


*And if when I say friend it means a certain willingness to throw everything away for a person you've just met or if you seek out certain intensities because you believe that is the purpose of friendship, to have grand and wild experiences, then perhaps we share a certain form of life—a certain idea of the good life, a common understanding of the word happiness.*

A photograph of two people wearing dark, hooded jackets, seen from behind, embracing each other in a snowy, mountainous landscape. The scene is captured in a high-contrast, black and white style, emphasizing the textures of the snow and the dark fabric of the jackets.

# THE TERRIBLE THINGS WE DO TO EACH OTHER

a lecture on anarchy and friendship

*The following essay was never meant to be read again, let alone put into print. That it appears here is an attempt to assault the dignity and intentions of the author.*

*It poses the question of friendship without even really beginning to answer it, relying on a handful of authors with a merely passing interest in friendship—even Derrida’s Politics of Friendship is really just about democracy. Reading books, friendship is elsewhere. After three hours of talking, we might arrive at a stronger sense of friendship, but it’s not the lecture per se that delivers us there.*

*The text that follows is compiled from an incomplete series of lectures delivered primarily to non-academic audiences, one at a private event and one as part of an anarchist convergence. It was an experiment in a different way of doing lectures. It makes several successive voices contemporaneous: the process of thinking about the subject, of writing about it, of speaking about it, of your reading which is about to commence. The resulting failure has only provided hours upon hours of continued adjustments, new hypotheses, and further attempts to arrive in a position for which we are sorely unprepared.*

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*Lecture liberated from the pages of VORTEXT, the UNCONSCIOUS ORGAN OF THE EXPERIMENTAL COMMITTEE, originally published by Crimethinc.*

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# ***ALL THE TERRIBLE THINGS WE DO TO EACH OTHER***

*This is a lecture,* workshop, and discussion on anarchy and friendship.

I am not a philosopher. Sure, this lecture is a part of a project that I'm going to use in a likely futile attempt to get into grad school [ed. note: did not apply to grad school], but really, the reason I'm here is to see what happens. It's 10 am this morning and I'm just now finally collecting all of my notes from a month—a rather intense month— which I have spent attempting to reconsider and experiment with friendship. Most often this has meant putting the reading and writing of this work aside for whatever idle conversation or meager adventure a friend has offered. So, what follows will not be edited nor philosophically thorough. It is the result of, I hope, lived friendship, and if I draw from experiences more than the texts in front of me, I hope none of you will hold this as a weakness.

Also, it would be a mistake to consider this lecture a proposal of any sort, or advancing a thesis. Mostly it's an attempt to capture thoughts and put them together in a way to see if they make sense to anyone else. It's certainly not a complete piece and the goal is more to spur a different sort of conversation and open up different directions for thinking anarchist thoughts.

Also—friends, don't record this.

Something about this talk feels dangerous or stupid. So I'm going to do it.

# I

## THE QUESTION OF FRIENDSHIP

*What is so pleasant as these jets of affection which make a young world for me again? What so delicious as a just and firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling? How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metaphorphosed; there is no winter and no night; all tragedies, all ennui, vanish—all duties even, nothing fills the proceeding eternity but the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years.*

— Emerson, “Friendship”

SO, HELLO FRIENDS.

Already a problem here, friends. All the earliest philosophers noted that philosophical matters are best discussed among friends. So then apparently we have a problem before we even begin—are we in the proper setting to even be having this discussion at all? If philosophy should be discussed among friends, one would think this lecture format inappropriate for communicating anything worthwhile. We should perhaps be sipping wine and smoking cigarettes and letting our minds wander from topic to topic. We should be wandering the town committing indiscretions and contemplating the implications of our actions. After all, don't lovers ponder love while lying next to one another in bed, where they are able to make the most of their discoveries and follow them through to their logical conclusions?

I think it would be fair to say pieces of this lecture are a sort of taking up of the *Letters Journal* challenge to break language like a window. If you listen closely, perhaps you'll catch it. If you've taken a philosophy course, maybe it will be pretty clear. A lot of this is free and automatic writing, so you'd be able to destroy what I say if we were allowed a period of contemplation. But we're not allowing that, right, you're only hearing the words, not reading along with anything, and we're not going to revisit anything I say. What I want to try is: Oh, here's a trash can, will this work? What about PVC pipes? Or bricks? Hammers? And even if any of these work, we're not trying to break the window that is the end of windows. It's a practice, a practice of breaking language, over and over, continually, giving it force and meaning and weaving these practices together with others, also breaking language or writing poetry or writing windows.

Who are you? How do I call you friends? What does this mean? And more importantly, if this next hour we spend together is to have any meaning, how

least in my current frame of mind.

I don't know, maybe you wanted a strategy outline or something, but it's nearly five o'clock in the morning and so it's come to this. Performance art, or lived poetry. Some crap like that. Really, that's all I've got. Potentiality, man. I'm not talking about the T-word, or *make total destroy* necessarily. What we need is the demand to experiment; experimentation to find the pure friendship and how to reproduce it. Friendship that expands, extends.

Friendship. That relationship in which we allow ourselves to be most vulnerable. And somehow where we find the most strength.

Friendship: we're back at the beginning now. Didn't you just hear me? I pretty much said expand friendship to everyone. But now we're thinking about events of friendship, the possibility of friendship. Not as any predicate or any prescriptive behavior. We want new openings with which to engage with others, always on the verge of collapse but always on the verge of exploding and being the one moment in which true friendship reveals itself. Where can we find this? Among friends? Among strangers? Can we trust anything that's been told to us about friendship, given its history?

Given our own history of our friendships? Each of us is thinking of at least one friendship that has ended horribly. How do we prepare ourselves for this? What form of life must we inhabit to undertake a constant experimentation of friendship and withstand its constant collapse?

A form of life where—***O my friends, there is no friend: only events of friendship.***

shall we put our discovery to use?

I'm intentionally reading this word for word, and I hope besides the content you'll appreciate something from the format itself. It's not so often we allow one of us to just write and talk and talk. I'm listening to Cindy Milstein right now—I wonder if she's in the room now—but listening to her talk is actually dizzying. Besides the content, she's talking so fast, so fast, my head is spinning. I can't concentrate. I can't even focus on what she's saying unless I try thinking along really really fast, so fast I am not even processing what is being said. I don't even know if I agree; or, I wouldn't, if it were simply this lecture I were being judgmental about. I'll do my best to speak slowly and clearly; stop me if you don't understand a word or just want to test and see if I'm using a word without knowing what it means. I don't want an experience of an experience, words flying past manipulating our emotions. I want an experience of language, I want your head spinning because you've made it spin, perhaps from some single sentence that resonates with you or some idea I'm trying out that you are able to figure out.

Given also that this is supposed to be a lecture of *anarchy* and friendship, perhaps it would be first prudent to elaborate that concept. For us, anarchy shall mean the state of affairs, or the attempts at moving toward such, that wholly rejects capitalism—that is to say, any form of quantitative logic, productive relations based on calculated reciprocity, economic relations mediated by money, and access to resources granted by social privileges—and the state—any system of horrible violence which coerces obedience and exacts punishment for misdeeds.

If some of you wish to make political use of the thought in this lecture, then we should begin here: before we claim to wish to build a politics based on a particular word: communism, anarchism, friendship, we need to understand what is meant by the use of the word. If up until now we have been able to function together in spite of our different uses of the words we hold in common, then perhaps all is well; but perhaps also we will find a day when our irreconcilable definitions make us wholly unable to communicate any longer. This is really just another way of saying we need to first “define our terms.” For communism or anarchism or liberation, OK, that seems easy enough. But friendship? What could we even mean by a politics of friendship? Friendship has a billion histories and as many meanings. The intensity with which we use the words needs to be matched by an intensity of thinking in common.

At first glance, and perhaps because I have already a position on the issue and so have framed it as such, one feels a particular affinity between the two concepts. After all, as I've described it, what is friendship but the anarchy of the relation between two loving bodies? And what is anarchy but a global system of friendship? But this would really be an over-simplification, of both terms. Anarchy, or anarchism, after all, is not merely some noble ideal, but a particular constellation of projects and rebellions over the past two centuries aimed

at overthrowing the ruling social order. It is a history of peasants ransacking town halls and government buildings, of conspiracies assassinating dozens of heads of state and capitalist magnates. Sometimes it fails, it fails at itself in its very being itself. It is the calculated project of shooting landowners and collectivizing land in Spain in 1936, of strikes and demands and riots across the United States, and a thousand other insurrections with and without flags aimed at wrecking the landscape to find out what happens when we attempt live without these practices of calculation and obedience which have dominated our forms of life for centuries and millennia.

Anarchy is not the mere extension of the offer of friendship to anyone (some fascists on the wrong side of a Heil Hitler salute could tell you that!). And there's something to our notions of friendship that suggests a universal friendship would not necessarily lead to the kind of world we are interested in. There's something peculiar about that idea. Friendship has its own history; it has billions of histories, and the rich and powerful monsters have friends no less than we.

Yet somehow here we are: anarchy, friendship. This lecture is less a proposal than an attempt to bridge the gaps in our thinking, a first movement in a direction, toward what really I don't know. Let's keep that in mind.

—I just took a break from writing this and had a thought, which I'll insert here and then see where it goes. When I said friendship before, when I say friendship, perhaps we are thinking of different things. After all, if friendship for each of us has its own history it obviously has its own meaning; we each use the word in different ways with different understandings.

We might suddenly find ourselves on different planets, speaking different languages, alienated, isolated, and alone. The exact same touches, words, and gestures suddenly convey such different meanings.

Doing philosophy is a way of putting our ideas together, gathering together from wherever we are, starting again from there so we can have this discussion. Maybe your understanding of friendship is one that, if applied universally, would or could somehow result in anarchy or the chaotic world we want. So, when I say friendship as a thing we have yet to figure out, you are confused. Friends, to you, perhaps, are obvious, more obvious than any political movement or ideology. We would disagree here, and our conversation would get sidetracked as your thoughts took you in the direction that I must be a fool, or megalomaniac or solipsist or sociopath, to say we have no idea what it is to be a friend, who is a friend, that I do not know whether or not you and I are friends.

So then, to begin to unsettle your understanding of friendship, I must begin again, from a different position. After all, this is supposed to be a philosophical lecture—and to be honest, when I'm not trying very hard to understand what a "friend" is in *doing*, I spend most of my time away from friends reading

absolutely, after all, this is just some attempt at metaphysical philosophical bullshit. I know how to use the word friend, and it means what the two of us are together right now. But what are we? How are we that? Where is this friendship thing that supposedly ties us to one another in some manner?

C— sits next to me. *I'm writing about friends*, I say. *She wouldn't know about that*, she says. Friendship, that is. She can't locate it. We chat. We're still not friends. We make sexy faces at one another and she gets up to leave. Someone takes her chair but I don't think to say that she was sitting there. Am I a bad friend? He gets up and she doesn't know what just transpired, how my own self-absorption nearly just cost us our friendship, a friendship that perhaps doesn't even exist at all.

Or else, it was a friendship that collapsed, momentarily, exactly in the manner in which it began—an inopportune moment in which we were thrust forward toward one another and could only respond in the manner in which we were ourselves: our form of life revealed itself to one another and we found—briefly—community, friendship, love together. Alternately, we can imagine that, having suddenly altered the terms of our activity, we might have found ourselves inhabiting a different form of life in which our activities took on completely different meanings and we could only know one another as enemies.

The silence that preserves friendship is more than the activity between friends: it is the nothing and emptiness—which is to say, truth—that we hold between us. Derrida has us saying that friends keep silent about the truth. This is less enigmatic than we might think. Our friends, those to whom we expose our vulnerability and ugliness, preserve friendship by keeping quiet on these matters. What a horror it would be to hear what our friends actually know about us! And that much worse to read it.

This black eruption, the supernova that is the destruction of our star of friendship. Suddenly every gesture takes on new meaning. Our words mismatch. Our attempt to communicate can only result in conflict.

But *enemy*. The correlate of that Aristotle quote or misquote: O enemies, there is no enemy. If "friend" brings with it no necessary precondition, then in reference to "enemy"—this enemy who has relinquished her silence, our silence—we cannot accept any prescribed manner of dealing with the enemy. After all, just as each friendship blooms in its own way, so too does each bursting star erupt in its own way. How to contain a dying star, without ourselves exploding; how to see the beauty of a dying star?

I apologize. Distractions. All of you are here in the room with me now; not now, as I read this to you (as you read this without me), but *now*, the time of writing. Now, the time of verbalization. The panel about "anarchist practice" is about to begin. I'm once again alone in a crowd of friends. I don't want to think of supernovas; too depressing. Broken hearts perhaps suit me better, at

a good way to go.

So far we seem to understand that friendship, at least as a thing to have as a relational quality, friendness or whatever we might say, might be impossible. It's like running en masse with the cops closing in, and we call out "Friends!"—and they are there, or else they aren't. Even the naming, the event of friendship, is not itself what makes friends. It's something else something beyond us, something whatever, that propels and captures us and forces us to be friends. And this something-beyond or something else also creates the conditions in which our friendships collapse.

*We were friends and have become estranged. But this was right... That we have to become estranged is the law above us; by the same token we should also become more venerable for each other—and the memory of our former friendship more sacred. There is probably a tremendous but invisible stellar orbit in which our very different ways and goals may be included as small parts of this path; let us rise up to this thought. But our life is too short and our power of vision too small for us to be more than friends in the sense of this sublime possibility! — Let us then believe in our star friendship even if we should be compelled to be earthly enemies.*

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

The end of friendship takes on new meaning if we are thinking the eventness of friendship. We could say friendship ends with its enunciation: "FRIEND!" And then it is gone. Or we could say friend points to our being-there-together, being-in-common, that activity at which my words point when I voice "FRIEND."

But we would be missing a properly grammatical use of the word friend if we were only able to imagine friends here and around us. When we say friend to those far off, we are referring to a certain distance, the distance itself, the nothing that is being shared at that moment. There is no activity of friendship outside my naming it as such; when my friend back home is off in her own world living her own life, perhaps I'm not even on her mind. But friend doesn't refer to a different state of affairs—it refers to this one, in which we are not thinking of one another, or even perhaps when we are thinking crossly of one another.

If we are attempting to move away from thinking of friend as a quality, "being friend," and rather friendship as an event, "doing friend," we have to locate this time element within the event that marks off its existence—the beginning and end of the event.

T— is sitting next to me. She sits. The event begins. We chat about the workshop she just attended. She leaves. Where does our friendship begin or end? Is it in the sitting together? Our first words? Is friendship something that passes between us, is it something we dwell in? Are we friends now, when I am writing here alone and she is in line for food? I'm tempted to say—yes,

books. Let's look at what Aristotle said of friendship, if only to use that as a starting point to get us on the same page. And then we can go from there, and we will try to figure out if when we use "friend" we are saying the same thing, if we even know what we are saying.

1

*Fine to lie in quiet together*

*Finer still to join in laughing— Underneath a silken heaven*

*Lying back amid the grasses*

*Join with friends in cheerful laughing, Showing our white teeth together. Am I right? let's lie in the quiet;*

*Am I wrong? let's join in laughing And in being aggravating, Aggravating, loudly laughing,*

*Till we reach the grave together. Shall we do this, friends, again? Amen! and auf Wiedersehen!*

2

*No excuses! No forgiving!*

*You who laugh and joy in living Grant this book, with all its follies, Ear and heart and open door! Friends, believe me, all my folly's Been a blessing heretofore! What I seek, what I discover— Has a book contained it ever? Hail in me the guild of fools! Learn what this fools-book's offense is:*

*Reason coming to its senses! Shall we, friends, do this again? Amen! and auf Wiedersehen!*

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

## II

### THREE TYPES OF FRIENDSHIP

"O MY FRIENDS, THERE IS NO FRIEND!"

A quote from Aristotle, coming to me by Derrida in citing Nietzsche citing Montaigne in what is perhaps a mistranslation of Aristotle that, nonetheless, provoked and courses through Derrida's book *Politics of Friendship*, the book that is largely responsible for my rambling up here today. Such mistranslation and misquoting will perhaps form the backbone of what follows in my attempt to do philosophy, so bear with me.

How could Aristotle, who writes two chapters on friendship in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, declare there are no friends? If there is no friend, then how could I call you "my friends," my friends? If I call you "my friends," how dare I add that there is no friend?

Friendship, then. What's most important for our purposes is not this misquote—this "supposed" misquote—but really Aristotle's take on three forms

of friendship. So, while you and I may have what we think is a pretty good understanding of friendship, Aristotle breaks it down into three categories of friendship. There are friendships of Pleasure—this is essentially the idea of Lovers—friendships of Utility—we have here political and economic friendship—and then friendships of Virtue—the exemplary friendship, the best friendships, the friendship based in Aristotle’s ideas of Virtue and the Good. It’s actually fairly difficult to use Aristotle’s forms to get us anywhere meaningful, not the least because we do of course reject his ideas of Virtue and the Good. But we can come to that bridge when we cross it.

First, we have the friendships of pleasure and utility. Aristotle criticizes these because these are both rather selfish forms of friendship. That is, friendships of utility dissolve as soon as they cease to be to the friends’ advantage. Likewise, friendships of pleasure collapse as soon as the object of pleasure no longer gives the expected form of pleasure. The friendships of these forms are not based in the virtue of the other but in what we take from them, what they do for us. What’s most contradictory here is that these forms of friendship, most prone to collapse, are built on the promise of their own stability.

Let’s take the utilitarian friendship, since this is what Aristotle calls the political friendship and since our lecture is supposed to be on anarchy—which, while it isn’t really, or at least it shouldn’t be, a political concept, we find many people treating it as such. The promise of certain political friendship is that one party is useful for the other, both parties find use in one another, and so an alliance is formed. Perhaps in the anarchist camp we find this as two bodies identifying one another as having this extremist ideology and then also doing something that appears to be a way of putting this ideology into practice—say, a variety of community projects or organizing efforts, or maybe it’s just the desire to riot and therefore making use of one another as objects of riot. The friends involved see the utility in one another and make use of it. This isn’t a condemnation of the friendship of utility—I’m merely pointing out what specifically is going on. But friendship based on this principle is easily subject to collapse: when I get burned out, injured, tired, arrested, suddenly I am no longer able to be put to use by my friend.

I think the trick here, really a good move on Aristotle’s part, is in his pointing out that the utilitarian friendship isn’t just political, which is the aspect Derrida tends to focus on, but also economic. The idea of “economic friendship” is a bit of a stretch for some of us, but let’s just hold the thought. We can imagine how two businessmen might engage in business—say, the trade of books or something—and in the course of business they consider one another friends. They act as friends might: they chat, give each other things, go out to eat. More importantly, they have a trust with one another that is very near the essence of friendship.

But it is a particular trust, based on a particular development of their friendship. The book buyer never expects his friend to give him books, and the

*The promise must be kept, nonetheless love is not the promise plus the keeping of the promise. It cannot be subjected in this way to verification, to justification, and to accumulation... Love is the promise and its keeping, the one independent from the other. How could it be otherwise, since one never knows what must be kept?*

—Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*

## V

### THERE IS NO FRIEND

NOW THEN, SECTION FIVE. IS THIS DOING PHILOSOPHY? I don’t think I’ve covered anything I said I would in the description. My throat hurts from cigarettes. I’m getting exhausted and I’m not sure I’m getting anywhere. All these pulled quotes from Derrida have gotten me nowhere. And this odd claim, whatever I’ve been getting towards, that there are no friends, only events, moments, of friendship, and perhaps we have not even had one yet. How do we even know afterwards? It strikes one almost as cold and empty and a bit sociopathic. Moreover, how can any meaningful politics come from this?

I don’t know how much time I’ve taken up in reading this to you so far. It feels like I’ve written a lot but not really said much. It’s 1 pm, yesterday, I’m in the lobby and most of you are in some workshop or another having a common experience that will give you new language, or new ways in which to speak with one another. I am out here alone, in my own world, writing, writing in silence in what I hope is a successful attempt to find friends. Perhaps you’ll be in luck, and at the end of this I’ll take questions after all. I’m sure you’re thrilled at the prospect.

I mentioned earlier the Whatever, a term I’ll readily admit has been abused by some in our anarchic milieu of late. Agamben mentions that the Whatever Singularity is “whatever you want, that is, loveable.” He wrote a whole book about it; it’s pretty obtuse, but I’ll collapse it and say basically I think he means we should stop looking around trying to find friends and instead start making friends, or, doing friendship, with those bodies with whom we share a form of life, the ones who understand what we mean when we say “friend,” or more importantly understand when we *do friendship*. And in doing so, we are creating a new form of life, developing new practices—creating new meanings for friendship in friendship.

This is largely, I think, grounded in the idea that we can lose ourselves—our predicates, our identities—in the Event. Maybe you’ve experienced this total loss of self, maybe not. I have, but then my self was found and things turned out pretty shitty [ed. note: a reference to ongoing legal troubles]. So really, the whatever might be a good concept for philosophy, and if you want experimentation and danger and the possibility and ever-present threat of being hurt—which is basically what friendship is, right—then Whatever might be



to which it gives name must carry in itself the fullest meaning of friendship. All friendship, as we have seen, carries within it the possibility of its collapse. But while Aristotle would demand that we be virtuous, we must ask what friendship becomes without virtue; when we prefer to take what is rather than some nonexistent noble virtue.

So, while Aristotle looks for those who are friends and finds himself lacking (O my friends! There is no friend!), we friends of anarchy must look for friendships of potentiality and becoming, always leaving open the perhaps of total collapse. This is a friendship that truly deserves the name—because we know, from where we are now, that we are never assured of adequation between our naming, the concept, and the event of friend. We know friendship must leave a place open for that which can still take place—by chance—that possibility that would be more favorable to the love whose just name would be friendship.

We know that when friendship claims to be realized, there is in fact no friendship. We utter “Friend” and “I love you” in moments of wild abandon before the scores are calculated, when our relationships are at their most delicate and fragile.

So, Friend is something we are trying to create, ever trying to create. We are in search of a singularity, the becoming–friendship of love, under the same name of friendship, but this time under the right name, just this one time, adjusted rather to an incomparable time, unique and without concept, a particular date, between two. The friendship of these friends, if there are any of this kind, should there be any of this kind, should take place one fine day, in the chance of a moment, an instant, with no assurance of duration, without the firm constancy of Aristotelian virtue—this is the condition of the pure potentiality of friendship.

We should immediately recognize the problem of such friends, those we name as such. It contains a “perhaps,” a structural uncertainty, a certain stammering in our voice as we speak. Friend. We never know our friends, we only name them.

*“I love you” is a promise... The promise neither describes nor prescribes nor performs. It does nothing and thus is always vain... “I love you” says nothing (except a limit of speech), but it allows to emerge the fact that love must arrive and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can relax, divert, or suspend the rigor of this law. The promise does not anticipate or assure the future: it is possible that one day I will no longer love you, and this possibility cannot be taken away from love—it belongs to it. It is against this possibility, but also with it, that the promise is made, the word given. Love is its own promised eternity, its own eternity unveiled as law.*

*Of course, the promise must be kept. But if it is not, that does not mean that there was no love, nor even that there was not love. Love is faithful only to itself.*

seller never expects more than the fair price. Their friendship is based on this calculated equality. It’s not difficult to imagine that the friendship as utilitarian friendship would quickly wither if the one’s printing press or the other’s bookshop closed down. As friends of utility, neither of them imagine differently. But they have between them a mutual understanding of the terms of their friendship. A friendship formed on fixed conditions is a “legal friendship.” This is perhaps one way of overcoming the arbitrary collapse of friendship, but the threat lingers.

So, here we have a central point of contention with our understanding of anarchy and friendship: it seems that, for Aristotle at least and likely within our Western political notions of friendship, a calculated equality is a way to maintain our friendship.

Friends of pleasure likely lack this strictly economic understanding of one another, but we see how that makes the threat of collapse that much more present. Our passionate friendships burn much brighter than our utilitarian ones. The businessmen have a clear understanding of what is and is not a part of their friendship, and this is perhaps one way of overcoming the arbitrary collapse of friendship. But we want no serious contracts in our friendships, right?

—Friends, again I get distracted from my writing. Meta. The offer of a cigarette from a friend. Pleasure. Utility. I’m jumping ahead here, but maybe this will be a good spot, so I can get ahead of myself and get back on track to get where I really want to go, the good part, the crazy part in all this.

Aristotle’s third form of friendship, true friends, good friends, friends of virtue, the friends I have here around me at the moment. Well, no, we’re certainly not friends of virtue (some of you can perhaps guess who is around me at the moment). But the highest form of friendship, which, obviously, I must think I share with those around me now—Aristotle would note these friendships too are comprised of utility and pleasure. But the character of virtue, the virtue of the other, is also some magic glue that holds friendships together. We obviously want to discard this idea of virtue, at least as Aristotle regards it, as something toward which to strive and which holds us together. Let all virtues collapse that our friendship may continue. But let’s consider virtue as a sort of empty placeholder for the *whatever* that holds us together as friends. We are each thinking of something different here, and probably different for each of our different true friendships, but that is the point, I think. We’ll get to that.

What is really important, that I’m giving short order here, is that the true friendship, like the one offering me this cigarette, gives me both pleasure and utility, but it is not reducible to these. It is something else, something whatever.

What this form really offers for us is the suggestion of a friendship grounded

in a whatever outside the selfishness of either party, a type of friendship based on the adherence to a set of values or external conditions— we would say, a set of practices—which bind us together. This is the ideal friendship, probably the friendship of which most of us speak when we say we want a politics based on friendship. It is the friendship in which we would say “something in my soul recognizes something in your soul,” a pure friendship. This is not to say it excludes qualities from the other two forms of friendship—this friendship is both pleasurable and utilitarian, but it is not reducible to these acts; pleasure and utility spring forth from a well of virtue—or *whatever*.

—I was speaking of my lovers. Not only is our relationship to a certain degree unspoken, unless it is the peculiar situation in which we arrange a contract as master and slave or husband and wife, but the pleasure we receive is not mutual. As the lover, I receive pleasure from my desired object; as beloved, from the acts he bestows upon me. For the lover the pleasure is in the mere presence of the desired object, for the beloved it is my own being-loved that I love. The gap between us is unbridgeable. It is, to whatever extent, an unequal relationship, or—an incalculable unequal equality. It would be absurd for the lover to expect any act of reciprocity in the types of love he bestows on the beloved. The lover loves to love. The sources of pleasure, inasmuch as they are different, confine us to a certain understanding of what it is to be equal and, inasmuch as we accept the roles and terms to which we are confined, we find happiness and love and bliss in this friendship, ever also on the verge of collapse.

*So then: friendship, the three types of friendship. Pleasure, utility, and, the one we have largely neglected with perhaps good reason, virtue.*

– Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*

### III

#### VIRTUE AND FORM OF LIFE

WHY, THEN, THIS NEGLECT OF VIRTUE? Well, to be honest, because I haven't read Aristotle's chapters on virtue and so making it the emphasis of this essay as a description of how we should do friendships is really beyond me. Nevertheless, my loose understanding of what is meant by virtue and Aristotle's treatment of virtuous friendship in the Friendship chapters reveal it as something we must reject if we are to achieve the chaos of love and friendship we so madly desire.

To begin again—why friendship and politics? For Aristotle, “the properly political act comes down to creating the most possible friendship.” This is a bit clarified, perhaps, when we utilize Nazi philosopher and jurist Carl Schmitt's concept of the political—that the “political” is the act of declaring friends and enemies. His desire, in a nutshell, in understanding this concept, is the suppression of the political within a political order—the suppression of

Really he's going about it all wrong. Perhaps Aristotle already has friends—we can assume as much if he's writing such chapters in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. His definitions and descriptions of friends read as a sort of praise of his friends and what they already share. We imagine he wrote this toward the end of his life, as he sorted through his collection of friends, judging and appraising their worth.

For us, though, friendship is still an unknown. Or at least, since you are still here reading, friendship is an activity that we are trying to discern as we are doing it. For Agamben, and so for us, friendship is what occurs in its utterance, that is, what occurs here, there, when I call you “Friend.” I'm not pointing here to anything in my lecture or notes, but *here*, to the lived activity outside language. We do not want friendship to be another term we use to describe things as they are; for us friendship is still an event, an unknown.

From Derrida, we receive an ominous and illuminating message: “Friendship does not keep silence, it is preserved by silence.” Here we challenge Aristotle directly. Friendship isn't the result of endless chatter and judgment of each other's virtue, but a shared experience in which we live in common and find ourselves headed in the same direction. To think alongside Wittgenstein again, there is that which can be expressed in propositions of language—say, my calling you “friend”—and that which can only be shown and never converted into words. Derrida's point, taken from Nietzsche, is that friends allow this *whatever* to lie between them, in silence.

For us, we share a form of life with an understanding of how the word “friend” is supposed to be used. But this doesn't mean we can use it. There is something missing if I simply call you all “friends”—it seems insincere, perhaps ungrammatical. After all, just because you've shown the willingness to sit through my bullshit doesn't mean we've had the event of friendship. Does it? I guess it depends. It's a perhaps. It depends on how this lecture ends.

For Aristotle and his virtuous friends, they are friends because they are virtuous. And a part of their virtue lies in understanding each other's roles and what they are due each other as friends. The utilitarian friends are friends because they can exchange a quantifiable equal amount of money, or votes, or power, or whatever. Friends of pleasure have an understanding of what they expect from either their lover or beloved. A proper inequality. But friends of virtue exchange and share equal virtue, they practice virtue together. They each give the other what is due them, although the exchange rate may mean trading money for honor, or praise for assistance, and so on. Aristotle names his friends after the event has concluded, and although he claims that his friendship is without justice, it is not until the quantities are calculated that one may or may not be called friend. This is friendship that demands the possible, and for that it deserves nothing but our contempt. Aristotle tests others and then names them as friends. Whatever it names has already disappeared.

For friendship to have meaning, it must be named in the event, and the event

In Agamben's essay "The Friend," he notes that friend is a sort of non-predicative term, that is, a term from which it is not possible to establish a class that includes all the things to which the predicate in question is attributed. When I say "I am your friend," we cannot point at what is it that crosses all such utterance; much like the phrase "I love you," whatever it means comes into being at the moment of its being said. It is simply a name which names.

In the curious case of insults, we find that often the insult is not the result of being compared to something undesirable but in being-named as such in a way that one cannot defend oneself. We think of children who insist on calling Nick "Rick," and Nick cannot defend himself because there is simply nothing to defend in the being called as such. There is no way to defend oneself from being called a friend, or being beloved. The naming of the friend as such is an event in itself, it calls forth and brings into being. It is not a definition, it calls upon nothing prior to itself, but it names the being together of those who are there.

How do we say "friend"? I think of those of you in this room whom I would call friend but couldn't, for whom I couldn't say a middle name or perhaps even a first. I certainly know nothing of your virtue, but you do, in fact, fall among my group of friends—I would even go so far as to say you are my friends, my good friends, my true friends. We know this when we are together and do what only friends can do. It's not that we are tied together by utility, though certainly we use each other in certain ways to achieve a goal. And we're not particularly tied by pleasure, at least most of us. Our relationship is based on something else, and this something else is what we call whatever, our form of life, an entirely contingent and arbitrary but intimately important set of practices in which we share a common language, we understand one another. This is virtually the opposite of what Aristotle would define as a true friend. What ties us together is not language—remember, it's the activity between us that gives us language. Rather, it is silence, and what happens in silence.

—Friendship. Friendship, then. Friendship as event. I think, hopefully, perhaps, Nietzsche's dangerous perhaps, I hope perhaps I have shown that friendship, at least inasmuch as Aristotle has conceived it for Western societies influenced by his thought, is impossible. Impossible, not for the least reason, that we are wholly unwilling to accept how he defines equality within the virtuous friendship.

Because for Aristotle, within the true and virtuous friendship, my friend and I accept our roles as they are and we respect one another for who we are—that is, virtuous bodies. We who do not respect property, authority, monogamy, prudence and other virtues can never, Aristotle says, have true friends. Not virtuous friends in Aristotle's sense of the word.

But Aristotle's sense of the word is inadequate for our form of life. I think that's already clear. Aristotle sees friendship as an attribute, a state of being.

difference and conflict within a society. By defusing the intensity within society with which people made themselves—that is, how they declared friends and enemies—the State would reduce all bodies to mere citizens, lacking the intensities of love and enmity that created discord. In this reduced position, as *hostis* [Latin for "enemy"], citizen bodies unknown to one another would find their only friends in the State, which would also then define their enemies and have total control over their form of life.

A bit of a bastardized paraphrasing, for sure. Continue to run with me.

For Aristotle, the *telos* or end-goal of the State is the Good Life. The ideal State is one that allows its citizens to dwell in virtue. And so here we have it again, that damn virtue. We can excuse Aristotle for not having seen the horrors that follow in the wake of all those grand projects of virtue, and certainly I need not list them for you. But this really is the crux of the problem, the problem of government and collectivities generally but also this problem of friendship, which we still haven't pinned down. We won't blame Aristotle for not being a nihilist, but really—this is a man who believes in good and evil, and metaphysics. I doubt he'd even heard of historical materialism. His attempts at defining and discovering virtue are virtuous, but what it reveals is something else—that which Aristotle defines as virtue is virtuous for a particular form of life. Certainly we don't expect wives to obey husbands or peasants to obey kings, so we can no longer call these things virtuous. So this is why we discarded the notion of virtue and used it as kind of a placeholder. That is, we can reject Aristotle's universal virtue for the idea that virtue, the object of the good life, is simply whatever is the object of a particular form of life.

I'm trying to use philosophy here to cross a few borders and get from Aristotle's descriptions of "friendship" to Agamben's prescription for the *whatever singularity*. Hang tight.

Agamben uses the term form-of-life (with hyphens) as a way to say "the good life," a life that cannot be separated from its form, in which the restriction of the possibilities of life is simply impossible. What is "good life," what is good for each form-of-life is simply happiness, however that form-of-life might define it.

He takes the term from a linguistic philosopher, Wittgenstein, who used the term in a radically different way. For Wittgenstein, form of life is simply a shorthand way of saying all of the environmental, historical, sociological factors that create the conditions for us to understand the words we use, how we understand and use language. When two bodies understand one another, they share a form of life. This is because words, in Wittgenstein's convincing characterization of language, only have meaning in shared use. So, for the word in our examples, "good," good isn't a word that has a meaning in itself. We learn "good" in activity, in our relations with one another. We can say "good" is the product of our form of life. Our understanding of good is a

part of our form of life.

Because Aristotle speaks of virtue, and we do not have virtue, only *whatever*, we will say that what Aristotle calls virtue is a common inclination toward a particular form of life; the whatever that holds us together as friends is a certain unspeakable fact of our living in common without justice. Justice, Aristotle's justice, is excluded even from his virtuous friendship. Why is this the case? Because we do not treat friends justly, we treat them as friends—friends, as we together understand the word, because we share a form of life. Friends do not share some-thing (virtue or justice, for instance), they are shared by the experience of friendship.

—I'm on page five of my speech; I don't know how far this is in the lecture itself. Maybe you're getting bored at this point. I hope not, because really this is where it gets even more boring. No one really understands this Agamben shit, and no one knows where he's going with it, except maybe our old friend and he just thinks it means the T-word. I'm going to try to salvage something from that understanding.

I guess a part of where I'm trying to go with this Wittgenstein-Agamben connection, at the moment so far removed from friendship, is that what is good is dependent on our form of life, it is dependent upon how we *always already* act in the world. If we understand something when it is communicated it is by always already having experienced it. And so when I say friend and we hear different things, it is because while we share some activity in common we inhabit different forms of life.

And if when I say friend it means a certain willingness to throw everything away for a person you've just met or if you seek out certain intensities because you believe that is the purpose of friendship, to have grand and wild experiences, then perhaps we share a certain form of life—a certain idea of the good life, a common understanding of the word happiness.

To share a form of life is to share potentialities, to inhabit a something that is possible in the future. It is not to be static, to be identified, but to be living in common. Aha! But here we have again Aristotle's friendship. That mistranslation from the beginning: "O my friends, there is no friend!" What if perhaps the translation was supposed to go something like, "He who has many friends, has not a single friend"? This is really then the question of numbers. When I call "Friends," how many of us are there?

Aristotle doesn't give us a clear number, but he makes it certain that we understand that true friendship is only possible with a limited number. So then here suddenly we see, if we didn't already, that really we can't just make anarchy in the world by becoming friends with everyone. That's silly. Our friendships would be meaningless. We all probably already knew this. Any of us who've had friends, or bodies around us we called friend, we know that friendship requires both time and a degree of living together.

There are just too many people for us to be friends with everyone. The more people we try to be friends with, the less time we have to develop each of our friendships. More importantly, though, friendship requires a degree of living together. We can understand this as the ability to develop collective experiences and understandings of the world around our friendship. Living together is a sort of putting our futures together: you have to admit that to some extent, even if we're not getting married, our futures are now intertwined. So, in some sense we've developed together a common goal, even if that goal is the friendship itself—which is to say, now, our form of life—and we can see that our form of life is the possibilities we share *and* the good life we create.

—I take a break again. A— is outside with the dog, and I'm trying to write, though it's a bit too bright and I'm distracted by text messages and awkwardness and at this point I feel like I'm running out of steam even though I haven't even gotten where I really want. But at this point here we are, thinking friendship together; whatever we're thinking about, we're calling it friendship. Even though we may inhabit different forms of life. But we see here Aristotle trying to figure out numbers, the numbers game.

Form of life for Wittgenstein isn't a technical term, there's not a number attached to it either, and really philosophers aren't clear if he suggests there's just one human form of life, or if form of life is something akin to culture or subculture or nation—though of course we must heartily reject the idea that form of life is anything with a distinct boundary. Form of life is both the experience of our past and the possibility we share of the future. Yet we inhabit form of life in the present: it is what we are when we speak.

Oh shit, I've just introduced the concept of time. And if I start saying "was," "is," and "will be" all of a sudden I'm going to be talking Heidegger and Being and grammar and shit.

Not going there.

*Friends. Friends make the world turn 'round You share secrets, lockers, money, hopes & dreams. Friends need you. You need friends. A friend can make the day go by, as fast as lightning all the giggles have to end. Or a fight with a friend can make you misrible as you count the minutes ticking by [sic] 1,2,3,4 it seems as if this day will never end. How can you say you're sorry if you feel that they have done you wrong, even if I want friend. If they go and play with some other friend. how can I join a game I know I would never play. you dont want to stay alone. Please just stay a true friend.*

## IV

### FRIENDSHIP AND EVENT

SO, TO BEGIN AGAIN, from a different position. How do we say "Friend"? What does it mean?