

## THE FRIENDSHIP-GOODWILL CONTINUUM IN ARISTOTLE'S IDEAL STATE CONSTITUTION

*“Friendship seems also to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality” (Nicomachean Ethics 1155a-24)*

What is the greatest and most practical form of social and political relation in Aristotle's model monarchical constitution? Aristotle has given his reader the tools of political science and ethics on a micro level and asked him to solve this problem of the state. In order to accomplish this, a discussion of justice and its relationship to friendship is necessary, as is one of friendship and its relation to politics. To begin with, a process of elimination is in order. It seems that friendship in the truest, most virtuous sense is clearly out of the question. In a state larger than just a few people, it is obvious that not everyone can even be well-acquainted enough to be friends with each other or with the ruler in question, nor would such a ruler be concerned with fully being friends of virtue with the denizens of his city.

This kind of hard-won friendship, the friendship of love and reciprocal goodwill, also has a divisive bent to it, making it less than desirable for the foundation of a stable polity, especially with regard to the ruling individual. Virtuous friendship, however, is not the only option in opposition to the negative relationship qualities Aristotle discusses—there can be unanimity,

goodwill, and friendships of utility. Each should be considered on the basis of political and social sustainability and of the virtue it possesses as an end in itself or a means to an end in order to get at the larger question of the relationship between friendship and justice in a political state.

### Unanimity

Aristotle describes unanimity as a type of relation concerning agreement “about matters of consequence and in which it is possible for both or all parties to get what they want” (Nic. Ethics 1167a-29). Unanimity is the first level of political friendship, but that is not to say that it cannot exist at all levels, for friends of the most virtuous type can be of the same mind as neatly as two people without knowledge of each other’s existence. Unanimity is not even necessarily ancillary to friendship, for friends can disagree. In this way, political unity is certainly not the most tenable position for a monarch to attempt to build upon, unless his citizens be friends first, for if there is discord, agreement gives way easily to faction. While a community in agreement about state issues seems ideal, without a deeper backing for citizen relationships, this unity is easily dissolved, and especially when action is required, agreement cannot be reached and competition begins. Unanimity for the stability of a state is clearly a good, but it cannot be the most desirable end of political interaction, for it is easily dissolved and is only sustainable if it is preceded and enriched by a form more substantial than itself, such as goodwill or friendship of some kind.

### Goodwill

Goodwill is described by Aristotle as “a friendly sort of relation, but not identical with friendship; for one may have goodwill both towards people whom one does not know, and without their knowing it, but not friendship” (Nic. Ethics 1166b-30). Goodwill is what precedes

friendship, and is the founding basis for friendly relations. Goodwill comes of a pleasing exchange, a lovely countenance, or a benefit bestowed, and if it is prolonged, becomes friendship when intimacy is added and excellence recognized in a lasting form. If unanimity can exist in all cases of human relations, it seems that goodwill exists only insofar as it is not discord and it is not fully friendship. Thus, goodwill is not a complete end in itself, nor does it seem to be sustainable for a dynamic populace in every case—men will become friends or they will not—goodwill does not seem to be an enduring condition. For this reason, a ruler would not wish to promote goodwill if he did not wish for friendships to be had between at least some of his citizens, but if goodwill without friendship were attainable in another form, this might be the strongest state condition.

### Friendship of Utility

Aristotle makes it clear that friendships of virtue are the truest and most lasting friendships, but there are friendships of utility that can also be a stopping point along the way to this most virtuous relation. The friendship of virtue is the end of human interaction, but Aristotle says that it is rare and most commonly found in old men who retain the need for other people only insofar as they can get pleasure and happiness from them. In this sort of relation, there is no value added by the introduction of justice, primarily because the bearer of the justice no longer has any need for it, being truly friends with the other concerned. Justice only adds value to friendships of utility, goodwill, and unanimity because the just man possesses it and this is a kind of preliminary state to attaining justice's end, true friendship.

This true friendship would be the most desirable form of relation, save for Aristotle's admission that "one cannot be a friend to many people in the sense of having friendship of the

perfect type with them...but with a view to utility or pleasure it is possible that many people should please one; for many people are useful or pleasant, and these services take little time” (Nic. Ethics 1158a-10). These friendships of service and pleasure are not traditionally long-lasting but also seem more temperate and just in their dealings—they are certainly on more definite terms. These friendships of utility are not ends in themselves when compared with the friendship of virtue, but they seem the more solid and the less likely to do harm to the state than that of political single-mindedness or mere goodwill. This friendship of pleasure or utility is also in some respects less dissolvable than that of virtue, for if a friendship is unequal, it would seem to be easier to bridge a simple gap of economics and the like than it would a gap in personal merit or wisdom. In any case, the dissolution of a friendship of utility would certainly be less tumultuous than that of virtue.

#### Justice, the Ideal Constitution, and the Friendship of Utility

Aristotle is a proponent of a monarchical constitution, the virtue of justice, and the ideal friendship. The final step is reconciling these ideas. To begin, we would be wise to pay heed to what he says of the kind of friendship to be expected in any given state: “one might mark off from the [other kinds of association] both the friendship of kindred and that of comrades. Those of fellow-citizens, fellow-tribesman, fellow-voyagers, and the like are mere friendships of association, for they seem to rest on a sort of compact” (Nic. Ethics 1161b-12). Thus, this friendship of utility would seem to be the primary form of friendship in a political state, aided by goodwill and perhaps unanimity when it furthers the purposes of the ruling body. It is important to note that in abolishing the idea of true friendships as the rule in the populace, Aristotle has effectively given justice back to the dominion of the individual man. If “each of the constitutions may be seen to involve friendship just in so far as it involves justice” (Nic. Ethics

1161a-10), and Monarchy is the most just, then there is to be both justice in the law and justice in the individuals that practice it.

If there is justice in the individual and in the constitution and friendships of utility are aided by natural goodwill, what is the relation of the ruler to his subjects? If goodwill is a precursor to love and friendship but cannot be a held virtue, then it would seem that both the friendship of utility and unanimity are to be utilized by the ruler in a sort of beneficial compact. The friendship would consist in each party (the king and the populace) doing what is required and preserving the state of goodwill—the King benefits his people, the people agree to keep him in power, and while true friendship is not reached, the friendship of utility grows from the goodwill inherent in the systems of mutual advantage: “the friendship between a king and his subjects depends on an excess of benefits conferred; for he confers benefits on his subjects if being a good man he cares for them with a view to their well-being” (Nic. Ethics 1161a-12). This authority figure is expected to conduct himself with justice just as the people are expected to conduct themselves with goodwill, treating both ideas as a means to an end and not as singular virtues. For as the people want friendship and happiness, the King wants not only these but also to stay in power in order to continue conferring benefits on his citizens with a view to unanimous happiness, for Aristotle says that “a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects; for a king who is not like that would be a mere titular king” (Nic. Ethics 1160b-2).

Aristotle’s ideal King would be like a father figure (“It is the ideal of monarchy to be paternal rule” (Nic. Ethics 1160b-26)), guiding and leading his citizenry so as to dissuade them from faction, oligarchy, and democracy and the evils therein. The citizenry would respond in

kind, promoting the King in a symbiotic relationship in which each man uses his internal justice to move the whole of the populace towards happiness and virtue. This relationship would not be of equals or of pleasure, for “the justice therefore that exists between persons so related [superiority of one party over another] is not the same on both sides but is in every case proportioned to merit; for that is true of the friendship as well” (Nic. Ethics 1161a-22). This relationship of justice and then utility by transitive property, would involve friendship of virtuous men, the recognition of advantages conferred by the authoritative leadership, and the idea of personal virtues utilized in corresponding ways for the attainment of happiness and stability for the populace.

Source

*Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle. Trans. W.D. Ross. Encyclopedia Britannica Great Books ed. Vol.

9. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1955. 54 vols. Print.