Nixon, Jon. "The Hermeneutics of Friendship." *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 159–174. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472505873.ch-008>>.

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The Hermeneutics of Friendship

Aristotle, speaking about friendship, remarked: 'The friend is another self' – meaning: you can carry on the dialogue of thought with him just as well as with yourself . . . Socrates would have said: The self, too, is a kind of friend.

LM, I, 189

Friendship as practice

Friendship was woven into the fabric of Arendt's life. She had a vast network of friends spread across Europe and the United States at a time long before email, Facebook, Skype, texting, Twitter or the now ubiquitous mobile phone. Her friendships were sustained through face-to-face meetings (often involving travel), regular correspondence by letter and occasional conversation by landline (which was, in comparison to today, an extremely expensive option). Friendship, in other words, involved a considerable investment of time (arranging and undertaking visits, writing and posting letters) and money (postage stamps, rail and air fares, telephone bills). Friendship was – to use McCarthy's term – necessarily 'workmanlike' in that it required a commitment to the routines and practices of friendship. Instant communication via the social media was not an option. It was necessary to think ahead, set aside time for letter writing and build into one's travel arrangements as many meetings with old and new friends as possible. While Arendt and Blücher were sufficiently well off to move into more comfortable apartments in Manhattan in 1959, they had until then been far from financially secure. Both also led extremely demanding professional lives. Yet, Arendt's commitment to maintaining her friendships and extending her network of friends was unremitting.

Given the central importance of friendship in her life, it is remarkable that in her writing Arendt developed no detailed analysis of the nature of friendship. As a writer she was methodologically and philosophically committed to making fine conceptual distinctions and developing her arguments by way of those distinctions. In her final work, *The Life of the Mind*, she summed up her position as follows: 'Everything that exists among a plurality of things is not simply what it is, in its identity, but it is also different from others . . . When we say what a thing is, we must say what it is not or we would speak in tautologies' (LM, I, 183). If plurality assumes difference, then difference implies the need to make distinctions. The rhetorical method follows from the philosophical premise.

Yet, in spite of this insistence that 'when we say what a thing is, we must say what it is not', Arendt seems not to have been interested in distinguishing friendship from other forms of human relationship. Admittedly she draws on the classic distinction between *philia* and *eros*, with the latter associated in her mind with an element of self-surrender, which is antithetical to the mutuality and reciprocity implicit in friendship. She also distinguishes friendship as a form of chosen relationship from kinship as given without choice: we do not choose our parents or our lineage. But beyond these fairly routine distinctions there is little attempt to define friendship as a distinct category. Nor is Arendt particularly interested in distinguishing between different forms of friendship, such as those traditionally characterised as friendships of pleasure, utility and virtue. She seems willing to take friendship at face value.

Why this reticence in analysing friendship? Why this uncharacteristic willingness to allow it to remain conceptually fuzzy? My guess is that Arendt was less interested in friendship as a concept than in friendship as a practice – less interested, that is, in friendship than in actual *friendships*. Friendship was something she *did*. It was – for someone who had existed as a stateless migrant – a necessary condition for survival. So she drew less on the traditional distinctions between friendship and other forms of association – or between different kinds of friendship – and more on what her experience taught her about friendship. She was, for example, very clear that friendship was about continuity. In practice, therefore, there was not so much a distinction to be drawn as a scale to be borne in mind: the oldest friendships were the best and, as the years passed and some friendships matured, the

older friendships moved up the scale of perfection. Not that there was any sense of 'perfect friendship' for Arendt, but there was the sense of persistence. Friendship was a long haul – a deeply rewarding and beneficial haul – but a long haul nevertheless.

So friendship necessarily involved that most unfashionable of virtues: duty. Duty has become politically suspect, associated as it now tends to be with enforced drudgery. No one would be dutiful by choice, would they? One's prime duty – in a consumerist society premised on the all-importance of individual choice – is duty to oneself. Duty and freedom are at opposite poles on this political spectrum. But, for Arendt, duty towards one's friends was a necessary means of ensuring the possibility of freedom. Her friendships had, after all, seen her through, sustained her and provided her with a modicum of security in what had been a chronically insecure world. Moreover, duty was one of the great republican ideals, as evidenced in the emphasis Aristotle placed on duties as opposed to rights. Duty on this alternative political spectrum is not the antithesis of freedom, but one of the conditions necessary for its realisation: duty is what we owe one another – what is due to us – by virtue of laying claim to a common world.

Duty meant that having arrived in New York as a stateless person you did everything you could – as soon as you could – to ensure that, for example, Walter Benjamin's work was preserved for posterity. It meant that – notwithstanding your own straitened circumstances – you sent monthly food parcels to the Jaspers who had remained in Germany. It meant that you dropped whatever you were doing to be with McCarthy when she miscarried. It meant that you prepared and delivered orations in honour of your friends as they reached key milestones in their public life, and that you similarly honoured them when they died. Duty was what made continuity possible. Arendt's sense of duty towards her friends was matched by their corresponding sense of duty towards her: supreme examples of which are McCarthy's editing of her friend's *magnum opus*, *The Life of the Mind*, and Jaspers' letters of support and encouragement in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial. Duty was also in evidence as her friends rallied around her immediately after Blücher's death in 1970, with McCarthy flying from Paris to find Arendt already surrounded by friends from New York and elsewhere. Without duty, there could be no continuity; and, without continuity, duty would become merely dutiful.

But the exercise of duty also requires impartiality. Arendt managed to maintain friendships with both Heidegger and Jaspers in spite of the fact that neither was reconciled to the other and that Arendt kept Jaspers in the dark regarding her continuing contact with Heidegger. She also insisted upon her right to maintain friendships with both McCarthy and her third husband in spite of the messy divorce proceedings underway. How to exercise the duties of friendship towards those who, for whatever reason, are in a state of discord, dispute or animosity? Arendt's position was very clear: you have a duty towards your friends regardless of their relationships with one another. You can be friends with people who are themselves not friends. You can even be friends with people who – for whatever reason – bear animosity towards one another. If continuity requires duty, then duty requires the kind of inclusive impartiality that embraces multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives.

Arendt, then, was less interested in what friendship is than in the conditions necessary for friendship – continuity, duty and impartiality – and how, when these conditions are met, friendship enables us to survive and flourish as human beings. She was interested in how friendship provides an intersubjective context within which we can realise our potential and thereby activate the power that is always latent in human relationality: the power that she considered fundamental to democratic politics. I shall draw out the implication of this theme in the final chapter, but first we need to explore how friendship works, what drives and motivates it, wherein its potentiality for power lies. What – in the constitution of friendship – provides it with that potential? In order to address that question we need to explore in greater detail some of the major themes of what Jerome Kohn (1996, 155) has described as 'her final, tremendously ambitious, yet strange work' – *The Life of the Mind*.

Thinking and willing

Friendship, for Arendt, was inextricably entwined with her notion of thinking. Much of our thinking is conducted in solitude, but – argued Arendt – even solitary thinking involves a dialogical element or what she called 'the duality of the two-in-one' (LM, I, 187). On that basis she drew a sharp distinction between loneliness and solitude: '[S]olitude is that human situation in which I

keep myself company. Loneliness comes about when I am alone without being able to split up into the two-in-one, without being able to keep myself company' (LM, I, 185). When we talk to ourselves we are thinking aloud, thereby carrying on a process that – when internalised – becomes solitary thinking and – when externalised – is manifest in the world of human affairs. In that sense thinking is Janus-faced, turning both inward towards solitary reflection and outward towards dialogue and discourse. If Heidegger represented the inward-looking aspect of human thinking, then Blücher represented its outward aspect. Friendship accommodates both. It allows for both self-reflection and for reflective dialogue. Friendship is a space within which we mediate and negotiate these different modes of thinking: a space within which people can be both self-reflective and reflectively expansive.

The link between thinking and understanding is crucial, since thinking is only hermeneutically purposeful through its focus on what is to be understood. That is not to say that thinking involves knowing in advance the object of thought, but that through thinking about and around a subject we begin to clarify what needs to be understood. Without that link between thinking and understanding, thinking drifts into daydreaming, wishful thinking or fantasising. Understanding grounds thinking in the world of human affairs. It is, as Phillip Hansen (1993, 207) puts it, 'a kind of thinking-in-action'. It guides the movement of our thinking, steering us out into the world and providing us with an objective – if nevertheless intersubjective – reality about which to think. So, the conceptualisation of friendship as a space within which people might engage in thinking raises the question of what understanding might thereby be gained. What is the hermeneutical value of friendship?

In addressing that question it is important to bear in mind the core elements that comprise friendship: self, the other and the world. The relation between these elements comprises the subtext of the four narratives of friendship outlined in the previous four chapters. Each of those friendships in different ways and to varying degrees enhanced the understanding of self, the other and the world. The friendship between Arendt and Jaspers, for example, was presented as primarily but by no means exclusively world-oriented, while the narrative of the friendship between Arendt and McCarthy highlighted the prime but again by no means exclusive importance of intersubjective understanding – the understanding, that is, of the self in relation to the

other. These particular and necessarily oversimplified typifications are less important than the idea that generates them: namely, that understanding within friendship is a cyclical process involving the distinct selfhood of the two friends and their interconnectedness with the world within and beyond their friendship.

For Arendt this cyclical process – whereby selfhood is enhanced through mutuality, and mutuality through selfhood – was the defining feature of friendship: ‘I first talk with others before I talk with myself, examining whatever the joint talk may have been about, and then discover that I can conduct a dialogue not only with others but with myself as well . . . [This] dialogue of thought can be carried out only among friends’ (LM, I, 189). By talking with friends I learn to talk with myself, and by learning to talk with myself – ‘to keep myself company’ – I learn to identify myself within the boundless plurality of the world. This ‘dialogue of thought’ enables us to understand ourselves in relation to others, and others in relation to ourselves. In so doing, it also enables us to understand the world as both intersubjective and objective reality – as ‘in here’ as well as ‘out there’.

Such understanding is possible, argued Arendt, because the world is naturally ‘phenomenal’. It is a world made manifest through *appearance*:

The worldliness of living things means that there is no subject that is not also an object and appears as such to somebody else, who guarantees its ‘objective’ reality . . . Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*, and this precisely because they are subjects and objects – perceiving and being perceived – at the same time.

LM, I, 19–20

We are, in other words, creatures whose being and becoming are defined through a lifelong process of differentiation. Central to that process is the innate capacity for the ‘two-in-one’ of solitary thought and its dialogical equivalent in the conversation between friends. Without that capacity we would be unable to become ourselves in the world and unable to make sense of others sharing the world with us.

In the second volume of *The Life of the Mind* Arendt locates this process of individuation in the human capacity for ‘willing’. The will, she argues, is the source of the individual’s specific identity. Because the architecture of her last work remains incomplete, the relation between her key concepts is never fully

explained. However, she clearly saw thinking and willing as distinct, while at the same time related. While thinking prepares us for the ongoing task of mediation and negotiation in a world in which each is both appearance and spectator, willing enables us to determine how the self is asserted within this phenomenal world: 'Just as thinking prepares the self for the role of spectator, willing fashions it into an "enduring I" that directs all particular acts of volition. It creates the self's *character* and therefore was sometimes understood as the *principium individuationis*, the source of the person's specific identity' (LM, II, 195). Through this identity-forming assertion of the self into the world of human affairs, the will becomes 'the spring of action.' The will – 'the self's *character*' – actualises thought.

The lynchpin of Arendt's conceptual system is what – as a secular Jew drawing on Augustine's defence of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – she termed 'independent substance'. She used the term to elucidate what she saw as the unity in complexity of the 'phenomenal' world: a world of mutuality predicated on independence. Friendship, she argued, is paradigmatic of that unity in complexity: 'two men who are friends can be said to be "independent substances" insofar as they are related to themselves; they are friends only relatively to each other. A pair of friends forms a unity, a One, insofar and as long as they are friends . . . The point here is that such a mutually predicated relationship can occur only among "equals"' (LM, II, 98). It is because friends are equal and different – and their equality and difference are defined in and through their friendship – that they are able to achieve greater understanding of one another and of the world within which their 'two-in-one' is a constitutive element.

'Enlargement of the mind'

The tripartite structure that Arendt had envisaged for *The Life of the Mind* focused on 'thinking', 'willing' and 'judging'. In the event only the first two of those three conceptual building blocks was put in place, with the result that the work lacks not only a detailed discussion of the third element but also an overarching argument as to how the three concepts are related within the overall scheme. In posthumously editing the work, McCarthy included as an

appendix to the second volume excerpts from Arendt's lectures on Kant's political philosophy that had a particular bearing on 'judging.' Her comments in these relatively brief extracts suggest that Arendt considered judgement to be an indispensable element in enabling us to think politically.

Arendt linked the human capacity for judgement to what – following Kant – she termed 'enlargement of the mind' (LM, II, 257). It is only by comparing our own judgements with other possible judgements that we develop our capacity for discrimination. Unlike thoughts, judgements are therefore *always* public. This distinction between thinking and judging is crucial: whereas thinking involves a necessary element of keeping oneself company, judging invariably presupposes the company of others; while thinking pulls towards 'the duality of the two-in-one' of solitary thought (LM, I, 187), judging is firmly located in what Arendt had earlier termed 'sharing-the-world-with-others' (BPF, 221). Judgements are in effect claims that are seeking assent but that may be challenged. For that reason a judgement – even when couched in terms of an assertion – invariably involves an element of persuasion. 'To judge', as Dana Villa (1999, 98) puts it, 'is to engage in rational public dialogue, deliberating with others with whom I must finally come to an agreement and decision'.

Arendt had already covered some of this conceptual ground in a 1967 essay that she had written in response to the controversy following her coverage of the Eichmann trial. (Entitled 'Truth and politics', the essay was published in *The New Yorker* and reprinted in the second 1968 edition of BPF.) In that essay she wrote: 'Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them.' She went on to argue that this process of representation 'does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else'. Rather it 'is a question . . . of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not'. Finally, she claimed that 'the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinions' (BPF, 241).

The faculty that allows us to feel and think as if we are in another's place is the imagination. This faculty, argued Arendt, 'makes the others present and

thus moves potentially in a space which is public, open to all sides; in other words, it adopts the position of Kant's world citizen' (LM, II, 257). As conceived by Arendt, imagination is diametrically opposed to both fancy and ideology. Both deny the public: in the case of fancy, by turning away from its externality; in the case of ideology, by violating its plurality. The imagination alone – drawing its inspiration from, and finding delight in, the plurality and specificity of the world – affirms the public through its willingness to reach out and accept its hospitality: 'To think with the enlarged mentality – that means you train your imagination to go visiting' (LM, II, 257).

Arendt's own imaginative reach is evident in the range and depth of her response to works of drama, fiction and poetry. She wrote with great insight on authors as diverse as W. H. Auden, Bertolt Brecht, Hermann Broch, Isak Dinesen, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Randall Jarrell, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Mann, Herman Melville and Rainer Maria Rilke – and, always, she sought what was distinctive in their work (see RLC). While she related works of literature to her own philosophical and political preoccupations, she never operated according to a critical template but encountered the text in all its particularity. Judgement was, for her, necessarily reflective and consequently not determined by the application of a general rule under which particulars could be categorised. She also, in her imaginative grasp of the work of particular authors, judged the authored work against the author's life and vice versa. The life and the work may have been at odds, but for Arendt they were all of a piece.

Her valedictory piece on Auden is a case in point. She began this piece by quoting one of Auden's lyric poems in full and suggesting that its greatness – its rare 'perfection' as she put it – lies in the untranslatability of its eloquently colloquial idiom. She then recalls the Auden she knew in the last fifteen years of his life: '[H]is face was marked by those famous wrinkles, as though life itself had delineated a kind of face-scape to make manifest "the heart's invisible furies"'. Yet, she continues: 'If you listened to him, nothing could seem more deceptive than his appearance. Time and again, when to all appearances he could not cope any more . . . he would begin to more or less intone an utterly idiosyncratic version of "Count your blessings"'. Surely, she suggests, the appearance was deceptive because here was a man who 'never talked nonsense or said something obviously silly' and who had 'the voice of a very great poet'.

But Arendt then performs a double turn by claiming that the appearance was *not* deceptive – that, for whatever reason, Auden did in fact endure misery while at the same time being a life-enhancing poet. Her understanding of Auden is finely attuned to the dishevelled appearance of the man and the authoritative voice of the poet – and her judgement balances each against the other without denying the significance of either (RLC, 294–6).

Nowhere does Arendt develop a detailed exposition of her views on the nature and purpose of critical reading. However, as a serious reviewer of literary texts and as an editor at Schocken Books, she clearly had views on this matter. It was while at Schocken Books that she had helped with the publication of Kafka's *Diaries* and she remained deeply appreciative of Kafka's work throughout her life. It is in an essay on Kafka – the original version of which was published in German in 1946 – that she made one of her clearest statements regarding what is involved in reading. To read Kafka well requires 'at every turn' what she called an 'exertion of the real power of the imagination' (RLC, 105). That is why, as she puts it, 'the purely passive reader . . . active only in his identification with one of the characters, does not know what to do with Kafka.' Similarly, 'the curious reader' will be disappointed by Kafka's novels because 'they contain no elements of daydreaming and offer neither advice nor edification nor solace'. Only readers who are themselves on 'a quest for truth' will, she claimed, be able to grasp imaginatively the significance of the work as a whole and as manifest in the minutiae of its 'banal events'.

In its interconnectedness and engagement, reading becomes paradigmatic of 'the enlargement of the mind.' Reading Kafka requires us to connect his life, work and context; to go beyond identification with a single character in order to grasp the underlying structure of the work; and, crucially, to bring our own passion for truth to the act of reading. We judge Kafka – as we would any modernist writer or artist – not only by the demands that his work makes on us as readers, but on our capacity as readers to meet those demands. Any judgement is, therefore, a judgement on the one who is judging as well as on that which is being judged: a judgement, that is, on the imaginative capacity – the capacity for 'enlargement' – of the judging mind.

The world, for Arendt, was an intersubjective reality that both divides us and unites us. What was of paramount importance to her was our own capacity to construct the world in such a way as to ensure that the centre holds – that

the complementarities of division and unity hold firm. That was why the conceptual trinity of thinking, willing and judging was of paramount importance to her: thinking is rooted in the inwardness of our being in the world; willing asserts our selfhood within and to the world; and judgement reaches out to engage with the world as it presents itself to us externally and objectively. It is within the world – and only within the world – that we are capable of ‘the enlargement of mind’ that makes us fully and complicatedly human. What the world ‘really is’ has to be understood with reference to the dichotomies of sharing and division, separation and linkage, difference and commonality – dichotomies that can only be resolved or held in equilibrium through dialogue and interchange:

If someone wants to see and experience the world as it ‘really is’, he can do so only by understanding it as something that is shared by many people, lies between them, separates and links them, showing itself differently to each and comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another. Only in the freedom of speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its objectivity and visibility from all sides.

PP, 128

Dialogue among equals

At the beginning of *The Life of the Mind* Arendt returns to a consideration of the Eichmann trial. Indeed, she uses her earlier analysis of that trial as the springboard for what were to be her final reflections. A world devoid of thinking, willing and judging would, she argued, be a world devoid of worldliness: a world characterised, that is, by ‘thoughtlessness’ and inhabited by automatons such as Eichmann, who lacked freedom of will and any capacity for independent judgement. The only notable characteristic she could detect in Eichmann ‘was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*’. He had displayed a complete ‘absence of thinking’, which, as she disturbingly pointed out, ‘is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination, to *stop* and think’.

Given the ordinariness of that experience, the question that ‘imposed itself’ (her phrase) was: ‘Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually “condition” them against it?’ (LM, I, 4–5). This, for Arendt, was not a rhetorical question (a statement masquerading as a question), but a real, pressing question that had been imposed on her by the nightmare that she and so many of her generation had experienced: a nightmare of total domination involving the obliteration of the willing and thinking self and ‘the paralysis of the faculty of judgement’ (Wessel and Bensmann, 2012).

She was clear from the start that ideology was the enemy of thought. Ideology denies the heterodoxy of thought through its insistence on adherence and complicity. It requires unthinking conformity. She had also become increasingly convinced that the routinisation of the modern world as she experienced it in her adopted country operated ideologically in such a way as to acclimatise us to the unworldly and the thoughtless. In a lecture she had delivered at the University of Chicago in 1964 – a lecture that relied heavily on arguments developed in her earlier *The Human Condition* – she had highlighted the extent to which mechanisation had led to a division of tasks involving a process whereby finished products become wrapped into a ceaseless round of means-end production and consumption: ‘[I]n a strictly utilitarian world, all ends are bound to be of short duration; they are transformed into means for some further ends. Once the end is attained, it ceases to be an end, it becomes an object among objects which at any moment can be transformed into means to pursue further ends’ (PHA, 176). Caught in this endless cycle, the individual can no longer ‘express otherness and individuality’; no longer ‘distinguish himself and communicate *himself*’ (PHA, 178).

Arendt returned to this theme in *The Life of the Mind*, arguing that this erosion of the powers of human expression and communication not only debases the language but adversely affects our ability to think: ‘Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardised codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognised function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence’ (LM, I, 4). Writing just ten years later,

Raymond Williams (1983, 18) was to make the same point in relation to what he saw as the cultural crisis of late capitalism:

There are times, in the depth of the current crisis, when the image materialises of a cluttered room in which somebody is trying to think, while there is a fan-dance going on in one corner and a military band blasting away in the other . . . It is a systematic cacophony which may indeed not be bright enough to know that it is jamming and drowning the important signals, but which is nevertheless, and so far successfully, doing just that.

For Arendt, friendship was one of the few spaces within which to escape the 'systematic cacophony' and reconnect with at least some of 'the important signals.' As the quotation that heads this chapter suggests, she saw friendship and thinking as inextricably entwined: 'Aristotle, speaking about friendship, remarked: "The friend is another self" – meaning: you can carry on the dialogue of thought with him just as well as with yourself.' The 'two-in-one' of solitary thought spills over into 'the dialogue of thought' that constitutes friendship. But, insisted Arendt, the latter is dependent on the former. This is precisely the proviso that she attributed to Socrates: 'Socrates would have said: The self, too, is a kind of friend' (LM, I, 189). Only those who are capable of being friends to themselves can be friends to others. Friendship – and 'the dialogue of thought' that it sustains – presupposes that each of the friends is in possession of a distinctive self that is valued by both parties.

The emphasis that Arendt places on equality in friendship – and in 'the dialogue of thought' that is sustained through friendship – has to be understood in this context. Arendt was adamant that inequalities exist, but equally adamant that equality can exist in friendship. However, it did not follow that only those of equal status, wealth or education could be friends. Of course, disparities of status, wealth and education may act as a constraint to becoming friends, but that was not Arendt's point. She considered equality in friendship to be based on the assumption that each human being is self-possessed and must therefore take ultimate responsibility for that self. Respect and self-respect are thus two sides of the same coin: we respect our friends insofar as they respect themselves, and they respect us insofar as we respect ourselves. Moreover, this mutuality of respect between friends sustains and strengthens the sense of selfhood enjoyed by each. The equality between friends relies on the recognition by each of what is distinctive and unique in the other.

From this perspective, pity erodes friendship. It was in her critique of the French Revolution – and what she called ‘the evil of Robespierre’s virtue’ – that Arendt was most outspoken in her condemnation of pity: ‘[W]ithout the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has a vested interest in the existence of the weak . . . Pity, taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself.’ Its capacity for cruelty – as exemplified in Robespierre – lay in the fact that it ‘drowned all specific considerations, the considerations of friendship no less than the consideration of statecraft and principle.’ It reduces the ‘specific considerations’ relating to particular persons to a homogenous mass of suffering humanity whose suffering is then – in a manner that Arendt found perverse – glorified as ‘the spring of virtue’ (OR, 79–80).

This strong reaction against pity might lead one to believe that Arendt was drawn towards those who were – or at least appeared to be – uniformly tough and resilient. But that is far from the case. She was respectful of fragility in others and was, if anything, drawn to men and women who were both strong *and* vulnerable. McCarthy certainly fell into that category, as did – in their different ways – Walter Benjamin, Heidegger, Randall Jarrell, Jaspers and even Blücher. Her lifelong fascination with Rahel Varnhagen was based on precisely that ambivalence between the woman who survived and the woman who suffered: her survival as pariah and parvenu was at the cost of the indignities and humiliations she endured in that role. In condemning pity, Arendt was not pointing to a particular kind of ‘pitiably’ person, but to a particular kind of response which sought to categorise others as ‘pitiably’. Pity – whether directed towards others or towards oneself – denies the will of the one who is pitied. In so doing it negates thoughtfulness and destroys any possibility of independent judgement.

Through ‘the dialogue of thought’ friends strengthen one another’s will and refine one another’s judgements. That is how Arendt responded to the emotional turmoil that McCarthy found herself in during her difficult separation from Bowden Broadwater – not through collusion, but by presenting McCarthy with the reality of the situation and with alternative perspectives of the predicament she found herself in. It is how Blücher responded to Arendt’s hurt and anger when she thought he had neglected to write to her – again, not

by consoling her, but by confronting her with his own situation and with his own feelings. It is also – and more complicatedly – how Arendt responded to Heidegger. She neither pitied him nor forgave him, but she did find something in him to respect. He was, after all, a great solitary thinker regardless of his colossal failures of judgement and his lack of magnanimity towards colleagues.

Friendship was, for Arendt, a metaphor for a world within which the thinking self communicates with both itself and others. The metaphor highlights the deeply dialogical nature of thinking, whether it be the ‘two-in-one’ of solitary thinking or thinking as ‘sharing-the-world-with-others’. Thinking is conditional upon the human will and makes possible ‘the enlargement of mind’ that informs human judgement. As such, it reflects the plurality of a shared macrocosm of which friendship is a microcosmic mirror image: friendship as a world within a world. The world constitutes us as thinking agents and we in turn exercise our agency through the constitution of our shared world. Against the implicit individualism of *cogito ergo sum*, friendship provides us with an image of the world as both a collective endeavour and a collective achievement. It is only because we are thinking beings that we are able to achieve a sense of collective purpose beyond the immediate ends and short-term outcomes of individual survival.

But friendship was, for Arendt, more than just a metaphor. It was the reality of actual friendships to which she was deeply and unconditionally committed. Those friendships provided a space within which thinking – through ‘the dialogue of thought’ – interconnected with what she termed ‘the public realm’. Arendt was not in the habit of politicising her friendships in the sense of using them to gain power and influence, but her friendships nevertheless provided a kind of power base in that they realised the potency between people: between Heidegger and herself, Jaspers and herself, McCarthy and herself, Blücher and herself and many others to whom the previous chapters have only briefly alluded.

The ‘dialogue of thought’ is an actualisation of the power latent *between* human beings. Through its participation in that process of dialogue, friendship is able to reach inward to a validation of the self and the knowable community of which the self is a part and extend outward to a validation of the other and the unknowable community to which the self is nevertheless connected. The boundless conversation with oneself and others that constitutes the ‘dialogue

of thought' was for Arendt the vital link between the private and the public. It is what makes the world hang together as both intersubjective and objective reality. Without friendship that dialogue would be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to sustain.

The 'dialogue of thought' that constitutes the common ground of friendship continues beyond the lifespan of those who at any particular point in history are sustaining and advancing it. It has an afterlife, but its afterlife is in the world and for the future. It is, Arendt maintained, always subject to the contingency of human affairs and is therefore wholly unpredictable in respect of its outcomes. Arendt could not have known where, if anywhere, her ideas might lead. Her legacy is not, in other words, her responsibility but ours: the debt owed by the living to the dead. The final chapter reflects upon that legacy not with a view to providing prescriptive advice, but in order to highlight the continuing relevance of her thinking to the circumstances we find ourselves in. Although very different from the ones she lived in and through, those circumstances are ones that she largely foresaw and about which she offered her own salutary warnings.