Friendship and the Political – A Hesitant Exploration

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> ‘Sed si aliquem amicum existimas, cui non tantundem credis quantum tibi, vehementer erras et non satis nosti vim verae amicitiae. / But if you consider any man a friend whom you do not trust as you trust yourself, you are mightily mistaken and you do not sufficiently understand what true friendship means.’
> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, Epistle III, 2.[1]

> ‘Eén keer trek je de conclusie:
> Vriendschap is een illusie…
> [One day you’ll draw this conclusion:
> Friendship is just an illusion.]’
> Het Goede Doel, 1983

> ‘Friendship (as the ancients saw) can be a school of virtue; but also (as they did not see) a school of vice.’
> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960), p.97

The topic of this paper is not an easy one. Of course, there are ways in which the notions of politics and of friendship can be connected. But how to do this is far from obvious. On the face of it, politics and friendship appear as each others opposites: politics is the sphere of suspicion and hidden agendas where “friends” are the last thing to rely upon, and it also is the sphere of interest and of the strategies and tactics to realize goals; friendship, by contrast, has to do with opening up, with sincerity, with trusting someone else as much as you trust yourself [see the quote from Seneca given as a motto above], with disinterestedness and freedom, and with having nothing to hide – not even your agenda. This is in line with another obvious link between the two notions, namely Carl Schmitt’s conception of “the political”, in which *das Politische* divides into friend and enemy.[2] The constellation which suggests itself here is one in which “the political” divides –this then becomes the *fundamental* political decision- into friendship and enmity aka politics. Politics, as the general name for the ways of dealing with the political, is a necessity to the extent to which the political is inescapable; friendship, by contrast, does not belong to the sphere of needs, but to that of desires.

[1] Seneca, *Epistles*, with an English translation by Richard M. Gummere [Loeb Classical Library vol.75] (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP, (1917) 2002), p.11

[2] Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, [1932] 1987), p.26f.

Friendship, to quote Seneca again, is something one does not *need*, but *desire*.[3] It belongs to what Aristotle called not life –*to zèn*-, but the *good* life – *to eu zèn*.[4] The two notions, politics and friendship, thus seem to have in common that they are very hard to combine with each other: their relation is one of mutual exclusion.

This, however, contrasts starkly with the fact that for thinkers like Aristotle and Seneca, friendship–*filia/amicitia*[5]- was of great importance precisely within the context of the *polis* or the republic. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, leaves the choice between the two forms of good life or 'life accompanied by virtue [*ó bios airetōtatos*],' namely *bios politikos* and *bios teoretikos*, undecided.[6] In both these good forms of life, friendship –the friendship with those with whom one takes care of the common good, and the friendship with like-minded people with whom one can discuss philosophical topics- plays a major role. The situation in which one finds oneself as a 21st century thinker thus is one of *embarrassment*: it is difficult to broach the subject because, on the one hand, what a philosopher like Seneca says about friendship is strongly convincing, while, on the other hand, it is hard to deny that this notion of friendship is at odds, and radically so, with Modern politics.

Embarrassment is a variant of wonder in the sense of "not really knowing what to think or say". In this paper, I try to give shape to the embarrassment that I face with respect to the topic of friendship and politics. If I had read any of the other papers for this workshop, I might have formed strong opinions with respect to this or the other approach to the subject. I may still do so. But I have resisted the temptation to read what others sent to me. As a result, my paper merely consists of a number of "reflections" or "considerations", raising questions rather than answering them and, hopefully, thus adding to the material for discussion.

1. Among Modern political philosophers, enmity occupies a much more important place than friendship. Since the rise of Modern political philosophy, with Niccoló Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, politics is treated as a relatively independent and "secular" realm (I omit here the ways in which this secularity can be shown to be less secular than it appears [see section 10 below]). Emphasis is on the essentially conflictual nature of social relations in Machiavelli and on the potential hostility of every human being towards every other human

[3] Seneca, op.cit., p.47.
[4] Aristotle, *Politikoon*, 1252b30f [translation taken from the Loeb Classical Library].
[5] Throughout this paper, I use, in a stipulative manner, the classical distinction of friendship- filia/amicitia from love-eros/amor and love-agapè/caritas, as well as from affection-storgè/affectio (cf. Clive Staples Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Harper Collins, [1960] 2002).
[6] Aristotle, *Politikoon*, 1324a27, 1324a32f, and 1325a17.

being in Hobbes.[7] Hobbes' idea of man being the natural enemy of every other man has "haunted" Western political thinking. Within this line, the political and politics are directly connected with conflict and *discord*, and the primary aim of political order as such is, along this line, the pacification of society and the preclusion of civil war. Though devised to end man's 'nasty, poor, solitary, brutish and short' life in the pre-political natural state, this political philosophy has the grim face of a sovereign power which, while never being secure of its position, has not only the right but even the obligation to employ every possible means to make its subjects obey.

The actually domineering line of political thinking is not this haunting Hobbesian-Schmittian specter, but rather the Lockean-Rawlsian line. The tradition of liberal thought running from John Locke to John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas is more optimistic, but also more "ideological": it assumes that human beings are, on the whole, reasonable enough to understand that their safety and property are better protected if they organize themselves in a political society of which they are citizens. Both lines, however, share an anthropology in which human beings are, in the first place, individuals, who, secondly, have a clear view of their own interests, and who, thirdly, organize their behavior in such a way as their power of reason tells them will best serve their interests. All men are, in this respect, equal, and if left free their combined reason will generate an optimum of political order and societal peace. Of course, there is a crucial difference between the "positive anthropology" of Locke, who believes that people *are* born free and with equal rights, and the much more sophisticated "political anthropology" of Rawls, who argues that people should treat each other *as* free and equal, regardless of the variety of "comprehensive doctrines" they may embrace. However, the two set in motion the same socio-political mechanism: the interplay of basically self-centered free individuals with rational capacities. On the whole, this is how modern Western liberal-democratic societies, i.e. the kind of society that Locke wanted to substantiate and that Rawls set out to write the political philosophy for, work (or are believed to work): democracy is organized around the individual citizen casting a free vote or running for office, a market

[7] Throughout this paper, I use the notion of "the political" [*le politique, das Politische*] to point to the ubiquitous possibility, in everything social, of real conflict, i.e. such a conflict as can not be resolved by recurrence to principles, rules, or procedures that are accepted by all parties involved. Politics [*la politique, die Politik*] I define as the totality of ways of dealing with the fact of the political – this notion of politics then covers an expression such as "politics of friendship" just as it covers "identity politics" or "politics of recognition", but it also covers "politics" in the habitual sense of a particular place within society where "politics takes place" (the government and other bodies, parliament, etc.). A polity -city-state, empire, nation-state, IGO- is the institutionalized form of political order, often called "the state". With the notion of political society, finally, I point to that part of civil society where public discussion over political issues –including the discussion about what is and what is not to be considered "political"- takes place; in late-modern liberal-democratic societies this includes a variety of television shows, opinion pages in journals, public debates, etc.

economy resting upon the idea of individual initiative or free "enterprise", and a civil society based upon the notion of voluntary association between, again, free individuals. The predominant position, both in its Hobbesian-Hegelian and in its Lockean-Rawlsian thus is based on the key notion of free individuality.

There thus is a strong tendency in Modern Western philosophy to consider politics as, primarily, a (set of) means to deal with the political, i.e. with the possibility, present in all societal relations, of conflicts between people and interests, as well as with, in the international arena, conflicts over territories and resources between nation-states. The latter are typically conceived in analogy with the situation of individual human beings in the "state of nature", facing the same two traditional options: the Hobbesian option of the full transfer of natural right to a sovereign power, and the Lockean option of the limited and conditional transfer of natural rights and liberties to a body which is legitimate only to the extent to which it properly executes and protects these rights and liberties.[8]

This position appears to contrast, but in fact matches perfectly with another line of thought, in which the opposite of *discord*, namely: *harmony*, is relegated to a non-political and tendentially *private* realm. This realm can, first of all, be the idea of a *community* [*Gemeinschaft*], traditional or not. A typical variant is the idea of *sobornost'* elaborated by Russian-Orthodox thinkers, perceived as a *revival* of a basically ecclesiastical community.[9] A communitarian position does not have to be "conservative" or "reactionary", as the example of Elizabeth Bounds shows, who elaborates a similar conception on the basis of the Protestant congregation.[10] It can, secondly, be the idea of a pacified *society* [*Gesellschaft*] in which conflict obtains the "positive" forms of competition [in economic society], plurality [in political society], and multiple voluntary association [in civil society]. Typical of civil society discourse, for example, is that it "exports" the conflict potential of the political to a separate realm of "politics". A third variant, finally, is to render harmonious society ultimately a-political by situating it outside the present world, placing it in either a near or distant future (the clearest example of this is Marxism) or in an otherworldly version of the Kingdom of

[8] The present-day problem of the partial or full transfer of sovereign power, for example with respect to human rights, to supranational bodies reflects this problem: is this a matter of sovereign states voluntarily and conditionally transferring part of their power which they can control, or is it a matter of a hegemonial power, sometimes called "Empire" which is sovereign already (cf. Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* [2nd edition] (London & New York: Routledge, [1995] 2000), p.130ff).

[9] See for example my 'Sobornost' als Gesellschaftideal bei Vladimir Solov'ev und Pavel Florenskij', in: N. Franz, M. Hagemeister, F. Haney (Hrsg.), *Pavel Florenskij - Tradition und Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main &c: Peter Lang, 2001), pp.225-246.

[10] Elizabeth Bounds, *Coming Together / Coming Apart; Religion, Community, and Modernity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997).

God (an obvious example is the anti-political political philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ëv, but it is not difficult to find similar examples).[11] This line of thought runs, at least, from (St.)Augustine of Hippo to the contemporary work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (*Empire* and *Multitude*). What all these variants share is their dualism, whether temporal, spatial or sectoral [public vs. private, *forum internum* vs. *forum externum*], and their tendentially negative evaluation of the polity and of politics, considering them at best as a necessary evil.

While the core of the first line of thought is formed by the notion of interest and, in the end, the notion of self-love, the core of the second line is formed by the notion of disinterested love-of-other, for which *agapè* is one of the names. The problem with the idea that one ought to love not only one's neighbor, but even one's enemy, is not only that it turns into a hard-to-achieve task in this world, but also that it becomes *abstract-universal* and fails to do justice to the concrete feelings of love and sympathy, which always have to do with particular individuals. It is easy, in fact *too* easy and cheap, to love everyone, it is much more difficult to respect all, while liking many, and loving only a few. Political order is viewed, first and foremost, as a device to suppress enmity, to keep it under control, or to steer it into a different direction. Friendship is seen, primarily, as something of the private sphere: it is an intimate and private relation between individual persons. Of course, friendship has a public aspect, too: both friendship itself and its effects can be visible to others, and, as Hannah Arendt rightly observed, such public display does not harm the friendship: '…love, in distinction from friendship, is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public.'[12]

Within the dominant tradition of political philosophy, we may conclude, friendship is not a political category.

2. To others, friendship *is* a political category. According to Carl Schmitt, the political –*das Politische*- is what divides groups of people into friends and enemies. The "logic" of the political, as introduced by Schmit, seems to lead to a "radical" choice: *either* you are an enemy *or* you are a friend [=ally]. Because of his affiliation with the nazi-regime, Schmitt has been a *persona non grata* in political theory for quite some time, but in the post-war period

[11] See, for example, my 'Zlo i politicheskoe: ob anti-politicheskoj politicheskoj filosofii Vl. Solov'ëva,' in: E. Takho-Godi (ed.), *Vladimir Solov'ëv i kul'tura serebrjanogo veka* [10-ye Losevskie chtenija] (Moskva: Dom Loseva) [forthcoming], and, in German, 'Das Böse und das Politische: zur anti-politischen politischen Philosophie Vladimir Solov'ëvs,' in: B. Zelinsky, J. Lehmann (Hrsg.), *Das Böse in der russischen Kultur* (Köln) [both publications forthcoming]

[12] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.51.

his insights were gradually appropriated not only by the conservative right, but also by leftist thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe, who, broadly speaking, invoke his notion of the political in order to counteract the depolitizing tendencies of liberal-democratic polities and of mainstream political philosophy.[13]

The opposition of a political world of enmity and discord and a non-political world of love and harmony, is not only less than helpful, it is even disastrous, as it is a major source of both quietist escapism and revolutionary utopianism, with a strong Leviathan as the seemingly only alternative. One way to develop a theoretical alternative, in which a *thisworldly* connection of politics and the political with the notions of friendship and love becomes possible, is to take a closer look at the notion of the political itself. As my point of departure, I take its "harshest" formulation, that of Carl Schmitt, using also the comments on his position by Chantal Mouffe and others.

A first step is to *acknowledge* the fact that the political is a *ubiquitous feature* of all societal relations: everything human, down to the most personal *is* always also political, i.e. potentially engaged in a real conflict, but nothing is ever *purely* political. Schmitt's attempt to save or revive the *limitation* of the political to the state –the *polity* in more general terms- rests upon a decision which, itself, is profoundly political. The omnipresence of the political implies that friendship, too, as something societal, is "political" [see sections 6 and 7 below].

A second step is to *amend* Schmitt's conception, replacing the opposition of friend and enemy by that of "the amicable" and "the inimical". Amicable and inimical, as qualities of something, are less harsh, in terms of consequences, than their identification with entities. The ultimate consequence of the identifying of something as inimical is that it must disappear, and identifying the inimical with an enemy, i.e. a person as carrier of the inimical, is that this enemy must be destroyed. This amendment, I believe, is in line with Schmitt's own analysis, in which the other "dividing principles" –the moral, the aesthetic, the economic- divide into adjectival, not substantial notions, too: the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the useful and the harmful, etc.[14] The meaning of the political is adjectival, not substantive, and to identify something amicable or inimical with its "bearer" –an institution, a fellow human being, a country, a terrorist network- is of course possible (it is what happens in "war"), but not necessary. A principle of "dissociation" is arguably the general precondition of dealing

[13] See Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*(London & New York: Verso, 1993), particularly here critique of the political liberalism of John Rawls and others (pp. 41-59 and 135-154), and idem (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London & New York: Verso, 1999).
[14] Schmitt, loc.cit.

with conflict in a *civilized* way, just as a dissociation of person and opinion is what makes it possible, to some extent at least, to disagree with a friend while remaining friends.

A third step is to *replace* the binary opposition of amicable vs. inimical by a triple one through the introduction of a "neutral" third element. Just as, from an economic perspective, that which is not profitable does not have to be harmful, but can also be "economically indifferent", so, too, in politics that which is not amicable does not have to be inimical. It can also be "politically left alone", and it is this *indifference*, with its "range" marked by expressions like "I do not mind" and "I don't care", that makes the difference between deadly dichotomy and freedom generated by a tripartition. The word "indifference" has its limitation here if it suggests an "I don't care", whereas the point is of course -as with colleagues- that cooperation does not presuppose friendship: indifference is not enough, is too "negative"; instead, there must be some sort of positive appreciation: the relation between "good co-citizens" should be similar to that between "good colleagues".[15] This "indifference" in the sense of "not minding per se" not only is among the principles on which civil society is based, where I do not mind per se if others want to defend the rights of Canadian baby seals as long as I can be member of a stamp-collecting club (or vice versa), but which also creates a possibility for a politics of friendship, understood as the creation of a place for friendship and "friendly networks" *beyond* the private sphere. Such a politics does presuppose, however, an effective exclusion of the inimical, and hence: a legal framework including the means to enforce the law (any "withering away" of the polity is a move *beyond* the political because it denies the *remaining* possibility of conflict).

Finally, the replacement of friend-enemy by the amicable vs. the inimical, combined with the introduction of a third, "neutral" category of "the indifferent", makes it possible to differentiate between friendship and friendliness. In Aristotle, *filia* means both, at least according to the translation I have used: it denotes friendship in its perfect form, i.e. as friendship 'between the good, and those that resemble each other in virtue,'[16] but it is also used to denote friendliness as a virtue that holds the middle between the vices of obsequiousness [*kolakeia*] and flattery [*areskeia*] on the one hand, quarrelsomeness [*dusereia*] and surliness [*duskolia*] on the other.[17] Arguably, the second, friendliness, is a social virtue, while the first, friendship, is a personal bond with (an)other person(s) – we may also call them

[15] For an interesting elaboration, see Iseult Donohan, *Civic Republicanism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.267-269 [I am grateful to Oleg Kharkhordin for this reference].
[16] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, iii, 6 [1156b8f].
[17] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II, vii, 13 [1108a26ff]; in the *Eudemian Ethics*, friendliness holds the middle between *kolikeia* and surliness [*apekhteia*] (1221a7f)

the weak and the strong form of friendship. Hypothetically, I think that friendliness and friendship need to be distinguished in order to assess the relation of politics and friendship. Hopefully, the escape, suggested above, from the "dichotomous logic" generated by a binary opposition of friend and enemy –which forces one to turn all one's non-enemies into friends [or: allies] (and vice versa) *or* to relegate all "genuine" friendship to a non-political realm, however defined-, is a precondition for a *positive* politization of friendship or, perhaps more precisely, friendly relations. Just as hypothetically, I suggest to make a distinction between a network-of-friends and a friendly network.

3. In politics, an opponent is not automatically an enemy, nor is an ally automatically a friend. Similarly, a competitor in the economy is not automatically an enemy, nor is a colleague or consociate automatically a friend. This is possible only because the actors involved, the "political subjects" and the "economic subjects" respectively, are capable of reproducing, within themselves, the functional differentiation of political life, economic life, social life, and private life. Allies in politics, colleagues at work, and consociates in business are necessary, but friendship, however deeply it may be desired, it is not a necessity – life can do without, even if thereby becomes less pleasant. Friendship presupposes the desire or need to have friends, but it also presupposes lack of interest apart from the friendship itself. This is the crucial difference between making friends and socializing: the latter is an instrumentalized form of friendship. A Dutch saying states that 'A good neighbor is worth more than a far friend [Een goede buur is beter dan een verre vriend]' – the truth in this saying depends on the definition of "worth", i.e. of the good involved. Neighbors, for example, do not tell you unpleasant truths, while friends may very well do so.

Friendship can exist in the private sphere, in the economic sphere -including the mafia- , in civil society, and in political society. Friendship can, in fact, exist in any sphere of society, even within the family: you can be friends with a brother or sister, with a parent, etc., while being link by a family or blood tie as such does not generate friendship. Friendship –like love- can exist in any sphere of society, and it does so separate from and in addition to the relations –including friendly ones- that belong typically to that sphere. Also, presupposing "privacy", it presupposes an establishend distinction of the private and the public sphere.

Friendship is a good in itself –a *bonum per se*- and an end in itself, even if it simultaneously it also is a means to other ends. As such, as a good in itself, it is indifferent with respect to other ends. Friendship within a small religious community, a suppressed

minority, or a group of human rights activists is just as close and true and genuine as that within 'a circle of criminals, cranks, or perverts.'[18] Therefore, there is a danger involved in associating too closely the principle of voluntary association that is at the heart of the idea of civil society, and the motive of friendship. The two certainly do have things in common: both are forms of positive, not of negative freedom; both belong to the sphere of desires and ideals, not to that of wants and necessities; both are, for that reason, fragile; both provide a sense of sharing and community; both are essentially *about* something; both generate social cohesion. The difference between a group of friends organized around the collecting of 19th century Russian *zemstvo* stamps and an association of *zemstvo* stamp collectors is radical in legal terms, the first being a gathering of individuals, the second a legal person in its own right, but gradual in terms of the participating individuals and their activities: the association will more often than not have arisen from such a group of friends, and this *is* the transition from private sphere to civil society that feeds the latter. Friendship or, more modestly, friendly relations within such a group are essential to this process. At the same time, however, there is no difference, as far as friendship is concerned, with the transition from informal networks-of-friends in an illegal sector of the economy, say: marihuana growing, to organized crime. Oleg Kharkhordin has rightly pointed to the civil society potential of friendly networks, based on free association, in the late Soviet period, but subsequent developments have shown that these networks also had a different potential, i.e. that voluntary association is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of civil society.[19]

4. A friendly network, hypothetically, is not the same as a network-of-friends. Networking, for one thing, is primarily an economic activity. It is one of the ways in which humans use their communicative and social skills as part of their labor power. In an economy based on communication and interaction, these skills are of great importance, and it is not accidental that they are something in one's c.v. when applying for a job: a curriculum vitae is essentially the *curriculum vitae animalis laborantis*, it is one's auto-narrative *as a worker*. Friendliness is one of the many virtues that are helpful for the networker in economic society – others include alertness, white teeth, the capacity of selection, a plastic smile, and efficiency ["Don't' spend all your time on one person during the reception"].

[18] Lewis 2002, p.97.
[19] Oleg Kharkhordin, 'Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 50 (1998), pp. 949-68

As with any social activity, economic activity creates a place in which personal relations can come into existence. From an economic point of view, however, *liking* somebody is counter-effective, both if it means entertaining feelings of friendship [filia] and when it means sexual attraction [love-eros]: if you become befriended with a colleague you will start ineffectively long conversations instead of professional talks; if you can't keep your eyes off a woman at a reception you are not really concentrating on the networking business you are supposed to be engaged in.

It is not just that our system leaves us free to move or allows us to develop friendly networks, this freedom of movement and of association is part of its very basis, just like for instance the principle of private property over the means of production. Strictly speaking, we *ourselves*, when networking or entertain private friendly relations, *are* means of production that are our own property, because entertaining friendly relations is *work*, i.e. investment of productive power. Friendliness is economically beneficial, friendship is potentially hazardous.

5. Friendship is *not* necessarily exclusive. Even if the political is what divides into the amicable and the inimical, friendship does not, out of itself, imply either enmity or even non-friendship. Friendship *does* presuppose the notion of the non-friend, because a friend is essentially made out of a non-friend, but a non-friend is not an anti-friend. There is, at this point, a strange contradiction in C.S. Lewis' analysis. On the one hand, he claims that 'to say "These are my friends" implies "Those are not",'[20] and even that 'the Friendship may be 'about' almost nothing except the fact that it excludes.'[21] At the same time, he argues that 'two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend,'[22] and also that, contrary to lovers who seek it, 'friends *find* this solitude about them, this barrier between them and the herd, whether they want it or not [italics mine, EvdZ]. They would be glad to reduce it. The first two would be glad to find a third.'[23] The upshot of this analysis is, it seems to me, that exclusion and exclusivity, whether appreciated or not, are as such an unintended outcome of the making of friends. Two analogies may help here. When you cut a statue out of marble, you get a residue, but not because you wanted the residue to be there, and it would be pure accident if the leftovers of a statue would be statues in their own right. Still it seems to be a *necessary* byproduct. Falling

[20] Lewis 1960, p.72.
[21] Lewis 1960, p.103.
[22] Lewis 1960, p.74.
[23] Lewis 1960, p.79.

in love, starting a relationship of love-eros, is like cutting a statue: there is a necessary byproduct, because, first, you can only love one person, and second because all others *do* become less important. But making friends, it seems to me, is rather like picking a fruit from a basket: the other fruits automatically become "non-picked", but this is a mere effect of me having to select: it is not excluded off hand that in addition to an apple, I may also pick an orange, a pear, a strawberry, etc. Similarly, when you select a person as your friend, all the others automatically become non-friends. But it is not a priori excluded that the mechanism of the two who are delighted to be joined by a third, and the three who welcome a fourth, will continue with a fifth, a sixth, etcetera, provided that all newcomers "qualify to become real friends". There may be a limit to the number of friends that one can "make", similar to the limited number of fruits that you can digest, but this limit has merely to do with one's limited capacities (which, as we all know, differ both with respect to friends and to fruits). It is neither intrinsic to the friendship or to the fruit-liking as such, nor has it to do with the qualifications of the newcomers (as we also know, we can deeply regret that we can not be friends with everybody [or taste all the fruits, for that matter]). Moreover, contrary to the fruit-example, it can be the fourth who becomes friends with the fifth, while the first two only are friends with the third and the fourth, and the "last" are again friends with the first: a network-of-friends is not the same as a *group* of friends.

6. It is a fact of experience that a group of friends is often the best qualified actor to solve a practical (or theoretical, for that matter) problem: division of tasks is smooth, critical feedback is constructive, and the idea of working together is a stimulus . As C.S. Lewis rightly observed, friendship, contrary to love-eros, is not focused on the persons involved, i.e. on the relation itself, but is *about* something: lovers typically "are together" while friends typically "do things" (to be sure, lovers can be friends, too): 'Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.'[24] This explains why, far from being absurd, the idea of a group of friends "running" the polity and taking care of the common good is attractive and suggestive even if it is an illusion. The idea of an "amigocracy", to an extent perhaps identical with the republican ideal, faces two problems, one of a fundamental nature, the other of a factual: it only works if *all* are friends, and it only works at a relatively small scale. Since friendship, albeit selective, is not

[24] Lewis 1960, p.73, cf. p.80: 'Hence we picture lovers face to face but Friends side by side, their eyes look ahead.'

necessarily exclusive, it is possible that within a small group of people everybody is everybody's friend or at least a friend of a friend, but this means that, if we are talking about the polity, the visions of the common good of the people involved must be the same or, if different, compatible, which is the case, for example, if the common good is, precisely, the "running of the res publica in a good manner" (this explains the proximity with republicanism). It also means that, in practical terms, an "amigocracy" can only be an effective form of government if the number of people involved is limited, either because only a small section of the population participates in the polity or because the society in question is small.

With respect to the first, "amigocracy" understood as "rule by a group of friends" or "rule by a friendly network" is, when it is limited in number, i.e. when the group of friends does not coincide with the *dèmos*, a form of aristocracy. Any form of aristocracy is fundamentally anti-democratic, not so much because it is government by an elite –that in itself can be the outcome of democratic procedure-, but because the real political question at stake here, the question *who decides* who is an aristocrat is answered by the *aristoi* themselves: aristocracy is a form of self-appointed government, and, when continued over time, co-optation by definition, and this is what any *dèmos* rightly fears when they perceive friendly relations between those in power. To be sure, there are inevitable elements of co-optation in representative government, too: the leading groups within political parties, for example, are also largely self-appointed. But in that case, the *dèmos* can at least have the idea that such elites can be sent home by means of elections.

With respect to the second, it is not accidental that friendship was regarded as an important political concept within the context of relatively small and surveyable city-states like Athens or the Roman republic, and, later, Italian and other city-republics. Supra-national polities such as the European Union sometimes appear as amigocracies when the leaders of the governments of the member states get along very well, but while this may be effective at the level of the polity itself, the problem is immediately perceptible: these government leaders represent democratic polities, the *dèmoi* of which are being disempowered by being excluded from this friendship. Amigocracy and democracy are compatible only if the group of friends *is* the *dèmos*. To the extent to which friendship is 'an affair of the few', it is understandable that 'some forms of democratic sentiment are naturally hostile to it.'[25] Nothing is harder to beat that an old boys' network, and since the old boys started out like college or university

[25] Lewis 1960, p.72.

friends, it is impossible to *become* an old boy. If, in large democratic polities, friendship is looked upon with hostility by the *dèmos*, in authoritarian polities it is looked upon with suspicion by those in power, because a group of friends can be –and historically has often been- the beginning of a conspiracy or rebellion, 'a pocket of potential resistance.'[26] This is why both democratic and totalitarian regimes in our age tend to make friendship, like love-eros, a private, not a public affair. It this connection then, it is or becomes political when it crosses the border between the private and the public spheres.

7. There is an obvious tension between the idea of networks-of-friends and the formal character of the juridico-political order. Old friends' networks are essentially anti-democratic and anti-republican, yet probably essential for a working economic and political society under liberal-democratic conditions. Moreover, if politics takes place, first and foremost, in the spheres of the polity –the state, the government- and of political society –the part of civil society oriented towards the polity-, then it is clear that both offer, like in fact any societal sphere, opportunities for individuals to develop relations of friendship (and of love, hatred, etc.). Friendship is a spontaneous process: one is struck positively by someone else's opinions, observations, ideas, habits, or moral stance, and one spontaneously develops sympathetic feelings. Becoming friends with someone is always a very pleasant, delightful, and often liberating event, and the place of politics, like the work-place, is a place in which the relief of finding somebody who relates in the same manner to other people or events can be very great: at last one finds somebody who perceives things the same way. At the same time –as in the work-place- business goes on, too, and a relation of friendship (just as one of love, hatred, etc.) is at odds with a professional and neutral approach. Only if *all* people involved would be friends, things would go smoothly and, perhaps, optimally: it is not accidentally that a situation of universal love is a major dream in political philosophy, a recent example being offered by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*.[27] And the problem with friendship –contrary to love-agapè that can be universal and love-eros that is exclusive by definition- is that it is selective, but not necessarily exclusive: other people become my friends because I, on the one hand, desire friends, and, on the other, consider particular

[26] Lewis 1960, p.96.
[27] 'Militancy today is a positive, constructive, and innovative activity. (…) This militancy [the fully immanent militancy that is linked a world that knows no outside, EvdZ] makes resistance into counterpower and makes rebellion into a project of love.' [Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP, 2000), p.413]

persons the perfect candidates for being my friend (in reality, things do not develop in such a rational and conscious way, of course). But if I make only a limited number of friends, that happens because, on the one hand, not everybody "qualifies" and, on the other hand, I know from experience that there is a limit to my capacities to spend time with friends, to dispense energy, be attentive, etc Both limitations, however, are limitations of fact, not of principle. As a result, while love-agapè is a political dream which, if realized, would not hurt anybody, and love-eros a fact of life which, if it happens, can be given a place (partners at work can, for example, make a clear distinction between their private and their professional life), friendship is both limited and open affair by definition.

From a democratic point of view, therefore, friendship is a *risk* to politics, because it generates inequality of trust and confidence. As such, it is itself political, i.e. containing the possibility of real conflict, and hence it must be the object of politics: part of the "meta-politics" of a democratic polity is and must be the *containment* of friendship. Who has never experienced, as a citizen, the unpleasant feeling that the outcome of political debate or decision-taking was the effect of personal relations between politicians, rather than the outcome of a democratic process of which one is, as citizen, the only source of legitimacy? From the perspective of the citizen of a democratic polity, relations of friendship with elected politicians are fine, as long as they do not interfere with the political process itself – the trouble, however, is that they do.

In an era of globalization and of the development of forms of supraterritoriality,[28] friendship no longer presupposes a shared place. Zygmunt Bauman has made a distinction between two categories of people, those who are moving through the world vs. those who are moved by the world: 'For the inhabitants of the first world – the increasingly cosmopolitan, extraterritorial world of global businessmen, global culture managers or global academics, state borders are levelled down, as they are dismantled for the world's commodities, capital and finances. For the inhabitants of the second world, the walls built by immigration controls, of residence laws and of 'clean streets' and 'zero tolerance policies', grow taller;'[29] Friendship is not limited to either of these two worlds, but it easily imaginable how a member of the "extraterritorial elite" that populates the first world, can have friends whom she or he meets in hotels, on airports, at conferences, etcetera. Global networks-of-friends are just as possible as global friendly networks, and they represent the same political risk factor.

[28] For an elaboration, see Jan Aart Scholte, 'What is 'Global' about Globalization?,' chapter 2 of his *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Houndsmills & New York: Palgrave 2000), pp.41-61.
[29] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization; the Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, (1998) 2000), p.89.

8. In 1983, a Dutch rock group, “Het goede doel” [*The good cause*] released a song that would become a hit: ‘Vriendschap [Friendship]’.[30] The lyrics of the song, written by Henk Temming and Henk Westbroek, include the following lines:

Als kind had ik een vriend waarmee ik alles deed
Als hij begon te vechten, dan vocht ik met hem mee
Als ik in het water sprong, dook hij er achteraan
Een mooiere vriendschap, kon er in m'n ogen niet bestaan

This suits what Seneca writes about friendship: sharing everything, doing everything together, fighting along. When your friend is in a fight or dispute with someone else, you may wonder whether he or she is right, but this will not diminish your fundamental loyalty. “Right or wrong, my friend.”

Totdat hij verhuisde naar een andere stad
Ik heb als ik het goed heb nog één kaart van hem gehad

In the world of Seneca, as in that of Aristotle, there was no “moving to another town”, because there basically was only one town, the city-state. Physical distance / proximity obviously has a lot to do with the possibility of friendship. We all know, of course, how difficult it is to “entertain” friendship with those who have moved a long way. My best friend from the gymnasium lives two hours driving away, but I have a hard time maintaining the same kind of contact that I used to. Do we not all have friends that we would like to see more often, call more frequently on the telephone, share more with? Do we not all *hesitate* making new friends, because we realize that we will not be able to live up to our own expectations?

Eén keer trek je de conclusie
Vriendschap is een illusie
Vriendschap is een droom
Een pakketje schroot, met een dun laagje chroom

Is friendship indeed a dream, then, an illusion kept alive only by factual proximity? If the latter is the case, illusory friendship partly is an *optical* illusion: we mistake actual nearness

[30] http://wheredoibegin.web-log.nl/log/2104271

for a relation of friendship. Certainly the coming-to-be of friendship presupposes proximity, though this need not be physical proximity but can also be the internet.

…
Als het gaat om geld
Als het gaat om vrouwen
Als het gaat om alles wat je lief hebt
Wie kun je dan vertrouwen?
…

The band was very successful, but in interviews, band leader and song-writer Henk Westbroek showed himself disappointed about the "friends" that his success attracted.[31] Clearly they were of the kind 'who begins to be your friend because it pays.'[32] Later he became an active politician. With a populist program and the party "Leefbaar Utrecht [Livable Utrecht]" he and his political friends obtained a substantial say in local politics. Again, once he participated in politics, he became deeply disappointed: politicians, he found, were interested neither in truth nor in the common good, but primarily in power and their own ego.[33] This, of course, suits the "public" image of politicians, arguably the least respected profession in terms of sincerity and morality. True as this may be, it should be added that is not friendship as such that is an illusion, but *this* or *that* particular friendship that proves to be illusory. Moreover, this example occasions us to question whether *political* friendship actually is *friendship.*

9. In actual politics, friendship appears to play an important role. Recently, a Dutch minister, Thom de Graaf, saw his proposal to change the constitution in order to allow for the election instead of royal appointment of mayors perish in the First Chamber of parliament –the Senate or House of Lords, if compared to the US or the British situation- after having it seen accepted by the Second Chamber (in the Dutch situation the Second Chamber is the legislative body, but the First Chamber can block legislation). The proposal was rejected by an opposition party which the minister had every reason to regards as his "political friends", and which basically supported his proposal (they wanted to see the mayor elected by the city council while the minister was in favor or direct election, but for both options the constitution had to be amended by deleting royal appointment). Upon this defeat, he reconsidered his

[31] http://www.henkwestbroek.com/artikelen/henkwestbroekoverdeillusievanvriendschap.htm
[32] Seneca, op.cit., p.49.
[33] See the interviews on same website.

position as member of the cabinet (not only as minister, but also as vice prime-minister) and at that point saw himself let down by another political friend, the leader of his party's fraction in parliament, who did not want to jeopardize his party's participation in the government coalition. De Graaf thus was twice betrayed by political friends. A political friend apparently is *not* the kind of friend who will follow you in exile, or who will stake his own (political) life against your (political) death.[34] A *political* friend is someone whose friendship is conditional, someone 'who begins to be your friend because it pays' and therefore 'will also cease because it pays.'[35] A *political* friend is someone for whom friendship is a means to an end, not an end in itself (Aristotle would qualify it as "friendship of utility"). Political friendship thus is a contradiction in terms, however important friendliness may be for a good-working political society and polity, and however much politics may offer, like any sphere of societal activity, a place for friendship to come into existence.

10. Zygmunt Bauman writes: 'Scared loners without a community will go on searching for a community without fears, and those in charge of the inhospitable public space will go on promising it. The snag is, though, that the only communities which the loners may hope to build and the managers of public space can seriously and responsibly offer are ones constructed of fear, suspicion and hate. Somewhere along the line, friendship and solidarity, once upon a time major community-building materials, became too flimsy, too rickety or too watery for the purpose.'[36] Does he have a point, or is this mere "scared loners'" nostalgia for a situation that may have never existed other than as an idealization in the first place?

Are we not, in all this, idealizing friendship-filia/amicitia in a way not unlike the idealization of the Ancient polity –the *polis* with its *agora* and its *bios politikos*- by Hannah Arendt and other "civic humanists"?[37] Friendship, like the voluntary association of civil society, is a form of *positive* liberty, and it can only exist as such. A system that is based on free individuality puts, quite naturally, an emphasis on *negative* liberty: citizens must be protected against each other –monopoly of legitimate violence on the part of the polity, inviolable property rights, protection of the integrity of life and limb- as well as against the

[34] Seneca, op.cit., p.49.
[35] Seneca, op.cit., p.49.
[36] Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1999), p.14
[37] I take this notion from John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), p.206, who in turn (loc.cit., n.38) borrows it from Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers* vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), pp.334f; cf. also, for example, the critical remarks by Charles Taylor, 'Irreducibly social goods,' in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP 1995) pp.141f.

possible intrusion of the polity itself –arbitrariness, suppression, curtailment of freedom of expression, "big government" etcetera-, in order to reach a position of maximum liberty. What they *do* with this liberty is, by and large, their own business, which is what makes modern society essentially *frail*.

There is, I believe, a lot of nostalgia and idealization in political philosophy, and this probably affects the combination of the notions of politics and friendship, too. At the same time, however, if we are right to presume a link between that combination and the tradition of republican political philosophy, we may well ask ourselves whether, perhaps, the difficulty of the combination politics-friendship and the relatively weak position of republicanism have something to do with each other. To put it far too bluntly,[38] one could argue that the two predominant traditions in political thought, namely democratic liberalism on the one hand, and "corporatism" in its many forms (including socialism, Christian utopianism, nationalism, fascism, and communitarianism), are both *essentially anti-political*: liberalism seeks to sublate societal antagonism by means of, on the one hand, maximum liberty for the individual (limiting the political space, that is), and, on the other, the solution of conflict by means of the right legal procedures, thus minimalizing the polity and marginalizing and criminalizing political conflict; corporatism, by contrast, seeks to replace antagonism by solidarity and brotherhood, thus making the polity in the end superfluous and denying the political. *Neither* of them holds a *political* place for friendship: in liberalism it is replaced by friendly relations within the various spheres of society while friendship –outside the private sphere- is a danger rather than an advantage; in corporatism it is replaced by love-agapè, the love of all with all, whether in this or in another, post-revolutionary or post-apocalyptic world.

The gradual disappearance of the notion of friendship as an important bond between people beyond the strictly private sphere, noted by C.S. Lewis, is neither only related to the increasing instrumentalization and functionalization of life in society, both of which "threaten" friendship because it is not "useful" –its possible usefulness is a by-product, not its *telos*-, nor is it merely an effect of the rise of democracy, with which friendship is potentially at odds. It also has to do, it seems to me, with the predominant notions of societal bond within the Christian tradition. Lewis ends his analysis with an eulogy of God opening, through Friendship, our eyes for the beauties of other people, thus turning it into 'His instrument for

[38] Of course this opposition is too simple. Having taken it from Lenn Goodman, who ranks fascism, Marxism, and communitarianism under the general heading of corporatism, I use it merely to suggest a spectrum of anti-political positions in political philosophy (Lenn Goodman, 'Political Philosophy,' in: Oliver Leaman (ed.), *The Future of Philosophy Towards the 21st Century* (London & New York: Routledge), pp.68-71).

creating as well as for revealing,'[39] which strikes the non-believer as odd and artificial. Of course, from a Christian point of view, friendship is part of God's creation and as such *must* have a purpose. But at the same time, it is precisely friendship that is largely absent from the relation between the divine and the human: 'Finally, we must notice that Friendship is very rarely the image under which Scripture represents the love between God and Man. It is not entirely neglected; but far more often… Scripture ignores this seemingly almost angelic relation and plunges into the depth of what is most natural and instinctive. Affection is taken as the image when God is represented as our Father; Eros, when Christ is represented as the Bridegroom of the Church.'[40] To which we might add that love-eros also is the model of the relation between "the brides of Jesus" in a convent and the divine. And charity, love-agapè, is of course the primary model of interhuman relations. This means that, out of the "four loves" distinguished by Lewis, it is precisely friendship-filia/amicitia that is missing.

If Lewis is right in pointing out the 'distrust which Authorities tend to have of close Friendships among their subjects,' this, I would argue, holds not only for "secular" authorities –Leviathan's distrust is as obvious as it is understandable-, but also for ecclesiastical authorities –who rightly suspect the development of monastic orders and other forms of *bratstva* and *sestërstva-*, *and* of course for G(g)od h(H)imself. This inclusion of the notion of friendship in political theology is worthy of further exploration, not least because "the ancients", for whom friendship *was* a political virtue, worshipped a divine world inhabited by gods who were like humans inasmuch as for them, too, friendship both among themselves and between them and humans, was a relevant phenomenon, contrary to the "lonely" and sovereign God of monotheistic religions.

11. Modernity was, in philosophy at least, ended by thinkers who are together labeled the masters of suspicion: Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and, to an extent, Charles Darwin. Since then, people essentially have started to mistrust themselves and their motivations: the transparency of the subject is a thing of the past even as an ideal. We are post-modern in the sense that we no longer take our own desires and strivings for granted: behind our backs, we may well be determined or co-determined by material interest, whether class-based or not, our benevolent actions may well be driven, in the end, by will to power, our conscious action may well be caused by unconscious and subconscious motives, and,

[39] Lewis 1960, p.108.
[40] Lewis 1960, p.94.

finally, in the end it may be our genetic material that merely uses us as a vehicle for its own reproduction. The trouble with all this is that there is no position beyond universal humanism, while at the same time it is very easy to deconstruct any type of humanism as the ideology of a ruling class, an elite, the white male subject, or the biological species *Homo sapiens.* We have, in terms of the intellectual history of the last century and a half, every reason *not* to trust ourselves. This has consequences for friendship as well: we suspect egotistic interests behind our own noble motives and fear that our "friends" are mere vehicles for our own benefit; we dread the fact that our feelings of friendship are never "pure" but always a matter of compromise, because the notions of purity and authenticity have, for better or for worse, been relegated to the realm of an *Übermensch* that has little if anything to do with the everyday life in which we often struggle to pay sufficient attention to our dear ones; we fear our unconscious motives and our erotic drives, hidden to ourselves; we are anxious, finally, that political idealism may, in the end, be mere struggle for life.

But does this then not mean, in the end, that the well-known quotation from Seneca: 'Sed si aliquem amicum existimas, cui non tantundem credis quantum tibi, vehementer erras et non satis nosti vim verae amicitiae,' can be interpreted anew? If we have learned to mistrust ourselves, often more than we mistrust others, we can perhaps again become friends with these others. If we are all in the same uncertain boat, and if we no longer believe in either a divine pre-ordering of political life, or in ourselves as transparent and sovereign subjects of politics, then we can, perhaps, give the political back its proper place by acknowledging it fully, and by conceiving of politics as the set of ways of dealing with it. If we recognize each other as "politicians" in the precise sense of having to "do politics" in order to row the boat, then it is, hypothetically, possible to engage in a network-of-friends-of-friends-of-friends based on the recognition of difference, made possible by the introduction of a third element, namely the element of "indifference" or, perhaps more accurately, of "letting be". Not all must be my friends, as long as friendly relations can be maintained *and* as long as being a non-friend does not imply being an enemy.