and power – whether treated as basic motivations or as structural phenomena – is not an attempt to bring friendship into realism (although phenomena of friendship may well be compatible with sophisticated realist thinking). Questions of security and power are central to many other schools of thought from liberalism to post-structuralism, although their conceptualisation might be different. Indeed, if anything, the below account builds on the fact that those two concepts are quite complex and have different facets, which perhaps brings it closer to the constructivist camp. In the end, and in line with the overarching objective of this volume, the broader aim is more to encourage analysts to pay attention to friendship and integrate it into their analytical repertoire whatever the theoretical score. Towards this end, the chapter will first lay out my conceptualisation of (international) friendship, followed by discussions of how

it is linked to questions of security and then power, respectively, as well as showing that the two also are intertwined through friendship.

Approaching Friendship

Friendship is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. There is no blueprint for it. So in approaching the difficult task of conceptualising friendship it is helpful to make use of some key analytical frames. To begin with, friendship is special. Sociologists and philosophers tend to agree that ‘true’ friends are few in number and are tied through a particular and morally significant relationship. While this relationship can take many forms, the cosmopolitan dream of a bond among all humankind is not suitable to serve as the basis for a serious discussion of friendship. As friends are closer to each other than they are to non-friends, one might say friendship is an intimate relationship (Berenskoetter 2007).

In order to get a better grasp on the nature and consequences of this ‘closeness’, it is furthermore helpful to consider two analytical juxtapositions. The first, which goes all the way back to Aristotle’s discussion of friendships of excellence, of pleasure and of utility, is the distinction between ‘end’ and ‘instrumental’ friendship (Badhwar 1993: 3). The former sees one caring for the friend simply because of who (s)he is. It emphasises friendship as a loving relationship based on “the friend herself as the particular person she is, that is, as constituted by her fundamental qualities” (Badhwar 1993: 4). In other words, friendship is an end in itself and serves no higher goal than caring for each other. By contrast, actors in an instrumental friendship need the relationship for other purposes. Although in behavioural terms it shows all the features of friendship, the bond does not go as deep as the end friendship and only lasts as long as the friend remains ‘useful’. As Badhwar (1993: 3) puts it “if either friend ceased to be useful in helping the other to reach her goals, she would thereby cease to have the features that ground the friendship”. Now, most friendships probably are a bit of both and so it is in the account below. Certainly in the case of international friendship it is difficult to argue that we are dealing with a relationship based purely on collectives falling in love with each other. Arguably most friendships form out of an instrumental relationship, where the initial interaction is driven by detached utilitarian motives, which then moves to another level as the actors come to know and appreciate each other’s qualities. Yet it would be misleading to read this

process as a neat sequence in which ‘utility’ is entirely replaced by ‘care’. Surely, as John Cooper (1980) points out, genuinely wishing the friend good for his own sake is essential to all friendships. But even though it is this other level of caring for each other that makes a friendship distinct, the bond is not devoid of utilitarian, or instrumental, functions.

The second is David Kahane’s (1999) distinction between ‘object centered’ and ‘relationship centered’ friendship.² The former is similar to the ‘end’ friendship noted above and emphasizes that friendship is based primarily on attributes inherent in the friend, “specific values or virtues or understandings or assets that draws us to them” (Kahane 1999: 270). It is an essentialist reading of friendship where bonds are formed because the actors involved share the same intrinsic properties. Echoing Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, Kahane criticizes this reading for not allowing difference to exist within friendship and for encouraging a rather teleological or, one might say, totalizing view of friendship. It also provides a static picture. Assuming that core attributes of the other are stable, friendship does not form but, once we recognise each other’s qualities, it just is. In contrast, the ‘relationship-centered’ friendship emphasizes not properties but the relationship as such for “its value as a formative process over time”. Kahane favours this reading because it allows for a certain distance between friends, that is, it allows for the fact that friends may not completely agree about everything. Rather than suggesting that friendship is built on ‘sameness’, this account gives room for pluralist understandings of ‘the good’, which is complex and may even contain contradictions. It thus carries a more pluralist/heterogenous understanding of friendship and points to the relationship as a site where differences can be ‘bridged’. It shifts the perspective from individual attributes to the relationship of friendship as something developed ‘in-between’ friends (Kahane 1999: 270). As Kahane puts it friends need not have the ‘same’ perspective on everything but “[they] ‘triangulate’, in effect, on a third object – the friendship itself” (Kahane 1999: 279).

My account takes a ‘relationship-centered’ perspective for three reasons. First, it forces us to not simply think about two actors and their behaviour towards each other but about their relationship. That is, it requires conceptualising not only what makes a

² Kahane differentiates between three types of friendship, though he does not really elaborate on the second one which he calls ‘capacity centered’.

friend but also the intersubjective dimension, the bonds of *friendship*. Second, the notion of friendship as a process prompts us to understand the bond as dynamic, as something that evolves and needs to be observed over a period of time, rather than something static that can be captured through a snap shot of stable properties. Third, by reading the ‘in-between’ as a negotiated space where differences are bridged and a shared world is built, it also allows thinking about friendship as a political relationship. That said, in my reading friendship and the emerging something underpinning it is not a separate ‘third’ hanging between actors, but is constituted by and through them and, thus, is tied to their very ontology. As such, my account of friendship and, by extension, of security and of power, rests on a particular ontology of actors and their needs. To elaborate this, let us turn to the link between friendship and security.

Friendship and Security

Any discussion of security requires an account of what we want to secure, that is, the nature of the referent object, and an understanding of what the threats to this object are. For IR scholars the answer used to be very clear. The reference object was the Westphalian state and maintaining its security meant, above all, protecting its sovereignty, which realists conveniently reduced to meaning territorial integrity (Hobson 2000: 56ff; Mearsheimer 2001: 31). Thus, for a state to survive meant primarily to remain safe from external military threats. This materialist reading of referent object and threats is concerned with what scholars have termed ‘physical’ security. In this reading, states qualify as friendly if they agree to respect each other’s sovereignty and rule out military force as a means to solve disputes amongst them. In the strongest terms, friendship would be an agreement of solidarity to help each other if one of them is being threatened, expressed for instance in NATO’s article five. This account of friendship is well established in the IR literature. It has a home in the idea of collective security and scholarship on alliances and security communities.³

While the material reading of security remains dominant in IR, the concept has been broadened. Especially among European scholars we have seen a vivid debate over the meaning of security and an embrace of new frameworks for analysis (Buzan et al.

³ Walt (1987); Adler and Barnett (1998); Mueller (2002).

1998) and an understanding of security as a “discursive formation” (Huysmans 1998). Scholarship in this tradition highlights that not only are referent objects and threats socially constructed; their meaning also is a frequent object of political contestation. One approach that has made significant inroad in this discussion is the constructivist emphasis on identity as the referent object. This is the approach adopted here. Identities are a fundamental element of being, hence to speak of the security of an identity is no esoteric matter. Indeed, identities are so central that some have come to speak of ‘ontological security’, a concept stemming from the psychological literature that enjoys growing popularity among IR scholars and referring to a stable ‘sense of Self’ (Giddens 1991). I will use this term here acknowledging that it privileges a particular ontological feature, namely identity.⁴ In general terms, the literature suggests that an actor feels ontologically secure if it is able to reduce (tame/control) the anxiety brought about by the radical uncertainty of life; that is, if it manages to generate a satisfactory degree of certainty and predictability in both everyday life and long term orientation. Put differently, ontological security is achieved by ‘knowing’ ones’ place within and, thus, relation to, the world, by having a clear sense of who and where one is.

The argument here is that friendship plays an important role in generating that knowledge and, hence, in providing ontological security. But how are we to think about this? How and why does friendship stabilise a sense of Self?⁵ To begin with, it would be misleading to suggest that friendship ‘protects’ the identities of the actors involved as this could be read as implying a pre-existing and fixed identity. Yet we know that identities are not fixed or given but evolving and complex. So a reflection about why and how friendship provides ontological security must be embedded in an understanding of how identities form. In other words, carving out the relevance of friendship in providing a stable sense of Self requires a basic understanding of the process in which ‘Selves’ take shape. Moreover, I suggest that friendship is not

⁴ Giddens (1991) uses the term in his exploration of self-identity. IR scholars like Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008) then adopt it from Giddens to make a distinction between physical and ontological security. While this works as a strategic move to introduce a new concept, it would be a mistake to treat the two as categories of the same order. After all, physical being is just as much a part of my ontology as is psychological or emotional being. In the same vein, identity can be based as much on physical features as on ideational or discursive ones. So it may be more accurate to speak of psychological, or emotional, security.

⁵ Scholars of friendship alluded to this function (Allan 1989: 59ff; Pahl 2000: 68f), as have scholars of identity (Giddens 1991: 87-98), yet without greater depth. The two literatures also rarely meet.

simply added to but woven into this process. Friendship and Self are ontologically intertwined. And so an understanding of how identities form, how a stable sense of Self is generated, also allows us to grasp the ontological parameters of friendship. Thus, and quite importantly, in the account presented here the very conceptualisation of friendship emerges out of and is intertwined with a theory of identity formation.⁶

With this in mind, let me briefly outline the theory employed here.⁷ It builds on the phenomenological insight that humans, as individuals and collectives, are incomplete beings that unfold into the world. Their identities are formed not separately from the world but are intertwined with it. More precisely, their sense of Self develops together with an understanding of their socio, spatial and temporal environment. Gaining an ‘identity’, then, is about finding and defining ones’ place in an unknown world by creating a meaningful structure of social, spatial and temporal relations and orientations. These structures of meanings are bundled in a biographical narrative that offers a reservoir of memories and visions, which situate the Self in a socio-spatial past and future. The biographical narrative, in other words, provides the Self with horizons of experience and of possibilities which enable it to ‘make sense’ of where it comes from and where it could be going. Out of those the Self spins an idea of order whose guiding principles – norms and values – manifest what counts as good behaviour. As such, the narrative functions as an “anxiety controlling mechanism” (Giddens 1984: 50) that provides cognitive and emotional stability by positioning the Self in a ‘known’ world from and towards which it can act.

Psychologists have long explored how individuals build and sustain such narratives for their ontological security and as I discuss elsewhere a similar phenomenon occurs on the collective level (Berenskoetter 2012).⁸ That said, even national biographies are not built and sustained in isolation but in interaction with others. Two arguments can be made in this regard. First, actors want to have their identities recognised by others. Thus, a community that identifies with a particular biographical narrative will also seek external recognition of that narrative. Exactly *whose* recognition is sought then

⁶ To be sure, this is just one way to tackle the phenomenon of friendship, but it seems inevitable once we accept the intrinsic role friendship in identity formation.

⁷ For an elaboration of this account, see Berenskoetter (2012).

⁸ Of course, the state is a social configuration that cannot simply be anthropomorphized. Yet scholarship exploring the phenomena of nationalism and other forms of collective identity formation has shown that a sense of Self also exists among collectives.

becomes a crucial and often overlooked question. Here it suffices to say that recognition is required not from just anybody or indeed everybody, but from a *significant Other*. Second, it is hard to imagine a biographical narrative formulated without links to an external Other. Communities formally separated by, for instance, state borders often have overlapping memories and ideas of order. To be sure, overlap *per se* does not provide ontological security; whether that is achieved depends on how the overlap is dealt with.

For the sake of simplicity, let us say that overlap can produce two kinds of relations: enmity, where stability is achieved through borders, and friendship, where stability is achieved through bonds. Much of the IR literature focuses on the former and emphasizes the use enemy images as anxiety controlling mechanisms (Campbell 1998; Neumann 1999; Weldes et al 1999;). Here the argument would be that two actors with overlapping biographical narratives compete for the ownership over the narrative or, more precisely, they seek control over the contested elements of the narrative and its practical manifestation. In trying to gain this control one actor will try to discredit and denounce the competitor's narrative as dangerous and label this Other an enemy.⁹ While the Other may reciprocate in the same way, thereby granting recognition to the Self and establishing a relationship of enmity, an enemy image can also be a purely narcissist construct, a process which involves little, if any, interaction and in which the Other has limited, if any, agency.

I suggest that friendship is a more promising and, indeed, preferred approach. If we take seriously the premise that ontological security is achieved through interaction between Self and significant Other, it seems plausible to choose a relationship capable of making productive use of the relationship. Thus, we turn to friendship because it does what enmity cannot, namely compel the actors to creatively support each other in formulating and sustaining their respective narratives through a shared idea of international order. That is, friends not only positively recognise each other's narratives, they also strengthen them by making productive use of their overlapping experienced space and link it to a shared future. In other words, they commit to investing in a shared spatio-temporal conception of the world. To be sure, no two

⁹ The logic is expressed in William Connolly's (1991) discussion of the problem of evil.

worldviews are identical, nor are they fixed, and so a significant aspect of friendship is about negotiating a shared idea of international order that both sides want to invest in. I will take a closer look at this below; for now it suffices to say that friendship is understood here as a special relationship of choice which does not simply form on the basis of geographic proximity, close trade links or an otherwise high level of ‘interaction’, but through a mutual commitment to use overlapping biographical narratives for pursuing a shared idea of international order. Although it draws on shared experiences and lessons learned, this shared idea is forward-looking in the sense that it is about *building* that order in a shared future.¹⁰ As C. S. Lewis (1993: 43) puts it, all friends are “travellers on the same quest, have all a common vision”. Thus, one might say that states form a friendship through a shared project of ‘world building’ where commitment is confirmed through practices considered by both sides as adequate investments towards realising the shared vision of international order.

An example here is the Franco-German relationship following the Second World War. Both societies emerged out of the war fractioned and ontologically insecure, needing to regain self-confidence and a stable sense of being in the world. Their governments addressed that need by embedding their post-war Selves in a shared project of integration. Without downplaying their history of antagonism, violence and humiliation, German and French leaders used the overlapping experienced space to negotiate and invest in a shared vision of political unity in Europe. To be sure, having to overcome deep-seated feelings of enmity, building up a friendship was a long process that only slowly, and imperfectly, came to involve civil society and establish special bilateral ties on the elite level.¹¹ As such the Franco-German case illustrates that international friendship is a political choice, never free from tension and requiring on-going commitment, yet also has a structural component that survives changes in government. In addition, it reminds that friendship is built not just on the basis of shared ideas of order but also through doing things together. While narratives provide frames of meaning, as Aristotle already emphasised friendship is also carried by common activities, that is, by doing things together. Such activities can take a variety

¹⁰ Note this differs from Kahane (1999) who only emphasizes the importance of a shared history. On the relevance of the future/visions for identity formation, see Berenskoetter (2011).

¹¹ See, for instance, Gardner Feldman (2012, Ch.3) and the contribution by Vion in this volume.

of forms, from regular routine interaction to special symbolic acts, consciously chosen to generate shared experiences and enhance the shared project.¹²

Friendship and Power

Friendship is not only a potent anxiety controlling mechanism and provides ontological security, it is also a significant source of power. Gaining a better understanding of how power operates between and through friendship is not only important to enhance our understanding of the difference it makes in the world, it also helps us see friendship as a political relationship and how it matters in international politics.¹³ In what follows, I suggest that friendship exercises power both in a productive, creative sense and in exclusionary, discriminatory ways. Before outlining this, however, it is necessary to clarify the meaning(s) of power employed. This is not easy as power is an essentially contested concept. In the IR literature it was long dominated by realists who over time reduced its meaning to military resources and territorial control (Mearsheimer 2001).¹⁴ The past decade has seen renewed attention paid to different kinds of ‘soft power’, ranging from Joseph Nye’s (2004) liberal version to more structural ones drawing on Neo-Gramscian accounts of power as ideological control or Foucault’s notion of governmentality established in everyday practice (Guzzini and Neumann 2012). I suggest that both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power are at play in and out of friendship, yet to grasp them it is useful to take a step back and recall how the very concept of power can be understood in two fundamentally different ways, namely in terms of ‘power over’ and ‘power to’.

The ‘power over’ approach is well represented in Robert Dahl’s definition of power as ‘A getting B to do something B would otherwise not do’ (Dahl 1961). This conception, which can be traced back to Max Weber’s classic notion of power as having one’s will prevail in a social relationship, is generally understood as expressing a hierarchy between A and B. This understanding resonates with Dahl’s study, which attempted to measure who possesses ‘power’ in a political community. More precisely, he sought to show ‘who governs’ by identifying who was most

¹² See also the list compiled by Oelsner and Vion (2011: 137). I disagree with Giddens’ emphasis on everyday routines as the primary anxiety controlling mechanism, generally adopted by IR scholars discussing phenomena of ontological security (Giddens 1984: 50; 1991: 37; Mitzen 2006).

¹³ Here I follow Karl Deutsch’s (1967) view that political relations are relations of power.

¹⁴ Classical realists, such as Carr, Morgenthau, or Aron had a more sophisticated understanding. See also Schmidt (2005).

successful in advancing preferences in a series of decisions. Dahl did so by first recording conflicting preferences for the outcome of a given decision among the actors involved to then analyze whose interests prevailed by recording successes and defeats in the decision-making process (Dahl 1961). The resulting understanding of power as prevailing in observable conflict between A and B and, hence of A exercising power over B, is popular among IR scholars and often reduced to mean domination and control through coercive means.

The ‘power to’ lens captures a very different facet of power by directing attention to the phenomenon of (collective) empowerment as highlighted by Talcott Parsons and Hannah Arendt. Rooted in an Aristotelian understanding of human nature, Arendt defines power as “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt 1970: 44). Rather than seeing power expressed in hierarchy and obedience, Arendt sees power as *creative*, as something productive. Like Parsons (1963), who argued that power flows from a social system’s potential to coordinate human activity and resources towards (shared) goals, Arendt points to the force that emerges through people coming together, as exemplified in non-violent resistance movements. This communal, or consensual, conception of power shifts the focus away from Weber’s emphasis on the ‘prevailing will’ to the extent that ‘acting in concert’ creates something new that has not been there before.

Employing both of the above readings helps to see the various ways in which power operates through friendship. The following will first discuss how friendship is a form of empowerment, or ‘power to’, and then outline how this opens the door to ‘power over’ phenomena.

Friendship as Empowerment

A useful starting point for seeing that friendship involves power is the notion that the formation and maintenance of friendship is based on some sort of mutual attraction.¹⁵ Conventionally understood as a force through which two units are magnetically drawn towards each other, attraction may first appear as a form of power two actors exercise ‘over’ each other. However, in line with the earlier point on the relational and process

¹⁵ While IR scholars note that attraction is a central aspect of ‘soft power’, they have not gotten very far in conceptualizing, let alone measuring it. For attempts, see Nye (2004); Bially Mattern (2005).

aspect of friendship, attraction here is less (or primarily) about the Other but about what the relationship enables friends to achieve together. Take, for instance, Peter Blau's (1964: 69) suggestion that attraction rests on approving of each others opinion. In the case of international friendship this opinion would be the conception of the good life embedded in a shared idea of international order and affirmed through practice, that is, through an agreement how to create that order. There are several aspects here that need to be looked at more closely.

To begin with, this idea is negotiated on the basis of overlapping national narratives, that is, on the basis of a sufficiently shared bundle of significant experiences and visions that resonate with each other.¹⁶ Rather than a natural fit, resonance designates a potential that is productively exploited in negotiation over a shared idea of international order and fulfilled in a project of 'world building'. As such, the mutual approval of each other's opinions, or worldviews, is neither natural nor total, but emerges between friends. Second, the mutual agreement on an idea of international order not only provides a sense of orientation it also strengthens the actors resolve to pursue it. This process is not merely stabilizing the friends' sense of being in the world, it empowers them: the creative force emerging out of the process of 'world building' expresses Arendt's aforementioned reading of power as the ability to act in concert and to achieve/produce something together (see also Chiba 1995: 523). In other words, the power at work here is *productive* (power-to) rather than coercive (power-over). It lies in the creative potential of overlapping biographical narratives and is an emerging property generated through reciprocal investment in an idea and, thus, a form of social exchange (Blau 1964).

So if we accept that gaining ontological security through friendship is not merely about preserving but building something (together), we can see that this project empowers in various ways. The psychologically informed notion of friendship as an anxiety controlling mechanisms sees it as providing a cognitive devise enabling orientation in time and space both sides feel comfortable with. Yet as philosophers of friendship all the way back to Aristotle have argued, friendship is also an important source for moral growth and provision of happiness (Sherman 1993). We can see how

¹⁶ On resonance, see Marcussen et al. (1999); Payne (2001).

moral growth and achieving happiness are empowering if we accept that a happy person with strong moral convictions acts differently from someone who is unhappy and unsure about its moral standing. The former arguably displays a higher level of self-confidence and sense of self-sufficiency (albeit one embedded in friendship). Or, as mentioned earlier, that actor shows more resolve to pursue a certain path. That said, while we can say that friendship exerts ‘power to’ by giving us a sense of what is ‘the right thing to do’, it is important to take on board Lewis’ reminder that strong moral convictions should not be equated with goodness. Although for Aristotle and most ancient philosophers true friendship was a feature of the virtuous and moral growth meant coming closer to fully achieving the good life (and, thus, happiness),¹⁷ this must be qualified from both a relativist and universalist standpoint. It is not only that friends’ pursuit of an idea of international order in a world of moral pluralism may have negative consequences, as discussed below. Friends may also reinforce each other’s ‘bad’ views. In Lewis’ words, “Friendship can be a school of virtue; but also a school of vice... It makes good men better and bad men worse” (Lewis 1993: 46).

In either case, the productive effect of friendship can be witnessed in two ways. The first is learning. As captured in the notion of friendship contributing to moral growth, in the process of shared world building friendship does not merely strengthen the Self but transforms it as well (Friedman 1993: 195-202; Allan 1989). Because biographical narratives are never identical, the creative potential of friendship is drawn from the unique experiences and expectations held by the parties which enable them to exchange views and provide each other with slightly different perspectives, thereby stimulating the learning process. As Marilyn Friedman (1993: 197) notes,

“the experiences, projects, and dreams of our friends can frame for us new standpoints from which we can experience the significance and worth of moral values and standards. In friendship, our commitment to our friends, as such, affords us access to whole ranges of experience beyond our own”.

¹⁷ I am aware that I am in danger here of conflating the two, effectively reducing happiness to moral fulfillment. Yet separating them out and discussing the relationship requires a deeper philosophical discussion for which I lack both space and expertise.

This learning process requires that friends are willing to share concerns and to listen, that they are open for learning and moral growth. It is also here, in satisfying recognition needs and in mutually providing stimuli and energy for common projects, where friends relate as equals and contribute on a unique logic of reciprocity (see below). Empowerment understood as a transformative process implies that friends must not only “respect and take an interest in one another’s perspectives” (Friedman 1993: 189) but are also willing to adapt and recognize the productive benefits arising from doing so. Applied to the state level, this implies the willingness to adapt domestic orders and the narratives which uphold them, in line with James Rosenau’s (1981) notion of states as adaptive entities changing in response to stimuli from salient environments. To be sure, this does not rule out the possibility that disagreements arise over how to read ‘the world’. What matters is that compromises are made voluntarily, arrived at through deliberations characterized by respect for occasional divergence of views and the willingness for mutual understanding, solidarity and, again, learning (Risse-Kappen 1995).

A second mechanism of mutual empowerment lies in the fact that friends (are expected to) help each other. Or, as Aristotle put it, true friendship is based on reciprocated goodwill (NE, Book VIII, 2 and 8; Smith-Pangle, 2003: 142ff). This is expressed in the phenomenon of solidarity among friends, which can be understood as an expression of support, as providing help in times of need. In this case, the need for friendship as an anxiety controlling mechanisms is continuous. Said differently, the notion of friendship as a dynamic process and a ‘shared life’ (Sherman 1993) suggests that it is not very useful to conceive of solidarity as a singular or isolated act. It is also more than voicing support. Without downplaying the symbolic importance of rhetorical gestures, the practical contribution which substantiates the commitment to shared world building is arguably of greater relevance, in particular if solidarity is expressed in the realm of security policy and is likely to involve some sort of sacrifice. Yet an act of sacrifice for the friend is not an act of altruism: because it is to benefit not merely the friend but is to sustain the friendship, the common project, it also is an act of self-empowerment.

Equally, while expressions of solidarity, and the commitment to cooperation/support they entail, rarely come with a time limit attached, they are not valid indefinitely. A’s

solidarity with B is maintained if it is recognised and valued by B and not perceived as exploitation by A. As such, practices of solidarity are part of a process of continuous social exchange in which both sides invest in the shared project and, thus, contribute to mutual empowerment. To be sure, reciprocity in friendship does not follow a ‘tit-for-tat’ logic and cannot be seen in terms of an instrumental or utilitarian notion of exchange (Hutter 1978: 3; Pahl 2000: 55). This is because, as Aristotle notes, notions of value, return and debt are difficult to assess within friendship. Yet while “friendship seeks what is possible, not what accords with worth” (NE, Book VIII, 14), friends have to give proportionate to their abilities. In other words, while it is clear that among friends there really can be no expectations about what is an appropriate return, this does not mean that no return is expected. It just means that “it is enough ... to do what we can” (NE Book XI, 1).

Mutual empowerment through learning and solidarity is a process that can be witnessed over time, yet they also play out in particular situations. The cooperation between the US and the UK in the run-up to intervening in Iraq in 2003 is an example for the latter. Of course, this cooperation built on a longstanding ‘special relationship’ and, thus, had a structural element that carried the positive personal relationship between the political leaders, George W. Bush and Tony Blair. It also followed military interventions carried out together in Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001), which both displayed acts of solidarity and reciprocity. Yet the Iraq case is significant because, facing potent criticism about the wisdom and legitimacy of the intervention, the two governments mutually empowered each other in affirming the righteousness of their moral assessment about Saddam Hussein as ‘evil’, the necessity of regime change and the appropriateness of military force. While neither the US nor the UK faced a military threat from Iraq, the collaboration rested on a shared self-understanding as (in many respects rather unequal) co-leaders of the Western world with a historical responsibility and a shared vision of international order, including a transformed Gulf region. The mutually confirmed narrative of having to ‘carry the burden’ for the free world strengthened their resolve and belief in having a good cause, allowing both governments to claim legitimacy for their action despite the lacking UNSC approval and resistance from NATO allies like Germany and France. Their internal agreement saw both sides making concessions to help each other, such as Bush supporting Blair’s attempt to get a UN mandate, and it allowed for very

different contributions. While Britain could not provide significant material support to the operation, Blair played a crucial role rhetorically in making the case for war to the American public (via Congress), demonstrating that the Bush administration had ‘good’ Europeans on its side.

Friendship and Power Over

The above example already indicates that the process of mutual empowerment throws up some further facets of power operating within and out of friendship. The remainder of this chapter will first look at power operating internal to friendship, noting that it holds significant potential for friends to wield power over each other. It then delineates how friendship exerts power externally by undercutting international order and excluding, even exercising violence over, others.

Let’s begin with how friends (can) affect each other. One significant effect of friendship exemplified above is that it levels hierarchy. To the extent that the friend is considered ‘another Self’ it cannot, logically speaking, be conceived of as inferior or superior to the Self. As Aristotle (NE, Book VIII, 7 and 11) suggests, formal inequality can be compensated through similarity in virtue (a sense of what is ‘right’), making friendship the one thing which can transcend otherwise divisive hierarchies.¹⁸ As joint investors into the shared project of creating the good life, friends regard each other as equal. This equality does not refer to a right that can be claimed but to an unspoken recognition that the choices and judgments are made from the ‘same’ baseline and for the same aspirations of world building. Thus, as indicated in the US-UK example, this sense of equality – expressed not least in the negotiation of the shared project and mutual recognition of each other’s narrative –bridges inequalities in material resources or formal institutional standing.

Yet bonds of friendship also inversely create a relationship of interdependence: by empowering each other in pursuing a project that entwines their national biographies, friends also come to depend on each other for sustaining the same. Said differently, the social capital contained in friendship, namely the ability to sustain a project that provides ontological security for both, turns into a soft-power relationship in which

¹⁸ See also Hutter (1978); Kutcher (2000).

interdependence exposes its flip side, namely vulnerability.¹⁹ Thus, the reliance on the friend also creates a ‘power-over’ potential: precisely because the significant Other is so vital in sustaining a stable sense of Self, it also has the capacity to undermine it. As Horst Hutter (1978: 12) puts it: “there is no one who is as vulnerable to the actions of Self as a friend (...) no power is as total as the power one has over friends”. This vulnerability becomes a factor when there is deep and enduring dissonance among friends over what makes an appropriate contribution to the shared project. I will not speculate here about what causes dissonance, except to note Aristotle’s point that significant shifts in formal status and resources/assets amongst friends changes conceptions of what/how much can be contributed to the shared project, which in turn may lead to false expectations and a (perceived) corruption of reciprocity (NE, Book VIII, 14). In that case, we may witness the emergence of a power over phenomenon where friends (perhaps unintentionally) coerce each other into changing their behaviour by applying what Bially Mattern (2005) calls “representational force”.²⁰

Perhaps more relevant for students of international politics is how friendship exerts power externally. Whereas modern sociology long assumed that the intimate character of friendship had no broader consequence for society, scholars have now caught up with thinkers like Georg Simmel (1950) and Hutter (1978) in recognizing that friendships are capable of both carrying and undermining/transforming order (Allan 1989, 1998). These ‘external’ effects of friendship become apparent once one takes into account that the world-building process does not take place in a social vacuum. After all, the world built by friends is not *that* intimate, which is to say that the ‘in-between’ in friendship relations is not an exclusive space. Broadly speaking, friends can be seen as affecting third parties/international order in two ways.

First, as illustrated in the US-UK decision to go to war against Iraq without a UN mandate and violating a basic principle of international society, namely sovereignty, friendship has the power of undercutting an established international order. This arises out of the fact that friends apply a double standard when operating in a social environment. Most obviously, friends trust each other more than they trust others and

¹⁹ This duality inherent in relationships of interdependence is discussed for the economic realm by Keohane and Nye (1989).

²⁰ For examples of such dynamics, see Bially Mattern (2005); Berenskoetter and Giegerich (2010).

so are more likely to reveal and discuss their true intentions, concerns and agendas with friends than anyone else. As Goffman (in Allan 1989: 59) puts it “the self that is revealed in our dealings with our friends is closer to our self definition than the ‘self’ we portray in other contexts...friends are permitted ‘backstage’ more than most”. Moreover, in their support for each other friends do not necessarily abide to formal rules and regulations. By definition they privilege each other over others, and so if their commitment to solidarity is in conflict with a broader normative framework postulating neutrality, or impartiality, friends ignore it and engage in what from another perspective appears as corrupt practice. In doing so, they display disrespect for this order and undermine its legitimacy. Hence it can be said that “every real friendship is a sort of secession, even a rebellion” (Lewis 1993: 46)

Second, as perhaps more visible in the Franco-German example of investing in the project of European integration, the creative potential within friendship may also come to benefit others and strengthen international order. Even if friendship is a special, or intimate relationship, the international order friends seek to build does not need to be ‘closed’ to others or detrimental to their interests/identities. Here international institutions come to play an important role. While there is no doubt that friends interact informally and, in a sense, privately, this does not prevent them from also making extensive use of international institutions to negotiate, administer, and manifest the common project.²¹ Friends may adopt international institutions as vehicles for their ‘world building’ project, not only for their exclusive benefit but also to attract and receive support from third parties. Indeed, they may use international institutions to open up their project to others and include them, perhaps to even win them over as friends.

That said, the conception of friendship as an intimate relationship existing in a broader international society means there always will be a tension/potential conflict between those two. And even if the project pursued by friends allows some others to benefit, that has its limits, too. For one, the application of a double standard does not merely exclude ‘third parties’ from decisions and leave them in the dark about the ‘real’ reasons for doing X or Y. Because friendship is a source of self-confidence and

²¹ For a discussion of institutions as structures of empowerment, see Ringmar (2007).

moral certainty, friends are less inclined to listen to strangers and learn from them, let alone accept and engage their criticism. One consequence, visible in Washington and London when planning the intervention of Iraq, is a state of mind akin to ‘groupthink’ which creates a cognitive bias and allows leaders to ignore international and, indeed, internal doubts and opposition to their agenda. Moreover, the project pursued by friends may not only exclude and discriminate against others, but may also involve violent practices against those who (are perceived to) stand in its way, thus exercising ‘power over’ in its most drastic form. US-British military cooperation to build and safeguard an idea of international order again offers fitting examples. For instance, as Peter Harris (2013) reminds, the American use of a joint military base on Diego Garcia, a British colony in the Indian Ocean and the largest of the Chagos islands, builds on the forceful removal of the native inhabitants of that island by the British government and on keeping them in exile. Thus, the Chagossians are third actors negatively affected by the US-UK friendship and one might say with Harris that they are integral to the relationship rather than situated outside of it. The military intervention in Iraq in 2003 also had significant and often deadly effect on many parties, not least by pushing Iraqi society into cycles of violence. And when the main justifying claim Washington and London had constructed – Iraq’s alleged WMD capabilities – unraveled and the many ‘unintended consequences’ of the intervention displayed the limited control the friends had over their vision of re-ordering the Gulf, one is reminded that friendship can also be a source of hubris.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that the phenomenon of (international) friendship greatly affects questions of ontological security and is a significant source of power. It suggested that friendship shapes and reinforces the identity of the actors involved; that is, it stabilises their sense of Self by embedding their respective biographical narratives in a shared project of ‘world building’. It was argued that friendship is not merely an anxiety controlling mechanism but empowers actors through mutual learning, reciprocity/solidarity and the provision of self-confidence through moral certainty. Although the discussion located friendship within a theory of identity formation, its relevance extends beyond the inter-subjective space between friends. Because friends do not float in a vacuum but are embedded in a larger social environment – an international society – their world building efforts not only create an exclusionary

space that seals friends from criticism and creates bias, but also promote an idea of international order which affects others. Thus, friendship is difficult to ignore when it comes to consider the sources and wider consequences of productive power, which, as was noted, can be quite violent vis-à-vis third parties.

It will not have escaped the attentive reader that this chapter also made a fundamental point about what motivates collective behaviour. Namely, it assumed that humans, as individuals and collectives, seek ontological security and then suggested that friendship is the most effective way to satisfy this need. While this is not the place to further elaborate on this rather crucial move, it should be noted that this is not assumed to always be a conscious goal. In other words, I am not suggesting that actors are constantly on the lookout for friends, or weigh all their decisions according to whether they support a particular friendship. That said, the chapter does underscore Aristotle's famous claim that "no one would choose to live without friends" (*NE*, Book VIII, 1). And so the extent that the attempt to gain and sustain ontological security through friendship emerges as a fundamental driver, the chapter has laid out the basis for a theory of action. IR still has a long way to go in developing such a theory. Hence, let me conclude by pointing to three areas for further research. First, while recognising that friends are few in number, there is the issue of multiple friendships and how we can conceptualise 'circles' of friends.²² Another question arising here is to what extent multiple friendships reinforce each other and at what point they come into conflict. Second, while one of the basic points of this chapter is that friendship does not rely on a shared enemy, there is the question of how enmity affects friendship. That is, without reverting back to Schmittian understandings of the political, we need to explore what role enemy images play within friendship. And finally, we need to know more not just about how friendships form and how they affect others, but also about why and how they might weaken and dissolve.

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²² Nietzsche offers some interesting reflections about 'circles' of friends (see Smith 2011: 152).

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