

Politics and Friendship

A Discussion with Jacques Derrida

(Centre for Modern French Thought, University of Sussex, 1 December 1997)

Geoffrey Bennington:

It's a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome Jacques Derrida on behalf of the University of Sussex, and more especially on behalf of the Centre for Modern French Thought. This is the second time in the last five years or so that Jacques Derrida has visited us, and I know from the many reactions I've had how lucky people feel about that. I'm not going to make a speech of any sort about who Jacques Derrida is or what claims he might have on our interest; I take your presence here in such numbers to be sufficient grounds for thinking that you're clear enough about that anyway, so I'll just make some brief remarks to leave us much time as possible for us to listen to Jacques Derrida. The format that we've agreed for the session is as follows: I will speak for five minutes or so and suggest three or four preliminary areas of discussion to which Jacques Derrida will respond, under this general topic of politics and friendship, which as many of you will know gives its title to a book recently published in English (it was published in French in 1994), and I expect many of you will have read it. So, I'll initially suggest three or four lines of inquiry to give an opportunity for Jacques Derrida to sketch out some of the main lines of argument in the book and after his responses to that invitation he will be happy to take questions from you. I would like to suggest for the earlier part of the session, and we are severely limited by time, that we try to remain at least broadly within the ambit of these initial themes that come out of the book.

I've got four lines of questioning which are simple, and simply openings to discussion on the basis of the book *Politics of Friendship*. The first one is the question: 'Why politics?'. You've obviously been the object of a demand for politics or a demand for a politics for years from many sides, and it might be thought that this book is finally answering that demand. So, are you now elaborating, some people would say finally elaborating, a political theory or a deconstructive politics? Second question, or line of questioning, equally straightforward: 'Why friendship?' The book is called *Politics of Friendship*, and it might seem strange to approach political arguments through the apparently marginal concept of friendship rather than through more obvious concepts such as sovereignty, power, legitimacy, representation, and so on. In other words, what has friendship got to do with politics, and what has politics got to do with friendship? Third question or line of questioning is about a word or a concept that appears insistently throughout the book, and that's the word or concept democracy - and more specifically in the formulation, which is repeated throughout the book, of a 'democracy to come'. I wonder if you could tell us something about that and what it might mean. And the last line of questioning, which is really an opening onto work that you have done since the publication of this book in French in 1994, is based on the observation that that more recent work has tended to move the, or seems to have moved the centre of gravity of this type of political or quasi-political investigation towards the concept of hospitality. You have published a lot of work in recent years around the concept of hospitality: I wonder if you might be able to give us some sense of what that involves, perhaps around the situation here today where we're offering you something like hospitality, we're welcoming you more or less hospitably into our more or less domestic space which is itself enclosed in a national or cultural space which hasn't always been, and still often isn't, very hospitable to your work. So, four questions: 1) Why politics?; 2) Why friendship?; 3) What about democracy?; 4) What

about hospitality?

Jacques Derrida:

I have thirty minutes today. Thank you, I'm very grateful and I'm pleased and honoured to be back here, and especially to be associated with this new Centre for Modern French Thought which I think, and I'm not the only one to think that, is a very important and necessary initiative. We all look forward to its success and we'll try to do our best to participate in it.

Now, as you can imagine these questions are all the more difficult because I have to really improvise in English in a few minutes a straightforward response, and not knowing if some of you have read or not the texts that are more accurate and explicit than what I could say here. So, I'll try to adjust a minimal and straightforward response to Geoff's questions.

1. Why Politics?

It is true that, from the beginning, so to speak, when I started writing and teaching, many people, friendly and unfriendly, reproached me with not directly addressing political questions. I think that it was at the same time both an unfair and fair objection. Unfair because I think everything I did was directly or indirectly connected with political questions, and I could show this in a very precise manner. But it is true and it is a fair objection to the extent that this relation to politics was very indirect and very elliptical, and waiting for a moment in the development of my work when the level I wanted to reach in this re-elaboration of the political question could be reached; and this accounts for the delay, for the implicit fashion I addressed this question at the beginning.

Now, to take literally Geoff's question which I have in front of me: I don't think that even now I am answering the demand for politics, that is to propose something which could fit into what one calls in our tradition, politics. What I am trying to do now, especially in the books *Spectres of Marx* or in the *Politics of Friendship*, is to try to understand or to re-think, I'm not the only one doing that of course, but to try with others 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, and for the very same reason I don't propose a political theory because what I'm saying, specifically on friendship and hospitality, on what friendship is and what hospitality is, exceeds, precisely, knowledge. In its extreme and more essential form it has to do with something which cannot become a *theoreme*, it is something which simply has to be known, there is some type of experience, of political experience in friendship and hospitality which cannot be simply the object of a theory. Which is not an anti-theoretical move; I think political theory is necessary, but I try to articulate this necessity of a political theory with something in politics or in friendship, in hospitality, which cannot, for structural reasons, become the object of knowledge, of a theory, of a *theoreme*.

So, it's not a political theory - part of what I'm trying to say in these texts is not part of a theory that would be included in the field known as *politology* or political theory, and it's not a deconstructive politics either. I don't think that there is such a thing as a deconstructive politics, if by the name 'politics' we mean a programme, an agenda, or even the name of a regime. We will see even the word *democracy*, which I try to locate, is not simply the name of a political regime or nation-state organisation. So, I don't think that what I'm engaged in, what I have been trying to do in a very complicated way for a long time, can be called political theory or deconstructive politics, but I think that given - or supposing that they are given - the premises of what I have been doing before these last books, the time has come for me to say something more about politics. Not simply a political theory, a deconstructive politics, but to say something about politics is again not simply a speculative gesture: it's a concrete and personal commitment, and this

performative commitment is part of what I'm writing. Spectres of Marx, before being a text about Marx's theory, Marx's heritage, is, let's say, a personal commitment at a certain moment, in a certain form, in a singular fashion.

2. *Why friendship?*

Why then - the second question - this privilege granted, within this field that I have just described, to friendship? Geoff says, rightly so, that friendship has been an apparently marginal concept within the field of politics and of political philosophy for centuries. It is true and not so true - it is marginal in the usual taxonomies of political concepts. You can't find the concept of friendship there; usually it's left to ethics or psychology or morals, but it's not considered a political concept as government, or sovereignty, or citizenship may be considered political. But as 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. I quote in the Politics of Friendship many texts of Plato and Aristotle in which friendship is defined as the essential virtue, for instance.

Let me make just a single scholarly reference to Aristotle, who says that there are three types of friendship. Firstly, the higher friendship is based on virtue and it has nothing to do with politics. It is a friendship between two virtuous men. Secondly, the friendship grounded on utility and usefulness, and this is political friendship. Third, and on the lower level, friendship grounded on pleasure - looking for pleasure among young people, Aristotle says. So you see that we have a concept of friendship which is and is not political. The political friendship is one kind of friendship. One of the questions might be, to put it in a very everyday fashion, should we select our friends from among our political allies, should we politically agree with a friend to enter into friendship, is it necessary, are politics and friendship homogeneous? Could we have a friend who is politically an enemy and vice versa, and so forth? In Aristotle again you have this idea that the quest for justice has nothing to do with politics, you have to go beyond or sometimes betray friendship in the name of justice. So, there are a number of problems in which you see love - not love, but *philia* or friendship playing an organising role in the definition of the political experience.

Then what I try to do - I'm looking at my watch - is to follow the thread of the paradoxes between friendship and politics, to look for a prevailing canonical model of friendship which in our culture form the Greeks to now, in Greek culture, in Roman culture, in Jewish, Christian and Islamic culture, has been dominant, has been prevailing and hegemonic. What are the features of this prevailing hegemonic concept which could be politically meaningful and politically significant? I don't want to homogenise of course - this concept is not a single homogeneous concept, it is not exactly the same in Greece, in the Middle Ages, and today, but there are some permanent features, and it is this set of permanent features that I try to discover, to analyse, to formalise from a political point of view.

So, what are they? To be very, very, very rough: first of all the model of this friendship is a friendship between two young men, mortals, who have a contract according to which one will survive the other, one will be the heir of the other, and they will agree politically - I give a number of examples of this. Which excludes first of all friendship between a man and a woman, or between women, so women are totally excluded from this model of friendship: woman as the friend of a man or women as friends between themselves. Then the figure of the brother, of fraternity, is also at the centre of this canonical model. I show this of course through a number of texts and examples. Brotherhood, fraternity, is the figure of this canonical friendship. Of course this concept of brotherhood has a number of cultural and historical premises. It comes from Greece, but it also comes from the Christian model in which brotherhood or fraternity is essential. Men are all brothers because they are sons of God, and you can find the ethics of this concept in even an apparently secular concept of friendship and politics. In the French Revolution this is the foundation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Fraternity was the object of a terrible

debate in France at the time, and fraternity appears, between equality and liberty, as one of the foundations of the republic. So, you have to deal here with what I would call a phallogocentric or phallogocentric concept of friendship. Which doesn't of course mean to me that the hegemony of this concept was so powerful that what it excluded was effectively totally excluded. It doesn't mean that a woman couldn't have the experience of friendship with a man or with another woman. It means simply that within this culture, this society, by which this prevalent canon was considered legitimate, accredited, then there was no voice, no discourse, no possibility of acknowledging these excluded possibilities.

So, all the concepts which are fundamental in politics - I just mentioned those which Geoff selected: sovereignty, power, representation - were directly or indirectly marked by this canonical concept. So, even the idea of democracy, the way it was defined in the beginning, had to agree with the presuppositions of this concept, with the privilege granted to man, to brotherhood. What does brotherhood mean? It means of course the family, the familial schema, filiation, it means brother instead of sister and there are a number of texts in which sister is simply a case of brother, no different, and it makes no difference. So, you have here all the conditions for the canonical definition of politics, of the state, the relation to autochthony in Greece, to the territory, the nation-state, filiation, representation, sovereignty, all these share this phallogocentric concept of the social bond as friendship. That's why I thought that this leading thread, the problematic of friendship, could be useful in order to go on with the deconstruction of (let's say too quickly) the massive bulk of traditional political theory, and to provide me with a strategic lever to continue the work I have done, while entering the field of politics in a more efficient way.

3. *What about democracy?*

Now, the third question has to do with democracy: why the word 'democracy' in 'democracy to come', which I repeat again and again - because democracy is a strange name for a regime; from the beginning it was difficult to locate democracy among the spectrum of regimes, and everyone has always had difficulty with assigning a place to democracy. Democracy means, minimally, equality - and here you see why friendship is an important key, because in friendship, even in classical friendship, what is involved is reciprocity, equality, symmetry, and so on and so forth. There is no democracy except as equality among everyone - I'll try to make this everyone more specific in a moment - but an equality which can be calculated, countable: you count the number of units, of voters, of voices, of citizens. On the other hand, you have to reconcile this demand for equality with the demand for singularity, with respect for the Other as singular, and that is an aporia. 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?

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. Now it is possible to think of a democracy which could be, if not adjusted, then at least articulated with another concept of friendship, another experience of friendship which wouldn't simply be dependent on or subordinate to what I call the prevalent canonical concept of friendship (phallogocentric, male, and so on and so forth), and this is what I'm trying to elaborate in the Politics of Friendship. A democracy which is so strange that it is no longer simply reducible to citizenship, to the organisation of a regime for a given society as nation-state. I've nothing simply against the nation-state, I've tried to understand what today goes beyond the borders of the nation-state, and I'm now slowly approaching the last question of hospitality. What have been, what are and what will be the limits of the problematic of the nation-state? Is it possible that beyond the nation-state the concept of democracy keep not only a meaning but a force of injunction? Can we think of a democracy beyond the limits of the classical political model, of the nation-state and its borders? Is it possible to think differently this double injunction of equality for

everyone and respect for singularity beyond the limits of classical politics and classical friendship?

It is in the name of this that we could try to question the canonical concept of friendship. Why would we do that in the first place, why are we interested in questioning, deconstructing if you want, the canonical concept of friendship? It is in the name of democracy. I think that there is inequality and repression in the traditional concept of friendship such as we inherit it. It is in the name of more democracy that I think we have to unlock, to open, to displace this prevalent concept, and this is not my initiative, not the initiative of someone operating in a deconstructive manner; it is what is happening today. Today this model of brotherhood, man, friendship is being deconstructed in the world. What I say about the nation-state is what is happening today in the world. This so-called deconstruction is simply what is happening in a more or less visible way, in an unequal way with what is called the 'inequality of development'; because today if you're interested in this you can see how powerful the concept of fraternity still is: in the rhetoric of politicians, fraternity comes back again and again, and sometimes it is very respectable, but if you look for the implications of this concept of fraternity you may have questions.

So when I speak of a 'democracy to come', I don't mean a future democracy, a new regime, a new organisation of nation-states (although this may be hoped for) but I mean this 'to come': the promise of an authentic democracy which is never embodied in what we call democracy. This is a way of going on criticising what is everywhere given today under the name of democracy in our societies. This doesn't mean that 'democracy to come' will be simply a future democracy correcting or improving the actual conditions of the so-called democracies, it means first of all that this democracy we dream of is linked in its concept to a promise. The idea of a promise is inscribed in the idea of a democracy: equality, freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press - all these things are inscribed as promises within democracy. Democracy is a promise. That is why it is a more historical concept of the political - it's the only concept of a regime or a political organisation in which history, that is the endless process of improvement and perfectibility, is inscribed in the concept. So, it's a historical concept through and through, and that's why I call it 'to come': it is a promise and will remain a promise, but 'to come' means also not a future but that it has 'to come' as a promise, as a duty, that is 'to come' immediately. We don't have to wait for future democracy to happen, to appear, we have to do right here and now what has to be done for it. That's an injunction, an immediate injunction, no delay. Which doesn't mean that it will take the form of a regime; but if we dissociate democracy from the name of a regime we can then give this name 'democracy' to any kind of experience in which there is equality, justice, equity, respect for the singularity of the Other at work, so to speak - then it's democracy here and now; but of course this implies that we do not confine democracy to the political in the classical sense, or to the nation-state, or to citizenship.

We have today, for many reasons that we all know, to think of a democratic relationship not only with other citizens but also with non-citizens. That's a modern experience; you know that between the wars, after the first World War, already there were in Europe - Hannah Arendt paid special attention to this - huge crowds of people not even in exile, not even deported but displaced persons who were not considered citizens, and, according to Hannah Arendt, that is one of the origins of what happened in the second World War. 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. We all have examples of this situation today with what are called non-governmental interventions, everything which calls for interventions, for political initiatives, which should not depend on the sovereignty of the state, that is, finally, citizenship. In fact we know - that's why the task is so enormous and endless - we know today that even within international organisations and institutions, the sovereignty of the state is a rule, and that in the name of international law some nation-states more powerful than others make the law. Not only because this international law is basically a European law in the tradition of Europe and law, but because these more powerful nation-states make the law, that is they in fact rule the international order. So, there are a number

of urgent problems which require precisely this transformation of the concept of the political, of the concept of democracy, and of the concept of friendship. Now, this accounts to some extent for the reasons I choose the theme of hospitality as a privileged theme in my recent seminars and publications.

4. What about hospitality?

I have to - and that's an unconditional injunction - I have to welcome the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context, or a passport. That is the very first opening of my relation to the Other: to open my space, my home - my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state, and myself. I don't have to open it, because it is open, it is open before I make a decision about it: then I have to keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally. But of course this unconditionality is a frightening thing, it's scary. If we decide everyone will be able to enter my space, my house, my home, my city, my state, my language, and if we think what I think, namely that this is entering my space unconditionally may well be able to displace everything in my space, to upset, to undermine, to even destroy, then the worst may happen and I am open to this, the best and the worst. But of course since this unconditional hospitality may lead to a perversion of this ethics of friendship, we have to condition this unconditionality, to negotiate the relation between this unconditional injunction and the necessary condition, to organise this hospitality, which means laws, rights, conventions, borders of course, laws on immigration and so on and so forth. We all have, especially in Europe, on both sides of the channel, this problem of immigration, to what extent we should welcome the Other. So, in order to think of a new politics of hospitality, a new relationship to citizenship, to have to re-think all these problems that I have mentioned in the last few minutes.

Let me say just one more thing before I stop on this tradition of the concept of hospitality, given what I have said about citizenship and non-citizenship. We could simply dream of a democracy which would be cosmopolitical, a cosmopolitan form. There is a tradition of cosmopolitanism, and if we had time we could study this tradition, which comes to us from, on the one hand, Greek thought with the Stoics, who have a concept of the 'citizen of the world'. You also have St. Paul in the Christian tradition, also a certain call for a citizen of the world as, precisely, a brother. St. Paul says that we are all brothers, that is sons of God, so we are not foreigners, we belong to the world as citizens of the world; and it is this tradition that we could follow up until Kant for instance, in whose concept of cosmopolitanism we find the conditions for hospitality. But in the concept of the cosmopolitical in Kant there are a number of conditions: first of all you should of course welcome the stranger, the foreigner, to the extent that he is a citizen of another country, that you grant him the right to visit and not to stay, and there are a number of other conditions that I can't summarise here quickly, but this concept of the cosmopolitical which is very novel, very worthy of respect (and I think cosmopolitanism is a very good thing), is a very limited concept. Limited precisely by the reference to the political, to the state, to the authority of the state, to citizenship, and to strict control of residency and period of stay.

So, I think that what I try to call a 'New International' in Spectres of Marx should go beyond this concept of the cosmopolitical strictly speaking. We have to do a lot of things, and to work of course within the space of the cosmopolitical, and an international law that keeps alive the sovereignty of the State. There is a lot to be done within the State and in international organisations that respect the sovereignty of the State, that's what we call politics today, but beyond this task, which is enormous, we must think and be oriented by something which is more than cosmopolitical, more than citizenship. So you see, just a few sentences before I stop, how strange is this itinerary calling for a new concept of democracy grounded - assuming this is a ground, and I'm not sure it is - grounded on this groundless experience of friendship, which shouldn't be limited in the way it has been, and a concept of democracy which would re-define the political not only beyond the nation-state but beyond the cosmopolitical itself. That of course looks like a utopian or very distant perspective. I don't think so. Of course there is an enormous distance if we

think that these things have to be reached and concretely embodied, but we know today as soon as we open a newspaper that these problems are urgent and prevalent in everyday life. In everyday life we see that the classical concept of democracy, the way it inhabits all the rhetoric of politicians and parliament, is shaken, that we need something else. We see that the concept of citizenship, the concept of the border, immigration, are today under a terrible seismic displacement. We not only feel this: we can analyse this every day, so what seems to be, and is, very far ahead of us, is also very close to us every day, and it is an urgent task to re-elaborate, to re-think, to re-engage and to be committed differently with these issues.

I see that my time's up, so I'll stop there.

Questions

Q1: On the notion of welcoming someone, of being hospitable to them: well, firstly, welcoming to what? To a thing, whatever that might be? But secondly, it seems to me that it implies a form of acceptance and maybe inclusion, and I think that the notion of inclusion is problematic because it tends to imply some form of assimilation, and again assimilating someone to what? Which carries us on to the notion of equality, which can be coercive, and I wondered what you thought about the notion of coercion and equality: people aren't necessarily equal, nations aren't equal, states aren't equal and what is the form of agency that will make them equal and therefore perhaps avoid assimilation?

J.D.: Thankyou. No, when I speak of hospitality I have in mind the necessity not to simply assimilate the Other, but that's an aporia. We have to welcome the Other inside - without that there would be no hospitality, that the Other should be sheltered or welcomed in my space, that I should try to open my space, without trying to include the Other in my space. That is to ask that he or she learn my language, or adopt my religion or become English or become French, today for instance that's the condition, that's the left-wing discourse, the prevailing left-wing discourse, 'we are hospitable to the immigrants to the extent that they become French citizens, respect secularism, that they learn the French language', assimilation. We call this integration, and of course this can be done in a novel fashion and that is part of hospitality: if I want to open my house of course my bed is your bed, you want to use my bed? - it's still a bed, you have to get used it; this is what I eat, I can give you what I eat; you have to get used to it. But that's a double bind, on the one hand I should respect the singularity of the Other and not to ask him or her that he respect or keep intact my own space or my own culture.

That's what I said at the beginning about the unconditionality. I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language. That's the problem: hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the Other. That's why it has to be negotiated at every instant, and the decision for hospitality, the best rule for this negotiation, has to be invented at every second with all the risks involved, and it is very risky. Hospitality, and hospitality is a very general name for all our relations to the Other, has to be re-invented at every second, it is something without a pre-given rule. That is what we have to invent - a new language for instance. When two people who don't speak the same language meet, what should they do? They have to translate, but translation is an invention, to invent a new way of translating in which translation doesn't simply go one way but both ways, and how can we do that? That's the aporia, and this is political, the new form - but it had always been a form - of politics, but today it has, because of the development of communication, of crossing borders, of telecommunications, it has new forms of urgency.

Q2: What in a sense I found missing from your talk is an explanation of why borders, sovereignty, the old structures of politics, are being transformed. You don't seem to be able to name the process through which this is happening, and it seems to me that one

could understand what you're talking about in terms of globalisation, the formation of a common social space, a single world-meaning within which all these old structures which try to absolutise and fix differences are changed, but this, it also seems to me, is a ground on which to found a new form of democracy, and that ground has to be found in the concept of globality and in the concept of world unification. I wonder what your response is to this?

J.D.: Everything I have said up to now was referring to what you called 'globalisation', what we call in French 'mondialisation'. That's the only thing I've said; but why didn't I use the name 'globalisation'? Because today it's a confused concept and it's the screen for a number of non-concepts and sometimes of political tricks and political strategies. Of course something like globalisation is happening - not only today of course, it started a long time ago - but today there is an acceleration of this mondialisation, but as you know, using this word, this key word, allows a number of political appropriations - in the name of the free market for instance. People try to have us swallow the idea that globalisation means the free market, or that the concentration of tele-technological communications beyond the States are what makes globalisation possible, and what should be supported or simply accepted. So I have, and I'm not the only one, many, many, reservations about the use one makes of this word: but I agree with you, this is, if not the ground (because I don't think it is a ground), but this is the space in which these problems take their shape. I agree with you, but I wouldn't simply rely upon the word 'globalisation' in order to name this phenomenon.

Q3: This is a question about the book, if I could begin with the second essay and perhaps go on to the first. When you speak about the 'voice of the friend' in *Being and Time* you say it could be subjected to a certain kind of deconstructive critique that perhaps Husserl might have called for, and then you ask: why does this phrase appear in Heidegger? Why not construe it in an obvious way as a reference to Aristotle's discussion of friendship in *The Ethics*, and indeed to book one of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, to which Heidegger does refer in earlier discussion in courses from which that section of *Being and Time* is drawn? The point of that would be that it looks like Heidegger thinks that there might be a more interesting account or perception of friendship in Aristotle, and one which could go beyond a certain kind of critique that we would perhaps find in the first text of the book, and indeed if you read *The Nicomachean Ethics* it does seem that Aristotle has this worry and this conflict between universality and singularity in friendship, and this problem of nearness and distance, and that to engage in virtue, true friendship, one would have to like the friend for their sake and not for one's own sake; and this seems to call for a certain separation - and so when he gives examples of true friendship the examples will be of women separated from their children and people separated by political enmity, enemies in war who nevertheless remain within this true friendship. The question is: isn't there in Aristotle, and indeed throughout the history of the so called reflection on friendship, a worry that somewhere anticipates what you have called the non-canonical view of friendship? And doesn't the non-canonical, and perhaps Kantian view - in that it seems that in the notion of respect Kant introduces, he make explicit a worry that will have been there going back to Aristotle - doesn't the non-canonical inhabit the canonical?

J.D.: Thankyou. This is a very rich intervention and a difficult question, especially all the more difficult because you have read this chapter in French because it's not included in the English version! [Laughter]. Let me tell everyone by the way that the English version is the book *Politics of Friendship* without an essay which comes at the end, to which you've just referred, in an appendix and which can be read in French in *Politiques de l'amitié* or in English - it has been published in the United States. So, it's a very difficult question. It has to do with Heidegger's mention in *Being and Time* of the voice of the friend we have in us. It's a very strange occurrence, because suddenly, in a context in which no one would expect the friend to appear there is this reference which puzzles every reader of Heidegger. So I tried in this chapter to account for this single reference to the voice of the friend in us, but I can't re-constitute what I do in this chapter, which is to try to reconstitute the politics of friendship in Heidegger and the way in other text he thematises friendship, loss, war, peace, the *polemos*, the political, and so on and so forth. To answer very briefly your difficult question I would say that in the context of *Being and Time* it is

difficult to speak of a politics of friendship on a political level in this context. I think that the friend he is referring to cannot be identified with anything Aristotle has to tell you, there is no reference to virtue, even less to utility or to pleasure. So although Heidegger of course knew these texts by Aristotle I don't think that there is even an indirect reference to Aristotle, I don't think so but I cannot demonstrate this here, you think so?

Q3: But it's a quotation from book one of The Nichomachean Ethics.

J.D.: Perhaps, in which case I missed a quotation and please give me the reference. I'm ready to consider this, if it's a hidden quotation this could account for the strangeness of this reference. As if Heidegger was saying 'well everyone knows what Aristotle said and that's the friend I am referring to.'

Q4: I admire your injunction to teaching symbology and looking for new modes of friendship and communication but I was struck, unless I've made a mistake, by the quite positivistic character of friendship: you say it cannot be completely described theoretically, it has to be approached and accepted, and that reminded me ...

J.D.: 'Approached and...'?

Q4: Accepted.

J.D.: I didn't say accepted.

Q4: You said you cannot theorise friendship, so it seems positivistic.

J.D.: No, when I say you can't theorise it that is not positivistic. I mean of course we can theorise, that is what I do! [Laughter]. I try to do that, but I argue that there is something which has to be theoretically determined as going beyond theory - but that's not positivist.

Q4: I was interested also in the metaphor of translation across culture which you used, and I think there is also quite an interesting parallel to be drawn about what we might call trans-historical communication, whereas translation would be trans-cultural through language ...

J.D.: Let's say trans-.

Q4: The transhistorical or the history of ideas is an interesting element of what you brought out, so I congratulate you [laughter].

J.D.: That's the hospitality I love, that's hospitality the way I understand it!

Q5: On the cover of the book Politics of Friendship it says 'At issue is an anti-genealogy upsetting the genealogical motif itself'. Does this book mark a move away from Nietzsche?

J.D.: Yes, in fact it's perhaps one of the first times - I try in this context to disassociate gestures that I have already constantly associated before now, that is deconstruction and genealogy. Deconstruction as being at least partly a genealogical anamnesis or deconstitution of a series of traditional layers, a deconstitutive genealogy in a Nietzschean sense. To that extent deconstruction was tied to a certain Nietzschean concept of genealogy, but in this context, for the reasons I gave earlier (that is the fact that the classical concept of democracy, the political, brotherhood, fraternity was genealogical, that is grounded on filiation, family, autochthony, the territory) I thought that I should suspect the authority of genealogy at some point from that point of view. That is to disassociate the deconstruction of the concept of fraternity from the genealogical scheme

or to think of another kind of genealogy. There is still genealogy, but it's a genealogy that goes in the opposite direction, it's a way of questioning the unquestioned authority of genealogy. I'm not against genealogy or simply for it, but I want to be more careful about its implications.

Q6: You talk about geographical exclusion and how your idea of hospitality can address that, but you haven't mentioned the way in which geographical exclusion is completely tied up with economic exclusion. The countries from which it's difficult to get into England are poor countries: it's not really France or Germany, it's the Caribbean, it's Africa, it's the Indian sub-continent, and I wondered how you think your concept of friendship, your non-canonical concept of friendship, can address economic exclusion, and especially economic exclusion in its most extreme form which is the exclusion by those who own capital of everyone else. You can't ask those who own capital to be hospitable ...

J.D.: I ask them nevertheless [laughter].

Q6: It's naive to ask them, it's a naive request.

J.D.: Perhaps, but I still do. The problem of the economy, although I didn't refer to it explicitly in this short presentation, is at the centre of this. It's a problem of economy, of appropriation, misappropriation, hospitality is economy. This is the question we addressed a moment ago about assimilation, which means appropriation, that is exploitation, and so on and so forth. So, I think of course that the problem of capitalism is at the centre of this question; if I didn't name it before I apologise, but it is at the centre of this attempt, without a doubt. When I try to question or to deconstruct the classical concept of the political, it is in order to open it on to other fields, spaces, strata and layers, such as the economical or economy in the broad sense. In the narrow sense of use and exchange values, capital, speculation, financial return and also in the broader sense of propriety, the proper, what is proper to whom, appropriation, and the concept of hospitality should not remain outside of this, and of who owns what. It consists of opening your own space, your own goods, your own house and nation, it's economical and it has to do with economy; and of course however naive I may be, I'm not totally unaware of the problems of the poor being more excluded at the border than the rich. In my own country I can see this every day, at the airport I see who enters easily and who does not with the same legislation. Thankyou for your suggestion, but I'm not totally blind to these questions.

Q6: I am only saying: how can you use your concept of hospitality to address the problem of capitalism?

J.D.: I can't do it right here and now, but I think this is the problem, the problem that has to be faced no doubt. What I call the transformation of international law implies a transformation of the market, of the global market, and you can't touch the global market without touching capitalism. Everything I say here has to do with that, it would have been easier for me to say 'Well, that's capitalism', but capitalism is precisely tied to this organisation of the political, the classical organisation of the political. At the same time I think it's a little more complex than that, and I think that the development of new forms of capitalism are responsible for, on the one hand the consolidation of the old concepts of politics, democracy, friendship, etc., but at the same time undermining this tradition. It's because of new developments of capitalism that everything is shaken. When you see that for instance the concentration of the powers of the media and tele-technologies goes beyond state power, becomes international, on the one hand it confirms the traditional structures of politics, and on the other it deconstructs them. There is a deconstructing effect of capitalism, that's why the approach to capitalism is very complex, but I agree with you it's a central problem.

Q7: I wanted to link into this last question, and I just wanted to ask you if you think it's possible to transform a concept like democracy without linking that attempt to an attempt to transform material reality? In other words, the example you used about immigration

and democracy - the fact that under bourgeois democracy in theory everyone is free to go wherever they like and do whatever they like, except if you're seen as the wrong colour you can't cross the border, or if you don't fit with the politics of a certain nation - and doesn't that mean that basically we have to go back to Marx and say that to throw your weight behind the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters is the only way you can go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy? Don't we have to go beyond discourse and look to a systematic attempt to change the world?

J.D.: We won't change the world before two o'clock [laughter], but what I'm saying is that we have to, and through the transformation of the organisation of capitalism, to a transformation of the Marxist heritage, taking into account what's happening today especially in terms of citizenship and colour of skin and so on and so forth; and when I'm not giving a lecture at the University of Sussex I try to do my best as a French citizen to fight for the transformation of the laws on immigration in my country, which is a very burning issue right now in the French parliament. I'll do what I can to intervene, very modestly and minimally, in this field of concrete and urgent questions. We have to do both, to speak and to act.

Q8: I actually wanted to address one of your other books in relation to what you have been saying today when you talk about a visitor coming into your country, and sharing, and also the necessity to break down capitalism, and I'm just wondering - since this is about relations between different individuals, different citizens, different nation-states - about going back to The Other Heading and re-thinking yourself and re-thinking what happens. Do you think that in some ways because there is this interplay of the Other and yourself in friendship that you are in some ways the Other and that the Other is in you?

J.D.: Yes, it complicates the issue, because the Other is not simply the Other as coming from the outside so to speak. One is the one, I am the one, one is more or less the one and everyone is more or less the one and more or less one with him or herself. Which means that the Other is already inside, and has to be sheltered and welcomed in a certain way. We have to negotiate also, that's a complicated unconscious operation, to negotiate the hospitality within ourselves. To this one in ourselves, to this image that might exclude this other one or be allergic to this other one. We know that someone who doesn't negotiate this hospitality in him or herself in a certain way cannot be hospitable to the Other, that's what the Greeks taught us. That you have to solve the problem within yourself, and it's already a society, a multiplicity of heterogeneous singularities, to be really smiling to the Other. If you are at war with yourself you may be allergic to the Other, that's what complicates the issue.

Transcribed by Benjamin Noys

However, friendship is a more interesting test because some of democracy's highest values are actually at odds with it. In short, friendship puts the humaneness of abstract democratic ideals on the spot. For example, democracies tend to nurture utilitarian approaches to politics, based upon trying to establish the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Friendship, though, abhors "felicific calculus", preferring to build relationships. In *The Politics of Friendship* Derrida renews and enriches this orientation through an examination of the political history of the idea of friendship pursued down the ages. Derrida's thoughts are haunted throughout the book by the strange and provocative address attributed to Aristotle, "œmy friends, there is no friend" and its inversions by later philosophers such as Montaigne, Kant, Nietzsche, Schmitt and Blanchot.