Friendship and International Relations

Using a Case Study, Address Whether one can Speak of Friendship in International Relations

"War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading" (Hardy, 1920: 71). Implicit in this claim is that the social sciences have been predominantly concerned with the question of conflict and enemies, whilst marginalising the themes of peace and friendship. Indeed, there seems to be a stark discrepancy between jargon of policy makers, in which the notion of friendship is an integral and frequently invoked part, and the lack of scholarly attention the concept receives (Wendt, 1999: 298). The intention of this paper is to bridge this gap between academia and practice by critically engaging with the concept of friendship in the context of international relations (IR). Rather than simply being a pedantic question of semantics, the relevance of conceptualizing and investigating whether friendship exists in IR will yield a tangible insight into the motifs of states' behaviour. Due to the limited scope, this paper will focus on friendship between countries[1], rather than leaders or peoples.

First and foremost, friendship will be conceptualized before it can be engaged with critically. Thereafter, the underlying ontological assumption will be discussed before its applicability to states is scrutinized. In subsequence, the Franco-German relationship will serve as the case study which shall illustrate the theoretical discussion. The central thesis of this paper is that the notion of friendship is used misleadingly without due theoretical discussion. The defining characteristic, altruism, is arguably incompatible with the very raison d'etre of states, namely advancing the interest of its citizens. The analysis acknowledges, however, the crucial importance of social bonds established between states, which may alter and even converge their self-interests; henceforth it suggests the concept of partnership instead.

The definition of friendship is contentious among scholars; Wendt proposes straightforwardly that "allies engage in the same basic behavior as friends, but they do not expect their relationship to continue indefinitely" (1999: 299). Feldman simply regards friendship as the outcome of reconciliation (2012: 2). Kupchan identifies "setting aside grievances, escaping geopolitical competition, and constructing a relationship that precludes the prospect of armed conflict" as defining elements of friendship (2010: 17). The common thread of these definitions is the failure to capture the crucial element of friendship – altruism – without which it could neither be distinguished from partnership, comprising mutual trust and common goals, nor Security Communities or Democratic Peace democracies (Deutsch, 1957; Doyle, 1983; Berenskoetter, 2007: 650). Aristotle, however, differentiates between friendship of utility, pleasure and virtue. Whilst the former two are motivated by self-interest, Aristotle suggests that true friendship is only "the friendship of good people similar in virtue" (1999: II.6). Oelsner and Koschut invoke the term normative friendship to clarify Aristotle's notion of virtue; they argue that "normative friends genuinely trust each other because their relationship is not based on instrumental rational thought process and utility-based cost-benefit calculations but is manifested as an emotional and moral disposition" (2014: 14-5). Mutual trust, reciprocity and honesty are necessary elements of friendship, but insufficient in themselves. Only normative or virtuous friendship, based on overcoming self-interests, deserve the name.

Friendship when applied to IR, implies that states' behaviour is motivated not only by material but social forces (Finnemore, 1996: 2). This assumption resonates in the theoretical rationalist-reflectivist debate (Keohane, 1988). Reflectivists propose a social ontology: agents are social actors, whose identity is shaped by mutual interaction and thus product of unique "historical, cultural, political and social contexts" (Hopf, 1998: 176). States' behaviour is not

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teleologically pre-determined by anarchy, but rather a result of its identity and interactions (Wendt, 1999: 247). IR, consequently, is not necessarily a Hobbesian realm, but a reflexive community in which social bonds could be constructed to unite states in a common goal and create mutual trust (Berenskoetter, 2014: 264; Adler, 1997:339). Rationalists, however, rely on a materialist ontology: agents are autonomous, whose identities are exogenously formed by the distribution of material power (Checkel, 1998: 326). Consequently, states are "functionally undifferentiated" and "peace is mainly a function of the geometry of power in the international system" (Waltz, 1979: 97; Mearsheimer, 1992: 220). Thus, they behave like 'billiard balls' denying the very existence of social bonds and depicting political friendship as oxymoronic (Berenskoetter, 2007: 652; Lu, 2009, 43). The following example, however, discredits the rationalist insistence on materialism as the sole determinant of states' behaviour. For the United States, Wendt suggests, it makes a difference whether Canada or Cuba are militarily strong, thereby shedding light on the existence of a social relationship which constructs these different meanings; for the perception of a threat, it matters who possesses certain military capacity (1992: 397). This valuable contribution demonstrates the existence of social bonds between states which have a meaningful influence upon respective interests (Hopf, 1998: 189). Yet, this does not inevitably imply the existence of friendship in IR, as the latter extends beyond social bonds to include self-sacrifice.

In order to address the viability of self-sacrifice, it requires investigating the very nature of states. Its raison d'etre as the arbiter of justice is to establish domestic peace, advance the public good and thereby further the interest of the citizens (Locke, 1997; Rousseau, 1997).[2] This purpose is formulated as 'the national interest'; and despite scholarly disagreement about its constitution, it is widely recognised to drive states' behaviour (Burchill, 2005). Here, it is essential to highlight that national interests may change as a result of socialization to include other states' interest. However, that is not a sign of friendship but *partnership*; interests may change, but its nature of determining states' behaviour does not. Altruism implies a certain opportunity cost for the citizen; if country A self-sacrifices itself for country B, it is the citizens of A who have to bear the costs. This, however, is incongruent with the purpose of a state, unless that sacrifice is in the self-interest. By logic, states cannot be altruistic and hence friends (Keller, 2009: 67; Sloterdijk, 2009: 9). Yet, this argument does not suggest that all states are 'functionally undifferentiated'; as Wendt's example outlines, social bonds enhance trust, openness and therein reduce uncertainty between states (Hopf, 1998: 188). These characteristics, therefore, mark a state of partnership, but not friendship.

The evolution of Franco-German relations exemplifies the flaws of the concept of friendship and underlines the proposed notion of partnership. The subsequent paragraphs demonstrate how the two countries overcame the Hobbesian relationship of 'hereditary enemies', manifested by Napoleon's invasion of German lands in 1806, Prussia's victory over France in 1871 and eventually German aggression in the two world wars of the 20th century (Germond & Türk, 2008: 1; Rovan, 1945; Marcowitz, 2008: 13ff.). Titled by Charles de Gaulle the "miracle of our time", the success and longevity of German-Franco reconciliation and partnership is largely due to common policies which created social bonds (1971: 450). Consequently, they resulted in convergences of national interests in many realms, mutual trust and reduced uncertainty. However, the enduring dominance of the respective national interests as driving forces of policy-making, thereby subverting the notion of friendship, has been evident throughout.

The aim is not to provide a chronological narrative of Franco-German relations since 1945, but an analytical framework of cognitive evolution and collective identity formation – the convergence of national interests as states regard the interest of the other as their own – to demonstrate the closeness of their relationship, yet also perseverance of self-interest (Wendt, 1992: cf.387). Krotz and Schild propose two paramount institutional frameworks through which the aforementioned processes were enabled over the past decades: regularized intergovernmentalism and public exchanges (2012: 5).

The Elysée Treaty of 1963 is widely celebrated as the caesura of not only Franco-German but European relations (Fischer, 1992). Signed by de Gaulle and Adenauer, the 'Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on Franco-German Cooperation' institutionalized permanent intergovernmental cooperation and anchored the bilateral relations in international law. Regularized intergovernmentalism signifies intensive interaction as it comprises here that through annual 'Franco-German Ministerial Councils' "the two governments consult each other before every important decision in all important questions of foreign policy" (Kortz&Schild, 2012: 57). Beyond specific policy coordination, this framework has created social bonds and meaning: it has standardized bilateral

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policy interactions and therein created trust, bound foreign policy personnel, and established standards of normality, fostering mutual understandings of aims and expectations (2012: 68). Moreover, coordinating policies and setting common goals has facilitated creating a collective identity; either side identifies with interests and values of the other. The latter is manifested in numerous symbolic events and gestures as well as tangible cooperation in the military realm (Feldman, 2012: 8; Pfeil, 2012: 8). Furthermore, the common project of advancing the economic and political integration of Europe, and the Franco-German collective identity mutually reinforce each other: either creates as well as necessitates trust, interaction and a convergence of national interests (Münkler, 2015: 53).

Beyond interaction on a governmental level, bilateral relations have been underlined on the public level. Enshrined in the Elysee Treaty, both countries have pursued an extensive youth exchange and language programme, signed an agreement to establish a commission to address contentious question in history, supported Franco-German prizes, and established 2200 town twinships (Feldman, 2012: 84). The former German ambassador to Paris, Herbst, insisted that "we have knitted a net of human ties […] These ties are more than a mere addendum to the official relations; they give official relations, like the solid fundaments of a house, robustness and endurance." (1978). In congruence with regularised intergovernmentalism, these public interactions deconstruct the other by enhancing mutual knowledge and hence increase bilateral trust. Feldman summarises, "in the annals of international relations there is probably no equivalent of the dense network of ties, institutions, and common policies that bind the policy elites and societies of France and Germany today" (2012 : 79).

Nonetheless, the collective pursuit to integrate Europe also illustrates the permanency of self-interests in the bilateral relations. Whilst consensus existed on the overarching goal – furthering European integration – the motifs differed starkly. Beyond obvious economic advantages, the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 for example was driven by the French desire to control the German heavy industry to prevent rearmament and German aspiration to escape its international isolation (Schöllgen, 2013: 34). The common initiatives bore advantages for either side; France extended her political weight beyond their economic and demographic capacity and ensured control of Germany, whilst the latter avoided sparking isolation and fear of hegemonic aspirations (Münkler, 2015: 52). Demesmay therefore argues that "the legitimacy of the German-Franco cooperation is dependent on the European context" (2012: 37). It follows that the partnership has not been an end in itself, but means to achieving a superior goal: advancing the national interest, here the integration of Europe. It was not altruism that led to Franco-German cooperation but self-interest, despite the fact that they increasingly homogenised and included the wellbeing of each other (Küsters, 2012). The recent substantial disagreements on the handling of the European Sovereign-Debt Crisis and subsequent cooling of relations indicate the limits of bilateral cooperation when national interests are in jeopardy (Economist, 2014).

To conclude, the paper has presented a nuanced view on friendship. Whilst it does not reject the capacity to construct meaningful bonds between states, friendship is refused as theoretically unsound in the realm of IR. Altruism as the crucial component of friendship is incompatible with the purpose of states to further the interest of its citizens. Nonetheless, countries have the faculty to overcome the Hobbesian state by creating meaningful social bonds and thereby converging national interests and pursuing a common project. The Franco-German partnership demonstrates the possibility to overcome hostility by close interaction that creates mutual trust and certainty, whilst equally revealing the permanency of self-interest in their actions, despite the special relations. Henceforth, it is important for policy-makers and scholars alike to acknowledge that friendship and hence altruism cannot exist between states. Further research could address friendship in consideration of leaders or peoples, and expand on specific events that demonstrate the permanency of self-interest. Critics may note that the analysis is limited by the rigorous understanding of friendship; it rests heavily upon the assumption of altruism as defining characteristic. Some may highlight the evolving contextual understanding of friendship and hence not preclude the possibility of it per se. However, Lord Palmerstone eloquently captures the central argument of this paper: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow" (1848, 122).

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[1] The terms countries and states will be used interchangeably.

[2] Of course, this attitude is not shared by Marxist and anarchist philosophers who believe in the need for a stateless society, see for example Marx & Engels (1997).

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