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Amor mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of world

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Chapter 5

Arendt and Derrida on friendship and the problem of political community

As we saw in the preceding two chapters, the question of how the civic bond should be thought, apart from the canonical, communitarian notion of political community, was for Arendt an urgent one. She was concerned about the compulsion to homogenization and uniformity that proceeds from such a community. In the last two decades, we have witnessed a return of this concern in French postmodernist thought about political community.¹ This philosophical debate about the problem of community was instigated by a lengthy exchange of ideas between Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy, that resulted in the publication of Blanchot's *La communauté inavouable* (1983), and Nancy's *La communauté désoeuvrée* (1986). After that followed Giorgio Agamben's *La comunità che viene* (1990). Each of these philosophers regards community as a philosophical and political problem, rather than a solution for the problems of modernity. Whereas they try to rethink community, the position of Jacques Derrida, who joined in the debate with his *Politics of friendship* (1997), is a more radical one. In the last pages of this book, he reviews the books of Nancy and especially Blanchot in a highly critical way, to finish with the following question: 'I was wondering why the word 'community' (avowable or unavowable, inoperative or not) - why I have never been able to write it, on my own initiative and in my own name, as it were. Why? Whence my reticence? And is it not fundamentally the essential part of the disquiet which inspires this book?'²

Starting point of this chapter is that though both Arendt and Derrida are critical regarding the dominant conception of community, they both do not reject community *per se*. Both are, on the one hand, opposed to communitarian notions of community and relate this to the classical figure of 'brotherhood'. On the other hand, both reject radical

1 The comparison of French postmodernist thought on the political with Arendt's thought is not arbitrary, since both Nancy, Agamben (1998) and, to a lesser extent, Derrida (1997), draw from her thought.

2 Derrida, 1997, 304-05.

individualism, that is, in Arendtian terms, subjectivism or solipsism.³ For both, the problem of community comes down to the question of how to conceptualize a civic bond or political being-together that cannot be reduced to the communitarian notion of community, i.e. to brotherhood. Both suggest a particular conception of friendship as a promising alternative perspective. For both something valuable is at stake, either democracy (Derrida), or the common world (Arendt). Finally, neither Arendt nor Derrida are driven solely by conceptual problems. Besides criticizing classical metaphysical assumptions regarding politics, for example with respect to political agency and sovereignty, their urge to rethink political community is also raised by particular political developments, especially the increasing hold of the nation-state and other (quasi-)naturalist views of political community.

In this chapter I will examine the relationship between, on the one hand, the political and, on the other hand, friendship and brotherhood, as it appears in the works of respectively Derrida and Arendt. Which are the consequences for their analysis of the problem of community? And to what kind of a community does a politics of friendship lead, as opposed to a politics of brotherhood? In this chapter I will, besides similarities, mainly show differences between their conceptions of a politics of friendship. My guiding question is what a politically fruitful interpretation of the civic bond comprises.

One last remark in advance. Staging a conversation between Arendt and Derrida is possible, not just because they broach similar themes, but also because there are similarities in the mode in which they respectively approach the political, and in their style of philosophizing about politics.⁴ In an interview, Derrida makes clear that he does not intend at all to develop a political programme or a new political theory:

What I am trying to do now, is to try to understand or to re-think (...) what the political is, what is involved precisely in the dissemination of the political field. So, I'm not proposing a new political content within the old frame but trying to re-define, or to think differently, what is involved in the political as such.

According to him, 'the political' should be distinguished from 'politics', 'if by the name 'politics' we mean a programme, an agenda, or even the name of a regime'.⁵ Even though Arendt does not make explicit the now established distinction between 'politics' and 'the political', it is clear that she is not interested in the business of politics, in the sense of

3 I hereby use the phrase radical individualism, and not individualism *per se*, because both reject only the former, not the latter.

4 This similarity undoubtedly has to do with the fact that both are embedded in and at the same time have a critical attitude towards the same philosophical tradition, most notably Heidegger's phenomenology.

5 Derrida, ?, 'Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida'. As far as I know, this extremely clarifying interview has never been published.

government or public administration, as situated, for example, in the parliament and other clearly determined institutions. Just like Derrida, she was committed to understanding the political by demonstrating the experiences that are the basic principles of our ideas about the political being-together.

1. Friendship and brotherhood

It is remarkable that Derrida and Arendt introduce the question of friendship and brotherhood in their reflections on the political being-together, the civic bond, since it is not immediately obvious to connect politics with friendship and brotherhood. Derrida's *Politics of friendship* is, as the title suggests, even based completely on an analogy between friendship and the political.⁶ On the basis of canonical texts about friendship, such as Plato's *Lysis* (380 BC), Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea* (350 BC), Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia* (44 BC), Montaigne's 'De l'Amitié' (1580) and passages from the works of Kant, Nietzsche and Schmitt, Derrida shows that the political community and friendship are strongly connected in the western tradition of thinking about democracy and politics in general:

[A]s soon as you read the canonical texts in political theory starting with Plato or Aristotle you discover that friendship plays an organising role in the definition of justice, of democracy even. (...) [A]ll the concepts which are fundamental in politics - (...) sovereignty, power, representation - were directly or indirectly marked by th[e] canonical concept [of friendship].⁷

This is the case most explicitly with Aristotle:

Friendship (...) seems to be the bond that holds communities together, and lawgivers seem to attach more importance to it than to justice; because concord eliminating faction, which is enmity. Between friends there is no need for justice, but people who are just still need the quality of friendship; and indeed friendliness is considered to be justice in the fullest sense.⁸

Arendt also connects friendship with the political. She points out that for modern people it is 'perplexing' that for the ancient philosophers 'humaneness should be sober and cool, rather than sentimental; that humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship; that friendship is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to the world'.⁹ And she agrees openly with Aristotle when she states: 'For the Greeks the

6 Lynch, 2002.

7 With 'canonical' Derrida means the same as what I indicate as 'communitarian'.

8 Aristotle, 1976 [350 BC], 1155a.

9 'On humanity in dark times', MDT, 25.

essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*.¹⁰

The ‘canonical understanding of friendship’, that Derrida finds in the works of the aforementioned philosophers¹¹, is according to him, most of the time implicitly, synonymous with brotherhood: ‘the figure of the friend [regularly comes back on stage] with the features of the *brother* (...). Democracy has seldom represented itself without the possibility of at least that which always resembles (...) the possibility of a *fraternization*.’¹² I understand his meticulous deconstructions of the classical philosophical texts therefore so that he brings to light unintentional tensions between explicit and implicit meanings of friendship, and thereby shows that the figure of friendship is systematically threatened from within by the figure of brotherhood. Arendt also makes a normative distinction between friendship and brotherhood; the first is politically relevant, the second is not. A distinctive feature of the brotherhood that Derrida points towards is its androcentrism or phallogentrism, for in the tradition it is reserved for men. Arendt does not pay attention to this; something I will return to later. However, for her brotherhood, unlike friendship, does, as it does for Derrida, refer to a politicization of the naturalism and familialism or consanguinity. With that, the discourse of brotherhood is one of unity, that is, what Derrida calls ‘identity’ and Arendt calls ‘sameness’. The ground of brotherhood is a collective identity, a well defined ‘we’ from which is acted and judged. So far, Arendt and Derrida agree. Their ways part when we regard their views on the consequences of such a naturalist concept of friendship. I will first discuss Derrida’s argument.

2. Fraternization, *différance* and the coming friendship

Derrida points out that the effect of the logic of consanguinity is exclusion; primarily of the other as other, or as stranger, but also of the sister as sister. Brotherhood cannot accommodate differences, in the sense of alterity or (sexual) difference, what he calls *différance*¹³. Women are even excluded in two ways, because brotherhood does not allow for friendship between a man and a woman, or between two women. They are being made invisible because the only way they can appear is as brothers.

10 ‘On humanity in dark times’, MDT, 24-25.

11 Nietzsche seems to be the only exception.

12 Derrida, 1997, viii.

13 The term *différance* is a neologism Derrida coined in the context of his philosophical reflections on language. It is a deliberate misspelling of the French word *différence* with which it is homophonous.

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This fraternal figure is politically beyond all innocence, because it is regarded in influential metaphysical texts as the preeminent model for the political, according to Derrida. ‘From the beginning, democracy has been associated with values, with axioms, which belong to this canonical concept of friendship: that is, brotherhood, family, roots in a territory (autochthony), the nation-state depending on a territory, soil and place, and so on.’¹⁴ Political community, in its canonical form, is based on a particular collective identity and therefore operates through the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The members of a society, i.e. the ‘brothers’, are included at the cost of those who are not. This makes Derrida’s discomfort with community intelligible.¹⁵ Exclusion means a violation of the universal law of justice, i.e. the demand of equality and justice for all.

However, striving towards universal equality cannot be the only political principle, because it neglects, eliminates or neutralizes differences between people as a principle, by assimilating the other to the self or same.¹⁶ Because of that, Derrida asserts that the principle of equality, should be complemented by one that acknowledges ‘the absolute singularity of the other’¹⁷. In short, the democratic community should do justice, according to Derrida, to two opposite demands, a ‘double injunction’, that is, the universalistic demand of equality and the particularistic demand of respect for the singularity, alterity and difference of the other.¹⁸ With that, Derrida sets democracy the following task: to respect the singularity of all people. ‘How can we, at the same time, take into account the equality of everyone, justice and equity, and nevertheless take into account and respect the heterogeneous singularity of everyone?’¹⁹ According to Derrida, this is impossible, an ‘aporia’.²⁰ Even stronger, the political is located exactly in the middle of the irresolvable tension between equality and difference. So brotherhood does not only have a high moral price, namely the sister and the other, but also, in the end, a political one, democracy, i.e. a ‘democracy to come’ (*à venir*) or a ‘coming democracy’.²¹ Derrida hopes that friendship, that is, a ‘coming’ friendship ‘beyond the principle of fraternity’²², can do justice to the tension between equality and difference.

Consequently, he strives to evocate or open up a democratic community by a deconstruction of the dominant image of political community as a form of kinship. ‘Why

14 ‘Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida’.

15 Caputo, 1999, points out the biographical background to this discomfort.

16 Derrida here follows Levinas.

17 Derrida, 1997, 276.

18 ‘Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida’.

19 ‘Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida’.

20 ‘Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida’.

21 Derrida, 1997, 104.

22 Derrida, 1997, viii.

would the friend be like a brother? Let us dream of a friendship which goes beyond this proximity of the congeneric double, beyond parenthood.²³ Derrida calls such a politics ‘coming’ (*à venir*). The universal law of justice for singular people is not a positive, legal or moral, law, as is, for example, the moral principle of universal equality, but needs, as a principle, always still be realized, specified or interpreted. Democracy, justice, the political, and, I would like to add, community, can never be embodied in an actually existing politics, democracy, law, constitution, nation state, etc. Striving towards a positive notion or execution of community, or just even use the word, would mean a violation or betrayal of this *à venir*, that is, of the impossibility of community under the condition of its necessity. ‘For democracy remains to come (...) not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists.’²⁴ Such a coming democracy does not refer to brotherhood, but to an idea of friendship; indeed, a coming friendship.

An example might be able to clarify the aforementioned. In an interview, Derrida declares what was the immediate reason for writing *Politics of friendship*, the impotence and unwillingness of the present Western, wealthy nation states to admit immigrants and refugees into the political community:

We have today (...) to think of a democratic relationship not only with other citizens but also with non-citizens. (...) This non-citizenship of people we have to care for, to welcome, urges us, compels us, to think of a democratic relationship beyond the borders of the nation-state. That is, the invention of new practices, new international law, the transformation of the sovereignty of the state. (...) In fact (...) we know today that even within international organisations and institutions, the sovereignty of the state is not the only one that makes the law.²⁵

Even though *Politics of friendship* seems to be a purely intellectual exercise, it contains, although concealed, a plea for a coming friendship, and for a coming, open, hospitable, democracy, without concepts of national identity, citizenship, national borders and immigration policies.²⁶ As we know from this essay on hospitality, in which he, unlike in *Politics of friendship*, enters into an explicit discussion with Arendt²⁷, Derrida criticizes the French immigration policy in particular. In *Politics of friendship*, he expresses this criticism

23 Derrida, 1997, viii.

24 Derrida, 1997, 306.

25 ‘Politics and friendship. A discussion with Jacques Derrida’. See chapter 7 on the issue of losing citizenship. In fact, Derrida refers to Arendt in this respect.

26 See also Caputo, 1999, 187.

27 Derrida, 2000, 2001, 2002.

more carefully: 'This book set itself up to *work and be worked relentlessly*, close to the thing called France. And close to the singular alliance linking nothing less than the history of fraternization to this thing, France - to the State, the nation, the politics, the culture, literature and language.'²⁸

As has been already said, Arendt points out that the politics of brotherhood is modeled after the family and consanguinity. Like Derrida, she is concerned about the political consequences of this kind of naturalism. However, her arguments differ from Derrida's. A politics of brotherhood is worldless and because of that it denies difference. Arendt conceives of this difference as plurality, instead of *différance*, alterity or singularity.

3. Brotherhood and the loss of world and plurality

An example of worldlessness and the denial of difference is the politics of identity of marginalized groups, or what Arendt often calls 'pariahs'²⁹. In political 'dark times'³⁰ 'the insulted and injured'³¹, out of fear or hatred, tend to lock themselves up in a safe small circle of fellow sufferers with the same cultural, religious or ethnical background for the sake of comfort and security. Here she has in mind the attitude of the German Jews in the Third Reich, but it applies just as much to other, marginalized collective identities. Such a brotherhood is wordless in three aspects. First it is non-public, since brotherhood is characterized by political aloofness and invisibility. Brotherhood is a social condition that stands with its back to the world. It constitutes a secure, even more and obscure, community that 'you can afford (...) only in the private'.³² A common world, however, can only come into being and flourish by acting in public space in Arendt's view.

Secondly, brothers share an inner world, instead of the outside world. 'Brothers' do not relate to each other as citizens in public space, but as members of a family. Because of that, brotherhood is a form of identity politics: its foundation is a particular collective identity. Differences between brothers, and sisters, for that matter, their plurality of ways of life and visions on the world, cannot flourish under these conditions, because of the

28 Derrida, 1997, 264.

29 JW ('We refugees'; 'The Jew as pariah: A hidden tradition'; 'Zionism reconsidered'), Ch 3 OT ('The Jews and society') and *Rabel Varnhagen*, 1997.

30 The titles of 'On humanity in dark times' and MDT refer to this.

31 'On humanity in dark times', MDT, 16.

32 In a letter that Arendt wrote to the Afro-American writer James Baldwin who fought for the emancipation of black citizens, Arendt 1962; cf. 'On humanity in dark times', MDT, 13. On the relation between security, darkness and obscurity, see Part III, in particular chapter 6.

absence of a pathos of distance. The intimacy between brothers adopts the logic of the family and love, which is characterized by social, quasi-natural, sameness, which is by definition worldless, because it ‘burns’ as it were the ‘between’.³³ And human relationships without this in-between, Arendt writes in her *Denktagebuch*, are ‘welt-feindlich’ and ‘anti-politisch’³⁴:

Wir verstehen einander gewöhnlich nur in einem Zwischen, durch die Welt und um der Welt willen. Wenn wir einander direkt, unvermittelt, ohne Bezug auf ein zwischen uns liegendes Gemeinsames verstehen, lieben wir.³⁵

So, according to Arendt, this situation destroys the core of what she understands as the political, namely speaking and acting in a common world that becomes and stays common only as long as people, from a plurality of perspectives, tell meaningful stories about it.

Finally, brothers do not take responsibility for the world and public space, and thereby condemn themselves to political irrelevance. By collectively retreating from the world, they position themselves in an invisibility that is for Arendt an absolute curse. Those who retreat from a hostile world ‘may feel wonderfully superior to the world, but their superiority is then truly no longer of this world: it is the superiority of a more or less well-equipped cloud-cuckoo-land.’³⁶ This cuckoo’s nest is warm, but obscure; safe and comfortable, but completely cut off from the world. In ‘extreme cases’, in which this situation persists for ages, it turns into ‘true worldlessness’, with which Arendt probably alludes to early Christian brotherhood.³⁷ She immediately adds: ‘And worldlessness, alas, is always a form of barbarism.’³⁸

Friendship, that is, the political friendship between citizens, on the other hand, is a worldly relation. The world is the condition, topic and effect of the conversation between friends. It is its condition, because the conversation between political friends takes place in public space. Furthermore, this conversation is not self-referential, but relates to a common point of reference, namely the world. Political friends do not exchange emotions, nor do they share their inner worlds. What is being exchanged are opinions (δόξαι), perspectives on a common world. Political or civic friendship is cool and distant: ‘This converse [between friends] (in contrast to the intimate talk in which individuals speak about themselves), permeated though it may be by the pleasure in the friend’s presence, is

33 See chapter 2.

34 DB, 493.

35 DB, 428.

36 ‘On humanity in dark times’, MDT, 18; Arendt cites Aristophanes’ comedy ‘Ὀρνιθεὶς’ (*The birds*), 414 BC). Νεφέλοκοκκυγία is a neologism that combines the words for cloud and cuckoo.

37 HC, 53.

38 ‘On humanity in dark times’, MDT, 13.

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concerned with the common world, which remains 'inhuman' in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings.³⁹ Rather than to intimacy or connection, Arendt compares political friendship to respect, 'the regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us'.⁴⁰ The world is the substance of the distance between friends, which is the very condition for an effective exercise of plurality. The differences between friends that make them situated individuals, is conditioned by their mutual equality. The friend is both irreducibly different from, and equal to, though not the same as, the self. In other words, friendship has a political quality to the extent that it, firstly, constitutes a space in which the uniqueness of friends, i.e. their irreducibility, can become visible. The dialogue between friends 'doesn't need a conclusion in order to be meaningful', Arendt states.⁴¹ Secondly, friendship is predicated on equality: 'The equalization in friendship does not of course mean that the friends become the same or equal to each other, but rather that that they become equal partners in a common world.'⁴² The acknowledgement of the irreducible plurality of visions on the world that is possible in friendship, enables the, polemic and never-ceasing, conversation about the common world, and maintains the differences between the friends. That is why respecting, instead of erasing, differences between people is for Arendt an important quality of friendship. Equality also and mainly implies that friendship is a horizontal relationship, because, given that, authority, i.e. rule, is not necessary.⁴³

In conclusion, the conversation between friends about the world contributes to the maintenance of the world, because it brings into being a mode of community. 'Community is what friendship achieves.'⁴⁴ This happens in the conversation, in which we try to 'see the world (...) from the other fellow's point of view'.⁴⁵ 'More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different.'⁴⁶ So friendship is strongly connected with what is for Arendt the political attitude par excellence, the *erweiterte Denkungsart* or enlarged mentality.⁴⁷

39 'On humanity in dark times', MDT, 24-25.

40 HC, 243.

41 Arendt, 1990, 'Philosophy and politics', 1990 [1954], 82.

42 'Philosophy and politics', 82-83.

43 'Philosophy and politics', 82-84.

44 'Philosophy and politics', 82-83.

45 'Philosophy and politics', 83-84.

46 'Philosophy and politics', 83-84.

47 See chapter 1.

4. Towards a politics or an ethics of friendship?

Just like Derrida, Arendt rejects a conception of political community as a politics of brotherhood, grounded in a particular given collective identity; as well as a positively defined political community based on universal equality, because such a community would not do justice to the differences between people. For Derrida this observation leads to an impasse which to me seems to be politically futile.

The relation between difference and equality takes the shape of an aporia for Derrida. The 'double injunction' of democracy and the political in general, points to the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of equality and justice for all, and with that of the democratic political community. Derrida divides the democratic bond between citizens into, on the one hand, a particularistic ethics of singularity and, on the other hand, a universalistic politics of equality. The first, i.e. the demand for respect of singularity, dissolves the political bond in the relation between the self and the 'concrete other'⁴⁸; the political bond is in this respect intimate and dual. The two, that is, I and the other, replace the many, i.e. I and the others, i.e. citizens in public space. The second, i.e. the demand for universal equality, transfers the political to a transcendent future that is indefinitely pushed forward. Equality and justice therefore always have the feature of being elsewhere, later or not yet. This double shift implies that the bond between citizens shifts from the public sphere of many to, on the one hand, the private relation between two, i.e. self and other, and, on the other hand, to a future relation of equality that can by definition never be described or judged in positive terms. The promise of the coming community of friends can, as a principle, never be redeemed. In short, the political will be infinitely delayed and therefore ends up being out of the reach and opinions of citizens, who are always with many, and live together, under the condition of being here and now.

The fact that difference and equality constitute an aporia for Derrida, and a paradox for Arendt, refers, I would suggest, to their various conceptualizations of difference and equality. Derrida conceptualizes difference as *différance*, which turns it into the ethical ideal of respecting the uniqueness of the singular other. It is radically opposed to equality, because Derrida conceptualizes the latter as a universal and absolute value. Arendt, on the other hand, analyzes equality and difference phenomenologically, that is, as lived experiences. Such a phenomenological analyses reveals that these are different but nonetheless related features, i.e. the two sides of the coin of plurality and the world. Additionally, Arendt's plurality refers to a uniqueness that we do not acquire until we act as

48 I borrow this term from Benhabib, even though she works from a completely different theoretical framework.

citizens in public space, in the company of others.⁴⁹ For Derrida people are radically different from one another as human beings, for Arendt just in their quality of citizens. Uniqueness for Derrida points towards the private sphere, that is, to the relation between self and other. For Arendt it is a public attribute, because it can appear and disclose itself only in public space. Only in public space are we different from one another.

Even though Derrida's project to think through democracy and the political as a, coming, friendship aspires to strip the striving for equality inherent in identity politics and brotherhood, his conceptual framework does not allow him to distinguish between sameness and equality. From Arendt's perspective, Derrida's demands of *différance*, respectively equality, are both a-political, because the first is of an ethical nature and the second of a social one, that is, comes down to sameness. Hence *différance* and equality end up in an aporia. For Arendt, plurality means that equality, that means, political equality, is not opposed to difference, because both refer to public space and the common world. The presence, respectively absence, of the world that mediates between people, is what differentiates between political and social equality, or, in Arendtian terms, between equality and sameness.

5. (M/F) = 2. Many is more than two

Some commentators have pointed out that Derrida's politics of friendship is to be preferred to Arendt's position, because Derrida's conceptual framework enables him to denounce the androcentrism of the discourse of fraternity. Arendt, on the other hand, seems to be blind to sexual difference.⁵⁰ This objection against Arendt's politics of friendship runs parallel with early feminist criticism on Arendt's work in a broader sense, namely that there is no room for gender identity in her work, or even stronger, that her work is male-identified or patriarchal. It is indeed true that Arendt does not discuss gender, and that she herself held quite conservative views on the roles of men and women. Also true is the statement that a politics of brotherhood is patriarchal, because it excludes women by definition. Feminist philosophers have also pointed out that a politics of sisterhood is just as undesirable as a politics of brotherhood, because it reproduces the underlying logic of identity, and with that the exclusion that comes with it. Derrida seems to be aware of this and does not plead for a replacement of the figure of the brother by the sister. It is clear, however, that he regards sexual difference as an important aspect of

⁴⁹ For the phrase 'the presence of others', see HC, 188, among others.

⁵⁰ Cornell, 1993 and De Schutter, 2005.

alterity. However sympathetic this sounds, sexual difference is again of a dual nature.⁵¹ Here again, it seems to me that Arendt's argument against a conception of difference as *différance* or alterity in the political sphere is valid. Her personal prejudices aside, it could be stated that Arendt downplays sexual difference as a form of collective social identity theoretically, for the sake of a far more radical understanding of difference, and with that of equality in public space, namely plurality.⁵²

6. The 'coming community' and the common world

For Derrida, the political, democratic, community, i.e. the 'other', non-canonical, non-communitarian friendship, is always yet 'to come'. We must hope for it to come, but we may not expect it. There is nothing we can do to bring it closer. Thus, the community to come has been rendered transcendent, since it will come from outside, that is, outside of our civic being-together. Therefore, it is worldless, in the Arendtian sense of the word.⁵³

Though from secular Jewish descent like Derrida, Arendt is not attracted to such a messianism. An Arendtian notion of friendship is oriented towards the maintenance of the, always contingent, common world that lies between us, and which is the effect, though not the product, of our common action and speech in relation to that world. Even though we make the world only to a certain degree – the artifact as part of the material world is a human product; for the rest the political is alien to the logic of production and fabrication – as citizens, we can and should act and speak, according to Arendt. The common world is the, albeit contingent, result of that. Or, to turn it around, without acting in and speaking about the public world, the commonality of the world will be lost. Arendt is thrifty with the use of the word 'community', but generous with 'common' (κοινον) 'common world' and 'common sense'.

For Arendt, human existence means living-together in a non-trivial, fundamental manner. Our experience of reality and of ourselves is dependent upon others. Only speaking about the world, with others, who regard it from other perspectives, enables us to experience and understand it. One could even say that prior to that, the world does not even exist. The world comes into being in the conversation about it with one another. Our experience of reality and ourselves is dependent on others, the web of relationships in which we live. Speaking about reality with others who regard it from different perspectives

51 Although it is not necessary to assume two sexes or genders when talking about sexual difference, still almost all thinkers do so.

52 This is not to say that Arendt's thought cannot be made fruitful for feminist philosophy. See chapter 8.

53 Cf. De Schutter, 2005, 126.

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enables us to experience and understand it. Through speaking with each other about the world that is between us, it gains solidarity and reality. The fact that we do not always agree does not change that. On the contrary, a plurality of perspectives on the world will only enrich it.

Political, that is, non-given, non-natural, non-homogenous and pluralistic, community only emerges when individuals, i.e. citizens, display their plurality of perspectives and opinions (*δόξαι*) in public space. Its aim is not to achieve consensus, harmony or another form of unity by homogenizing differences, as is the case in traditional conceptions of community, but instead to play out and do justice to the multiplicity and diversity of individual perspectives, so a common world comes into being. This is exactly what happens in the dialogue between friends. This common world is not reflected in the dominant communitarian conception of community; but neither in the ‘coming community’.

