My interest in bringing concerns of classical theories of friendship into contemporary political discussions comes from the ubiquity of this phenomenon in post-Communist Russia, on the one hand, and the absence of thinking on friendship in mainstream political science, on the other. Indeed, the central place of friendship in such classics of political theory as Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine has only recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. For example, rather than relegating friendship to a politically marginal private sphere, these thinkers offer a discussion of the "political friendship" that may serve as a model for a project to address the troubles of contemporary Russia. Obviously, this possibility cannot be realized through a mechanical application of their work, but will require a rethinking based on a close examination of the actual practices of Russian friendship.

This paper will describe the range of possible concerns of such a study, first by stressing the relevance of friendship as a means of cohesion and then by giving an overview of debates in political theory on the issue of friendship. Some conclusions on the relevance of political theories of friendship for contemporary Russian experience will be offered in the end.

Importance of Friendship in Russia

My interest in thinking about friendship stems from the ubiquity of this phenomenon in post-Communist Russia since, as some observers would maintain, this may be a saving grace for the country. Indeed, with all other resources ensuring peaceful social cohesion severely depleted, friendship may turn out to be the only extensive resource easily available. Yet, the topic of friendship in Communist and post-Communist societies is severely understudied. For example, given its ubiquity and salience, there has been remarkably little scholarly analysis published on issues of friendship the Soviet Union. Perhaps in the only notable exception, Vladimir Shlapentokh described friendship as one of the most valued social relationships in the USSR. He cited data from one 1981 empirical study to stress the difference between Soviet and American perceptions of friendship and to highlight the extraordinary importance that Soviet people ascribed to friendship: 15.8 percent of Soviet respondents met friends every day, 32.3 percent once or several times a week, and 31.2 percent - several times a month. For the

Page 1
In the us of the same period, the median was substantially lower: 4.49 times a month for young bachelors and 3.08 times for married couples. Face-to-face interaction with friends surpassed all other leisure activities in terms of time spent, except for watching TV, because friends played the role of confessors for each other, served as the means of communication alternative to official mass media, and helped each other in procuring scarce goods and services in the conditions of the economy of deficit. Hence, Soviet official sources never exalted friendship; Pravda never ran an editorial on it. The only scholarly Soviet study that directly addressed the subject was more concerned with expounding historical views and philosophical doctrines on friendship from Aristotle to Hegel than with actually examining the peculiarities of Soviet friendship. It hinted, however, that unconditional trust and the possibility of confessing and discussing personal problems at any time made Soviet friendship an unofficial moral value. My own work on the formation of the basic unit of Soviet society, a self-policing work group of allegedly equal builders of Communism - the designation of which was conveniently transliterated into English as kollektiv to stress this specificity - has also shown that close interpersonal friendship was always suspect in the eyes of the powers that be because of its potential contribution to creating a “false kollektiv” that challenged the official ones. Friendship


Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 3

built informal networks that subverted official collective surveillance and discipline. Bringing all these accounts together, one understands why friendship became a suspect value for the Stalinist regime: friends did not abandon each other even when the kollektiv attacked one of them. A friend, by definition, then, was an individual who did not let you down even under direct menace to himself or herself; a person to whom me could securely entrust one’s controversial thoughts since he or she would never betray them, even under pressure. Friendship thus in a sense became an ultimate value. produced in resistance struggle in the Soviet Union: any ascribed category of human relationship could crumble under the threat of terror.
denounced parents, wives betrayed husbands or vice versa, and so on. By contrast “friend” was not an ascription but an achievement; it was a definition forged by terror and thus represented a dearly earned status.

This value of close interpersonal friendship in informal life developed, however, not only as a result of terror but also because a friendship network became the main arena for unofficial individualization, for revelation of knowledge about oneself and the formation of self-identity. This function of Russian friendship, one may argue, did not disappear even in the current conditions of the radical weakening of the repressive state, and the contemporary salience of friendship in Russia is not a result of strong or weak state institutions.

My book suggested that one of the sources of centrality of friendship for Russian life lies in the fact that friends form an arena for existentially important communication through which the sense of a given individual self emerges. Curiously, submitting to a periodical review by relevant others - upon which Soviet citizens habitually relied in their everyday lives in order to establish the sense of their selves and check previous self-evaluations - was an unintended spin-off of the uniform purge practices in the official sphere, themselves an heir to the penitential techniques of self-cognition practiced by Orthodox Christianity for ages. That is, a network of close friends was instrumental in the establishment of the sense of an individual self through voluntary submission to a review by relevant others in situations as birthday parties or famous regular “kitchen” discussions of ethical concerns.


5 Kharkhordin, The Collective and the Individual, chapters 2 and 5.

In other words, in later Soviet society, friendship as a moral value was tested in milder but more widespread struggles, while it also served as the arena for the emergence of selfhood. Still, the obligation to withstand pressure in order to be called a true friend and to be admitted to rituals of construction of the self of your friend persisted. Dyadic and triadic interpersonal relationships and larger networks of friends constituted the unseen underpinning of everyday life in the Soviet Union. These relationships made life simultaneously tolerable and intriguing for Soviet citizens, as well as for the Sovietologists doomed to do research amidst the grayish landscapes of Soviet life: who would live in a society consisting of obedient automatons, duped...
Friendship as a Means of Civil Cohesion

After the collapse of the Soviet regime, Russia has inherited friendship ties as very important part of its social terrain. Friendship spans a complicated set of transformed elements of the Soviet society and new social entities that together constitute post-Soviet society, as I argued elsewhere.**6** Friendly networks that formerly existed as if on the obverse side of society have emerged into the open. On the one hand, they have become an obvious part of the post-Soviet business world and of what some observers call clan politics. At least, some friendly networks, transformed and institutionalized to a certain extent in assigning related government or business positions, lie at the core of many power groups. In stating this, one needs to be doubly cautious, however. First, the term "clan" came into wide mass media usage after a famous article by David Stark, "Privatization in Hungary: From Plan to Market or From Plan to Clan?"**7** Successful as a rhyming catchword, the metaphor of a clan is somehow misleading: it would be far-fetched to model relationships of dependence and patronage in contemporary Russian politics on Scottish kinship lineages. Rather, following an initial set of distinctions proposed in a classic article by Eric Wolf, we may envisage a spectrum of interpersonal relationships that may develop from a friendship into a clique and then into a patron-client relationship.**8** A former friendship network that united equal partners in the Soviet days might be transformed upon entering joint pursuit of wealth or power in the post-Communist days into a clique, which is defined as the group tied, not by polyvalent and multifaceted interests in each other, but by "a set of roles associated with the particular job". In short, a friendship network abandons existentially important communication and is transformed into a simple group of more or less equal political or economic entrepreneurs, which makes this group rife with potential conflict and accusations of betrayal.**9** If further developments bring obvious differences in status, a clique might devolve into a patronage network, when a "big man" moving from one office to another carries with him (or her) a whole following of loyal clients.

Neither pattern of group arrangement is novel to twentieth century Russia: T.H.

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6 Oleg Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (September 1998).

7 East European Politics and Societies 4, no. 3 (1990).

8 Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 5.
Rigby attracted attention to cliques in the internecine fight for power and promotion in the "cryptopolitics" of the late Soviet system, while patron-client relationships were clearly one of the ubiquitous phenomena of the Stalinist system: see accounts about a whole army of middle managers arriving with the new director of the new industrial plant or of Stalin's attempts to root it out.

In contrast to cliques and clienteles, friendships are polyvalent networks of equal and close partners who are genuinely interested in an unspecified number and types of concerns of each other, rather than only in job-related concerns as in cliques or in an exchange of power for loyalty as in a clientele. Thus, those friends' networks that withstood the temptations.

8


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The best literary account of what happens with the Soviet friendship network, when it enters business, is a famous novel by a former top Logovaz manager - Yulii Dubov, Bolshaia paika [A Big Serving] (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000).

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T. H. Rigby, Political Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev (Aldershot: Edward Eigar, 1990),

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Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 6

of jointly pursuing wealth or power seem to retain the functions they inherited from the old days: they provide the most fundamental means of social welfare and defense for the individual, but - more importantly - ensure the maintenance of the arenas of existentially important communication contributing to personality formation among their members.
The usual description of the post-Soviet social terrain stresses the weakness of the state: post-collectives and the recently created business groups are tied into post-Soviet society by means of hundreds, if not thousands, of semi-private and semi-public protection providers that use the threat of physical violence to maintain the predictable behavior of civil bodies. The weak state has brought into existence a whole plethora of entities that use violent non-civil methods to ensure the more or less smooth functioning of businesses. However, all of these bodies, civil and militant, are penetrated by the networks of friendly concern, mutual help, and nonviolent influence. The central problem of contemporary Russian civil society thus may consist in making uncivil society - meaning that it uses military and frequently barbaric, rather than civil and civilized means to solve the problem of its cohesion - into a civil one. It might then entail transforming the relations of uncivil violence according to the principles of friendly networks, the only extensive resource of benevolence that Russia has.

Objections and Research Questions

There are a couple of objections usually immediately raised against this type of argument. The first objection holds that what people most frequently call friendship in Russia is actually something else, and that the rhetoric of altruistic friendship is just a disguise for obvious relations of gain. Another objection is that, even if we ever find genuine altruistic friendship in Russia, it is exclusive by definition: it links a few private individuals in an exercise in mutual benevolence, opposing a broader society. Thus, it would seem impossible to link the whole society employing the principles of contemporary private friendship. These objections, however, are not insurmountable obstacles. Recent thinking on friendship may provide us with grounds to adequately address both of them.


Kharkhordin, ECP paper, p. 7

Let's take the first objection. On the one hand, "clan politics", which are so often painted out as the main feature of political struggles in Russia, can be described as friendship only with a great deal of conceptual stretching. In fact, as I have argued, these "clan politics" are either clique politics that are inherently unstable and rife with conflict, or patronage politics. Now, no matter what people accustomed to ordinary usage of the term "friendship" in Asian or African villages are prone to see in Russia, a stable exchange of material benefits for personal allegiance and political support is hardly ever called "friendship" in contemporary Russian parlance. The blatant inequality of a patron-client relationship prevents people from calling one's patron or superior "my friend".
On the other hand, exchanges between more or less equal partners very often merit the title of friendship, and here the analysis of such sociologists as Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski looks very appropriate, because it helps us to carefully dissect the intricate mix of utilitarian and altruistic components of a typical modern friendship between equals. For example, the work of Bourdieu suggests that people linked in networks tend to misrepresent their own relationships of equivalent exchange of gifts and services in normative terms of altruistic friendship. They rely on these terms to make the functioning of exchange relations smooth and unproblematic. In his corrections to Bourdieu's theory Boltanski has shown, however, that many human relationships we cherish do not employ the critical capacity of a suspicious social scientist who uncovers acts of equivalent exchange allegedly disguised by altruistic language, nor should this capacity he used at all if we are to keep these very relationships going. That is, according to Boltanski, what he calls relations of agape and what we may call "authentic friendship" may develop out of a regular gift exchange after participants in this exchange consciously stop monitoring the value of gifts exchanged.16

Friendship then becomes sharing in active forgetting, that is, jointly stopping the act of critically evaluating inputs brought into the relationship. In her recent work on the informal exchange of favors in Russian society Alena Ledeneva used some concepts of Boltanski but for some reason did not employ this very idea.17 On the basis of her and Boltanski's work, one can show how relations of authentic friendship may emerge from the most widespread relation of everyday equivalent exchange of favors in Russia. The Soviet phenomenon of blat, for example, the exchange of services of access to scarce goods in the conditions of the economy of shortages may have frequently given rise to genuine friendship when participants in the blat network ceased habitually monitoring the value of services exchanged and thus started acting for the sake of their friend himself or herself. Even in the Soviet days, the most cynical relationships may have engendered the most altruistic. This mass potential for altruistic behavior survives in post-Communist Russia as well.

The second typical objection - stressing the exclusive character of modern
Russian friendship at the expense of broader society - may be challenged on different grounds. Modern friendship seems to have become an exclusive private relationship involving a few individuals only after the epochal transformation brought about by the appearance of the impersonal market and bureaucratic mechanisms in the Western world. For example, as Allan Silver has persuasively argued, thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, who were among the first to theorize this change, thought that only after commercial exchanges between individuals had become subject to transparent market evaluation did pure, disinterested emotional ties between individuals become possible. Without the need to procure favors, gifts, or services by means of others - since people could now get them in the open market - were people expected to be drawn together by genuine interpersonal sympathy.18

However, until this great transformation that rendered friendship and enjoyment of interpersonal communication a private pastime, there was a wholly different classical tradition that viewed friendship as a public virtue and a common good for the polis. Classical political theory thrives on discussing the issue of friendship. Recent studies by Alasdair MacIntyre,17 Alena Ledeneva, Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).18 Allan Silver, "'Two Different Sorts of Commerce'– Friendship and Strangership in Civil Society," in Public and Private in Thought and Practice, ed. Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Bernard Yack, and Jacques Derrida,19 to name just a few, have rediscovered this overlooked tradition of theorizing "political friendship" that started with Aristotle and went through Cicero, and Augustine almost to Montaigne: ancient Greeks - and early Christians, to a lesser extent knew how to befriend each other in the thousands, and this experience can shed some new light on our modern problems. That is, in Classical Greece, Greeks talked of hetaereia (tight interpersonal networks, effectively being groups of male peers who grew up together and fought and participated in city politics together), different types of philia or xenia (different types of well-wishing), and political friendship proper, politike philia. This last concept will concern us more than the others in the exposition that follows.20

Political friendship was looked upon as a species of friendship for gain (utility friendship) that presupposed equal exchange of contributions and gifts. That is, among the three types of...
friendship (for pleasure, for gain, and virtuous friendship), political friendship clearly had a very specific transitional status between the second, middle and third, higher form of friendship. Briefly, political friendship had one peculiar feature that neither friendship for gain nor virtuous friendship possessed. Although Greeks thought that befriending many was impossible as a rule in utility friendship this led to too many quasi-contract obligations, in virtuous friendship this led to necessarily ignoring the demands of your dear friends and thus to a decrease in your own virtue - in political friendship, one could be friends with many other citizens without servility or loss of virtue.21


Getting slightly ahead of the exposition, I would like to mention another curious quality of philia politike. At least according to one influential interpretation, partners in political friendship banded together for material gain, but they also gained in virtue as a result of this friendship. In other words, equal exchange and a common pursuit of the shared goal remained, but these gain-oriented relations contributed to the growth of virtue among all the people involved in political friendship.22

These theoretical considerations seem to offer some promising avenues of thought on using the potential of friendship relations in Russia to ensure public order and develop civil society. However, many questions still remain unanswered. How does one reconcile...
in practice the principles that tie small interpersonal networks at the expense of the broader society with the demand to integrate these networks together in this very society? How does one transform the ancient ideal of common undertaking in the pursuit of virtue to fit the realities of present-day Russia, where virtue hardly seems to be a word to ever be used? Which principles of friendship can be employed in transforming the vast terrain of uncivil life, if one is not just naively trying to make everybody befriend everybody else? Answering all of these questions would require at least a painstaking study of the classical sources and of contemporary works that rethink the classic experience, an objective for future study. What will follow now is a preliminary attempt to map possible approaches to dealing with such questions.

Aristotelian Ruminations

Communitarian thinkers have demonstrated a marked interest in the problem of political or civic friendship. Many have noted one of the starting sentences of the eighth book of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: “Friendship also seems to hold cities together, and lawgivers seem to be more concerned about it than justice...”22 For when people are friends, justice is unnecessary, but when they are just they need friendship as well.”23 Maclntyre, who explicitly brought this quote into the central debate of communitarian thought, seemed to represent friendship as a prerequisite of any community, whether just or unjust. In practical terms, he depicted friendship as a series of sets of personal friends or their overlapping networks that together constitute a sharing of all in the common project of creating and sustaining life in the city, a sharing incorporated in the immediacy of an individual's particular friendships. Of course, he stressed that political community envisaged as a set of friends' networks was alien to a standard liberal individualist model; but, insisted Maclntyre, that is how many Americans still tended to think of such social endeavors as schools, hospitals, and philanthropic organizations. Thus, friendship is an affection that arises in common allegiance and common pursuit of goods.24

Bernard Yack has made an especially illustrious attempt to challenge this communitarian vision and show the purely instrumental, self-interested character of political friendship in...
Aristotle. He points to barter and market exchange, which Aristotle describes as a kind of political friendship, and notices no element of close personal emotion in them. A thin well-wishing needed to qualify the relationship as friendship is preserved in these relationships only to the extent that there exists “the disposition of human beings to develop a sense of concern for the good of individuals with whom they share goods, identities and activities.”

When political friendship, not mediated by clearly stipulated obligations—which Aristotle calls “ethikon friendship for gain”—develops, emotions based on accusations of betrayal of these obligations threaten the very existence of the polis. Yack therefore concludes that Aristotle is a realist who is in favor of the minimal well-wishing that exists in stable political friendships like those based on clearly formulated exchange agreements.

The majority of those writing on friendship in Aristotle dispute this rather thin notion of political friendship. The influential interpretation of John M. Cooper uses a discussion of the goal of political regimes to shed more light on Aristotle’s sparse lines dealing with civic friendship as such. His argument then rests not only on all direct elaboration on the topic of political friendship in the various Ethics (such as 1161b13, 1163b34, 1167b2, 1171a17, 1242b22) but also adds a discussion in Politics (1280b5-38) on why citizens have to care about each other’s good life so that no vicious or unjust person takes part in polities. A polis, in this excerpt, is said to care about the eunomia (the good character) and virtue of its citizens. Cooper writes: “According to Aristotle, then, a city is a kind of community that depends upon the friendly interest that the citizens take in one another’s qualities of mind and character”, as well as in their economic interests. In Cooper’s opinion, political friendship does not require the deep empathy that Yack ascribes to a communitarian position, but it does require goodwill and concern for the moral qualities of other citizens. Thus, he rejects the common undertaking model of MacIntyre, but also rejects the minimal well-wishing model of Yack; a shared concern for the virtue of others becomes central for Cooper.

Sibyl Schwarzenhach, who follows Cooper’s exposition on Aristotelian friendship, tries to adapt this interpretation to the needs of modern Swiss democracy. After freedom of conscience was established by the Reformation, the notion of “thick values” that unite people in...
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political friendship based on religious unanimity should be abandoned, she says. Schwarzenbach proposes to tone down the radical intensity of any similar kinds of political friendship and to introduce a consensus on what she calls “second-order values”, instead of the Aristotle-inspired common pursuit of shared “thick values.” These second-order values would include well-wishing toward the other, tolerance, abiding by the law, acknowledgment of the universal principle of respect for others, and perhaps the new value of care and friendship. Also, given the professed liberal ideal of the impenetrability of the borders of private life, she proposes that people caring about the virtue of others should concern themselves only with the “public political character,” rather than with the comprehensive moral qualities of fellow citizens.27

This project retains a stress on virtue, but it aims at checking the moral virtues of others, a project of dubious quality. At least in the case of post-Communist Russia, Cooper/Schwarzenbach’s paradigm seems very questionable. One could argue that the USSR was an example of repressive Aristotelianism: concern for the virtue of a fellow citizen was best exemplified in the procedure called the purge, in which the comprehensive moral character of each Communist and later, each Soviet citizen, was checked at periodic individual screening sessions staged by every work collective. The state cared about the virtue of citizens, all of whom were officially called “comrades”, and all of whom shared the same goal of the good life,

Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 318.

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Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 13
defined as the radiant ideal of Communism. The end result of this politics of state-promoted friendship based on unanimity and care for virtues was disastrous.

Friendship as Communication Between the Distant and Dissimilar

Two recent theorizations seem to try to recover the radically different Greek experience of political friendship, and in so doing they distance themselves from the classical formulations of the Aristotelian theory of friendship. The Aristotelian system, according to one of these theorizations, is based too much on the model of enforced rulership rather than on the contest among equal friends for excellence in the eyes of relevant others. This is the position of those who follow Hannah Arendt’s stress on pre-Socratic friendship as a model for free politics. Another theorization is linked to the works of Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot and tries to transcend the Aristotelian view of friendship as a reciprocal
symmetrical relationship of a similar ego and alter ego. It aims at recasting political friendship as non-reciprocal and at introducing radical dissimilarity between friends to the point of eliminating any symmetry in their relationship.28

Let us first see what the followers of Arendt have to say on matters of friendship. She rarely mentioned this category in her written work – an address on Lessing, a few lines in The Human Condition, and the transcript of the 1954 lectures at Chicago are almost all we have. But her commentators consistently point out the centrality of friendship in her life and writings: a search for the new vinculum, a bond that would tie people together in a truly human, political, rather than a natural way, and would thus distinguish them from herd.

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Peter Fenves, “Politics of Friendship – Once Again,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 32, no. 2 (Winter 1998-99), elucidates these points very succinctly.

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Animals or gods.30 The Latin term in question comes from Augustine, on whose concept of love Arendt wrote her first dissertation. But she deemed Christian love for a neighbor unpoltical, and thus she later opts for another bond – fellowship based on debate and deliberation that allows immortal deeds to be registered. As she states in the 1954 lectures, what characterizes friends is an unending debate on how things appear to them. Just saying the doxa – how things appear to you – without the need to come to a final resolution and absolute truth, is what makes a conversation between friends so special. By discussing the different perceptions of the common world that lies between them, uniting and separating them simultaneously, friends establish and sustain this in-between, a world as some phenomenologists would understand it: a unity of shared things that set up the coordinates for prospects for meaningful action. Acts of immortal quality acquire an arena in this world, while debate and deliberation produce stories of great deeds as automatically as fabrication produces artifacts.

Friendship thus is not modeled on joint commercial pursuit or dividing something, it
is about being partners in establishing and maintaining the common world. One could say that the central feature of friendship for Arendt is its background quality: she does not discuss it very often, concentrating rather on attracting attention to the agonistic character of pre-Socratic politics, on the constant striving to perform an immortal deed of superior excellence, but friendship is what makes all this agonistics possible. Friendship is “the common regard for the in-between”, friendship sets up this background - the world that serves as the arena for struggles and contests in the foreground. Without friendly discussion, a world would remain inhuman, says Arendt - one could almost take that to mean that no humanity is possible without a fundamental friendship in discourse that founds the common world.

Her approach is pre-Socratic, of course, in that she abandons the need for a Platonic absolute truth or correct world-view imposed on all. All citizens are equal in expressing their different views of what lies in between them, and the greatest virtue of a statesman, a primus inter pares, is to be able to bring all of these different views (doxai) into one unified sensus communis, a common sense of the world, shared by all but perceived differently. The appearance of a philosopher-ruler breaks this background friendship and establishes a state with one philosophical truth imposed on all. The genuine political friendship is then lost, together with love for the common world; the struggle is unleashed to tame the fundamental condition of human plurality and unpredictability by forced rule that makes actions predictable. Concomitantly with the substitution of rulership for politics, a warm feeling develops among the oppressed that gives rise to the notion of fraternity, so poeticized by Rousseau some time later. This is no equivalent for friendship, however, in Arendt's opinion: people linked by fraternity have no responsibility for the world that they have lost. Once freed, these former pariahs do not become friends who build a free politics in a common world; rather, they remain worldless and...
In Arendt's view, friendship is what makes people constitute the world between them; it is a background quality of debate and common deliberation that allows distinct and plural partners to establish and maintain a shared world without violence and direct rule over one another. Friends in this polis do care about the virtue of others, but they do not care about enforcing these demands of virtue by orderly communal pressure. Rather, an ongoing contest decides who is most virtuous, while friendship sets the stage for this contest.

A second recent theorization of friendship— that proposed by Jacques Derrida—also stresses the background quality of political friendship. Derrida provides his own Aristotelian exegesis, discussing the relevant quotations on civic friendship contained in Nicomachean and Eudemian Ethics, but then shows how the usual characterization of political friendship as a mutual advantage friendship is destabilized by a famous remark, ascribed to Aristotle, "O friends, there is no friend." Derrida points out that this classic rendition of the phrase from Diogenes Laertius that was used in many commentaries (most notably, by Montaigne and Nietzsche) can be also interpreted in a more conventional way: "He who has many friends, has no friends." This last interpretation is in line with Aristotle's assertions that friendship of virtue is impossible with the many. But the undecidable condition of two competing interpretations—a paradoxical appeal to friends that tells them they are no friends, and a logical statement that better fits what Aristotle wrote in other places—is less interesting than the aspect of appeal to friends inherent in every version of interpretation. If the first interpretation has an appeal "O friends" right before our eyes, the second has it in an implicit form, since Aristotelian treatises were directed to his friends—disciples in the Academy, for example—and thus may have the same emotional invocation attached in the beginning even of this seemingly most dry theoretical statement.

In other words, there is a performative aspect in both sentences that we tend to overlook if we look for constative meaning only. Following Hanna Pitkin, one could say that both interpretations are quasi-performatives, in that they have a part that conveys a constative meaning and a part with implicit or explicit performative (illocutionary or perlocutionary) effects. In Derrida's approach, an interlocutor in discourse on friendship becomes a friend himself or herself by at least being willing to listen and understand the enunciation produced by the other. This well-wishing present in the agreement to understand is very thin, but it is there.
nevertheless:

This request for friendship, this offer of friendship, this call to coming together in friendship, at least to hear, the time it takes to hear, at least to finally agree, the time it takes to agree on the meaning of the sentence, is ... an inflexible hyperbole of philia, ... because its featherweight vulnerability would offer no foothold for a reversal of any kind ... And if politics were at last grounded in this friendship, ... the politics of this hyperbole, would this not be the break with the entire history of the political, this old, tiring and tired, exhausted history?36

This performative politics of friendship also concerns Maurice Blanchot. Writing on Bataille's death, Blanchot states that only the death of our friend makes it clear to us that we can hardly speak of him. During his life, we could always speak to him, but we cannot speak of him now, since a radical existential abyss separates us from his unique experience.

We shall never breach this abyss, no matter how hard we try. During his life we could afford to overlook this abyss and stress similarities between his experience and ours; his death now makes this illusion impossible. The only thing we could do now, in the radically asymmetrical relationship with our deceased friend (since he is dead, he cannot reciprocate), is to provide incessant but always incomplete answers to the question "Who was Bataille?"., based on his remaining works. But this question is doomed to remain unanswered.37

This asymmetrical relationship is characteristic of any literary community that ties together the deceased writer and his latter-day-reader friends and would not surprise us. The point of Blanchot's philosophical analysis of this posthumous friendship, however, also has a direct political bearing: in his opinion, this is the generic structure of what he calls the unavowable community. Friendship established in performative effects of a speech act, friendship as a background feature of any literary community, is, in his opinion, also at the heart of such politics as exemplified by the May 1968 events in Paris. A community of friends that gathered on the streets and barricades of Paris was "a community denied community": this friendship ultimately toppled De Gaulle, but once the crowds disbanded, nobody could easily grasp what had brought these people together.38 The radical alterity of these...
friends engaged in May 1968 politics, the absence of any common ground that could justify their being together, is akin to the radical alterity and insurmountable difference that is stressed by Blanchot in his friendship with the deceased Bataille. Literary communities united by friendship (which serves here as a background condition of a successful speech act) and political communities of a novel kind share the notion of friendship as a non-symmetrical relation of radical alterity between its parties, rather than a symmetrical reciprocal relationship between similar ego and alter ago that Aristotelians like so much.

Derrida's and Blanchot's notion of political friendship embodied in performative effects of each understandable utterance might seem very strange and alien to us, or so thin that it does not merit being called friendship at all. However, it is precisely so strange and alien because it carries some features of Greek philia politike, which moderns would hardly characterize as close.

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Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 18

to our habitual notion of private and personal friendship. In a sense, we are all Greek in that we retain this capacity to befriend another with a help of performative effects of a special type of speech acts. Thus, perhaps we should not be looking at the ancient texts to find what they might tell us about friendship. We should better explore how they embody friendship in their very functioning, how they establish friendship between an author and a reader, this minimal philia politike that we would hardly call friendship now. Not all texts would qualify, however: we should first explore only those we are more or less sure embodied friendship in their form- and here classic texts about friendship are our best example (our best friends, one is tempted to say): most of them provide a reader with an offer of befriending an author as the prerequisite for a correct understanding of this text.

Friendship as a Configuration of Diverse Practices

A brief overview of attempts at establishing a background friendship as offered by a text provides an exhilarating sense of many as yet unexplored possibilities. The first rendition of the topic of friendship in the form of a philosophical dialogue, Plato's Lysis, provides us with a description of friendship among boys and of love for boys (both captured, of course, by the same word philia). 39 Ignoring what Plato says on friendship and concentrating on the
performative
effects of the text, one might propose that this dialogue offered a temptation
to a young reader:
enchanted by Plato’s words and thrilled by the lack of resolution of the problem
discussed in the
dialogue, a reader was expected to come seek the answers in personal
communication with the
author and, as a result of this encounter, to fall for Plato’s ideas and style,
to befriend him, and to
befriend wisdom. This strategy of offering friendship by means of the text,
though not as obvious
as in Lysis, is manifest in other classics as well.

Lysis is generally considered to be an “early” dialogue, different in form and effect
from such mature expositions as The Symposium, for example. This makes its
performative
strategy less intricate and more visible. For recent debates on this dialogue, see Don Adams, “A
Socratic Theory of Friendship,” International Philosophic Quarterly 35, no. 3
(September
1995).

Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 19

I shall not comment here on Aristotle’s texts and their addressees in the
Academe, since
we have already briefly touched on this topic. Suffice it to say that later
philosophical schools (of
the Hellenistic age) similar to his are frequently taken to be the only true
remaining embodiment
of the tight interpersonal friendship of classical Athens.40 Friendship served
as the background
quality for producing philosophical truths, including truths on friendship
itself. Later, in Cicero,
we encounter a similar but very curious friendship offered to the reader. His
dialogue Laelius. De
Amicitia opens with an address to his friend Atticus that clearly “bares the
device” of
performative strategies employed in the text. Cicero says that he has imagined
this dialogue so
that truths stated in it seem more persuasive and so that Atticus recognizes
himself while reading
it. Obviously, Cicero means that Atticus will identify with one of the virtuous
characters of the
dialogue and thus will see himself mirrored in the text. However, he may also
imply that Atticus
will perceive the skillful and virtuous hand of Cicero himself, who has been
arranging the text in
a very specific way, and thus perceive his alter ego.41 In both cases, however,
the reading of
Laelius is supposed to raise the virtue of Atticus and also of us, modern
readers, taking his
position centuries later. Befriending Cicero is a background act that is
required from the reader in
order to understand the text in all its intricacies.

Augustine also expects his reader to befriend him, although this friendship
would be
different from the one with Cicero. In his texts, Augustine is always with
friends and disciples;
he is hardly ever alone. Even in his famous scene of conversion, he abandons his
friend Alipius,
with whom he has been spending time reading the Bible, just for a short moment
of time and
after prostration and crying under a tree in an orchard, goes back to him to
read yet another line,
which solidifies him in his conversion. As it turns out, Alipius has been experiencing the same thing. Having congratulated each other on such an event, they go to share their joy with Augustine's mother, another devout believer. Now they are all friends in Christ. A new type of friendship is born: turn away from former fallen friends, turn yourself to God in solitude, but then immediately look for new friends in God, those friends who have experienced the same conversion.

40

Hutter, Politics as Friendship, 49.

41

Atticus, as we know from historical records, was selling Cicero's letters and thus served as a small publishing house, a kind of machine for immortalizing the great deeds of Cicero - a final service to his deceased friend.

42

St. Augustine, Confessions 8.12.

Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 20

conversion. In this exposition on pagan friendship turned Christian, the story also gives a clue on how one should be reading this text itself: to become a friend of the author, to become Augustine's alter ego, a reader should abandon the world and turn to God - only after this exercise will he or she join the circle of the elect that truly understand this text.

Nietzsche requires a similar conversion, in a sense. In the introduction to Human, All Too He gives advice on how to become a “free spirit” by means of training and revelation. The truth to be revealed, however, is the opposite of Augustine's — God is dead, and free spirits linked by this truth are friends linked by a loss. Indeed, Nietzsche is looking for friends, but for as yet non-existent friends, as he asserts, hence his attempt to create them by advising potential free spirits who read his books. These spirits will therefore enjoy a friendship that is based on the experience of a double loss: a loss of God and a loss of Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche's text is a reaching out towards future friends, bridging the gap of his death as well. Perhaps one might say that faith in God is replaced in Nietzschean writing by faith in a friend; but this new faith in friendship is necessarily predicated on a loss - Nietzsche explicitly makes friends only with those who will come after him.

A loss as a central feature of any friendship, a radical abyss that separates friends no matter how close they are, was already mentioned in the discussion of Derrida and Blanchot, who took up these Nietzschean topics. Aphorism 376 from Human, All Too Human seems to nicely sum up this conception of friendship as a non-symmetrical and radical
alterity: just think about the different opinions we have and the many reasons for misunderstanding, and you will see how fragile is the ground on which our friendships rest. Friendship resides in self-delusion: to remain your friends, people have to deceive themselves concerning your nature. Also, would not any of us be deadly offended if we for a minute realized what our friends knew about us deep in their hearts? But let us be tolerant to others the way we are tolerant to ourselves, writes Nietzsche, and the old Aristotelian maxim will be recast: "O enemies, there are no enemies."

Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, section 2 of the introduction.

A more detailed and accurate analysis of friendship in and with Nietzsche can be found in Oleg Kharkhordin, "Druzhba svobodnykh umov: vozmozhno li nitssheanskoe soobshchestvo?" [Friendship of Free Spirits: Is a Nietzschean Community Possible?] in Nietzsche and Contemporary Western Thought, ed. Viktor Kaplun (St. Petersburg, Moscow: Letnii Sad, EUSP, 2003).

Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 21

Alterity highlighted in this Nietzschean aphorism can be dealt with by jointly forgetting the precarious basis of friendship, a remedy proposed by the aphorism. Also, this alterity can be overcome by reaching out for a friend who will come afterwards, a strategy that Nietzsche employed by offering his texts to his future reader-friends. Derrida and Blanchot noticed what Nietzsche not only said in his texts but also did with the help of his texts: his offer of background friendship.

Let us sum up. So far I have given some examples of strategies of befriending a writer and a reader that different classic texts on friendship imply. I have tried eschewing the analysis of what these texts said about friendship, not taking these texts to be containers of a blueprint to be implemented in reality. I have concentrated on the "how" of these texts rather than on the "what": how do authors establish friendships with their readers, necessary for the understanding of their utterances? Applying to the texts of Derrida and Blanchot such an analysis becomes very complicated: their strategies of befriending the reader relate to Cicero's attempts at befriending as higher math relates to simple calculus. Suffice it to say that Derrida and Blanchot are intentionally opaque and paradoxical, eloquently stressing the unbridgeable alterity of our friend the author. They are intentionally non-symmetrical, so that almost any trace of reciprocity is abolished: readers can hardly identify with Blanchot as their alter ego, and hardly any reader could write in the same manner - thus friendship with him is difficult if we are looking for
similarities and symmetries. Another hint on Blanchot’s strategies of befriending the reader, even if this friendship is of a very special kind and may seem rather strange to many of us, is offered by one of his rare direct political remarks. In his words, a community of friends conceived akin to a literary community is “a war machine” that has a goal of destruction of society.45

That the May 1968 events, which Blanchot gives as an example of the unavowable community, might have been a revolution against mass society and the conformism attending to it is a well-established platitude. Thus, one would expect that the community of friends that appeared briefly in 1968 was against “society” understood as Heidegger’s das Man, that it was Blanchot, Unavowable Community, 48. In this very excerpt he talks about the community of lovers, but earlier compares it to the May 1968 crowd, in which everyone could “mix with the first comer as if with an already loved being, precisely because he was the unknown-familiar.” (30)

Paul Rabinow has shown that only by the 1830s did the French word Societe started to habitually designate all those living in France and concomitantly sociology became possible as a science describing all people joined in this entity.46 Vadim Volkov has investigated a similar development in the Russian case47 – only after the 1860s’ reforms that had liberated the serfs and the concomitant development of the mass press did the Russian word obshchestvo cease to designate the public of the salons of the opening pages of Tolstoy’s War and Peace, where the “good society” of Russian aristocrats engaged in polished conversations in French, and came to express the notion of the reading public and later the notion of all people living in the same country, tied by a system of norms and laws applicable to all. Heretofore, the Russian nobles and the Russian peasants could hardly be described by a single term obshchestvo this joint description presupposed a profound effort of bringing together their lifestyles and mores and molding a universal standard of civilized behavior. Some would say that this epochal break was completed only by the Bolsheviks, who imposed the universal structure of Soviet das Man on each citizen or, better, socialized everyone in accordance with the demands of this set of unobtrusive norms guiding everyday behavior.

But if société, obshchestvo, societas is a historical and a very specific...
configuration of practices, it might wane or even disappear one day, like other previously dominant configurations of practices - for example polis, imperium, Christianitas, to name but a few. Bringing together people in their radical alterity and plurality without a mandatory common ground, rather than striving for the homonoia (unanimity) of the Greek polis, concordia of the Roman Empire, or caritas of Christendom, might introduce friendship as a novel and influential form of vinculum - this very important tie that Arendt was studying all of her life.


**Inconclusive Conclusions**

But what might this discussion of Aristotelian and post-classical friendship possibly mean for the present-day concerns of Russia? Conclusions are difficult to draw now, but here are some interim remarks.

First, I have to discuss the obvious mapping of ancient experience onto contemporary Russian political reality. As Hutter and many others have noticed, friendship became coequal with the structure of the polis not because of the extension of the ideals of a tight group of personal friends (hetaereia) to cover the whole polis, but because these powerful factions competed for power in Athens and finally ruined democratic life there. One hetaereia vanquished all others and became the set of people controlling main power positions in the polis.

The Roman version of the same model demonstrates that eventually one patronage group (or a group of amici) could manage to gain total control of the offices of the Republic, with Sulla first realizing the power of provincial armies by installing his amici to rule Rome. The ideal of the universal friendship of the Stoics - their philanthropia among the sages - was formulated against this background of the formation of the ruling elite based on one winning group of friends that came to control the whole empire and thus, for the Romans, the whole known world.

Now, this is hardly a desirable development in contemporary Russia, even though it seems very possible. The current president could attempt to transform one group of his former Petersburg colleagues from local bodies of state security or mayoral offices into the backbone of his administration. This would allow this clan of amici to vanquish opposing clans and run the whole country, recruiting new members to run distant places and recalcitrant...
localities. This power structure is reminiscent of the ancient hetaereia and may even use the rhetoric of friendship as a state ideology, but would hardly be close to an alternative vision of politics. Also, a vast resource of everyday friendship that Russians enjoy in their ordinary exchanges would be left untapped - only the few would be able to join the select circle of “friends” ruling the country and jointly diverting the anti-oligarchic sentiment of the disgruntled masses from the real oligarchs that would rule them.

Another straightforward application of the discussion above would be to heed Cooper and Schwarzenbach and to advise reintroducing care for the moral character of the citizen as a central concern of the polity, although in an attenuated form. Schwarzenbach actually proposes an experiment for Switzerland: replacing a regular but largely useless army with a “care corps” in which both women and men would engage in community service. As a result of this, the army as a school of male bonding in joint violence would be replaced by a school of caring service, in which new mores of concern for the other would be inculcated and would change the political system eventually. This community service would have more far-reaching consequences than just helping the needy or fulfilling unpleasant citizen tasks; people united in the care corps would also learn to care about each other’s moral qualities, even if looking for second-order rather than thick values.

In the Russian context, a rebirth of this type of politics of caring friendship could have another cultural resource already available: a purge ritual, when the moral qualities of each person are evaluated by the relevant community, a ritual that has a very bloody history. Now, paradoxically, banned from the political sphere, it is represented by the firmly entrenched benign rituals of everyday life, like birthday celebrations, when people toast the celebrant with special speeches, implicitly evaluating his or her moral qualities, which are subject to a caring communal review once a year.48 Nietzsche has shown that the origins of many great things, including the highest moral ideals, lie in the most bloody and lowly of endeavors. Elements of human sacrifice and partaking in the flesh and blood of the killed become the central ritual of Christian morality. Thus, practices are frequently remolded to suit different aims and goals and may bring sublime achievements as well as debased and horrible results. To give another example: concern for the Christian virtue of your neighbor meant an almost total communal surveillance in Calvin’s Geneva, and the Consistory might have been as ferocious as the Russian purge commissions in the 1930s, had it been given the same orders and the same technical means to carry them out.49 Nevertheless, Schwarzenbach can now call for a care for friends’ virtues,
Kharkhordin, ECPR paper, p. 25

stressing the attenuated form of a similar practice, that is, insisting on the inviolability of individual rights and on the need to eschew a single thick definition of the religiously conceived good. As a result, the practices may be similar, but the outcomes to which they are directed are different.

In an analogy, a call for the reestablishment of a periodic communal review that would evaluate the second-order virtues of Russian citizens need not be considered a reestablishment of bloody pure commissions, but a remodeling of the formerly terror-ridden practice to achieve noble and humane goals, by introducing necessary safeguards. This could make befriending each other in hundreds, rather than in small tight networks, possible. However, more research would then be needed on how one could integrate the mechanisms of communal review of excelling deeds (that exist in sports, arts and sciences, within business community and even within the networks of virtuosos of violence) with mechanisms of existentially important self-review and thus transform the former without endangering the latter.

The third and final proposal that I shall discuss here - to model political friendship on anti-Aristotelian patterns, be they of the pre-Socratic or postmodern types, is interesting but is much too radical and looks very unrealistic once we descend from the heights of theory to the mundane details of configurations of humans, objects, and practices. This third proposal implies transcending state borders and thus spells death for a national community as traditionally conceived. A literary community of writers and readers, or a political community based on this background friendship model, or an Arendtian community of debate and deliberation on issues of the common world - all of these hardly fit existing national borders.

Russia recast as this type of political friendship would look more like a network of spaces linked by discourse in the Russian language than like a nation with physical territorial constraints. Language thus might become a Heideggerian "house of Being" in a very immediate,
demetaphorized sense, particularly if technology enters the picture and the common world becomes linked through the Internet. Might then a friendship network called Russia be defined as a set of carriers of definitive texts of Russian culture and the interpretive community around it? Or might national culture itself be envisaged as a network of political acts produced by quasi-literary communities of friends, so that the common political arena is constantly shaped and redefined?

I will stop here, with no ready solutions for Russian problems and with no unified interpretation of what political friendship as a new configuration of practices - replacing the old configuration called society - might look like in everyday life. This is a doxic statement, I guess: this is how things appear to me in an on-going debate. If readers accept this claim as an initial move setting the stage for concerned discussion, joint deliberation will help us clarify other aspects of this common world.