

## *Benevolentia* vs. Patronage: Cicero's Redefinition of Friendship in the *De Amicitia*

In this paper, I will argue that Cicero uses the *De Amicitia* to reorient the perception of friendship from a relationship of exchange, instead centering it around love. He accomplishes this through the use of and emphasis on the concept of *benevolentia*. Cicero's use of *benevolentia* in connection with his ideal of a love-based friendship challenges the commonly held belief that relationships of friendship and of patronage overlap in many ways and share a fundamentally similar motivation. Saller traces this overlap to the fact that "the Romans could hardly conceive of friendship without reciprocal exchange" (Saller 15). In the *De Amicitia*, Cicero redefines and reinterprets *amicitia* by emphasizing the role of *benevolentia* in a true and virtuous friendship and thus distinguishes it from a patronage relationship.

Modern scholarship has closely associated patronage and friendship, especially based on the exchange of *beneficia*, *officia*, and *gratia* (Brunt, 1988; Saller, 1982; Verboven, 2002). It has emphasized the political and economic aspects of friendship, and the great amount of overlap in the functionality of these two relationships. The Roman system of patronage involved two members of different classes who exchanged gifts (known as *beneficium*) and favors. The relationship was always unequal because the member of the lower class would be unable to reciprocate the *beneficia* received from his patron. In order to avoid the use of degrading terms to describe one's patron or client, the term *amicus* was often used. An *amicitia*, on the other hand, was a vague term used within the social, academic, and political spheres in Rome which described a multitude of levels of relationships, generally between equals.

Cicero uses the word *benevolentia* a number of times, and from its very first usage, he is already linking the concept of *benevolentia* and *amicitia*, and in doing so undermining the conflation of friendship and patronage: "*Namque hoc praestat amicitia propinquitati quod ex*

*propinquitatem benevolentiam tolli potest, ex amicitia non potest: sublata enim benevolentia amicitiae nomen tollitur, propinquitatis manet*" (Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 5.19). He differentiates a relationship (*propinquitatis*) from an *amicitia*, and the decisive difference between them is the presence or lack of *amicitia*. He argues that *benevolentia* is so essential to a friendship, that if it is destroyed then the friendship is destroyed as well. In his redefinition of *amicitia*, Cicero raises it to the divine level, above the petty plays of politics and exchange of a patronage: "*Est autem amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensus; qua quidem haud scio an excepta sapientia nil unquam melius homini sit a dis immortalibus datum*" (Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 6.20). The combination of the divine, humanity, *benevolentia*, and care results in what Cicero calls "a gift from the gods", once again emphasizing the centrality of *benevolentia* and also arguing that friendship should be treated with reverence. Cicero's understanding of *benevolentia* was deeper than just a common goodwill or kindness, but a deep affection for one's friend: "*Amor enim, ex quo amicitia nominata est, princeps est ad benevolentiam coniungendam*" (Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 8.26). He is directly addressing the understanding of *benevolentia* as a type of *beneficia*, claiming that it is not merely an exchange of kindness necessitated by the social climate, but rather claiming it is a type of *amor*, similar to that one would have for their family. In its final use in the dialogue, Cicero indicates why he has placed such emphasis on his redefinition of *amicitia* through the use of *benevolentia*: "*semper aliqui anquirendi sunt quos diligamus et a quibus diligamur: caritate enim benevolentiaque sublata*" (Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 27.102). He believes the purpose of mankind is to love and to be loved (*diligamus* and *diligamur*), not to advance in life through gaining favors. The worth is placed in life by *caritas* (affection) and *benevolentia*, without which

“every joy is destroyed from life” (*omnis est a vita sublata iucunditas*, Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 27.102).

### Bibliography

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