

Article

Metamorphoses of Friendship: Jacques Derrida and Saint Augustine

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Abstract: In his *Circumfession*, Jacques Derrida journeys at length with Saint Augustine. The angle adopted is somewhat autobiographical, its philosophy staying as close as possible to the body, to the intimate, to the family. In *Politics of Friendship*, the Bishop of Hippo is one interlocutor among others. Once again, the autobiographical vein is kept alive, this time by book IV of Augustine's *Confessions*. The episode of private life, the dear friend's death, opens now onto political dimensions. Saint Augustine plays a pivotal role in what Derrida calls the infinitization of friendship. Over time, links were put in place, and the contemporary society cannot ignore or get rid of them. Our work here goes back to the traces left in the writings of Saint Augustine by the most classic canons of friendship incorporated into Christian theology. In our conclusion, we will see that Derrida puts this tradition in tension with fraternity, family, and community—all elements that the philosopher considers the most problematic in our current situation, and even more so for a democracy to come.

Keywords: friendship; fraternity; hospitality; community

1. Introduction

Our thesis in this paper on friendship is not to work on the subject of St Augustine himself, but to examine the reception of a classical Christian author (Augustine) in a contemporary philosophical context (Derrida). The trend of our essay is in line with the shift from dogmatism to a more public reflection on theology.

On several occasions, Jacques Derrida appeals to Saint Augustine, whom he greets as his Algerian compatriot, born in 354, in Thagaste (Souk-Ahras): “in this Numidian soil, writes Serge Lancel, where three centuries of Roman presence had not erased the traces of a previous double culture” (Lancel 1999, p. 17). Such “traces” are our passage, bridge, and interface to Derrida himself, born in El Biar in 1934. Elsewhere (in *A Silkworm of One's Own*), on a more familiar tone, it is from “old Augustine” that the philosopher borrows his famous quote: “sero te amavi” (“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you” (Augustine of Hippo 1991, X, xxvii, p. 38)),¹ while in his *Circumfession*, he reads the *Confessions* of Augustine very closely. This is the occasion for their most personal, autobiographical encounter. The philosopher would like “to raise the stakes” with the bishop of Hippo, as if in a game of poker (“the expression ‘raise the stakes’ belongs only to my mother”) (Derrida 1993, 1/3), or like in a race: “one car overtaking another, doubling it rather” (Derrida 1993, 7/39). Elsewhere, in *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida briefly brings in Saint Augustine. Therefore, through this political bias of friendship, then of fraternity and community, we will approach here the intersections between the thought of Augustine and the work of Jacques Derrida.

To read Derrida, himself a meticulous reader of the great classics, we can appropriate these observations of Jürgen Habermas:

The reader of Jacques Derrida meets an author reading the texts against the grain until they deliver a subversive meaning. Under his inflexible gaze, any context crumbles into fragments; the ground that was supposed to be stable becomes shifting, and the one that was supposed to be full reveals its double bottom. The usual hierarchies, arrangements



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and oppositions give us a meaning that goes against the familiar one. The world in which we thought we were at home becomes uninhabitable. We are not of this world: we are strangers among strangers (Habermas 2004).²

As is often the case with Derrida, reading a text calls for, or even requires, reading a whole bundle of other texts with which it is linked, like an ivy or a vine, impossible to detach from their anchoring surfaces. It is about moves, strategies, covers, explorations, and explanations. In a certain way, Habermas has clarified or recalled what Derrida himself had written in *Dissemination*. If it is true that “these texts, and their commerce, definitively escape any exhaustive treatment”, it remains possible “to mark out, in a few rough strokes, a certain number of motifs. These strokes might be seen to form a sort of frame, the enclosure or borders of a history that would precisely be that of a certain play between literature and truth” (Derrida 1981, p. 183).

In *Politics of Friendship*, the theme is therefore inscribed in an arborescence whose varieties Derrida unfolds through time and space. Friendship is part of one or more “clusters”: semantic aggregates expressive or suggestive of many different social practices; policies where links are tied and/or undone between the private and the public, between religion and philosophy. Augustine’s friendship is pivotal in Derrida’s attention to these different policies. It is indeed the place of passage, transition, translation, and transmission of the Greco-Latin heritage in Christianity.

2. The Resumption of Augustine’s Voice

Friendship is caught in the network of languages and cultures. Augustine’s Latin is a living language for him. Yet, for Jacques Derrida, it is a foreign language, if not a dead one, a crude language, steep and arduous, as he confessed elsewhere. The fact that the philosopher assumes Augustine’s Latin, without making it his own, raises the question of language like the raised grain of the wood, and by extension, the questions of translation and then of quotation. Derrida wants to walk, to travel with Augustine, and we feel that the compatriot, in all the complexity of his *Confessions*, is mobilized by Derrida to play a role in a strategy put in place long before this recourse. To recall it briefly, this strategy is based on these crucial dimensions for the author of *Of Grammatology*: language, translation, writing, orality, etc. Moreover, closer to our subject, friendship, the search for another self, “all these words [writes Derrida]: *truth, alienation, appropriation, habitation, home [chez-soi], ipseity, place of the subject, law*, and so on remain, in my eyes, problematic. Without exception. They bear the stamp of the metaphysics that imposed itself through, precisely, this language of the other, this monolingualism of the other” (Derrida 1998, p. 59).

On the same occasion that he lends him his voice, Augustine allows Derrida to introduce into this intellectual strategy revolving around the concept of friendship what “thought” (in its long Platonic reverberation) has always wanted to keep outside, like a foreign body to its reflection: the body itself, the tears, the salt, the blood. Passion, emotion, mourning.

3. The Tears

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida opens, displays, and scrutinizes a dossier he has collected concerning politics and friendship: one *and* the other—politics and friendship; and one *of* the other—the politics that friendship establishes or makes possible, the politics that friends want to undertake together for the common good. The philosopher is interested in friendship, its definitions, scissions, curves, ruptures, and duplications. Above all, he is interested in the doubling of friendship, or rather it being overcome, perhaps, by fraternity, its extension to the community in which it is inserted, and the loss of value it may undergo there. In chapter seven of his book, Derrida first evoked the Aristotelian theme of a soul in two bodies, as recalled in the famous words of Montaigne: “One soul in bodies twain, according to that most apt definition of Aristotle”. While pursuing his study of Greek and Roman schemata, all of these discourses “setting off a powerful historical tremor” (Derrida 1997, p. 186), Jacques Derrida invites us to undertake an attentive reading, or better still, a

meditation of Book IV of the *Confessions*: a book, he says, that is “an immense and singular signature [*paraphe*]”, that is to say, “the abbreviation of a paragraph: what is written next to it, in the margin” (Derrida 1986, pp. 34–35). And he states that it “would here deserve, for itself alone, an interminable meditation”, which would seek to take into account the friend, the couple of friends, the mourning, and the testament, “the flow and the economy of tears on the death of a friend, the Christian infinitization of friendship or of a spiritual fraternity which continues, beyond all ‘conversion,’ to implement, in their translations, Greek and Roman schemata” (Derrida 1997, p. 186).

At the heart of this fourth book, we learn that an “infinitely dear friend” has died, that the unthinkable and the impossible have thus happened, and that mourning has begun. From this painful centre flows abundant tears: “Only tears were sweet to me and in my ‘soul’s delights’ (Psalm 138: 11) weeping had replaced my friend” (IV, iv, 9). Starting from a centre, from a bleeding heart, these tears drift in streams of ink towards the margins to inscribe this singular signature in a text dealing with friendship. However, before following them to where their weight of love leads them, we must evoke the presence of those whom the knell that announces death summons, counts, and classifies.

4. The Large Number

One of the shocks caused by the best friend’s death was the exit of the room, the house, the villa of the father, and the discovery of the large number of people: “This work of mourning is called—*glas*. It is always of/for the proper name. The *glas* is first of all [...] the signal of a trumpet destined to call (*calare*), convoke, gather together, reassemble as such, a class of the Roman people” (Derrida 1986, p. 86). Such an apparition had not come much to Augustine’s mind before 397. A recent bishop, a sought-after orator, he had undertaken a preaching tour in Carthage and the surrounding areas while keeping on with the redaction of his *Confessions*, “begun in the same year Augustine preached in Carthage” (Brown 2001, p. 596). The spectres moving in the foggy visions of previous stays suddenly took shape on this occasion. “These men and women whom Augustin had rubbed shoulders with without asking any questions about their subjects in the days of his student youth, whom he had seen again with a look that was already different, a little more distanced, from his professorial chair, he now had them in front of him, certainly differentiated from each other, but, in the eyes of the pastor he had become, overall a dangerously exposed *massa peccati*, who had to be led to his salvation” (Lancel 1999, p. 280). In these circumstances, Augustine no longer converses, exchanges, or dialogues with familiars, these other selves, friends in spirit and wisdom, friends taking advantage of intellectual leisure. In front of him are gathered the current Christian listeners (or readers), the curious, the influential pagans, still very present in society and with whom it is necessary to correspond.

On the one hand, the radical view of the gospel is that the proclamation of the risen Christ has nothing to do with the artifices of rhetoric. In *The City of God*, Augustine readily acknowledges this: “Men uninstructed in any branch of a liberal education, without any of the refinement of heathen learning, unskilled in grammar, not armed with dialectic, not adorned with rhetoric, but plain fishermen, and very few in number,—these were the men whom Christ sent with the nets of faith to the sea of this world” (Augustine of Hippo 1887b, XXII, V).

On the other hand, the law of a large number of listeners is diverting, bending the whole conception and practice of Augustine. The experienced rhetorician already had the tools of dialogue, persuasion, confrontation, appeal, pretence, and tears, actual or fictitious. But within the framework of a persuasion aimed at this crowd, which always slips away from rhetorical influence—in the theatre, Terence will complain about the “coarse multitude”—he knows that he will have to resign himself to resorting to the testimony of the example, and first, to testify from oneself, to take oneself as a witness, and sometimes to bear witness. Augustine had already noted this in a late addition to Book IV of the treatise *On Christian Doctrine*: “Whatever may be the majesty of the style, the life of the speaker will count for more in securing the hearer’s compliance” (Augustine of Hippo 1887a, XXVII,

p. 59). He adds, “The man who cannot speak both eloquently and wisely should speak wisely without eloquence, rather than eloquently without wisdom” (XXVIII, 61). Moreover, if to speak wisely is beyond the orator’s power, “let his manner of living be an eloquent sermon in itself” (XXIX, 62). Was this not Augustine’s explicit intention: “This I desire to do, in my heart before you in confession, but before many witnesses with my pen” (X, i, 1)?

The narration of the story and its dissemination is a fundamental step in keeping the friendship alive, nourishing and igniting it with a fire taken from the ether of the spirit. Friendship gives and is given as an example to a small number, but then you never know into whose hands the book may fall, and if not the book, the noise made by the book, and the rumour that carries the story beyond the circle of friends. “To whom do I tell these things? Not to you, my God. But before you I declare this to my race, to the human race, though only a tiny part can light on this composition of mine” (II, iii, 5). It may therefore be that the friends themselves, or their friendship, if possible, will be put on show. Since the knell sounding of the death of the infinitely dear friend has made it possible to gather and classify unexpected interlocutors, appearing from nowhere, from no horizon of friendship or even civility, something more illustrious is needed, which will shine forth the brilliance of genuine friendships. The surviving friend must build another architecture, a more prominent place that can accommodate the crowd and where theatrical performances will strike the imagination.

5. At the Theatre: *Homo Sum*

From the margins of this chapter four, which interests Jacques Derrida, the flood of tears drifts to the sand of the arenas, the circus, or the theatre. Augustine admits, “I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own miseries and fuelled my fire” (III, ii, 2). Yet it was in such a place, as the socialist Pierre Leroux reports, that “the feeling of collective humanity” was expressed in Rome for the first time; and it was another compatriot of Augustine and Derrida, “a freedman, a child of Carthage, taken from his family and fed by the Romans as a slave, who formulated it, and this formula was so new that it struck every one with astonishment” (Leroux 1848, pp. 120–21). Leroux then quotes the passage of Augustine’s Letter 155 to Macedonius, an important figure in the Roman administration, vicar of Africa, a “penetrating” and “educated man” (Letter 153), with whom Augustine had already interceded in favour of criminals. Their correspondence speaks of “true friendship”, which is “an entirely gratuitous love that does not derive its price from temporal advantages. For no one can truly be the friend of a man if he has not first been a friend of the truth”. The bishop proposed to extend the movement of the love of God, wherein the base of true friendship is the love of neighbour. According to a very typical mixed argument, and since it is a question of truth, he relies first on the commandment drawn from the Scriptures: “For Christ, that is to say, the Truth, teaches us that all the Law and the Prophets are bound by these two precepts: to love God with all soul, with all heart, with all mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mt 12, 37–40)”. Then, he slides without transition on a concordance with both philosophy (reason) and commercial exchanges.

For if the bond of money unites people, how much more does the bond of nature unite them, which they share not by the law of exchange but by that of birth? For this reason, that famous comic playwright—for the splendour of the truth is not lacking to brilliant minds—has one older man say to another: Do you have so much leisure from your own affairs that you busy yourself with the affairs of others that are none of your concern? And he added the response from the other: I am a human being; I do not regard anything human as of no concern to me. They say that the whole theatre, full of stupid and ignorant people, applauded that idea. The union of human minds naturally stirs the love of all human beings so that each human being in it feels that he is a neighbour of any other. (Augustine of Hippo 1990a, p. 14)

The beginning of the following paragraph, however, will reaffirm the primacy of the Gospel commandment: “Man, therefore, must love God and himself and his neighbour

with that love which the divine law commands him”, so that the detour made by the scene of the universal applause appears after all as an almost ornamental excursus, a figure of speech, a reminder of a kind of commonplace rather than an evocation of the truth. Moreover, the recourse to divine law is a juridical formulation of a deeper theology, as stated by Saint Paul: “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans, 5, 5).

6. Genetics of Friendship

The way Augustine seems to understand it, this verse by Terence belongs to an argumentation that aims to deploy the phases of the genetics of friendship. There are many harmonious metamorphoses wherein the natural, physical, biological, animal, or vegetable character that we like to show moults without shock or mutation, as if it were a vital drive, which triggers the organic development of an appetite for life that blossoms into a friendship. Here again, Augustine speaks with the same voice as Cicero, and both follow the Stoics. “It is nature itself, he observes in *The City of God*, which urges us to love those who are born of us” (Augustine of Hippo 1887b, III, xix, p. 62): household, family, loved ones, fellow citizens, neighbours. Laelius, for his part, puts in first place the political scope of this natural development, to which, he says, friendship must bring a correction and a supplement.

For I believe I see quite clearly that all men are meant by nature to have some sort of companionship one with another, and that the depth and significance of this companionship varies according to the degree of relationship between them. Thus, it is stronger between citizen and citizen than between citizen and foreigner, between those who are related by blood than those who are not. In the latter case, at least, nature herself brings about a friendship, but it is not quite as firmly based as it ought to be. For the friend has this advantage over the relative: relatives may lose their goodwill, friends cannot, for once goodwill has been lost, the friend is no longer a friend, but the relative is still a relative. (Cicero 1971, V, p. 19)

The same development is found again in Augustine’s comment on the classic Christian text on friendship, that of the First Letter of John. “It is with it [love and/or friendship] like fire: It must need, like fire, first seize upon what is nearest, and so extend to what is further off” (Augustine of Hippo 1888, viii, p. 4).

Love all men, even your enemies, not because they are your brethren, but that they may be your brethren; that you may be at all times on fire with brotherly love, whether toward him that has become your brother, or towards your enemy, so that, by being beloved, he may become your brother. Wheresoever ye love a brother, you love a friend. Now is he with you, now is he knit to you in unity, a catholic unity. (Augustine of Hippo 1888, X, p. 7)

The Italian translation expands the semantic field of “catholic unity” to this sense of humanity attached to Terence’s verse: “nell’unità che si estende a tutti gli uomini”. And Augustine, the rhetorician homilist, is carried away by the fire of love/Caritas: “The discipline of charity, my brethren, its strength, flowers, fruit, beauty, pleasantness, food, drink, meat, embracing, hath in it no satiety. If it so delights us while in a strange land, in our own country, how shall we rejoice!”.

Yet the difficulty of the interactions between humanity, friendship, and fraternity is not resolved. On the contrary, it is even more complicated by a third middle way, which considers the greatest number but establishes a hierarchy between individuals and groups, which is also considered natural. If humans are members of a universal fraternity, this “membership”, free and open to all, must draw the law of its organization from the human anatomy. “Just as, among the parts of the body, there are some which are as it were made for themselves, the eyes for example and the ears, while certain members serve as auxiliaries to others, the legs for example and the hands . . . likewise we are by nature prepared to form groups, assemblies, cities”. We can foresee all of the socio-politico-religious extensions of

this recourse to the body, and we can read about them in the letters of Paul, where a lot is said about the head, the chief, the headgear, the *esprit de corps*, the mystical body, and so on.

7. Survival of Friendship

While discussing the genetics of friendship, we are still debating the tears shed and the death toll, which, as Derrida reminds us, unites and classifies. At first, Augustine, the tried friend, pushes a rather rhetorical exclamation: How to survive his dead friend? The friend who stayed behind fears that he will now only live halfway, deprived of his other self. Augustine indeed knows all resources of eloquence when he writes: “I was surprised that any other mortals were alive since he whom I had loved as if he would never die was dead. I was even more surprised that when he was dead, I was still alive, for he was my ‘other self’” (IV, vi, 11). The survivor grieves (*mourning*) for surviving, and this grievance (*guilt*) expresses itself in blame: “What madness not to understand how to love human beings with awareness of the human condition!” (IV, vii, 12).

On the other hand, the survivor is afraid of dying too, in fear that the friend who is already dead will thus die definitively, entirely. Will the friend’s memory fade? Will the friend who was half of oneself now be a spectral companion, an immaterial ghost who accompanies, obsesses, and haunts his friend who survives him? “Things rise and set: in their emerging, they begin as it were to be, and grow to perfection; having reached perfection, they grow old and die. Not everything grows old, but everything dies”. (IV, x, 15) This reality, which one would say is ecological, is symbolized by Augustine in the movements of our language. Those who pass away and disappear after having appeared in our lives carry out, in fact, the same movement as the words of the language, which follow one another at the same time as the meaning of the sentence is formed: “I retain images of the sounds which constitute these words. I know that they have passed through the air as a noise, and that they no longer exist” (X, x, 17).

“He, [Augustine] avows ‘horror,’ and confesses to a double terror: that of surviving and not surviving, of surviving with half his soul amputated—the ineluctable arithmetical consequence of the Aristotelian axiom—but also that of not surviving, that is, of *perhaps* (*forte*) not keeping within himself; in what is left of self, at least a little of the beloved” (Derrida 1997, p. 186). If the spectrality threatens the dead friend, it also affects the survivor, who will henceforth be only half of himself, and who states “I did not wish to live with only half of myself” (IV, vi, 11). Death, mourning, and guilt made Augustine question himself so much that he had become a “vast problem” to himself (IV, iv, 9).

In another theatrical formula, Augustine exclaims: “Perhaps the reason why I so feared death was that then the whole of my much-loved friend would have died” (IV, vi, 11). Once the friend is dead, the need for the survival of the bond of friendship now gives it an extension, a diffusion, a political illustration. Jacques Derrida recalls that Aristotle’s “*Eudemian Ethics*, for example, inscribes friendship, knowledge and death, but also survival, from the start, in a single, *selfsame* configuration” (Derrida 1997, p. 7). While the death toll summons many strangers to this friendship, it is perhaps through the question of the friend’s survival that the friendship finally touches on political life. The friend’s death will be spread, and, like a tocsin, this noise will provide an occasion for the people to gather not around his still warm bed but around the memory of an immortal friendship. A monument to the dead, a column, or a stele must be erected and turned towards this vast audience needing “edification”. Loss drives friendships to engage in the work of memory, commemoration, and dissemination, in such a way as is described in the following strong expression of Cicero: “So that where his friend is he is; [. . .] and in his friend’s life he enjoys a second life after his own is finished. This last is perhaps the most difficult to conceive” (Cicero 1971, VII, p. 23).

It is, therefore, a question of surviving the dead and, ultimately, death itself, of living beyond or even in a beyond. A loss opens the door to survival, but faced with the friend’s death, the young Augustine, barely a Christian, does not yet possess the beautiful, haughty serenity of the pagan Laelius. “I do indeed grieve! After all, I have been bereaved of a friend

such as the world will never see again—at least so it seems to me. One thing I am sure of: there was never such a one before. But I am in no need of panaceas; I am quite capable of consoling myself, and I am particularly comforted by the fact that I am free of that error which in most men is the casual cause of anguish at the passing of friends” (Cicero 1971, III). What is this error? It is that something bad happened to the friend. Laelius adds, “I do not feel that Scipio has suffered any misfortune; I am the one who has suffered misfortune if any has occurred. But to be crushed by grief at one’s own misfortunes is the act not of a man who loves his friend, but of one who loves himself” (III, 10). It is, therefore, necessary that everyone supports what happens to oneself, stoically. Moreover, this friend, Scipio Africanus, had not died young, unlike Augustine’s anonymous friend. He had achieved in his long life all that he could wish to do, all that could be expected of him. “Well, then, what would a man like that have stood to gain from the addition of a few more years of life?” (III, 11), asks Laelius.

On the other hand, should the survivor’s sadness be based on whether there is some immortality after death, or whether there is none? Laelius and his friend Scipio are among those who think according to a long tradition bearing the opinion of the ancients and of “the wisest of men by Apollo’s oracle” (Socrates), who maintained “that the souls of men were divine, and that when they had departed from the body, they found the road back to heaven lying open before them, and that, the better and more just a man had been, the smoother and easier this road was for him” (Cicero 1971, IV/13). Augustine, the narrator of the *Confessions*, shares the same opinion, which for him is now doubled with a Christian belief. However, at the time of his friendship in Book IV, he states “I did not know this” (IV, xii, 20), that is: friendship in God. “‘Happy is the person who loves you’ (Tobit 13: 18) and his friend in you, and his enemy because of you (Matt. 5: 44). Though left alone, he loses none dear to him; for all are dear in the one who cannot be lost. Who is that but our God, the God who made heaven and earth and filled them? By filling them he made them. (Jer. 23: 24). None loses you unless he abandons you”. (IV, ix, 14). Among the pagans, “if, on the other hand, the opposite view is sounder, that is, that body and soul both perish together, and no sensation at all is left, then, to be sure, there is nothing good in death, but equally surely there is nothing bad”. Since the dead do not suffer at all, the suffering is therefore only that of the survivors, and Laelius has already concluded that they must master their pain. It is therefore up to them to ensure the dead maintain a specific survival in the world they have left, through the work of memory and celebration.

At first, this memory that has woven a narrative of the memories of the days lived together is a personal treasure. Then, however, the ordered memory of the beautiful past concordance and the perfect agreement that the friends have known must also be shared by the public in a social diffusion. Friends, few on Earth in the society of the living, will be even fewer in the limited pantheon of famous men. “And I cherish this hope [the hope that for all time to come men will remember my friendship with Scipio] the more because in all the course of history, men can name scarcely three or four pairs of friends; to this category, I venture to hope, men will assign the friendship of Scipio and Laelius” (Cicero 1971, IV/15). This social recognition does not relate to the memory of a single man, or of a great man—nor is it about two or more of these characters. It is about the friendship that united them, and that the memory is now offering as an example.

8. Backtracking: Emulation and Imitation

Let us come back for a moment to the experience of humanity that took place at the theatre. The instantaneous (and ephemeral?) effectiveness recognized in the theatrical performance is entirely based on a complex dynamic of mimesis, the very one that presided over education, then friendship, and which will now be used to persuade the great number. It is therefore necessary to pause in order to follow its establishment in Augustine’s thought. Two major statements preside over it. On the one hand, a fundamental theology: humans are imitators of God himself. “In their perverted way, all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you. But even by thus

imitating you they acknowledge that you are the creator of all nature and so concede that there is no place where one can entirely escape from you" (II, vi, 14). From a less spiritual point of view, imitation seems to be the realization of this statement of Aristotle: "First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (Aristotle 2008, IV). Thus, in the *Confessions*, the imitation practiced by the schoolboy in the first book pursues the bitter experience of the jealous infant (I, vii, 11) while transforming it. What is now the object of imitation at school is first an imitation through narrative. The student must memorize the words and the corresponding acts thanks to the stories that have organized them. The reading, for example, of the misfortunes of Dido in tears brings tears to the young reader. Augustine succeeded too well in this exercise, which he considered to be "fornication". Nevertheless, this is how language is learned, and words, "which are like exquisite and precious vessels" (I, xvi, 26) only reach us filled with those poisons that we must absorb before protecting ourselves against them. "It is as if we would not know words such as 'golden shower' and 'bosom' and 'deceit' and 'temples of heaven' and other phrases occurring in the passage in question, had not Terence brought on to the stage a worthless young man citing Jupiter as a model for his own fornication" (I, xvi, 26).

Secondly, another form of imitation offered to the schoolboy is what the poet's words give us to see. The "copy" that the young boy must make in his life concerns the painting of a painting, a fresco, more precisely, "representing how Jupiter, they say, sent a shower of gold into Danae's lap and deceived a woman". What the schoolboy reads in this play by Terence allows him to see a "young debauchee" who contemplates this image and proposes to imitate in his conduct the "lust of Jupiter": "Notice how he encourages himself to lust as if enjoying celestial authority". And Augustine, after quoting the two verses that report the self-excitement of the young man in the legend, exclaims: "And am I, poor little fellow, not to do the same as he? Yes indeed, I have done it with pleasure" (I, xvi, 26). The pedagogy of imitation is practical, since "the words actually encourage the more confident committing of a disgraceful action".

This process of pedagogical imitation is essential for Saint Augustine. In his Letter 91 (year 408) to Nectarius of Calama, he comes back to it more explicitly, and at the same time, he discusses the political repercussions of *mimesis*. He observes with satisfaction that "those most learned men [...] who investigated or even described the character that they thought the earthly state or city ought to have in discussions among friends" have ceased to propose to youth the imitation of their gods, and replaced it by the imitation of men "whom they considered outstanding and praiseworthy". Augustine, having reminded his correspondent of the well-known episode of another play by Terence, *The Eunuch*, adds that this young man "would in no way have fallen into that sin out of passion or have plunged himself into it by committing it, if he had preferred to imitate Cato rather than Jupiter". Such a choice, however, was impossible, since the young man "was forced to worship in the temples of Jupiter rather than Cato". Is it not, therefore, the religion that acts as a meta-rule governing individual and collective behaviour?

Moreover, as a moralist, Augustine observes that the perversion of the people makes them recognize themselves in these comedies that resemble them. "Read or recall how wisely the same books [of the *Republic*] explain that the descriptions and actions portrayed in the comedies can only be accepted if the morals of those who accept them are in harmony with them". Calling again upon "the authority of the most illustrious men, who are outstanding in the state and are discussing the state", Augustine draws the conclusion that "very wicked men become worse by the imitation of the gods, not, of course, true gods, but false and fictitious ones" (Augustine of Hippo 1990b, p. 4). In the second book of *The City of God*, Saint Augustine will rephrase the same argumentation, calling this time to the authority of two of those "most learned men", Cicero and Scipio the African: "The opinion of the ancient Romans on this matter is attested by Cicero in his work *De Republica*, in which Scipio, one of the interlocutors, says, The lewdness of comedy could never have

been suffered by audiences, unless the customs of society had previously sanctioned the same lewdness" ([Augustine of Hippo 1887b](#), II, ix).

The different orders of human activity do not function in isolation. Saint Augustine's argument thus works on several correlated levels: the theatre, the official religion, and public mores. The most radical solution for the bishop writing to a cultivated pagan who shares the same culture is that the metarule should be an authentic religion, the religion of the true God. Once this is in place, the other dimensions of human life will find their ethical and political dispositions.

9. Confluences of Friendship and Imitation

While the primary level of imitation in the first book of the *Confessions* is pedagogical, the following books still bring out more of its resources. Our Book IV gives us a new cartography in three configurations, as imitation is grafted onto friendship. At first, this book is about the role of imitation in the perversion of the one-to-one relationship between one friend and another, and this perversion was to be one of the causes of tears at the time of mourning. But it was a brief friendship of youth that lasted barely a year. Initially, Augustine and his companion formed a small community of tastes. It was a friendship of thought. But retroactively, the theologian Augustine will consider (despite the profoundly emotional tone of the rest of the story) that it was not a true friendship, since there is no true friendship except that which God cements.

The second configuration of imitation organizes the relationships between the individual and his group of friends. Augustine illustrated the harmful powers of these friendly liaisons, the "mysterious seduction of the spirit", in the well-known episode of the theft of the pears. An almighty narrator, the bishop undoubtedly aggravates the power of harmful influences to better warn his current readers: "Friendship can be a dangerous enemy [. . .]. As soon as the words are spoken 'Let us go and do it', one is ashamed not to be shameless" (II, ix, 17). The moment of decision under the influence of friendship is instantaneous; it suffers no delay and no procrastination.

Finally, a third configuration links friendship to public opinion. Augustine, after writing his first book, *De Pulchro et apto*, dedicated it to a man unknown to him, Hierus, orator of Rome: "I had never set eyes on him, but I loved the man for his renown as a person of high culture, and because I had heard some words of his quoted which gave me pleasure" (IV, xiv, 21). Augustine gives then a glimpse of the insidious work of social persuasion.

How do I know and how can I be sure in making confession before you that my love for him was aroused by the regard of those praising him rather than by the actual achievements which evoked their praise? If, far from praising him, they had vilified him, and had given a critical and scornful account of his work, my interest would not have been kindled and aroused. Certainly, the actual facts would have been no different, nor the man himself. The only alteration would have been in the feeling conveyed by the speakers. See how the human soul lies weak and prostrate when it is not yet attached to the solid rock of truth. The winds of gossip blow from the chests of people ventilating their opinions; so the soul is carried about and turned, twisted and twisted back again". (IV, xiv, 23)

Likewise, for spiritual friendships, it is still the image of fire, of flame, which illustrates the contagion that expands membership: "But love in one person is infectious in kindling it in another. Hence, it comes about that a person who is praised comes to be loved, when people believe that the praise comes from a sincere heart, that is, when the praise comes from one who loves him" (IV, xiv, 21).

Thus, in these three stages, imitation exerted itself on friendship to lead it astray by persuasion. It exercised such a constraint that the action was done reluctantly, and finally, via an emotional contagion, it moved to love a stranger according to the strength of praise given to him by praisers presumed to have sincere hearts.

10. Derrida's Revival of Augustine

Jacques Derrida invited us to a meditation that he said would be endless and which had to consider the autobiographical elements described in a masterful way in Book IV of the *Confessions*: “the friend, the couple of friends, on mourning and the testament, the flow and the economy of tears on the death of a friend the friend, the couple of friends”. This anchoring point in the emotional, the intimate, and the domestic, was to open onto “the Christian infinitization of friendship or of, spiritual fraternity which continues, beyond all ‘conversion’, to implement, in their translations, Greek and Roman schemata, Book IV of his *Confessions*” (Derrida 1997, p. 186).

However, the incompleteness of this conversion is not entirely due to blindness, inaction, or the resignation of Christian thought. Jacques Derrida recognizes that the Greek concept of friendship was already pregnant, full of Christian developments to come: “We could identify a Christian logic only after acknowledging *also*, in the same move, with all its subsequent consequences, the deployment of a Greek memory” (Derrida 1997, note 10, p. 268).

The new phenomenon, of which Augustine gives the expression, and the lived testimony is indeed that of a cultural continuity, whereas the Catholic bishop maintains or appears to maintain the Greek and Roman patterns. “He [Augustine] is an heir and a shaper of a long tradition that takes from the Greco-Roman past assumptions about human beings and how they work. The intellectual revolution of Greek antiquity and the cultural revolution of Christian antiquity both make sense within that underlying tradition. If that tradition now gives way, ideas built on them will find the ground shifting precipitously” (O'Donnell 2005, p. 326). Augustine claims to maintain these assumptions while making them undergo a Christian conversion, a curvature, a radical translation. This radicality would be that of the Good News, of the message of Christ. The Christian conversion of classical schemata and their translation entails an extension to infinity, which Derrida calls “infinitization”, taking place in two directions. One is vertical, a metanoia *in God* in the Christian faith “of this model of fraternal friendship”, as we can read more specifically in the confessional speech given by Augustine. “Here, one would then have to call on the testimony of the entirety of the *Confessions*, for this is the very law of their movement” (Derrida 1997, p. 187). This upward orientation and this Christian turning away is expressed, for example, in Augustine's injunction to “love the friend in you, O God, and the enemy because of you”.

The Christian infinitization of friendship is also expressed in its extension to a spiritual, theological, communal fraternity. The texts of the Greco-Roman canonical tradition are confronted with the canon of the Christian scriptures (and the institutions that stem from them), in which fraternity and community are intimately linked. Derrida believes that this “perhaps suffices to de-configure, if not to disfigure, the exemplary paradigms, the classifications and the periodizations of use” forming “the tormented landscape of these geological folds”. However, it appears that the expected Christian discrimination will not have taken place. Thus, with Augustine, we see how the restricted circle of friends widens progressively according to new configurations required by the novelty of the Gospel. At the same time, this widening of the circle corresponds to an extension of the meaning of the words *friends* and *friendship*, although the lexicon and large sections of the old discourses are taken up as they are in their new context and Christianized Latin. For example, the few friends in Christ develop into many brothers, the number of which comes into play in democracy, in a way that does not overlap with what is experienced in the assembly of Christians. Civil political fraternity may appear to duplicate Christian political fraternity, but it is not identified with it. For a Christian, the friend often takes on the brother's features, and vice versa: fraternal friendship or friendly fraternity. Theology and the institution find their interest in these semantic overlaps. But the community of brothers (and sisters, although they remain firmly in the background if they are not totally excluded) is not a democracy, no more than the family unit.

At the end of his “digression”, Derrida brings together in a single appreciation a movement that is common to Saint Augustine and Montaigne.

The fact that Saint Augustine and Montaigne (among others) continue to develop, deploy and make explicit Aristotelian and Ciceronian motifs, to claim authority for themselves in the letter of these texts while undoubtedly submitting them to a sort of infinite transplantation, to an uprooting and transplantation of the infinite, is enough to cause us to suspect something untimely, some non-identity with self, in each of the presumed models: Greek, Roman, Christian. (Derrida 1997, p. 188)

Therefore, a contemporary reading that would try to disturb the beautiful Greco-Roman-Christian order, the conservation, and transmission of this archive would not be so untimely. It would not be at all out of place to question the strategies and effects of these displacements. Considering completely new situations that would have been unthinkable for the Ancients, this contemporary reading would be perspicacious, interrogative, clairvoyant, and young in a certain way. In the sense of the work proposed by Derrida himself, it would seek to try to displace the conventional practices of reading to create a new kind of community of readers, as he said in “Une folie. . .” (8). He immediately indicated, however, that he did not like either the word community or even the thing: “if by the community we mean, as often, a harmonious whole, consensus and fundamental agreement under the phenomena of discordance or war, I don’t really believe in it and I sense as many threats as promises”. His interlocutor, François Ewald, suggested to him that would not his own “deconstructive” work be “to induce these reading practices which will themselves be producers of meaning?” Certainly, agrees the philosopher, insofar as a community “knows its limit—and that its limit is its openness: once it believes it has understood, collected, interpreted, kept the text, then something of it, something quite different in him escapes him or resists him, which calls for another community, which never allows itself to be completely interiorized in the memory of a present community. An experience of mourning and promise which establishes the community but also forbids it to come together keeps within itself the reserve of another community which will otherwise sign quite different contracts” (Derrida and Ewald 1991, pp. 8–9).³ A community that is aware of its circularity and which would not allow itself to be locked into it would be driven by a call to go beyond its borders to give place and hospitality to any other community that is simultaneously a signatory to the shared contracts and dissident.

11. Conclusions

Did not Derrida evoke “a powerful historical tremor” (Derrida 1997, p. 186) that should occur at the root of a democracy to come, the necessity and the possibility of maintaining both the heterogeneity of the “all other is all other” concept, and equality? Derrida, writes Paola Marrati, “forcefully asserts that the democracy to come is not only not present, but that the very idea of a democracy that bears infinite otherness at its root has not yet been thought of” (Marrati 2004, p. 240).⁴ However, it is quite the contrary. As clearly stated in the list Cicero gave, priority is always given to the closest to oneself. “Apparently freer from the “natural” ties of family and consanguinity”, adds Paola Marrati, “therefore less suspect in the register of democratic and universalist policies, friendship nevertheless renews, and powerfully, a family model, and not just any family model. Friends-brothers, equality as fraternity, moves away from the family in the strict sense of the term only to universalize it in the figure of a fraternal community” (Marrati 2004, p. 241). It is only step by step that the figure of the stranger appears, sometimes like a spectre or a haunting. Caught in the difficulties of the double etymology: *hostis* and *hospes*: enemy and host, “the categorical imperative of hospitality” of which Anne Dufourmantelle (1997, p. 71)⁵ speaks struggles to make itself heard and even more so to impose itself.

Jacques Derrida (and Emmanuel Lévinas, even more powerfully) recalls the necessary ethics of the other and of the Wholly Other to policies that otherwise encourage the self-segregation of the same, of the other as oneself, and the gathering of the same. “The *hostis* responds to hospitality as the ghost remembers the living without admitting oblivion.

To the pacified reason of Kant, Derrida opposes the primary haunting of a subject that otherness prevents from closing in on his peace of mind" (Dufourmantelle 1997, p. 12). As an echo of the astonishment of the pagan correspondents of Augustine, reticent at his openness to *Caritas*, Jacques Derrida asks himself: "Why would I call this foreigner my friend (for we are speaking of this absolute foreigner, if only the neighbourhood foreigner, the foreigner within my family) and not the other? Why am I not the friend of just anyone? Am I not, moreover, just that, in subscribing to such a strong and at the same time disarming and disarmed proposition? There could never be any appeasing response to this question, of course" (Derrida 1997, p. 298). This deconstruction of the (too) familiar to restore its appearance of foreignness constitutes a healthy asceticism for the better health of our life in common.

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- ¹ Unless otherwise specified, references are to the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.
- ² My translation.
- ³ See note 2 above.
- ⁴ See note 2 above.
- ⁵ See note 2 above.

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