

**Looking for the Political Good:  
A “Friendly” Encounter Between Aristotle and Jacques Derrida**

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A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctorate of Philosophy

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Canada

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*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-16669-7*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-16669-7*

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## ABSTRACT

I seek an ethics of open-ness and questioning or “political good.” Namely, an ethics without any fixed standard, but informed by perpetual otherness. To flesh out this ethic, I rely on Aristotle and Derrida, particularly their views of the good and friendship.

Aristotle offers an “in” to otherness when he suggests Plato’s view of the good as one-ness is empty because it largely ignores the human fact of plurality and free choice. So how to marry the good with these facts? Friendship. In particular, Aristotle uses the love bond of friends to show how our multiple views of the good can work to form a common good. Thus, thanks to the affection and love of friendship, the good is set alongside a greater sensitivity to the other. On the other hand, this sensitivity is ultimately limited, since friendship like everything else in Aristotle remains defined by the Platonic good.

Derrida takes otherness more literally and so gives plurality and choice freer play. Thus, following Heidegger, he suggests that a fixed, singular good does not exist. In other words, the good exists only in perpetual change, questioning and work. The reason for this, Derrida suggests, is that when the good is fixed or presumed from the start as in Aristotle, it is ultimately not very “good” at all. Namely, it is not open to all views of the good, but instead favors one particular view. Further, this pre-eminent view must be assured by force or the absolute exclusion of other views.

If there is to be hope for a truly universal good then, we must get beyond this ethics of force and exclusion. Thus, Derrida posits an ethics which is never fixed and final, but ever open to the questioning of the other. Precisely, it is a vision of the good

ever undone by its other. As such, Derrida's view of the good is literally one of friendship. Namely, it is a common good which is ever questionable, ever informed by its other and for that very reason, inclusive and universal.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to all of the members of my committee, especially my thesis supervisor, Professor Newell, for advice and support. Thanks also to Vincent Turgeon, Omür Birler, Catherine Pacella, Toivo Koivukoski, Daniel Pierre-Antoine and members of the unofficial “thesis support group” for their common sense and invaluable advice. I would also like to acknowledge Michel St-Germain, Paul Kelly and especially Chris Stark who were very patient, especially on “stressful” days. And lastly, thank you to my parents and to my family who have always been there.

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## INTRODUCTION

As I have been writing these lines that concern a dear friend and one of my literary mentors, I have been experiencing a real difficulty “ending” and “concluding” something about Albahari’s literary opus. But then I realized that this kind of prose poses the ultimate challenge to the literary scholar. How does one end writing about a writer who always writes beyond ending? The reality beyond “reality” that Albahari’s prose circumscribes is by definition inconclusive, uncertain, erratic. His prose testifies to that dimension that exceeds words, that remains hidden in the “half-tones of unwritten music” he invokes in the story “The Playground.” So I end without ending, letting that music of words point toward that “something else” buried in the stories we tell each other.

- Tomislav Longinovic, Afterword, *Words are something else*<sup>1</sup>

In this dissertation, my “argument” is essentially this: ethics should not be based on certainty, or a presumption of the good, or even a model of a certain kind of human community (*ethos*). Indeed, do any of these things, and ethics, or more precisely the question of what is good or right, becomes a pretext for exclusion and hence not very good at all. In effect, to opt for “givens” as far as the good is concerned is to inevitably make the question of the good a matter of force, of excluding certain groups from participation in the good from the start; or more bald-facedly, of me imposing my particular view of the good over all of you. And so, for the good to be good, for ethics to be possible at all, my “uncertain” contention is that one must eschew all such presumptions of one-ness and instead opt for the trope of friendship; of a perpetual openness to, and therefore a perpetual trust in, the perspective of the excluded other. In this sense, this friendship sense, ethics, the good, becomes a kind of unending work on our

part. Namely, it literally becomes a political good, a good negotiated and renegotiated, simultaneously embraced and questioned, alive in the stories we tell and retell each other. Or in more political terms, ethics always already exists there in our particular laws, mores, conventions, philosophies insofar as we all realize that they could ever be better, ever more inclusive. In the end then, the notion of ethics I am seeking in this dissertation is a perpetual and participatory striving for the universally good. As such, it is a “standard” which is not simply just for the moment, but just for all human beings who have ever been and who ever will be precisely because it endlessly strives to include all of our myriad perspectives.

To support my search for this open-ended and radically inclusive conception of ethics, I rely principally on two very different thinkers, at least on the surface: Aristotle and Jacques Derrida. In general, my use of Aristotle and Derrida is meant purposefully to suggest that this open-ended ethical formulation is not mine alone. Further, I do not even intend it to be an ethical “solution.” Rather, what is being implied here is something broader. In short, such ethical open-ness, far from being a novel proposal by me, may very well be deeply embedded in the tradition of political philosophy itself. Thus, all at once, my argument for the political good becomes something more akin to a search.

Or to put this in another way, what I am simply suggesting is that the spirit of political philosophy guides “my” notion of ethics. Namely philosophy is not deterministic. It is not meant to be a theory that captures all of reality. On the contrary, given its spirit of pursuing knowledge, it necessarily welcomes questions and critique. As such, no matter where it finally stands, no matter whether it exalts freedom or the

eternal good, political philosophy, by “definition,” remains open-ended. Indeed, it must. For without at least an implicit nod to open-ended-ness, there would be no way to finally distinguish political philosophy from political ideology. And thus, I confess that it is this non-deterministic spirit of philosophy in general that ultimately prompts my search for a so-called political good.

Launching now into my chapter-by-chapter summary, I begin, in Chapters 1 and 2, by suggesting that such an open-ended spirit exists at the heart of Aristotle’s political philosophy. Thus, in Chapter 1, I highlight a seeming “contradiction” in Aristotle’s political thought. To the point, in both his *Politics* and *Ethics*, Aristotle defends the fixed eternal good by ironically rejecting simple one-ness in favor of the much more convoluted pathway of plurality and free choice.

Specifically, in both the *Politics* and the *Ethics*, Aristotle quibbles with Plato’s vision of the singular good. Namely, Aristotle argues, while it is his ultimate political purpose to defend the primacy of the good in human affairs and with it a universal harmony achieved by rank, one must nevertheless take care how this defense is made. In particular, one must avoid the apparent if understandable mistake of Plato who, it seems, makes this defense too literal.

To elaborate, in Book 2 of the *Politics* and at various points in the *Ethics*, Aristotle explains Plato’s problem in the following way. Quite simply, Plato’s “problem” is not that he defends the singular good. Rather, it is the method he uses to do so that is at issue. It is so uncompromising as to be self-defeating. Or more precisely, Aristotle argues, Plato is so consumed with defending the idea of the good that he forgets the

human fact of his audience. As a result, Aristotle concludes, his defense of the good becomes empty or without substance. Plato's good is simply too uncompromising in the face of actual human political realities.

And so, it is to rectify this situation and thereby "save" the singular, Platonic good, that Aristotle utters what is probably his most famous statement, "man is by nature a political animal." And further, in the *Ethics*, he goes so far as to suggest that the political life is valuable on its own terms; it does not always, as Plato thought, need the "sanction" of philosophy to make it worthwhile. In any case, taken together, these statements serve to suggest an open-ended ethic in Aristotle's political philosophy. Quite simply, with respect to the good, human beings are not literally one but political. Namely, they have no seamless connection to the good but must choose. Hence, Aristotle's entire political philosophy is taken up by the question of how to marry the singular good to the fact of man's free choice and his context of plurality (that he exists among others who also have this capacity for free choice).

Next, in Chapter 2, we show how Aristotle seems to most fully achieve this "marriage." Friendship. To elaborate, with friendship, Aristotle puts the pluralistic fact of the human relation to the good to work. In particular, by making friendship a virtue, Aristotle suggests that other points of view are not, as Plato thought, hindrances to the good. On the contrary, they are integral to it. For, without the confirmation of others, how can we possibly have any sense of the good? In effect, it becomes little more than a fantasy in the mind of a single philosopher. As such, friendship is necessary to imbue a real feeling of participation in the good, to bring it alive, so to speak.

In a sense then, this tradition of Aristotle questioning Plato's good in the name of the human reality of politics (free choice and plurality) is really what we mean in the first paragraph when we speak of the political good. In particular, as embodied by his notion of our political nature and his accompanying idea of friendship as a virtue, we see in Aristotle more than simply a singular idea of the good. Rather, it is a good which *is* only insofar as it jives with the reality of human relations. In Aristotle's words, the good is the product of our interaction with others, of testing our views with and against others in the name of forging a common good that is not simply abstract, but something which is real to us because it is something in which we are passionately and perpetually involved.

And yet, to complete our summation of Chapters 1 and 2, in the very instance of seeming to embrace the political good, Aristotle ultimately does something rather odd. He recoils from it and actually favors the singular Platonic idea of the good. Thus, we see that his political animal argument in the *Politics* is finally undercut by his presumption that the good of the political community is simply superior. In this way, we are led to believe that political animals are not really free or plural at all. Instead, informed by the superior good of the political community, they will necessarily always choose the fixed eternal good. So much for a truly vibrant political good in the *Politics*.

As for friendship in the *Ethics*, its open-ness to others is similarly undercut by a presumption that friendship is necessarily defined by sameness. Namely, the only true friendship is good friendship whereby two men finally share the same view of the good. This, Aristotle argues, is the real basis for the affection towards the other. By the same token, to be truly other is therefore to be excluded from the good. Once again, no

political good here after all. Furthermore, this is confirmed by the overall presumption of the *Ethics*, namely that for all its worthiness, the political life is finally subservient to the superior life of contemplation. Thus, in the end, for Aristotle, like Plato, the good must finally be eternal, not hindered by the deliberations of politics.

So how did it come to this? All at once we are prompted to turn to Derrida for an explanation and at the same time to seek a means by which to “save” the political good. The journey begins in Chapter 3 with Derrida’s redefinition of the good. In particular, Derrida begins this redefinition by dwelling on the very contradiction that Aristotle brings to light. Namely, Aristotle both defends and at the same time undercuts the political good. Perhaps there is something to this. In effect, far from attempting to “resolve” this apparent Aristotelian paradox, Derrida, using Heidegger’s conception of Being-as-time will actually build his conception of the political good precisely on Aristotle’s simultaneous embrace and revulsion of the political good.

To elaborate, we start with something we first query in both Chapters 1 and 2. To the point, is it not quite simply most perplexing that Aristotle, who finally reduces friendship to the imperative for sameness, who ultimately undermines the promise of the political animal by presuming a superior good for the *polis* from the start, nevertheless spends so much time on both? Indeed, if his aim were simply to re-defend the singular Platonic good, why take the more convoluted political animal/friendship paths in the first place? Clearly, whatever his explicit intentions, there must be something deeper going on in Aristotle’s “traditional” defense of the good. And needless to add, it is this “something deeper” which Derrida attempts to describe in his vision of the good.

In Chapter 3, Derrida undertakes this “description” by first, as we suggested, drawing on Heidegger’s Being-as-time. In particular, like Heidegger, he takes this apparent vacillation between otherness and sameness, between the political animal and the singular good in Aristotle not as a problem in need of a solution, but as itself evidence of the truth. In brief, argues Derrida, this seeming contradiction suggests two things about the good. First, with respect to the true, the good, the overall principle of reality, we human beings ever err. Thus, like Aristotle, like Plato, like all human beings, we will always in one way or another, undercut the political or open-ended good which necessarily includes all, with our fixed singular exclusive presumptions of the good. This is quite simply our nature: namely to assert our being-there in the “chaos” of existence (the political good) and so impose our particular view of the good, of justice, of everything, upon everyone else.

On the other hand, amid the despair that such imposition and error ever suggests, the political good yet remains possible for us, or so Derrida now distancing himself from Heidegger suggests. How? If we simply learn to let being be. More precisely, Derrida dares us to live in the realm of Being-as-time not by skipping from error to error as Heidegger suggests. But rather, insofar as we accept the profound responsibility that such a letting-being-be stance presupposes. Namely, drawing on Levinas, Derrida suggests that we take this “chaotic” posture of Being-as-time as itself a kind of ethical standard. In short, we are called upon to embrace the other as other and in this way, turn away from the singular truth as standard and instead be guided by the more humble stance of learning to become “friends of the truth.”

In order to understand how this works, and more precisely, how it contains any kind of ethical flavor, we all at once turn to the posture of deconstruction. This for Derrida is quite literally the truth of Being-as-time. *Destruktion*. Dissimulation. The perpetual undoing of truth by its other. In effect, the good only *is* for Derrida insofar as it is never finally achieved but always kept in motion, always questioned. What's more, in keeping with Aristotle's vacillation above, Derrida suggests that this impossibility of all fixed goods, so to speak, is actually borne out by the tradition of philosophy itself, albeit reluctantly. And so, in order to live in this literally non-exclusionary good of Being-as-time, we are necessarily tasked with the constant responsibility to look for it. Specifically, we are prompted to re-read the tradition, not to see what the author explicitly says, but what this author, in his authorial pronouncement of truth, must finally exclude. And thus, we are suddenly propelled to Chapters 4 and 5, namely Derrida's deconstructive readings of Carl Schmitt and Aristotle.

In Chapter 4, we start with Derrida's deconstruction of Carl Schmitt. Why do we bother with Schmitt before turning to Aristotle? Well, as I have implied and will now state explicitly, there is the niggling doubt that what Derrida proposes, namely a Being-as-time impossible good, is actually good. It is political to be sure. It is rife with deliberation, free choice, questioning, otherness and uncertainty. However, is this good? Needless to add, this is a critique by many of Derrida, including that which we highlight, namely Fred Dallmayr and his charge of narcissism. So how to answer this unethical charge? Derrida's approach to this "accusation," I believe, lies in his reading of Schmitt.

Indeed, in many ways, Schmitt's decisionist politics, his belief in *Concept of the Political* that political communities are based on nothing but an arbitrary public decision as to an enemy (an other from which to distinguish ourselves) seems to reflect the Being-as-time impossible good that Derrida "defends." Thus, in keeping with Dallmayr's critique, Derrida emerges as little more than a decisionist. What's more, in his actual reading of *Concept of the Political*, Derrida himself appears actually to confirm this unethical view insofar as he takes Schmitt to task for not being arbitrary enough. Specifically, as Derrida points out, far from being an arbitrary decisionist, Schmitt assumes that it is worthwhile to make this decision in the first place. All of which suggests that clearly, for Schmitt, there is more than an arbitrary public decision behind his concept of the political. In effect, whether admitted or not, there is also a profoundly fixed ethical assumption by Schmitt for decision-makers. In effect, Schmitt's politics is conditioned not by freedom or arbitrariness at all. On the contrary, it clearly favors a rather substantive and profoundly exclusive common good. Namely, it is one which eschews the weak, exults the decisive. As such, it is necessarily conditioned by a fixed ideal of a man who is audacious and strong, possessing the will to impose his views over everyone else.

So Derrida's deconstructive read of Schmitt. The question is, is it simply proof of Derrida's own arbitrariness and narcissism or is something else going on? Clearly, or so I suggest, it is the latter. Uncovering Schmitt's profound exclusivity surely has profound ethical potential. For remember, it is upon this exclusivity that Schmitt constructs his supposed arbitrary decisionism. As such, by exposing the substantive ethical other

conditioning Schmitt's supposed defense of a free politics, Derrida shows that politics can never be purely political but is ever bound up with ethical considerations. But even more importantly, in his very "defense" of the "impure," Derrida also suggests a more satisfying ethico-political alternative to that offered by Schmitt's profoundly aggressive, masculine political good. Quite simply, it is a political good that is more political. That is, it is literally open to all others, including even Schmitt's aggressive decision-maker.

In any case, instilled with this hope for a truly political good, we turn at last to Chapter 5 and Derrida's deconstructive read of Aristotle. And here, all at once, we come to the crux of our search for a political good. Put bluntly, if Derrida is correct, if the only truth or good is the undoing happening of deconstruction, then what does this mean for an explicitly "good" view like that of Aristotle's politics? Quite simply, deconstruction would surely render any such ethical view as hopelessly problematic. Which all at once gives rise, yet again, to the Dallmayrian charge of narcissism.

Keeping this in mind, we proceed. In fact, we actually begin by suggesting that rendering Aristotle's view of the political good as hopelessly problematic is precisely Derrida's aim. Thus, in an even more powerful fashion, he brings up Aristotle's "betrayal" of his own political principles all over again. In short, to repeat, Aristotle does in the end undermine his political animal and friendship claims with a desire to defend the fixed eternal good *a la* Plato. Furthermore, Derrida exposes exactly how Aristotle is able to do this. Counting. Basically, the perplexity of Aristotle defending free choice, plurality and otherness on the one hand, and the fixed eternal good on the other is suddenly made less perplexing upon the uncovering of a rather disturbing little fact which

conditions Aristotle's overall ethico-political argument. Quite simply, in order to substantiate his defense of the fixed eternal good, Aristotle decides to limit those who would be political animals to the absolute few. More precisely, these few are limited to those I know I can trust; who live near me and who I am thereby able to constantly test and so feel assured that they are good like me.

Having exposed then that Aristotle's political "ethics" ultimately rests not on ethical considerations but counting, on the numerical control of those who can be trusted to be free, we all at once discover what Derrida alternately wants to defend. It is necessarily a more open-ended, inclusive, freer vision of the political good. But perhaps this is narcissistic? Indeed, if ethics finally rests on such numerical exclusion of all but the few, why not abandon it in favor of politics alone?

On the other hand, however, as the deconstruction of Schmitt suggested, this will not do either. Pure politics, in short, can be just as exclusionary. Perhaps even more so. And so, what is left? Perhaps nothing. Or, and this seems to be Derrida's answer, perhaps everything. It all depends on how you look at things.

More to the point, as the deconstruction of both Schmitt and Aristotle reveals, I think it is clear that, from Derrida's perspective, something more than a simple rejection is going on. In particular, while clearly critical of both thinkers and indeed all thinkers, Derrida at the same time professes a profound debt and respect to these same thinkers. Indeed, he continues, without their thought, their willingness to engage the most perplexing of questions, there would be no crevices to expose in the first place, no hope for the possibility of an other way to see this same reality.

And thus, alongside Dallmayr's narcissistic critique which indeed Derrida never can overcome, nor finally wants to anyway, there is also the possibility of a profoundly inclusive political good which embraces friends and enemies. Which encompasses tradition and non-tradition alike, freedom and the eternal good alike. In effect, all are ever potentially there in this vision of political ethics, provided of course, we are ever willing to make the effort to discover this possibility. Indeed, it actually takes a great deal of effort. Such inclusion of all others is by no means a certainty. On the contrary, it is profoundly difficult, perhaps even impossible.

On the other hand, impossible or not, it is surely inspiring to have so many thinkers to emulate, so many who have precisely made this very effort in spite of the profound difficulty. Such is the spirit of philosophy by which, Derrida suggests, we should finally be guided. Not authority, not a single pathway to truth, but rather the emulation of a lived pursuit of truth. In this way, all together, whether alive or dead, whether old, young or not yet born, we can all participate. We can all thusly become "friends of truth."

In the end then, though of course if this political good is to "survive" there can be no end, everything rests on the most fragile thing imaginable: a trust that others have done and will continue to do this work of ethics. And thus, Derrida ends his *Politics of Friendship*, not with an assertion of his view of the good, but with a plea for we, his readers, to continue this work of otherness. "O, my democratic friends..."

## CHAPTER 1

Politics is innately good. Of all political thinkers, Aristotle would seem most firmly to defend this notion. What it amounts to is an assertion of the intrinsic worth of plurality and a concomitant faith in man's ability to freely choose the good. And yet, here, in this barest of beginnings, we are confronted with a problem. To the point, Aristotle ultimately bases his argument for political value, for plurality and free choice, on strangely non-plural, non freely chosen grounds, namely that of nature or, what is the same thing, a singular "divine" vision of the good. Thus, the inevitable and depressing conclusion: perhaps politics as politics can never truly be considered good. Indeed, does not one of its most confident proponents feel the need to search elsewhere, beyond plurality and free choice, to assert its worth? And so, in the name of rescuing the political good on its own free choosing and pluralistic terms, perhaps we too, in the end, must search elsewhere, beyond Aristotle.

Of course, it is one thing to make such claims, quite another to prove them. Lest I be accused of over-simplifying a complex and sophisticated argument, I will begin by being fair to Aristotle. Thus, the first half of this chapter will largely be devoted to simply explicating his "natural" political argument. The implication here is that despite not being based on plurality or free choice, Aristotle's naturally good view is, quite simply, "political" enough.

Specifically, on the one hand, unlike Plato, who has his Socrates insist on the "unity of virtue," Aristotle says that man is by nature a political animal.<sup>1</sup> We are not all capable of being philosophers, of contemplating the oneness of the cosmos. In fact, for

the most part, all men deliberate, disagree and even, if pushed too far, fight for what they feel is right. This, Aristotle suggests, is our nature. In short, with respect to the good, men are not at one, but plural and capable of free choice.

Further, deepening his favorable view of man's political nature, Aristotle, in discussing the best human life, puts the political ruler virtually on par with the philosopher. The bottom line here is that as far as Aristotle is concerned, a life that involves being able to freely choose among several options in order to act in the best interest of the polity is not something undertaken by the failed philosopher. On the contrary, this political life is worth living *per se*. Namely, its freer, potentially conflictual, vision the good has virtues all its own.<sup>2</sup> Or so Aristotle appears to argue in the *Ethics* via his account of the moral and intellectual virtues. And so, in the end, thanks to Aristotle's overall vision of politics, a hope for such a thing as a truly political good seems to emerge.

And yet, turning now to the sketch of my critique, which will occupy the last half of the Chapter, I cannot help but question if it is truly politics that Aristotle is praising here. Let us take his discussion of the best human life first. Basically, while it is true that the political life is worthy for Aristotle, it is also clear in the *Ethics* that, ultimately, it takes its cue from philosophy. In short, the measure of a worthy life, of the good life, is not finally based on the free choice and plurality characteristic of politics, but rather on the singular good, which is the object of philosophy. Thus Aristotle, in Book 10 of the *Ethics* concludes, though we are indeed political animals, we must nevertheless strive with every nerve for the divine.<sup>3</sup> Quite simply, a singular divine good finally defines all

things, including politics. Needless to say, this “divine intervention” does not bode well for the defence of free choice and plurality as such.

Second, this apolitical bent of Aristotle’s politics is also borne out with respect to his political animal declaration in the *Politics*. In particular, precisely because politics is deemed natural in the first place, its plural and free-choosing character all at once becomes suspect. Thus, the *polis*, Aristotle tells us, is the highest, most complete human association, embracing all others. It follows that the good at which it aims is the most complete, the most perfect.<sup>4</sup> And so, it seems, we can rest assured that no matter how heated our disagreements, the good life of politics will always triumph in the end. Beyond the random plurality exists the natural guarantee of unity. And thus, Aristotle’s natural defense of politics is ultimately apolitical. Indeed, to, in effect, trump our deliberative, conflictual capacity with a higher good surely undermines the intrinsic worth of plurality and free choice, does it not?

Or does it? To conclude the sketch of my argument for this opening Chapter, I wonder if perhaps politics, to be considered good at all, must nevertheless, in spite of my “free” critique, adhere to some fixed, apolitical standard. After all, surely sheer free choice can lead to nothing but random plurality or chaos. And certainly this cannot be considered good. And so, the inevitable if unsatisfactory conclusion: political worth cannot finally be defined by free choice and plurality. It must simply (and suspiciously) be given.

On the other hand, to segue to Chapter 2 and beyond, perhaps things need not be presented so starkly, namely, as free choice and plurality versus the good. Thus,

friendship as an ethical principle for politics enters the discussion, first via Aristotle, then, later, via the more “free” Jacques Derrida. Why friendship? Being more personal, less abstract, it will be my contention that, especially in its Derridean incarnation, friendship serves to put a more individual, human face on Aristotle’s divine good and thus, at least in terms of degree, promises to make it more political. That is, seen through the lens of the human relation of friendship, the good as such becomes more sensitive to what plurality actually means. And herein, I will finally conclude, lies the possibility for its closer kinship with free choice as such, known in modern parlance as liberty or freedom. In any case, having set forth the path for Chapter 1, let us now take up the way.

Setting the tone for the entire work, Aristotle opens his *Politics* thus:

...every state is an association of persons formed with a view to some good purpose. I say 'good' because in their actions all men do in fact aim at what they think good. Clearly then, as all associations aim at some good, that one which is supreme and embraces all others will have also as its aim the supreme good. That is the association which we call the State, and that type of association we call political.<sup>5</sup>

In effect, a hierarchical order of human associations is proposed with the political association placed in a position of preeminence. And it is the highest, Aristotle suggests, because of the greater tendency of men in a polity to exercise their capacity of choice, namely to choose the good rather than be subjected to that which is merely useful to secure life. Indeed, the polity is the only association, which aims at the supreme good. As such, the state association appears to set the standard of the good by which all other associations therein must abide. In Aristotle's political cosmos, we hence see that what is good for one is delimited by what is good for all.

Having thusly proposed this innate or natural defense of the common good from the outset, Aristotle then goes on to add further nuance to his argument, declaring that man is by nature a political animal.<sup>6</sup> To elaborate, though the supreme good of the political community serves to, as it were, ground all human interaction, Aristotle is nevertheless careful to prevent the conclusion, which may follow from this assumption. In particular, as implied by the above invocation of choice, it seems that the natural superiority of the political association is not meant to connote a literal unity and thereby preclude the free expression of views. Hence, man as a natural political animal, in which the mark of distinction is not seamless cooperation, but in fact reasoned speech where humans are able to indicate their perception of “what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is right and what is wrong.”<sup>7</sup>

And thus, in but a few opening pages of the *Politics*, Aristotle seems to make his case for the political good. In effect, the predetermined good of the *polis* is married to the free expression of men. The result of this marriage is to produce a common good which is singular and supreme, that is, providing an ethical standard, and at the same time dynamically plural, namely it does not impose this standard but allows men to freely choose it. Needless to add, this apparent marriage of opposites is very impressive. The question is, however, does Aristotle really mean to thusly defend a political good? On the one hand, he may simply be contradicting himself. On the other hand, perhaps something more sinister, more imposing and forced, is at work; indeed, as we shall learn later, for Aristotle, only the few are capable of free choice.<sup>8</sup> In any case, suspending our critique for now, let us probe deeper into the *Politics* and search for further justification

of the political animal claim. In this regard, Book 2, in which Aristotle makes his objections against Plato's common good, is particularly instructive.

To explain, in setting up his discussion of Plato's political ideal, Aristotle makes the following revealing comment on method:

We have undertaken to discuss the form of association or partnership which we call the state, to ask the question what is the best type of such partnership...[and in doing so] we must... look at sample constitutions, for example...[those] that have been sketched by writers and appear to be good. Our purpose is partly to see what in them is good and useful and what is not; but we also wish to make it clear that if we keep looking for something different from what we find there, we do not do so out of mere captiousness or a desire to be clever; we have chosen this method simply because in fact none of the existing constitutions, whether written or actual, is entirely satisfactory.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, with this method, Aristotle announces a rather humble approach. While clearly looking for something different than all existing sketches of the political good, Aristotle, at the same time, acknowledges a kind of gratitude to these other views of the good. To the point, in his search for the best state, he does not simply reject other views. Rather, he insists on the necessity of sifting them, "see[ing] what in them is good and useful and what is not."

And so, the logical conclusion, which arises out of this approach, is as follows. In order to gain a deeper understanding of Aristotle's political view, it must be removed from isolation, as it were, and examined alongside other views. Seeing what it has in common with them so as to set its own distinct meaning in sharp relief. In any case, now that we have set forth this deeper, sharper path according to Aristotle's own method of arguing, let us take up the way and thusly compare Aristotle with Plato. Though one

prefatory note, as I am framing this comparison solely in terms of what Aristotle believes they have in common and what not, I dispense with any direct reference to Plato's texts.<sup>10</sup>

First, then, according to Aristotle, what does his notion of politics share with Plato's political view? Actually, I argue, it shares a great deal.<sup>11</sup> However, for our purposes, it is helpful to narrow all of these similarities down to just one. To the point, implied throughout Aristotle's critique of Plato in Book 2 of the *Politics* is a shared desire for natural unity. Thus, Plato is taken to task not because he promotes a city in line with a rather thick conception of the common good in which a natural harmony is favored against free choice and plurality. On the contrary, he is criticized because he actually seems to miss his own high ethical standard. In short, the means Plato employs to achieve a natural unity actually promote disunity. Or so argues Aristotle in Book 2.<sup>12</sup>

To elaborate in brief, this critique of Platonic unity emerges most clearly in Aristotle's rejection of the community of wives and children that Socrates proposes in the *Republic*.<sup>13</sup> Namely, this kind of community is not feasible because rather than fulfill Plato's own assumption of natural harmony, it actually, according to Aristotle, promotes jealousy and conflict. Thus, Plato's literal notion of unity ironically leads to disunity.

To repeat then, in agreement with Plato's political vision, Aristotle supports a rather fixed or natural conception of the common good. Like Plato, he wants a natural unity, a natural harmony. And thus, his critique of Plato is actually meant to assure this desire. Needless to add, this presumed agreement with the natural good of Plato makes

Aristotle's political animal argument, in which free choice and plurality are defended as the natural human basis for the good, all the more dubious.

Still, before coming to this conclusion, we would do best, in line with Aristotle's above-noted method, to explicitly discuss what differentiates his view of the political good from that of Plato. Indeed, even in the brief discussion of their similarities, we have already seen that, in Aristotle's view, Plato fails to achieve his own goal of natural unity. The deeper question now is why. Does Plato, via his mistaken means, simply contradict himself? Or is the problem more substantial than that? In short, perhaps he has a mistaken view of nature itself. A view, specifically, that is not sufficiently political, that is, not sufficiently attuned to the human reality of plurality and free choice with respect to the good. In fact, as we shall see presently, the latter *is* Aristotle's fundamental critique of Plato. Thus he suggests: "the state is *not* a natural unity in the sense that some people think."<sup>14</sup>

To elaborate, Aristotle expands upon his critique by quibbling with the dictum of Socrates: "It is best that the state should be as much of a unity as possible."<sup>15</sup> In short, the unity that Socrates is proposing here for the state or common good is akin to the unity of an individual writ large. It is seamlessly singular. It is literally one. And herein, according to Aristotle, lies the problem.

Quite simply, the state is not an individual, but a state. And what is a state? It is not a literal unity, but a unity of masses of men. It is a common good. Or, more precisely, it is a joining of men who are different; who are not simply as hands or feet to the rational brain of an individual. But who, in fact, are individuals themselves, capable

of making their own choices as to what is good and what is bad.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the natural unity of the state cannot, as Plato's Socrates proposes, simply be a unity. Rather, it can only be a plurality. In Aristotle's words, "it is the perfect balance between its *different* parts that keeps a city in being."<sup>17</sup> And further, "it is the sharing of a *common view* in these matters [i.e. decisions as to right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust] that makes a...city."<sup>18</sup>

And so, coming back to the political animal versus superior state dilemma we outlined earlier, in thusly conceiving of the common good as naturally plural, Aristotle showcases his true uniqueness; in particular his apparent ability to marry the political, namely that which admits of plurality and free choice, and the good, namely that which is one. Quite simply, as his critique of Plato reveals, Aristotle, while believing in natural unity, refuses to read this in an absolutely literal way. Why? Once again, the state cannot be an individual. Or to put it another way, what Aristotle is suggesting here is that, novel and exciting as Plato's "absolutely singular" idea is, it is simply not within the realm of human possibility.<sup>19</sup> In short, Plato's notion of natural unity is not realistic: though humans may want to achieve a singular unity, they cannot be expected to do so in a singular, all encompassing way. After all, they are not gods, but men. They must choose. And hence Aristotle, with his natural plurality, does not so much reject Plato's divine view as try to tailor a common good fit for human beings. In effect, it is a good brought down to earth; a good, which is not simply given, but chosen; a political good.

And yet, just coming to understand the political ground of Aristotle's vision of the good as it emerges in the *Politics*, are we not all at once confronted with another

problem? In short, perhaps Aristotle is settling for something lower, even non-good, by defending the good in political terms. After all, his main critique of Plato's more divine view is not that it is unworthy in itself, but rather that it is beyond the realm of human possibility. And thus, being ranked below the divine, man as freely choosing political animal almost seems a case of being man's lot rather than as being intrinsically worthy in itself. In effect, to defend the good on the basis of plurality and free choice is not really good, but simply as good as man gets.

Furthermore, Aristotle himself actually explicitly acknowledges this apparently lower value of politics with respect to the divine. Thus, in the *Politics*, he expresses a willingness to deal with tyrants on the one hand and defends the use of force as often the surest way to ensure the common good on the other.<sup>20</sup> Either way, the message seems to be that human beings, as political animals, cannot generally be trusted to freely choose the good. Indeed, why else would force be required? And thus, to repeat, the free-choosing-naturally-plural human status appears to be a concession to a less noble human political reality rather than a recipe for a truly worthy common good. And needless to add, once again, such a divine or natural bias puts the notion of the political good, and with it a positive value for human free choice and plurality, in serious doubt.

Or does it? Once again, in the spirit of fairness, let us suspend critique and search for deeper grounds in the labyrinth of Aristotelian thought. Indeed, there is more to Aristotle's political view than that contained in the *Politics*. In particular, there is the *Ethics* in which a less "forceful" presentation of politics seems to come to the fore. More than that, Aristotle speaks therein as if the freely choosing political animal actually does

have a worth all its own. Thus, the virtues of practical wisdom are praised virtually on their own terms, philosophical divinity notwithstanding.<sup>21</sup> In any case, turning now to the *Ethics*, let us see if, in fact, such virtue amounts to a defense of what we continue to seek, namely a truly thriving political good.

To begin on this more hopeful path, it would be useful to start with Aristotle's definition of virtue. Fortunately, we do not have to dig too deep into the *Ethics* to find such a definition. Thus, on page 2, after having suggested that man seeks the good in all of his actions, Aristotle, in the same breath tells us that this good is not self-evident but requires knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Further, and herein his notion of virtue is revealed, acquiring such knowledge requires order and discipline; in particular, a life that is ruled by right reason.<sup>23</sup>

Next, now that we have thusly defined Aristotelian virtue, we are led to wonder, in keeping with our overall argument, how exactly does it connote a defense of innate political worth? Well, on the strictly "worthy" side of things, the answer is obvious. Insofar as virtue implies acquiring knowledge of what is best for us, it is literally at one with what is innately worthy for us. On the other hand, however, in terms of assessing whether or not this worth is political, things are not so clear. Indeed, does not the acquisition of virtue, and thereby of what is innately worthy for us, require the rule of right reason? The implication here is that far from praising the free choosing and plural political animal on its own terms, Aristotle, via his notion of virtue, in fact seems to believe that the good life for human beings is a given, set forth from the start in the form of a rule of what is right. And thus, rather than solve the problem of the *Politics*,

Aristotelian virtue in the *Ethics* appears to restate it even more powerfully. In effect, the rule of right reason suggests that the philosopher, namely he who seeks to discover and emulate the singular divine rule of the cosmos, is the ultimate guide for all political action. The worth of politics is quite simply dependent on the singular, divine good of philosophy.

However, before we finally give up hope that Aristotle defends any such thing as a political good and by extension something truly human rather than divine, we would do best to take a closer look at this so-called “rule of right reason.” In particular, after all that we have just said, it may come as a surprise that Aristotle characterizes the acquisition of knowledge concerning what is good for man as political science.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, if nothing else, this suggests our conclusion that Aristotle simply rejects politics in favor of philosophy as the only guide to what is good is perhaps too simplistic.

And so, prepared once again to suspend critique for the last time in this chapter, we now examine Aristotelian virtue in light of his notion of political science. To elaborate, we ask the following question: how can the rule of right reason, in Aristotle’s view, possibly jive with the free choice of the political animal and so connote a more genuinely pluralistic view of the good? The answer which seems to emerge from the *Ethics*, or so I will now argue, is twofold. First, the subject matter of this rule that is, its so-called singular truth, can only emerge roughly and in outline.<sup>25</sup> Second, following from this, the discovery of this rule is not simply given but depends a great deal on the exercise of each man’s individual choice.<sup>26</sup> Needless to add, herein the choice indicative of the political good appears to gain a kind of favor all its own. And further, insofar as

this occurs, Aristotle's pluralistic vision of the good emerges almost equally as worthy as that of the more divinely inspired, singular view. In any case, to prove these contentions, let us discuss each of these claims in turn.

First, what does Aristotle mean by political science being discoverable only roughly and in outline? Let me admit from the outset that the answer to this question is by no means a simple one, but is quite involved and complex. Still, we beg the reader's patience as we attempt to link this notion of "rough-ness" to our overall search for the political good in Aristotle.

And so, to begin, having defined the knowledge of what is good for man as political science, Aristotle goes on to discuss the so-called nature of this science. In particular, re-invoking the same method used in the *Politics*, which we outlined above, he clarifies what this science is by first telling us what it is not. Not surprisingly, in this exercise of clarification, Plato emerges once again as a kind of foil.<sup>27</sup>

To elaborate, with respect to what is good for man, Platonic thought emphasizes the Idea of the good.<sup>28</sup> What is this Idea? According to Aristotle, it posits a singular universal good to which everything, including man, is subject. And thus man's good, to the extent that it is defined by such an Idea, is literally fixed from on high. Indeed, it must be if it is to be in harmony with the good of the whole, which literally encompasses more than that of man. Needless to say, here, we have the philosophical view whereby man's good is not singled out in any way. Or to put it more tellingly in terms of our overall argument, man's good, in thusly being so small and partial, has no worth in itself. And hence the inevitable apolitical conclusion: thanks to the Idea of the good, free choice

and plurality must necessarily give way to the philosophical demand for whole-ness or one-ness.

Now, as we have already suggested, Aristotle, in discussing this notion of the Platonic Idea of the good, does so only to clarify his own distinct position. In short, for Aristotle, man's good is not simply subject to the singular philosophical Idea, but is also discovered in its own human terms. Indeed, it even has its own science, namely that of political science. However, before we run away with this line of thought and thusly conclude that Aristotle defends a notion of the good that is truly political, let us proceed cautiously. Thus returning to the text of the *Ethics*, we seek clarification as to what this so-called rejection of the Idea of the good means in terms of Aristotle's view of man's good. In particular, we are interested in how it colors Aristotle's notion of the right rule of reason which, he says, man must follow if he is to discover what is best for himself. As a hint in this regard, we are at last explicitly approaching the first significant notion of Aristotelian political science, namely that its good can only be conceived "roughly and in outline."

In his critique of the Platonic Idea of the good, Aristotle cites two different, but related objections with respect to its ability to identify what is inherently worthy for man. First, he argues, it is too universal.<sup>29</sup> To paraphrase Aristotle, the good is never simply collapsible to a singular Idea. Indeed, he argues, far from being singular in meaning, the good can actually be used in many senses, for example in terms of the substance of a thing as well as in terms of the qualities of that substance. And so, if one is to properly speak of the good, one must forego seamless universality and address each particular

aspect of the good in turn. Needless to say, the Ideas do not do this, and so the good they posit is vague at best.

Second, the Platonic Idea of the good is empty.<sup>30</sup> Again, to paraphrase Aristotle, some Platonists try to overcome the universal problem just stated by arguing that each thing is good in reference to its own singular Form. However, far from overcoming vague universalism, this seems to underscore it even more. To the point, the Form is defined as that which is good in itself, that is, it is the pure good by which an actual thing is defined *as* a thing. The problem here, though, is that this pure good upon which thing-ness depends is utterly abstract and non-demonstrable. Thus Aristotle suggests, even if there is such a Form “which is universally predicable of goods, or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achieved or attained by man; but *we are now seeking something attainable.*”<sup>31</sup> And how do we do this? “Presumably then, *we must begin with things evident to us.*”<sup>32</sup> That is, the good of a thing can only be assessed in light of its concreteness, complexity and particularity. In short, its truth is not simply in itself but must be assessed through human eyes. And herein lies the point of this whole Idea digression.

Quite simply, when it comes to assessing what is best for man, or more precisely, what constitutes the “right rule of reason” by which he is to guide himself toward that end, universalist, philosophical abstraction alone will not do. Why? Because it is a human good that is being sought here. That is, a good colored by the actions and perspective of its human subjects and so a good subject to incredible variety and fluctuation or, what is the same thing, a good that is freely chosen and hence essentially

plural.<sup>33</sup> Thus, with respect to gaining a knowledge of this good, the “divine certainty” of philosophy must make room for the “rough outline” of politics. In short, the good, in human terms, is always political.

And yet, tantalizing as this “rough” conclusion is, in terms of our overall search for a truly political good, more remains to be said. To the point, it is not yet clear how this rough outline of politics translates into a defense of the free-choosing political animal as such. And hence, the dilemma of the *Politics*, namely that politics is simply our lot rather than being intrinsically worthy, re-emerges. For, while it may be true that the discovery of the human good can only be reached roughly and in outline, this statement, in itself, does not bestow any innate worthiness on the political way of doing things. In fact, its very sketchiness seems rather to once again underscore our human inadequacy with respect to reaching the good, does it not?

And so, lest we simply rehash the negative tone of the *Politics* yet again, some statement, which brings this political truth to life beyond mere “roughness,” would appear to be required. In effect, we are looking for something that does more than make it seem as if the Ideas are inadequate simply because they are beyond our paltry human understanding. And thus, by fits and starts, we are led to the *pièce de resistance* of Aristotle’s argument in the *Ethics*. Namely, it is the notion that the right rule, which essentially guides all human striving for the good, is based not on the divine rule of philosophy, but on the emulation of the plural and freely choosing political animal itself.

To elaborate, let us return once again to the opening pages of the *Ethics*. Having made the statement that we must begin with things evident to us, Aristotle goes on to

make another that seems precisely aimed at forestalling the negative conclusion we just ascribed to him, namely that political science is no more than a recognition of innate human limitation with respect to the good. And I quote: “Hence, anyone who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science, must have been brought up in good habits.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, all at once, hope for a truly political good re-emerges in Aristotle.

Indeed, on the more obvious side of things, the noble and just tags surely bestow some flavor of intrinsic value on the variable matter of political science. However, beyond this shallow indication of worthiness, of more profound significance is Aristotle’s requirement that a proper hearer of political science be “brought up in good habits.” The implication is that political science is noble and just solely by virtue of man’s good character, which itself is molded not from on high, but via habituation, in particular, by the example set by the actual community into which he is born and raised. In effect, the basis of the right rule of reason, which helps a man to be virtuous and good, is nothing other than man’s political activity itself.<sup>35</sup>

Still, we might wonder, uncomfortable by notions of molding and habituation, whence the intrinsic worthiness of the freely choosing political animal? Well, Aristotle, might respond, is it not obvious? Indeed, who is responsible for creating the good community and thereby the good habits that will mould future generations if not human beings themselves? Or, in Aristotle’s language, the good end of the polity is not simply given, but must be attained by the thinking actions of men.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is upon man’s ability to choose what is right, and to consciously act toward that end, that the noble and

just polity arises in the first place. What's more, it is this same noble and justly chosen polity that serves as a beacon to future generations, to show how they too, can choose what is right and so perpetuate the noble and just polity. And, needless to say, herein we ultimately appear to hit upon the source of the political good in Aristotle's thought.

In particular, as this formula for the inculcation of good habits implies, the good for man, and with it his ability to emulate the right rule of reason, cannot simply be drawn from abstract philosophical principles or what Aristotle calls the intellectual virtue of contemplation. On the contrary, it must also be learned from actual human experience and thereby also entails a combination of moral and practical intellectual virtue. More precisely, the rule of right reason is based on more than the model of the philosopher. It also arises out of the imitation of actual human beings who choose aright, also known as political animals.<sup>37</sup>

And so, seen in this rather dynamic, human light, surely politics is, according to Aristotle, finally defensible on its own freely choosing, plural and thereby "rough" terms. Indeed, what could possibly bestow more worth on politics as such than to, in effect, choose the political actor rather than the divine god as often the best exemplar of the human good?<sup>38</sup>

And yet, having just made our strongest argument in favor of an Aristotelian political good, we are, all at once, moved to begin the critical half of this chapter. To the point, for all this exemplary worth of the political actor, Aristotle, in the end, actually does explicitly favor the philosophical life and thereby a fixed, singular and divine vision of the good. Thus, to repeat the paraphrase from our introduction, in Book 10 of the

Ethics, Aristotle concludes that though we may be political animals, we must nevertheless strive with every nerve for the divine.<sup>39</sup>

So, just what is going on here? How can the freely choosing, plural, political life be worthy, virtually set the bar for the rule of right reason, and yet remain below the ultimate tag of worthiness, namely the divine? Indeed, coupled with the negative political tone of the *Politics*, this divine conclusion of the *Ethics* is enough to lead one to suspect that, for all of his political leanings, Aristotle finally rejects the pluralistic good and with it, man's ability to freely choose the good for himself.

To firm up this critique of Aristotle's political good, we begin by offering a sketch of the argument. I start with the argument of the *Ethics*. Indeed, though we have asserted plainly Aristotle's divine bias, we have yet to see how, or even if, it undermines the ethico-political argument we just asserted in his name. What of his notion of the political actor as exemplar of the good? Must we now doubt it? Assert that the divine god is the model after all? Perhaps. And in fact, on this score, we would do best to remind ourselves that Aristotle does require that political actors be molded by good habits. The implication here is that the good, not being self-evident to men, necessarily requires more than the self-perpetuating cycle of freely chosen political actions we suggested above. And needless to say, herein the universal and divine good or, what is the same thing, the non-freely chosen and therefore non-human bias of the *Ethics* makes its stand.

To elaborate, the divine and non-freely chosen implications of such molding will be brought out in a twofold way. On the one hand, Aristotle suggests that all of us, even

the virtuous-seeming, constantly require being molded. The reason for this is that, despite our status as political animal by nature, we are at the same time ever subject to a composite condition.<sup>40</sup> Namely, we at once possess a capacity for rationality and an infinite variety of not always controllable passions. And so, for Aristotle, it would seem that human beings, whatever their rational potential, can never finally be good on their own. Specifically, for all their rationality and capacity to follow right reason, they are, in effect, ever dogged by uncontrollable passions, which pull them this way and that, away from the good, which is presumably singular.

On the other hand, it follows that being good for human beings becomes a matter of control rather than of free choice. And further, since human beings cannot control themselves by themselves, their being good is not finally a political or human matter but a philosophical, divine one. And thus the inevitable apolitical conclusion: human beings cannot be trusted to freely choose what is best for themselves. Rather, this choice must ultimately be controlled, even by force if necessary, by the singular truth of philosophy. Needless to add, disturbed by the forceful implications of such a stance, we might wonder what has happened to Aristotle's defense of man as a free-choosing political animal by nature and its concomitant nod to a more truly pluralistic vision of the good?<sup>41</sup>

Turning now to the sketch of our critique of the *Politics*, we see that the political problems begin precisely because Aristotle dares to make politics natural in the first place. This indeed is the cause of his negative tone in that work which we noted earlier. In particular, to recall the opening pages of the *Politics*, it is no accident that Aristotle makes his political animal claim only after his declaration of the superior goodness of the

political association. The message here is that the goodness of politics by definition cannot be based on free choice and plurality. On the contrary, the opposite is the case. Being able to freely choose the good in a pluralistic context is only possible because there is a fixed and non-free good to choose.<sup>42</sup>

And so, with respect to hope for a political good, Aristotle's final word, in both the *Ethics* and *Politics* is the same: there is no hope for a political good. In short, free choice and plurality are finally undercut by the "guarantee" of a higher singular good, which we, literally, have no recourse to question. And needless to add, we now begin to see all too clearly why Aristotle appears to assume a negative, more forceful tone as far as assuring the human good is concerned. Still, before we conclude that Aristotle thusly condones a kind of tyranny of philosophy, let us show some "Aristotelian" discipline. Thus, having completed our critical sketch, we now expand upon it in an attempt to more fully justify its provocative claims.

Turning to the *Ethics*, we expand upon our critical assessment by first picking up the strands of the pro-political argument that seemed to emerge before the divine statement of Book 10. Thus, we recall that we turned to the *Ethics* in the first place in order to deepen the political good claims of the *Politics*. In particular, we were seeking something more than the *Politics* seemed to offer, namely some argument which would show us that the topsy-turvy deliberative world of politics is not only our human lot; that is, a result of our inability to be gods and engage in philosophy. Hence, the move to the *Ethics* in which, thanks to the notion of virtue, we were seemingly able to locate in Aristotle an affirmation of the human good on its own freely choosing, pluralistic terms.

Specifically, as we saw, Aristotle appeared to suggest this innate political worthiness in the following way. First, he suggests that the right rule of reason which each of us must follow in order to be good (i.e., virtue) is itself political. Thus, on the one hand, Aristotle rejects the abstract universality of the Ideas in favor of a more humanly attainable vision of the good, which emerges roughly and in outline. On the other hand, following from this, man's active ability to choose aright, rather than philosophical contemplation alone, becomes the model in terms of his coming to know and thereby realize this good for himself. In effect, as Aristotle's notion of molding by good habits underscores, the good comes to light through a kind of dynamic human cycle of activity. That is, man must choose aright and so foster a good community in order to teach others how to choose aright and so on into the future. In any case, here, or so the argument concludes, we would appear to have Aristotle's defense of the political good. To repeat, the freely choosing political actor rather than the divine god often becomes exemplar of the good.

And yet, turning now to our critique of the *Ethics*, while taking seriously this political argument, we nevertheless feel compelled to ask some basic clarifying questions. Just what is it that compels man to choose aright in the first place? Is it simply a matter, as the exemplary political actor suggests, of bald-faced free choice? Or, is something more divine actually conditioning this rightness?

Returning to the text itself, I think it is clear that Aristotle, for all his political overtones, ultimately favors the divine proposal. Indeed, generally speaking, does he not, as we saw, take great pains to confront Plato's universal Ideas head-on?<sup>43</sup> This suggests

that far from rejecting Plato's universalism, Aristotle actually seeks to strengthen it by embracing a fuller, more realistic picture. Thus, he caps off his discussion of the Ideas not by denying their "truth" but rather by telling us "we are now seeking something attainable."<sup>44</sup>

To repeat then, Aristotle, like Plato, wants his notion of the good to be universal, in line with the divine standard. Where he differs from Plato is merely in the method chosen to defend this universal, divine standard. Plato's method is quite simply too abstract. By contrast, thanks to his exemplary political actor, Aristotle "corrects" this problem and so endeavors to give us a vision of the good that is truly universal. To the point, unlike Plato's Ideas, Aristotle's good also takes into account human plurality and free choice. As such, it becomes more truly a divine good, that is a good which more fully embraces the whole of existence.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, looking more deeply into Aristotle's argument, perhaps we even have reason to doubt this political caveat to the divine whole. Indeed, does not Aristotle insist that his political actor be molded by good habits? In particular, the bare fact of requiring that humans must constantly be molded in this way suggests a perpetual deficiency of man with respect to the good. Or, more precisely, insofar as it must ever be learned, it would appear that the good is not something man actually possesses. As such, the good surely cannot depend on man's free choice and plurality but actually requires a divine, singular good, which conditions man's choice and therefore provides the measure by which he is deemed free in the first place.

In order to justify this second claim, we turn once again to the text of the *Ethics*. But first, by way of a brief preface to this textual discussion, we do indeed have much to justify here. In particular, it may be recalled that it was precisely upon this notion of molding by good habits that we originally imputed Aristotle's favoring of the political good in the first place. Thus, the perpetual cycle of human activity in which actual political actors create the good community which forms the good habits which in turn educate future political actors and so on and so forth. And so, all of this political good activity in Aristotle: do we now question it with our divine charge? Indeed we do. In fact, in a rather odd turn of events, we will now see how this molding by good habits, rather than making politics good on its own terms, actually serves to show just how lowly man's freely choosing, plural lot is in Aristotle's estimation. In effect, Aristotle's exemplary political actor is himself not a political creature at all. He is actually divine. Indeed, why else would man require, as we shall see presently, perpetual molding by such a character? Surely, this would not be necessary if men shared such traits simply by virtue of being human.

But enough of a preface, to the text. Specifically, we ask, how does the requirement of molding by good habits in the *Ethics*, for all its propping up of the political actor, nevertheless seem to in the same breath undermine all hope for a political good? Once again, to repeat what we said above, there is an implication here of man's innate deficiency with respect to being able to freely choose the good. And hence the notion that the model political actor is, himself, divine. And so it goes in the *Ethics*. Thus, almost immediately after declaring that the nobility and justice of the subjects of

political science depend on good habits, Aristotle attenuates this notion, and thereby reveals his divine bias, by saying the following: "...a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life...[and]...tends to follow his passions."<sup>46</sup>

Now, to be sure, on the face of it, the suggestion behind this quotation seems rather benign. In effect, it simply says that young men require some education, guidance and experience before they can properly become exemplary political actors and therefore become capable of freely choosing the good and so set the inculcation of good habits in motion. And where, we might ask, is the harm in that? Well, in fact there is much harm here. Indeed, as we learn a little later on in the *Ethics*, all human beings, not just rash young men, are subject to the perpetual "interference" of the passions with respect to acting upon the right rule of virtue. The passions, in other words, are not some mere problem of youth which we will eventually outgrow to become good political actors. On the contrary, speaking in the language of the actual human condition now, Aristotle suggests that they are something human beings must constantly wrestle with all of their lives. Thus, he points out that human beings are composite beings or impure amalgams of rational and irrational or passionate elements.<sup>47</sup> Further, because this is so, all men, even the virtuous, constantly require outside guidance, education and experience in order to learn how to choose the good. And needless to say, herein enters Aristotle's divine bias of the *Ethics*.

In short, no man, while he lives in this world, can truly be considered virtuous and thereby capable of being a political actor who creates the good habits of the political

community. On the contrary, due to our composite condition, we ever remain incomplete in this respect.<sup>48</sup> In other words, we will never have enough experience to be able to choose the good on our own. All of which leads us to see that, as far as Aristotle is concerned, there is only one way for human beings to become truly political and so able to freely choose their own good. They must literally be divine.<sup>49</sup> Thus, to repeat what we already said above with respect to the apolitical bias of the *Ethics*: the political actor as exemplar of the good is really not “political” at all, namely freely choosing and plural, but rather divine and singular.

But, let us back up a bit to fully clarify this argument. The fact that man, despite his political nature, is ever misled by the passions suggests two closely related and ultimately profoundly apolitical notions. First, being able to freely choose the good is neither innate to man, nor, second, is it even possible for everyone. In short, because of their composite condition, men never fully realize their political nature. And so, as far as choosing the good is concerned, they can always be led astray by the passions.

On the other hand, as far as such choice not being possible for everyone, we see Aristotle in the *Ethics* restricting the capacity for free choice to all but the few. In particular, all slaves, women and girls are barred from politics *per se*. As for elite boys and men, these are admitted, but with severe restrictions, and also with the additional proviso that if education does not work, they too must be compelled like all the rest to the good.<sup>50</sup> Basically, the justification for such massive exclusion and force seems at least in part to be that if the political animal is indeed truly a divine ideal, then surely we would be mad to dare to open up politics and free choice to everyone. Indeed, if the passions

are a perpetual problem for all of us, would we not do best to restrict the struggle for control over them to all but those few who would rule? Surely a smaller test case for the realization of free choice is our only real human hope for some kind of common good in this world?<sup>51</sup>

Thus, far from assuming that men are innately free to choose the good, or that they can all be educated to that end, much of Aristotle's teaching is precisely aimed at controlling all slaves, women, girls and boys and virtually all men so as to presumably fit the divine ideal of the good. In other words, to repeat again and again, Aristotle's political good is not political at all, but divine. All of which leads to the further conclusion that if at least an approximation of this good is to be assured in this world, control and even force, rather than free choice and plurality becomes the order of the day.

And indeed, as if in direct support of this argument, it is quite clear that Aristotle meant the *Ethics* to be read only by the few who presumably, in one way or another, would be able to assert such control. To the point, as is made clear at the end of the *Ethics*, when Aristotle takes pains to contrast it with the more forceful *Politics*, we learn that its intended audience is generally that of elite young men who are likely to become political rulers.<sup>52</sup> And so, it would seem that the *Ethics* is basically intended as a manual by which these few potential rulers are taught to apply the singular rule of right reason in each particular case with the goal not to prop up the worth of free choice and plurality, but rather to assure, by force if necessary, some modicum of the divine common good in the world.

In any case, whether for the many or for the few, the lesson here, with respect to our overall search for the political good, is hopefully becoming more obvious. In effect, free choice, the quintessential “good” for man, is not “free” at all but is, in fact, a matter of control by the few. What’s more, coupled by the fact that all men, rulers and ruled alike, are composite beings, ever subject to uncontrollable passions, we are led to doubt even these few. And thus, we can only conclude that, at best, Aristotle’s political good is assured only by virtue of the force of the few. Or, more precisely, Aristotle’s political exemplar, the one who freely chooses the good and so sets the inculcation of good habits in motion in the community, is profoundly elitist. And at worst? Such a political animal is actually an impossible prospect for human beings period.

And so, all at once coming back to the beginning from whence we launched this critique of the *Ethics*, with respect to what is best for man, it would seem that philosophy actually does trump politics. Even by an almost singular or tyrannical force if necessary. But just in case there is any doubt here, how about a more explicit demonstration by Aristotle? Thus:

[Philosophic wisdom is concerned with] the highest objects, we say; for it would be strange to think that the art of politics, or practical wisdom, is the best knowledge, since man is not the best thing in the world.<sup>53</sup>

And further:

Now if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly, as Theognis says, have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are, while they seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among our youth, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by virtue, they are not able to encourage the *many* to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness, but through a fear of punishment... What argument would remold such people?... And in general, passion seems to yield not to argument but to force.<sup>54</sup>

And so, the real political “truth” of the *Ethics* is fully and bluntly revealed: politics, namely that which is plural and based on free choice, can only be considered worthy insofar as it is circumscribed within the divine, preordained realm of philosophy and thereby stripped of its plurality and free choice. This is what Aristotle finally means by his notion of the political good. Namely, it is that which is not political and in fact, not really human, at all. Indeed, it cannot be, suggests Aristotle, for should the good not ultimately be defined by the best thing in the world? Hence the privileging of the philosophical object of divine oneness. And as for the mass of humanity which, in its passion, may rebel against this one-ness of the good, Aristotle’s response is most chillingly, plain: force.

So how did it come to this? All at once we are moved to turn our critical eye to the *Politics*. In particular, we ask: if Aristotle favors the singular good of the divine from the outset, why bother to make that tantalizingly political statement of the *Politics* in the first place, namely that man is by nature a political animal? Is Aristotle simply contradicting himself? Or, perhaps something more sinister is going on. Why give man

the promise that he can freely choose the good and then all at once take it away by making acquisition of this ability divine? Indeed, if we did not know better, this perplexity of the *Ethics* might lead us to think that Aristotle is playing a conjuring trick; his talk of the good masking a deeper political teaching, namely the need to rule the fickle many by force. And in fact, lending further credence to such a theory, we recall that Aristotle actually expresses a willingness to explicitly engage tyrants in the *Politics*.

On the other hand, however, given the complexity of Aristotle's ethical argument as whole, such a purely *realpolitik* motive seems rather too simplistic and neat, does it not? To the point, if puffing up aristocratic young men to be tyrants were truly Aristotle's point, there would surely be easier, more direct ways to do this than to prate on about the good and the need to follow right reason. In short, men who merely seek power in politics do not need to mince words. Witness Machiavelli's praise of wickedness.<sup>55</sup>

And so, taking Aristotle's desire for the good seriously, we opt for the less sinister but more complicated path. Aristotle seems to contradict himself. Or, more precisely, Aristotle's argument for the political good, for all its seriousness, nevertheless goes awry. And needless to say, it is here that my critical analysis of the *Politics*, makes its stand. Quite simply, I argue, as I did in the first sentences of this Chapter, that Aristotle is doomed from the moment he declares politics to be natural.

To elaborate, we recall that the *Politics* opens with a declaration of the innate superiority of the political association. Its common good is bluntly announced as supreme. So what does this mean? Well, from the perspective of the freely choosing

political animal, who only emerges after this declaration of supremacy, it means that his choice of the good cannot really be “free.” On the contrary, it is delimited from the start by a political ideal. And so, the apolitical bias is plain from the outset. In effect, even in the case of the elite few, man does not choose his own good at all, but actually appears to have it chosen for him.

Now, to repeat, Aristotle probably does not mean to condone tyranny with such a formulation. Specifically, to couch this discussion in more explicitly Aristotelian terminology, in declaring the common good of the *polis* to be supreme, I do not think that Aristotle is intentionally arguing against man’s free choice *per se*. Instead, what he seems to be doing is to seek something prior to this free choice in an effort not to undermine it, but to actually deepen it. In short, in order to be able to choose the good, man must first have a good to choose. Thus, seen in this light, it is likely that Aristotle would not conceive of himself as favoring “tyranny” at all but rather as one who, thanks to his supreme good “guarantee,” necessarily enriches and deepens free choice all the more.

And yet, while convinced of Aristotle’s good intentions as far as politics is concerned, it cannot be denied that this natural priority of the good in the *Politics* nevertheless does serve to ultimately undermine the plural and free-choice potential of the political animal and thereby the possibility of a truly political good. After all, if the good to be chosen is “guaranteed” from the start, surely man’s free choice and concomitant plurality, at best, rings rather hollow. And at worst? The tyranny of philosophical singular goodness resonates once again. The latter all the more suggestive

given our interesting “stroll” through the controlling, exclusionary pages of the *Ethics* and our earlier identification of the ultimately negative political tone of the *Politics* itself.

In any case, thus ends our initial critique of Aristotle’s political good. Basically, for all his sensitivity to political particularity, Aristotle, in both the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, nevertheless seems to finally reject the possibility of a pluralistic, freely chosen good in favor of one which is divine, given, natural. And indeed, insofar as this denies a positive place for human freedom in politics, this is truly disturbing. In particular, aside from the possible tyrannical implications, Aristotle’s divine bias essentially makes it impossible for human beings as such to achieve any real or lasting good in this world. Not a very pleasant conclusion, especially given our present political circumstances.

On the other hand, we must be careful not to be too hasty in our dismissal of Aristotle’s political argument. Indeed, once again, we are reminded that even if we deem his political good a failure in truly political terms, the *Politics* and the *Ethics* must nevertheless continue to be taken seriously. To the point, whatever its contradictoriness, it is Aristotle’s political animal argument that gives hope for a truly political good in the first place. And so, if Aristotle, in this same argument, does express a profound skepticism as to the realistic possibility of a truly political good, we would do best not to ignore it.

In particular, it is all well and good for us to throw up our hands in despair at the divine and exclusionary implications of Aristotle’s ethico-political argument. And yet, if we are to be honest with ourselves, a truly political good likely cannot simply be political. Indeed, if all is simply bound to mere free choice, surely only a random, rather

anarchic plurality results. And where, we might ask, is the good in that? At best, it would only be accidental. In any case, it would surely not be good in the sense we wish it to be, namely a good which emerges as a result of human free choice.

And so, seen in this more “honest” light, we would seem, insofar as we adhere to any notion of political ethics, to be tragically caught between the extremes of freedom and the good. Quite simply, the political good is either too political to be good or too good to be political. What’s more, either way, the political good is literally impossible.

So what are we to do? Well, herein, or so I will now argue, the ethical notion of friendship has a place. In particular, employing first Aristotle’s vision (Chapter 2) and then later, Jacques Derrida’s more radical formulation (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), I hope to show the possibility of a kind of middle ground between the good and freedom. Indeed, friendship is apt here because it is not simply an ethical notion, an abstract principle of right and wrong. On the contrary, it is above all, the description of a particular human relationship, which firmly exists in this world. Thus, Aristotle’s insistence that friendship can only occur between human beings and Derrida’s that regardless of how “impossible” friendship looks from a universal or divine point of view, it nevertheless does occur between actual human beings.<sup>56</sup> In both cases, the point here is that friendship embodies a vision of the common good, which is essentially based on a concrete, particular human relationship. And more broadly speaking, precisely because this is so, the ethic of friendship seems particularly suited to navigate the impossible waters of the political good with greater ease and so give us more hope for good, for some kind of ethics, in this world. For after all, we all have experience of friendship, do we not?

However, before embarking on this “friendlier” path, a caveat. I do not want to be misunderstood, taken to argue that friendship is a “solution” to the impossibility outlined above. Rather, what I hope more humbly to show is that friendship is closer to embodying what this “impossible” is. Thus, our experience of friendship gives us insight into the political good solely insofar as it confronts us directly with its almost tragic good-versus-freedom complexity. No final transcendence of the tragedy is offered. On the other hand, this need not give us reason to despair. In fact, precisely because it refuses to offer an “end” to the tragedy, we may in fact have profound reason to hope. In short, friendship offers a way to ever live through the tragedy. Or more positively speaking, thanks to friendship, the political good, though never finally realizable, is nevertheless ever possible.

## CHAPTER 2

Politics is innately good. So far, using Aristotle, what this means eludes us. In particular, as we saw in Chapter 1, he seems to have this rather disturbing tendency to favor the divine or apolitical good as against a political one. What's more, he does this despite his own claim that men by nature freely choose the good. Bottom line, Aristotle does not in the end appear to trust his own political, free-choosing, plural argument, preferring instead to confine most, if not all, men to the "forceful" rule of philosophical one-ness.

And yet, here in Chapter 2, with a view to reviving our search for a truly political good, we propose to begin anew not by abandoning Aristotle, but by most emphatically sticking with him. In particular, we will argue that his ethic of friendship, as it emerges in Books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with help from Book 7 of the *Eudemian Ethics*, offers a potentially rich new perspective in terms of being able to negotiate between claims of supreme goodness and the free choice of the political animal.<sup>1</sup> So what is going on here? Well, lest we be accused of contradicting ourselves, we should, before even summarizing the specific friendship argument to be made in this Chapter, justify this rather odd turn of events. How can we both see a problem in Aristotle, and yet use him to rectify this very problem?

To come straight to the point, perhaps rectifying the problem of the political good, specifically the human freedom versus divine good dichotomy that it throws up, is not the best ethical approach. Perhaps learning to view the political good as a problem, which we must take seriously and act upon moment-by-moment is the better way to proceed.

Indeed, perhaps this is what a truly political ethics should be about. And hence, seen from this perspective, far from rejecting Aristotle, we would do best to take his political thought seriously. Remember, in contrast to the more idealistic Plato, he actually attempts to bring the good down to earth amid the messiness of human affairs. As such, I do not think it an exaggeration to suggest that it is thanks to this bold attempt, this daring and paradoxical move to make man a political animal by nature, that a truly political ethics in all of its complexity comes to light in the first place.

Now, of course, not to forget, Aristotle does finally fail in this attempt. Specifically, like Plato he does, as we saw in Chapter 1, ultimately prefer to flee to the divine beyond rather than continue to confront the ethical “messiness” of human affairs. And herein, tyrannical “force” disturbingly becomes a viable option.

On the other hand, as we shall now argue in this Chapter, there remains something enduringly political about Aristotle’s thought despite its eventual succumbing to the divine, and potentially tyrannical, good. Witness, as an outstanding example, his ethic of friendship. In short, I am suggesting that Aristotelian friendship, though it too is eventually trumped by the singular good, nevertheless represents a particularly powerful attempt to strike a kind of dynamic ethical balance between freedom and the good. In fact, as we shall see in Chapter 3 and beyond, it is so powerful that Jacques Derrida will feel compelled to acknowledge a debt to it in his own construction of a more consistently political ethics as we have “problematically” defined it here.<sup>2</sup>

But enough of a preface, onto Aristotle’s friendship. Specifically, how does the ethic of friendship bring to light the political good in all of its tension between free choice

and a fixed standard? Perhaps, as we have just implied, it tries, and almost succeeds, to strike a kind of vibrant middle ground between the two? And so it goes. In any case, we begin by offering a brief sketch of the argument.

First, we will focus on how the good is addressed in this respect. What may initially seem ironic given our political good claims for Aristotelian friendship is that not only is it meant to defend the supreme and therefore fixed, apolitical good of the polity. In fact, it appears to do so in an even deeper way. Thus, speaking of a pleasure in living together, Aristotle suggests that friendship will speak of a common good beyond abstract precepts and logical arguments.<sup>3</sup> In effect, a good polity must also be based on a common bond established amongst its citizenry, a more personal sense of love among the people. For only in this way does the common good become real, only then, will it be true.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, just as we define the good intentions behind Aristotle's friendship, argument, almost immediately its freer aspect comes into focus. To elaborate, in thusly defining the good in terms of a bond based on human love, Aristotle is suddenly confronted with a problem. Indeed, as he suggests early on, love tends to obscure the good with the seeming good. And thus, in the very act of thinking we are instilling the common good, we may, in fact, be loving a bad man.<sup>5</sup> In effect, friendship, in thusly affixing the good to love, always risks sending everything topsy-turvy. Risks actually defending, regardless of its more fixed intentions, something more akin to a political good.

Now Aristotle, obviously not so open to this freer side as we would like, seeks to resolve this risky ethical proposition in a two-fold manner, both of which are intended to rein in the potential boundlessness of love and firmly affix it to the singular good. First, friendship is placed in a hierarchical structure with good friendship placed on top and proclaimed to be the only completely true friendship.<sup>6</sup> This approach serves to confine boundless love to “lesser” more incidental friendships. Second, and more deeply, he suggests that good friendship is superior because it is ultimately based on an “internal” argument, namely that only the good man, the “unit” of good friendship, is truly lovable.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, in contrast to the bad man who, in beastly fashion, is torn this way and that by his various passions, the good man, guided by his singular love of the good, is necessarily more in control of who he is and so is the only one capable of offering a stable, fully human, personality. In short, with the good man, there is some constant thing to love.<sup>8</sup>

Still, for all their logical power, these resolutions are unsatisfying with respect to the ethical “problem” of boundless love. Indeed, can one really defend the good of love in such an objective, “thingly” manner and still call it love? On the other hand, even Aristotle seems to oscillate here, reiterating time and again the need for friendship to instill a sheer pleasure in living together.<sup>9</sup> In either case, the possibility that the love bond may over-run, or even undermine, the divine good ever remains.

And so, to conclude this brief sketch, given its privileging of human love, Aristotelian friendship provides, at the very least, the paradoxical seeds for “founding” a more truly political good. And in fact, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and beyond, Derrida

will actually draw upon this paradox in the hope of bringing forth an ethics more in keeping with the boundlessness inherent in human love and indeed, in all human relations. In any case, having set forth this less imposing, potentially more political ethics of friendship, let us now take up the way.

In turning to the books on friendship in the *Ethics*, we are almost immediately struck, I think, by a different tone.<sup>10</sup> To the point, the austere, divine ideal is all at once framed in a more humble, human way:

Surely it is strange...to make the supremely happy man a solitary; for no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone, since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with others. Therefore even the happy man lives with others; for he has the things that are by nature good...[T]he happy man *needs* friends.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the supremely happy man, who for Aristotle *is* the good man, needs others. And not just any others will do. These others must be friends. And thus, the emphatically human tinge to Aristotelian ethics all at once emerges: divine goodness actually depends on the love of other human beings. What's more, this dependency of the good on human love, on a kind of common bond of affection, is explicitly linked to our political nature; that is, our capacity not simply to accept the good as seamlessly superior and one, but to deliberate with others about it. All of which leads to the intriguing possibility that perhaps, with friendship, Aristotle will at last live up to his political animal claims and finally defend a vibrant, more truly political conception of the good.

And yet, before we run away with this possibility, it is important to take a closer look at the text. After all, given his generally more divine leanings, this may be merely another way for Aristotle to justify his more apolitical approach to ethics. And in fact, as

we read on, we learn that this is precisely what Aristotle attempts to do. To the point, as we shall see presently, he actually tries to use this love-bond argument to even more deeply defend the divine good. Of course, as we have already hinted in our introductory sketch, this latter aim will eventually meet with some serious problems, thus renewing our hope that love can lead to a freer conception of the good. But for now, first things first, how does Aristotle argue that friendship is akin to a more profound defense of the fixed, singular good?

In order to explain this link between friendship and the divine good, it is best to begin where Aristotle begins, namely with the opinion that people in general seem to have of friendship. The implication here is that Aristotle's "fixed" ethical justification will not be based on the abstract imaginings of a philosopher, like Plato's Ideas, but actually powerfully reflect what already exists in the popular mind.<sup>12</sup> And needless to add, such a "realistic" approach makes we, the populace, all the more malleable to what Aristotle will ultimately say.

To proceed with the popular opinion, Aristotle says, friendship is often held to be that which is most necessary with a view to living. And indeed, this is not surprising. For, not only do friends provide us with a purpose for our prosperity, namely to be beneficent to those we love. They also help us to preserve and protect our prosperity in the first place. As for times of poverty and misfortune, friends are also a boon. In fact, they are often our only refuge. But the worth of friendship does not end there. It also, says Aristotle, appears to have an even more noble, political relevance for most people. After all, does not the love bond of friends seem to hold states together in a way beyond

even the dictates of political justice? And further, given such praise, it is no wonder that many often think it is the same people that are good men and are friends.<sup>13</sup>

So ends the initial expression of customary opinions of friendship. Clearly, they suggest a rather high-minded conception of political ethics, going so far as to equate friendship with an ability to make the political community deeply cohesive, almost akin in spirit to a kind of literal common good. What's more, it is a good that is beyond the mere dictates of political justice. All of which leads us to the conclusion that insofar as Aristotle's more considered view of friendship builds upon these customary views, he probably will not use friendship to defend a conception of the good which is open to free choice and plurality. On the contrary, to be true to public opinion, to our beyond-political-justice views, it would seem that Aristotle, true to his more "realistic" approach, must use friendship to even more deeply defend a singular and divine conception of the good. And so it goes.

Inspired by this expression of popular sentiment and humbly wishing to reflect it, Aristotle defines friendship as that which necessarily eschews the constant deliberation of differing points of view in favor of that, which is common. In short, his political argument via friendship, made all the more powerful by its popular resonance, amounts to the following: only men who are essentially the same can be friends.<sup>14</sup> Namely, they must get beyond political deliberation and all such unfriendly bickering and ultimately share the same view of the good. A literal common good and thereby most apolitical good indeed.

Still, though compelling (and perhaps disturbing), such a conclusion remains, for all intents and purposes, within the realm of loosely held belief. What of proving the argument? Obviously Aristotle must provide deeper grounds for his notion of so-called good friendship. Indeed, while it may “feel” true, it is by no means clear that friendship can actually be used to more profoundly defend something like a literal common good, which is essentially the singular, divine good. And in fact, as if recognizing this very difficulty, Aristotle himself admits that, “not a few things about friendship are matters for debate.”<sup>15</sup> In particular, the crux of this debate revolves around the question of love. That is, as we already suggested above, Aristotle clearly recognizes that friendship is not merely based on good character but also love. Therefore, in order to more deeply justify his fixed good argument using friendship, Aristotle must obviously address this issue and, somehow, resolve it in favor of the good. Of course, as we shall see presently, this is clearly no easy thing to do.

To elaborate, on the one hand, this is precisely the reason for friendship’s deeper value with respect to the common good. Namely, the love-bond is that firmer glue holding states together, making the literal common good possible in the first place. Thus, Aristotle says, when we speak of the same men being friends and good men, we do so precisely because they love their friends. Essentially, thanks to love, the disturbing aspect of force, which, as we pointed out in Chapter 1, ever appears to accompany Aristotle’s ethical argument, all at once becomes less prominent. In short, love makes us more likely to choose the good man to be our friend and thereby freely opt for the literal common good.<sup>16</sup>

And yet, still from the perspective of the good, because love is essentially linked free choice, it also presents a problem. The political animal returns with a vengeance. Thus of friendship, people also speak of opposites attracting. Of harmony achieved out of perpetual strife.<sup>17</sup>

And so, while it is true that in loving my friend, I might be supporting the fixed common good, it is also equally true that this love could lead to an undoing of this same common good. In this respect, Aristotle cannot help but admit the possibility that regardless of my good intentions, I could very well come to love a man who is not the same as me; who may even be a “bad” man.<sup>18</sup> A friendly, more literal common good, for all its popular resonance and perhaps even because of it, may not be guaranteed after all. In short, thanks to the deeper love-bond element of friendship, the good is ever open to a more freely chosen, pluralistic and therefore truly political, vision of the good.

And so, lest his own view be undone by the very opinion it is trying to reflect, Aristotle, to repeat, clearly has much more explaining to do in terms of his use of friendship to defend the singular, apolitical good. And indeed, this deeper explanation is precisely what he sets out to provide in the bulk of his friendship chapters in the *Ethics*. Specifically, his deeper argument for “the good” of friendship is set forth in two stages. The first is as follows. Aristotle clarifies what he means by friendship by creating a hierarchy and by setting “good” friendship atop this hierarchy. This serves to distinguish it from friendship in general. Next, having thusly “purified” friendship, he happily embraces its loving side, going so far as to declare that the sheer pleasure in living together, which friendship instills will, far from threatening to undermine the fixed good,

actually support it all the more. In effect, thanks to good friendship, free choice can, quite literally, be at one with the divine, singular good.<sup>19</sup>

The second stage involves Aristotle's internal argument of friendship whereby the good man is put forth as the only "fully human" being and so the only one capable of truly being loved. Basically, as shall hopefully become clearer as the overall argument of this chapter unfolds, the "messiness" of love cannot quite be put in its divine place by the hierarchical friendship argument. As such, this internal, almost psychological, argument with respect to the constitution of the good man becomes necessary to shore up Aristotle's fixed ethical argument.<sup>20</sup> In any case, having set forth this deeper argumentative path, let us now take up the way. First, we address the hierarchical argument and Aristotle's privileging of good friendship.

Why must friendship be good? Obviously, in seeking to clarify his view of friendship and thereby justify his "superior" ethical model of the common good of the polity, Aristotle must answer this question. The problem is, as we have just seen, this is by no means an easy question to answer. To the point, thanks to the potential unwieldy freedom of its love element, friendship, it appears, may just as easily promote the non-good, at least from Aristotle's fixed point of view. Or to put it another way, far from being attracted to those who are the same, we may actually prefer those who are utterly different.

So, how does Aristotle deal with this difficulty? Not surprisingly, in line with his "sifting" method which we discussed in Chapter 1, he begins by defining and defending good friendship in all of its apolitical fixity and sameness by first telling us what it is not.

In particular, he sets up a hierarchy, suggesting that not all friendships, and therefore not all love-bonds, are created equal. And thus, in this way, he is able to distance his friendship argument from the paradox of love by suggesting that it is only “lesser” friendships that create the “political” problems for the cohesion or sameness of the common good.

To elaborate, in clarifying his view of friendship, Aristotle distinguishes and ranks three friendship bonds, placing good friendship, also known as the relation between men who share the same view of the good, clearly on top. Further, he does this in the name of arguing that friendship is, by definition, good, thereby effectively eliminating any “political” claims to the contrary. However, before jumping directly into the elucidation of how such a good friendship distinction leads Aristotle to this potentially paradox-ending, apolitical conclusion, we would do best to back up a bit and see why Aristotle feels he needs to make this distinction in the first place. Indeed, why go to all this trouble? Is not friendship simply friendship? More precisely, given its nobility in the popular mind, is not all friendship already defined by the good, indicative, in political terms, of a literal common good?

In a word, Aristotle’s answer to this question is most certainly yes. Or, he might clarify, at least it should be yes. The problem is that, as the paradox of love shows, this popular feeling of nobility is clearly not enough to assure friendship’s defining politico-ethical characteristic, namely its essential being as a literal common bond of sameness. Quite simply, as Aristotle points out via his contrast of loving the good versus loving what is good for us, the tangible fact that friendship is connected to love sometimes

confuses matters, often leading people to defend as friendship what is not really common at all.<sup>21</sup>

And hence, Aristotle concludes, if there is to be such a thing as friendship, such a thing as a common bond which defends the worth of politics beyond the mere dictates of political justice, perhaps, odd as it may sound, friendship cannot simply be friendship. Because love obscures, and it is notable here that Aristotle does not shy away from the paradox but confronts it head on, more detail beyond popular opinion and feeling is needed to justify the very thing that this opinion wants to confirm, namely that friendship, as a freely tinged, potentially boundless, love-bond, is most truly akin to a literal common good. And so the reason for the friendship distinction all at once emerges. Basically, it is based on Aristotle's desire to stabilize the relation between love and the good and thereby that of free choice and the good.<sup>22</sup> In particular, distinguishing friendships based on their objects of love, Aristotle aims to show by way of comparison, that only a love which is affixed to the singular divine good can properly speaking be friendly and ultimately, of true political worth.

Now, having justified the need for the distinction, obviously we must show what it is. In particular, what are these friendships based on differing objects of love and why is good friendship necessarily set apart in this comparison? Further, how does this privileging of good friendship serve to link love and the good and so, according to Aristotle, be indicative of a literal common good? Let us look at the specific friendship bonds outlined in the *Ethics*.

Aristotle illuminates his view of good friendship by distinguishing it from two other kinds of “lesser” friendship bonds, namely those based on utility and pleasure.<sup>23</sup> Why they are “lesser” shall become clear presently. In any case, to proceed, while all friendships, Aristotle says, contain an element of love; and further, while all friendships even contain an intention to the good, only one, naturally the good one, is truly able to meld love and the good and so fully be friendship. Specifically, constructing a scale of ascending order as to the lovable-ness of the respective parties, Aristotle ranks the three friendship bonds as follows: utility, pleasure and true/good. The first two, defined respectively as love for the sake of what one can get from the other and love for the sake of what is pleasant to themselves, are only incidentally friendships, says Aristotle. Or what is the same thing, they are not really, properly speaking, friendships at all. Why? Quite simply, they offer no stable common bond.

More precisely, this notion of stability is justified by way of relating what the parties in the friendship actually choose to love in the relationship. Put bluntly, do they love each other, or something else? Clearly, as we have just seen, in utility and pleasure friendships, the latter is privileged. And as such, in these friendships, the common bond of friendship is put on the literally precarious ground of self-interested love rather than on loving the other friend for his own sake. Basically, end the use or the pleasure and the friendship itself ends. And herein, we come to appreciate the potential power of a love-bond to hopelessly obscure that which is common. People, quite simply, are all too often devoted to their own good to truly care about and thereby freely choose the fixed, divine common good. In other words, it would seem that we human beings generally prefer to

truly exercise our freedom and so proffer our own differing views, effectively loving others for far more ambiguous, less explicitly common good reasons.<sup>24</sup>

But all is not lost for now enters good friendship. And thus, all at once the common bond and with it the literal common good is saved. Why? Again, as Aristotle explains, precisely because of the specific object of love involved. Quite simply, being devoted to the fixed, unchanging, divine good, the love of the parties in this friendship is necessarily and most emphatically not self-interested. Or more precisely, in loving the other for the sake of this good, I necessarily love the other for his own sake. And thus, Aristotle argues, good friendship is necessarily the most complete definition of what friendship actually is. Indeed, what could possibly be more non-self-interested, more truly common, than the shared love of a singular, divine good? And needless to add, this affixing of love to the divine good is the only basis for true friendship, which for Aristotle is defined by the common bond as such.

Herein then, thanks to his sifting method, Aristotle offers a portrait of friendship that does overcome the paradox of love. How? Basically, good friendship, which for Aristotle is the only true friendship, also provides a fixed, stable definition of love. Specifically, in good friendship, love of the other is defined neither by the other person nor by myself. Rather, eschewing all hint of self-interest, it is affixed to the divine good which, by definition, we both necessarily share and which at the same time transcends us both. In this universal way then, our common bond, our love-bond, and hence our friendship is resoundingly and fully achieved.

Or to put it another way, the possibility that love will undo the common good is removed with good friendship. Why? Basically, the parties in good friendship are asserted as intrinsically lovable in themselves. Indeed, because the object of love here is the divine good, nothing outside of the friendship, the literal common bond, can possibly be asserted as worthwhile. Specifically, the divine object of love ensures that there is no self-interest to muddy the choice of the common bond for its own sake. And so, when I freely choose to love a good man, my choice cannot help but be married to the literal common good. In short, it is thanks to the “divine love” in good friendship that the common good can be literally achieved.<sup>25</sup>

And thus, coming back to our overall thesis, the “contradiction” of Aristotle’s ethical thought which we identified in Chapter 1, namely that of the tension between the political animal and the supremely good *polis*, would all at once seem to be addressed by this good friendship argument. Quite literally, as its apparent ability to stabilize human love shows, it is indeed possible to rein in what is boundless and thereby encourage one to freely choose what is fixedly good.

And yet, while marveling at Aristotle’s ability to put the political good in its place, as it were, the question remains: how exactly does good friendship transcend the problem of boundlessness; the problem of men confusing the good with what they think is good? Indeed, whatever its higher pretensions, good friendship remains inextricably intertwined with human love. And in fact, its parties are actually asserted to be the most lovable of all in this respect. All of which suggests that, rather than effectively reconciling free choice with the fixed, divine, singular good, good friendship may

actually seem to make matters more complex on this score. The implication here is that human love and thereby the common bond of friendship, can never finally extricate itself from the “problem” of free choice and potential boundlessness. The dilemma of the *Politics*, namely the contradiction between the natural political animal and the superior polis runneth over.

What’s more, for all his stabilization procedures, Aristotle himself never quite hides the possibility that fixed goodness is ever in danger of being undone. Indeed, is it not he who brings up the problem of boundless love in the first place? On the other hand, so compelling is this problem of boundlessness that he feels duty-bound to spend a great deal of time trying to teach otherwise. In effect, one cannot help but read Aristotle’s attempt to solve the so-called ethical problem of love as an implicit admission that this solution is ever doomed to fail. Bottom line, in whatever its form, it would seem that free choice simply cannot finally be controlled, even for worthwhile ethical purposes.<sup>26</sup>

Still, before pursuing this point further, let us pause for a moment and consider the sheer ingenuity and even audacity of Aristotle’s hierarchical approach to friendship. Essentially, it amounts to the following claim: love is only a “political” problem if, as in lesser friendships, it is tinged with self-interest. Then, literally, people do muddy the common bond waters, do confuse the good with what they think is good for them. Why? Because self-interest basically makes them put themselves, or more precisely their own good, ahead of that of the other. In essence they love themselves more than anyone else. As such, the common bond of friendship, which, Aristotle argues, must ultimately be

literally common, is quite simply undone. And needless to say, herein, in this claim of literal common-ness, lies the sheer audacity of Aristotle's argument for good friendship.

Indeed, such a literally common claim amounts to the idea that, with good friendship, there is quite simply no self-interest. In effect, in loving the good man, you at the same time love the least self-interested thing possible, namely not the man himself, but the divine good within him. On the other hand, insofar as you thusly affix your desire to this good, a good which you naturally both must share, you necessarily love the other for his own sake, that is, not for the sake of your own self-interest. In sum, thanks to good friendship, the common good and love of the other become as one. Hence the intrinsic lovableness of the parties in good friendship and hence an affective bond which does, as the customary opinion hoped, glue a state together in a manner beyond the mere dictates of political justice.<sup>27</sup>

And indeed, returning all at once to the more "human" sounding quotation by which we began our more detailed elaboration of Aristotle's argument, we now see why Aristotle is so keen to attach the supremely good or happy man to the need of friends. In short, seen in the light of good or true friendship, the love of others, far from threatening to undo the literal common good, actually deepens it all the more. For after all, says Aristotle, no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone. Quite simply, it is the love in good friendship, the pleasure of being in the company of truly good men that makes living in the world not only bearable but also capable of truly being good. Or to perhaps put it more tellingly in terms of our overall political good argument,

the tangible feeling that a literal common good is possible exists thanks to a love of good friends, to the delight and happiness that their company brings to us.<sup>28</sup>

And so, to repeat, it is because of this hierarchy of friendship, this insistence that all friendship is necessarily defined by that which is divinely or fixedly good, that Aristotle is able to link human love, in all of its boundless-ness and connotations of free choice, to the supreme good of the *polis*.<sup>29</sup> And needless to say, this is not where we want to go in terms of our ethical argument. What of the freer side? Can human love and free choice really be tied to the fixed, divine good? More precisely, is there something Aristotle misses about friendship with his hierarchy? And more broadly speaking, is there a deeper “political” truth to the paradox of love that even his good friendship guarantee, a guarantee it must be added which seems to agree with the public opinion of friendship as that which is essentially common, cannot quite erase? The eternal boundlessness of love, despite Aristotle’s magisterial logic, is all at once thrown up again.

To elaborate, in spite of Aristotle’s persuasive and edifying claims to the contrary, there remains something enduringly political, that is, indicative of plurality and free choice, about the relation between friends. And in fact, it is not simply we who point this out. Indeed, to now expand upon what we implied earlier, oftentimes, it is Aristotle himself who appears to keep alive these continuing “troubles” of love and friendship with respect to the good. Witness, for a start, that for all his insistence on the superiority of good friendship, he yet feels compelled to concede the existence of the “lesser” friendships of utility and pleasure friendship amongst others.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, given this variety

of friendly relations, which are mentioned in the *Ethics* alongside the true one, I think it is fair to say that Aristotle is at least aware of the pervasiveness of self-interested love in most actual human friendships. But more than that, insofar as he is not completely dismissive of these lower friendships, and at times seems positively sympathetic towards some of them (we see this especially with pleasure friendship), a greater openness to a more truly political common good than his tidy hierarchy would suggest all at once comes to the fore.<sup>31</sup>

Now of course, one might palpably suggest, as we have thus far suggested, that such a concession is likely not a real admission on Aristotle's part as to the more positive "political" nature of his ethic of friendship. Indeed, it might simply be something on the order of throwing up one's hands in the air yet again. In effect, while people have the potential to be good, they nevertheless, for reasons of their flawed composite nature, seem ever to fall short. Sound familiar? We are back to the "conditional" human being of Chapter 1, that is, the one who is ever a mix of the rational and irrational. As such, even exercising his free choice becomes akin to an unreachable divine ideal. So why not also in terms of the choice of one's friends, of one's relations with others?

On the other hand, however, unlike the other virtues in the *Ethics* and the negative tone of the *Politics* in general, the tone of the friendship chapters seems more positive and, as such, less overtly dismissive of men's qua human or non-divine ethical prospects. Once again, I remind the reader that for all their lowliness in ethical terms, utility and pleasure friendships remain friendships for Aristotle.

Now, to be sure, they are only friendships insofar as they partake in some measure of good friendship's exemplary model of what the common bond is supposed to be, namely at one with the fixed, divine, good.<sup>32</sup> And in this sense, good friendship and thereby the literal common good is always Aristotle's last word with respect to the true "political" worth of friendship. In short, it is not political, or subject to mere plurality, difference and free choice at all, but most emphatically good. And yet, the fact remains that, in the face of this seeming ethical inflexibility, Aristotle nevertheless takes the time to address utility and pleasure friendship, at times, almost seeming to defend them on their own terms.

Thus, having railed against the deficiencies of utility friendship, Aristotle proceeds in the *Ethics* to talk of its relevance, often positive, with respect to commercial and political relations.<sup>33</sup> And the picture is even rosier for pleasure friendship. At times, one can almost feel Aristotle's indecision at dismissing it as inferior. For example, in the same breath as arguing against its youthful caprice, he suggests a kind of intrinsic worthiness to pleasure beyond the confines of the fixed, singular, divine good.<sup>34</sup> And, indeed, this vacillation on Aristotle's part with respect to pleasure friendship is understandable given the importance that he assigns to pleasure, passion and love in terms of friendship's profound relation to the innately good and happy life.

So what is going on here? If utility and pleasure are lesser, why are they still friendships? Why Aristotle's refusal to banish them from his discussion of the good? And further, why does he often seem to praise them on their own terms? Indeed, to do the latter surely risks praising self-interested human love, which, if true, would clearly

contradict his earlier defense of the divine good, would it not? And so again, I repeat, what is going on here?

In the midst of this web of questions, what I simply want to suggest is that the paradoxical love-element of friendship cuts deep.<sup>35</sup> So deep in fact that Aristotle himself cannot quite escape from the confusion of the good with the seeming good that friendship and the love-bond throws up. Bottom line, there is something about the ethic of friendship itself, namely its existence as a love-bond, that ever leads, whatever its fixed divine good claims, to the promise of a truly free and plural political good. In short, friendship in all its myriad forms suggests that a fixed good exists, but at the same time, precisely because of ambiguous human elements like love, it is a good that is necessarily constantly up for grabs. That is, it is a good constantly in need of negotiation and re-negotiation; of deliberation and free choice; of open-ness to various differing views of the good. In short, it is a political good.

But perhaps this duality of Aristotelian friendship and, in particular, its tendency towards a political good almost in spite of itself, is not yet clear? If so, let us bring the argument to a head. To the point, as if recognizing this potentially slippery nature of his hierarchical argument, Aristotle takes one last deeper stab at proving the divine goodness of love and friendship by reverting to friendship's so-called internal nature.

To elaborate, Aristotle undertakes this argument in his usual customary and persuasive sifting manner. Specifically, arguing that the relations between friends seem to proceed from a man's relations to himself, Aristotle aims to definitively stabilize the relation between love and the good and so establish once and for all the superiority of

good friendship and with it the divine apolitical good. How? By showing that the good man alone is the only one who is truly lovable. In short, unlike the “bad” man who is torn this way and that by his passions, the good man, loving above all the divine, fixed good, offers a stable personality and so something tangible to love.<sup>36</sup>

And thus, politically speaking, thanks to this internal argument of friendship, a most powerful connection between our free choice and the divine good emerges. Indeed, insofar as we can only truly love the good man, all other friendly love is exposed as a sham, or at the very least hopelessly incomplete, leaving us with only one real choice to make.<sup>37</sup> It follows that only a friendship between good men, namely good friendship, is truly indicative of free choice. As such, it is the only kind of human love, which fully actualizes our nature as political animals. And thus, love and friendship, much like the rest of Aristotle’s thought, does not only not promote any such end as a political good, namely that which is much more ambiguous with respect to what free choice means. In fact, it positively rejects it.

Such is Aristotle’s succinct internal argument for the divine good. And a most powerful argument it seems to be, made as it is on the grounds of free choice itself. Still, for all its power, it is not without its weaknesses. Weaknesses, I might add, to which Aristotle, himself, ultimately concedes.

To explain, before even launching into this internal friendship argument, Aristotle prefaces it by explicitly admitting that though they are the most lovable in theory, such good men, much like good friendship itself, are rare if not impossible in the real world.<sup>38</sup> All of which, once again, provides a positive opening to the lower, freer, more political

friendships of utility and pleasure, amongst others. More precisely, if good friendship is practically impossible, if the only truly lovable man is non-existent in the real world, we would seem to be left with two extremes. Either all hope for a common good in Aristotelian terms is lost. Or, and this seems to be Aristotle's preference, the other, broader, more ethically ambiguous side of friendship is embraced as necessary for the common good alongside that of the divine good guarantee.

And thus, the political good slippage of Aristotelian friendship resurfaces even more strongly than was the case with the hierarchical argument thanks to the raising of this rare if not impossible internal argument. Quite simply, since it is not a given that we are good and hence truly and fully worthy of love, we can only ever, in our muddled, self-interested, pluralistic, freely choosing, human, way try to work toward that impossible end. And thankfully, love, in its boundlessness, which Aristotle himself also admits he can never quite control, provides just such a pathway through this never-ending labyrinth which constitutes the human common good. The political good of Aristotelian friendship indeed.

Of course, it is one thing to make such a provocative, paradoxical set of claims, quite another to more deeply justify them. Let us elaborate on this internal nature of friendship a bit more to see how precisely, in the midst of trying to most definitively justify the divine good, Aristotle actually provides an even more powerful opening, arguably the most powerful in Aristotelian thought, to a truly political good.

“Friendly relations with one's neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relations to himself.”<sup>39</sup> Having defended

good friendship as necessarily superior to all other friendships, Aristotle now attempts to show how this superiority plays itself out on an individual level. In effect, the objects of love in good friendship, namely the individual good men who constitute it, will now be examined more closely with an aim to show exactly what it is that seems to make them the most intrinsically lovable of all human beings and so necessarily superior in their friendly relations. And needless to say, within the context of our argument, this is an ingenious move. Basically, as if anticipating our critique of his slippery hierarchy, Aristotle, ever undaunted, wants to overcome the “political” boundlessness of love once and for all and finally, firmly, affix it to the good. And indeed, what better way to do this than to “prove” definitively that only the good man is worthy of love?<sup>40</sup>

So what is it that makes the good man intrinsically lovable? We should not be surprised that Aristotle attacks this question by way of what is by now his infamous sifting method. Thus, the innate lovability of the good man emerges via the argument of why a bad man is not similarly worthy of love.

So why is the bad man not lovable? To answer this question in a roundabout way, it is important to state first that before even attempting to explicitly address this issue, Aristotle seems to assume that we, the readers, will already be sympathetic to this view. Thus, in his characteristically matter of fact way, he prefaces his discussion by suggesting that naturally, if a friend turns bad, we will want to cease and desist all relations with him. For surely, he continues, what is evil neither can nor should be loved.<sup>41</sup> Thus, since only what is good is capable of being loved, the bad must be obviously be rejected.

And yet, though presented in such a self-evident manner, this rather cold-blooded approach to the “good” of friendship seems rather shocking to our modern ears, does it not? Indeed, if we truly love a friend, should we not want to help him through his trials and tribulations? And thus, rather than end relations with him, would we not be moved to love him all the more when he turns bad, hoping that with our love, he will see the light? Surely this, rather than Aristotle’s self-serving argument, as if a bad friend might “taint” my goodness, constitutes the truly good friendship.

And so, lest Aristotle’s good friendship seem not really very good at all, it is important to define our terms here. Specifically, what does Aristotle mean by a “bad man?” And further, why is this badness, by definition, not conducive to love as such? Basically, there is an implication here not simply of vice, but of a different kind of being. Namely, the truly bad man is not simply a stubborn human making evil choices and so capable of reform. Rather, he is almost akin to being sub-human, making it a perversion at best for humans to think that their love can induce such a one to see the light. In short, for Aristotle, a thoroughly bad man literally does not speak the same human language. He is quite simply more of a beast than a man.

Now, obviously, Aristotle needs to justify this argument. And hence, he moves from this need to break off all relations with such a man to the internal argument for friendship. In particular, a more intimate portrait of the bad man needs to be drawn in order to clarify this beastly portrayal. For indeed, it will be thanks to this contrast that the innate lovability of the good man, and with it the superiority of good friendship (also known as the literal common good), will at last emerge in sharp relief. In effect, being

truly or fully human, the good man becomes the only one literally capable of being chosen as the object of human love.

In any case, thusly turning inward, we are now more than ever compelled to ask, who then is this bad man? Well, herein, Aristotle suggests, is precisely the problem. Specifically, upon closer internal examination, we quickly realize that neither we, nor even he, can identify who he is.

To elaborate, using his rationally self-controlled model of virtue as sketched in Chapter 1, Aristotle is able to identify the bad man as he who not only lacks, but who refuses all such rational internal control. And as such, willingly torn this way and that by his ever-changing passions, the bad man becomes a flaky character to say the least and thereby an innately and purposefully deceptive personality, both to himself and to others.<sup>42</sup> And needless to add, being so literally inconstant and unreliable a human being, how can such a one possibly be lovable? There is, quite simply, nothing tangible, fixed, singularly human, in him to love. To love him is to, quite literally, be deceived. In fact, Aristotle suggests, if he is bad enough, he might not even be human at all.<sup>43</sup> Thus, returning all at once to Aristotle's insistence that we must cease and desist all relations with a bad man, we now see the compelling logic to justify such a clean break and are now almost inclined to agree.

Enter now, by contrast, the good man. Basically, unlike the bad man, he *is* self-controlled. In particular, his soul is not rent by factional, irreconcilable desires because all such desires are finally ruled and thereby harmonized by a singular desire, namely that of the divine good. So what does this mean in terms of his lovability? Naturally, because

he lets his desires be guided by that which is singular and one, the good man, by definition, displays a singular and reliable human character or being. More precisely, thanks to his supreme love of the good, he necessarily knows his own human limits, namely that his desires are not endless and chaotic but measured and ranked by a higher end or purpose. And thus, in a very literal way, he knows who he is.<sup>44</sup> This in turn necessarily makes him innately lovable.

In the end then, unlike the deceptive, bad man, the good man offers some tangible and stable thing to love. And what is that thing? For Aristotle, it is the divine, singular, good by which all human beings are literally delimited and which we therefore ignore at the peril of this same humanity.<sup>45</sup>

In any case, as is hopefully fairly obvious by now, in this internal portrait of the innately lovable good man, we would seem to have Aristotle's most essential argument for the affixing of love to the good and thereby his justification *par excellence* for using his friendly argument to finally reject any such thing as political good. Basically, as this brief foray into being shows, such an internal argument clearly forms the basis on which Aristotle's philosophic teaching quite literally rises or falls.

To explain, that human love is boundless, confounding the good with the seeming good and thereby serving to make free choice chaotically free may seem true at first. However, once we are initiated, either by persuasion or force, to Aristotle's teaching on human love, we shall know paradoxes notwithstanding that such a messy human-love-based common good simply cannot be. And what is this Aristotelian teaching? Not surprisingly, it all hinges on the logic of the internal argument. In effect, given that only

the good man, namely he who loves not humans but the good, is the only one aware of his human limits and possibilities, we, as human beings, can only properly choose to love him. Or what is the same thing, we must literally share his love of the singular divine good.

And so, only this can be the essence of our free choice and thereby our humanity, namely this ironically non-free, singular, divine love of the good. As for those who refuse this teaching, who take boundless love at face value, obviously they must be either mad or beastly. Certainly they are rejecting their humanity as Aristotle defines it. And as such, in ethico-political terms, this justifies their outright expulsion from the common good, or at best, a more brute kind of “persuasion” or control of their too boundless, too free interpretation of who and what they choose to love.

And thus, Aristotle’s internal argument for friendship whereby he “proves” that only the good man can be loved, simply serves, to repeat, to demonstrate on a more intimate and powerful level what the rest of his thought in the *Politics* and *Ethics* already confirmed, namely the paradoxically divine bias of his political ethics. That is, the ironic espousal of the literal, fixed common good on the basis of human free choice.

But again, in the interests of clarifying Aristotle’s decidedly apolitical political good argument still further, how is this possible? More to the point, how can the human love of other human beings possibly be used to defend the divine, singular, apolitical good? Surely we are all different, are we not? And naturally this means that we will hold different things to be good, love different men, often mistake the bad for the good.

Indeed, this is why love is boundless, why, with respect to the good, men are not gods but men, why they have no seamless knowledge of the good but must ever choose.

Perhaps. On the other hand, Aristotle suggests, insofar as the good man, by definition, is defended as the only fully human being, naturally it follows that the only truly human choice must be that which chooses the good man, namely that of the divine, singular good. And so, once and for all, thanks to the objectively lovable good man, who once again is the only fully human person, Aristotle establishes, or better, “stabilizes,” the paradoxical “truth” of his rather apolitical political ethic.

And yet, for all the mastery of Aristotle’s logic, we realize once again, thanks to this same Aristotle, just how fragile it is. Bottom line, the lovable good man upon whom good friendship is based, and with it the superior good of the *polis*, does not really escape the boundless love paradox. Why? To repeat, has not Aristotle already told us, before even launching into this internal argument, that such an intrinsically lovable good man is rare if not impossible? In short, if nothing else, clearly this is an admission that none of us can quite escape our “bad” tendencies. In effect, akin to our nature as political animals, few, if any of us, can ever be fully human.

Or to perhaps put this in a less negative way, we humans seem to ever stubbornly refuse to fit into Aristotle’s tidy definition of what constitutes human-ness. That is, we ever “fail” to let our messy passions be ordered by the objective, singular divine good. And to the extent that this “bestly” tendency is true of all human beings, friendship and its focus on a common bond based on human love is an oxymoron. Namely, the common bond is undone precisely because it is based on the innately unreliable nature of human

beings themselves. They cannot, quite simply, be trusted to love the divine good and so recognize that only the good man, and thereby the literal common good, should be loved.<sup>46</sup>

Now, of course, with respect to our overall argument, this admission regarding the failing of human beings is not very satisfying. More precisely, it appears to undermine once and for all what we have argued for, namely that in Aristotelian friendship there is, whatever its divine leanings, nevertheless a most powerful positive endorsement of a truly political good. In short, thanks to the admission by Aristotle that both the good man and good friendship are most likely impossible divine ideals, we would seem, once again, to be left with little more than a proverbial throwing of hands into the air. In other words, human beings should be good. They should choose the good. They should love the good. After all, these are all defining elements of their human nature. That they do not actually do so, clearly this can only be indicative of a profound flaw, if not in Aristotle's "good" argument, than in the fact of most if not all actual human beings.

Such, in any case, are the implications behind Aristotle's "impossible" argument. Sound familiar? Once again, what we have here is the idealized political animal of Chapter 1. But this time, his promise of free choice to all is even more distant and ideal. In effect, we have seen, thanks to the more intimate discussion of friendship, just how far away we actual human beings are from Aristotle's truly divine good. To the point, we humans are not even capable of loving one another.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, beginning our segue to Derrida, the impossible admission on Aristotle's part may, precisely because it refuses to lower ethics to a more human,

political, level, not be as much cause for despair as it initially seems. To the point, just because we flawed human composites can never fully realize our humanity is no reason to reject the notion of the impossible ideal. In short, the affective bond of friendship, while unreachable, nevertheless serves as an important guidepost for all of us. Or, to put it more tellingly in terms of our political good argument, that actual human beings may be radically different, may share no common view of the good, may even be literally free, is not cause for rejecting the truth of the common view. Indeed, Aristotle suggests, without such a common premise, how can men possibly hope to be friends at all?<sup>48</sup>

More broadly speaking, at stake here is reining in the dangerous political instability that a simple ethical advocacy of actual human relations based on boundless love would let loose. Basically, Aristotle's idealistically stable ethic of friendship, impossible though it may be, serves to provide purpose to our seemingly endless desires and so infuse the political community with a spirit of goodwill rather than of internecine conflict.<sup>49</sup>

This is surely a powerful political justification of the fixed view of the good. And yet, for all its power, one cannot help but continue to feel negative and hopeless about the prospects of good for actual human beings. Put bluntly, for all its edifying side, there remains a suspicion that Aristotle's political ethics is essentially a testament to the idea that men can never be friendly to each other, can never reach a common good. And as such, they would seem to ever be subject to the very internecine political conflict that Aristotelian ethics seems intent on avoiding. And further, if true, this leaves only one, not very satisfying, option to avoid such conflict. Namely it is to finally forego free

choice, human love, plurality altogether and opt instead for the more stable, though potentially not very ethical idea, of control by the few.

To elaborate, once again, using Aristotle's logic of the internal nature of friendship, one cannot help but be forced to conclude that most, if not all, actual human beings are akin to some form of beastliness. And so, Aristotle's ethic of good friendship, profoundly distrustful of actual human love and free choice, becomes a potential justification for actual political horror. And needless to add, the "force" justified by Aristotle's argument, which we sketched clearly towards the end of Chapter 1, now placed in this more intimate context, becomes even more pronounced and disturbing.

Or does it? Perhaps, despite all that we have just said in Aristotle's name, there is a more positive possibility after all? Namely, the notion that the good is impossible does not have to suggest Aristotle's explicit notion of the divine ethical guidepost. On the contrary, if taken more literally, perhaps its very impossibility could even be used to defend a truly political good. And herein, or so I will argue now, finally in direct segue to the Derrida chapters to come, lies the uniqueness of friendship in Aristotelian thought.

To explain, despite his divine intentions, Aristotle, especially in his writings on friendship, is nevertheless not quite prepared to simply deny the more "flawed," human side of things. Thus, as we saw, alongside his insistence on the fixed eternal good as absolute standard, does Aristotle not also indicate an open-ness to "lower" less literally common friendships, especially that of pleasure? Also, with respect to the internal argument for friendship, we see that whatever his explicit intentions to stabilize and

control it, Aristotle remains constantly aware of the not quite controllable boundlessness of human love.

And hence, seen in this light, the impossibility of good friendship may be more than merely an indictment of men as not measuring up to the absolute strictures of the divine good. Indeed, it may also indicate a kind of ethical slippage, an opening to a freer, more pluralistically human, conception of the common good. In other words, what we would seem to have here is the possibility of an Aristotle who is of two minds. On the one hand, there is the Aristotle of the *Politics* and of much of the *Ethics* who basically insists that man's free choice must be affixed to the divine good if it is to be considered free at all. On the other hand, however, there is the Aristotle of the friendship books of the *Ethics*, who, while similarly insisting on the superiority of good friendship and the good man, nevertheless is prepared to say that the life of the supremely good and happy man must not simply be good, but also be infused with actual human love and pleasure.

Of course, in terms of our overall political good argument, this friendly concession to human love and pleasure by Aristotle is not sufficient to yield the kind of free choice and plurality that we are searching for and which, it must be added, is promised by Aristotle's own deliberative political animal. To the point, regardless of his recognition of the importance of pleasure and love in good friendship, Aristotle is most emphatically not prepared to take this recognition to its logical boundless conclusion. Thus, the reason for his hierarchy privileging good friendship and his accompanying assertion that only the good man is fully human and thereby worthy of being loved in the first place. The implication here is that, from Aristotle's explicit perspective, human love

and pleasure, while necessary for the attainment of true human goodness, must nevertheless ever be regarded with suspicion, must ever be controlled, even by force if necessary.

On the other hand, however, and here is the crucial point, I think it is justifiable to finally ask, in thusly attempting to control love in this way, does not Aristotle actually risk destroying it altogether? And indeed, as if in backhanded acknowledgement of such a risk, perhaps this is the ultimate reason for Aristotle's acceptance of lower, less intrinsically good, friendships as valuable. And further, this might also be the reason that he feels compelled to acknowledge that both good friendship and the good man are rare if not impossible. Taken together, both serve as a kind of damage control, a way of assuring that actual human love, which Aristotle does not quite trust, can nevertheless be saved from being crushed by his impossible demand for divine love.

So what is going on here? How can Aristotle, with friendship, seem to at once reject and yet give hope for a truly political good? Why the simultaneous tendency to at once reveal human love's almost intrinsic ethical potential while at the same cut off this same potential by asserting a need for divine control, even by force if necessary?

Well, perhaps, as have we have already suggested, there is a kind of duality going here. Or, more precisely, perhaps such Aristotelian "schizophrenia" may simply be a sign that we need to move on. In effect, in order to more fully understand and, more importantly, appreciate the paradoxes of his ethical thought, most particularly that of friendship, we would do best to move beyond Aristotle. Hence, in Chapter 3 and beyond, in the name of keeping on with our search for the political good, we make the rather

jarring shift from Aristotle's view of political ethics and friendship to that of Jacques Derrida's more radical vision on both counts.

As a preliminary sketch in this regard, the question that Aristotle's paradoxical thought on friendship throws up is as follows: is there a way to hold on to love's boundlessness, to accept the sheer impossibility of its control by the divine good and at the same time, in all seriousness, posit a common bond, a possibility of friendship on this basis? In effect, the call here is for friendship to be established on the basis of a truly political, that is truly plural and freely chosen, good.

More specifically, and perhaps less daunting, the challenge here involves a shift of perspective. Will we remain with that of Aristotle which, while laudably revealing the boundless, impossible side of any adherence to a literal common good, yet, in the midst of embracing it, ends by recoiling from it and, worse, asserting against it a desire for absolute control? Or, will we choose to be more forgiving of the admittedly frightening realm of ethical uncertainty that actual human beings, in their relations to themselves and to others, necessarily throw up? In short, in a kind of Heideggerian spirit, the question is whether or not we are willing to let human love be. And more generally, whether or not we are finally prepared to accept that the pursuit of the fixed good is just as human as is the impossibility of ever reaching it. Herein lies the justification for the turn to Derrida who indeed takes on precisely such a challenge by positing the notion of friendship-as-impossible.

### CHAPTER 3

Politics is innately good. We ended the last chapter by suggesting, perhaps for this first time, what this might positively mean. Namely that, ethically speaking, we are essentially dealing with the impossible. Hence, the turn away from Aristotle to Derrida and in particular to the latter's notion of friendship-as-impossible.<sup>1</sup>

To elaborate, we justified this impossible turn, seemingly bizarre at first glance, in the following way. On the one hand, it is Aristotle himself who throws up this impossible possibility. In short, against all odds, he dares to suggest that there might indeed be such a thing as a political good. Thus, in the *Politics*, alongside his insistence on a singular ethical standard, on a notion of the good as one, divine, natural, he posits, as we saw in Chapter 1, that man has a political nature. And what does this mean?

In brief, man is one with all other human beings only to the extent that he is plural. Or, more specifically, in defining man as essentially political, Aristotle makes it clear that men do not simply bow down to a singular good. On the contrary, ideally speaking, they should freely choose the good and deliberate with others about their similarly freely chosen views. What's more, given his practical wisdom stance in the *Ethics*, Aristotle actually appears to make this pluralistic, deliberative nature a virtue. And so, seen from the point of view of the singular good, as it were, it seems fair to conclude that the common good of men, according to Aristotle, is not literally common, not seamlessly singular at all, but multiple, plural, free. A positive endorsement of the political good indeed.

Moreover, Aristotle's apparent nod to this positive impossibility, namely the possibility of a truly political good, becomes even clearer in Chapter 2, with his discussion of the ethic of friendship. In particular, in daring to base man's common good on the bond of potentially boundless human love, Aristotle comes extremely close to defending the good as that which is both singular and plural. Thus, while defending the superiority of good friendship, Aristotle in the same breath admits some worthiness for the "lower" or less singularly good friendships, especially that of pleasure friendship. Further, he gives these lesser, more political forms of the common good even more direct support insofar as he declares that the superior good friendship, just like the good man himself, is actually profoundly rare if not impossible. Love's boundlessness, apparently, runneth over.

Specifically, this open-ness to lesser friendships along with the impossibility of good friendship colors his conception of the good in the following way. Basically, this more slippery view of the common good encourages Aristotle to "taint" his view of the good such that its divine austerity, its purity, becomes all at once dependent on the love of other human beings. Further, these human beings, given their composite condition, are not "pure" at all, but messy, plural, free, political.

And so, at this point, we might be wondering why then, if Aristotle essentially has said it all as far as the political good is concerned, do we need to turn to Derrida? Well, and this may sound odd, though Aristotle may indeed have said it all, he does not really recognize it. Or more precisely, he does not want to recognize it. Quite simply, in the

end, regardless of his political overtones, Aristotle consciously defends the following notion: the singular must trump the plural.

To recall, in the *Politics*, before proclaiming man's political nature, Aristotle declares explicitly that the good of the polity is simply superior, without question. And so, man's deliberative capacity with respect to the good is undercut, perhaps even undermined, by a guarantee that the good governs all anyway. The same is true with regard to his praise of practical virtue and the political life in the *Ethics*. Ultimately we see that this praise is derived from the standard of the philosophical life, which in essence eschews free choice in favor of contemplation. In this way, again, we see Aristotle moving from greater open-ness to the political good to a belief that all "goods" are necessarily governed by the singular, divine good as such.

And thus, the political good, in both instances, gives way to the singular, divine, natural guarantee of the good. Which led us to the conclusion of Chapter 1, namely that Aristotle seems to be somewhat disingenuous as far as his own ethico-political claims are concerned.

As for friendship, the story is a little more nuanced. And this is why, or so I argued in Chapter 2, this notion is the most persistently political in all of Aristotelian thought. Basically, with friendship, we see Aristotle consciously trying to do the impossible, namely to affix the good to the human bond of love. To the point, Aristotle quite clearly understands the difficulty of this task and he confesses this to us himself. Hence he declares openly that though necessary for the good, human love is ever

potentially boundless, threatening to confuse the good with what men think is good for themselves.

And yet, while making this admission which in effect amounts to a recognition that perhaps the good can only ever be a political good, Aristotle nevertheless tries to save the good in all of its singular purity. And so, though later admitting that it is rare if not impossible, Aristotle in all seriousness defends the superiority of good friendship. In short, mirroring the oneness of the good, Aristotle feels compelled to privilege the bond of those political animals who, while being capable of free choice, nevertheless ever choose the same good. Bottom line, love's boundlessness will be controlled; the human common good will, in spite of free choice, be one. And this desire for control, needless to add, threatens to exclude vast swaths of actual human beings from being considered good, namely of being both capable of free choice and of being worthy of love.

So Derrida. The implication is that, like Aristotle, he will confront the "impossible" of the political good. However, unlike Aristotle, he will, in this confrontation, not attempt to flee, overcome, or control it. Rather, finally, scarily, impossibly, he will, simply, accept it. Hence, we have Derrida's notion of friendship-as-impossible, which, as I suggested at the end of Chapter 2, essentially argues for a bond of love, which eschews all bondage. Basically, the boundlessness of love is accepted for what it is. Boundless.<sup>2</sup>

Now of course, from the point of view of the common good, this kind of acceptance may mean anarchy. In short, boundlessness literally cuts across all boundaries and thereby cannot help but question the idea that we can, in fact, hold

anything in common. On the other hand, however, as Derrida points out, it is precisely this anarchy that allows for the possibility of a truly universal, truly common good in the first place. In particular, such boundlessness literally holds the promise that all, not just the few, are worthy of love, are capable of free choice. As such, this kind of anarchic or impossible stance with respect to the good necessarily provides the “foundation” out which all common goods are formed.<sup>3</sup>

And thus, ironically, in the midst of all of its ethical ambiguity, such an impossible good seems to hold the most universal promise as far as the good is concerned. In short, it ever puts forth, quite literally, the possibility of a truly political good. More precisely, such impossible ethical ambiguity necessarily opens up the possibility for a good that, at one and the same time, is both singular and plural, both indicative of the fixed, divine good and of the actual human capability to freely choose the good.

Turning now to the specific focus of this Chapter, the elucidation of what Derrida means by friendship-as-impossible is probably best appreciated if we begin as we began with Aristotle, namely with a discussion of nature. What is Derrida’s view of the one, the divine, the natural, the good? Does he have a view? Indeed, given his acceptance of the impossible for what it is, namely that which is impossible, and so unknowable, even unthinkable, it is not easy to pin down with any precision a strict Derridean definition of the good. And one gets the feeling that, as far as Derrida is concerned, perhaps this imprecision with respect to any singular standard is precisely the point. And herein lies

his ever-readiness, from our point of view, to embrace such a paradoxical “thing” as a political good in the first place.

In any case, working backwards, as it were, we begin this discussion positively by suggesting the obvious. To the point, the impossible, lending itself to no easy definition, does not, for this very reason of ambivalence, simply reject the good. By the same token, neither does it simply accept the good. All of which leads one to the conclusion that, with respect to his view of nature, oneness, the divine, Derrida’s impossible stance is not merely negative. That is, it is not merely anti-nature, anti-oneness, anti-divine. Rather, as the tone of these few sentences already suggests, what Derrida points to is something, someone (impossible to name), prior to such dichotomies of good versus not good, of nature versus non-nature.<sup>4</sup>

Or, to put it another way, for Derrida, nature, one-ness, the divine is necessarily double at its source. Basically, nature can be natural only because there is something defined as the non-natural. These two separate and opposing concepts, in effect, allow the one-as-natural to come to be. And hence the one, far from being singular, actually comes third. That is, you have the one, the other, and then, thanks to this ontological difference (one could also say plurality), the one can ever be, in its various incarnations, asserted. Needless to add, one example of such an incarnation is Aristotle’s assertion of the innately superior political community and the similarly superior relationship of good friendship.<sup>5</sup>

Still another way of putting this, and this is the specific approach that we will take in this Chapter with respect to outlining Derrida’s notion of nature-as-impossible, is that

Derrida largely accepts, and attempts to expand upon, Heidegger's concept of Being. Thus, the purity and singularity of the one, for example that of the good espoused by Aristotle, is conceived of as merely a part of a broader movement of perpetual becoming. And so, the first half of this Chapter will attempt to sketch how this broader movement works and how this work of becoming colors Derrida's impossible notion of the good.<sup>6</sup>

Second, having outlined Derrida's "natural" affinity to Heideggerian Being, we will then attempt to illustrate that Derrida, for all this affinity, is yet not in complete agreement with Heidegger. And herein will enter such notions as deconstruction, *la différance* and the "privilege" Derrida grants to writing over speech and in particular, to readership over authorship.<sup>7</sup> The bottom line here is that, if the work that Heidegger proposes of Being is to be taken seriously, the "stance" of difference, of absolute otherness, of dissociation rather than Heidegger's own apparent preference for "gathering," must become the condition of the one and all of its expressions thereof. And, needless to add, this dissociative attitude is key in terms of understanding Derrida's notion of impossible friendship from whence a truly political good emerges. In any case, this explicit linkage to friendship will be discussed at length in the two Chapters following this one. For now, having set forth the former, rather difficult task of discussing Derrida's impossible good *a la* Heidegger and beyond, let us now take up the way.

In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida, in a supportive mood, nicely summarizes Heidegger's thoughts on Being thus:

If the meaning of Being always has been determined by philosophy as presence, then the *question of Being*, posed on the basis of the transcendental basis of time (first stage, in *Being and Time*), is the first tremor of philosophical security, as it is of self-confident presence.<sup>8</sup>

There is a lot going on here in this deceptively short and seemingly innocuous quotation. First, it suggests that Being-as-presence is the usual stance of all philosophy Aristotle's included. What is Being-as-presence? In short, it is akin to Aristotle's divine, natural, one, good assumptions which we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Basically, to paraphrase Derrida *a la* Heidegger, Being-as-presence insists that the principle of all existence, including that which makes human beings what they are, is governed by the eternal.<sup>9</sup> And what does this mean? Well, to put it bluntly, what everything *is* does not change. In effect, that which makes a human being a human being is static. It literally does not move. But more than that, because what a human being *is* is eternal, all of the past and future possibilities of what a human being might be, no matter how radical the proposals, no matter in what time period, are all collapsed into this singular, eternal definition. And so, for example, when Aristotle says that man is a political animal by nature, he means, and we saw this explicitly in Chapter 1, that man's political, plural, free choosing status is fixed. Go outside of this fixed boundary and what you have is no longer a man. Or to put it another way, man's free choice is not really free, but by design. It is an ideal of free choice and plurality by way of an eternal, unchanging model.

Now, to avoid a misunderstanding, what Being-as-presence does not mean is that actual human beings are static. We, you and I, all of us men and women, certainly do

move.<sup>10</sup> And indeed, as we saw once again in Chapter 1, Aristotle is also quite plain in this context. Thus, human beings in their actual composite condition not only do move, but also, according to Aristotle, must move. Why? Have we thusly contradicted what we just said about the static nature of Being-as-presence? Hardly.

To the point, the fact that we actually do move, for Aristotle, simply means that there is a gap between actual human beings in all of their incomplete rationality and uncontrollable passions and *species human being*, which is the model of self-control and complete rationality.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Being-as-presence is the measure of all of existence, including man. And as such, that actual existence does not measure up is no reason to reject the measure. On the contrary, the measure provides the singular goal by which all actual existence is imbued with meaning.<sup>12</sup> Take away the certainty, or more precisely the stability, of this goal, for example the definition of man as a political animal by nature, and all that you have are unanswerable questions. Is free choice of the good really free? What is free choice? What is good? Who decides? Is a final decision on either ever really possible at all?<sup>13</sup> And in fact, with such questions, you virtually have nothing at all. That is, neither free choice nor the good have any stable meaning. All that is left is literally a profound and utter “mess.”

Which all at once brings us to the second part of the quotation above which, as should be clear by now, is not very innocuous at all, but profoundly radical. Questions. What if, as far as the meaning of human existence is concerned, all we really have are these impossible, unanswerable questions? What if Being-as-presence, nature, the singular good cannot, for all its self-confident eternity, escape these questions? What if

the idea of a singular nature is in fact actually possible solely because of these eternally unanswerable questions? So suggests Derrida *a la* Heidegger.

On the other hand, as if transforming a potentially boundless sense of despair of all meaning into yet a potential for a truly universal sense of meaning, the above quotation also suggests the following. To the point, if this interrogative “stance” is truly all there *is*, two things happen. First, Being-as-presence is exposed as but a moment of Being. Hence the linkage of Being posed as a question to the “transcendental basis of time.” Basically, Being is “defined” as a process of becoming of which Being-as-presence is an intimate and decisive, but not the be-all and end-all, part.

Second and related, Being, as this process, is both before Being-as-presence and yet not, for that reason, superior to it. In effect, unlike the moment of Being-as-presence which, as we shall see directly, tends to hierarchialize and exclude most if not all actual human beings in favor of its own ideal, Being-as-process, as the condition of this ideal, does no such thing. In short, coming both before and during the decision as to hierarchicalize and so dichotomize, Being as the process of becoming basically lets human beings be.<sup>14</sup> Hopefully what this means with respect to our search for a truly political good will become clearer as this section unfolds.

Onto Being-as-presence as but a moment of Being posed as a question on the basis of transcendental time. More precisely, what this questioning pose of Being suggests is that all singular notions of nature, the good and in fact all “eternal” measures are neither given nor eternal at all. Rather, as Derrida suggests using Heidegger’s notion of Being, such measures may actually be little more than historical decisions made as to

the status of Being (which itself has no fixed status). And so, here, in ancient Greece, there, in Tang China, here, in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, this is good, that is free choice.<sup>15</sup>

Now, to avoid yet another misunderstanding, what is implied by this historical sensibility is not that the good, the divine, the natural is simply relative, subjective, a matter of mere individual choice.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, insofar as the good is set within the context of a notion of Being-as-time, particular contextual decisions are not made willy-nilly, but actually become a key part of the inner necessity of Being. Bottom line, as implied by such bold, decisive, historical language, such contextual decisions, far from being relative, are each innately infused with a sense of the good in its broader questioning incarnation. How? Well, since the good is not eternal, but an historical decision reflecting the existing conditions of its own time, this good, by definition, must be questioned. And thus, the process of Being is set in motion.<sup>17</sup> All in all, it is the perpetual battle of historical decisions, each trying to raise itself as the ideal model of existence, that bestows upon Being-as-process, or Being-as-time, its time-bound truth.

Thus, in the first instance, Being-as-presence which, suggests Derrida using Heidegger, so far has conditioned (and perhaps must always condition) every philosophy, becomes defined as that which is not really eternal at all, but rather an enforced ideal model of existence.<sup>18</sup> In short, to use explicitly Heideggarian language, it is an ideal a people in a given epoch wants and tries to keep abidingly in force.<sup>19</sup>

And so, seen from the “perspective” of Being-as-time, Being-as-presence, the so-called eternal, becomes akin to a particular and at the same time, necessary search for, and enforcement of, the truly excellent form of existence in the vocabulary that makes

sense to a particular people at a particular time. And for that same reason, Being-as-presence is not Being broadly defined. Rather, it is only a moment, albeit a necessary human moment, of decision as to the eternal, the divine. In other words, the true divine “standard” is radically beyond any one particular human decision as to its meaning.

In any case, having suggested that Being, or the principle by which all human existence is defined, is not simply captured by any human attempts to define it, we now wonder, in a more positive cadence, what then is Being? In short, if Being-as-time is not simply Being-as-presence, how can human beings possibly understand the meaning of their own existence? Needless to say, it is here that Derrida’s nature-as-impossible will eventually make its positive stand.

But again, to take this discussion step by step, we ask: Being according to Heidegger and Derrida, what exactly is it? So far, it seems, we have only learned what it is not. Namely it is not Being-as-presence alone. Which is basically another way of saying that any and all meaning of human existence is ironically beyond any human attempts to finally define what it is.

And yet, surely it follows that if this beyond-ness is the case, why should we bother to seek such meaning, such a good at all? Perhaps, in effect, it is enough to say that we human beings simply do not know what the meaning of existence is. In other words, when it comes to ultimate ethical principles such as the good, all we can do, at best, is to ask questions.

And indeed, as far as Derrida and Heidegger are concerned, that is precisely the point. In particular, to ask what Being *is* is really all we human beings can positively

know about Being.<sup>20</sup> Remember, our pronouncements on Being are only a moment of Being. Or, to put it another way, when human beings speak of Being, they can only offer empty words. No mere human vocabulary, particular way of life, philosophy, can finally capture Being in itself.

Then again, here, in this ultra human “fact”, if we truly take our particularistic “role” in Being seriously, words about what Being *is* can be found, even if to our human ears, they sound, must sound, paradoxical, contradictory, impossible. Thus Derrida, quoting Heidegger in *Humanism*, says: “But if man must one day arrive in the neighborhood of Being, he must first learn to exist in that which has no name.”<sup>21</sup>

Basically, what Derrida and Heidegger are suggesting here is that Being itself does not equate to any fixed human articulation and meaning attributed to Being. On the other hand, precisely because this is so, something is revealed about Being itself. Specifically, in its very incomprehensibility to we human beings, Being, the divine, the good is most emphatically felt not to be static, not to be subject to any singular name, definition or nature. Instead, to the extent that it surfaces for we human beings at all, it appears in “ghostly” fashion via a perpetual questioning of our own historically attuned pronouncements on Being.<sup>22</sup>

And yet, explicitly bringing back our political good thesis into the picture, we might wonder at this point if we have not perhaps strayed too far a-field with such a time-based concept of Being or principle of existence. Indeed, without any fixed standard of existence possible, how can any good, even a political good, be said to exist? Bottom line, if the political good is to have any meaning, surely, in addition to being free of all

fixed human attempts to define it, it must also hold out some hope for some kind of standard, some ethical dimension to human life and decisions.

And so again, we wonder, can Derrida and Heidegger's profound refusal to rest satisfied with any singular human decision as to what the good is really offer anything in the realm of political ethics? Perhaps, at best, only profound anarchy emerges. And surely this rather chaotic view of the good, namely no stable view at all, is neither politically nor ethically satisfying. In fact, it may be positively dire on both counts. Witness, for a start, Heidegger's own brushes with Nazism.<sup>23</sup> And further, witness Derrida's defense of Paul de Man and Heidegger despite knowing that, at one time, both were Nazis party collaborators and/or members.<sup>24</sup>

In any case, thusly aware of these risky ethico-political implications of Derrida's Heideggerian conception of nature and Being as that which is ever questionable, we are duty-bound, it seems, to expand further upon Being-as-time. In particular, despite its seeming proclamation that all standards of the good are impossible, we continue to search for something ethical in this very impossibility. And thus, we now explicitly turn to the second aspect of Being we outlined above, namely its "nature" of letting human beings be.

To begin in this vein, we are all at once confronted with a familiar approach. Basically, what Being-as-time positively is, namely that which lets human beings be, will become clearer if, using something akin to Aristotle's "sifting" method, we take a step back and yet again contrast it with the stance of Being-as-presence taken alone as the

singular principle of existence. Thus, Derrida, continuing in his Heideggerian cadence, says:

If every “philosophy,” every “metaphysics,” has always sought to determine the first existent, the excellent and truly existent existent, then the *thought* of the Being of the existent is not this metaphysics or first philosophy... Since it [the thought of Being] is not first philosophy concerned with the archi-existent, that is, the first thing, or first cause which governs, then the thought of Being is neither concerned with, nor exercises, any power. For power is a relationship between existents.<sup>25</sup>

Let us start with the last sentence of this quotation. “For power is a relationship between existents.” This, in effect, is Derrida’s pronouncement with respect to Being-as-presence taken alone as the singular principle of existence. Indeed, only traditional philosophy and metaphysics, which are ostensibly based on the priority of Being-as-presence, deal with the search for the first and most excellent existent. As such, only philosophies of Being-as-presence get caught up in such exercises of power; get bogged down by assertions that only their notion of the good is right.

And yet, at this point, we might justifiably wonder, so what? What does such a pronouncement of power actually mean? Why is it significant? And, more precisely, how exactly does the implied “lack” of power of Being-as-time thusly emerge, as we have claimed, in a more ethically positive, “letting human beings be” light?

Well, to address these questions in tandem, as the earlier portion of the same quotation tells us, the “fact” that Being-as-presence is imbued with exercises of power suggests that the traditional “eternal” approach to the good is, to repeat what we have already said, not really eternal at all. But more than that, thanks to such power dynamics, we now additionally see that to assert as singular that which is historical or time-bound is

actually profoundly dangerous, profoundly violent. To the point, the attempt to assert as eternal a particular moment of Being-as-presence is not only logically contradictory. Indeed, it actually threatens to set in motion an unending and bloody struggle of particular views of the good. Specifically, each philosophy, insofar as it embodies the belief that its specific determination of the most excellent existent is the same as the universal good itself, is engaged in a potential struggle for power, for pre-eminence as against other philosophical competitors.

Another more telling way of putting this, one perhaps more in keeping with our overall political good thesis, is that Being-as-presence, far from truly providing a universal standard of good, is in reality, profoundly exclusive. For tangible evidence of this, and also highly relevant to our argument, one need look no further than Aristotle's "universal" standard. Thus, as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, free choice and the bond of love in friendship, both in their own way said to define what it means to be human, are at best the exclusive purview of the superior ethical few. All the rest of humanity, by extension, must tremble before the example of these few. That is, at least until they revolt, overcome, and so impose their own "superior" view in the same violent and enforced manner over and against all others. And so, the Christian moment overtakes the pagan and so on *ad infinitum*.

Enter by contrast, though of course it has been there all along, Being-as-time. This, in the above quotation, is what is referred to as the thought of Being, which is basically interchangeable with a stance of profound questioning of all fixed human

definitions of Being. In any case, again thanks to the notion of power, we now see precisely what such questioning of the metaphysic of Being-as-presence means.

To elaborate, this metaphysical questioning is tantamount to the suspension of power relations, at least for a time. Namely, all historical decisions as to what constitutes the preeminent standard of existence and with it, all battles of particular views of the good are suddenly, in being questioned, cast into doubt. And thus, all at once, thanks to this “stance” of questioning, an opening, a possibility of infinite and universal inclusion, is introduced both before and within the very cycle of perpetual exclusionary decision-making. And herein, in this opening to all views of the good, as it were, lies the ethical significance of the letting human beings be notion of Being-as-time.

Quite simply, the indecisiveness to which the questioning of our own particular views of Being necessarily leads us uncovers a fundamental truth. Basically, while, on the one hand, the power struggle of particular views of the good continues, in fact must continue in light of our innate human particularity and limits in this respect, the resulting imposition of an exclusive good on everyone is, at the same time, never taken as the final ethical word. For after all, to so freeze what is most emphatically not universally good would surely be most unethical, would it not?

And so, by fits and starts, we come to see, thanks to Derrida following Heidegger, that perhaps a truly political ethics lies precisely in refusing to take any fixed good as the final, singular standard. Indeed, it is only because there is no such singular standard that it is possible for we limited human beings to meaningfully speak of the good in the first place. Take away this infinite ethical possibility of the good, also known as the

impossible good, and any particular human decision as to what is good, not to mention what is bad, becomes utterly nonsensical.<sup>26</sup>

But more than this, to thusly let human beings be, namely to accept that the standard of existence for human beings must remain an open question, is profoundly ethical insofar as it also connotes a radical open-ness to the other. In short, in the moment of questioning, the dichotomy between “us and them” is less stark. Specifically, as Derrida and Heidegger suggest via their shared notion of Being as the suspension of power relations, the temptation to assert our view of the good as superior and thereby impose it upon them gives way, for a time, to despair of never being able to finally know the good.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, at this point, we might justifiably wonder, how can this possibly be ethical? Well, thanks to the very despair of having lost our way, does not a feeling of connectedness to all others all at once becomes eminently possible? In effect, out of the very chaos of not knowing the good, there is also the hope for infinite inclusion. And what could be more positively ethical and in fact more truly universally good than that.

And yet, with respect to our search for a political good, almost as soon as we mouth this letting-human-beings-be notion of ethics, it seems to fall apart. Indeed, the chaos within it remains troubling, does it not? Put bluntly, thanks to such radical openness and freedom with respect to the good, everything may very well be acceptable, may very well be included under the banner of what is worthwhile. And surely, to the extent that this is the case, any and all notions of the good become rather meaningless. Quite simply, without a stable or fixed standard with which to reliably judge what is right and

what is wrong, we are cast adrift in a kind of ethical malaise. And thus, the disturbing possibility of turning a blind eye or even embracing something like Nazism emerges once again.

And in fact, the disturbing ethical implications do not end there. The discussion of power, it seems, throws up an even more poignant reason to despair. To the point, the infinite inclusion implied by such a questioning, letting-human-beings-be stance, for all its positive universal ethical flavor, does not at all oppose the most violent aspects of the “us and them” mentality latent in the Being-as-presence ideals of existence. In short, questioning each particular human decision as to what is right and what is wrong in the name of greater inclusion does not remove the fact that such impositions will ever continue.

To elaborate, as both Derrida and Heidegger point out, the very historicity of Being, namely its time-bound conception of reality, actually requires the exclusive decisions of Being-as-presence. After all, without such exclusivist, particular conceptions of the good, what would there be to question? Besides, are we human beings not, as necessarily limited beings, by definition inherently exclusivist anyway? And thus, we reach the inevitable conclusion that the very impetus of Being-as-time is derived from the fact that we human beings ever err with respect to the good. In other words, we will always, in our wrong-headed universalism, impose our good as against others. This, according to Derrida and Heidegger is the inescapable fact of our being human. What’s more, it is thanks to this very fact, in particular our “being” as ethical blunderers that we also help to keep the process of Being moving.<sup>28</sup> And needless to add, coupled with the

profound ethical chaos we spoke of above, is not such a dependency by Derrida to rely on such a perpetual human tendency to err profoundly disheartening with respect to any hope for a truly political good?

So, what answer to give to such despair of the good? On the one hand, as both Derrida and Heidegger stress, it is actually important to be aware that this despair can never be overcome. The good, in effect, ever remains an open-ended political prospect. On the other hand, however, what I want to suggest now in the final section of this Chapter is that, precisely because of this refusal to reject despair, this refusal to finally control the political good, a way by which one can remain hopeful for a truly universal good may yet emerge. Quite simply, it all depends on how you choose to approach such natural ethical ambiguity and human error.

And thus, all at once, we turn to discussion of how Derrida, for all his affinity to Heidegger's concept of Being, nevertheless disagrees with him on one crucial point. Basically, while it is true that when confronted with the impossible, a wrong-headed decision will always be made, this need not be eternally tragic if, as Derrida opts to do, we focus less on the wrong-headed decision and more on its undoing by questioning. In short, as we shall see presently, the apparent Heideggerian preference for reinvigorating the human capacity to err is replaced by a focus, in Derrida, on how these errors are ever undone almost in spite of themselves. And hence, deconstruction, and with it the realization of our profound responsibility to ever question our own truths and so ever be more open to the other becomes the key to Derridean ethics. In effect, this process of undoing, and not the human tendency to err, is Derrida's way of infusing endlessly free

and chaotic Being-as-time reality with yet an endless hope for a truly inclusive and therefore truly universal good.

Of course, it is one thing to make such an argument, quite another to prove it. Let us now elaborate on its fundamental claims. To begin, Derrida, in uncharacteristically blunt fashion, distinguishes his own view from that of Heidegger in the following way:

[One] recurrent critique of deconstructive questions has to do with the privilege Heidegger grants to what he calls, for example, this gathering; gathering is always more powerful than dissociation. I would say exactly the opposite. Once you grant some privilege to gathering and not to dissociating then you leave no room for the other, for the radical otherness of the other, for the radical similarity of the other. I think that separation, dissociation is not an obstacle to society or to community, it is the condition.<sup>29</sup>

Thus Derrida makes his dissociative case. However, before we can fully appreciate this as a differing approach to Heideggerian Being and thereby to the notion of the naturally good standard as a whole, we would do best to talk briefly of Heidegger's "gathering" bias.

However, first, a caveat. To avoid a misunderstanding, let me state from the outset that Heidegger's bias is by no means a simplistic one. For after all, it does not emerge in a vacuum, but rather out of the "truth" of Being-as-time. As such, given this rather chaotic context with respect to all fixed notions of the good, if Heidegger does seem to promote "gathering" or a kind of fixed approach to the good, I think it is fair to suggest that he does not do so with a view to, in Being-as-presence style, "freezing" it as the singular standard of existence. In short, he is not a new Aristotle.

And yet, and here emerges the point of this gathering discussion, to the extent that Heidegger does take up such a fixed approach to Being-as-time, one cannot help but feel that there nevertheless is an Aristotelian danger here. Indeed, why not freeze it? It is a fixed good after all. Now, to be sure, it may miss the full truth of Being-as-time. And as such, this kind of good ever remains, and this is Heidegger's own word for it, an error. On the other hand, however, what if such errors are privileged, if man's role as ethical decision-maker, wrong though it may be, is seen as the most important aspect of Being-as-time? Indeed, would not such an approach amount to a tendency to see Heidegger's deeper chaotic, impossible truth with respect to the good solely in negative, non-good terms? Indeed, which would you rather choose: an exclusive error-ridden good or inclusive chaos?

And so, to close this caveat, all at once, should this gathering bias of Heidegger prove true, it would cast serious doubts upon his own notion of Being-as-time. In particular, while it may not disprove the truth behind Being-as-time *per se*, what does occur is a potential undermining of the very promise of universal inclusion embedded in open-ended Being-as-time.<sup>30</sup> And in this sense, namely in threatening to make Being-as-time seem too one-sidedly a cause for despair, the very open-ended promise behind Heidegger's Being-as-time may very well be violated by Heidegger himself. Quite simply, if he does in fact privilege of the role of human error, surely there is always the risk that he may very well be deceived by such an error, taking it, rather than the perpetual process of Being-as-time, as the truth. And in fact, as we shall see shortly,

Heidegger virtually admits as much in his highlighting of the particularly powerful human error of technology.

In any case, explicitly launching on our gathering discussion now, obviously a lot depends on how Heidegger conceives of man's innate tendency to err. In particular, what place does man's tendency to impose his culturally particular view of the good on everyone else play in Heidegger's overall conception of Being? Is it too prominent? And second, to the extent that it is too prominent, how does this seem to undermine Heidegger's deeper truth? To the point, does Heidegger, in thusly privileging our particularistic ethical role, risk alienating us from the deeper ethical truth of Being, namely the necessity to question all such particularistic, exclusive truths?

To deal with these issues in tandem, let us first examine what prominence Heidegger grants to man's tendency to err in matters of truth and the good. In this respect, his argument in the essay entitled, "On the Essence of Truth" is particularly apt. Indeed, the claim, which lies at the heart of this essay, is that the key to understanding Being-as-time lies in man's experience of his own error.<sup>31</sup> And what does this mean? More precisely, what has it to do with the potentially truth-obscuring preference of approaching Being-as-time from the point of view of man's particularistic view of the good?

Well, on the one hand, nothing. Specifically, as Heidegger goes on to explain, and as we have already suggested above, from man's point of view, the truth of Being-as-time can only ever be particularistic and therefore in error. Thus, it makes no sense to speak of a preference for man's error here. Quite simply, one cannot prefer what simply

*is*. With respect to the truth, man errs. And so, in an odd twist of the argument, we might say that by not focusing on man's error, we may actually be doing a profound disservice to the only window we have on the deeper truth of Being. For the sake of clarity, let us quote Heidegger in full to drive home this point:

The error in which historical man must always walk, which makes his road erratic is essentially one with the manifest character of what-is. Error dominates man through and through by leading him astray. But, by this self-same aberration, error collaborates in the possibility which man has (and can always extract from his ex-istence) of *not allowing* himself to be lead astray, of himself experiencing error and thus not overlooking the mystery of *Da-sein*.<sup>32</sup>

In short, it is only by thusly realizing his role as he who errs that man will be driven ever onward to overcome this error and so encounter most directly, even if only fleetingly, the truth of Being-as-time, also known as the impossible good.

Now, of course, in this drive, as the quotation suggests, man will continually err. And yet, Heidegger continues, this need not be an obstacle to realizing the deeper "chaotic" truth of Being. On the contrary, it is only by fully experiencing his own error, his own tendency to want to control this chaos, that man has any hope of such a realization; of, as it were, finding his place within the mysterious, chaotic, radically free cosmos that Being-as-time portends.<sup>33</sup> And needless to add, seen in this light, the "preferential" treatment Heidegger gives to man's particularistic role of ethical blunderer is not akin to a so-called gathering bias at all. Rather, as we have just seen, it is the only way man can hope to experience the truth of Being and with it, hope for a truly political good.

So, begs the question, are we, following Derrida, thusly wrong to take Heidegger's focus on man's error-ridden, particularistic imposition of the good as a violation of the deeper, radically open-ended ethical truth of his Being-as-time? Perhaps. On the other hand, however, in reviewing another of Heidegger's essays, namely "The Question Concerning Technology" we see that even Heidegger, in the end, seems somewhat skeptical of the "truth" of his own error-based focus.<sup>34</sup> And so, perhaps the truth-obscuring, even "fixed", tendency behind Heidegger's so-called "gathering" bias is not so absurd after all.

To elaborate, in this essay, and indeed in all of the later essays on technology, there is a focus on just how powerful man's descent into error can be.<sup>35</sup> To the point, for Heidegger, technology is based on the particular Platonic decision to "control" Being-as-time by affixing its ambiguous, radically free movement to rational human activities like shoemaking which have a stable end product. As such, technology, which Heidegger explains, has been the dominant truth-error of the West for 2500 years, represents a particularly powerful error of man. Indeed, it may be so powerful as to actually disconnect us once and for all from the truth of Being-as-time. Why? What is the power of this Platonic error that it so threatens to cut us off entirely from the truth of Being?<sup>36</sup>

Well, as Heidegger explains, the key to this error's power lies in technology's mimicking of the movement of Being itself such that we believe that it actually is that movement. Specifically:

The coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve.<sup>37</sup>

In effect, technology with its standing-reserve threatens to cloak forever the radically free and ambiguous reality of Being with its own mock, human-writ large movement, also known as virtual reality. Thus, suggests Heidegger, so great and powerful is our tendency to err that we can actually do more than create exclusivist “goods” *a la* Aristotle that are maintained by force and so, ethically speaking, beg to be questioned. In fact, we can create a new bastard Being-as-time and conceal from ourselves that it is a bastard. And so, even if we do question it, this bastard error may very well remain untouched.

Now, to be clear, in bringing up this Heideggerian notion of the essence of technology, it is not my intention to discuss whether Heidegger’s notion of technology is correct or not. Rather, it is to show the ultimately despairing negative path to which a sole focus on Being-as-time from the perspective of human error can lead us. Indeed, so great can this error be that even the necessity to question our own fixed truths may become utterly meaningless.

In effect, Heidegger’s notion of technology reveals that our fixed truth may become so large as to be not merely a necessary moment of Being, but actually to rival the impossible, unknowable reality of Being itself.<sup>38</sup> And given this context, it is no wonder Heidegger laments in one of his few interviews, “only a god can save us.”

Basically, if one looks at the truth of Being solely with a view to re-igniting man’s experience of error, namely to feel the process by which particular views of the good are asserted and reasserted, surely this danger of a permanently frozen standard of existence, of nature, of the good ever exists. Quite simply, if this process itself can be usurped by error, such a fixed standard is all that is left. Heidegger’s gathering bias indeed. And

needless to add, what violence and exclusion such an almost permanent error might portend one can only guess. Regardless, the profound politico-ethical despair and concomitant obsession with control of such a view is clear enough.<sup>39</sup>

And so, lest the impossible good of Being-as-time be rendered so impossible that a permanent retreat into fixity and control becomes preferable, we turn, in our continuing quest for a truly political good, to Derrida's slightly differing perspective on the truth of Heideggerian Being. That is, we shift from a focus on the experience of error to the undoing process by which all erroneous views of the good are questioned even as they are asserted. In short, Derrida's ultimately more ethically hopeful philosophy of nature, if we may call it that, is based on deconstruction which, I will argue, represents a more truthful rendering of Heidegger's Being-as-time. In particular, Derrida focuses his attention almost entirely upon Heidegger's notion of *Destruktion* or dissimulation of truth.<sup>40</sup>

Now, for the sake of clarity, let us begin this final fleshing out of Derrida's ultimately dissociative approach to the good by returning to his seemingly pro-Heideggerian argument in *Writing and Difference*. Indeed, as we shall see presently, it is actually in the very way Derrida embraces Heidegger's notion of Being that his own differing, dissociative perspective emerges.

In particular, as becomes clear even from a cursory reading, Derrida does not embrace Heidegger's Being-as-time as if in a vacuum. On the contrary, there is a broader argument at work. To the point, he uses Heideggerian Being as a corrective to the argument for the Other of Levinasian philosophy.<sup>41</sup> And thus, seeking in this way to

strike a kind of balance between Being- as-time and absolute otherness, Derrida clearly announces his more hopeful, questioning and so radically inclusivist ethical focus.

To elaborate, let us first examine his corrective stance toward Levinasian Otherness. Basically, that Derrida is willing to go to all this trouble clearly indicates some sympathy towards Levinas' embrace of the other as other in all of its radical, chaotic, inclusive good connotations. However, while sympathetic, one tendency in Levinas makes Derrida uncomfortable. And what is that tendency? Quite simply, it is the shunting aside, even demonizing, of Heidegger's Being-as-time. To the point, Levinas looks at the chaos and inherent violence, namely those power struggles we saw above, of Heideggerian truth and reads in it an inherent antipathy toward the Other, of its perpetual subsumption. In effect, Levinas "freezes" Heideggerian Being-as-time and sets it against his own conception of Otherness.<sup>42</sup>

So what is the problem here? Well, according to Derrida, Levinas, in the very act of defending Otherness in this way, risks its supreme violation.<sup>43</sup> Basically, Derrida argues, by setting it against Being-as-time, Levinas serves to reject the very process, which throws up absolute otherness in the first place. Indeed, as we saw above, otherness as otherness can only be thanks to the failure of we, as exclusivist beings, to finally capture the truth. More precisely, it is through the very process of asserting our ethical exclusiveness that we come to see the other as other in the first place; first negatively, as something to impose our own ethic upon or against. But then, as the process moves on, this seeing of the other becomes potentially more positive, more inclusive, to the extent that we come to realize our inherent ethical failure through profound questioning.

Namely, thanks to our very ethical despair, the other as other becomes less an object to oppose and more something to be accepted, and thereby potentially ever more progressively embraced, for what it is, simply other.

And so, in thusly using Heidegger's argument in this corrective manner, Derrida shows that Levinas' Other, for all its laudable pretensions to an ethic which embraces all others, is ultimately little more than another error-ridden Being-as-presence truth which ironically excludes others. In sum, it amounts to the dream of the pure thought of pure difference. And as such, it serves to violate actual difference which *is* only by virtue of its play with actual sameness or ethical exclusiveness.<sup>44</sup>

Now of course, at this point, given that we have undertaken this discussion with a view to uncovering how Derrida's view actually differs from Heidegger's, we might wonder how this correction of Levinas' Otherness clarifies matters on this score. Well, at the risk of repeating ourselves, what this corrective use of Heideggerian Being suggests is that Derrida does not simply embrace Heidegger's own approach to Being without question. Put bluntly, as his efforts to correct Levinas' Other show, Derrida clearly thinks that Heideggerian Being-as-time requires something more than Heidegger's focus on the perpetual experience of error and/or ethical exclusiveness. Quite literally, it also requires something other. And herein lies the crux of Derrida's distinctive approach to Being-as-time.

In effect, to re-invoke Derrida's dissociative distinction from Heidegger, what we have here, in addition to a correction of Otherness in light of Being-as-time, is also a correction of Being-as-time in light of Otherness. And what does this mean? Well, it

simply suggests that Heidegger, if he is to be truly loyal to his own notion of Being, cannot really offer any justification for privileging man's experience of his own particular truths or errors. Indeed, the other is the only hope for us being able to see our error in the first place. Or more precisely, it is only thanks to groups with opposing values that we can hope to be jarred from the certainty of our own values and so, finally and meaningfully, question them. As such, to repeat, this undoing other is essential to the very realization of our own error.

Bottom line then, as far as Being-as-time is concerned, there is nothing common or fixed to cling to either in terms of Levinasian Otherness, or, in terms of Heidegger's privilege of human error. In fact, Derrida suggests, if we are to be truly honest with ourselves, we would be forced to admit that even our own experience of error is shot through with otherness and error. As such, it is literally impossible for us to ever know the true depths of our error, let alone understand what the experience of this error is supposed to teach us, namely to give us insight into the impossible good of Being-as-time.<sup>45</sup>

And yet, at this point, ever mindful of our overall thesis, we might wonder how this dissociative approach to Heideggerian Being is possibly, as we have claimed, more imbued with hope for a truly political good. Indeed, given that we cannot even trust our experience of error, it would seem that matters are truly hopeless as far as any good, even a political one, is concerned. Well, Derrida answers, as if turning the tables on us, it is in being true to this very hopelessness that lies the profound fountain of hope.

Quite simply, he explains, the fact that even our experience of error is shot through with otherness means two opposing things. On the one hand, there can be never be any escape from our own tendency to fix the good in place with a particular view of the good and in this way, literally violate the truth of Being-as-time.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, however, precisely because this is the case, our responsibility to question that error becomes all the more powerful. Through and through, Derrida asserts time and again, the truth is infected with its other.<sup>47</sup> Thus it is not simply an error, but an error which ever undoes itself. There is no stopping this process. Which, in a positive ethical cadence, means that Heidegger's notion of the supreme error of technology is all at once rendered supremely impossible. In effect, Derrida's focus on the fact of undoing itself ensures that nothing, not even supreme error, is guaranteed. And needless to add, seen in the light of inclusive truth, this is profoundly hopeful.

In any case, to reframe and hopefully clarify all of this, let us turn away from this narrow context of a debate between Levinas and Heidegger and use more explicitly Derridean terminology. To the point, the radical "truth" of otherness as far as all truths, goods, ethical standards are concerned is what Derrida calls deconstruction.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, as Derrida took great pains to try to clarify throughout his life, deconstruction is not simply a method that is used to dissect and thereby see the "error" of philosophical truths. Indeed, do this and you risk defending another error. In effect, the notion of deconstruction itself would become a fixed good.

And so, seen in this light, deconstruction must be something else. In particular, it must be something, which is necessarily beyond our methodical control and thereby

reflective of the untouchable process of Being-as-time. And so it goes. Derrida names it deconstruction, but he is careful to suggest that such a name is no more than his word for a process that always already happens in the very expression of our particular truths.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, the “other” or argument which questions all particular truths emerges alongside their very expression. As such, again, this deconstructive othering is literally not within any human control. This is the undoing “truth” of deconstruction, which Derrida also names *la différance*. In short, the only truth of deconstruction is this: in the beginning, there is not one-ness but difference, both the truth and its other.<sup>50</sup>

Now, of course it is one thing to make such an assertion, quite another to prove it. To the point, on what possible basis can Derrida make the seemingly absurd claim that deconstruction simply happens, that each truth contains its own untruth, each good its own non-good? More precisely, from where does Derrida derive the confidence to make the claim that the other of truth emerges within its very expression? Perhaps, on this score, we would do best to take a closer look at precisely how the truth is thusly expressed? And in fact, this is precisely what Derrida does.

In particular, Derrida directs our attention to the philosophical canon, Aristotle included. And what does he find there? Or more precisely, what does he not find? Well, to put it bluntly, what he does not find is one clear, firm expression of the truth, the good. On the contrary, what he finds instead are in fact a plethora of texts, innumerable texts. And not only “primary” texts like Aristotle’s are found either, but interpretations of interpretations of Aristotle.<sup>51</sup>

Still, having revealed such a profundity of confusion and complexity as to the expression of truth, we might wonder, what next? At this point, Derrida makes a truly surprising move. Basically, he dares us to view all such expressions of truth, both primary and interpretive alike, not from the usual authorial standpoint, as if we can fully know the author's intentions and so seamlessly unite the lines of each text into a singular, consistent truth or expression of the good. Rather, what Derrida asks of us is that we view all such expressions of truth from the perspective of the reader, the inexact interpreter, the questioner, even the perplexed.<sup>52</sup> What's more, Derrida believes he is deeply justified in doing this. Why? Again, it seems to reflect the othering truth of deconstruction.

Or more precisely, as virtually all of Derrida's own writing attempts to show, the othering of truth occurs not only thanks to the innumerable texts in existence. In fact, it also occurs within each singular text as well. What's more, this simply reflects the fact that, within each of us, there is literally both an author, namely he or she who announces the fixed good or truth to be presented, and the reader, or other who interprets and thereby undoes that good or truth as soon as it emerges.<sup>53</sup>

Now, to make sure we stay on track with our political good thesis, let me say that with this dualistic pronouncement on both a plural and singular level, we are obviously on the cusp of grasping Derrida's "proof" that the process of undoing itself is the basis of all truth, nature, the good. As such, we are almost in a position to fully appreciate what he means by nature or the good-as-impossible. And yet, while so close, there nevertheless remains the daunting task of showing why Derrida feels justified in, as we

have just suggested, not simply showing this dualism, but actually privileging the reader side of the dualistic spectrum of truth. Indeed, by so tipping the balance in favor of the reader-questioner as against the authorial-announcer of truth, does not Derrida risk going beyond the process of othering and so, in Levinasian fashion, turn the other into a Being-as-presence truth? And thus, for all his play with Heideggerian Being, we would be forced to conclude that Derridean undoing or deconstruction is actually little more than his method of securing truth and thereby yet another turning away from a truly political or impossible good in favor of yet another fixed Being-as-presence good.

In any case, suspending this critique for now, let us see how Derrida in his own writing justifies both his reader and author claims and at the same time defends his readerly approach. Indeed, as if addressing this critique directly, we shall see that, for Derrida, uncovering the former actually entails the latter. In effect, the fact that truth contains its own undoing can only be uncovered by the reader because we, disciples of Platonic philosophy, have tipped the scales too much in the authorial, error-based, direction of privileging exclusivist Being-as-presence truth. And so, to see the more inclusivist truth of Being-as-time, we necessarily require the reader perspective. For it is only by this approach that the authorial perspective will finally be restored to its proper place alongside, rather than being superior to, its reader-other.

Turning now to Derrida's specific deconstructive justification of truth, we begin with his seminal work, *Of Grammatology*. Basically, it is within this work that Derrida most clearly shows the authorial bias and so the remedial need for the reader perspective. How? Not surprisingly, via a discussion of the expression of truth. Thus, our above

allusion to Derrida on this score is confirmed. In particular, to repeat, Derrida delves into the “textuality” of truth itself, namely, its written expression in the philosophical canon, and exposes a rather odd bias, namely the authorial bias. But more precisely than that, he actually justifies this bias by exposing an even odder tendency in philosophy, to link truth and speech.<sup>54</sup>

To elaborate, this latter oddity is telling with respect to Derrida’s unique deconstructive view of truth, nature, the good on two levels. First, and more obvious, the fact that truth is linked to speech in a written text is, to repeat, rather bizarre. Thus almost immediately, Derrida awakens us to the fact that something rather uncanny might be going on in the canon’s very expression of truth. Namely, everything cannot be as it should if the traditional philosophical expression of truth, writing, is itself denounced by these same writers. Indeed, the suspicion that something is not fully “right” in these expressions of truth, in fact that there might even be something forced about them, all at once comes to the surface.<sup>55</sup>

Second, obviously jarred by this apparent contradiction, we are thusly moved to discover the reason for this speech bias. To the point, what makes its allure so powerful that philosophers would be moved, in writing, to defend it as the only valid path to truth? Well, at the risk of over-simplifying Derrida’s rather detailed and careful answer to this question, the linkage of speech to truth is ultimately based on a kind of utopian dream.

Basically, defined by Plato (and Aristotle) as that which can more purely express the truth, speech is deemed closer to the natural, the true, the good. Specifically, as opposed to the greater abstraction of writing, speech is argued to be intimate, perhaps

even at one with that which is represented. As such, though both are but signifiers or representations of truth, speech is nevertheless privileged, identified as that which can somehow become one with the true, the good, the natural.<sup>56</sup> And hence, all at once the utopian dream emerges, a dream, it must be added, which tempts us to this day. In short, it is the fantasy that perhaps one day human beings will not just philosophize about the truth, but actually come to know it.<sup>57</sup> And further, to tie everything together, so powerful is this dream, so blinding is its allure of truth, that the purity of speech can even be defended in the abstraction that is writing.<sup>58</sup> And thus, in turn, we now discover why writing itself is imbued with its own authorial bias. Such a bias is quite literally a reflection of this truth-making authority of speech.

In any case, with respect to the truth of Being-as-time or nature-as-impossible notion that we have attempted to highlight as Derrida's own in this chapter, hopefully why this speech bias, and with it the favoring of the authorial voice in writing, is a violation of the truth as Derrida understands it is abundantly obvious. But just in case it is not, let us complete this Derridean discussion of the speech, authorial-based bias in the written canon of philosophy by showing how Derrida explicitly responds to it. Indeed, the very title of his work, *Of Grammatology* in itself already implies this response. Thus, in remedial fashion, Derrida will propose to "save" philosophy from this temptation to make exclusivist truths universal and thereby make Being-as-presence the eternal standard of all existence, by privileging writing over speech. What's more, he will do this by way of giving a more equal voice to the reader, in particular that undoing other who is usually silenced by the more resounding voice of authorial truth.

Bottom line, to wrap up Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology*, the point here is not, as many critics of Derrida accuse, to reject either speech, authorship or even the philosophical canon from whence it is derived.<sup>59</sup> Rather, as he makes clear time and again, it is by privileging the abstraction of writing and the voice of the reader, that Derrida hopes to actually establish the authority of truth on more firmly philosophical grounds. In particular, the truth should not be based on utopian dreams of certain knowledge, but instead on that of philosophy or the love of knowledge.

Or to put this in another way, all human beings are inherently limited, particularistic, exclusive beings. And as such, all human expressions of truth, including speech and authorship, are necessarily abstractions of the truth. Forget this, succumb to the admittedly powerful dream that there is such a thing as a direct human link to the truth, and we renounce whatever hope there is for a truly universal, inclusive, and so necessarily impossible truth or good.<sup>60</sup>

Turning now to the elucidation of deconstructive truth on more positive grounds, Derrida proposes to showcase the actual balm of this writing and reading perspective by doing something rather literal. In short, all of his writings are, in one way or another, devoted to a reading of the philosophical canon. And thus, the reader-other of authorial truth is brought out with each discussion Derrida undertakes of a given text.<sup>61</sup> What's more, knowing that such a task can never be completed, for while the author of each text is one its readers are infinite, Derrida invites his readers to do the same with the texts they read, including his own.<sup>62</sup>

And in fact, to make my own confession in this regard, this is what I tried to do with Aristotle in the first two Chapters. Namely to reveal that despite his singular authorial intentions, Aristotle cannot help but reveal the reader-other side of his argument which undoes these intentions. Hence, for example the political animal-supreme common good tension from whence the eminently paradoxical political good emerges in the first place. Of course, in true reader fashion, this means that my interpretation too is subject to the infinite reader-other.<sup>63</sup>

In any case, herein Derrida's unique perspective on nature-as-impossible and with it his linkage to our political good thesis is at last fully revealed. On the one hand, with Heidegger, he accepts the "messy" or radically open truth of Being-as-time. And thus, a profound questioning stance is used not to reject Aristotle's good, but to expose its fixity as a non-universal, exclusivist truth, in short, a necessary but palpable error. But what is the effect of such exposure in terms of "proving" our thesis? It is to further unchain Aristotle's political animal from its captive fetters to become truly, impossibly, both good and free.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, to ensure that we remain honest with ourselves as far as these errors are concerned, for as we saw Being-as-presence errors are perpetual, Derrida goes yet further. Thus, beyond Heidegger's focus on the experience of error, Derrida instead focuses his attention upon questioning, in particular, the process of undoing itself. In this way, Derrida confronts us with the fact that truth itself is imbued with its other.

More precisely, as seen in the countless ways humans express the truth, it becomes clear that embedded deep within each of us is both an author and a reader, a

decisive truth maker and a questioner of that same truth. All of which leads to the conclusion that ever conflicted, we can never rest satisfied with either one side or the other, but in fact are endowed by nature with the profound responsibility of questioning all fixed truths, including our own. In the end, what Derrida wants to restore is the idea of philosophy, namely that human beings are nothing more and nothing less than lovers of wisdom. Or more tellingly in terms of our overall political good thesis, what Derrida desires, and what he in fact explicitly calls for, is to restore Aristotle's political animal in all of its deliberative, restless, free choosing, spirit, so evoking a vision of the good that is not fixed, but inconclusive, impossible, political.<sup>65</sup>

And yet, all at once bringing back the critique we suspended earlier, and by way of providing a segue to Derrida's elucidation of friendship, in thusly "privileging" such a spirit of undoing, what possible guarantee is there that human beings will realize this profound responsibility to question all truths and so fully realize their inner author-reader being, as it were? Again, without any fixed good to cling to, even in an error-ridden sense, what possible motivation do people have to pursue a good, which is, by definition, impossible? On this score, Fred Dallmayr's critique of Derrida on the grounds that the latter's thought, for all its universal philosophical intentions, may actually promote unabashed narcissism, is well taken.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, what is to stop Derrida's perpetually questionable good from being collapsed to a belief that there is simply no good at all, thus leading to the conclusion that I can simply do whatever I want? And needless to add, to the extent that people give in to such narcissism, all hope for a political good is lost. Heidegger's "only a god can save us" indeed.

On the other hand, to beg the reader's patience once again, we now turn in earnest to Derrida's notion of friendship-as-impossible. In particular, the ethical import of this notion will be revealed in two ways. First, in Chapter 4, Carl Schmitt's decisionist thoughts on the political will be deconstructed with a view to suggesting that, while impossible, Derrida nevertheless intends a truly ethical vision of friendship and the common good. In effect, mere arbitrary decisionism is not enough to explain human relations or politics. Specifically, it is inadequate with respect to "deciding" with whom I choose to relate. Something other, something ethical and good, is needed to complete this picture. And hence narcissism, though ever a possibility within Derrida's thought, is not something he is explicitly seeking to defend as true.

Second, Derrida's notion of friendship-as-impossible will then be discussed via his deconstruction of Aristotle's vision of friendship in Chapter 5. In short, what this undertaking will hopefully show is that the more fixed Aristotelian alternative that Dallmayr promotes as an antidote to narcissism is ultimately not a corrective anyway.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Derrida exposes Aristotle's notion of good friendship to be a kind of tribal narcissism, finally defended only by exclusion and force. In sum, the corrective other of truly free choice is needed here to enrich and make truly universal the good of good friendship.

Now, of course, by way of finally bringing this Chapter to a close, as to whether this Derridean deconstruction of Schmitt and of Aristotle will be enough to induce us to truly embrace our ethical responsibility and not simply resign ourselves to despair and a life of self-indulgence, it may be impossible to say. On the other hand, as far as a truly

political good is concerned, perhaps this is not the way to think about it anyway. In other words, perhaps we would do best, if this is possible, to take what we receive from every thinker, rather than just resign ourselves to the truth of one.

## CHAPTER 4

Politics is innately good. In seeking to discover what this means, we have confronted the impossible. Deeply. Indeed, we have gone so far as to suggest, with Heidegger and Derrida, that there is no fixed singular nature and so no fixed singular good. To the point, as Being-as-time teaches us, through and through, the good is not fixed at all, but “free.” Specifically, it is a movement that makes possible the historical choices of peoples through time. Therefore, insofar as the historicity of this choice is experienced, all at once the good is open to question, multiplicity, the political. It is essentially Aristotle’s deliberating political animal without the supreme good guarantee.

And in fact, as if to ensure that this freer conception of the political animal remains just that, Derrida feels compelled to go yet further. Thus, with deconstruction, Derrida suggests that perhaps even this movement, framed as it is in terms of the experience of historical choice, is also too fixed. Indeed, if the multiplicity, the historicity, the questionability, the truly “political nature” of the good is to be taken seriously, how can we possibly rest satisfied with the experience of such choices, such errors? How can we possibly rest satisfied with anything? In effect, the political good Derrida is implying here entails that there be no definable buoys or guideposts in the infinite sea of politico-ethical deliberation.

To more fully justify this “political good” of radical freedom, Derrida, as we discussed in Chapter 3, attempted to link the good to a process of its own undoing. This is deconstruction. Thus, he revealed, every singular notion of truth, good, nature contains its other. And what does this mean? Well, what it does not mean is that the good will be

replaced by an-other good. Derrida, in short, is not defending a notion of one versus an-other. Rather his intention is to defend the one and the other. In this way, we see that Derrida's notion of the other is actually an-other which is not against, but within, the one.

Put bluntly, for Derrida, every singular notion of truth, the good, nature has its own opposing notion contained right within it. Both the one and the other, in short, exist together, at the same time. As such, every singular notion human beings assert is necessarily dissimulated with this same assertion. Or to put this in another way, the undoing process is, quite simply, the only truth there is. And so, naturally, it must always already occur in every singular truth or good that we dare assert and act upon.

Still, we might wonder, why exactly is this true? And how, at the same time, does this undoing truth suggest a so-called political good of radical freedom? Well, Derrida's answer, as we saw in Chapter 3, is the same on both counts.

Quite simply, this undoing process, because it is literally the overarching reality of all existence (remember Derrida equates it with Being-as-time), also naturally occurs within every man, woman and child. In effect, within all of us there is an "other," in fact, infinite others. Therefore, it follows that when any of us, either as an individual or as a people, chooses a view of the good, this choice is at the same time inherently fragile and uncertain, shot through with its other. Or to put this more bluntly, all at once, in our choice of a singular view, a multiplicity of other views of the good are always already at play. And these views are not only all around us, but deeply inside each of us as well, even as we make our singular choice.

And so, beyond what we saw as Heidegger's "gathering" preference, namely to see the processural truth of Being-as-time as driven by our perpetual error-ridden tendency to assert our good as the good, Derrida offers a broader, freer, dissociative, "othering" approach. What's more, precisely because this is so, Derrida's approach is necessarily more promising, his embrace of radical freedom more ethical, more indicative of a truly political good. Why? Well, as we suggested in Chapter 3 and again above, Derrida's deconstructive approach asserts more than the idea that we will always err with respect to the good. Rather, taking the process of undoing as its hallmark, deconstruction necessarily makes an ethical demand of us. We must not rest satisfied with error but instead dare to live in a "state" of perpetual questioning. In this way, presuming that we are able to meet this challenge of "othering," we will keep alive hope for a truly inclusive, truly universal ideal of the good. In short, thanks to deconstruction, we will learn to be fundamentally open to all views of the good.

And indeed, to close this summary of the argument in Chapter 3, the ethical responsibility behind the othering, open-ended good is the reason Derrida used notions of the reader and author, writing and speech. Quite simply, by privileging the reader and writing, Derrida's intent is to show how we might learn to live in the undoing truth of reality. For, taken together, the reader and writing both suggest an inherent uncertainty in the human expression of truth. In other words, no matter how authorial our claims, no matter how much speech seems to put us in direct line with the truth, both will always be abstractions of truth. This is what the reader and writing perspectives teach us. As such, to the extent that we learn to accept this otherness, namely that we authors of the good

cannot yet escape our “readerly,” interpretive side, there is a very real opening here to a political good. We are, quite literally, charged with the ethical responsibility to perpetually question all fixed conceptions of the good.

Now, with this kind of radically open conception of the good, we might think we have strayed very far from our argument in Chapters 1 and 2. However, in the interests of tying my overall argument together to this point, we see that even with respect to Aristotle, this open-ended, questioning approach also rings true to some extent. To the point, as I attempted to bring forth in those first two Chapters, the reason that Aristotle’s political thought, for all its fixed intentions, remains so rich is precisely because Aristotle cannot quite cover up the “problems” that his own “fixed” discussions of political ethics throw up. And in fact, as I think both his notion of the political animal and his discussion of friendship reveal, he sometimes even appears prepared to embrace these very problems. Indeed, in this context, we would do well to remember that Aristotle’s point of departure is to question Plato’s divine notion of the good on the grounds that it threatens to exclude free-choosing, plural, love-based, human issues. In short, the divine good of Plato, not being sufficiently “political,” is also deemed inadequately universal.

Bottom line, what I am getting at here is that Derrida has hit upon something truly universally good in his refusal to rest satisfied with any one particular view. Indeed, what makes thoughts like Aristotle’s so durable for all their fixity is indeed true of philosophy in general. Namely, virtually every philosophical text reveals both a truth and a hint that this truth is not singularly assured. And thus, in turn, the enduring, undoing, deconstructive, *la différance* truth of the political good all at once emerges. It is, quite

literally, a testament to the idea that each and every “genuine” presentation of the true, the natural, the good necessarily calls for a new interpretation, an-other read. The question is, will we take up that this philosophical call to truth?

And yet, on the cusp of offering so “literal” a presentation of the political good, perhaps, to repeat the quandary at the end of Chapter 3, we have done little more in ethical terms than expose its utter absurdity? For remember, as incarnated by Derrida, the good can never be fixed. And in this sense, it must, by definition, ever finally be unattainable by us if it is to remain truly good. And needless to add, herein lies the absurdity. If the good is essentially impossible for us, perhaps what we have here is no real conception of a good at all. Or more precisely, Derrida’s notion of deconstruction perhaps amounts to little more than a conception of the political good where politics, open-ness, radical freedom, ultimately trumps the good. Such, in any case, is the basis for Dallmayr’s charge of narcissism.

And so, lest Derrida’s political good be exposed as that which is simply too political to be good (in contrast to Aristotle’s which seemed too good to be political), we would seem to require something more tangible than Derrida as yet has offered. In particular, to mitigate this very real ethical “problem” of daring to embrace the impossible, something else besides impossibility and sheer otherness would appear to be necessary. And thus, we turn at last to the focus of this Chapter, namely the discussion of Derrida’s notion of friendship.

However, before we undertake this discussion, we would do best to pause for a few paragraphs to explain, once again, why friendship in general is so integral to our

overall search for the political good. As we suggested at the end of Chapter 1, friendship is an ethically unique concept because it alludes, on the one hand, to a personal, love-based, concrete human bond, which deals with human beings in all of their complexity and difference. On the other hand, it is also a common bond and as such has common good overtones. In sum then, because it is both open to a multiplicity of people with differing perspectives of the good and at the same time indicative of a singular common good, friendship would seem to resonate with that seemingly impossible combination of the political and the good.

Now of course, thus far, we have mainly talked of friendship in terms of trying to find a corrective for Aristotle's version of it. And so, we have perhaps as yet not been as fair to the full ethical implications of friendship as we could have been. In particular, in the interests of trying to dilute Aristotle's too rigid, potentially tyrannical embrace of the singular good, we perhaps underemphasized the common good aspect of friendship. Thus, in turning to the elucidation of Derridean friendship, the implication is it will somehow allow us to more fully and truly embrace both sides of friendship.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, having reiterated our claims for friendship in general, we return directly to the focus of the argument for this Chapter, namely to show the value of Derrida's version of it. In particular, this discussion will be undertaken in the following way. First, we will begin with a very basic question. Why friendship? More precisely, if Derrida declares, as he does in *Politics of Friendship*, that friendship is essentially impossible, how can he possibly say anything of value about it?<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it almost seems

as if we are confronted with the non-good or narcissistic problem of deconstruction or the perpetual othering of truth all over again.

Perhaps. On the other hand, and here will occupy the remainder of our argument, what if this very othering of deconstruction can, with friendship, actually be turned to a good end after all? In effect, we are suggesting that Derrida's notion of the need to question all truths may in fact literally be akin to friendship itself. For, indeed, does perpetual questioning not entail, as we suggested above, an open-ness to all others?

Still, it is one thing to make such a claim, quite another to prove it. In order to show what amounts to a claim that deconstruction is at one with a radically inclusive and therefore truly universal [common] good, Derrida must put it to work. And thus, the bulk of this Chapter is devoted to precisely this work of otherness, specifically as it is applied to the truth as it emerges in Carl Schmitt's text, *Concept of the Political*.<sup>3</sup>

In particular, in his deconstructive read of Schmitt, Derrida will reveal two things. On the one hand, he will suggest that Schmitt explicitly defends the idea that there is such a thing as a purely an-ethical, purely political kind of way for humans to relate to one another. In other words, in the interests of defending a "pure politics," Schmitt attempts to remove all other claims upon it, including the ethical claim of friendship or that of politics by way of a common bond. And thus, friendship for Schmitt emerges only by a kind of default; what comes first is the "political" or arbitrary decision as to an enemy.

On the other hand, however, thanks precisely to his deconstructive lens, Derrida will also suggest something rather surprising. In effect, despite his explicit anti-common good or purely political intentions, Schmitt nevertheless cannot not help but confound it

with these same ethical, common good, considerations. As such, in his very defense of pure politics, Schmitt opens the door to an ethico-political possibility. Quite simply, arbitrary grounds or not, is he not preoccupied above all else with preserving the sanctity of the political community *per se*? What's more, he even privileges a particular kind of character to populate it, namely the courageous, arbitrary, decision-maker. Bottom line, to repeat, whether admitted or not, a substantial common good is presumed here.

And thus, in terms of our overall claim for Derridean deconstruction as a kind of all inclusive or universal friendship, we see in this deconstructive read of Schmitt a kind of proof of this very claim. That is, thanks to the duplicitous truth of deconstruction, we discover that regardless of its arbitrariness or impossibility, no view is pure. More precisely, while such views may indeed seem to imply that there is no such thing as the good thereby feeding the narcissism Dallmayr fears, this is not all they imply. For after all, as we have just seen, is there not a common good buried within Schmitt's very claim of utter arbitrariness? What's more, in accounting for this, Derrida thereby literally showcases the ethical possibility inherent in deconstruction.

In particular, this ethical other of the arbitrary or impossible, while there, is only visible to us if we do the work. Namely, we must do the work of deconstruction. And herein precisely lies the heart of Derrida's universal ethical friendship claim. Quite simply, deconstructive otherness is only there for us if we actually open ourselves up to its processural truth and so do the work of bringing out the other in all expressions of truth. Furthermore, given our ever-pervasive tendency to err, this at the same time entails a perpetual call to others to similarly undertake this work.

And hence, to repeat, thanks to this critical and yet “friendly” read of Schmitt’s “negative” or arbitrary vision of friendship, hope for a truly universal ethical dimension to Derrida’s radically open politics all at once begins to emerge. In effect, it is a political good by way of a call to friendship: to eschew all pure visions of politics in favor of accepting and even embracing the idea that political views are infinitely multiple. What’s more, this is a constant responsibility for all of us, as questioning readers, to try to bring out.<sup>4</sup> In any case, having now completed our sketch for the argument of this Chapter, let us now take up the way.

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida colors his entire discussion of friendship with the following quotation: “O my friends, there is no friend.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, the essential trope of Derrida’s account of friendship emerges at once. In short, friendship, as it is asserted, is quite simply impossible. What’s more, citing that this quotation comes from Montaigne reading Cicero who gleans it from Diogenes Laertes who in turn attributes it to an aging Aristotle, Derrida, in truly othering fashion, suggests that this impossibility actually emerges out of the very traditional philosophical defense of friendship itself.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, that Aristotle, of all people, the philosopher of friendship, that he would even be rumored to make such an utterance, suggests that even a profoundly positive justification of friendship or common good cannot in the end escape the negative possibility of its other.

And so, oddly, in his book on friendship, Derrida, to repeat, inspired by this little quotation renders friendship, down to its very roots, impossible. And thus, once again, Dallmayr’s narcissism charge reemerges.<sup>7</sup> For after all, if even the most positive conception of the common good proves indefensible, what is left for ethics but

narcissism? And needless to add, if true, friendship-as-impossible can serve to do no better than the impossible good as far as breathing life into our political good is concerned. Indeed, it might even be more damning insofar as Derrida would seem to deem hopelessly untenable any tangible common human relations as such. Narcissism and despair of the political good indeed.

And yet, while compelling, does such an argument truly do full justice to Derrida's notion of friendship? Indeed, the man does devote an entire book to the theme of friendship after all. And why would he do this if he did not mean for us to take friendship seriously. What's more, to lend substance to such seriousness, Derrida directs our attention to the fact that, impossible or no, friendships do happen.<sup>8</sup> All of which suggests that, even in the face of our inability to finally define what friendship *is*, it nevertheless does occur, in one form or another, amongst human beings.<sup>9</sup>

And thus, by fits and starts, we come to see that while Derrida's rendering of friendship-as-impossible does have narcissistic overtones, clearly something more is happening in this instance. A kind of truth is being declared. To the point, as evidenced by our propensity to form friendships in spite of our not knowing exactly what friendship *is*, friendship clearly has an uncanny quality about it. "O my friends, there is no friend." It is there. We all know it is there. And yet, at the same time, friendship is beyond all of our attempts at pinning it down, at defining it. In this way, Derrida suggests that it comes closest to mirroring the reality of Being-as-time.<sup>10</sup>

And so, once again minding the quotation from whence Derrida's friendship-as-impossible springs, "O my friends, there is no friend," we begin to wonder if exposing

the other in the tradition of friendship is actually, far from being purely narcissistic and anti-common good, profoundly necessary for friendship to truly be what it is, namely other than that which is purely narcissistic or anti-common good. In other words, perhaps friendship's ambiguous stance with respect to all fixed notions of the common good, and thereby its concomitant brushes with narcissism, is the only truly philosophical way to unite that equally impossible, but fully universal, combination of freedom and the good. For after all, friendships do continue to exist in spite of the inability of fixed definitions of the common good to finally capture their spirit, do they not? And hence, logically speaking, as absurd as this might sound, an ethical standard that reflects the inherent inadequacy of all such standards of the common good is surely the only standard (non-standard?) worth having. And indeed, as if demanding we see this tangible, paradoxical, yet universally ethical side of friendship-as-impossible, Derrida dares speak of an uncommon common, a "community of those without community."<sup>11</sup>

Still, on the cusp of seeing friendship-as-impossible in more positive political good terms, the reader would be forgiven for continuing to see something ethically dubious in this formulation. Quite simply, precisely because it is meant to reflect the inadequacy of all ethical standards, it is by no means clear that such friendship is necessarily more universally ethical. In fact, to use Derrida's own brand of "logic" against him, given that no fixed standards are possible, why could we not simply say that this friendship-as-impossible is merely another way of suggesting that there is no such thing as a common good?<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, throwing the existence of actual friendships into the mix does not solve this problem. Indeed, rather than accept the

impossible as more universally ethical, does their existence not instead compel us to want to seek a more stable common good ground, even if that search means embracing the more exclusive tendencies of the tradition?<sup>13</sup>

And so, thusly confronted with the profoundly anti-good connotations that friendship-as-impossible throws up yet again, we would perhaps do best to begin our defense of the political good efficacy of Derridean friendship by directly dealing with this negative charge.<sup>14</sup> In short, we seek to “prove” that Derrida’s process of othering or deconstruction actually does have positive political good potential by showing how it works when applied to an explicitly negative or arbitrary conception of friendship. To the point, does Derrida simply accept such arbitrariness and so confirm our negative, anti-good, narcissistic suspicions? Or is something else going on here? And hence, we are at last led to the main focus of the rest of this chapter, namely Derrida’s putting to work of deconstruction by applying it to the arbitrary account of friendship that emerges in Carl Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political*.

Now, obviously, by way of offering a brief sketch of this Schmittian turn in the argument, taking this route entails some notion of Schmitt’s conception of friendship. In particular, what is this decisionism of which we speak and what seems to make it so negative, even narcissistic, with respect to the common good? Next, having made this clear, we will then be prepared to see whether Derrida’s friendship-as-impossible is simply a reiteration of this view or something more. To the point, what becomes of Schmitt’s arbitrary notion of friendship upon its deconstruction? Perhaps, in truly impossible, othering fashion, it will be found not to be so negative and narcissistic after

all? And needless to add, if this is the case, herein will lay the hope for a truly political good *a la* Derrida's friendship-as-impossible. Quite simply, the implication here is that, thanks to the othering truth of deconstruction, even purely political or arbitrary conceptions of human relations depend upon some presumption of a good. In any case, having laid the path for the argument to come, let us now take up the way.

We begin with a discussion of Schmitt's conception of friendship. To the point, what is it? To answer this question, it seems we must turn to his *Concept of the Political*. For, it is in this little book that Schmitt explicitly speaks of friends (and enemies). And thus, it follows that Schmitt's definition of friendship must somehow be revealed therein. And so it goes.

To elaborate, in contrast to Aristotle's *Ethics*, which as we saw devoted some three chapters to defining what friendship positively and ideally is, Schmitt in *Concept of the Political* prefers a more "realistic" route. Thus, and this is obviously telling, what friendship *is* is couched within a search for the so-called "pure" definition of politics. Or, to quote Schmitt's first line in *Concept of the Political*: "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political."<sup>15</sup>

In effect, for Schmitt, friendship is, at best, a secondary concept. That is, the tie that binds a people together to form a state and thereby a common good or political community is worthless in itself. More precisely, its "worth" is wholly dependent on the so-called "political." And needless to add, in terms of our overall search for a truly political good, such a statement of political priority from the outset already leads us to suspect that what Schmitt is after here is more political than good. Nevertheless, let us

see if this political primacy is enough to confirm our negative friendship, anti-common good suspicions. In particular, how does Schmitt define the political?

In this vein, Schmitt begins by suggesting that his view will serve to “correct” the usual definitions of politics. Specifically, the problem with these other definitions, according to Schmitt, is that all too often, they discuss not politics but ethics, economics, religion, and other such non-political “things.” As such, he argues, they affix political concerns to concerns not properly its own.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, precisely because they are not thusly political, these non-political definitions, beyond being factually incorrect, actually threaten to undermine what the political truly is. And hence, all at once, Schmitt announces a need for his “corrective” definition.

To explain, from Schmitt’s point of view, such mixed definitions are not simply conceptually incorrect. In fact, as evidenced by such corrosive notions as liberalism (and possibly democracy), such mixing could actually encourage a dangerous violation of the great spirit that politics itself is supposed to embody, namely something that is fixed to nothing but this political spirit itself.<sup>17</sup> And thus, after this brief “corrective” preface, Schmitt’s definition of the political at last emerges:

The political is the most intense and extreme *antagonism*, and every *concrete* antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping. In its entirety the state as an organized political entity *decides* for itself the friend-enemy *distinction*.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, all at once coming back to Schmitt’s definition of friendship, we see precisely how secondary it is to his conception of politics. In particular, dependent as it is on such a definition of the political, friendship and by extension the common good or political

community, clearly cannot be conceived of in any fixed, positive way. On the contrary, as the above quotation suggests, the emphasis is on a kind of negative dynamism. In other words, according to Schmitt, the binding tie on which a state depends is not something substantive. What the state *is* in effect has nothing to do with this or that vision of the common good. Instead, eschewing all such ethical concerns, Schmitt is consumed by antithesis, specifically by that which is publicly decided upon in a concretely antagonistic way, namely by arbitrary exclusion and war. And needless to add, given this rather spirited, dynamic and violent conception of politics, our earlier suspicions that Schmitt's vision of friendship might be negative are indeed resoundingly confirmed.

And in fact, as if to remove any lingering doubt that might be left on this score, Schmitt goes yet further. Thus, taking this rather negative vision of friendship or the common good to extremes, Schmitt sharpens his antithetical definition of the political by suggesting that the key to this antithesis lies not merely in distinguishing friend from enemy. Rather, the priority here, and hence that which ultimately binds the state together falls solely upon the decision as to who is the enemy. Precisely, as Schmitt logically argues, it is the real existence of an enemy, or someone to define oneself against, that gives the political entity, the state, the common good its force, its reason for being, both in concrete and theoretical terms.<sup>19</sup> For after all, without enmity, what is friendship?

Clearly then, from Schmitt's point of view, it is rather meaningless to speak of a tie that binds if that binding is, in effect, seamless, without a real threat from others. In short, he would obviously reject Derrida's positing of a boundless, universally inclusive

bond as “realistically” absurd.<sup>20</sup> But more than that, and herein completes the picture of Schmittian politics and with it his profoundly negative notion of friendship, Schmitt would also consider Derrida’s conception too effeminate. In particular, of key importance in Schmitt’s enemy notion of politics is not simply the real existence of the enemy, but that upon which this very reality depends in the first place. Namely, it is the great, clear and certain public decision as to who is the enemy.<sup>21</sup> And herein, as I have already suggested, lay the ultimate basis for Schmitt’s profoundly non-friendly, most non-common good politics.

However, lest we not do full justice to Schmitt’s view (and by extension Derrida’s later deconstruction of this view), let us elaborate on this all-important decisionist basis of his politics still further. Put bluntly, Schmitt defines decisionism and thereby brings out its most negative friendship connotations in the following way. First, he explains, the enemy against which a people is able to define itself and so confirm its friendship bond, is by no means a given.

The criterion of the friend-and-enemy distinction *in no way* implies that one particular nation must forever be the friend or enemy of another specific nation or that a state of neutrality is not possible or could not be politically reasonable.<sup>22</sup>

In short, for Schmitt, there is no stable enemy, no universal “badness” on which we, as a political community, can rely to forever define ourselves against. All of which begs the question, so what then, according to Schmitt, gives the political community its force? Indeed, without a reliable enemy to count on, on what basis can we, in Schmittian terms, possibly assert any kind of political bond? Needless to say, herein emerges the seemingly non-common good, decisionist basis to Schmitt’s political thought.

Specifically, as if in answer to our queries, the *Concept of the Political* boldly asserts thus:

If a people no longer possesses the *energy* or the *will* to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a *weak people* will disappear.<sup>23</sup>

Negative dynamism indeed. In effect, what gives force to Schmitt's enemy-based conception of politics is ultimately nothing but sheer will. More precisely, divorced entirely from all ethical, religious, economic and other such "private" concerns, politics in its antithetical purity becomes tantamount to a necessary, yet arbitrary and free, "public" decision as to who is the enemy.<sup>24</sup> Quite simply, for Schmitt, the sheer will to decide to define oneself as a group against all other groups is all that matters in politics.

And so, to repeat, thanks to such "public" enemy-based decisionism, one may justifiably conclude that as far as the common good is concerned, there is nothing whatsoever to appeal to in Schmitt. In short, all that exists is the sheer will to survival of various peoples, each by necessity defining themselves as against others willy-nilly. Thus is the purity of Schmitt's antithetical concept of the political achieved. And thus, with respect to our overall political good thesis, is its most arbitrary, negative, anti-good, purely political basis for friendship or the common good forcefully confirmed.

However, before we get caught up in Schmitt's non-ethical, decisionist bent any further, let us turn back to the specific reason we introduced it in the first place. To the point, having laid out this arbitrary Schmittian basis for friendship, we are impelled to ask now if Derrida, with friendship-as-impossible notion, simply shares this view. Once again, at stake here is the larger question of our thesis. Namely, whether Derrida's

deconstructive or undoing truth is more than a kind of self-indulgent or willful narcissism, but actually able to support a substantive notion of friendship and thereby a truly political good.

To address this obviously important question point-by-point, we actually begin not with Derrida, but, ironically enough, with Schmitt himself. Specifically, though indeed the arbitrary willfulness of decisionism does have overtones of a self-indulgent view of the good, of deciding to do whatever I will, I think it is also fair to suggest that the latter is clearly not Schmitt's intention. Indeed, as we have just seen, while Schmitt's view is indicative of willfulness and arbitrary freedom, it is also overrun with a kind of necessity. In particular, as we saw in the early stages of this discussion, Schmitt is moved by a very real concern to maintain the integrity of politics and political communities as against what he sees as the corrosive influence of such mixed versions as liberalism (and possibly democracy).

Now, clearly, if nothing else, this desire to preserve and protect political purity, as it were, suggests a concession on Schmitt's part to maintain some modicum of a substantive common good.<sup>25</sup> For after all, were this not the case, why would he have such a concern with impure political communities? And thus, Schmittian decisionism, while imbued with narcissistic tendencies by virtue of its seeming rejection of any substantive notion of friendship or the common good, is not intended to be defence of self-indulgence *per se*.

And yet, what of this arbitrary-necessity tension of Schmitt's view? In particular, regardless of his desire for a pure politics, the fact remains that Schmitt bases this purity

on the most non-pure grounds of arbitrary decisionism. On the other hand, however, precisely because of this paradox which, as we have just suggested Schmitt initially seems to point out himself, there is also the suggestion that there may indeed be something ethical in Schmitt's thought after all. And so it goes.

Specifically, as with the dualism of Aristotle's thought, we are all at once confronted with the possibility that perhaps there might be more than one way of reading or interpreting Schmitt. And thus, again as with Aristotle, if we are to bring out the full ethical implications behind the arbitrary-necessity paradox of Schmitt, we would probably do best to turn elsewhere, beyond the confines of the intended meaning of the "conflicted" author. All at once then, we turn to Derrida's deconstructive or othering approach. In particular, as we shall see presently, the promise of this approach lies precisely in its ability to embrace paradoxes; or, in the case of Schmitt, in its potential to uncover a substantial vision of friendship or common good within the heart of what would seem to be an arbitrary conception of politics. In any case, thusly directed to follow what amounts to this Derridean pathway to the political good, let us now proceed to his deconstruction of Schmitt's argument in *Concept of the Political*.

We begin by offering a sketch of this all-important discussion. First, for the sake of clarity, we will proceed by way of similarity. To the point, how does Derrida's reading of Schmitt seem to suggest that his friendship-as-impossible has the same arbitrary grounds as decisionism? Basically, here we will see Derrida admitting that his impossible common good cannot preclude the collapse of ethics to sheer will. Indeed, it seems to positively call for it insofar as the impossible literally deems a fixed, ethical

notion of the common good to be never finally attainable. And so, all at once, thanks to this initial link of friendship-as-impossible to decisionism, the narcissism charge, and with it, the triumph of politics over the good, hampers Derrida's political philosophy all over again.

However, just when we are ready to resign ourselves to the fact that there is no political good either in Schmitt or Derrida, the latter makes a surprising move. Thus, still guided by the trope of the impossible, he exposes the other within Schmitt's text, so revealing that a similarity to decisionism may not be so ethically damning after all.

Specifically, highlighting the strange tension in Schmitt's little book between arbitrary dynamism and a desire to maintain the integrity of political communities (which we call necessity), Derrida suggests that there may be more to Schmittian decisionism than initially seems apparent. Quite simply, in the end, even for Schmitt, the decision itself is ultimately not decisive on its own. Rather it is also conditioned by Schmitt's desire to defend and preserve a kind of politics in "purer" form. All of which suggests that even a politics based on sheer will necessarily cannot help but make some substantive assumptions as far as a common good is concerned. The "other" of a more positive ethic of friendship always lurks inside it like a ghost. What's more, lest we not be "true" to Schmitt's decisionism, we naturally have the responsibility to actually tweak out this ethical other.

And so, to close this brief sketch of the argument, thanks to the dissimulative truth of deconstruction as applied to Schmitt, we discover an opening to a truly political good. How? Insofar as we realize that no pure truths, not even seeming non-ethical ones, can

escape the fact of their ethical other. And more broadly speaking, spurred on by this single example of deconstruction, such a political good emerges to the extent that we come see reality as deconstruction itself, and this deconstruction in turn, as a kind of friendship. Specifically, in true Derridean friendship-as-impossible fashion, the case of Schmitt will help us to learn to see ourselves as more than simply holders and imposers of singular truth. Instead, we will also see the importance of being readers, each charged with interpreting and reinterpreting all expressions of truth. Or more precisely, thanks to the oversight of Schmitt with respect to his own argument, we can actually learn a positive lesson, namely just how important it is to accept and indeed welcome all other views. Indeed, in the end, it is only this latter inclusive stance that comes anywhere near the “true” truth.

Of course, at this point, one might reasonably assert that the questioning of a purely negative, political portrait of friendship is not necessarily tantamount to something so positively true or universally welcoming. In particular, just because Derrida, with his deconstruction, renders non-ethical decisionism impossible does not mean that friendship-as-impossible is itself eminently ethical. Indeed, true to form, would not such friendship-as-impossible also necessarily reject all purely ethical conceptions? Or perhaps there is something ethical in rejecting purity as such? In any case, the definitive answer to these questions will have to wait for Chapter 5 in which we will attempt to outline the ethical significance of Derrida’s deconstruction of Aristotle’s purely positive conception of friendship. For now, we will confine ourselves to fleshing out the remainder of this chapter’s fundamental claims with a view to “proving” that Derrida’s

notion of friendship-as-impossible is at the very least more than simply negative as far as a truly political good is concerned.

First, we begin with a discussion of the similarities of Derrida to Schmitt. How does the notion of friendship-as-impossible seem to be at one with decisionism in all of its arbitrary, free, non-common good connotations? To open with a rather blunt assertion on this score, we see quite clearly that like Schmitt, Derrida, throughout *Politics of Friendship*, does not to speak of friendship-as-impossible in any direct way. Rather, again much like Schmitt, he appears to couch his definition of friendship within a broader arbitrary decision-based context. To the point, suggesting that the decision is ever required if we are to “‘live’, [and] assume immediate responsibilities” and that this is “‘inscribed more naturally in the space of political philosophy,” Derrida appears to be in general agreement with the Schmitt’s political-decisionist conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Namely, it is the decision of the political animal alone that is the only binding “ground” of political reality. And further, as if to drive this decisionist point home in explicitly friendship or common good terms, Derrida asserts that, with respect to tangible answers and responsibilities beyond the mere decision and thereby the assurance of some kind of substantive common good, “we will always be in a state of lack.”<sup>27</sup>

And in fact, Derrida, reading Schmitt’s friend and enemy distinction explicitly now, actually seems to go further down the arbitrary road than even Schmitt himself. Thus, Derrida sets the need to make Schmittian-type decisions in a world that has been “‘delivered over to what resembles a chaotic madness, disorder and randomness.”<sup>28</sup> This is most unlike Schmitt who, with his political world of opposed states, at least assumed

people would want to maintain states and so consciously tailor their actions to that end. By contrast, Derrida's "madness" and "chaos" imply there is nothing we can count on.

In truly impossible fashion then, it would seem that, as far as Derrida is concerned, people's decisions quite simply have no real end or grand purpose. That they do exist is merely a reflection of the fact that humans must act and make decisions in order to live at all. Needless to say, taken to its logical conclusion, this decisionism-to-live, if we may call it that, suggests that perhaps there is not even such a thing as politics, let alone political community in Derrida's thought.<sup>29</sup>

Further, as if this were not enough, Derrida also attacks Schmitt directly, suggesting that the latter's argument is simply not true to its own decisionist principles. In particular, Derrida suggests, by placing too much stock on the concrete existence of the friend and enemy, Schmitt contradicts his own notion of the arbitrary decision of a people with a fixed assumption that they will desire a state.<sup>30</sup> And surely, this desire for a community would seem go against the arbitrary freedom of decisionism, would it not?

In any case, in terms of a preliminary assessment of political decisionism and its relation to friendship-as-impossible, Derrida, to repeat, seems to be substantially in agreement with its non-good, arbitrarily free principles. In fact, given his refusal to accept even the hint of a political community, he actually appears to be more literal in this respect than Schmitt himself. All of which leads us to the conclusion that in terms of our overall search for a political good, Derrida's politics is rather more hopeless than that of Schmitt. More precisely, as Derrida suggests in both his agreement with and logical

correction of Schmitt's decisionism, utter plurality or freedom can only ultimately mean utter arbitrariness. And this, we can only conclude, is what must finally animate his notion of friendship-as-impossible. Not a very "good" prospect for politics, to say the least.

Or is it? To the point, as if responding to this negative ethical assessment leveled at him, Derrida all at once warns against such fixed conclusions. To the point, why must a similarity to and even possible intensification of Schmitt's arbitrary decisionism necessarily equate to an utter rejection of the common good? Precisely, what of the friendship in Schmitt's thought in spite of his embrace of the arbitrary and free? Does not this paradox and more importantly Schmitt's apparent inability to account for it suggest that something deeper, eminently good, may be going on within the utterly arbitrary and free? As for Derrida's questioning Schmitt's faith in the concrete existence of friends and enemies, perhaps this too underscores this "goodness insofar as it promises to offer that deeper account?"

Bottom line, seen from this differing perspective, Derridean deconstruction may not be rejecting the last vestiges of faith in political community after all. On the contrary, thanks to its othering truth, it may very well promise the opposite, namely to broaden and strengthen such a notion of the common good all the more. In this vein, again we ask ourselves, what of Derrida's questioning of Schmitt's friend and enemy distinction? The implication is that if this distinction is rendered unstable, perhaps the ability to arbitrarily decide exactly who one's friends and enemies are may also be doubted. As such, within the possibility of utter arbitrariness, a common good of even broader, more universal

scope is promised. Namely, it is one in which both friends and enemies are embraced. This is another possibility of Derrida's friendship-as-impossible.

And so, beyond the too fixed conclusion of arbitrary decisionism and its accompanying narcissism, there may additionally reside within deconstruction a truly inclusive ethics. More precisely, satisfied with no fixed conclusions, but ever seeking the other, deconstruction, to repeat, stops at no pure conception of friendship, including that of the purely negative or arbitrary variety. As such, it may very well promise a truly political good. The universal ethical reality of friendship-as-impossible indeed.

In any case, to sketch out how this now explicit deconstructive turn to the argument will proceed, we will begin by taking yet another look at that so-called purely negative or arbitrary friendship contained in Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*. To the point, we will ask again, perhaps it is not so purely negative after all? Indeed, as already hinted by both Derrida's "correction" of him and our own earlier assertions as to Schmitt's desire to preserve the political community, it seems that Schmitt, for all his arbitrary decisionism, actually seems to adhere a positive vision of friendship. Thus, in our deconstructive search for a so-called ethics within decisionism, it would be useful to start by looking for this positive vision within the *Concept of the Political* itself. In other words, whatever its explicit intentions, is there actually evidence in Schmitt's text of a common good *per se*?

Second, if and when we find this positive evidence, we will, not surprisingly, be confronted with an even more difficult question. How does such evidence jive with Schmitt's earlier assertions of a purely non-ethical or decisionist view of politics?

Indeed, as we shall see shortly, the answer to this latter question is especially important. In particular, it is this answer that will at last bring the dualism of Schmitt's paradoxical conception of politics to a head. At the same time, this will also lead us to the need for something else, something other. And needless to add, herein the ethical salve of Derridean deconstruction and thereby his "standard" of friendship-as-impossible will all at once emerge.

To now elaborate on this deconstructive argument, we return first to *Concept of the Political*. In particular, we do so in order to seek positive proof of friendship and thereby begin our promised destabilization of Schmitt's paradoxical decisionism. And indeed, thanks to our new deconstructive lens, we need not search far to find what we are looking for.

To the point, shortly after defining the political in terms of the friend and enemy distinction, Schmitt explains that "[this] distinction...denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a *union* or separation, of an *association* or disassociation."<sup>31</sup> And thusly, all at once, do we have one aspect of our positive "common good" proof from Schmitt himself. Specifically, the literal linkage of the friend to the notions of both union and association suggests that Schmitt takes seriously the realm of the "common" in his decisionist politics, albeit in antithetical form.

As for an explicitly "good" tone to this acknowledgement of common-ness, Schmitt's insistence in *Concept of the Political* upon the concrete fact of the friend and enemy distinction and, more importantly, his desire to preserve this distinction is telling. Indeed, to accept the fact of this distinction is, to paraphrase Schmitt, to believe that there

is such a thing as a political-reality-as-pluriverse.<sup>32</sup> But more than that, so compelling is this reality of a world of multiple, yet integral political communities that Schmitt honestly believes that people will want to exercise their public will to maintain such communal integrity. In essence, what Schmitt asserts here is a singular reality of political plurality which people will find so intrinsically worthwhile that they will exercise their so-called arbitrary or free will to reinforce it.<sup>33</sup>

So what is going on? How can Schmitt possibly maintain such a faith in integral political communities alongside his belief that they are essentially grounded on the basis of nothing but sheer arbitrary will? Basically, in philosophical fashion, we are asking him to account for the arbitrary-substantive paradox that his own argument throws up.

Well, and herein lies the crux of the matter, the problem is that nowhere does Schmitt offer such an account. And indeed, given what we have already seen of his argument earlier on in this Chapter, this is not surprising. Quite simply, because Schmitt's explicit intent in *Concept of the Political* is to defend politics on solely arbitrary, non-ethical, decisionist grounds, he is oddly incapable of seeing its communal side despite presenting it here, before our very eyes.

And thus, given this state of affairs, one is moved to conclude either one of two things. Either the author Carl Schmitt is stubborn or he is mad. Indeed, what else can one call an author, any author, who cannot account and thereby assume responsibility for the fullness of his own argument? What's more, harkening back to Heidegger's notion of error in Chapter 3, the tragedy of this lack of responsibility is amplified insofar as we realize that we are all, inevitably, such authors. And needless to add, despair of the

political good indeed if we cannot even trust the veracity of either our own or others' arguments on the subject.

On the other hand, however, still utilizing Heidegger's trope of error, we all at once recognize that perhaps this need not remain tragic after all. Quite simply, as the word error itself implies, alongside the tragedy of missing the full truth, we also have a capacity to learn from our mistakes. All of which suggests that, while ever asserting fixed truths and goods, we ever have the ability to get beyond them.<sup>34</sup>

And so, in a sense, despite missing the full truth, it would seem that we ever have a capacity to assume our full responsibility. More precisely, true to the movement of Being-as-time, while ever asserting singular errors as true, good, natural, we also have the ability to profoundly question and so see these errors for what they are, namely errors. And in this way, an equally profound hope emerges that we can catch a glimmer of the truth within, for example, Schmitt's refusal to account for his arbitrary decisionism-substantive political community paradox. Perhaps even a promise of a truly political good?

Still, in the midst of this hope and promise, a question inevitably arises. How do we thusly actualize this ability and so assume our full responsibility? Indeed, as we have already suggested, Schmitt, with his explicit arbitrary intent, seems rather resistant to the idea. And in fact, all of us, understandably favoring the temporary security that fixed truths, goods and ethical standards give, even if these ultimately prove to be profoundly unjust, are similarly resistant. So again, what do we do, in the face of such a dangerous and perhaps perpetual resistance to Being-as-time truth, to realize our full responsibility?

Well, there is always, and this was the flavor of Heidegger's answer in Chapter 3, force. Thus, a realization of the error of our own ways comes to the fore insofar as we are confronted with the assertion of the fixed ideas or "errors" of others and so on ad infinitum.<sup>35</sup> And thus, in terms of our Schmittian context, this would amount to the assertion that Schmitt's decisionism is wrong because it contradicts itself by presenting a friendlier side. And so, in the interests of overcoming this contradiction, another more friendly "solution" is presented. But this, in turn, is wrong because it necessarily comes to neglect its decisionist side. In any case, in this way, a kind of battle of one people's politics against that of another ensues which, presumably, is without end so long as there are people in existence.

On the other hand, and herein finally enters the "need" of Derridean deconstruction and with it his notion of friendship-as-impossible, there is perhaps another more universal, less conflictual, way to proceed. To the point, what about a realization of error by recognizing that within every singular assertion, even before it is finally made, even before it enters the forceful Heideggerian fray, is an other that we humans, in our infinite otherness, cannot help but present?<sup>36</sup> And thus, that the decisionist author "Schmitt" contradicts himself is not a reason to reject his decisionism in the name of another more ethical solution which will, in turn be rejected and so on and so forth. No. Instead, what Derrida posits is an undoing common good ever existing at the heart of Schmitt's intended decisionism.

In short, reflecting the truth of Being-as-time, namely that there are no fixed truths, nothing, to repeat, can be pure, not even decisionism. What's more, evidence of

this undoing “fact” of truth exists in every human expression of truth. Put bluntly, every human being cannot help but do two things. First, I must con-textualize my expression of truth. In Derrida’s words, every truth a human being expresses is necessarily a “writing” or abstraction of truth. And second, because this is true, every human expression of truth or “text” cannot help but present a contradiction of its own central assertion. In short, I will inevitably reveal that my truth is in fact an abstraction or “error” of truth. Or to put it another way, something will be “missing” in what I say.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in a very literal sense, by “nature” as it were, Schmitt’s decisionism, according to this Derridean approach, cannot possibly be as purely negative, arbitrary or anti-common good as it wants to be. By the same token, uncovering this impurity becomes the universal ethical task. Quite simply, if we are to be “true” to Being-as-time, we are necessarily burdened with the task of questioning every fixed truth, whether purely good or purely non-good, with a view to uncovering its other. On the other hand, the “burden” is worth it insofar as we realize that such an “open” posture is closer to a truly universal good. In any case, to perhaps make all of this clearer, let us turn now to see how this deconstructive truth explicitly works in Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political*.

Derrida looks at Schmitt’s contradiction of defending arbitrary decisionism and a substantive common good in the following way. Namely, in an effort not to control or overcome, but to account for this contradiction, Derrida focuses his deconstructive lens on the friend and enemy distinction. To recall, this distinction is the fundamental basis upon which Schmitt grounds his entire political argument in *Concept of the Political*. For, the essence of politics, he tells us, is the friend and enemy distinction.<sup>38</sup>

And so, what does Derrida do with this distinction? Let us offer another, our last, brief sketch of the Chapter. First, Derrida will begin by rendering this friend and enemy distinction inherently unstable. Next, having exposed it as it unstable, Derrida will suggest what Schmitt might really be up to. Specifically, he may very well be imposing an ironically “fixed” notion of arbitrary decisionism on something much deeper and more complex.<sup>39</sup> By the same token, in thusly questioning Schmitt’s friend and enemy distinction, Derrida thereby does something more than merely critique this particular distinction. Thus, the last step in his deconstruction of Schmitt’s friend and enemy distinction. Namely, this very deconstruction is an attempt to offer a universal ethical account which gets beyond Schmitt’s contradiction, not by overcoming but rather by accepting it. And hence, at last, Derrida’s friendship-as-impossible emerges as that which eschews hard and fast distinctions to embrace both friends and enemies.

To now elaborate on this most crucial argument of the Chapter with respect to our overall thesis of the political good, Derrida begins by suggesting that Schmitt, for all his arbitrary decisionism, is oddly blinded by an over-confidence in his ability to purely decide between friends and enemies:

Schmitt wants to be able to count on this opposition, and reckon with it. Even if no pure access to the essence or *eidōs* is to be had, even if, in all conceptual purity, it is not known what war, politics, friendship, enmity, hate or love, hostility or peace are, one can and must know - first of all practically, politically, polemically - *who* is the friend and *who* is the enemy.<sup>40</sup>

In essence, Schmitt believes in the purity of the friend and enemy distinction. Thus, confirming our suspicions above, the sheer willingness to make this distinction, to decide

to do so, is in fact not free or arbitrary at all, but undergirded by a profound faith that human beings will desire this distinction so strongly that it becomes a part of human nature; a fixed assumption as it were. Indeed, does it not positively eschew other justifications like, for example, an ethic of friendship? The implication is that such justifications would likely threaten to taint the purity of politics which, guided by the friend and enemy distinction alone, must remain neatly, tidily, purely arbitrary.

And so, essentially, Derrida exposes that Schmitt adheres to a purely arbitrary, enemy-based decisionism and thereby a purely negative notion of the common good. And yet, we might wonder, so what? Indeed, is this not the intent of Schmitt's argument in the first place, to defend precisely this arbitrariness as the essence of the political? Whence Derrida's supposed uncovering of the ethical other contained therein? Well, in fact, Derrida has quite clearly pointed out the very existence of this other in Schmitt. Namely, that there is in fact a truly positive, substantive vision of friendship in the argument of *Concept of the Political* is evident insofar as it is obsessed with establishing political purity.

In particular, thanks to this exposure of purity, Derrida is able to sharpen the arbitrary-common good contradiction all the more in *Concept of the Political*. To the point, precisely because Schmitt so determinedly believes in the purity of the friend and enemy distinction, namely in the ability to decide who one's friends and who one's enemies are, he must necessarily layer his arbitrariness with substantive common good assumptions. And thus, Derrida tells us in *Politics of Friendship*, despite the fact that for Schmitt the decision is "not linked to communal appurtenance, is not caused by it [i.e., it

is purely arbitrary], the decision [nevertheless] *reaffirms* appurtenance.”<sup>41</sup> In short, according to Derrida, there is in Schmitt’s text, *Concept of the Political*, regardless of whether Schmitt intends it or not, an *a priori* assumption that the friend exists on its own despite the fact of the friend-enemy distinction. Or, to use Schmitt’s language of the state, the state presupposes the political, but the state, as the locus of decision, is also presupposed insofar as it breathes life into the political itself.

And so, Derrida concludes, there is always already implicit in the supposedly arbitrary and decisionist Schmitt a very clear assumption that friendship does substantively exist. For indeed, without this assumption, where would the unmitigated confidence to distinguish oneself from one’s enemies come from? What’s more, with respect to our earlier assertions that Schmitt seeks to preserve the world of antagonistic, plural yet integral political communities, the words of Schmitt’s text actually defend a particular type of community. Namely, it is one which is aggressive, which particularly favors the bold and decisive man. Furthermore, because of these characteristics, it also presupposes a fraternal kind of friendship, founded by blood, but often based on antagonism.<sup>42</sup>

Bottom line then, because of Schmitt’s intended argument to defend pure political decisionism, a substantive kind of friendship akin to a community of aggressive strong-willed men who are willing to go to war, as it were, is presumed from the start.<sup>43</sup> For again, without this silent assumption, Schmitt’s pure belief in the willingness of people, in particular those privileged strong-willed men, to decide to define themselves as against others would surely be misplaced.

On the other hand, Derrida argues, further honing his deconstructive lens, herein lies the crux of the matter. Schmitt clearly makes this fixed common good assumption; even, as we just saw, seems to defend it in his own decisive words. However, at the same time he has also, as we have seen time and again, imbued arbitrary decisionism with a pure, almost transcendental air. As such, because of this latter more explicit aspect of his argument, Schmitt clearly cannot, or more likely will not, see the fixed communal presuppositions on which it clearly rests.

In effect, more inflexible than even a Plato or an Aristotle, we remind ourselves that Schmitt's definition of politics is in fact launched by this very refusal, namely to refuse to "taint" his supposedly purely arbitrary politics with any such corruption as an ethics of friendship.<sup>44</sup> And so, in an odd turn of events, Schmitt's supposed assertion of arbitrariness, in its very obsession with purity, automatically becomes suspect. After all, to use Schmitt's own logic of distinction against him, without a substantive ethical account, how can a pure political arbitrariness possibly be meaningful? But more than that, by not taking responsibility for his silent communal assumptions, Schmitt deceptively avoids wrestling with the boundless love ties that such a communal account necessarily involves.<sup>45</sup> And hence, in this latter respect, far from arbitrariness, Schmitt's pure decisionism actually threatens to freeze communal exclusivity in a way that Aristotle and Plato, who more openly deal with the problems that political community entails, could not have dreamed possible.

In any case, thusly tasking himself with the responsibility of revealing the full implications of Schmitt's arbitrary argument, Derrida, again, puts deconstruction to work.

Thus, he tries to account for both sides of Schmitt's argument. How? First, he profoundly questions Schmitt's wrong-headed striving for the purely decisionist friend and enemy distinction and with it, a purely negative account of friendship. Or to put it another way, Derrida asserts that in the beginning, the very purity of decisionism always already undoes itself:

In short, it is no easy task to decide whether th[e] decision [of naming who is the enemy] supposes, rends, undermines or produces the community; or to decide what binds it to itself in a friendly attraction or a self-conservation which resembles *philia* or *philautia*.<sup>46</sup>

Quite simply, insofar as one remains true to the arbitrary or free rhythm of decisionism, any confidence in the friend and enemy distinction is misplaced. Indeed, the very need to constantly make a decision on this score, Derrida suggests, presupposes that we ever do not know, with any kind of certainty, who either are friends or enemies are. In sum decisionism is inherently impure.

On the other hand, as far as accounting for the substantive vision of friendship which silently guides Schmitt's decisionism, we also, thanks to this same revelation of impurity, once again uncover Schmitt's fixed fraternal assumptions on this score. And indeed, it is no wonder that he makes an effort to hide them. Basically, mirroring the "violence" that he does to the radical freedom of decisionism with his too pure friend and enemy distinction, Schmitt, to repeat, implicitly proffers a vision of brotherhood sustained and purified by such violence. Again, what emerges here is vision of the common good which is essentially male, aggressively young, and most certainly, willing to impose its will, as needed, on a weaker people.<sup>47</sup>

Bottom line then, thanks to Derrida's deconstructive othering, and in particular its destabilizing or "impure" influence on Schmitt's friend and enemy distinction, we receive a full account of Schmitt's decisionist-communal contradiction. In particular, at last, we learn what kind of politics he truly defends. In effect, what emerges is a brand of politics which is not arbitrary and free at all, but which exists thanks to an elite fraternity of men who have precisely that favored mixture of aggression and decisiveness to at once defend and create the common good. And needless to add, precisely because of these few who are at once favored and whose favor is yet hidden behind a cloak of supposed arbitrariness, what Schmitt's concept of the political finally amounts to is a profoundly exclusive view.<sup>48</sup> This in spite of Schmitt's explicitly arbitrary and free defense of politics.

Further, having thusly revealed this most fixed, exclusive truth behind Schmitt's supposed decisionism, Derrida all at once is prepared to reveal his own more inclusive version. In particular, in keeping with the othering work of deconstruction, Derrida appears to champion precisely that impure decisionism which he proffered as a corrective to Schmitt. That is, he appears to call for a notion of community truer to the reality of radical freedom, of arbitrary decisionism. But how is this possible? Precisely insofar as the othering truth of deconstruction necessarily renders the purity of the friend and enemy distinction and thereby Schmitt's rather aggressive, masculine, militant community impossible. Or to put this in another way, in his very attempt to account for Schmitt's supposed decisionist-communal contradiction, Derrida all at once announces a more truly

open, freer basis for political community. Namely, it is a political community that includes everyone.<sup>49</sup> This is friendship-as-impossible.

In any case, to finally draw this Chapter to a close, it might be useful, in the interests of our political good search, to elaborate on what this vision of political community might look like. Specifically, based on the critique of Schmitt and thereby the rejection of pure decisionism, Derrida, as we saw, appears to defend a more impure and thereby freer, more inclusive version of community. Still what exactly does this mean? Indeed, as we have already suggested, given his stance of impurity and arbitrariness, could we not say that Derrida might in the end offer up no real vision of political community and thereby no such thing as a truly political good?<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps. On the other hand, however, as our interlude with the too purely arbitrary and negative Schmitt has shown, it is also important to remember that what Derrida finally seems to reject with his deconstruction is neither political decisionism nor political community. Rather, all that he denies is that there can be a pure conception of either notion. And indeed, on this score, one would do best not to forget the exclusionary politics that Schmitt was able to justify even as he defended a supposedly pure politics of arbitrary decisionism.

And so, to repeat, thanks to his embrace of the impure, namely both impure decisionism and impure political community, Derrida all at once makes possible a radically new basis for an equally impure, radically open vision of political community. What's more Derrida himself suggests as much when he defines deconstruction thus:

And what if tomorrow a new political wisdom were to let itself be inspired by this lie's wisdom, by this manner of knowing how to lie, dissimulate or divert wicked lucidity? What if it demanded that we know, and know how to dissimulate, the principles and sources of social unbinding, all menacing disjunctions? To dissimulate them in order to *preserve* the social bond and the *Menschenfreundlichkeit*? A new political wisdom - human, humanistic, anthropological of course? A new *Menschenfreundlichkeit*: pessimistic, sceptical, hopeless, incredulous. A *new virtue* from that point on?<sup>51</sup>

Basically, what we have here is a vision of deconstruction as virtue. Why virtue?

Because, undoing all apparent "truths" like that of the friend and enemy distinction, deconstruction is conducive to a new ethico-political standard. Why new? Because, seen through the lens of the undoing truth or ethical standard of deconstruction, the political itself becomes new.

In sum, being utterly open, knowing no fixed boundaries, this new, ever new, political reality necessarily calls for a new standard, which reflects this boundlessness. But what can such a boundless standard possibly be? Well, Derrida suggests, it is a standard, which must, naturally, reflect a dissimulation of the "truth" of the friend and enemy distinction. Leaving what? Nothing short of an ethic of responsibility to the enemy, or what is the same thing, to the absolute other.<sup>52</sup> By the same token, it calls forth a profound duty to perpetually question all fixed/singular truths and/or views of the good. In a word, it is an ethical "standard" of friendship-as-impossible in which all, friends and enemies alike, are included.

Thus is Derrida's radically inclusive and therefore radically universal common good announced thanks to his putting to work of deconstruction on the negative, all too

negative, author of *Concept of the Political*, namely one Carl Schmitt. Still, to all at once announce our segue to Chapter 5, does not such a dissimulative undoing truth cut both ways? Indeed, while rendering Schmitt's view untenable because too purely arbitrary, would not Derrida's more impure friendship-as-impossible standard also render a too purely common good view similarly untenable? In effect, if Derrida's radically open vision of community is not to seem, yet again, hopelessly uncommon and narcissistic, we would do best to balance this deconstruction of pure negativity with that of a more positive vision.

And so, in earnest, we now turn to the deconstruction of Aristotle's notion of friendship. In particular, in undoing what amounts to a fixed vision of a purely positive common good, the hope is to show, once and for all, that Derrida's friendship-as-impossible is not merely problematizing negativity, but can actually offer a positive pathway to a truly vibrant political good.

## CHAPTER 5

Politics is innately good. Perhaps we are finally getting closer to grasping what this means via Derrida's friendship-as-impossible?

In particular, the argument so far has suggested that friendship-as-impossible, while literally skeptical of any fixed, common good standard, nevertheless holds out the possibility for some flavor of universal goodness. In effect, the impossible is not purely impossible. For if it were, would it not merely be replacing the tyranny of the good *a la* Aristotle with a tyranny of freedom? In short, a purely impossible friendship would be tantamount to outright rejecting all ethical standards, leaving only narcissism to rule the day. And so again the argument: to assert that in its very eschewing of all fixed standards, the impossible becomes a worthwhile ethical standard which we all can and should share. And hence, there is the hope that with friendship-as-impossible we are at last capturing that truly elusive, paradoxical, impossible ethic of a political good.

Still, asserting is not proving. How does Derrida actually put this argument to work? More to the point, how is such a good of friendship-as-impossible possible? After all, as Derrida himself points out, the impossible is ever beyond all fixity. That is, it must by definition favor the arbitrary and free over a fixed ethical standard or good.

Well, in Chapter 4, we began this upward ethical climb, as it were, by suggesting that the very fact of the impossible being linked to friendship is of help. In short, in ethical terms, friendship arguably offers an "in" to a more malleable kind of good. Namely, it is one that is overridden with universal common good overtones and yet at the same time is also innately sensitive to the vicissitudes and particularity, trust and love of

concrete human relationships. And indeed, we saw the very possibilities of such ethical malleability initially put to work in Aristotle, almost making his too fixed embrace of the good free. With Derrida, friendship has a similarly moderating effect, though perhaps in the opposite direction. Thus, we suggested, finding some good within the radically free or impossible is perhaps made less daunting a prospect insofar as it is seen through the lens of friendship.

Next, having reasserted this mediating trope of friendship, we then looked more deeply into Derrida's "impossible" connection to a truly political good by way of examining his method of deconstruction. More precisely, as we learned in both Chapters 3 and 4, it is this method of exposing the other of truth, the good, nature that ultimately gives a kind of ethical "substance" to Derrida's friendship-as-impossible claims. How? Well, thanks to the destabilizing or othering effect of deconstruction with respect to fixed truths, all pure notions, whether they be purely free or purely good, are literally rendered impossible. And thus, does that seemingly impossible marriage between freedom and the good all at once become possible.

In short, with the "reality" of deconstruction, everything is rendered impure. And it is this very impurity that allows us to be more open to infinitely other possibilities, other notions of truth, other perspectives of the good. Or to put it in another way, the undoing truth of deconstruction has the effect of literally suspending, indefinitely, both purely free and purely good notions of reality. As such, what deconstruction leaves in its wake is the potential for a "standard" of universal open-ness and thereby universal inclusion. And this, literally, is the ethical promise of friendship-as-impossible: the

universal notion that such a thing as a truly political good is possible. In effect, the deconstructive truth is itself akin to a kind of friendship.

However, having made these claims from the outset of Chapter 4, we remained troubled by the ethical difficulties of adhering to open-ness and universal inclusion as standards. And hence, there was an inevitable pause to our political good search in Derrida to ask the following question: can friendship-as-impossible really be a universal ethical standard? Indeed, to embrace such radical open-ness, how can this possibly be anything but a product of sheer will or free choice? As such, far from suggesting a universal standard, the “friendly” truth of deconstruction seems tantamount to suggesting that any vision of the good, even something like Nazism, can be worthwhile. The disturbing problem of narcissism runneth over.

In any case, bearing in mind this problem, which to repeat, never quite goes away, we nevertheless pressed onward and upward with the ethical possibilities of friendship-as-impossible. Thus, we devoted the remainder of Chapter 4 to a so-called “proof” of the good of friendship-as-impossible. In particular, focusing in on the deconstruction of a purely free and therefore ostensibly negative notion of friendship, we sought to suggest that, at the very least, there must be something good within friendship-as-impossible. For after all, true to the othering reality of deconstruction, such a so-called negative friendship cannot, by definition, be so pure. It must also contain some good. It simply remains for us to do the work to uncover it.

And hence, using Schmitt and his notion of friendship in *Concept of the Political* as our negative case, we saw how Derrida, thanks to the othering of deconstruction, was

actually able to expose positive crevices. To the point, working within Schmitt's own argument, Derrida's deconstructive reading shows that, regardless of its explicit intentions, the argument for arbitrary decisionism contained in *Concept of the Political* simply cannot be without implicit communal presuppositions. Thus, to put it bluntly, we all at once learn that a purely arbitrary or purely free and decisionist conception of political community cannot stand on its own. It actually requires something bordering on a substantive vision of the common good as a supplement.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, before concluding that Derrida thereby points us toward the possibility of a truly political good, the question remains, if this communal side to arbitrary decisionism is so apparent, why then does Schmitt explicitly deny it? Clearly, it is not his intention in *Concept of the Political* to defend any such substantive vision. All of which leads us to question Derrida's motives. Perhaps, in seeking out an ethical side to Schmitt, he is simply deceiving us, playing with us.<sup>2</sup> And so once again, narcissism runneth over.

Or does it? Herein lies our most important claim in Chapter 4. Let us return to the question of motives. Who is really deceiving whom? In particular, by so explicitly refusing to see this ethical other in his politics, perhaps it is Schmitt who is really deceiving us. Indeed, if there were no ethics in politics, how could Schmitt possibly justify his decisionism? From what would we need to distinguish ourselves? Surely one does not make a decision in a vacuum. There is always some greater context. All of which leads to the conclusion that if the political decision is to be, something more, something other than this decision must be presupposed from the start.

And so, again, if Schmitt in *Concept of the Political* does not explicitly admit to this other, naturally we must become suspicious. Something is missing. Or, as Derrida suggests, something, whether purposefully or not, is hidden.<sup>3</sup> This then, far from deception, is the deeper purpose of Derrida's deconstruction of Schmitt: to actually try to fully account for the latter's theory of politics.

In particular, in his deconstruction of *Concept of the Political*, we see that Derrida's ultimate motivation is to try to account for the positive side upon which Schmitt's more negative view appears to depend. How? By more precisely trying to show us why it is that Schmitt chose to ignore or disavow this positive side in the first place. And herein, in seeking to discover this hidden agenda as it were, the broader ethical claim of friendship-as-impossible becomes, perhaps, not so playful after all, but very serious. Or more precisely, the posture of deconstructive play itself is at the same time most grave.<sup>4</sup>

To explain, having exposed that there must indeed be an-other communal side to Schmitt's argument, Derrida then goes on to show why Schmitt might have actually taken pains not to acknowledge it, even to hide it. Thus, on the one hand, Derrida reveals to us the character of Schmitt's hidden communal presupposition. Basically, cloaked in the necessity to make a decision, it amounts to the defense of an exclusive community whose membership is decided by the sheer ability to decide and impose that decision on everyone else. In short, it is an aggressively fraternal politics founded and maintained by blood and will. For after all, does Schmitt not assert that he has no time for non-aggressive or weak peoples? Thus, he is prepared to let such indecisive types disappear.<sup>5</sup>

But more than this, and here lay the ethical possibility of deconstruction or friendship-as-impossible, having thusly laid bare how profoundly fixed, exclusive and even tyrannical are the presuppositions which ground so pure a defense of seemingly negative or free friendship, Derrida thereby announces his own intentions. Again, he will defend the impure. In effect, all fixity, even the purely free, is to be rejected, or at least ever suspended, in favor of the process of othering itself.

And hence, in essence holding forth the universal value, even profound responsibility, to never finally defend anything pure, even if that purity be one of freedom, we, in Derrida, discover an ethical possibility in the rejection of all fixity. In short, thanks to his willingness to do the work of deconstruction, the purely non-ethical or free politics of Schmitt is rendered hopelessly problematic, profoundly exclusive. At the same time, precisely because friendship-as-impossible embraces the impossible, it naturally contains embedded within it a more inclusive, universal promise of the good.<sup>6</sup> All of which suggests that perhaps it cannot simply be rendered narcissistic after all. At least insofar as we are willing to do this same work of otherness.

Still, now turning at last to the focus of this Chapter, one cannot help but wonder if this kind of promise is truly satisfying.<sup>7</sup> To the point, is the rendering of pure negativity as hopelessly problematic really enough to take Derrida's friendship-as-impossible beyond the charge of narcissism and so to the realm of a truly political good? Indeed, true to its othering, embrace-of-impurity form, would such a friendship not also reject just as vehemently a purely positive notion of the common good or friendship?

And so, lest Derrida's friendship-as-impossible again and again seem to undo its own ethical possibilities and lead us again and again to narcissism, we would do best to describe how it specifically deals with a positive conception of friendship. In particular, we must do so in order to finally "prove" the following. Namely, that the deconstruction of all fixed truths, including that of a common good, is more than simply a meaningless embrace of chaos. Indeed, it may be thanks to this very embrace that we are able to hope for a truly universal and inclusive good in the first place. In any case, onto the deconstruction of the all-too-positive Aristotle and thereby a deeper account of the universal ethical possibilities of Derrida's friendship-as-impossible.<sup>8</sup>

We begin by offering a sketch of the argument. Not surprisingly, we will start our deconstructive journey with respect to Aristotle's political thought by crossing over well-worn territory. Thus, echoing our discussion in Chapters 1 and 2, our first task will be to summarize in brief Aristotle's account of political community. In particular, of interest to us here will be to highlight once again the deep contradictions contained therein. What's more we will see these contradictions made especially plain thanks to Aristotle's attempt to "personalize" and thereby deepen his account of political community via his notion of friendship.

Next, we will go on to suggest what role deconstruction can play with respect to these contradictions. Basically, as with Schmitt, it will not be used to reject Aristotle and thereby provide a non-Aristotelian "solution" to Aristotle's contradictory "problem." Rather, what Derrida will offer with his process of othering is akin to a new perspective on this same problem.

To the point, unlike the explicitly “negative” attitude of Aristotle which we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the contradiction between freedom and the good will, with Derrida’s impossible trope, all at once emerge in a more “positive” light. Thus, the fact of the other of boundless love, which Aristotle both recognizes in friendship and, at the same time, tries to control with his good friendship ideal, will no longer be viewed in this way. Instead, with deconstruction, such boundlessness will all at once be shifted from the realm of “in need of control” to the realm of a universal ethical standard.

In particular, once again putting deconstruction to work, Derrida will show us that it is this very Aristotelian tension between control and boundlessness that lay at heart of his own impossible ethical “solution.” In short, friendship-as-impossible is ever capable of being a political good because it finally recognizes and, more importantly accepts that no final control is ever possible in this context. The bond of love cannot be forced, but must remain just that: boundless.<sup>9</sup>

And in fact, in thusly “defining” friendship-as-impossible, we have, so to speak, summed up the entirety of Derrida’s political philosophy. Namely, for Derrida, political philosophy is not ultimately about controlling boundlessness in order to be at one with either the purely free or the purely good. Rather, in truly impure, othering fashion, it is about a willingness to finally understand and accept both, in all of their contradiction and mind-boggling complexity. In short, this is the political good promised by Derridean deconstruction: an ideal, all-inclusive philosophy of friendship.<sup>10</sup> In any case, now that we have thusly set forth the path for this Chapter, let us now take up the way.

In Book I of the *Politics*, Aristotle, as we have already seen, sets forth both the promise and the paradox which lies at the heart of a defense of the political good. Thus, on the one hand, he asserts: "Man is by nature a political animal."<sup>11</sup> To fulfill their nature, human beings must live in political communities. And what is the nature of this community? At the risk of sounding obvious, it is political. Unlike gregarious animals such as bees, Aristotle argues, human beings do not simply live together in an unqualified union. Rather, nature has endowed each man with the power of reasoned speech and thereby the ability to indicate what is right and wrong, just and unjust, good and bad. As such, the human community and hence the common good emerges as a unity marked by deliberation and even potential conflict as to what is best for all. Or, to look at it from the perspective of each individual political animal, it is quite simply man's nature to deliberate, disagree and even, if pushed too far, fight for what he feels is right. The bottom line for Aristotle is that in order to be fully human one must be a free man; that is, one who is able to choose among the good and the bad. In short, it is a notion of politics as plurality.

On the other hand, behind this defense of politics lurks a seeming contradiction. To the point, precisely because politics is natural and not a mere product of human freedom, the pluralistic common good has, ironically, a rather bizarre, fixed character.<sup>12</sup> The *polis*, Aristotle tells us, is the highest, most complete human association, embracing all others.<sup>13</sup> It follows that the good at which it aims is also the most complete, the most perfect. And so, it seems, we can rest assured that no matter how heated our disagreements, the good life of politics will always triumph in the end. Beyond the

apparently random plurality exists the natural guarantee of unity. But does not this kind of guarantee ultimately serve to make Aristotle's defense of politics decidedly apolitical? To, in effect, trump our deliberative, conflictual capacity with a higher good surely undermines the intrinsic worth of plurality, does it not?

In any case, so once again emerges the Aristotelian paradox in the *Politics* and with it the general problematique between the good and political freedom/plurality. And needless to add, inspired by this Aristotelian conundrum, the entire motivating search of our thesis was set in motion, namely the search for an ethical standard that embraces both the "political" and the "good." In particular, Aristotle's "problem" begs the question: what balance of freedom/plurality and the good is necessary in order to "make real" the true ethical promise of the political animal? What's more, if Aristotle appears to favor an intrinsic good to the detriment of politics as true plurality, then it would seem necessary to look for a conception of politics more attuned to a multiplicity of "goods," as it were. Specifically, it becomes a matter of how to "lighten up" Aristotle's fixed good so as to make more room for the political animal as such.

Of course, and here we began to approach the friendship theme which became integral to our overall political good search, Aristotle does appear to offer a possible solution to his own "problem" by suggesting in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that politics is a kind of friendship.<sup>14</sup> Marked by a deeply intimate or private character, indeed Aristotle says, it is ultimately derived from one's relations with oneself, the friendly bond appears to lack any absolute "fixity."<sup>15</sup> More specifically, friendship is connected to love which, Aristotle tells us, while having the effect of deepening the common good bond, is also

problematic to this same bond insofar as love is difficult to control. For after all, humans can love anyone it seems, even bad men.<sup>16</sup> As such, to the extent that love and friendship are connected to politics, any certainty as to a singular common good standard is rendered ambiguous, so allowing plurality a freer hand, as it were. Indeed, suggesting such a nod to particularity, Aristotle says of the obligations of friendship: “discussions about feelings and actions have only as much definiteness as their subject-matter.”<sup>17</sup>

And yet, despite its private, intimate, boundless-love, overtones, Aristotle ultimately defines friendship, as his politics, in terms of the transcendental, fixed or natural good. True friendship, he argues, is defined by the relations of good men.<sup>18</sup> That is, the mark of friendship *per se* is that two men love each other not for the sake of each person’s distinctness or uniqueness; their ability to be free persons, as it were. Rather, what is cherished above all is the sameness of the good, namely virtues which emphasize self-control and finally harmony or beauty, that each mutually recognizes in the other. In fact, to reiterate what we just said above, so cherished is this sameness that Aristotle actually bases his ideal of friendship upon the proper or good and orderly relations one has with oneself. In this way then, the pluralistic common good for Aristotle is literally collapsed to an ideal of oneness, a kind of good individual writ large.<sup>19</sup>

And so, while acknowledging the boundless love of friendship, Aristotle in the end, rejects it and actually tries to control love by affixing it to the singular good. Expressed in political language, Aristotle connects friendship to the notion of like being dear to like and so once again seems to preclude the promise of the political animal: namely to defend a notion of politics based on its own free, pluralistic, terms.<sup>20</sup>

Admittedly, in the end, Aristotle does recognize that such true or perfect friendships are very rare if not impossible.<sup>21</sup> And this seems an implicit concession to the fact that distinctness, and thereby possible conflict, but also freedom, with respect to defining the good, plays a large part in actual political relations. Nevertheless, true friendship is the standard by which all other friendships are judged. As such, much like the notion in the *Politics* in which the *polis* is simply the highest human association, we are once again faced with a guarantee of the good at the expense of a recognition of true freedom and plurality.

So, what are we to do? If even within a context of greater particularity or intimacy, the true promise embodied by the political animal is obscured, perhaps the whole notion of a political good is absurd. Absurdity again. And madness too? Quite simply, perhaps the search for a “proper” balance between a “fixed” standard of the good and the free political actor can never be because the two are simply opposed. In short, choose one and you ultimately undo the other.

Perhaps. On the other hand, perhaps this contradictory tension is not such a bad thing? Here begins the deeper justification behind trying to prove the existence of a truly political good, even in all of its so-called madness. And needless to add, this will provide the motivation for our turn to Derridean deconstruction and subsequent need for a standard of friendship-as-impossible amid such a fixed Aristotelian backdrop.

To elaborate, a lot is at stake behind the seemingly absurd concept of a political good. On the one hand, as I have already suggested, the political good must presuppose a great deal of freedom on the part of the political animal, something the Aristotelian

“guarantee” of the common good appears to dangerously undermine. On the other hand, however, absolute freedom from all ethical guarantees ironically erodes the freedom of the political animal. After all, without some standard of judgement, some definition of goodness, the capability of human beings to choose among the good and bad is rather meaningless. In more frightening terms, this suggests that, in the name of freedom, anything may be justifiable. And indeed, in this regard, our foray into the murky waters of Schmitt’s decisionism turns out to be most instructive. For, did we not see there, alongside its purely arbitrary claims, precisely such an erosion of meaningful freedom to the point of allowing for the disappearance of a people solely on the grounds of an almost physical weakness?<sup>22</sup>

And so, turning back to the Aristotelian “solution” of friendship, we feel compelled to frame the political conundrum of striking a balance between the good and freedom in a more positive light: is there some way to keep the ideal of friendship while at the same time having it more closely reflect the reality of uniqueness and boundless love? Or more generally, is it possible, even in a politics which takes the notion of political animal or freedom to near extremes, to find a standard of the good? And if so, what is that standard and can it provide a possible pathway to a viable political good? Basically, here, or so we will now argue, is where Derrida’s deconstruction and friendship-as-impossible has its place.

Specifically, turning to a sketch of the deconstructive argument to come, what Derrida offers in this Aristotelian friendship context is twofold. First, in terms of showcasing the radical freedom of his politics, Derrida, as we shall see, makes every

effort to render Aristotle's good friendship argument impossible. Thus, similar to his approach to Schmitt but in a reverse direction, Derrida will uncover the free or boundless other which implicitly makes Aristotle's good friendship claims possible. Of particular interest in this regard will be Derrida's honing in on Aristotle's need to ironically undergird his fixed notion of friendship or common good with the perpetual and most unfixable test of time. Bottom line, even for Aristotle, it would seem that the singular, universal good can only be insofar as it is ever tested, questioned, and so ever subject to the free choice of the political animal.<sup>23</sup>

Second, having set forth this boundless common good within Aristotle's own argument, Derrida then goes on to suggest why Aristotle nevertheless takes pains to hide it in this same argument and instead ultimately defend a fixed singular good. And needless to add, it is here that the truly positive vision of the political good of deconstruction and friendship-as-impossible seems to emerge. In effect, Derrida argues, the reason that Aristotle can only finally see the contradiction of the political and the good in negative, controlling terms rather than in more hopeful, ethical ones is because, like the tradition of political philosophy in general, he is obsessed with putting his particular or exclusive stamp on the good. Remove this dangerous, even tyrannical obsession with control and one's outlook on the political good, even in all its impossibility, open-endedness, radical inclusiveness and yes perhaps even madness, becomes at once infinitely more promising.<sup>24</sup>

Still, how can one propose such a perpetually open and inclusive vision as an ethical standard? What of the madness, the danger of narcissism, behind such an

uncertain, chaotic, contradictory approach? Well, thanks to deconstruction, Derrida, as we shall see, will actually turn these questions on their ear. To the point, a political vision of the good is only mad or narcissistic from the perspective of the controlling singular tradition of the good. From an-other point of view, namely a more radically open and inclusive one, the matter is altogether different, altogether more positive.<sup>25</sup>

And thus, using Aristotle's own contradiction against him, as it were, Derrida will ultimately propose a radical reframing of the philosophical tradition itself. Gone will be the imprisoning of philosophical thought by way of one successively imposed and re-imposed singular and profoundly exclusive truth. And its proposed replacement? Philosophy will ever be rendered impure. Or more precisely, the whole pursuit will be guided by a new vision of truth, namely one which is informed by its perpetual undoing or, what is the same thing, by its perpetual open-ness to the other.<sup>26</sup> In short, in truly universal and inclusive fashion, philosophers will be called on to be more friends of the truth.<sup>27</sup> Thus, will the truth, in all of its contradictoriness and political goodness, be allowed simply to be. In any case, onto an elaboration of this explicitly deconstructive turn to the argument.

To begin, let us be blunt: that Derrida is not afraid of radical freedom the way Aristotle seems to be is made clear from page 1 of his *Politics of Friendship*. Thus, to repeat our claim of Chapter 4, he announces his more open-ended approach to the common good by way of an oft repeated quotation which is loosely attributed to a despairing Aristotle: "O my friend, there is no friend."<sup>28</sup> In short, as against the tradition dictated by Aristotle, Derrida chooses to read this quote positively (or at the very least, he

refuses to see it simply in negative terms). And thus, also against this same tradition, he ultimately embraces rather than eschews the ethical possibilities implicit in such friendship-as-impossible.

Of course, it is one thing to make such a provocative, non-traditional claim, quite another to prove it. How does Derrida justify such an impossible embrace as an ethical common good standard? Logically speaking, the onus would seem to be on him to suggest why the more despairing Aristotelian approach is found wanting. And so it goes. Taking up this very challenge, Derrida starts his positive ethical argument for friendship-as-impossible, and with it hope for a truly political good, by interrogating Aristotle. Or, more precisely, what he actually does is target Aristotle's argument for friendship since it is this argument, as we shall see presently, that ultimately makes a despair, and even hatred of the impossible in all of its common good ambiguity, possible in the first place.<sup>29</sup>

And so, onto Derrida's questioning of Aristotle's friendship argument. Now, at the risk of sounding obvious, we might as well preface this discussion by asserting that Derrida's approach in this regard will be deconstructive. Namely, rather than simply rejecting Aristotelian friendship and asserting his own as a "solution," what Derrida does is more ingenious insofar as it is ultimately more in keeping with his truly impossible "stance." Thus, a positive embrace of the impossible becomes eminently possible because it will actually be found to emerge not outside, but within Aristotle's own argument. In effect, the key to seeing the hopeful, ethical side of friendship-as-impossible is actually there, within the supposedly despairing and fixed tradition itself.<sup>30</sup> Infinite hope for an impossible and thereby political good indeed.

In any case, keeping this in mind, let us proceed with Derrida to deconstruct Aristotle. In reading Aristotle's argument for friendship, Derrida points out two things that seem crucial to making it work. And needless to add, as we shall soon see, it is these two things that Aristotle, try as he might, cannot quite control in the name of assuring what he explicitly intends, namely a fixed, stable, common good.

So what are these two things? Not surprisingly, the first is love. In particular, as we made clear in Chapter 2 and again reiterated above, with friendship, Aristotle acknowledges the need for love in his notion of the common good. Why? Does he thereby intend to "lighten up" his more rigid presumptions about the common good in the *Politics*? Well, and again this should not be surprising given our earlier foray into this same territory, indeed he does not. Thus, in supposed agreement with the common opinion, Aristotle suggests that the love bond of friendship will actually strengthen the literal oneness of the common good. Specifically, insofar as it brings the truth of the good down to a more intimate, personal plane, the singular standard of the common good sheds the cold guarantee of the *Politics* and speaks to each of us more directly, as it were. And hence, thanks to love and friendship, the truth of the fixed common good will, according to Aristotle, actually hit home all the more.

And yet, as we also made clear in Chapter 2, though this may indeed be Aristotle's explicit argument, the words of his text also seem to reveal something most non-common-good-like. In particular, while seeking to use friendship so as to deepen his natural common good argument, Aristotle at the same time realizes that this is no easy thing to do. In short, he recognizes that love, while integral to his fixed "solution," may

also be dangerously chaotic.<sup>31</sup> Now, what Derrida does in this context is merely to push this “danger” a little further in Aristotle’s argument. And needless to add, this push will eventually confront us with the second aspect crucial to making Aristotle’s good friendship argument work, namely the requirement of the test of time.<sup>32</sup> But first things first: onto Aristotle’s particular characterization of love.

To elaborate, with respect to Aristotle’s explicit intentions, we remind ourselves once again that he turns to friendship not because he is nervous that his fixed common good presupposition might seem too forced or even dangerously tyrannical. On the contrary, drawing on the more personal one-to-one nature of friendship, and especially its love element, his hope is to make the truth of this fixity even more obvious. Thus, to repeat, in agreement with the common opinion, he makes the linkage of friendly relations to strengthening the bond of the political community.<sup>33</sup>

As far as Aristotle’s explicit notion of love goes then, the rather bold argument here is as follows. Put bluntly, affection and love is not put forward as a means by which to bring disparate, free-minded, people together in some kind of tenuous arrangement. Rather, its bonding power is much more forceful and binding than that. Thus, Aristotle suggests, love and friendship can actually firm up one’s individual commitment to the common good to the point of actually making disparate, free-minded people of one mind. But how, we might wonder, is this melding of the intimate with the communal possible?

Well, as Aristotle suggests in both the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, it is all quite simple really. Having a personal stake in the community means that I view the community and its values not merely in abstract, universal terms. On the contrary, thanks to love, it

actually becomes of personal value to me. I have a stake in it. And so, because I literally have this personal connection to the community, I naturally feel bound to making sure its common values are upheld. Indeed, I existentially identify with them.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, love and friendship thus literally become the most reliable way of assuring a unity of opinion as far as the communal good is concerned. In short, thanks to this ongoing, tangible relationship, the intimate and communal “good” actually become as one. And needless to add, in this context, we now see why Aristotle defines friendship ultimately in terms not of plurality or combining of different persons but instead on the basis of a proper relation to oneself.

In any case, the bottom line here is that, far from freeing things up, Aristotle, with love and friendship, is, in effect, actually attempting to justify even more deeply why the individual political animal’s choice of the good must be at one with that of the community with no deviation. On the other hand, however, almost as soon as this leaves Aristotle’s “mouth” (text), so to speak, it is also acknowledged that a kind of force is being placed upon love in order to assure such a fixed, reliable, singular conclusion.

Indeed, it is precisely this open acknowledgement of a need for fixity and force that compels Aristotle to go yet further, ultimately defending the idea that only good friendship can be true friendship. This bald-faced claim in turn is justified on the basis of an internal argument. Namely, the deeper argument here is that good friendship, or the bond between men who are literally the same, is superior because only good men can properly love and therefore be loved.<sup>35</sup> For after all, how better to finally justify why the political animal must ever choose the singular good than to transform him and all his

bundle of passions into, exclusively, a good man. But herein, all at once, lies the “problem” with this whole fixed or singular argument and ultimately the reason for its despairing trope with respect to a truly political good.

Specifically, as Derrida suggests, by thusly forcibly affixing love to the singular good, what Aristotle does, and he admits as much in his text, is to make man, that indefinable mess of passions and rationality (a who), into a more stable, orderly and measurable thing (a what).<sup>36</sup> In effect, and again this is admitted by Aristotle himself, human beings are transformed into what they are not, namely idealized political animals who allow right reason to rule and so always choose the “right” (singular) good. And needless to add, this choice conditions who we should love as our friends, namely only good men.<sup>37</sup>

Bottom line, the fixed common good and the individual’s good are thusly tied together in an idealized, ultimately non-human and therefore potentially de-humanizing way. For after all, as we have just shown, it is thanks to this ideality alone that Aristotle is able to make his argument for the literal melding of the personal and intimate good to that of the common in the first place. But of course this begs the question, what of the actual human plane? One gets the feeling that that is a much messier, freer, more pluralistic ethical story.

In any case, seen in this radically idealized and therefore radically “exclusive” light, it is no wonder that Aristotle concludes that good friendship, the fount of his fixed common good argument, is rare if not impossible.<sup>38</sup> What’s more, and here is the crux of the ethical “problem,” since good friendship must, according to this same “ideal” logic,

define all friendships, Aristotle cannot help but finally see this “rare if not impossible” fact of friendship in profoundly negative terms. Thus, as we saw in both Chapters 1 and 2, his opining as to man’s persistent badness and his suggestion that the bulk of humanity are not capable of the deeper bond of love and friendship thereby justifying the use of force against them in order to assure the common good. Quite simply, thanks to his ideal, fixed model of the good man and good friend, Aristotle makes it clear that as far as a real participation in the common good is concerned, most, if not all, men (and of course, all women) simply do not count.<sup>39</sup>

So, where does Aristotle go wrong? How can the more intimate focus on human love become so idealized as to actually require radical exclusion on the one hand and force on the other to make it good? Surely, with this fixed and forced characterization of love and friendship, we, contrary to Aristotle’s intentions, slip even further away from a truly universal good. In short, the free choice of the political animal is surely sullied and even precluded by an obsession with control so as to assure the singular good. Despair indeed.

But wait. To paraphrase Derrida, all at once, objections are piling up. And even more surprisingly, these objections actually begin with Aristotle himself. In particular, enter, in the heart of this despair, the second aspect Derrida identifies as crucial to making Aristotle’s good friendship argument work, namely the requirement of the test of time. And thus, alongside his exclusive portrait of love and thereby his despair of true friendship, Aristotle, motivated by his same pursuit for a universal good, makes an-other less controlling, more hopeful vision of friendship possible. For surely the requirement

of a test of time almost makes it seem as if Aristotle is rendering any kind of control impossible. Or why the need for this test in the first place? And thus, in this sense, he seem very close to embracing friendship-as-impossible as the only possible ethical standard.

Of course, given Aristotle's overall fixed and controlling intentions with respect to friendship and the common good, we might justifiably balk at such an embrace. To the point, what exactly is this requirement of the test of time? Does it really suggest something beyond the fixed argument for good friendship? Indeed, as we shall see presently, this is definitely not Aristotle's intention. On the other hand, as Derrida, with his othering and impossible trope will show, whatever Aristotle's intentions, non-fixity cannot help but emerge as the test of time's most tangible effect. What's more, insofar as this test is integral to his vision of the good, another less fixed view of the good, dare we say a political good, all at once becomes eminently possible thanks to Aristotle himself.<sup>40</sup>

But first things first: what is the requirement of the test of time and how does Aristotle use it to support his good friendship argument? Well, to put it bluntly, Aristotle introduces this test as a means by which to assure the goodness of a friend.<sup>41</sup> That is, in order to prove that another is a true friend and not merely a flatterer after his own self-interest, one must test them, in particular their mode of love, to assure that it is proper, namely literally aligned to the common good.<sup>42</sup>

Now in terms of his desire to literally link the personal and intimate good to that of the common, this seems a most logical course for Aristotle to take. And yet here, already, even in this most basic of definitions, problems arise. Quite simply, given the

confidence and force with which Aristotle earlier evoked his vision of the common good, one might wonder why this test is necessary at all. Surely, given that the assumption of what is good is singular and fixed, one presumably must either be a good man and thereby truly worthy of love and good friendship, or one is not. End of story. And so again, we wonder, why is there this need for a test of love?

Well, before jumping to any hasty conclusions, let us probe deeper into the matter. To the point, the reason that Aristotle ultimately seems to require the test of love in order to support his good friendship argument is because of a key distinction he draws between loving and being loved.<sup>43</sup> In particular, as Aristotle makes plain in the *Ethics*, in order for friendship to be true and good, it must privilege loving over being loved. For only in this way is friendship not confused with mere flattery, mere self-love and narcissism, and so made capable of underwriting a common good in the first place. Or more precisely, this is the basis for the distinction: this privilege of loving over being loved which grants to friendship its trueness and thereby its ultimately fixed or stable goodness. And so, tying this back to the need for the test of love, because the act of loving is privileged over the passivity of being loved, testing, by definition, is surely required for true friendship to be rendered assuredly true.

However, lest there be any misunderstanding here, let us be still more clear. In effect, thanks to this distinction, in particular, the linkage of true friendship to the act of loving, the following claim is made: I can know who my true friends are.<sup>44</sup> This is Aristotle's fundamental assertion. And further, this is why the test of love is so key in terms of making his good friendship argument work. Quite simply, in interrogating how

another loves me lay the pathway to certain knowledge of what friendship and the common good actually *is*.<sup>45</sup> And as such, far from opening the way to an impossible or truly inclusive friendship, Aristotle's test of love, connected to this active preference for loving, serves to undergird his fixed, exclusive, divine view of friendship all the more.

Still, on the cusp of finally closing the door on all hope for Aristotle's embrace of a truly political good or friendship-as-impossible, Derrida all at once offers another read of the situation. Basically, he wonders, what if there is a problem in the surety with which Aristotle makes this distinction? To the point, what if the knowledge presumed in the act of loving is just as unsure or potentially narcissistic as that of the beloved? Would not the test of love take on a whole new rather more boundless meaning?

To take this deconstructive read step-by-step, Derrida spells out the problem with the Aristotelian distinction between loving and being loved in the following way:

Friendship, the being-friend – what is that anyway? Well, it is to love *before* being loved. Before even thinking about what *loving*, *love*, *lovence* mean, one must know that the only way to find out is by questioning first of all the act and the experience of loving rather than the state or situation of being loved. Why is that? What is its reason? Can we know? Well, precisely by reason of *knowledge* – which is accorded or allied here to the act. And here we have the obscure but invincible force of a tautology. The argument seems in fact simple: it is possible to be loved (passive voice) *without knowing it*, but it is impossible to love (active voice) *without knowing it*.<sup>46</sup>

In essence, what Derrida is getting at here is that, for Aristotle, the only kind of love and friendship worth anything is that which, to repeat, we can know. More precisely, and herein lies the force of the tautology of which Derrida speaks, the seed of what love and friendship is lies in the ability to know, to be cognizant or conscious that love, in

particular friendly love, is in fact occurring. And hence, Aristotle's privilege of the act of loving from whence he is ultimately able to derive good friendship.

Indeed, logically speaking, are we not more fully aware that love is on the scene when we actively pursue it? And thus, only the lover, in his pursuit of love, can actually hope to "feel the love," so to speak. What's more, and herein lies the argument for good friendship, in thusly being more literally capable of knowing and feeling what love is, the lover alone is able to distinguish it from mere flattery and so ultimately draw the necessary connection between true love and the fixed, stable, reliable, singular good. The beloved, by contrast, simply sitting there and receiving attentions, he can never quite be sure of any of this. Everything runs together. Bottom line, having no active experience of love, he cannot make the necessary distinctions which finally make possible the good friendship argument, namely that which aims to define love in stable, reliable or, to coin Aristotle's exact word, steadfast (*bébaios*) terms.<sup>47</sup>

And yet, as Derrida's paraphrase of Aristotle's loving versus being loved argument also suggests, as soon as this distinction is uttered, a distinction which is clearly integral not only to the good friendship argument but also to the notion of the fixed good itself, it is almost immediately problematic. In short, it undoes itself. Why? Well, to put it bluntly, Aristotle puts all his faith in the act of loving as far as being able to finally know what friendship truly is. And in so doing, Derrida suggests, contrary to Aristotle's explicit intentions, what you end up with is not finally a common good that is reliable or stable at all. But rather, everything, nature, truth, the good, ultimately depends on the

most unreliable test of time.<sup>48</sup> Sound familiar? We are ever so closely approaching the Being-as-time truth of Chapter 3, but this time, within Aristotle.

In sum, what eventually emerges out of Aristotle's attempt to stabilize friendship as a common good is the realization that such knowledge is not fixed or certain at all, but must ever be won.<sup>49</sup> Remember, Aristotle privileges the act of loving. Act, movement, interrogation, undoing from which stability must be wrought. Again, this sounds all too familiar. What's more, the very distinction of the lover and beloved further underscores this most unreliable notion of the common good. Quite simply, given the very unreliability of the object of love, namely the beloved, the friendship of the lover surely cannot be assured in any fixed good friendship way. Indeed, at best, it would seem that the latter can only ever exist as a promise, something that must ever be tested, questioned and ultimately, true to Derrida's impossible trope, left up in the air.

Of course, at this point, we might wonder, even if this boundless, need-to-be-tested truth of love is the true unstable ground on which Aristotle's good friendship rests, what "good" is it? Again, having uncovered a sense of the impossible in Aristotle's text, are we not brought to the door of despair as far as any universal ethical standard is concerned yet again? Whence, as we claimed at the outset of this Chapter, Derrida's more positive reading of this entire ethical "mess?"

Well, with these questions, we are at last led to the last aspect of our discussion. Basically, much like Schmitt though in reverse fashion, Derrida must show us why Aristotle, despite these impossible, testing, connotations, nevertheless takes pains to hide them and defend the fixed, stable, reliable good. Indeed, again as with Schmitt, it is in

the offering of this deeper account of the other in Aristotle, namely why it is acknowledged but finally disavowed, that Derrida's friendship-as-impossible ethic and ultimately his promise of a truly political good, will most positively emerge. In fact, it will eventually take us to Derrida's friendly reformulation of political philosophy itself.

In any case, to launch into this deeper deconstructive account, we begin all at once by taking another look at the notion of counting in Aristotle's text.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it shall presently become all too clear why we are doing this. But to continue, who, according to Aristotle, counts, is counted, as far as the common good is concerned? Everyone? No-one? Well, as Derrida reading Aristotle points out, no precise number is given. And indeed, given what we now know about the importance of the test of love in Aristotle's account of the common good, coupled with our earlier awareness of his divine despair, this is not surprising.

On the other hand, and here is the crux of the matter, alongside this acknowledgement of ambiguity as far as a clearly defined common good is concerned, Aristotle nevertheless wants to offer something precise. Again, we remind ourselves of his despair, his desire for control given the impossibility staring him in the face. And thus, in place of precise number, he all at once offers a method by which to assume greater control of the situation.

Thus:

There is no stable friendship without confidence, but confidence needs time. One must then make trial, as Theognis says, 'you cannot know the mind of man or woman till you have tried them as you might cattle.'<sup>51</sup>

And further:

The primary [good, true] friendship then is not found between many, for it is hard to test many men, for one would have to live with each. Nor should one choose a friend like a garment. Yet in all things it seems the mark of a sensible man to choose the better of two alternatives; and if one has used the worse garment for a long time and not the better, the better is to be chosen, but not in place of an old friend one of whom you do not know whether he is better. For a friend is not to be had without trial nor in a single day, but there is need of time and so the 'bushel of salt' has become proverbial.<sup>52</sup>

And finally:

But it is natural that such friendships [good ones] should be infrequent; for such men are rare. Further, such friendship requires time and familiarity; as the proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have 'eaten salt together'; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each. Those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they both are lovable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not.<sup>53</sup>

And so, in face of the seemingly contradictory fact of the need of time and familiarity in order to establish a truly good friendship, Aristotle boldly provides the means by which to yet assure the existence of a fixed, definable, singular common good. Specifically, as the quotes suggest, it involves severely restricting and controlling from the outset the number of those who would be considered possible candidates for friendship. Thus, in the first quote, we learn that humans are to be proven true friends not by being taken as they are *en masse*, but rather only insofar as they are placed under the cattle-like yoke of trial and testing and thusly sorted in or out. Next, in the second and third quotes, the efficacy of this restrictive trial and testing method is further justified by a

“hierarchicalizing” of friendship, thereby reducing the possible candidates for friendship even more.

Bottom line, the combined effect of these quotations is as follows. The less who need to be tested, indeed Aristotle often hints that his ideal would be to narrow this testing pool down to as few as one or two persons, the more assured will this test be in terms of insuring that the person being tested will be a proper lover or good man.<sup>54</sup> And beyond this restrictive group? Obviously, the common good in this context will entail a greater degree of force. In either case, control rather than freedom becomes the order of the day. And needless to add, with this method of controlling friendship, Aristotle in effect, undermines all hope for a truly political good and with it, all hope for a good which is truly universal and/or not tyrannically imposed.

In any case, this is the “ghost” which haunts Aristotle’s argument for good friendship. Namely, it is a common good which is undergirded less by ethical concerns and more by arbitrary counting and thereby arbitrary exclusion.<sup>55</sup> Or so the ever deconstructive, readerly Derrida suggests.<sup>56</sup> But just in case this is too vague, let us underline the deconstructive logic involved still further.

Basically, Derrida argues, the reason Aristotle hides or disavows the full implications behind his test of love is because if they are fully revealed, they will uncover a most disturbing fact about the true character of his own vision of a fixed, singular, common good. Put bluntly, to expose that Aristotle’s vision is in effect dependent upon the test of love is to suggest that his vision of the common good is not as stable or fixed as he would have us believe. Indeed, the only way the test of love could be thusly good

is if men themselves were divine. For then they would have all the time in the world to “prove” their goodness.<sup>57</sup> As it stands, however, this is obviously not the case. Men (and women too) are finite. They have limited time and as such must ever choose.

Or to put it in another way, men (and women too), being human and not gods, can never finally possess the certain knowledge of what properly constitutes love and friendship. As such, automatically, the door of the political community opens to include a far wider range of people. Indeed, speaking in impossible or idealistic terms, perhaps it includes everyone.<sup>58</sup> What’s more, though not his original intention, Aristotle, with his very privilege of the act of loving in friendship, actually confirms this perpetual lack of certain human knowledge as far as the common good is concerned. In effect, thanks to Aristotle himself as read through the deconstructive lens of course, all that is left in this ethical realm of love and friendship is ambiguity, freedom, choice. On the other hand, however, herein, at the same time, lies the disturbing fact of Aristotle’s good friendship argument. Quite simply, while hinting at this finiteness, Aristotle nevertheless will have it his way; men must strive with every nerve to the divine.<sup>59</sup>

More broadly speaking, if good friendship is to be in the face of the finite, free choice, messy reality of human existence, then it can only be if Aristotle, another human being, chooses for it to be so. In short, the provocative claim here is that Aristotle’s fixity is at least in part akin to an arbitrary Schmittian decision. In some measure, it is necessarily associated with force, with an imposition by the will of the stronger over the weaker.

What's more, what makes Aristotle's "decision" more dangerous than Schmitt's is that unlike the latter, the former is not presented as a decision in any way. On the contrary, it is explicitly presented as a universal ethical standard. Thus, that arbitrary counting which Aristotle uses to distinguish between the worthy and unworthy, the effect of which is to justify the exclusion of women, slaves and virtually all men from politics, all at once assumes the mask of political justice.

Such, in any case, is where Aristotle's despair of the impossible and his concomitant desire for control ever threatens to lead us: to a near-total exclusion of embodied persons from ethical consideration. And so, we are confronted with a stark truth with respect to our overall thesis, our overall search for a political good. To the point, lest we despair of political ethics altogether, somehow we need to get beyond this despair, this seeming fear of the impossible. On the other hand, given the potential chaos and narcissism that accepting the impossible suggests, getting over this fear is by no means an easy, or perhaps even a desirable thing to do.

Nevertheless, Derrida presses on. In particular, thanks to this very exposure of the arbitrary "truth" lurking within Aristotle's fixed vision of the good, Derrida is able to suggest an-other, more truly universal way to look at the good. In other words, having uncovered the equally dangerous tendencies of fixity, he necessarily encourages a shift of perspective with respect to the impossible. Namely, all control and counting will be suspended indefinitely and instead, friendship-as-impossible will be embraced as the new ethical standard.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, in truly deconstructive fashion, it is actually Aristotle who, almost in spite of himself, is a great help in pointing this more positive side out to us. Hence, as we saw, he openly wrestles with, and never quite overcomes, the boundless love which, it seems, clearly makes friendship possible. The othering and thereby ethical effect of deconstruction apparently runneth over. In any case, let us now elaborate on the truly positive political good possibilities of friendship-as-impossible. Clearly as we just implied, these other possibilities are able to emerge thanks in large part to Aristotle's good friendship itself, at least insofar as it is deconstructed.

In this vein, we begin by rehashing the apparent duality in Aristotle's argument as it emerges in the *Politics* and the *Ethics* with respect to the fixed good. To repeat, while presenting the boundlessness associated with friendship, Aristotle is nevertheless ultimately obsessed with control. Namely, he wants to rein in this boundlessness in order to present before us a divine ideal, in particular a fixed common good by which we can all be measured and so made more comprehensible in ethical terms. And thus, in a very literal way, the human capacity for free choice, while acknowledged by Aristotle via the political animal, is at the same time cast aside in the name of a willful decision to defend good friendship and with it, a politics based on control. Quite simply, it would seem that free choice by humans, while desirable in theory, is in the end too messy for the neat and tidy, more logically understandable, common good that Aristotle wants to secure.

Or to put this in another, more telling way in keeping with our political good search, in the end, freedom and the good are clearly in conflict. This is Aristotle's fundamental belief.<sup>61</sup> Not just with respect to friendship but indeed in terms of his entire

political philosophical argument. For indeed, were this not the case, he would not feel so compelled to resolve this *aporia* of freedom and the good and thusly choose the good over freedom. What's more, were he more accepting rather than despairing, he certainly would not go so far as to actually characterize this arbitrary resolution on his part as the truth, the natural, the good. Rather, he would let the *aporia* be and ever work at the inherent complexities involved in trying to marry the impossible combination of a plethora of views of the good to the belief that this very incommensurability of views can bring forth a universal, because truly free and inclusive, good. In short, the truth of philosophy would be less about singularity, oneness and force and more about questioning, multiplicity and ultimately, open-ness to the other.

And yet, as Derrida suggests, it is at the same time thanks to Aristotle that this more hopeful, ethical or "friendly" approach to the freedom and good *aporia* actually becomes possible.<sup>62</sup> And needless to add, herein completes the picture of Aristotle's duality and in fact, the duality inherent in the entire tradition of political philosophy. Derrida merely dares to assert it in its most positive form, going so far as to declare that we cannot know the truth but can only be its friend.

Nevertheless, daring aside, the key point here is that Derrida's positivity with respect to a truly political good in all of its impossibility and otherness is, to say this again and again, only possible because of the tradition. More precisely, its very promise emerges not against but thanks to thinkers like Aristotle who founded that tradition. What's more, Derrida constantly takes pains to acknowledge this debt of gratitude thus giving us to think that this ultimately informs his embrace of friendship-as-impossible.<sup>63</sup>

So begs the question, what is this indebtedness to tradition upon which Derrida's radical, inclusive, political good reformulation of that same tradition ultimately seems to rest? Obviously, understanding this indebtedness is key to understanding what he means by "friend of truth" and thereby finally establishing, as we have just suggested, his overall relevance to our political good search. However, to avoid any misunderstanding from the start, it is important to repeat that Derrida's embrace of the tradition is not seamless, reverential, but rather inherently dual, inherently critical. Namely it is to see how the undoing duality of tradition's truths reflect the universal and ethical "truth" of undoing in general.<sup>64</sup>

In any case, to perhaps make all of these points clearer, let us elaborate on how this all specifically plays out with respect to Aristotle. To the point, how does the duality we just located in Aristotle actually work? Well, to put it bluntly, we are reminded that alongside his insistence on fixity, we also saw some very real soul-searching as far as his test of time was concerned. Bottom line, for Aristotle, the fixed common good assertion does emerge but clearly only after a very great effort on his part. What's more, as we have hopefully shown above, the flavor of this effort clearly colors all of his writings.<sup>65</sup> Thus, in the *Politics* and the *Ethics* we saw that, only after a very involved bout of real wrestling with various counter-arguments is Aristotle able to make his fixed good case. And even then, when the wrestling is done, so to speak, the effect of the freedom that Aristotle has supposedly overcome, remains.

Indeed, his own fixed preferences aside, we would do best to recall that it is Aristotle himself who confronts us with the freedom and good contradiction both in terms

of his natural political animal and in his introduction of and argument for good friendship. Furthermore, even in defending his fixed good argument, the boundless claims of love clearly remain in the forefront. Hence the reason that his good friendship argument is so involved in the first place. For surely, without taking seriously the boundlessness of love, would he have really needed to bother with such an argument at all? In particular, he surely would not have needed to bother to try to accommodate within his good friendship an open-ness to “lesser” friendships. Nor would he have needed to take such care to suggest that while the divine good is superior and measures all, the human good is nevertheless distinct. And in fact, it may be so distinct that it is actually defined by its own science, not a science of the gods, but a rougher, political science. That is, a kind of good or truth which can only be presented roughly and in outline and, by the same token, thereby requiring our constant and perpetual and rough human judgement to make it work.<sup>66</sup>

To sum up then, the point here is that Aristotle and indeed all philosophers worthy of that name, even if they end up in the rather disturbing controlling posture we delineated above, are nevertheless genuinely concerned with the universal truth, the universal common good. Thus, to repeat what we said earlier, by asserting the supremacy of fixed or divine truth on the one hand and the contradictory need of the freedom to choose on the other, Aristotle is not playing a game with us and simply defending the fixed good only because he has more sinister Machiavellian motives. For indeed, if this were the case, if he did not really care about getting at the universal truth or good, he would certainly not have gone to all the trouble of acknowledging openly the

breadth of the freedom-good contradiction and only then, with the strands of freedom still dangling in the wind, defended his fixed good.

In any case, we might wonder at this point, what is the ultimate purpose in asserting all of this “messiness” in Aristotle’s text? Is there really something good to it after all? This seems to be the suggestion. And so it goes. To put it bluntly, this very exposure of messiness and duality is the ultimate philosophical-ethical insight which emerges out of Derrida’s deconstructive, othering posture. More deeply, what this otherness finally reveals is Derrida’s essentially grammatological, almost psychological insight with respect to our absolute limit. Namely, as embodied, finite, human beings, we simply cannot ever fully express any singular fixed or ultimate truth. In the end all we have are words, words, words.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, by fits and starts, we finally come to see that the contradiction of Aristotle’s text despite its expressed intention to defend one-ness reveals the following shallow yet profound “truth.” Quite simply, the complex, living person behind the authoritative author, Aristotle, is someone who we do not know and whom we can never know. He, this “strange” man, long dead, can never fully be captured by any text or summary ideas about the good. And in fact, it is the very slippages of text that reveal this ultimately unknowable “truth” which conditions and must always condition our human existence.<sup>68</sup>

Of course, without knowing the truth, we might ask Derrida, perhaps we may indeed have nothing at all. Indeed. This is always a possibility. On the other hand, there is also another possibility. A well of trust is also manifest here in Derrida’s very willingness to deconstruct rather than simply reject any thinker out of hand. For, even

without sure knowledge of Aristotle, the mortal man who died so long ago, we nevertheless share his finite humanity, do we not? And with this little fact, we may have a much more universal ethical perspective than any theoretical summation can realize. At least, insofar as we give up dangerous utopian dreams of one-ness and divinity and choose instead to share our human limits and thereby our very different, even incommensurable views with each other.

And so, having at last revealed the true ethical character behind Derrida's deconstruction of the supposedly despairing tradition, we are now prepared to make our closing remarks with respect to Derrida's place in our political good search for this Chapter. Specifically, we begin by asking: what, in terms of his deconstructive posture to the tradition, is Derrida's overall approach? Well, as we have just seen, what this approach is not is a bald-faced rejection of either Aristotle or the tradition. Again, as we have just seen, Derrida is clearly indebted to it, to its texts and to the interpreters of those texts.

On the other hand, however, as our brief foray into the ambiguity of actual human lives and embodied experience showed, indebtedness does not mean blindness. Thus, Derrida asks that we do more than simply become a disciple of the tradition. Indeed, he actually has the audacity to ask that we live in the contradiction that the tradition itself brings forward and at the same time fears. In effect, and here is his rather demanding ethical call to us, he asks that we take a risk. Rather than give in to the despair that the impossible throws up and thereby live within a limited, profoundly exclusive space, we must try, if we truly care about a universal good, to embrace this impossibility as the

universal standard or truth of political philosophy. And thus, his ultimately political good, which is of course at the same time an assuredly human vision of the good: in our very embrace of tradition, we are necessarily called upon to ever question and undo its fixed truths.

More precisely, this profound questioning stance toward tradition is essentially what Derrida's means when he seeks to re-orient political philosophy from truth to that of being a friend of truth:

But the friends of the truth are not, by definition *in* the truth; they are not installed there as in the padlocked security of a dogma and the stable reliability of an opinion... The friends of the truth are without *the* truth, even if friends cannot function without truth. The truth – that of the thinkers to come – it is impossible to *be it*, to *be there*, to *have it*; one must only be its friend.<sup>69</sup>

Basically, here we have Derrida's most positive ethical affirmation of friendship-as-impossible. To the point, with this shift from the truth to instead being a friend of truth, Derrida quite literally takes friendship in all its traditional complexity, duality, boundless love, absolute otherness and elevates it to the realm of a universal standard. Simply put, friendship, in all of its paradoxical otherness, test of time and common good connotations, is his political philosophy.<sup>70</sup>

And so, in terms of our search for a truly political good, we finally have our conclusion, if only tentatively. Namely, thanks to the friend of truth standard gleaned from tradition, those same despairing and controlling tendencies of tradition are all at once replaced by a gesture of profound open-ness and hope. In short, as Derrida endeavors to show, the questioning or undoing of all fixed goods in the name of the other

can in fact have the flavor of a truly universal ethical standard. However, and here is the tentativeness, this standard can only be if we, all of us, the living, the dead, the yet to come, are ever prepared to do this work of otherness. In the end, Derrida's political good standard quite simply lays entirely in our most fragile, finite, freely choosing, human hands.<sup>71</sup> But does this not, we might wonder, leave us with Dallmayr's narcissism? Perhaps. But hopefully, trustingly, not.

## CONCLUSION

The only lesson of history is that there are no lessons of history.<sup>1</sup>

- A. J. P. Taylor

In this dissertation, we have attempted to showcase a “new” vision of ethics in which the standard that guides all human actions is revolutionized, radically opened. In short, naming it a “political good,” I have suggested, with the help of Derrida and Aristotle, that perhaps there can be a standard which encompasses both the good and freedom in all of their irresolvable tension. An “impossible good” so to speak which eschews all tyrannies, hierarchies, singular classifications, controlling ends, to embrace all human beings, past, present and future, in all their myriad choices of the good. And thus, the good becomes what it is supposed to be: truly inclusive, truly universal.

Still, we might wonder, how can this political good be? How is its standard-bearing potential actually possible? For must it not, in its embrace of all others in their freedom, necessarily render all ethical standards impossible?

Difficult questions to be sure. And yet, our singular answer to them was surprisingly simple, if no less complex. Friendship. Precisely, as we learned first with Aristotle, friendship is unique insofar as it offers up an ethic that truly carries with the other. In this way, love, trust, open-ness, free choice “taint” Aristotle’s otherwise teleological or guaranteed singular good portrait of ethics.

Next, enter Derrida, who takes this otherness to its extreme. How? Thanks to his deconstructive portrait of nature, reality, the good. In particular, mixing together

Heidegger's historicity with Levinas' priority of the other, Derrida comes to view the good not in terms of a state of being, but as a process of perpetual undoing, perpetual othering. In short, from the perspective of the good, Derrida defends not the singular, not the purely one, but the infinitely multiple or impure. Thus, he rejects both the purely free (Schmitt) and the purely good (Aristotle) in favor of their perpetual and messy interplay. Further, in this way, his ethic of the impossible good literally emerges: friendship-as-impossible.

Put bluntly, this kind of friendship is tantamount to an all-embracing standard which is based on our willingness to ever question all fixed standards and, in effect, embrace the other as other. Which is merely another way of saying that, in the end, the only ethical "standard" Derrida proffers is that which is the most fragile, and hence most demanding, of all, human trust and love for and in each other.

Still, minding our narcissism trope throughout the Derridean part of this dissertation, we might wonder how truly ethically satisfying this trust and love in the other as other is. In short, again we are compelled to ask whether this open-ended "good" of friendship-as-impossible can really be an ethical standard. Indeed, rather than embody a standard, does not its very embrace of radical otherness seem to suggest ethical chaos? As such, friendship-as-impossible appears tantamount to a self-interested mentality as far as the good is concerned. Whence Derrida's love and trust in the other? Needless to add, seen in this light, Aristotle and Schmitt's more purist, "tyrannical" or singular approaches to the good become almost understandable. To the point, at least they provide some standard, albeit imperfect, for human action.

Again, these are difficult questions with no easy answers. On the other hand, difficult or no, Derrida actually does seem to address them and so defend the ethical viability of his open-ended approach. How? We summed this answer up via his notion of work.

To elaborate, in both Chapters 3 and 4 as well as in the latter half of Chapter 5, this notion of work emerged through our discussion of Derrida's specific approach to tradition, in particular, how to read and interpret the philosophical canon. The upshot of this discussion was that his othering, deconstructive approach, while inherently critical of the traditional view of the good did not amount to its out and out rejection. For after all, being able to wholly reject one view of the good implies that one has another to offer in its place. And this, surely, is what Derrida most emphatically denies: the ability to proffer a fixed view of the good as such.

On the other hand, as if testifying to the truth of this innate questionability, it is precisely from the tradition that such a problematique with respect to all fixed goods emerges in the first place. In short, as our Derridean reading of Schmitt and Aristotle's texts attempted to show, no truly philosophical argument is neat and tidy. On the contrary, whether it is welcomed or not, each argument necessarily involves an unsettling confrontation with its undoing other, the result of which is to reveal that no finite human being's view of the good can ever be taken as the final word. Indeed, do this, namely accept a singular summation of the good, and hope for a truly universal good which "speaks" to all human beings at all times in all places is surely well and truly lost.

Bottom line then, rather than talk of rejection or acceptance of the traditional view of the good, we should, Derrida suggests, speak of both our indebtedness and responsibility in this regard. Specifically, lest we falsely impose singular, “immortal” views on finite human beings, our stance toward the philosophical canon can only be as it has always been, namely one of constant uneasiness, perpetual activity, eternal questioning. In effect, it is as if each of us individually and yet at the same time all together are ever called, in the name of truth, to forego truth and instead embrace being a friend of truth.

And so, all at once, we have Derrida’s answer to how the impossible good and friendship-as-impossible address narcissism and at the same time offer an ethical standard that is truly universal. Quite simply, it is our profound responsibility, all of us and each of us, to perpetually work at it; to forever question and critique with a view to welcoming the other as other. What’s more, in this way, Derrida’s political philosophy thus becomes at one with philosophy, in particular, its enacting and re-enacting of the perpetual “struggle” between free choice and the good that all of us, as human beings, must learn to cope with each and every day of our lives. In short, it is a philosophy of friendship. Namely, a perpetual learning to be open to, to take seriously rather than reject out of hand, others’ views of the good, whether past, present or future.

Such, then, was our ultimate “proof” of the ethical viability of the political good as we have attempted to “define” it. Namely, the universal good as far as human beings are concerned (and what other way can there be?), can never be singular and one. Rather, echoing the “work” of both Aristotle and Derrida, it can only ever be a perpetual

questioning of all singular truths, all notions of divine good. Or to put this in another way, in the end, for human beings, the good can only ever be a gesture of friendship, love and trust; an endless task of learning to come to terms with the fact that we are not gods, but men and women who will always be confronted with each other's differing, often opposing, ethical views.

And yet, while this is my conclusion, I propose at this point, not to end my discussion, but to clarify something I feel is important. To the point, I am trying to avoid a misunderstanding about what the political good is. And thus, perhaps odd for a conclusion, I want to make sure that this dissertation ends inconclusively.

In this vein, I would ask the reader to kindly recall that in Chapter 1, I made a promise of sorts. Friendship, I said, will not be a "solution" to the freedom and good contradiction. In fact, I suggested that in this dissertation, no such solution will be offered. And yet, thus far in this conclusion, it almost seems as if I have betrayed this statement. Quite simply as my friendship-as-impossible discussion has just suggested, it appears that I have offered precisely a solution to this contradiction, namely a kind of elevation of the contradiction itself to the realm of ethical "ideal."

To elaborate, in his deconstruction or othering of all truths, Derrida's point was not, as we saw, to reject the good as such. Rather, it was to question, albeit deeply, its fixed, singular status. In any case, the point here is that, even with the questioning, the possibility of a good remains. And thus we are left with the rather odd possibility that perhaps Derrida's very "stance" of questioning all fixed goods is itself a fixed good.

Indeed, going further in this vein, we are reminded that Derrida, for all his embrace of absolute difference, does have a view of nature. In short, following Heidegger, he asserts that nature should not be singular or hierarchical but left as it is (let be) in all of its mind-boggling complexity. On the other hand, it is this very conception of nature that allows Derrida to make two key ethical assumptions. First, all perspectives of the good should be embraced. Second, and more importantly, there is a presumption that those perspectives which do not adhere to this all-embracing mantra are somehow wrong. Or to put this in another way, while tradition is not rejected, its purist tendencies are. And thus, open-ended or no, Derrida's friendship-as-impossible appears to be willing to exclude some people, namely purists, from its admittedly larger common good.

Bottom line then, thanks to Derrida's impossible good or friendship-as-impossible ethic, it seems we have a fixed good after all. In effect, the political good is asserted as the only worthy standard. What's more, and disturbingly so, it may be all the more powerful in its exclusive-ness since its very goodness is predicated on the questioning of all views of the good. Quite simply, how can one question the questioner? The tyrannical imposition is complete.<sup>2</sup>

Or is it? Hence my attempted reinvigoration in this conclusion of what the political good means. Lest the political good collapse in on itself to become the "tyrant" par excellence, it cannot offer itself up in any way as a solution to the so-called good versus freedom contradiction. In short, it must itself ever remain a question.

Still, we might justifiably wonder, how is this seeming exultation of ethical ambivalence possible if even, as we just said, something like Derrida's friendship-as-

impossible can become a fixed good? On the other hand, given the inevitable despair that such ambivalence represents, perhaps ethical “fixity,” for all its force, is preferable anyway. Either way, it seems that the political good, playing as it does with the irresolvable poles of freedom and the good, can only ever end in madness or tyranny and ultimately, tragedy. Indeed, one need only look at the bloody pages of human history, which continue to be written to this day, to feel the weight of this very real ethical conundrum.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, perhaps it is precisely this “Catch-22” aspect of the political good which ironically offers the strongest justification for its ethical “existence” as an open question. Quite simply, what better way to ensure that we eschew narcissism and take our ethical responsibility seriously than to refuse all escape to the divine beyond; to confront us, instead with the horror and exclusion that “divine” or singular ethical positions sanction in this, our human world? And hence, we see the immense responsibility behind the ethical paradox that is the political good, namely to question all ethical positions.

Indeed, to rest satisfied with a singular good, while good for the few, is always a potential recipe for disaster for much of the human race. It can only finally mean justifying one’s ethics and morals on the basis of exclusion, force and, if need be, bloodshed and violence. Aristotle admits as much with his acknowledgement that while dialogical persuasion can make the few good, the many usually require a more brute kind of persuasion or force.<sup>4</sup> As for Heidegger and Schmitt, the nod to violence is even more blunt. For the latter especially, agonism and conflict is virtually all that is left of ethics, of human society and mores.<sup>5</sup>

And thus, lest we are finally led to a Schmittian world where “ethics” become transformed into little more than exercises of strength and power, embracing the good from a human perspective can only mean, to repeat, questioning all fixed ethical positions. Horror and exclusion are real. We should beware of making them permanent with righteous ethico-political justifications, with pure conceptions of the political. All of which leads to the “conclusion” that our only fleeting hope for something other in this rather tumultuous human world is to keep moving.

Hence, again and again, the ethical responsibility to ever question every ethical assumption emerges and re-emerges. Not to overturn ethics, but to recognize that its promise of universality can only exist in a vital way, as a promise. Do more (or less), and the bloodshed and exclusion will be all that is left.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, here lay our justification for emphasizing once again the truly “open-ended” character of ethics. But of course, since we are still dealing with ethics, this leaves the daunting task of how to begin to conceive of the ethical responsibility we outlined above. In short, how can we human beings, having shed all pretensions of godhood, possibly make ethics “work” in the name of making for a less bloody, more inclusive world? Enter friendship.

More precisely, as both Aristotle and Derrida teach us, to take friendship seriously in ethical terms is to confront us with our humanity with respect to the good. In sum, being innately human, friendship necessarily sets the striving for the good within the non-divine context of human plurality and free choice.<sup>7</sup> As such, the “ethic” of friendship

cannot help but literally represent the questionability of the good. In other words, thanks to friendship, we discover that for human beings the good can only ever be political.

And thus, echoing the open-endedness of the political good, the friendship “ethic” leaves us with no “final solutions.”<sup>8</sup> Rather, reflecting our human reality of ever being required to make a choice in the face of others, friendship, as a relation essentially built on human love and trust, embodies an ethic imbued with the perpetual “work” of re-viewing the good. And herein, at once confronting and getting us beyond the possibility of violence that burdens all human ethics, lies the hope that on the other side of bloodshed there is an-other way. Namely, within the hatred, fear and force, there is also at the same time the possibility of loving others as others; of laying down our weapons and letting each other be; of accepting each other as we are, namely in all of our myriad and often incommensurable views of the good. In effect, within the tragedy of human existence, there is also an ethic of friendship. For is it not true that, in the face of exclusion and grand ideals which often end up turning into profound injustices and worse, ordinary people for the most part nevertheless get on with their lives? In sum, to repeat what I said at the end of Chapter 1, do we not all, in one way or another have some experience of friendship?

However, just in case this “friendly” rendering of the good remains unclear, I am going to close this open-ended “conclusion” by re-focusing on two key aspects of the “work” of deconstruction *a la* Derrida. But first, before even getting to this last

clarifying discussion, we feel compelled to ask, why deconstruction at all? More precisely, what has it to do with the open-ended ethic of friendship just proffered?

Well, as we saw with Aristotle in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 5, and further, as we have now implied in this conclusion with reference to Derrida's vision of friendship-as-impossible, the temptation is great, even in an ethic more intimately attuned to otherness, to put forth a divine, contradiction-overcoming good. In short, for all the nuance of Aristotle and Derrida's portraits of friendship, I am suggesting that each nevertheless cannot help but finally turn away from the topsy-turvy realm of otherness, difference and free choice in favor of a more peaceable ideal of sameness. Hence Aristotle and his good friendship in which the sameness of the good is literally touted as the ideal. As for Derrida, there is the exultation of friendship-as-impossible in which sameness is deceptively disguised as an ideal of otherness or perpetual questioning of all fixed views.

More precisely, in both cases, the implication is that the messy and open-ended reality of actual human relations is eschewed in favor of setting forth guidelines by which human beings are sorted in or out. What's more, insofar as thinkers as varied as Aristotle and Derrida equally appear to succumb to this "temptation," one gets the feeling that it might in fact be more than just a temptation. Indeed, it might actually be inevitable, the tragic hallmark embedded within all ethical assertions that human beings make. For after all, since human beings cannot finally know what the good is, we are not gods after all, how can our ethical proposals be anything but exclusionary, a matter of one imposing its view of the good on everyone else?<sup>9</sup>

And thus, we are led to the disturbing conclusion that perhaps all human visions of ethics, even those that seek inclusion, cannot help but be exclusionary and thereby matters of force rather than friendship. On the other hand, it is thanks to this very conclusion that, all at once, we have the answer to the “why deconstruction” question. Namely, in the face of all this inevitable and most unfriendly exclusion, our only hope for the universal good lies in the deconstruction or undoing of all fixed truths or views of the good.

In any case, keeping all of this in mind, we explicitly turn now to the two aspects of deconstruction we alluded to above and how these serve, in the face of such inevitable exclusion, to make a universal ethics ever possible. First, to repeat what we said in Chapter 3, Derrida explains that deconstruction is not merely some method he uses. Rather, it is something that always already happens regardless of whether he or anyone else undertakes the work of deconstruction.<sup>10</sup>

Second and related, precisely because this is the case, there is only one privileged perspective in deconstruction. In particular, as we learned again in Chapter 3, this perspective is that of the reader, or more precisely the paradoxical formulation of author as reader. In short, what this means is that whether it be the friendship of Aristotle or the friendship-as-impossible of Derrida, neither “ethical philosophy” so to speak is to be taken on faith. We must, each of us and all of us learn to forego answers, authority and discipleship and ever be prepared to do the work of ethics. And in this sense, the philosophy of deconstruction amounts to the following: not only politics, as Aristotle

suggested, but philosophy too is a kind of friendship, involving love, trust, open-ness, questioning.

To elaborate, we begin by expanding on the notion that deconstruction simply happens. What exactly does Derrida mean by this statement? Put bluntly, he means just that: undoing happens no matter what we say or do. Thus, the moment I assert something, indeed, even as I make this statement now to you, it comes apart. In other words, the meaning of all propositions, whether a banal fact or the most exulted truth, is not something closed and given, but ever open to interpretation.

Hence, calling to mind Derrida's grammatological argument of Chapter 3, both I and my singular authorial statements cannot help but call upon the other, both in myself and in you, infinite readers, for help. What's more, this help or supplement, as Derrida names it, of the other is ever needed because there is no final yardstick of meaning. In effect, Aristotle did not know how right he was when he said that we are by nature political animals. There is, quite simply, no meaning and hence no hope for goodness, either in individual or communal terms, without constant deliberation, without constant questioning of all our own truths, goods, traditions, even as they are lived and asserted.

In any case, herein, all at once, would seem to lay the ethical hope of deconstruction amid the tragedy of our inevitably exclusionary ethical proposals. Basically, given that every assertion of truth or good is never final but ever requires the help of others to make it work, we are offered a way out of the vicious cycle of exclusion. To the point, insofar as we are willing to accept that deconstruction does happen and

therefore that the help of others is not simply useful and edifying for ethics but actually its fundamental requirement, a good which is truly inclusive is ever possible.

Of course, as our narcissistic trope throughout much of this dissertation suggested, accepting this truth is no easy thing to do. Indeed, it amounts to accepting, with Heidegger, that every truth or good we assert and attempt to fixedly apply in the form of laws, customs and traditions, is essentially in error. This, in short, is what it means to perpetually need others; all truths are singularly hopeless. And hence, understandably, we see the temptation of ethical narcissism. In fact, in light of such hopelessness, we might go so far as wonder why there need be ethics at all.

Or to take this argument to extremes, if there is no such thing as a singular truth or good, why bother pursuing the good at all, political or otherwise? Why not instead be honest and say that the universal good is a sham. All that matters in the human world is the imposition and force of one good over another, of power relations, exclusion and violence. In effect, we should just say that Machiavelli and Schmitt were right. It is this “wicked” imposition of one view of the good over that of all others, and not some overarching utopian, impossible good, that ultimately makes human mores and laws work. For have we not seen time and again that, even with the best of intentions exclusion rather than the universal good, is where we end up?

Perhaps. On the other hand, as we tried to show with the deconstruction of Schmitt in Chapter 4, there is another side to this story. Put bluntly, these supposedly more “realistic” assumptions, rather than rejecting the singular truth, are themselves yet another version of it; yet another utopian and impossible good. Specifically, as Schmitt’s

archetypal man-of-aggressive-decision-making suggests, once again a singular model, a singular ideal of what constitutes right action is preferred to the complexity of human relations. For after all, if human beings were simply aggressive, how could they possibly be capable of friendship? Or to put this in Schmittian language, how could the so-called pure decision as to who one's enemy is possibly be without some tangible experience of friendship? In the interests of supposed realism, Schmitt has effectively excluded half of human experience.

Such then is the dual-sided happening of deconstruction that, to repeat, makes ethics at once impossible, admitting of narcissism, and yet ever possible, requiring friendship or the other. Bottom line, the undoing truth in the end undoes everything, all our singular authorial assumptions with respect to what constitutes human nature, the good, the true, all our certainty of what and why reality is the way it is, whether good, bad or ugly. And thus, whether we like it or not, all of our assumptions are beholden to the perspective of the other. And herein, the argument continues, lies the profound hope for universal inclusion, a truly universal good. Namely, insofar as we are willing to live in this kind of "process" and thereby accept the inherent otherness in all truths, mores, laws, the good remains ever open to us, a perpetual promise that things can get better in the future.

Still, we might justifiably wonder, how truly satisfying is this promise of the universal good? Indeed, does not the happening of deconstruction in effect render the good impossible? Is this not where a beholden-ness to the other necessarily leads us? What's more, insofar as this is true, how can we possibly come to accept it? In essence,

the ethical responsibility implied in deconstruction is not only mad but also paralyzing. For in accepting the other, must I not effectively doubt everything I say and do? Surely not a very reliable basis on which to enact one's ethical responsibility.

And hence, again rather than grounds for instilling hope, the deconstructive "good" can only remain, at best a kind of riddle or question. On other hand, however, turning now to the second key aspect of deconstruction, namely its privileging of the reader or interpretive perspective, perhaps this very questionability is not so inimical to ethics as it seems.

To explain, the readerly trope of deconstruction makes plain that there can be no resting satisfied with any singular author or authority of truth or goodness. Interpretation is all. And therefore, the need of others is not simply edifying but a must, a kind of ethical demand. What's more, as we suggested in Chapter 5, this kind of demand is not new. In fact, all truly philosophical thought actually inscribes this lack of authority and need of others within its very expression.

Put bluntly, philosophy is not and never has been deterministic. It prescribes no certain truths. As such, in its very attempt to express the truth, it necessarily must call upon the aid of its reader, whether known or unknown, to fill in the inevitable gaps, to correct the perpetual misunderstandings, to interpret.

And thus, ethically speaking, we are able to put the undoing truth of deconstruction to work and thereby instill hope for a truly universal good. How? Through the emulation of the philosophical mode, namely a gesture of open-ness even as we express our fixed view of truth, the good, nature. In short, every philosophy is not a

closed circle but necessarily must elicit the help of its readers, calling for their involvement in its ever incomplete, imperfect, limited, human expression of all that is. In short, philosophical truth or goodness is, like deconstruction, nothing more or less than a gesture of friendship.

Specifically, to make this perhaps a little clearer, we cite two examples on how this gesture plays itself out. First, we look at how Derrida concludes his argument in *Politics of Friendship*. Thus, having spelled out his friendship-as-impossible ethic, Derrida concludes not with an authorial pronouncement, but with a plea to his readers. “O my democratic friends...”<sup>11</sup>

Quite simply, it is to we, the infinite readers of *Politics of Friendship*, that Derrida finally addresses his ethics. In effect, the possibility of this ethic depends upon we, the readers from various time-periods, from various backgrounds and cultures, to willingly participate and thereby meet the perpetual deconstructive demand of interpreting or questioning all truths or goods. Of course, the question remains open as to whether we will be willing to meet this unending and open-ended ethical demand. Nevertheless, in face of this admittedly profound sense of doubt, once again we hear it, “O my democratic friends...” In the end, almost seeming to open his arms to us, Derrida quite literally trusts that we will do so.

Onto the second and last example of this ethico-reader aspect of deconstruction, in an English interview on *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida was asked if he did not think such an open-ended standard naïve.<sup>12</sup> To the point, amid so much real exclusion, especially on economic grounds, how could one possibly suggest holding to an extreme

ethic of such infinite “hospitality” to the other? Derrida’s answer, playful (evoking laughter) and very serious at the same time was simply: “I ask them nevertheless.”

Surely such a response is naïve. Perhaps even mad. Indeed, is it not rather depressing to think that this open-ended and trusting stance, this political good, may be all we humans have got? On the other hand, in light of all that Aristotle and Derrida have taught us about the human relationship to the good, this call to friendship might actually mean a great deal in ethical terms.

In closing then, the political good amounts to this: amid the violence and exclusion, the tyranny and force, all that we have to rely upon is, to repeat, that most fragile of ethical foundations, human trust and love for and in each other in all of our differences. Such, in any case, is where Aristotle and especially Derrida with his deconstruction finally lead us. Now, of course, given our bloody human history which continues to this day, this seems a rather dubious ethical prospect at best. Indeed, one may even go so far as to say that such a willing open-ness to the other may very well lead us to an ethical abyss from which we ever attempt to escape via narcissistic, tyrannically imposed ethical “fixes.”<sup>13</sup> Still, while all of this is probably true, always will be true, is there not at the same time something amazing about the fact that in the face of millennia of violence and hatred, human beings yet continue to form friendships, to somehow cross the Rubicon and actually seek the love and trust of others? And in this sense, while friendship may be all we humans have, its ubiquity in all cultures, in all of human experience, assures that its ethical promise is great, perhaps more than we have yet dared realize.

**ENDNOTES****NOTES - INTRODUCTION**

<sup>1</sup> Longinovic, Tomislav, "Afterword," *Words are something else*, David Albahari, Ellen Elias-Bursac (Tr.), Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Ill., 1996, pp. 207-215, p. 215.

**NOTES – CHAPTER 1**

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, T. A. Sinclair (Tr), Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1975. Pp. 69-70. Aristotle critiques Socrates views on virtue in the *Republic*.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross (Tr.), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991. pp. 140-149. Aristotle distinguishes between political and philosophic types of science or knowledge. On the other hand, as we shall see in the body of the text shortly, while different, political knowledge is finally *lesser* than the philosophical (p.145). It is worth adding that this is a key divide amongst Aristotelian scholars. Two collections of essays which capture this divide particularly well are: 1) Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. 2) Günther Panzig, *Aristoteles "Politik": Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, Friedrichshafen/Bodensee, 25.8.-3.9.1987. See especially Terence Irwin's article "The Good of Political Activity."

Lastly, as a general technical note, I refer to both *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Eudemian Ethics* as the *Ethics* in the body of the essay.

<sup>3</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> *The Politics*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Note that the term "man" here is significant. Aristotle will later suggest in both *The Politics* and *The Ethics* that women, children and slaves amongst others are not naturally political. More on this exclusionary tendency of Aristotle's political good will be discussed later in the body of this Chapter which will later be expanded upon in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 when Derrida is brought into the discussion.

<sup>7</sup> *The Politics*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> See note 6.

<sup>9</sup> *The Politics*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> This may seem a surprising move, but I believe it is fully justified. I am not concerned with whether Aristotle is "right" in his critique of Plato or not. Rather, what matters is how Aristotle thusly uses his method to distinguish his thought. In other words, Aristotle's thought on politics is inextricably linked to his distinguishing himself from Plato. I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum for this insight: Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986. See Chapters 8 and 10.

<sup>11</sup> As a useful comparison and with whom I respectfully quibble see: Hans George Gadamer, *The idea of the good in Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy*, P. Christopher Smith (Tr.), Yale University Press: New Haven, 1986. In particular, I agree with Gadamer that in spite of Aristotle's critique, Plato and Aristotle share a similar view of the good. On the other hand, I quibble with his view as to who is the "dominant" partner in this relationship. Namely, while he thinks that Plato is more Aristotelian, I think that Aristotle is more Platonic. See note 1 for reference to a collection essays that further enrich this discussion and to whom I additionally relied upon to formulate my own opinion on this matter.

<sup>12</sup> *The Politics*, p. 57. Aristotle contrasts his view of political unity with that of Plato and suggests that the latter actually violates his own unity claims.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61. See also note 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. Emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to this notion of greater individuation in Aristotle to: Martha Nussbaum, "Shame, Separateness and Political Unity: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato," Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. pp. 395-435.

<sup>17</sup> *The Politics*, p. 57. Emphasis author.

<sup>18</sup> *The Politics*, p. 29. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> *The Politics*, p. 69. Aristotle notes the novelty of Plato's ideas.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224-231. On how to preserve tyrannies. With respect to the frequent need of force to compel the masses to the good, this is implied throughout *The Politics*.

<sup>21</sup> See note 2.

<sup>22</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. Aristotle speaks here of acting in accord with the rational principle. By the way, this definition of virtue is explicitly linked to political science. This will become relevant in a few sentences.

<sup>24</sup> See note 23.

<sup>25</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See note 25.

<sup>27</sup> Actually, Platonists rather than Plato are criticized in this instance. As an aside, many scholars suggest that Aristotle's critique of Plato may be directed more at his disciples who, it seems, unlike their more nuanced teacher, tended to take his ideas in orthodox terms as disciples sometimes do. See notes 2 and 11 for references which discuss this issue. Also, see: Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1999. In this book, Annas suggests we moderns may be missing Plato's nuanced view of the good because we have colored it with our own modern, progressive interpretations. In this sense, if Annas is correct, Aristotle may not be disagreeing with Plato at all, but with his followers who tended to narrow down Plato's views to further their own agendas.

<sup>28</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. Emphasis mine.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. Emphasis author.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 4-6. However, this is a theme throughout Aristotle's *Ethics*. Not surprisingly, this centrality of habituation or "a good upbringing" is something that sets Aristotle's view of the good apart from Plato who tends to prefer remaking the *polis* from scratch. See: Plato, *Republic*, Allan Bloom (Tr.), Basic Books, 1991. See especially Book 5. For an interesting divergence of views on the role of habituation in Aristotle see the references in notes 2 and 11, plus the two following references: 1) For a positive view (in contrast to our non-habitual modern view) see: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1981. 2) For a view which sees this almost entirely in terms of lessons taught by a philosopher to a young potential political ruler see: Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the philosophy of friendship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 11 and 13. Aristotle suggests the final end for man is a good achievable by action. Further, he suggests this good is related to man's unique nature. Namely, we are not simply like other living things; we do not seamlessly reach our final end. On the contrary, we are governed by a rational principle which at one and the same time compels our obedience and requires that we think and deliberate about our ends. For man, that final end which defines what he is is always based on his actions and deliberation. It is never seamless. In short, by nature we are political animals.

<sup>37</sup> See notes 35 and 36.

<sup>38</sup> See notes 35 and 36. Also, this political exemplar is implied from Aristotle's notion that what is good for man is based not on contemplation alone, but mainly on political science.

<sup>39</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 265.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27. In discussing the kinds of virtue needed by men, Aristotle discusses not our political nature, but our human *condition* which is ever composed of the rational and irrational (passions). The implication is that the political nature is an ideal which, given our condition, we strive for but can never quite reach. This will be discussed further in the body of the text shortly.

<sup>41</sup> This idea of control rather than free choice is once again a hot topic amongst Aristotelian scholars. See notes 2, 11 and 35 for a list of references. In a literal sense, I think it is hard to dispute this conclusion

since Aristotle himself has affixed the good for man or political science to the idea of following the right rule of reason which as we have seen, entails self-control. In other words, in order to choose aright, we must, Aristotle suggests, “act in accord with the right rule of reason.” The freedom of free choice is quite simply not an option for Aristotle.

For a slightly different but no less “unfree” point of view on this matter, see in particular: Jonathan Barnes, “Aristotle and Political Liberty” Günther Panzig (Ed.), *Aristoteles "Politik": Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, Friedrichshafen/Bodensee, 25.8.-3.9.1987. On the other hand, for a “freer” point of view see: R. Sorabji, “Comments on J. Barnes” in the same volume.

<sup>42</sup> *The Politics*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle’s refutation of Plato’s Idea of the good in the *Ethics* is in fact based on a much more detailed refutation in *The Metaphysics* which seems to make this contention of his agreement with Plato’s singular principle behind this good clearer. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, John Warrington (Tr.), Dent: London, 1961. See especially Book M.

<sup>44</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> This is of course debatable. See note 2 for but one collection of essays on this debate. In particular, as is outlined succinctly at *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 144-147, Aristotle implies my argument by suggesting philosophic wisdom is the most finished form of knowledge. As such, it necessarily encompasses all other forms of knowledge including political science. Further, because of this added political nuance, Aristotle adds a more enriched portrait of the universal good as a whole. On the other hand, as J. L. Ackrill in “Aristotle on Eudaimonia,” *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.) University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980, suggests, the relation between philosophic wisdom and political science is unclear in Aristotle. Indeed, in support of Ackrill’s view, in the passage I just referred to in the *Ethics* above, Aristotle also suggests that while philosophic wisdom is the most finished form of knowledge, it is also evident, that this wisdom and the art of politics *cannot be the same*. Needless to add, it is this ambiguity in Aristotle that causes the debate of whether or not philosophy trumps politics in his thought in the first place.

<sup>46</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> See note 40.

<sup>48</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 19-22. Aristotle suggests some hope for our reaching the good and happy human life during our lifetime, but at the same time he also suggests that because virtue is an activity, there is also a sense of incompleteness at least until we are dead. And even then, there can be reversals insofar as our descendants may dishonor our legacy. The activity of virtue, by the way, is made necessary in the first place because of our composite condition and more precisely due to the fact that we always have irrational, passionate elements within us.

<sup>49</sup> See note 48. In particular, our perpetual incompleteness which is often remedied by our death suggests that the only road to completeness must be divinity. Needless to add, this transforms our political nature into a kind of divine ideal. Human mortality is quite literally a problem for the good. This will be a launching point for Derrida’s differing view of the political good beginning in Chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 210-211. Discussion of various differing virtues and affect on who rules and who does not. An adult aristocratic male rule is implied here. See *The Politics*, p. 52 for an even more blunt assertion of each one’s virtue and what effect this has in terms of their political nature: “Thus the deliberative [political/free choosing] faculty in the soul is not present at all in a slave; in a female it is inoperative, in a child undeveloped.” From this, Aristotle derives their subsequent tasks. As an aside, I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum’s account on this score. See: Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986. In particular, in Chapter 12 of this work, while suggesting Aristotle’s more “politic” method leads to a more enriching account of the good, Nussbaum also suggests that Aristotle’s own application of it sometimes leaves a little to be desired, for example, his account of women’s possibility for excellence is crude and hastily drawn. See the following for an alternate view of Aristotle with respect to women: Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the philosophy of friendship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003. In particular, Pangle suggests that Aristotle’s views on women may be more circumscribed given his audience, not his own views on women.

<sup>51</sup> This discussion of what Aristotle's "exclusion" might mean will be taken up again in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 when Derrida's view of the good is discussed.

<sup>52</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 269-276. In his transition to *The Politics*, Aristotle suggests a) that persuasion to his ethical teachings is likely achievable only by a few noble young men and b) that the many are more likely compelled by force; hence the necessary turn to the more "negative" *Politics*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271. Emphasis author.

<sup>55</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Leo Paul S. de Alvarez (Tr.), Waveland Press: Prospect Heights, Ill., 1989. p. 54. In speaking of Princes who obtain their principate through wickedness, Machiavelli does not condemn wickedness as such, but rather cruelty badly used. In other words, wickedness is fine if it is used to found and maintain a political state. There is no concern with "good" here. However, as an aside, as we will see in Chapter 4 with Derrida's deconstruction of Carl Schmitt, such an apparent lack of concern with the singular good may itself imply that a fixed good is actually present. For Machiavelli, as for Schmitt, this "good" relates to the desire for "glory."

<sup>56</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 204. See also: Aristotle, *The Eudemian Ethics*, J. Solomon (Tr.) in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English, Volume 9*, W.D Ross (Ed.), Oxford University Press: London, 1966. 1244b 5-15 and 1245b5-20.

For Derrida's citation see: Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins (Tr.), Verso: London, 1997. p. 302.

## NOTES – CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup> From here on out, both works will be collectively referred to as the *Ethics* in the body of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida's approach is not simply construction but construction via perpetual deconstruction. It is this deconstruction that, as we shall see in Chapter 3, will make more of a political ethic possible in the problematic or open-ended sense that I am suggesting here.

As for my "opinion" on the politic nature of Aristotle's ethic of friendship, it is necessarily caught up in the huge debate amongst Aristotelian scholars on this very subject. See in particular the following: 1) Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. See especially John Cooper's article, "Aristotle on Friendship." 2) Günther Panzig, *Aristoteles "Politik": Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum, Friedrichshafen/Bodensee, 25.8.-3.9.1987*. See especially John Cooper's article "Political Animals and Civic Friendship," Julia Annas's article "Comments on J. Cooper" and Terence Irwin's "The Good of Political Activity." 3) Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000. See especially Richard Mulgan's article "The Role of Friendship in Aristotle's Political Theory." 4) Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986. See especially Chapter 12. 5) Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the philosophy of friendship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003. 6) Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's philosophy of friendship*, State University of New York Press: Albany, 1995.

In general Cooper, Pangle and to some extent Nussbaum take a fairly uncritical view, namely that Aristotelian friendship fairly seamlessly links up to his political philosophy. On the other hand, Mulgan, Irwin, Annas and Stern-Gillet see more of a tension, namely in Aristotle's attempt to universalize friendship and at the same time make room for unique, actual friends. I confess I am more sympathetic to the latter view and hence the eventual need for Derrida in my argument. However all of these works were highly useful in suggesting to me the political depths of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship and in particular all that goes with trying to rectify a singular good or ethical standard with the reality of *others*. By contrast, moderns, who largely do not tarry with this other, perhaps sacrifice a huge swath of human reality (its politic or otherness *fact*) for the sake of logical consistency.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross (Tr.), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991. pp. 246-247. The essence of friendship is in living together and the good is augmented by their companionship.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193. See also: Aristotle, *The Eudemian Ethics*, J. Solomon (Tr.) in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English, Volume 9*, W.D Ross (Ed.), Oxford University Press: London, 1966. 1234b10-

1235b20. Opinions about friendship are given which Aristotle goes on to say he will now more deeply try to justify in an attempt to “put an end to difficulties and contradictions” on the topic.” More on this desire to accord reality with opinion, and how it will eventually suggest the tension of note 2, will be said below in the text of the essay. With respect to his “sifting” method in general, see: Aristotle, *The Politics*, T. A. Sinclair (Tr.), Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1975, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.194 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1236b25-1237a35.

<sup>6</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 195-199 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1239a1-1239b20.

<sup>7</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 227-230 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1240a5-b35. Note that this internal argument is far less systematic in the latter work. This might suggest two things: 1) it is an earlier work. 2) it is difficult to *make* this internal argument systematic. As shall become clear in the body of the text in this Chapter, I lean towards the latter interpretation. I am grateful to the following for both of these insights: Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1999. In particular, in this book, Annas suggests we moderns may be missing Plato’s nuanced view of the good because we have colored it with our own modern, progressive interpretations. In this sense, if Annas is correct, Aristotle’s view does not “progress” from one work to another. And this, by extension, hints at the latter interpretation of his view.

<sup>8</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 232-234. Aristotle here speaks of men loving more what they have won by labor; it is the “handiwork” of their love as it were. In this way, the good man becomes a kind of *product* and therefore a more stable *thing* in the act of loving. We shall see how this becomes problematic shortly.

<sup>9</sup> See note 3. Aristotle vacillates between the good and pleasure. I am grateful to the following for this insight (though it is more positive about Aristotle’s ability to rectify the two than I am): Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986. See especially Chapter 12.

For a less “tense” view of this relationship, see: Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the philosophy of friendship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003. She resolves the tension by suggesting Aristotle’s “perfect” or truly good friendship is akin to a pedagogical relation of older teacher (philosopher) and student.

<sup>10</sup> This idea that friendship is a rather “odd” virtue ties into the general Aristotelian scholarly debate around Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*. In particular, it is unclear how or if Aristotle reconciles practical virtue to his account of the good/happiness. On the other hand, there is also a great deal of debate centering on whether Aristotelian friendship has any link to the value of politics whatsoever since it is virtually not mentioned at all in the *Politics*. For the debate around *eudaimonia*, see especially: Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. For the apparent lack of friendship references in the *Politics*, see Rorty’s collection again and also: Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000. See especially Richard Mulgan’s article “The Role of Friendship in Aristotle’s Political Theory” where he quibbles precisely with this problem.

<sup>11</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.238-239. Emphasis mine.

<sup>12</sup> See note 4.

<sup>13</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196. However, this is also a general theme of the friendship books in both *The Eudemian Ethics* and *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>15</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 193 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1235b10-1236a15. In the latter, Aristotle actually suggests he will resolve this puzzle.

<sup>16</sup> This, as we shall see, is Aristotle’s fundamental claim. See especially *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 234-238. “The true nature of self-love.”

<sup>17</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 193 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1235a10-1235b10. Interestingly, the latter presents these “opposite” opinions in more detail. This suggests that they may be more persuasive than perhaps Aristotle would like given his desire for sameness.

<sup>18</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 194. Men confuse the good with the seeming good. This will be expanded upon in the body of the text shortly. Nevertheless I will add here that this is what Aristotle will seek to resolve with his internal friendship argument on pp. 227-238.

<sup>19</sup> See notes 6 and 18.

<sup>20</sup> See notes 7 and 18.

<sup>21</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.194. People love on more grounds than one. See also note 18. Lastly, see *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1235b15-25 where an attempt is made to distinguish the “puzzle” of the love of what we desire (the pleasant only) from the love of what we wish for (the good).

<sup>22</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 194 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1235b15-25; 1238a10-15. This is the reason for Aristotle making the distinction between good and seeming good in the first place. He wants to resolve the puzzle whereby regardless of how “good” the good is, people nevertheless often love something *other* than this good. As such, he literally needs to make this link apparent. And in fact, in the last reference of *The Eudemian Ethics*, the word “stable” is explicitly used in this respect. See also note 8 with respect to transforming the good friend into a stable thing.

<sup>23</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 194-199 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1238a30-1239b5. Interestingly, Aristotle is far more precise about his friendship distinctions in the former than in the latter. Also, as is obvious especially in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, there are clearly more than 3 kinds of friendship and/or friendliness. On the other hand, the three main friendships distinguished here give the reader a clear sense of Aristotle’s approach and in particular his tendency to “hierarchicalize” in order to “stabilize” his notion of friendship.

<sup>24</sup> See note 23.

<sup>25</sup> See note 23.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Plato’s Dialogue on Friendship: An interpretation of the Lysis with a new translation*, David Bolotin (Tr.), Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1989. Plato’s *Lysis* amounts to this kind of admission of failure. In particular, the theme of this dialogue is basically that self-interest is probably too powerful in friendship precisely because of the interference of *eros*. As such, tempting as it may be to link friendship to the common good, this would seem to be next to impossible and perhaps even counterproductive. Not surprisingly, the *Lysis* is often argued to be Aristotle’s foil in the friendship chapters of the *Ethics*. Indeed, Bolotin himself suggests as much in his interpretation in this volume. See especially his comments on pp.124-125.

<sup>27</sup> Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. In particular, I am indebted to John Cooper’s article, “Aristotle on Friendship” for this interpretation of Aristotelian good friendship.

<sup>28</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 238-241; 244-247. Aristotle actually says as much on these pages. By contrast, it is interesting that he is much more vague on this subject in *The Eudemian Ethics*. There is, however, an indirect reference to this link of the love and pleasure of friendship and happiness overall on 1237a25-35. See also notes 9 and 10.

<sup>29</sup> In this respect, his explicit analogies of friendship to political communities are no accident. See: *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 207-215. On the other hand, for evidence of a tension in Aristotle with respect to this relation of friendship to politics, see note 2.

<sup>30</sup> See note 29.

<sup>31</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.196 and 246-247. Pleasure and utility are incidental but still remain friendships. As for the greater nod to pleasure friendship, since the essence of friendship is in living together, naturally friendship does have a close link to pleasure. And so, the onus on Aristotle in this respect is not simply to show why pleasure and utility fall short, but more precisely, why good/true friendship most completely encompasses utility and pleasure. Again, it is significant that Aristotle never simply *rejects* these two lesser friendships. This is obviously significant to my argument and will be addressed a great deal in the body of this Chapter.

<sup>32</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 197. See also note 31. Good friendship encompasses all friendship. As such, according to Aristotle’s teleological logic, it necessarily defines what friendship is. By extension then, it is good friendship that will decide just how much “friendship” there is in relations of utility and pleasure. Without good friendship, there would quite simply be no way to *know*.

<sup>33</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 215-218. The analogy of utility friendship to politics and commercial relations occurs here. See also note 31.

<sup>34</sup> See note 31.

<sup>35</sup> I am aided in this suggestion by others. See note 2.

<sup>36</sup> This discussion occurs throughout the entire Book 9 discussion in *The Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle discusses the “Internal Nature of Friendship” (pp.227-238). However, see especially pp. 228-229 and 237.

<sup>37</sup> See notes 8 and 32.

<sup>38</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 197 and *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1237b30-40. The latter reference which links the rarity of good friendship to the fact that only a few can be *tested* will become especially relevant when we turn to Derrida’s deconstruction of Aristotle’s friendship in Chapter 5.

<sup>39</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Much is made of this move of the argument to the individual or self-love level. In particular, many scholars are surprised by its seeming selfishness after so much seeming altruism. Indeed, did not Aristotle spend a great deal of time linking the common good of friendship to loving the other for his *own* sake? See especially John Cooper’s article “Aristotle on Friendship” in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980. In particular Cooper highlights this “selfish” turn and at the same time tries to justify Aristotle’s continued altruism.

On the other hand, other scholars seem to see in it a rhetorical move by which to call its noble audience to the common good. For this view, see especially: Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the philosophy of friendship*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003.

As for my own view, I see both and neither. Specifically, using Cooper’s own argument against him, as it were, I believe it is largely an argumentative tool on Aristotle’s part, in reverse of Plato’s tool in the *Republic*. Namely, it is a move from the macro to the micro level (whereas Plato moves from the micro to the macro level) to make the same argument, in this case the superiority of good friendship.

As proof of my own view, I draw on Aristotle’s argument itself, in particular the discussion which immediately precedes the internal one, namely, why must one break off friendships with bad men. For Aristotle, bad men simply cannot be loved. The shift to the micro level is therefore needed in order to justify why this is the case. In any case, this will be expanded upon presently in the body of the text.

As an interesting aside which is yet related to this micro-macro theme, see: Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle’s philosophy of friendship*, State University of New York Press: Albany, 1995. Stern-Gillet suggests that to read Aristotle’s internal turn as “selfishness” may in fact be a result of our modern concept of the “individual.” In Aristotle’s time, there was no individual *per se*. As such, when he turns to the discussion of our internal nature, he may be far more communal than we think.

<sup>41</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 225-227, “Occasions for breaking off friendship.” Aristotle simply assumes that we will want to break off relations with the bad man. Thus: “Surely it is impossible [to love a man who has turned bad], since not everything can be loved, but only what is good.” Now he must prove this contention. See also note 40.

<sup>42</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 229.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236. Not loving the authoritative element in himself, such a man in effect, virtually loves nothing at all.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.227-230 and 237. Unlike most of we poor creatures who think ourselves good, and unlike the bad man who has nothing in him to love, the good man *is* good. As such, only a good man should be a lover of self; for only in him is there quite literally some *thing* to love. See also note 8.

<sup>46</sup> See note 45. We actual men (and women) are poor creatures in this respect.

<sup>47</sup> More precisely, we confuse the good with the seeming good and so end up loving bad or at least not good men. See notes 18 and 21.

<sup>48</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 195-197. The good of good friendship is how one is able to know what friendship is. As such, it provides a measuring stick by which we can decide to what degree if any our own actual relations are “friendly” or not. Without this measure, we may have friendships, but we would never know. *This* is the launching point for Derrida’s argument. See also note 32.

<sup>49</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1981. I am indebted to MacIntyre for this particular insight. However, I should point out that I do not necessarily agree with how he chooses to apply it, namely as a means by which to use Aristotelian virtue to critique modern “emotivism.” Rather, as shall become clear with Derrida, I have an opposite intention.

Namely, I will try to suggest that even if all we have is emotivism to resolve moral claims of right, this does not make the ethic of friendship any less pertinent. Precisely because we exist in this so-called “after virtue” state of affairs, this ethic may be even more literally *there*.

### NOTES – CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup> The body of secondary sources on Derrida’s supposed ethical turn (or not) is vast. I will name here only those which directly influenced my own argument in one way or another. For an explicitly negative view see: 1) Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987. See especially Chapter 2. For a less negative though no less critical view of Derrida’s so-called ethics see: 2) Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000. See especially Fred Dallmayr’s article “Derrida and Friendship.” For a more sympathetic but finally skeptical view, see: 3) Matthias Fritsch, “Derrida’s Democracy to Come,” *Constellations*, Vol.9, No.4, 2002, pp. 575-597. For a fairly sympathetic though perhaps more Levinasian take on Derrida’s ethics see: 4) Adam Thurschwell, “Friendship, Tradition, Democracy: Two Readings of Aristotle,” *Law/Text/Culture*, Vol.5, No.2, 2001, pp. 271-325 and Adam Thurschwell, “Specters and Scholars: Derrida and the Tragedy of Political Thought,” *2002 Law, Culture and Humanities Conference*, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 2002. For a very sympathetic but perhaps more Nietzschean/religious take, see: 5) John Caputo, “Good will and the hermeneutics of friendship: Gadamer and Derrida” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.28, No.5, 2002, pp. 512-522 and John Caputo, “Who is Derrida’s Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come,” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.29, 1999, pp. 184-198. Lastly, for a view fairly close to the one I shall take see: 6) Gary B. Madison, *Working through Derrida*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1993. See especially Richard Kearney’s article, “Derrida’s Ethical Re-turn.” Also see: Chris Farrands, “Touching friendship beyond friendship: Friendship and citizenship in global politics,” *Alternatives* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 143-173.

In general, as shall hopefully become obvious in the text of this Chapter, I take a positive view of Derridean ethics. However, I shall qualify this in my conclusion insofar as no one formulation of ethics can ever be adequate. In other words, if the impossible of ethics is to be taken seriously, the work of ethics can never end.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, Verso: London, 1997. p.29. Loving with an open heart is contrasted to the attempt to stabilize love in the Aristotelian way.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 29. Derrida asks: “What would a future be if the decision [for friendship] were able to be programmed, and if the risk, the uncertainty, the unstable certainty, the inassurance of the ‘perhaps,’ were not suspended on it at the opening of what comes, flush with the event, within it and with an open heart?” Derrida’s “project” in this book is to literally render the traditional definition unstable not in order to reject it, but to discover its truly “unstable” origin, i.e., that which allows it to be. This shall become clearer in the body of the text when we discuss Derrida’s concept of “nature.”

<sup>4</sup> See note 3.

<sup>5</sup> I am entirely indebted to Descombes for the insights in this paragraph. In particular, see: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Trs.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980. See especially pp. 77-83 and 137-152.

<sup>6</sup> This connection of the Derridean “good” to that of Heideggerian Being is suggested by Derrida himself in the following collection: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (Tr.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978. See especially Derrida’s article: “Violence and Metaphysics.” Also of immense help to me in this context was Richard Kearney’s article, “Derrida’s Ethical Re-turn,” in Gary B. Madison, *Working through Derrida*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1993. In short, he also suggests a Heideggerian connection.

<sup>7</sup> These concepts emerge most clearly in Derrida’s masterwork on the subject: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976. However they are implicit or “applied” in all of his work. We shall see how this “works” below in the body of the text as well as in Chapters 4 and 5 to come.

<sup>8</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 134. Emphasis author. It is worth noting that this quotation is set in the following specific context. Derrida is qualifying and so defending Heidegger’s Being against the anti-otherness charges of Levinas. We will discuss the significance of what this means below in the body of the text of this Chapter. In particular, we shall use it later to explicitly address Derrida’s eventual “disagreement” with Heideggerian Being.

<sup>9</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*. pp. 135 and 140. Also see: Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in *Existence and Being*, R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick (Tr.), Regnery/Gateway, Inc: South Bend, IND, 1979, pp. 292-324. Being-as-presence is basically equated by both Derrida and Heidegger with Plato’s *eidos* or Idea of the good which Western philosophy has largely left unquestioned. By contrast Heidegger will posit Being as a question. As such, Being becomes transcategorical, beyond any single *eidos* or conception of truth or good. In any case, with specific reference to the quotation Derrida cites in note 8, it is important to note that Being both in the Heideggerian and Platonic sense refers to the principle of all existence or reality or good. We, of course, given our political good focus, will largely be focusing on Being in terms only of human existence. On the other hand, it is likely, especially in the Heideggerian case, that this narrowing to human existence or reality will not present a fundamental problem. In short, only humans question Being.

<sup>10</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*. pp. 135 and 140. Derrida himself does not, as we are about to do, clarify this actual dynamic side of things via Aristotle, but by way of Husserl. Still, though the two latter thinkers are vastly different I think what Derrida says in this context are relevant to both. In particular, like Aristotle, Husserl too finally succumbs to the eternal stance of Being-as-presence regardless of his dynamic actuality. Namely, as with Aristotle, Husserl is concerned about making theory fit with the “things themselves.” On the other hand, also similar to Aristotle, Husserl is eventually tempted to make his theory eternal. We shall see what this means with respect to Aristotle shortly. As an interesting aside on Husserl, he was Heidegger’s teacher, and so, needless to say, his thought surely had some influence on what were later to be Heidegger’s thoughts on Being.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1987, pp.141-142. Heidegger notes this zoological or categorical sensibility as far as man’s existence is concerned. “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p 140. Derrida, by suggesting that Heidegger’s Being is transcategorical literally tries, with Heidegger, to break out of this zoological framework.

<sup>12</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, pp. 134-135. Again, Derrida makes this point using Husserl rather than Aristotle. Nevertheless, again, it makes the same statement with respect to both. Thus, Derrida demonstrates this idea negatively by suggesting that Husserl violates the spirit of the “things themselves” by transforming this spirit into a singular principle of existence or theory. So too, I will argue shortly, with Aristotle’s political animal.

<sup>13</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, pp. 134-135. Last note on Husserl. Derrida makes this same point by suggesting that for Husserl the unanswerable question becomes: can we ever really know or finally capture what the “things themselves” actually are?

<sup>14</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, pp. 137-138. Being lets human beings be; lets human reality be what it is and as such, opens up the possibilities for all *eidos* of Being.

<sup>15</sup> See note 14. This historical decision is implied, Derrida suggests, by the non-determined, transcategorical nature of Heidegger’s conception of Being (i.e., what we will soon learn as its *letting be* character). Interestingly, Heidegger is more explicit as far as the need of this decision is concerned. Not surprisingly, this will eventually emerge as a point of divergence between he and Derrida (i.e., gathering versus disassociation). In any case, for “proof” of Heidegger’s decisiveness see especially: *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 37-39. Here Heidegger suggests with some ferocity what Germany’s “decision” and/or historical mission should be.

<sup>16</sup> Namely, it is not simply historicist. See the following for a very detailed account of how Heidegger’s historicity actually serves as a kind of “corrective” (if we have the patience) to this very problem: Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Trs.), Harper and Row: New York, 1962. See especially the Introduction, pp. 21-64 where Heidegger outlines the “exposition of the question of the meaning of Being.”

<sup>18</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper and Row: New York, 1971, p. 44. “Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force.” The work refers to a work of art and the emphasis in particular is on the work-being aspect of this work which human beings, as part of their being necessarily bring forth in their creation of this work. In this sense, it is an expression of their historical *being there* in which they are literally called upon by being to create in this way.

<sup>20</sup> This is the whole point of Heidegger’s book: *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

<sup>21</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Peggy Kamuf (Tr.), Routledge: New York, 1994. p. 10. *This* is what Derrida means when he speaks of the “priority” of the ghost in philosophy or the replacement of ontology with *hauntology*. Namely it is with Heidegger’s Being-as-time in mind.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” *Philosophy Today* Vol.20 No. 4, 1976, pp. 267-284.

<sup>24</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques\\_Derrida](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Derrida). As a related aside, Derrida does not shy away from the idea that in general, violence is a perpetual fact behind all notions of justice, common good and the like. In this respect, it is worth noting the influence of Blanchot on his thought as well: Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, Elizabeth Rottenberg (Tr.), Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 137. Emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger makes this same point in a slightly different way via his notion of human truth as error. See: Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in *Existence and Being*, R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick (Tr.), Regnery/Gateway, Inc: South Bend, IND, 1979, pp. 292-324. We will discuss this further in the body of the text below.

Also see the following for an article which makes a similar *political* point to that which I am making here: Chris Farrands, “Touching friendship beyond friendship: Friendship and citizenship in global politics,” *Alternatives* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 143-173.

<sup>27</sup> For similar take on this despair see: Adam Thurschwell, “Specters and Scholars: Derrida and the Tragedy of Political Thought,” *2002 Law, Culture and Humanities Conference*, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 2002. However, I think my view on this despair is perhaps less “despairing” than that of Thurschwell.

<sup>28</sup> “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 141. After refuting any such concept of Being as an ideal of peace with all others, Derrida concludes: “One cannot escape the *economy of war*.” Being-as-time quite literally requires the movement of “us versus them” decisions. On the other hand, as we shall soon see in the body of the text, because it is movement, it is also beyond these decisions or *errors*. See also Descombes for further clarification of how this movement works for Derrida: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Trs.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980. See especially pp. 77-83 and 137-152.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>

<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, perhaps inclusion is not really Heidegger’s “goal” anyway. See note 15.

<sup>31</sup> “On the Essence of Truth,” *Existence and Being*, p. 318.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 318. Emphasis author.

<sup>33</sup> As further proof of this point, note that for Heidegger, man’s creative faculties via art and poetry, and not philosophy or truth seeking, are the penultimate expression of this at once error-ridden tendency and the truth of the chaos of Being. See in particular all of the essays in the following collection: Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper and Row: New York, 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, William Lovitt (Tr.), Harper and Row: New York, 1977.

<sup>35</sup> In contrast with Heidegger’s earlier writings which seem to focus on the man’s error in an active sense, his later writings seem to sanction a more passive approach which lends weight to the temptation to see this error as the truth. See his own suggestions to this effect in the following: Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” *Philosophy Today* Vol.20 No. 4, 1976, pp. 267-284.

<sup>36</sup> The connection of Plato (and Aristotle) to this controlling error of technology is probably most clearly expressed in Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. See especially "Chapter 4. Limitation of Being."

<sup>37</sup> *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Of course, Heidegger seeks to remedy this precisely by *questioning* technology. See: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 35. On the other hand, given the danger the essence of technology represents, this so-called saving power of questioning may be inadequate. Indeed, what if his own questions are but similar bastards of this very bastard Being?

<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, some Heidegger scholars echo this sentiment. See especially: Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1995, pp. 272-273. See also: "Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel's Interview with Martin Heidegger."

<sup>40</sup> I am again indebted to Descombes for this insight. See his: *Modern French Philosophy*, pp. 77-83 and 137-152.

Also, Derrida implies as much on pp. 148-149 in "Violence and Metaphysics," *Writing and Difference*.

<sup>41</sup> Thus, the full title of this essay is: "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas."

<sup>42</sup> "Violence and Metaphysics," *Writing and Difference*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 151-152. Derrida suggests Levinas is an empiricist. Also see note 44.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151. "By making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other, Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse. [T]he true name of this inclination of thought to the Other...is *empiricism*. It is the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference."

<sup>45</sup> One may say this is Derrida's entire "project" to the extent that he has one, namely learning to accept this innate *unknowability*. Thanks yet again to Descombes' *Modern French Philosophy*, pp. 77-83 and 137-152 for this insight and those which I drew in the couple of paragraphs above.

<sup>46</sup> See note 28.

<sup>47</sup> Even the truth of otherness itself. "Violence and Metaphysics," *Writing and Difference*, pp. 146-147.

See also our remarks on this in the Conclusion Chapter.

<sup>48</sup> Following from Heidegger's *Destruktion*. See note 40.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>. "Deconstruction is not a method or a tool that you apply from the outside to something, deconstruction is something which happens, which happens inside."

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976, pp. 23 and 93. See also: Descombes' *Modern French Philosophy*, pp. 77-83 and 137-152.

<sup>51</sup> *Of Grammatology*, pp. 3-26. Derrida suggests this by pointing out the "logocentric" bias of the tradition of philosophy, as if Being, the truth, the good can be fully captured by our signs/speech. By contrast, he shows that with respect to this truth, all we have is writing or the text which is by definition (even as the tradition defines it) *inexact*. More on writing follows directly in the text of this Chapter.

<sup>52</sup> This is necessary precisely because of the speech/logocentric bias; namely this bias has been so complete and imposed that the only way to shake it up is a "patient meditation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called writing." In short: reading the canon. See: *Of Grammatology*, pp. 4 and 19.

<sup>53</sup> Difference, madness, duality, schizophrenia are all perennial themes in Derrida. For an explicit reference to this readerly or otherness fact within each of us see: *Politics of Friendship*, p. 71. "...where does one then find oneself, *qua* a self?"

<sup>54</sup> See note 51.

<sup>55</sup> *Of Grammatology*, pp. 10-18. "The Signifier and the Truth." The speech bias is announced whereby the signifier of reality, namely writing, is deemed exterior from said reality in general. On the other hand, Derrida goes on to suggest: "Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign [whether writing or speech] falls into decay."

<sup>56</sup> See notes 51 and 55.

<sup>57</sup> In this way, we see that Hegel is foreshadowed by Plato. See: *Of Grammatology*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Of Grammatology*, pp. 6-26. "We are disturbed by that which, in the concept of the sign-which has never existed or functioned outside the history (of) the philosophy (of presence)-remains systematically and genealogically determined by that history." (p. 14).

<sup>59</sup> For example, Rosen thinks that Derrida rejects Platonic philosophy. See: Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987. See especially Chapter 2.

By contrast Derrida in <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html> explains his approach as follows: "This has been from the beginning a terrible problem for me; not only for me - the caricature, the lack of respect for reading and so on and so forth... because as soon as you approach a text - not only mine, but many of the texts of people close to me - you see that of course the respect for these great texts, not only the Greek ones but especially the Greek ones, is the condition of our work... So I think we have to read them again and again and I feel however old I am, I feel that I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and I feel that I have to start again and again and again; it is something, it is a task which is in front of me, before me."

<sup>60</sup> *Of Grammatology*, p. 3. Derrida speaks of this in terms of logocentrism which he calls nothing but a most original and powerful ethnocentrism, imposing itself upon the world controlling in one and the same order: the concept of writing (privileging *logos*), the history of (the only) metaphysics (linking the truth to *logos*) and the concept of science (as logic).

<sup>61</sup> In fact, this is also true in *Of Grammatology*, which devotes a sizable chunk of its discussion (pp. 165-268) to the deconstruction of Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>. Same quotation as in note 59.

<sup>63</sup> I will attempt to show Derrida's own deconstruction or read of Aristotle, particularly his ethic of friendship in Chapter 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 24. The *aporia* in Aristotle's argument is linked to "another experience of the possible."

<sup>65</sup> See note 64.

<sup>66</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Derrida and Friendship," Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000, pp. 105-130, p. 124. "As experience teaches, retreat into solitude [the uncommon community] may occasionally lead to 'vertical' overtures, but it may also (and more frequently) be the gateway to an unabashed narcissism (which is the most prominent character flaw of our age)."

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 124-126.

#### NOTES – CHAPTER 4

<sup>1</sup> The secondary sources I relied upon to help flesh out my discussion of Derrida's friendship dovetail with those related to his ethical turn (or not) in Chapter 3, note 1. Indeed, as the argument of this Chapter will attempt to prove, Derrida's ethics is his philosophy and both in turn are friendship. In any case for the ease of the reader's perusal, I will list once again those sources particular influential on my own argument. For an explicitly negative view see: 1) Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987. See especially Chapter 2. For a less negative though no less critical view of Derrida's so-called ethics see: 2) Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000. See especially Fred Dallmayr's article "Derrida and Friendship." For a more sympathetic but finally skeptical view, see: 3) Matthias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come," *Constellations*, Vol.9, No.4, 2002, pp. 575-597. For a fairly sympathetic though perhaps more Levinasian take on Derrida's ethics see: 4) Adam Thurschwell, "Friendship, Tradition, Democracy: Two Readings of Aristotle," *Law/Text/Culture*, Vol.5, No.2, 2001, pp. 271-325 and Adam Thurschwell, "Specters and Scholars: Derrida and the Tragedy of Political Thought," 2002, *Law, Culture and Humanities Conference*, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 2002. For a very sympathetic but perhaps more Nietzschean/religious take, see: 5) John Caputo, "Good will and the hermeneutics of friendship: Gadamer and Derrida" *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.28, No.5, 2002, pp. 512-522 and John Caputo, "Who is Derrida's Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.29, 1999, pp. 184-198. Lastly, for a view fairly close to the one I shall take see: 6)

Gary B. Madison, *Working through Derrida*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1993. See especially Richard Kearney's article, "Derrida's Ethical Re-turn." Also see for an interesting International application of Derridean friendship: Chris Farrands, "Touching friendship beyond friendship: Friendship and citizenship in global politics," *Alternatives* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 143-173.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, Verso: London, 1997. Derrida's account of friendship is guided by the following quotation reiterated throughout: "O my friend, there are no friends." We will address this again in the body of the text.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab (Tr.), University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> As far as I am aware, I am the first to suggest that Derrida's notion of deconstruction is a kind of friendship. Indeed, most thinkers sympathetic to Derrida tend to see the deconstruction of friendship as *one* aspect of his overall argument rather than, as I am suggesting, its fundamental core. For example John Caputo, one of Derrida's most ardent defenders, emphasizes Derrida's undoing of the traditional, fraternal conception of friendship, but does not generalize this into a deconstructive vision of friendship-as-impossible: John Caputo, "Who is Derrida's Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.29, 1999, pp. 184-198. On the other hand, another defender, Richard Kearney, while suggesting that deconstruction is justice and further that this justice is linked to Levinasian alterity, yet makes little or no mention of friendship in Derrida's argument: Richard Kearney, "Derrida's Ethical Re-turn," in Gary B. Madison, *Working through Derrida*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1993. And yet, even in his earlier work, before the explicit *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida already hints at such conception. For example, in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976, p.71. "Only infinite Being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself." By contrast, for we, the finite, through and through, all is difference. And so, through and through, the human response should similarly be one of difference, of accepting the otherness as absolute, of being open, even hospitable to the other in our midst. *Friendship*.

<sup>5</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 1. However, this is also constantly echoed throughout the book.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Derrida and Friendship," Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000, pp. 105-130. Indeed, Derrida's account of friendship is the precise context for Dallmayr's critique.

<sup>8</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 302. "Without seeking to conceal it, it will have been understood that I wish to speak here of those men and women to whom a bond of friendship unites me – that is, I also want to speak to them... Let us cease speaking of friendship, of the *eidos* of friendship; let us speak of friends."

<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, like Aristotle, Derrida too believes that a friend can only confidently be proclaimed as such at death. So perhaps he does have a definition? See: *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 302-303. What this might ultimately mean for his conception of friendship-as-impossible will be addressed in the Conclusion. As a hint, we will suggest that such a belief could risk making Derrida's view yet another Being-as-presence truth and so not bode well for our political good search.

<sup>10</sup> In particular, it is linked to the fact that we are finite beings. See notes 4, 8 and 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 37. This discussion of the non-common community is prefaced by a discussion of the need for "philosophers of the future."

<sup>12</sup> This is the flavor of Dallmayr's critique. See his: "Derrida and Friendship" in *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*. Additionally, on a more overtly negative basis, this also colors Rosen's rejection of Derrida's too "hermeneutical" politics. See: Chapter 2 in Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> See our discussion of Heidegger's gathering bias in Chapter 3. Also, as a related aside, this brings to mind Gadamer's notion of our perpetual "prejudice" with respect to the good. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Trs.), Continuum: London, 2004. See especially Chapter 4, pp. 271-279. Basically, with prejudice, Gadamer suggests both that our interpretations are subject to error and that this need not be a problem if we simply acknowledge this

prejudice. In a sense, Derrida agrees with this notion of Gadamer's insofar as he calls upon others to ever question all expressions of truth. Clearly no interpretation or critique is adequate; it will also turn into an error-ridden truth if it too is not subject to this same critique. On the other hand, unlike Gadamer, I think, what Derrida dares us to do is get beyond this prejudice. How? By suggesting that beyond acceptance, there is the spirit of friendship, of welcoming the views of all others. For an expansion on my claim, see: John Caputo, "Good will and the hermeneutics of friendship: Gadamer and Derrida" *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.28, No.5, 2002, pp. 512-522.

<sup>14</sup> Although, as is hopefully clear by now, this negative charge can never quite be dispensed of once and for all. On the other hand, as we will now endeavor to show, this may be of crucial ethical importance in itself.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab (Tr.), University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 20-27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 69-78. Schmitt makes this point in reference to the "problem" of liberalism. Whether this also translates into a similar problem with democracy is an open question.

<sup>18</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 29-30. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> He would likely see Derrida as a liberal. See note 17.

<sup>21</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 29-30. At the risk of repetition, it is worth stating the quotation again, but this time with the last key sentence added which indicates the centrality of the *decision* in Schmitt's politics: "The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping. In its entirety the state as an organized political entity decides for itself the friend-enemy distinction. Furthermore, next to the primary political decisions and under the protection of the decision taken, numerous secondary concepts of the political emanate."

<sup>22</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 34-35. Emphasis mine.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53. Emphasis mine.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28-29. Schmitt is careful to draw his distinction between the public and private enemy. What Derrida will eventually quibble with is the certainty with which Schmitt seems to make this distinction.

<sup>25</sup> That this substantive good may mean an embrace of fascism is a distinct possibility. Schmitt was an active member of the Nazi Party for an extended period time. On the other hand, as was the case in my Chapter 3 discussion of Heidegger and Derrida's too slippery/non-fixed view of the good, perhaps such danger is innate to *any* view that dares to question ethical standards. In any case, for a slightly more sympathetic portrait of Schmitt's politics than perhaps what I sketch here, see both the "Introduction" by George Schwab and the "Foreword" by Tracy B. Strong in *The Concept of the Political*.

<sup>26</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 79.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104. Indeed, we see that Derrida does refer to his "project" as a kind of depoliticization. Of course, he also refers to such depoliticization as an opening to a new vision of politics. Needless to add, this is in keeping with the "positive" ethical side of his notion of friendship-as-impossible which we are now about to outline in the body of the text.

<sup>30</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 116, 127. Also see Chapters 4-6. On p. 116, Derrida questions Schmitt's concreteness, ultimately seeing it in terms of Schmitt imposing a kind of Platonic *eidos* on measureless political reality. On p. 127, we learn that despite not being caused by communal appurtenance, Schmitt's political decisionism nevertheless reaffirms communal appurtenance. Finally, the unifying theme of Chs.4-6 in general is that of the deconstruction of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction which broadly "proves" the odd "fixedness" of Schmitt's brand of arbitrary decisionism. We will refer to all of this again in the text below, but at that point, we will be speaking less in terms of arbitrariness but rather in more of an ethical cadence.

<sup>31</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 26-27. Emphasis mine.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> See note 30. This confirms Derrida's earlier "suspicions" about Schmitt's inconsistent arbitrariness.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" in *Existence and Being*, R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick (Tr.), Regnery/Gateway, Inc: South Bend, IND, 1979, pp. 292-324. As a reminder, Heidegger makes this conception of error clear in the following quotation, p. 318: "The error in which historical man must always walk, which makes his road erratic is essentially one with the manifest character of what-is. Error dominates man through and through by leading him astray. But, by this self-same aberration, error collaborates in the possibility which man has (and can always extract from his ex-istence) of *not allowing* himself to be lead astray, of himself experiencing error and thus not overlooking the mystery of *Da-sein*."

<sup>35</sup> This was the point of our "gathering" discussion with respect to Heidegger in Chapter 3. In brief, the crux of that argument was this: while Heidegger privileges the experience of our errors and thereby sees the movement of history in terms of a kind of battle of various assertions of error, Derrida instead privileges the process by which these errors are *undone*. Needless to add, it is the latter that is ultimately more conducive to a kind of dynamic yet universally inclusive ethic of friendship-as-impossible. The latter will be addressed in the text presently.

<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 3, we pointed out that difference, madness, duality, schizophrenia are all perennial themes in Derrida. As such, there is a readerly or otherness fact within each of us which assures that every one of our assertions is necessarily undone. In any case, for an account of this "madness see: *Politics of Friendship*, p. 71. "...where does one then find oneself, qua a self?"

<sup>37</sup> *Of Grammatology*, pp. 3-30. The insights of this entire paragraph are gleaned from these pages. In particular, here we learn that logocentrism is an ethnocentric view which has been imposed on the world. It can nevertheless be "destabilized" by privileging the "exteriority" of writing. The process of this destabilization involves patient reading and a detailed interpretation of texts. The reason it does not involve "more" is because the other of logocentrism is always already there. On the other hand, because of the power of logocentrism, it nevertheless takes constant work on our part to detect this excluded other.

<sup>38</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> As aside, it might be remembered that we attempted make a similar argument in Chapters 1 and 2 with respect to Aristotle. There is one fundamental difference, however. While Aristotle imposes his fixed good on the freely choosing political animal, Schmitt does the opposite, imposing the arbitrary on a much broader reality which includes the good. Nevertheless, or so Derrida contends and I tend to agree, the result of both impositions is the same: a kind of tyrannical or unjust imposition of a singular truth upon a much "messier" reality.

<sup>40</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 116. Emphasis author. Needless to add, we have now assumed an ethical cadence as promised in note 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 127. Emphasis mine. Also, again, see note 30.

<sup>42</sup> This fraternal, masculine bias of traditional concepts of friendship is a major theme in *Politics of Friendship*. In particular, it is something Derrida seeks to destabilize with questioning and interpreting that tradition. Hence his frequent, interspersed, "where is the sister?" remarks. In any case, for its specific application to Schmitt, see Chapters 4-6. Also, for a good secondary source on this fraternal argument in Derrida see: John Caputo, "Who is Derrida's Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.29, 1999, pp. 184-198.

<sup>43</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, p. 33. "The friend, enemy and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity. It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal or desirable. *But it must nevertheless remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid.*" Emphasis mine.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 20-27. We originally referenced this same point in note 16 and linked it to his rejection of liberalism in note 17. By contrast, given their ethical preoccupations, neither Aristotle nor even Plato for that matter seeks to be so politically *pure*.

<sup>45</sup> And which Aristotle more explicitly attempted to wrestle with. See Chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, p. 53. "If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a *weak* people will disappear." Emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 155-156. "Let us return to Schmitt and expand our perspective. That which a macroscopic view is able to align, from afar and from high above, is a certain desert. Not a woman in sight. An inhabited desert, to be sure, an absolutely full absolute desert, some might even say a desert teeming with people. Yes, but men, men, and more men, over centuries of war and costumes, hats, uniforms, soutanes, warriors, colonels, generals, partisans, strategists, politicians, professors, political theoreticians, theologians. In vain would you look for a figure of a woman, a feminine silhouette, and the slightest allusion to sexual difference. At any rate, this seems to be the case, the texts that deal with the political, with the political as such (*The Concept of the Political* and the *Theory of the Partisan*)."

<sup>49</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 302-306. Derrida speaks of democracy to come. As an interesting secondary source which touches upon the relationship of Derridean friendship to international relations see: Chris Farrands, "Touching friendship beyond friendship: Friendship and citizenship in global politics," *Alternatives* Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 143-173.

<sup>50</sup> Again, see Dallmayr's narcissistic critique of Derridean friendship: Fred Dallmayr, "Derrida and Friendship," Preston King and Heather Devere, *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity*, Frank Cass: London, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 60-61. Emphasis mine.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 250-252. Indeed, Derrida reveals this ethic in terms of the discussion of absolute responsibility of one before even the other-ness in oneself. On the other hand, the explicit reference to collapsing the friend/enemy boundaries occurs throughout Chapter 2 of *Politics of Friendship*.

## NOTES – CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976, pp. 141-164. This outlines Derrida's all-important argument on supplements/supplementarity in the expression of truth. This could also be rendered as the *trace*.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (Tr.), University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1978, pp. 278-300. Play is indeed significant in Derridean thought. However, as we shall soon see, far from being frivolous or narcissistic, such play is very serious. For Derrida, it is the only way to tweak out the other of logocentrism. For another interesting take on Derrida's "game-playing" and how this is the only way to remain free despite the yoke of the "master's" language (Hegel), see the as usual erudite and clear: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Trs.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980. See especially pp. 77-83 and 137-152. Also see Gadamer's discussion of the need for play in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Trs.), Continuum: London, 2004, pp. 102-110. Gadamer outlines the link between play and the centrality of the spectator (rather than the author/game-player) with regard to discovering "truth." In many ways, Gadamer's view agrees with that of Derrida. However, to see where it slightly differs (and to see how Derrida's take on play is perhaps more radical), see: John Caputo, "Good will and the hermeneutics of friendship: Gadamer and Derrida" *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.28, No.5, 2002, pp. 512-522.

<sup>3</sup> Another key theme in Derrida is this idea of the hidden. Obviously it is derived from Heidegger's conception of Being, in particular the relationship between the concealed and the unconcealed aspects of the *movement* of Being: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Trs.), Harper and Row: New York, 1962. See especially the Introduction, pp. 21-64 where Heidegger outlines the "exposition of the question of the meaning of Being." And for Derrida's agreement with this conception see: Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (Tr.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, pp.134-153. On the other hand, given his "dissociative" difference from Heidegger, Derrida nevertheless does have novel take on this hidden-ness of Being. Indeed, he uses it to defend something Heidegger would never do: democracy to come, or a radically inclusion conception of ethics based on acceptance of the other as other. For a taste of this novel conception see: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Peggy Kamuf (Tr.), Routledge: New York, 1994. Basically, Derrida suggests an indebted-ness on the part of much recent end of history literature to Marx.

In particular, he argues, there is a hidden specter of Marx (and obviously Hegel too) behind conceptions of end of history which ironically argue that Marxism has been effaced.

<sup>4</sup> See note 2.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab (Tr.), University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996, p. 53. "If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a *weak* people will disappear." Emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, Verso: London, 1997, pp. 60-61. "And what if tomorrow a new political wisdom were to let itself be inspired by this lie's wisdom, by this manner of knowing how to lie, dissimulate or divert wicked lucidity? What if it demanded that we know, and know how to dissimulate, the principles and sources of social unbinding, all menacing disjunctions? To dissimulate them in order to preserve the social bond and the *Menschenfreundlichkeit*? A new political wisdom - human, humanistic, anthropological of course? A new *Menschenfreundlichkeit*: pessimistic, sceptical, hopeless, incredulous. A new virtue from that point on?" In short, deconstruction makes all notions of political community possible. Hence, it is a virtue insofar as it opens up the perpetual promise for a fully inclusive community; it does this precisely because it destabilizes all fixed views of community.

<sup>7</sup> For a particularly good analysis of the ethical "problem" with this promise, see the otherwise sympathetic: Matthias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come," *Constellations*, Vol.9, No.4, 2002, pp. 575-597.

<sup>8</sup> This is my tentative answer to Fritsch's argument that Derrida's conception of democracy to come is too insufficiently theorized to be truly normative. On the other hand, as I will suggest in the Conclusion, I recognize that even if such a deconstruction of Aristotle represents a more firm "theory" of friendship-as-impossible as an ethical norm of inclusiveness, this could backfire insofar as it would suggest that Derrida is simply defending another Being-as-presence truth which by definition *excludes*. For a suggestion that perhaps Derrida (and others) might recognize this very "danger" see the discussion of the need of play in note 2 and also the implied relation to tradition in notes 3 and 6. Basically, as I shall go on to suggest, there is a balancing act going on in Derrida between recognizing the debt to traditional norms and the danger that such a debt represents. In short, it could easily turn into another exclusionary or imposed version of ethics if the equally important notion of playing with tradition, i.e. the radical questioning of it, is not perpetually *acted upon*.

<sup>9</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 35. Derrida explicitly refers to this as *lovence* and links it to an invitation to a community of social disaggregation.

<sup>10</sup> To repeat what I said in note 4 of Chapter 4, I believe I am the first to explicitly link Derrida's notion of deconstruction to a gesture of friendship. I also believe there is proof in Derrida's own writings of this, first in *Of Grammatology*: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976, p.71. "Only infinite Being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself." By contrast, since we are finite, we must be aware of this difference. And so, naturally, our response to Being/reality must be one of difference, of accepting the otherness as absolute, of being open, even hospitable to the other in our midst. Friendship. Second, the friendship centrality in Derrida's thought is made ever more obvious, I believe, by his "friend of truth" conception in *Politics of Friendship*. See especially p. 43 where he suggests his approach essentially amounts to a displacement of the usual approach to truth as singularity to that of being a *friend of truth*. I will expand upon this in the text below.

As for those who would disagree with my interpretation of Derrida in this way, see especially: John Caputo, "Who is Derrida's Zarathustra? Of Fraternity, Friendship, and a Democracy to Come," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol.29, 1999, pp. 184-198. Basically, Caputo speaks of Derridean friendship largely in terms of undoing of the traditional, fraternal conception of friendship and the consequences this has for his conception of political community. However, he never speaks of friendship-as-impossible as the philosophy of Derrida *per se*.

As an aside, I recognize that there is a danger to generalizing Derrida's philosophy in this way. And this may be why most writers sympathetic to Derrida refuse to do what I do with his notion of friendship-as-impossible. On the other hand, because it is impossible, and because this impossibility is explicitly related

to our perpetual need of otherness, I nevertheless maintain that there is something to my generalizing Derrida's deconstructive thought in this friendly way. Still, in another gesture of otherness (and hopefully friendship), I can only in the end let this interpretation rest in the hands of the reader(s).

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, Thomas Alan Sinclair (Tr.), Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1975, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> As we saw in Chapter 4, this was true of Schmitt as well, but for different reasons, namely, it is pure freedom that Schmitt privileges and it is this that "freezes" his notion of community. See note 5 for what this community *looks like*.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, p.25.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross (Tr.), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991, pp. 192-193. The *polis* and political justice are said to have a "friendly quality."

As an aside which is nevertheless extremely relevant to my overall "political good" thesis, if it seems, given my suggestion in note 10, that Derrida is literally "indebted" to Aristotle in this linkage of friendship to his political philosophy, then this is good. Establishing this "friendly" linkage of Derrida to Aristotle is my intention. On the other hand, as I hope will become obvious in the text of the Chapter, such a linkage does not mean discipleship, but a respect shown by way of *critique*. In a related vein, see Derrida's remarks, <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>, on how he manifests his love and respect for Aristotle (and Plato): "This has been from the beginning a terrible problem for me; not only for me - the caricature, the lack of respect for reading and so on and so forth... because as soon as you approach a text - not only mine, but many of the texts of people close to me - you see that of course the respect for these great texts, not only the Greek ones but especially the Greek ones, is the condition of our work... So I think we have to read them again and again and I feel however old I am, I feel that I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and I feel that I have to start again and again and again; it is something, it is a task which is in front of me, before me."

<sup>15</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 227. "Friendly relations with one's neighbors, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relations to himself."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 194. "Do men love *the* good or what is good *for them*? These sometimes clash. So too with regard to the pleasant. Now it is thought that each loves what is good for himself, and that the good is without qualification lovable, and what is good for each man is lovable for him; but each man loves not what is good for him, but what seems good." Thus Aristotle's whole "controlling" project: namely to stabilize this relation between love and the good and so abolish once and for all this confusion of the good with the seeming good. On the other hand, given this *same* statement, he obviously realizes how difficult this project is, perhaps even *impossible*: "...but each man loves not what is good for him but what seems good."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.195-197. Aristotle cites three kinds of friendship, one for the sake of utility, one for the sake of pleasure and the last and most superior for the sake of the good. Only the last truly defines friendship because, Aristotle explains, in essence the friends love each other for the sake of friendship itself.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 228. "...for the friend is another self..." *This* despite his objection to Plato on precisely this point. Also, see our specific comments on Aristotle's critique of Plato in Chapters 1 and 2. On the other hand, as I suggested then and as I will do so again, this is by no means my last word on Aristotle's friendship. In fact, overall, I share the following view (which I will expand upon in the text of the Chapter shortly): Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's philosophy of friendship*, State University of New York Press: Albany, 1995. In particular, Stern-Gillet suggests that to read Aristotle's friend as inherently "one" may in fact be a result of our modern concept of the "individual." In Aristotle's time, there was no individual *per se*. As such, when he suggests the friend is another self, he may be far more politically/pluralistically attuned than we think.

<sup>20</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 226. Discussing those occasions which may justify breaking off a friendship, Aristotle suggests that a good and bad man should not be friends because like is dear to like.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 197. But also see note 16.

<sup>22</sup> As we attempted to show in Chapter 4, Schmitt equates freedom with sheer will. As such, in rather deterministic fashion, this justifies his rather fixed notion of political community on the even more blatantly tyrannical/imposed grounds of will alone. See also notes 5 and 12.

<sup>23</sup> We already suggested this in Chapter 2, though not quite in this way. On the other hand, as we suggested in notes 14, 16 and 19, this further agrees with the idea that Derrida is simply bringing out what is already *there* in Aristotle. Of course, in Aristotle's case, such "stuff" is brought out and then immediately met with a desire for *control*. By contrast, Derrida will try to see beyond the control and thereby, ideally, bring out the full ethical implications of friendship, Aristotelian and otherwise.

<sup>24</sup> Again, Derrida clearly owes a "debt" to Heidegger's conception of Being. See our discussion of the nature of this debt in Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 29 and 81. "The possibilization of the impossible possible must remain at one and the same time as undecidable – and therefore as decisive – as the future itself." (29) and "We no longer even know whether these watchmen are guiding us towards another destination, nor even if a destination remains promised or determined. We wish only to think that we are on the track of an impossible axiomatic which remains to be thought." (81).

<sup>26</sup> Though it is also important to note that for Derrida, it has always been this way: "Deconstruction is not a method or a tool that you apply from the outside to something, deconstruction is something which *happens*, which *happens inside*." (<http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>). Emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup> See note 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 1. Nevertheless, this quotation informs Derrida's discussion of friendship throughout the book.

<sup>29</sup> In this sense I quibble somewhat with Adam Thurschwell's argument which sees Derrida's argument as despairing in the end. On the other hand, I do take seriously the notion that given Derrida's open-endedness, despair is a perpetual possibility which he cannot foreclose: Adam Thurschwell, "Specters and Scholars: Derrida and the Tragedy of Political Thought," *2002 Law, Culture and Humanities Conference*, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Tr.), John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976. This is *the* theme and/or "project" of this book, to show that this is true. For a very useful secondary source which also makes this same point see: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Trs.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980. See especially pp. 77-83 and 137-152. Lastly, see note 26.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle suggests this difficulty by distinguishing between what is good and what is good for man. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 194. See also note 16.

<sup>32</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 197 and 242-244. Aristotle outlines the need for this test and the concomitant need to *limit* the number of friends. For the same points, see also: Aristotle, *The Eudemean Ethics*, J. Solomon (Tr.) in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English, Volume 9*, W.D Ross (Ed.), Oxford University Press: London, 1966, 1237b5-1238a10. Not surprisingly, Derrida will explicitly refer to both sections below in discussing what this "test of time" notion means for Aristotle's ethic of friendship.

<sup>33</sup> For the explicit reference in Aristotle to this linkage see: *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>34</sup> *The Politics*, pp. 56-62. In disagreeing with Socrates' "false premise about unity," Aristotle suggests unity is rather based on a more personal kind of affection, namely an idea that one can point to something or someone and say: "this I own, this I love." Thus, as I suggested in Chapter 2, Aristotle with his notion of friendship and/or a more personal kind of love, does not mean to reject Plato's notion of political unity, but to strengthen it all the more but putting in greater touch with actual human realities. Needless to add, this is also the point of his friendship argument in the *Ethics*. In any case, to shore up this latter claim and also to see at the same time that Aristotle himself seems to recognize how difficult such a task is, see note 16.

<sup>35</sup> See notes 16 and 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 6. The who-ness of the friend versus the what-ness of friendship, Derrida suggests, begins with Aristotle who says both and yet does not seem to "tremble" at the tension involved here.

<sup>37</sup> This was our fundamental argument in Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>38</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 197.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 227-230 and 237. (Also see *The Politics*, p. 52 in which Aristotle outlines the deliberative capacities of children, women and slaves). Unlike most of we poor creatures who think ourselves good, and unlike the bad man who has nothing in him to love, the good man is good. As such, only a good man should be a lover of self; for only in him is there is quite literally some thing to love. In this way, Aristotle is able to justify exclusion. As we shall soon see, Derrida will play with this notion of who “counts” (who is good) and who does not in his deconstruction of Aristotelian friendship. As a hint of what he will do, see note 23.

<sup>40</sup> Or more precisely, it is thanks to the duality of his text. More on this to come.

<sup>41</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 197. See also note 32.

<sup>42</sup> See note 32.

<sup>43</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 205-206. “Loving is the more the essence of friendship than being loved.”

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 205-206. Being loved promotes flattery rather than knowledge, i.e., being honored for who you really are. By contrast, loving, as in a mother’s love for her child, is more a promoter of knowledge, namely of properly honoring the child for its own sake. The reason for this is plain: the child is above all else, the product of the mother’s *labor* (giving birth plus raising them). As such, she necessarily more fully knows who her child is. For more on this notion of handiwork and the privilege Aristotle grants to the activity of loving, see *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 232-234, “The pleasure of beneficence.”

<sup>45</sup> And of course, what it is not, namely flattery and thereby the promotion of narcissism. See note 44.

<sup>46</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>47</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 195-199. The whole reason Aristotle makes good friendship superior is because it is not like other friendships which are always changing. On the contrary, like the good, these friendships are the most enduring, the most permanent, the most without qualification useful and pleasant. And as such, being all of these things, there is the feeling that in good friendship, there is an almost absolute trust, a sense that ‘he would never wrong me.’ Of course, Aristotle prefaces this last remark by suggesting that this feeling is not necessarily innate. Instead, it is wrought by the fact that such a good man is good by virtue of having long been *tested* by oneself. We are about to elaborate on this apparent tension between permanence and the need for testing.

<sup>48</sup> See note 47.

<sup>49</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 23. Derrida quotes from Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* (1238a30): “Since friendship does not – and above all must not – have the reliability of a natural thing or a machine; since its stability is not given by nature but is won, like constancy and ‘*fidence*,’ through the endurance of a virtue, primary [good] friendship, ‘that which allows all the others to be named,’ we must say that it is founded on virtue.”

<sup>50</sup> See note 32.

<sup>51</sup> *The Eudemian Ethics*, 1237b15.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 1237b34-a3.

<sup>53</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 197.

<sup>54</sup> See also Aristotle’s explicit section in *The Nicomachean Ethics* pp. 242-244. “The limit to the number of friends.”

<sup>55</sup> And perhaps this is why, as we suggested in Chapter 2, Aristotle, for all his superiority of good friendship, nevertheless feels compelled to bestow some value so-called “lesser,” friendships. Namely, perhaps there is some recognition by Aristotle himself of this uncomfortable counting truth behind good friendship.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it is Derrida who hones in the particular Aristotle quotations above. *Politics of Friendship*, pp. 17 and 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24. It is precisely this *other* experience of the possible in Aristotle that launches Derrida’s more inclusive ethical claims with respect to friendship.

<sup>59</sup> *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 265.

<sup>60</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 22. “Note that the counselor never says *how many*, nor at what number virtue becomes impossible. What knowledge could ever measure up to the injunction to choose between those

whom one loves, whom one must love, whom one can love? Between themselves? Between them and the others? All of them?" Emphasis author. Derrida quite literally embraces Aristotle's good friendship as the standard, but *only* insofar as it remains *impossible*, namely unknowable and just as importantly, *uncountable*.

<sup>61</sup> Again, we remind the reader of our arguments in Chapters 1 and 2 whereby Aristotle seems at times willing to defend a tyranny in the *Politics* and, on the other hand, bemoans the composite, largely irrational fact of most actual embodied human beings in the *Ethics*. Bottom line, though by nature we are free to choose, Aristotle quite literally does not *trust* that we will properly exercise this choice. Namely, he appears to think that, for the most part, we will probably make the *wrong* choice. Hence, his preference for control as far as the political good is concerned.

<sup>62</sup> See note 58.

<sup>63</sup> See notes 14 and 58. For a similar though perhaps slightly more deferential view towards the tradition of philosophy see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Trs.), Continuum: London, 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Again, a comparison with Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" approach is useful here. See note 61. Also, for a good, fair-minded analysis of this comparison see: John Caputo, "Good will and the hermeneutics of friendship: Gadamer and Derrida" *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol.28, No.5, 2002, pp. 512-522.

<sup>65</sup> On this score, it is useful to note that Aristotle wrote on virtually every subject, all of it characterized by this same effort, which, as we shall see presently, is simply another way of saying that his thought, as in all of philosophy, is not deterministic. I am grateful to the following for this enriching reminder with respect to Aristotle: Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986.

<sup>66</sup> See our remarks on both the lesser friendships and the roughness of Aristotelian political science in Chapter 2.

<sup>67</sup> This is the central insight *Of Grammatology*. See especially pp. 3-26.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xv. "A man's life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol. And this is precisely what a proper name should always name." For a similar view of the ineffability of human experience see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 341-355. "The Concept of Experience and the Essence of the Hermeneutic Experience." Lastly, once again, I owe a debt of gratitude to Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, pp. 77-83 and 137-152.

<sup>69</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 43. Emphasis author.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24. Derrida sees in Aristotle both exclusion and at the same time the possibility of another experience of the possible.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 306. Thus Derrida ends his *Politics of Friendship* not with a philosophic pronouncement of truth, but with a plea for his readers to continue the task of reading/questioning/deconstruction even on his own work. "O my democratic friends..."

## NOTES - CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup> Paul Johnson, "A War Like No Other: Where Hubris Came From," *New York Times, Sunday Book Review*, October 23, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida is often asserted to have fascist/totalitarian tendencies. As just one example, see the rather uneasy Shoah interview: [www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203851.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203851.pdf). In short, Derrida's humor and play was not always understood and sometimes offense was taken. However, for another view of this Derridean play see: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Trs.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980. See especially pp. 77-83 and 137-152. Also for a similar "serious" view of play see: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Trs.), Continuum: London, 2004, pp. 102-110.

<sup>3</sup> Following Blanchot, Derrida never precludes violence. Obviously, in a related vein, neither do Schmitt and Aristotle. See: Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, Elizabeth Rottenberg (Tr.), Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1997. Also see: Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab (Tr.), University of

Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996. See especially pp. 32-37. Politics needs the extreme possibility of war. Lastly see: Aristotle, *The Politics*, Thomas Alan Sinclair (Tr.), Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1975. See especially pp. 225-231. On the preservation of tyrannies. However, of the three, Schmitt might be more exulting of violence than is advisable for a conception of politics. More on this below in the body of the text.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross (Tr.), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991, p. 270. "Now if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly, as Theognis says, have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are, while they seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among our youth, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by virtue, they are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness, but through a fear of punishment. What argument would remold such people? And in general, passion seems to yield not to argument but to *force*." Emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> *The Concept of the Political*, p. 26. "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy." See also note 3. For Heidegger, see our discussion of his "gathering" preference in Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> This would be my answer to Matthias' critique of the normative value of Derrida's notion of the "promise." See: Matthias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come," *Constellations*, Vol.9, No.4, 2002, pp. 575-597.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle and Derrida each in their own ways each attest to the unique human quality of friendship. For Aristotle see: *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 204. See also: Aristotle, *The Eudemean Ethics*, J. Solomon (Tr.) in *The Works of Aristotle translated into English, Volume 9*, W.D Ross (Ed.), Oxford University Press: London, 1966. 1244b 5-15 and 1245b5-20. For Derrida see: Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins (Tr.), Verso: London, 1997. p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> I use this disturbing terminology on purpose to suggest where fixed presumptions of any sort may lead us and what they may very well sanction. That Derrida seriously means deconstruction to address such horrors as the holocaust is I think made clear in the following: Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," Mary Quaintance (Tr.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, Drucilla Cornell et. al. (Eds.), Routledge: London, 1992, pp. 3-67.

<sup>9</sup> See our discussion of Heidegger's notion of *error* in Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> "Deconstruction is not a method or a tool that you apply from the outside to something, deconstruction is something which *happens*, which happens *inside*." (<http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/vill2.html>). Emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup> *Politics of Friendship*, p. 306.

<sup>12</sup> [www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/frenchthought/derrida.htm](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/frenchthought/derrida.htm)

<sup>13</sup> For a view that is perhaps not quite this harsh, but which does nevertheless share some of its spirit see: Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987.

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