

As Thick as Thieves:

Exploring Thomas Hobbes's Critique of Ancient Friendship and its Contemporary Relevance.

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ABSTRACT

Recent decades have witnessed a revival of interest in ancient friendship both as a normative and as an explanatory concept. The literature concurs in holding Hobbes responsible for the marginalisation of friendship in political science and suggests that Hobbes devalued friendship because of his understanding of man. This paper argues that although Hobbes's appraisal of friendship hinges on his assumption that man is self-interested, his critique of normative friendship does not rest on that notion. Hobbes's challenge to us is this: without foundation in the 'truth' (i.e. the 'Good Life') that underpinned ancient friendship, modern friendship, whether self-interested or selfless, cannot be assumed to be a civic virtue, nor an index of the health of a political association, nor a facilitator of domestic or global peace. Hobbes's critique is especially relevant for writers who maintain that a resurgence of friendship can nurture concord and foster reconciliation within contemporary liberal democracies.

Key words: Hobbes, friendship, peace, self-interest, selflessness.

Friendship is making a comeback (Digeser 2016, xi)

Until not long ago, the mention of civic or global friendship to a political scientist would raise a smile at best and an eyebrow at worst. Recent decades, however, have witnessed a revival of interest in the ancient concept of friendship (*philia*, *amicitia*) among a growing number of philosophers, political theorists, theorists of international relations, historians, sociologists, and journalists¹. Supporters of this trend have highlighted the normative quality of friendship (Dallmayr 2000; King and Devere 2000; MacIntyre 1981) and the explanatory merits of the concept (Foucault 1997; Gadamer 1999; Hayden 2015). While, traditionally, liberals have attributed a marginal role to ‘friendship’, an increasing number of writers are bringing the concept to the foreground of liberal theory (Digeser 2016; Georgieva 2013; Schwarzenbach 2009; Scorza 2004).

The literature on friendship broadly agrees that in the ancient world friendship was ‘the major principle in terms of which political theory and practice [were] described, explained and analysed’ (Hutter 1978, 2; see also von Heyking and Avramenko 2008, 1; Gadamer 1999), and finds Thomas Hobbes – the seventeenth century theorist of discord and disagreement (Abizadeh 2011) – largely responsible for the modern marginalisation of friendship in political science and political philosophy (Dallmayr 2000, 105; King, 2000, 13; Pangle 2003, 3; Schwarzenbach 2009, 4; Yack 1993, 110). Lorraine Pangle captures the dominant view when she writes that ‘the devaluation of friendship is the result of a decisive new turn in philosophy [...] Ever since Hobbes, modern moral philosophy, even when it has not followed his teaching about the state of nature, has conceived of men’s most important claims upon one another to lie outside the realm of friendship’ (Pangle 2003, 3).

Surprisingly, the literature has shown little interest in exploring Hobbes’s reasons for side-lining friendship² – a concept that had endured from antiquity through the Middle Ages

(Haseldine 2000), notably in the work of Aquinas (Schwarz 2007, Grayling 2013), and received a breath of new life from the English Renaissance (Lochman, Lopez, and Hutson 2011). The tendency among interpreters has been to suggest, often in passing, that Hobbes devalued friendship because of his views on the self-interestedness of man (Yack 1993, 110; Schwarzenbach 2009, 4).

This paper agrees that the paucity of references to friends and friendship in Hobbes's political works was the outcome of a deliberate and influential move³ but seeks to demonstrate that although Hobbes's account and appraisal of friendship hinge on his assumption that man is self-interested, his critique of normative friendship does not rest on that notion. To the ancients who had claimed that 'friendship can exist only between good men' (Cicero 1991b, 86), Hobbes retorted: 'And depraved though they are, do not conspirators aid and comfort one another, and share common desires?' (*Anti-White*, 479). The paper interprets Hobbes's challenge to be that, without foundation in the 'truth' ('the Good Life' or God) that underpinned ancient and medieval friendship (Fortin 1993, Schall 1996), modern friendship, whether self-interested or selfless, cannot be assumed to be a civic virtue, nor an index of the health of a political association, nor a facilitator of domestic or global peace. Hobbes's critique is especially relevant for writers who maintain that a resurgence of friendship can nurture concord and foster reconciliation within liberal democracies.

It has been argued that, in order to understand why Hobbes and 'the thinkers who prepared the way for liberalism ... chartered the course forward as they did, we must consider the problems they saw when they looked backward' (Stauffer 2016, 481) and that the best way to gain such understanding is by 'immersion in Hobbes's own arguments' (482).

In this spirit, this paper examines Hobbes's texts and seeks to establish his main concerns with the rich friendship tradition he inherited. First, it shows that Hobbes was well-acquainted with Aristotelian *philia* and his own notion of friendship retains some of the

original characteristics of the concept; next, it examines Hobbes's appraisal of the explanatory value of friendship; next, it discusses Hobbes's critique of ancient *philia* as a political and ethical norm; finally, it highlights the relevance of Hobbes's argument to contemporary debates.

Hobbesian Friendship and its Marks

By all accounts, the meaning of friendship is highly contextual (Silver 1989); it can vary across cultures at one time and across times in one culture (Konstan 1997, 8-11; Derrida 1997, 366-7). Here, I will not attempt a comparison of Aristotelian and Hobbesian friendship; rather, I shall review Hobbes's understanding of Aristotelian *philia* and compare it with his own notion of friendship in order to highlight certain shared qualities.

Hobbes was well-acquainted with the works of Aristotle and 'among the Hobbes papers at Chatsworth there is a free digest from the *Nicomachean Ethics*' (Strauss 1963, 42); he elucidates the meaning of Aristotelian friendship in his abridgement of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.⁴ Here Hobbes highlights the reciprocity of love and trust required in Aristotelian friendship, the selflessness and altruism entailed in the relationship, as well as the exchange of benefits that may take place between friends (*Art of Rhetoric* 454-6). Hobbes appears to have had a good ear for Aristotelian *philia* (EN 8.2 1155b34 ; EN 8.3 1156a-1158a; EN 9.4 1166a31-2) as his account of friendship agrees with the interpretations of modern-day commentators: they, too, highlight 'reciprocity' (Konstan 1997, 69; Pangle 2003, 38; Schollmeier 1994, 38) and 'goodwill' (Konstan 1997, 74; Pangle 2003, 39; Price 1989, 138-9, 197; Schollmeier 1994, 35-39) as central ingredients of the relationship; they stress the importance of the Aristotelian typology of friendship, based respectively on utility, pleasure, and virtue

(Nussbaum 1986, 354-372); they emphasise the ‘altruism’ and selflessness of perfect or true or virtue friendship (Konstan 1997, 76, 101; Schollmeier 1994, 51, 7-15;), and the self-interest inherent to imperfect friendships (Price 1989, 131-161).

Hobbes left us no detailed definition of his own conception of friendship, however, and so the key elements or (to use Hobbes’s terminology) the ‘marks’ of Hobbesian friendship must be reconstructed from scattered remarks.

Hobbes was a nominalist (Pettit 2008, Zarka 2016) and held that there is ‘nothing in the world universal but names’ (*Leviathan*, 17; *Elements*, 20; *Anti-White*, 34, 52). He maintained that particular men differ from one another, that the same man is different at different times (*Leviathan*, 21), and that what is constant in the same man, and common to all men, is the functioning of the body (‘vital motion’) and of the mind (‘voluntary motion’). Hobbes identified man with ‘motion’ (*De Corpore*, 137), which he defined as ‘actual power’, and attributed to him the endless search for ‘power’, which he defined as ‘potential motion’, in order to prolong his existence as motion. This brief reminder helps us to appreciate the first characteristic that Hobbes attributes to friendship, namely empowerment: ‘to have friends is power’ (*Leviathan*, 50). Hobbes’s claim that friends are ‘power’ therefore equates to the statement that friends contribute to the formation and establishment of the identity of the Hobbesian man as ‘motion’.

Secondly, Hobbes refers to friendship as a ‘contract’ (*Elements*, 44) and maintains that when a friend bestows a gift or good turn upon another, he expects something in return (*Elements*, 84). Given this contractual foundation, Hobbesian friendship requires trust and a positive disposition between contractors (*Elements*, 84); this inevitably fails in the Hobbesian state of nature (as discussed below). For Hobbes, then, friendship is not a relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ that can exist in a cultural vacuum. Rather, in order to materialise,

friendship requires a context (common language, shared values, trust, positive dispositions) that in Hobbes's theory is made possible only by the creation of the political state.

Thirdly, the balance of evidence suggests that Hobbes saw advantage as the most common motivation for friendship;⁵ however, he also mentions 'the love men bear to one another, or the pleasure they take in one another's company' (*Elements*, 43) and remarks that 'perpetual solitude is hard for a man to bear by nature or as a man' (*Citizen*, 24). These statements have led some interpreters to maintain that Hobbesian men are 'capable of benevolence and of genuine affection for other people, or concern for their good' (Rawls 2007, 45-6; see also Gert 2010, 63).

To summarise, Hobbesian friendship is generally, but not always, driven by self-interest toward the end-goal of empowerment; it resembles a contract allowing the exchange of benefits or favours between contractors, who in turn must be positively disposed and trusting towards one another. Hence, we may loosely relate Hobbes's notion of friendship to the Aristotelian emphasis on the reciprocity of good will; of the three types of friendship mentioned by Aristotle, Hobbes regards utility-based friendship as the most common. The language of exchange and contract used by Hobbes to convey the mutuality of friendship reminds us of a market society (Pagden 1987) and arguably shows the early-modern transformation of the classical concept while retaining some of its original characteristics.

Hobbes's Appraisal of the Explanatory Value of Friendship

In Hobbes's political works, we encounter leagues, confederacies, partial societies, systems, corporations, and factions. I describe the bond that holds agents together in such groupings as 'self-interested friendship' (even if Hobbes does not employ the expression) because it bears the 'marks' of Hobbesian friendship: it is contractual in nature, it entails the

exchange of benefits or favours, and it promotes empowerment and self-interest while relying on reciprocity of trust and of positive disposition.

This section arranges leagues, confederacies, partial societies, systems, factions, and personal friendships into three categories: *friendship-for-defence*, *friendship-for-commodious-living*, and *personal friendship*. The typology is mine and is made mainly for ease of exposition; it is not rigid because in Hobbes's argument, a 'system' created to enable commodious living can easily develop into a defensive alliance, and so on.

My aim here is to show that, with one proviso, Hobbes attributes limited explanatory power to the concept of friendship: friendship cannot explain how men can attain and maintain peace. The proviso is that, for Hobbes, friendship can explain phenomena that *undermine* peace, such as corruption and favouritism.

Leagues, Alliances, Confederacies, Factions, and Friendship-for-Defence

If the enemy were to go away, [the friend] is no longer, it seems, a friend to us. (Plato, *Lysis* 220e, trans. Ludwig 2010, 134)

One narrative that runs through the Western tradition, from Plato to Carl Schmitt and postmodernity, is that friendship brings people together against enemies (Ludwig 2010).

Although Aristotle discounts military alliances as a form of friendship, he nevertheless saw defence as one of the functions of political associations and he provided a concept of imperfect friendship, based on utility, that includes defensive friendship (Wight 1978, 122; Pangle 2003, 40).

This type of relationship – established in response to real or imagined enmity – is at the core of Hobbes's accounts of leagues, confederacies, and factions and has attracted the most attention from Hobbesian scholarship: interpreters have examined the dynamics of

leagues and alliances in the state of nature (e.g. Gauthier 1977; Hampton 1986), within political states (Evrigenis 2014), and in inter-state relations (e.g. Beitz 1979; Malcolm 2002).

Here I draw attention to Hobbes's discussion of defensive friendships in the state of nature because it is in this context that he distances himself from former narratives (e.g. Plato, *Protagoras*). In the state of nature, man seeks 'coalition for defence' (*Citizen*, 70) and 'confederacy with others ... that are in the same danger with himself' (*Leviathan*, 110) because 'mutual aid is necessary for defence' (*Elements*, 101). In relation to former narratives on alliances and confederacies (Gierke 2001), Hobbes is keen to demonstrate that defensive leagues cannot deliver man from the state of nature (Evrigenis 2014, 99-111) and provides both psychological and strategic reasons to explain why this is so. In natural conditions, Hobbes maintains, there is complete uncertainty about the attitudes and intentions of others, no common language, no shared value-system, no possibility of developing trust (Baumgold 2013). In such circumstances, no contract (including the 'contract' of defensive friendship) is binding; individuals are not bound by the law of nature of gratitude not to betray someone who has done good to them (*Elements*, 84).

Hobbes stipulates three conditions that a league must satisfy in order to be of defensive value. Firstly, it needs to incorporate a large number of people because 'the mutual aid of two or three men is of very little security' (*Elements*, 101; *Citizen*, 70). Secondly, there must be tactical agreement among members such that 'all direct their actions to one and the same end' (*Elements*, 108; *Citizen*, 70-71). Thirdly, a defensive group must promise longevity and not merely offer short-term protection from imminent attack. A friendship-for-defence that arises in the state of nature can clearly not meet these requirements: fear undermines the possibility of coherence and size; individual glory-seeking frustrates a league's pretensions to co-ordination and permanence (*Citizen*, 71).

Thus, although defensive friendships arise in natural conditions (Tuck 1999, 134), they must ultimately fail (Gauthier 1969; Hampton 1986).⁶ For Hobbes, friendship cannot create the conditions for the political; rather, the political creates the conditions for friendship: mutual trust, positive dispositions, common language, and shared values. Even though men find solitude ‘hard to bear’ (*Citizen*, 24) and seek the company of others (*Elements*, 41), according to Hobbes they can derive ‘no pleasure but on the contrary a great deal of grief, in keeping company’ (*Leviathan*, 75) outside the political state, and their life is bound to remain ‘solitary’ (*Leviathan*, 76).

To summarise, Hobbesian leagues, confederacies, and factions can be interpreted as practices of friendship-for-defence, a relation based on self-interest that assumes enmity, man’s vulnerability, rationality, and fear. Hobbes, in contrast to preceding narratives (e.g. Plato), attributes a very limited explanatory value to defensive friendship; for him the concept cannot explain how we come to live in political associations.

Corporations, Partial Societies, Systems, and Friendship-for-Commodious-Living

Friendship also seems to hold the polis together...For concord seems to be something similar to friendship. (Aristotle NE VIII 1155a22-26)

Civic friendship is according to utility. (Aristotle EE 7.10.1242b22-3)

Another narrative one encounters in the Western tradition is that friendship holds citizens together not in response to enmity but on account of man’s inability to live comfortably without the assistance of others. This type of utility friendship is at the core of Aristotle’s account of political associations (e.g. EE 1236a33-37); indeed Aristotle maintained that ‘friendship seems to hold the polis together’ (NE VIII.1155a24). This type of civic friendship can be found in the writings of a variety of thinkers, from Cicero to Jean

Bodin (1955, 135-7), from John Milton (1991, 63) to Adam Smith (1984, 85) and Adam Ferguson (1995, 38).

Even though Hobbes does not employ the expression, he too, acknowledges the occurrence of *friendship-for-commodious-living* within the commonwealth and refers to it as ‘*forensis quaedam amicitia*’ in the Latin *De Cive* (1983, 90).⁷ The Hobbesian man’s drive to enter the social contract is born not only from fear for his life but also from a desire to enjoy ‘commodious living’ (*Leviathan*, 78). He longs for the ‘ornaments and comforts of life which by peace and society are usually invented and procured’ (*Elements*, 73; *Citizen*, 214-5). For the sake of a comfortable existence, Hobbesian citizens create a network of corporations, systems, and partial societies. These have attracted the attention of historians, jurists, and political theorists – some examine the genealogy of Hobbes’s partial societies (Gierke 2001) while others emphasise the proto-liberal elements of Hobbes’s international corporations (Malcolm 2002; Sorell 2006), and others still point to intermediate societies as evidence of Hobbes’s ‘political realism’ (Bobbio 1993, 174).

Hobbes mentions partial societies only briefly in *Elements* and *Citizen* but devotes a whole chapter to the topic in *Leviathan*.⁸ Here, Hobbes describes the substructures within the body politic as ‘systems’ and explains that the term refers to ‘any numbers of men joined in one interest or one business’, driven together ‘by design or inclination’ (*Leviathan*, 146). In Hobbes’s account, ‘system’ denotes a diverse array of corporations and societies, from churches to universities, and from guilds of merchants to bands of thieves. Hobbes writes that there is ‘an unspeakable diversity’ of systems in a political association; their number is ‘almost infinite’ (*Leviathan*, 149). Men choose which systems to join – a university or a merchants’ corporation – based on their individual preferences, inclinations and designs. Ultimately, it is the Hobbesian man’s search for a good life that motivates him to join a system.

Hobbes is keen to emphasise, however, that the abundance of systems does not guarantee peace and harmony within the commonwealth. Although partial societies, corporations, and systems can indeed enhance man's quality of life and be the 'muscles' of the commonwealth (*Leviathan*, 146), they can equally become the 'wens, biles, and apostems' (*Leviathan*, 155) of the state and cause its destruction. In *Citizen*, Hobbes warns the reader that *forensis amicitia* can be 'sometimes the occasion of faction' (22). For Hobbes, some groups, such as a corporation of thieves, are patently unlawful, while others are unquestionably legitimate, such as those created by the state (e.g. colonies, provinces). Between these two poles, however, lies a wide spectrum of human activity; Hobbes suggests that it cannot be known *a priori* which of the endless variety of groups and societies originated by citizens is beneficial or damaging to the commonwealth. In Hobbes's view, the Leviathan must decide which systems are lawful or unlawful, to stamp out rogue associations and maintain peace.

Thus, to sum up, Hobbes's corporations, partial societies and systems can be said to embody a notion of instrumental friendship. In relation to former narratives that viewed friendship as holding communities together (notably Aristotle), Hobbes puts across the view that the impact of *friendship-for-commodious-living* on peace is always ambivalent: it can foster amity, or it can generate enmity and endanger the state. For Hobbes, authority and not friendship is the key explanatory concept of peace.

Private Friendships, Public Dangers

What is human life if not a succession of favours which one does for one's friends and from time to time not without inconvenience to oneself?
(*Correspondence*, Letter 100, Verdus to Hobbes)

Sixteenth century England witnessed a revival of the classical, same-sex notion of friendship. Indeed, the renewal of this concept by the writers, dramatists, poets and playwrights of the

time is seen by interpreters as a distinctive feature of the English Renaissance (Lochman, Lopez, and Hutson 2011). However, breathing new life into the ancient concept of *philia* also changed its character; we witness a ‘transition from one model of friendship to another, from an older kin and alliance model to a newer individualistic model of intimacy and personal choice’ (Hutson 2011, 241; see also Mills 1937). One could interpret the scarcity of references to friendship in Hobbes’s political works as an endorsement of the view that friendship describes an intimate relationship beyond the realm of political philosophy. However, this is not the case: in his political works Hobbes shows that personal friendships can acquire political significance and affect peace.

Like friendship-for-defence and friendship-for-commodious-living, so *personal friendship* is described by Hobbes as empowering (*Citizen*, 119), predicated on man’s lack of self-sufficiency, and commonly grounded in self-interest. Hobbes regards ‘favour’ as one of the marks of this form of friendship, and uses this notion to explain how friends may empower one another within the state. Indeed, Hobbes joins the two concepts to indicate one form of acquired power: ‘friendship or favour’ (*Elements*, 34).

Just as Aristotle had examined friendship both between equals and unequals, and highlighted the balancing nature of friendship, so Hobbes discusses symmetrical and asymmetrical friendships within the political state. For Hobbes, a personal friendship between socially equal individuals is based on the exchange of favours; a friendship between an unequal pair, on the other hand, entails that the subordinate offers honour, respect and recognition in return for the gifts and favour of the superior.

We may assume that personal friendships foster cohesion within the Hobbesian world, both between elites and common people and between citizens of the same class. However, Hobbes says hardly anything about the potential benefits of personal friendships; rather, he explains how such relations can breed division and enmity within the commonwealth.

Hobbes's position can be elucidated by means of three examples. First, Hobbes suggests that, by bestowing gifts and favours upon friends, an individual can gain widespread popularity and thereby enough support to lead a faction (*Citizen*, 120-21). Second, Hobbes indicates that people in positions of authority may be tempted to bend the rules in order to dispense favours to their friends (*Elements*, 182) and that corruption endangers peace. Third, Hobbes points out that although in his capacity as 'the source of civil honour' (*Leviathan*, 53) the sovereign (be it a man or an assembly) can award favours at his discretion, a king's favouritism engenders discontent and endangers peace; referring to civil war, Hobbes says that the 'greatest Complaint by them made against the unthriftiness of their Kings was for the enriching now and then a favourite' (*Common Law*, 15; see also *Elements*, 142, *Citizen*, 119). Indeed, Hobbes concludes that an important reason to prefer monarchy over democracy is that a single individual is likely to have fewer personal friends (and thus fewer opportunities to display favouritism) than an assembly (Smith 2008).

To summarise, Hobbes believed that personal friendships can easily spill from the private into the public domain, and are therefore very much a concern for the political philosopher and for the state. While friendship-for-defence and friendship-for-commodious-living cannot explain how agents attain and maintain peace, Hobbes suggests that personal friendships can explain phenomena that undermine peace, such as conspiracies, factionalism, corruption, cronyism, and favouritism.

Hobbes's concerns about the link between friendship, corruption and favouritism were already present in the ancient world (Herman 1987, 156-161) as was the awareness of the connection between friendship, wrong-doing, and conspiracies (Cicero 1991b, 94 ff); the ancients, however, denied that such relationships could be viewed as true or virtue friendship (Cicero 1991b, 94-95). This brings us to discuss Aristotelian virtue friendship, and Hobbes's critique of it.

Hobbes's Critique of Ancient Normative Friendship

The literature agrees that Hobbes rejected ancient virtue friendship (von Heyking and Avramenko 2008, 6) and that Aristotelian arguments regarding true friendship 'have no place in the Hobbesian scheme' (Smith 2008, 214-5, 219). Writers on friendship, however, tend to suggest that Hobbes's dismissal of virtue friendship is a corollary of his emphasis on the self-interestedness of man (Yack 1993; Schwarzenbach 2009). My aim here is to show that Hobbes did not rule out that men can truly love and care for their friends; rather, Hobbes discarded Aristotelian *philia* because he objected to the concept that underpinned it, namely the notion of 'the Good Life' and Aristotelian teleology. I argue that Hobbes provided a new foundation for modern friendship: the Leviathan. By measuring practices of friendship by their tendency to foster peace, the Hobbesian state encourages those which are beneficial to the commonwealth, and stamps out those which fall short.

The Caring Conspirator

An epicurean or a Hobbist readily allows, that there is such a thing as friendship in the world, without hypocrisy or disguise (Hume 1970, 296-7).

Virtue friendship is considered one of the most challenging parts of Aristotle's Ethics (Mulgan 2000, 15) and has generated much debate among specialists; Aristotelian scholars disagree on whether utility, pleasure, and virtue friendship are points on a continuum (so that even utility friendship contains some virtue, and virtue friendship contains some utility), or whether they are different in kind; they offer contrasting opinions on whether virtue friendship describes a practice or if it serves mainly as an ideal; they also offer different explanations on how virtue friendship relates to human flourishing and to the Aristotelian notions of 'the Good Life' and of 'the contemplative life'.

In spite of the complexities and subtleties of the Aristotelian concept, it can be argued that in his abridgement of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Hobbes captures a core ingredient of Aristotelian virtue friendship, namely one's willingness and ability to care for the other as 'a second self' (NE 1166a1-19; EE 1240a36-b20); he reminds us that for Aristotle 'a friend is he that loves, and he that is beloved', that 'to love is to will well to another, and that for others, not for our own sake' (Hobbes, *Art of Rhetoric* 454), and that 'a friend is he; that rejoiceth at another's good. And that grieves at his hurt' (455).

The first question to address is whether Hobbes's notion of man ruled out the altruism and selflessness that Aristotle ascribed to true friends. Granted that Hobbes highlighted the widespread unfriendliness of men towards strangers as well as the human tendency to be self-interested with everyone including one's friends, in the last thirty years a substantial number of scholars have argued that Hobbes does not rule out the occurrence of altruism (Van Mill 2001, 126), love (Patapan and Sikkenga 2008) or 'genuine affection' (Rawls 2007, 45) in human relations; they have pointed out that Hobbesian individuals see others not simply as instruments to attain commodious living, but often as an integral part of living well (Stanlick 2002). Indeed, according to Hobbes, 'depraved' as they are, even conspirators are capable of genuine care for each other: they 'aid and comfort one another, and share common desires' (*Anti-White*, 479). Hence, the view that Hobbesian friends behave towards each other 'with the cool calculation of bankers and accountants' (Yack 1993, 110, 127) does not apply to all Hobbesian men all of the time.

'I "ought" implies for Hobbes, "I can"' (Plamenatz 1965,76); therefore, if Hobbes had held man utterly incapable of love, selflessness, and altruism, then it would be correct to explain Hobbes's rejection of Aristotelian virtue friendship by referring to his notion of man's self-interestedness, as writers on friendship have suggested. However, as there is textual evidence that Hobbes saw love and altruism as human inclinations that are possible

and not less rare than sociability, the question arises as to why his laws of nature recommend ‘sociability’ (*Elements*, 95) instead of advocating the ancient norm of selfless or virtue friendship. The answer is not to be found in Hobbes’s psychology but in his views on Aristotle’s ethics.

The Foundation of Hobbesian Friendship

I want to say first of all that friendship can exist only between good men.
(Cicero 1991b, 86)

And depraved though they are, do not conspirators aid and comfort one another, and share common desires? (Hobbes, *Anti-White*, 479)

Interpreters agree that Aristotelian friendship was grounded in the notion of ‘the Good Life’ (Mulgan 2000, 15) while Thomistic friendship was underpinned by the belief in God (Schwartz 2007); they emphasise that while ‘the Good Life’ and God represented a ‘truth’ that ancient and medieval writers did not invent but acknowledged, modern friendship is not ‘ordered to anything beyond itself’ (Schall 1996, 135; Fortin 1993). As a result, in modernity, friendship came to indicate ‘an “I-Thou” relationship’ that ‘presumes that there are no pre-established, naturally knowable, or divinely ordained ends in the attainment of which human beings find their perfection’ (Fortin 1993, 47). Montaigne’s essay on friendship (1991) is regarded as ‘part of the struggle of ancients and moderns’ (Schall, 1996, 130); his famous remark that he was friend to Estienne de la Boete ‘Because it was he, because it was I’ (Montaigne 1991, 192) captures the trend of modern friendship:

When the friend does not exist in truth, that is, when both friends do not have a common good in which each exists, *they become laws unto each other*, precisely what they cannot be in friendship as Aristotle understood it (Schall 1996, 134 emphasis added)

These few reminders of the foundations of ancient and medieval friendship, and of the new character of modern friendship, help shed some light on Hobbes's own position on virtue friendship.

On the one hand, driven by his materialism and nominalism (Zarka 2016)⁹, Hobbes vigorously rejected Aristotelian teleology, the ancient concepts of 'the Good Life' and of *summum bonum* (*Leviathan*, 57; Rutherford 2003): 'unlike Aristotle... [Hobbes] not only does not put forward the life of the philosopher as the best life, he does not put forward any view of the best life' (Gert 2010, 65). Hobbes scorned the ancient belief that 'not the evil but the good have friends' as 'patently false' (*Anti-White*, 479). He held that genuine love, care, and selflessness can occur among the 'depraved' just as it can among obedient citizens.

On the other hand, Hobbes did not endorse the emerging model of modern friendship whereby 'friends become laws unto each other' (Schall 1996, 134); indeed, in his theory, when men become laws unto each other, anarchy materialises. As is well-known, Hobbes maintained that a major reason why the state of nature descends into a state of war is that men naturally disagree on what is good and evil; they create the Leviathan to put an end to such quarrels.

It can be argued that, in response to what he regarded as the flawed foundation of ancient friendship (the 'Good Life') and the dangers associated with the emerging individualistic model of friendship, Hobbes provided a new foundation for friendship: the state. In his theory, the Leviathan will decide which practices of friendship are good or bad and will use peace as its measure. From Hobbes's perspective, it is not the presence of self-interest that makes friendship imperfect; it is not the degree of selflessness or true love that makes it a virtue. Rather, friendship should be judged by its effect on the good of the commonwealth – in short, its effect on peace: the friendship of conspirators may include love and selflessness but nevertheless destroys the commonwealth; the friendship of merchants is

likely to be driven by calculations of self-interest but may nevertheless facilitate commodious living and foster peace.

Hobbes's foundation of friendship is different from the 'naturally knowable truth' (Schall 1996) that grounded ancient and medieval friendship¹⁰; although the Leviathan's decisions about friendships are not arbitrary but guided by the laws of nature that recommend peace, they are all the same discretionary.

Conclusions

[I]t is not clear that friendship and politics mix all that well. (Shklar [1987] 1998,14)

This paper started with the observation that there has been a revival of interest in ancient *philia* as a normative and an explanatory concept, and that Thomas Hobbes is regarded as largely responsible for the devaluation and marginalisation of friendship in political science. It maintained that the literature has shown insufficient curiosity in investigating Hobbes's concerns with ancient *philia*. This paper sought to rectify this lacuna.

First, I examined the explanatory potential that Hobbes assigned to the concept of friendship. Hobbes's texts acknowledge an ontological quality to friendship; indeed, Hobbes suggests that friends are a source of a man's identity and recognition by others. This distances him ideologically from later writers, such as Carl Schmitt, who saw the enemy rather than the friend as crucial to the development of one's political identity. Moreover, by maintaining that all friendships ultimately fail in the state of nature, Hobbes indicates that friendship is not a relationship between 'self' and 'other' that can take place in a cultural vacuum, but a relation that requires a communal context (including a common language and shared values) in order

to materialise. In this way, Hobbes anticipates insights developed by later philosophers who portrayed friendship not as a dyadic but as a triadic relationship, involving self, other, and context.

Next, I argued that, for Hobbes, friendship cannot help explain events and circumstances of utmost political relevance, namely how men attain and maintain peace and why they institute political authority, legal justice, and private property. Hobbes does acknowledge that ‘a constant civil amity’ is key to a healthy political association (*Leviathan*, 489), but maintains that the common recognition of authority and not friendship is crucial to this outcome. For Hobbes, friendship does not create the conditions of the political; rather, the political creates the conditions for friendship. Friendship does not prevent tumult or civil war; indeed, in such circumstances people have no hesitation ‘to throw stones to their own best friends’ (*Leviathan*, 42), in spite of noticeable exceptions (Hobbes pays tribute to Sidney Godolphin). Ultimately, in Hobbes’s argument, the main explanatory merit of friendship is that it can shed light on phenomena such as corruption, favouritism, nepotism, and cronyism; it can illustrate how sects and conspiracies are born and grow.

Next, the paper argued that Hobbes’s main concern was to undermine the ancient belief that friendship could serve as a political or ethical norm. Hobbes’s nominalism and materialism prevented him from accepting the foundation of Aristotelian virtue friendship, namely ‘the Good Life’, that had led Aristotle to maintain that true friendship (which is selfless and character building) is superior to self-interested friendship, and that only virtuous men are capable of the former. Hobbes rejected Aristotelian teleology and suggested that the distinction between self-interested and selfless friendship is politically irrelevant in so far as both can occur among obedient and disobedient citizens.

By discarding the concept of ‘the Good Life’ that underpinned Aristotle’s virtue friendship, and by claiming that conspirators are as capable of true friendship as obedient

citizens, Hobbes contributed significantly to the view that friendship may be a ‘school of virtue’ as much as a ‘school of vice’ and that it is therefore an ambivalent phenomenon – a view which some call the hallmark of modernity (Lewis 1960, 97). Hobbes was particularly influential on our current conception of politics (Stauffer, 2016, 481), and his appraisal of friendship resonates with current thinking. Common parlance acknowledges the potential gap between the quality of the bonds of friendship and the moral character of the friends themselves: we say that close-knit companions are *as thick as thieves*. Moreover, the close connection between friendship and corruption and favouritism is a recurring concern (de Graaf and Huberts 2008;¹¹ Roman and Miller 2014) as is the challenge that friendship poses to justice (Cordelli 2015).

The paper also argued that Hobbes did not endorse the emerging early modern model of friendship, whereby friendship is a private affair (Hutson 2011) and friends become ‘laws unto each other’ (Schall 1996, 134). For Hobbes, any personal relationship can potentially acquire political significance; he foresaw what later writers would stress, namely that disobedience, resistance, and opposition to governments start with meetings among friends (Shklar 1998; Digeser 2016) and that religious sects, political factions, conspiracies, rebellions, are all born within friendships (Lewis 1960, 96-7). Hobbes understood the dangers of letting friends becoming laws unto each other and offered a new foundation for friendship: the Leviathan, that guided by the laws of nature, would decide which ‘systems’ of friendship are the potential ‘muscles’ of the commonwealth, and which are its ‘wens, biles, and apostems’.

Hobbes’s argument on friendship- in particular, his view that all men, good or bad, are capable of genuine friendship, that friendship can have ambivalent effects on concord, that the Leviathan must regulate and direct citizens’ friendships in order to safeguard peace, and that no friendship can be excluded from the Leviathan’s scrutiny- contains a challenge that

contemporary liberal theories of civic or political friendship need to address. This can be illustrated by means of an example.

In her powerful advocacy of civic friendship that includes women in the state, Sybil Schwarzenbach (2009) aims to replace Hobbesian fear and self-interest with friendship as the glue of society (4) and to demonstrate that her notion of civic friendship can bring unity to modern democracies and sustain justice. She acknowledges that a contemporary theory of civic friendship can no longer rely on the ancient notion of the Good Life (67) but points out that this does not compel us to accept neutrality of values: the ‘Aristotelian concern with the moral virtue of one’s fellow citizens’ can be replaced by ‘a more tolerant, enlightened concern ...with their political character’ (66). She maintains that ‘[a] feasible modern political friendship will be evidenced by a certain degree of concern, good will, and practical agreement between citizens regarding primarily *constitutional essentials*’ (67 italics in the original). She explains:

If we consider the attempt to embody a doctrine of universal equality between persons in legal institutions of right (again attempted in the Constitution), we have a clear instance of what I am calling “civic friendship”(Schwarzenbach, 2009, 188)

Attention to the underpinning of Schwarzenbach’s concept of civic friendship sheds light on the challenge facing modern theories of friendship, as identified by Hobbes. Even though some interpreters have suggested that ‘Schwarzenbach updates Aristotle’s approach’ (Digeser 2016, 128), in fact Schwarzenbach’s and Aristotle’s concepts of friendship do not share the same status: the latter was a ‘truth’ that Aristotle did not invent but acknowledged (Fortin 1993); the former, depends on people’s agreement on a set of values. The different foundation of Schwarzenbach’s friendship vis-à-vis Aristotle’s raises questions such as: how likely is it that all members of a concrete liberal democracy agree on the same ideal of ‘political life’, on the same understanding of ‘constitutional essentials’, on the same norm of civic friendship? Wouldn’t the implementation of any specific notion or practice of civic

friendship foster the rise of opposition and enmity within societies? Would it not require substantial intervention into citizens' life by the state?

Hobbes's challenge to us is this: once the truth (the 'Good Life', God) that grounded ancient and medieval friendship is discarded, any concept or practice of friendship (in either selfless or self-interested form) can engender opposition and disagreement among men; the only way to ensure that friendship fosters amity and does not breed enmity is to entrust the mighty Leviathan with its management and direction¹².

From a Hobbesian perspective, liberal theories of friendship are utopian not because they assume that man is, by nature or education, capable of love, care and altruism (man is capable of all of these things) but because they presume that friendship is a civic virtue and a facilitator of concord and reconciliation in the absence of a fixed reference point, be it immutable (as for the ancients: the 'Good Life', God) or discretionary (the Leviathan). For a growing number of liberal theorists, friendship is a glue that can hold multi-cultural liberal democracies together; without the Leviathan, for Hobbes, it may instead act as a solvent which prises people apart.

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¹ For a valuable review of this literature see Heather Devere and Graham M. Smith (2010) and Heather Devere (2013).

² The existing literature on Hobbes's views on friendship is very limited (among the exceptions, Nancy Stanlick 2002, Travis Smith 2008) and does not address my present concern, namely Hobbes's critique of ancient *philia*.

³ The rarity of references to 'friend' or 'friendship' in Hobbes's political works is not only striking but puzzling. The revival of friendship had been the distinctive feature of the English Renaissance (Hutson 2011) and books dealing with friendship by Cicero (1991a, 1991b) and Erasmus (2001) had been best-sellers and could be found in every English gentleman's library (Mills 1937). Thus, in view of the rhetorical and divulgation purposes of his *Leviathan* (Skinner 1996), it is surprising that Hobbes makes virtually no mention of civic friendship in it, regardless of how much such references would have been expected by his readers. Indeed, Hobbes would have had good reasons to provide some discussion of public or civic friendship within *Leviathan* in order to persuade his readers of the possibility of 'a constant

civil amity' within the commonwealth alluded to in 'A Review and Conclusion' (*Leviathan* 489). It is worth noticing that Hobbes's theory of absolute state sovereignty did not require the elimination of friendship from his political argument; indeed Jean Bodin had advanced a similar theory and accommodated friendship within it. (Bodin 1955, 135-7). Neither Hobbes's biography (Aubrey 1982, 148-62) nor his *Correspondence* suggest that Hobbes had a personal dislike for friendship; on the contrary, he had some genuine friends, and he was a good friend to them (Malcolm 1994).

⁴ Even though Hobbes 'may not have been the author' of the digest of the *Art of Rhetoric* published in English, nevertheless he provided the Latin basis for that version 'truncating, reshaping and supplementing Aristotle's text' (Skinner 2002, 53).

⁵ One of Hobbes's most well-known statements is that 'By nature, then, we are not looking for friends but for honour and advantage (commodum) from them. This is what we are primarily after; friends are secondary.' (*Citizen* 22).

⁶ Hobbes occasionally refers to the commonwealth or body politic as 'a league of all subjects together' (*Leviathan* 153) but he is adamant that this state-league is not the descendant of a league that arises in the state of nature.

⁷ In the 17th century English version of *De Cive* (for a time attributed to Hobbes, now accredited to C. Cotton) *forensis quaedam amicitia* is translated as 'a certain Market Friendship' (*English Works*, vol II, 3); in the 1998 translation by Silverthorne (*Citizen*, 22) the expression is rendered as 'a kind of political relationship'. Perhaps the best translation is 'a type of public friendship' (Kinch Hoekstra 2011, personal correspondence).

⁸ A possible explanation for the change is that while in *Elements* and *Citizen* Hobbes's main concern was to discuss the origin and nature of law and government, in *Leviathan* he explores also what binds citizens together in a 'constant civil amity' (489).

⁹ Not only his philosophical orientation but also other more ideological reasons may have made Hobbes wary of ancient friendship. Although Cicero had argued that ‘a true friend’ could never ask one to ‘set fire to the Capitol’ (1991b, 94), another narrative was present in classical antiquity, which associated friendship ‘in the popular mind with courage, republicanism, and with the spirited resistance to injustice and tyranny’ (Pangle 2003, 1; Derrida 1997, 15). The story of the ‘completely loyal friendship’ between Phintias and Damon (Valerius Maximus 2004, 152), which had captured the ancient imagination (Cicero 1991a 116-7), shows that individuals capable of perfect friendship may very well be imperfect citizens.

¹⁰ For Hobbes, ‘truth’ is a property of propositions (*Leviathan* 19).

¹¹ She never received money for the corrupt acts. Her reward was love, if you can call it that’: this is an excerpt from a detective’s statement about a Dutch embassy official who issued visas on false grounds out of selfless love for friends; it illustrates the findings of a study according to which ‘next to material gain, the most important motives for officials to become corrupt are friendship or love, status, and making an impression on colleagues and friends’ (de Graaf and Huberts 2008, 643).

¹² For reasons of space, here I refer only to Schwarzenbach’s work, but Hobbes’s challenge applies also to other writings on friendship, including P.E. Digeser’s sober endorsement of the concept (2016). In her highly researched theory of friendship as a set of ‘practices’, that builds on concepts developed by Michael Oakeshott and Richard Flathman, Digeser maintains that friendship may provide openings for cooperation and reconciliation within liberal democracies. Even if Digeser does not mention Hobbes, her argument sounds very Hobbesian in places and reminds us closely of Chapter 22 of *Leviathan* where Hobbes discusses ‘systems’. Like Hobbes, Digeser acknowledges the potentially infinite variety of practices of friendship, the partiality of friendship, the problems that friendship can cause to

justice, the dangerous link between friendships, cronyism, corruption, factionalism and conspiracies, the impossibility of extending friendship to all members of a large society.

Unlike Hobbes, however, Digeser gives insufficient attention to the fact that some practices of friendship may target the existence of other practices of friendship or indeed have as their goal the destruction of the whole social network of friendships.