



The Role of Virtue in Building Strong International Alliances from Aristotle's Concept of Friendship

Prof. Andrew F. Uduigwomen

Department of Philosophy,
University of Calabar, Nigeria

and

Dr. Wilson K. Adegah

Department of Philosophy and Classics,
University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract

International relations of the day have veered off their course of creating a global village to rather leave the world with several imbalances ranging from, but not limited to economic, political, and technological imbalances. Due to the potential chaos that is likely to arise from these imbalances, there have been some concerted efforts to bridge this gap to promote equality, transparency, and cooperation among countries. These have only led to international alliances that can be reduced to one-sided role performance where one party is in the zone of being the provider whilst the other partner is at the receiving end the mark of a provider dependent relationship. Employing a critical analysis, the relationship that is devoid of intellectual reciprocity becomes an imminent time bomb likely to plunge the global world into the very same problem they seek to address with these relations. The aim of examining the role of virtue in building strong international alliances while drawing lessons from Aristotle's concept of friendship comes in handy and is meant to draw out the categories in which friendships latched onto provider dependent relationships fall and the flaws they come with. This will help to suggest the palpable footmark in building friendships capable of guiding the formation of international and political alliances among nations. The idea the paper seeks to project is that the shaping of our international political alliances is provided for by the intrinsic virtues of the perfect friendship of Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*

Keywords: International Relations, Virtue, Alliances, Aristotle, Friendship, Politics, Ethics

Introduction

"Friendship seems 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" (Aristotle 1 155a22-282).

The concept of friendship is seldom mentioned in contemporary discussions. However, this was a concept which, hitherto, had great minds deliberating on and its possible impact on social, political, and any kind of relation. The phenomenon of friendship, with its richness and complexity, its ability to support but also at times to undercut virtue, and the promise it holds out of bringing together in one happy union so much of what is highest and so much of what is sweetest in life, formed a fruitful topic of philosophic inquiry for the ancients (Schall 122). The words of Aristotle as quoted above propel the thought that with the gradual eclipse of friendship in the system and the acknowledgement that friendship provides leverage in all aspects of our lives; there is the need to invite the concept back into deliberations.

We realize that Aristotle, with the intent of developing ethical theories that can transcend the scope of ethics to make an impact in politics and other aspects of life, the ethics bordering on his conception of friendship charts a path for discussions in the civic, social, economic, and political space to accommodate friendship and examine how the alliances in these fields could capitalize on the phenomenon of friendship to run their affairs. Friendship, as presented by Aristotle was and has thus become the fulcrum on which some basic concepts like justice, love, commerce, and many others operate. Remarkably, we seem to be more cognizant of the emotional attachments we have fostered with our families, parties we belong to, and other identity groups than we are of the connection we might have with fellow citizens, the political, and the government. It goes without saying then that, friendship is ubiquitous but entrenched in the fabric of human lives wherein the connection between one person and the other strikes each individual's consciousness when there is a mention of a mutual connection. To talk of mutual connection in our dispensation today, we may be limited to the satisfaction of two concerns. The first is the compassion we may have for others. Also, the self-interest we may satisfy from the connection marks the second. An acceptance of these two concerns would imply the reduction of friendship to a preference based on something shared. A rediscovery of the appropriate kind of friendship to establish means a restoration of the Aristotelian conceptualization of friendship to its place in our discourses.

As part of the aim of this paper, the concept of friendship in Aristotle's understanding will be re-tailed for the global setting we have today. This will be done to show how relationships in our global world can be fitted into the larger theory of friendship suggested by Aristotle. This will be done with an overarching way of seeking to ethically situate global relations between individuals or nations within the scope of virtuous connections between the parties involved. This is intended to target the growing imbalances in the economic, political, technological, and environmental spheres of the world. If any attempt to bridge the gaps of imbalances succeeds, the impending imminent chaos could be avoided. In a rather hortatory tone, the measures put

in place to enhance international relations only leave the world with two factions; the benefactors and the dependents. This has led to a system of international alliances devoid of substantive intellectual stimulations and mutual understanding of goals. These are characteristics of one-sided role performances in a relationship likely to plunge the global world into the very same problem they seek to address with these relations.

The Precursors of Aristotle's Formulation of Friendship

Aristotle's *Eudaimonism* sets the tone for further examination of his conception of friendship. In developing his ethical theory, Aristotle opined that all human activities are directed toward the attainment of certain ends. This means that every human action serves as a means to the attainment of an end the attainment of which leads to further ends until the ultimate end or good is reached. This ultimate end is of what is termed the *Summum Bonum*. The *Summum Bonum* is the ultimate end or good to which all our actions are directed (Broadie 154). A development of this nature led to the educing of a distinction between two types of goods/ends as a panacea to living a *Eudaimonic* or flourishing life. He distinguished between intrinsic and instrumental goodness. In effect, intrinsic and instrumental goodness are key concepts to consider when it comes to Aristotle's ethical theory. Intrinsic goodness is exemplified in things that are good in themselves while instrumental goodness is characteristic of things whose goodness is directed towards the attainment of other goods. The understanding we get from this distinction, that is, the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goodness circumscribes his concept of friendship and how he delineates between the types of friendship (Cooper 290).

Succinctly, the good that is desirable in and of itself, and is esteemed uniquely for its usefulness to others is considered as intrinsic goodness. Happiness, virtue, and knowledge fall within the scope of intrinsic goodness because these phenomena define a flourishing life. Aristotle believed that the ultimate goal of human life is to achieve well-being, or *eudaimonia*, or a state of flourishing. The achieving of the state epitomizes intrinsic goodness. Instrumental goodness, however, concerns ends that are achieved for the purposes of achieving other goals or ends. They border around things that are valued for their usefulness in achieving other goals. Money, power, and fame, among others, are the things that can be instrumentally valuable or good since they facilitate the attainment of other goals in life. Instrumentally good phenomena have a peculiar place in the moral theory of Aristotle, nonetheless, they are ultimately subordinated to intrinsic goods (Aristotle).

The traits of the various goods spelled out by Aristotle have a level of significance that supports his moral theory. One thing that stands out from this distinction is that it furthers our understanding of the ultimate goals and values of our lives. It is from this that we get the clarity that the intrinsic goals are the ultimate goals of human life, while the means by which these goals are achieved are the instrumental goals. Based on this elaboration, the moral virtues of Aristotle's ethics are explained and these virtues, some of which include courage, justice, and generosity, have intrinsic goodness. This intrinsic goodness is developed through habit formation and practice.

They are virtues valued for their own sake but not for the attainment of any instrumental benefit. In like manner, friendship is an intrinsic good that ought to be developed through habituation and practice for it is relevant to human being's flourishing.

Aristotle's Account of Friendship

The lucid account of Aristotle on friendship is presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The great portion of *Eudemian Ethics* and other works of his give an account of the phenomenon. It is at the back of this that Heyking and Avramenko opined that the impactful ideas and foregrounding for the concept of friendship come from Aristotle amongst his contemporaries (6). He rejected the maxims of the prevailing doctrinal portrayal of friendship as a phenomenon linked to courage, republicanism, and resistance to injustice where it is assumed that the things of friends are in common and friendship is one soul in two bodies (14). According to Russell, Aristotle's friendship originates from the mutual desire of man to enjoy pleasure, to enjoy a mutual advantage, or to share in a mutual good. This leads to the classification of friendship into three types (748-749).

First and foremost, there is the friendship of utility. This type of friendship, according to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, comes from the mutual advantage individuals are likely to enjoy from other partners in a friendship. It thrives on the idea of mutual usefulness which extends to encapsulate the benefit the parties involved in the relationship can provide for each other (Aristotle). The basic idea inherent in utility friendship is the valuation of the other partner's usefulness, examining what they can bring on board as benefits to them. The focus is not on the nature of the person with whom the relationship is being established but only on the benefit derivable from him or her. The factors that call for the formation of connections such as these are hinged on external factors subject to change (Russell 750). It is due to this underpinning motivation for friendship that Aristotle classified it as the kind of friendship that is less stable and less satisfying, for a change in the external factors holding the companionship would translate into a change in the benefits derivable from a person, and as a sequel leading to the dissolution of the friendship. Put otherwise, a utility-based friendship is likely to end if the targeted utility is not achieved. A classification of this kind of friendship under the concept of good will fall under instrumental good. This is because it looks forward to benefits that can be derived from other people for one's interest.

The friendship of pleasure constitutes another classification of friendship from the Aristotelian point of view. The object of love or motivation for this particular friendship comes from pleasant affection. A friendship of pleasure is, thus, centred on the enjoyment or pleasures that parties involved in such companionship can provide to each other. Michael Pakaluk adds his opinion that the value placed on each party involved is drawn from the pleasure they can contribute to the companionship. The implication is that the individual self is not considered as a value in such friendship. These enjoyments or pleasures come from the shared activities between the parties concerned. This friendship is a momentary friendship because it may not thrive beyond the shared activity responsible for the enjoyment or pleasure (925). Hence, it can be stated that the move away from the shared activity responsible for pleasure would mean the absence of pleasure, and this consequently, leads to the collapse of such friendship. For this reason, the friendship of pleasure is considered the least of friendship since it is

characteristically less stable and less satisfying. This sort of friendship, barring its unstableness, finds a place mostly among the youthful group who value the pleasure and enjoyment that comes from spending time with friends who share their interests. In short, the friendship of pleasure falls into the instrumentally good category just as the friendship of utility.

The friendship of goodness is the type of friendship in Russell's estimation gets its content for mutual relation from intrinsic goods—the desire of the good. These goods include shared values, virtues, and goals. This informs Aristotle's definition of the friendship of good as the kind that is based on a shared commitment to intrinsic goods such as virtue, wisdom, and wellbeing. By virtue of these underpinning factors of the friendship of good, it exhibits characteristics such as mutual respect, trust, and affection (764). The parties involved in this type of friendship value the individuals they are involved with for these individuals' own sake rather than for any instrumental benefits that can be provided by these individuals—this signifies the presence of mutual respect and admiration. In the friendship of good, the pursuit of virtue sees to it that each individual provides the necessary help to make their partners better while focusing on achieving the Eudemean life together through a long-term connection. This is the only friendship, according to Aristotle, in which the parties involved open up to each other intending to be honest and to build trust since they are convinced their partners have their best interests at heart.

Aristotle, in structuring the broad range of meanings of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, stipulated that the best model of friendship is the friendship of the good. He, therefore, articulated that all the various kinds of friendship take their meaning as forms from the paradigmatic or best model of friendship—the friendship of good people targeting the sustenance of their virtues throughout their lives (Aristotle). The difference between perfect friendship and the imperfect kind lies primarily in the goal or end being targeted. For the friendships of utility and pleasure there is an instrumental goal or end in mind. Differently from the two, the friendship of good has an intrinsic target. What is deducible from this understanding is that the instrumental goals of both friendships of utility and pleasure make their definition contingent on the friendship of the good. This, according to Stephen Salkever, does not mean the friendship of good belongs to a higher order of being than pleasure or utility. It however means that although all three forms of friendship meet the definitional requirements for friendship, where the friendship of goodness does so straightforwardly, the friendships of pleasure and utility do so only in a way or only with certain qualifications. The extent to which both friendships, that is, partial friendships express their pleasure and utility indicates their focus only on parts of human life—a pleasure to be enjoyed in the instance of the friendship of pleasure and utility or advantages to gain from utility friendship. The focusing of attention on these aspects of human needs directs their concentration to only sections of the needs of man. The friendship of good, differently, assigns importance to every aspect of human life. In a bid to enhance every partner through a mutual connection, each party comes into such friendship with the expectation of making meaningful impacts in the life of another. This, in Aristotle's definition, makes friendship of the good primary or perfect (5456).

Marking a distinction between the perfect and the partial conceptions of friendship comes as an upshoot of Aristotle's biological distinction between the parts or events that make up the life of any organism and its life as a whole. What the virtue friendships possess that partial

friendships do not is that they take seriously the problem of life as a whole (Salkever 73). The practical implication of his theoretical distinction between perfect and partial friendships is that we need friends to help us take seriously the problem of living a good life, a problem that is unique to human beings. If we are to take seriously the quest of living a good life, then we ought to establish connections targeting the enhancement of our whole life but not specific aspects of our lives. This is because the entirety of our lives is more than the sum of its parts. Hence our desire to lead good life would necessitate connections that would draw man closer to virtue.

The concept of the friendship of good was promoted by Aristotle with the assumption that when people engage in partnership and alliances their actions will be morally and intellectually guided. He does not out of the bloom connect friendship of good with virtuous friendship, however, the intent was to morally regulate the mutual activities that people are to engage in. Hence, his idea of the friendship of the good finds some leverage in the theory of virtue. Considering this assumption as something to go by, then the perfect friendship resides in the backdrop of regular mutual activities which find their restrictions within the confines of virtues. This means that the activities to mutually undertake are restrained within a certain scope where there will be no room for extremes as well as deficiencies. The implication gotten from this is that Aristotle's portrayal of the virtuous or perfect friendship was intended to situate the kind of alliances and partnerships to form within the scope of the mean wherein the mutual activities people are likely to share in are means between two extremes the deficiency and the excess.

Aristotle's Friendship of Good as a Blueprint for Forging Political Alliance

Aristotle's contribution to the concept of friendship from the whole and part stratifies friendship into two where there is the perfect friendship, formed based on the good, differently from the partial ones built on pleasures and utility. Based on the understanding derived from Aristotle's principle of best or perfect friendship, it can be alluded to that friendship, to him, given an in-depth description of how humans can build relations through peaceful, pleasant, and considerate means compared to the Justice approach. It is important to mention that while friendship was treated in his work as a virtue, the majority of times the concept came up was to depict an interaction or togetherness among human beings, and this is the sort of interaction found in the societal or family setting. Friendships and personal relationships are commonly the intimations of political deliberations (Heyking 6). Indeed, politics is conducted by persons with distinct personalities, moral aims, and motivations.

When considering the Aristotelian assertion that man is a political animal, it becomes easy to understand the interplay of personal relationships as the crucible of political alliances and moral decision-making in connection to such alliances (Kraut). The idea the paper seeks to project is that the shaping of our international political alliances is provided for by the perfect friendship of Aristotle outlined above. The friendship of good, in this regard, becomes the standard for regulating political amities while these amities are only attempts to approximate the perfection of the friendship of good. This means that political friendship, of course, is not so high as virtue friendship because political alliances capitalize on a wider but lower array of the human goods associable with the necessities of lifenecessities that include material well-being and security. However, the goods that make life worth living are found in the perfect

friendships we build. These are friendships whose moral horizon targets higher pedestals than the target of political friendships. Friendship of good or virtuous friendship, in this sense, stands out as the measure of political friendship.

For the friendship of the good to be characterized as the measure of political alliances, then the intrinsic goal is at work in such alliances. This is the point where this paper alludes to the fact that the intrinsic goal or end which is targeting Eudaimonia creates that connection between friendship (political alliance in this case) and virtue. Coming from this tangent, the friendship of good fosters like-mindedness between the various parties involved in an alliance. Like-mindedness pushes the desire to enhance the habits of affection and love within oneself. With this, the good of the others involved become one's good. In addition to this, other factors that are intrinsically geared towards happiness are inculcated in the alliances (Heyking 9-10). This will then ground the connection between the international allies on virtue (happiness).

The concept of like-mindedness conscientizes individuals or nations in the formation of alliances to embrace mutual goals. This assumption acknowledges the high chances there are for people involved in friendship to come to terms with the existence of mutual goals (this may be something to be produced or something constitutive of the activity itself) in the friendship they seek to foster or have fostered, experience these shared goals, and have a commitment towards them. This would, in the international space, mean the phenomenon where two countries or more have a shared understanding of what they want to achieve through their relationship and are committed to working together to achieve those goals. As a result, there is a clear and mutual understanding of each country's interests, priorities, and objectives, as well as a willingness to cooperate and collaborate towards a common goal. As might be expected, the mutual recognition of goals and commitment to work towards them creates the platform where communication, negotiations, and compromises are made to ensure all parties involved are content with the outcome of their alliance. This is what Aristotle makes reference to when he claims that friendship of good aims at intellectual development and pursuant to virtue (Badhar 44).

As an upshoot of the preceding claim, there builds a mutual understanding between the various nations or individuals involved in the alliance or friendship on the particular role to be played by each in the pursuit of the common goal propelling the connection. From this, there is a clear-cut outline and appreciation of the responsibilities and contributions toward achieving the shared objectives in a partnership or alliance (Moore and Frederick 19). This may come in the form of recognition and respect for each other's strengths and weaknesses, as well as an acknowledgment of the unique contributions that each country can make toward the common goal. As might be expected, a military alliance would call for the appreciation of the military virtues of each nation involved. This then necessitates the need for an understanding of the individual roles targeted at fulfilling their obligations toward the common goal which in this case may be ensuring security and stability. The idea is not far from similar to the alliances based on economic partnerships wherein there is the need to understand each other's roles in providing resources, expertise, or market access. It is only through these understandings that the various partners can make meaningful contributions toward achieving shared objectives. This mutual understanding also, in effect, characterizes like-mindedness within partners.

Like-mindedness also terminates in intellectual stimulation between partners in an alliance. It is evident that within the framework of mutual knowledge and commitment, nations engage in the sharing and exchange of ideas, knowledge, and perspectives between each other. This may be targeted at nurturing innovations, creativity, and problemsolving. Intellectual stimulations may come in forms like intellectual discourse engagements and debates, sharing of information and expertise, and collaborative research and development projects. Intellectual stimulations are epitomized in situations where countries may collaborate on scientific research projects, share best practices in areas such as healthcare or education, or engage in cultural exchange to promote mutual understanding and respect. By exchanging these ideas and perspectives, the countries involved learn from each other and develop new solutions to common challenges. These new solutions are predicated on the development of new technologies, products, and services that can benefit their economies and societies.

Examining these elements of like-mindedness reiterates Aristotle's position that the friendship of good is the primary and perfect kind of friendship or partnership. From the elaborations in the preceding paragraphs, the best-fit friendship or alliance projects various qualities that cover every aspect of the partner nation's affairs and ascribe importance to these affairs. In a bid to enhance every partner through mutual connections, each party comes into such friendship with the expectation of making meaningful impacts in the life of another. These expectations are geared towards achieving *Eudaimonia*. It becomes evident that lying underneath these benefits enjoyed from the like-minded international alliances are happiness, virtue, and knowledge which fall within the scope of intrinsic goods. By virtue of these intrinsic goods, the well-being or flourishing of the ally nations becomes the principal motivating factor upon which they make their choices and decisions. This is the ultimate goal for a nation's attainment of *Eudaimonia*.

One gets insights on how political or inter-state alliances ought to be crafted on the perfect friendship of Aristotle. Judging from the elaboration above, it would be a misplaced priority for a nation attempting to build any external relations not to consider the goals necessary for the building and sustenance of such alliance, to also not have mutual understandings that tie in with the maxims of their partner states, and to stimulate the intellectual capacities of the ally states. This is mostly seen among alliances that are targeting specific benefits to attain from their partner states. The consequences of this disposition are dire to the sustenance of the nation involved. Countries who are interested only in getting monetary assistance from their counterparts in alliances where the terms of the agreement are meant to have the donor regulating the national activities of the borrower epitomize the concept of a lack of mutual goals, no common understanding of responsibilities toward each other, and no intellectual stimulations between the two. This kind of relationship is reducible to provider-dependent relationship. The provider-dependent relationship sees one party performing a peculiar but unchanging duty towards the other (this may be the provider in this case), while the other based on the state of affairs functions as the receiver. This condition, in Badhar's opinion, defeats the idea of each individual performing the functions as both active and passive partners. The ramifications of this are not different from the utility and pleasure friendships whose aims are not to achieve the full complement of a flourishing life but some short-lived benefit targeting just an aspect of life (46).

Conclusion

The basic of this paper is to draw a connection between the political alliances that are forged in our present global world and the theory of friendship proffered by Aristotle. The paper alludes to the fact that the intrinsic goal or end that is, happiness or flourishing in Aristotle's conception creates a connection between virtue and our relations with people. It is the position of this paper that if this connection is something to go by, then alliances forged on the basis of Aristotle's friendship of good present palpable elements that can guide international, political, or inter-state alliances. To achieve this, Aristotle's theory of *Eudaimonia* was examined as the flourishing human life consisting essentially of morally and intellectually excellent activities. This state of flourishing increases the urge within a person to share these activities. It was established within the writeup that all of Aristotle's substantial accounts seeking to outline the marks of friendship stress mutuality and reciprocity as vital elements of genuine friendship, which culminate in like-mindedness between allies. The like-mindedness of the allies breeds qualities identified in the paper as virtuous acts capable of promoting the perfect partnership. The key thing that comes at the back of all these elaborations is that friendship, be it, political, social, or civic can only be perfect or virtuous if each party involved understands the part each has to play as both a passive and an active ally. It is only then that the true mark of virtuous friendship can permeate any partnership.

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