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ARTICLE

## Critical Friendship After the Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT.** Are critique and the “art of governing” antithetical? The aim of this article is to examine this tension that was laid bare by the Covid-19 pandemic by introducing “critical friendship” as a conceptual framework for a constructive interdisciplinary engagement with science in a post-pandemic era. It does so by drawing on several works and insights: (i) Michel Foucault’s notion of “critical attitude” as well as his assessment of philosophy as providing a “diagnosis of the present;” (ii) Bruno Latour and colleagues’ idea of a “critical zone” or what I call a horizontal epistemology of critique; (iii) Aristotle’s notion of friendship as being necessary for the “common good;” and finally (iv) Jacques Derrida’s interpretation of the messianic character of friendship in the constitution of progressive democracies. Whereas critical theory has been described as either “explanatory-diagnostic” or “emancipatory-utopian,” a *critical friendship* approach aims to be both diagnostic *and* emancipatory in an age of uncertainty and democratic backsliding.

**Keywords:** critical theory, interdisciplinarity, epistemology, critique, Covid-19, critical friendship.

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“On the one hand, friendship seems to be essentially foreign or unamenable to the *res publica* and thus could not found a politics. But, on the other hand, as one knows, from Plato to Montaigne, from Aristotle to Kant, from Cicero to Hegel, the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship (but my question goes precisely to the philosophical canon in this domain) will have linked friendship explicitly to virtue and to justice, to moral reason and to political reason.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and perceptive comments in the spirit of “critical friendship,” as well as Annika Skoglund and David Armstrong for the invitation to contribute to this special issue and, last but not least, a “critical friend,” Melissa Franklin, for the many thought-provoking conversations. I would also like to pay tribute to all these interlocutors who have sadly left us during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, some of whom are mentioned in this article: Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021), Paul Veyne (1930-2022), Bruno Latour (1947-2022), and Ian Hacking (1936-2023).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship,” *Journal of Philosophy* 85:11 (1988), 641-642.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed an impasse between critique and governance. We witnessed what we could call a ‘Pontius Pilate moment’ when some social scientists washed their hands of the ways in which the pandemic was being managed by state authorities while warning about the dangers and deploring the pitfalls of such lack of foresight from the heights of their pedestal. Yet, in the face of such tragedy, simply criticizing without partaking in decision-making felt disingenuous. At the same time, some of the concepts that were deployed to understand the excesses of the state and its perversion of power, like the ‘state of exception,’ the ‘surveillance state,’ ‘sovereign power’ or even ‘biopower,’ fell on deaf ears. How could these concepts help translate critique into policies? After all, what is the point of talking about the participatory nature of civic democracy, if what Michel Foucault calls “critical reason” and the “art of governing” are from the outset antithetical?<sup>3</sup> As the pandemic unfolded, it became clear that we were in dire need for new critical theories and approaches to rethink this “life in ruins” to quote Isabelle Stengers.<sup>4</sup>

This article hence proposes to tether trust in science to the politics of life - both of which were laid bare by the pandemic - through the concept of “critical friendship.” By “critical friendship,” I do not mean a “pedagogical strategy” as it has been described in the literature on education.<sup>5</sup> Instead, I mean an epistemological approach as well as a motivating principle or ethos of engaging with science and scientists. More specifically, critical friendship is a way of performing a critique of science that is a priori neither suspicious of science nor conflictual and yet is part and parcel of the democratic nature and necessity of such an exercise for the sake of the *res publica*. In this article, I attempt to link this premise to what Jacques Derrida saw as a set of constitutive principles of the polis in the great philosophical and canonical works on friendship: “to virtue and to justice, to moral reason and to political reason” (cited in the epigraph).

To do so, I will try to weave four ideas and vital works that are seldom in conversation and which I think raise some interesting insights about the ways in which trust in science could be salvaged and the politics of life reined in. First, Foucault’s notion of “critical attitude” and his assessment of philosophy as being “diagnostic” in nature. Second, a more spatial, physical, or material definition of critical engagement with the sciences, as a *horizontal epistemological space of critical proximity* to the object of investigation. Third, Aristotle’s notion of friendship as being necessary for the ‘common good’ and for the polis and hence deeply political in nature. And, finally, Derrida’s interpretation of the messianic character of friendship in the making or constitution of democracies.

The political theorist Seyla BenHabib has characterized critical theory as having two tasks, namely “explanatory-diagnostic” or “emancipatory-utopian.”<sup>6</sup> Critical friendship, as I hope to demonstrate, can be both diagnostic *and* emancipatory.

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *Qu’est-ce que la critique? ; suivie de, La culture de soi* (2015), 35-36.

<sup>4</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Making Sense in Common: A Reading of Whitehead in Times of Collapse* [2020] (2023), 175.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Smith et al., “Critical Friendship as a Pedagogical Strategy,” in *International Perspectives on Designing Professional Practice Doctorates: Applying the Critical Friends Approach to the EdD and Beyond*, ed. Valerie A. Storey (2016), 233–48; Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, “Through the Lens of a Critical Friend,” *Educational Leadership* 51:2 (1993), 49-51.

<sup>6</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (1986), 142.

## THE CRITICAL NEURO-TURN

In our exploration of the new brain sciences, Nikolas Rose and I proposed a “critical friendship” approach or “ethic” as a way to describe a constructive critical engagement with the sciences at a time of intense polarization within the social sciences vis-à-vis the rising influence of the new brain sciences and more specifically the neurosciences (what has been described as the “neuro-turn”).<sup>7</sup> Critical friendship was a way to resolve the tension between a new ‘war’ that was emerging between two groups of social scientists; one group - call them *The Neuro-Enthusiasts* - embraced the promises of these new neurosciences and the hype that these sciences had generated in the popular and scientific imagination, and the other group - call them *The Neuro-Cynics* - considered such promises to be at best exaggerated and at worst deceitful. It is as if calls and efforts in the 1990s for creating a “fruitful dialogue”<sup>8</sup> between scientists and their critics had failed and new frictions and dissensions were being drawn from the critics themselves.

Our ‘critical friendship’ approach was the consequence of our respective interactions with various scientists and their ways of thinking and practicing science as well as our own ambivalence with science; having both originally studied and been formed in biology and medicine respectively before moving to sociology, philosophy, and history of science and medicine. In a sense, the approach reflects our own dilemmas with science as an object of study and as praxis; we were, and remain, both attracted to science and wary of its discourse, both interested in its claims and skeptical of its grandiose assertions, both critical of its reductionism and engaged with its method, and both hopeful of the possible productive and emancipatory tools of science and worried of its more perverted uses.

At the same time, it had become necessary to make sense of these inherent tensions. Hence, we provocatively asked in *Neuro*: what if the neurobiology and sociality of the brain were mutually constitutive? After all, the mind is neither entirely socially constructed nor entirely reducible to formulaic concepts. If, out of necessity, the brain and the mind are profoundly and all too humanely dialectical, then critical friendship was our way to express our deep belief in the “possibilities of critical and affirmative dialogue” beyond simplistic stereotypes.<sup>9</sup>

Hence ‘critical friendship’ was a way to resolve the tension of this new polarization. But I would like to argue in this article that critical friendship is not merely a reaction or an attempt to produce a productive dialogue. Critical friendship is an epistemological starting point; a way of *performing* a critique of contemporary scientific practices and discourses. However, since Rose and I did not flesh out in details what we meant by ‘critical friendship’- besides what is generically understood as collaboration, amicability, or

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<sup>7</sup> Nikolas S. Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind* (2013), 142. Our approach goes beyond a “critical neuroscience” approach - a stance of informed critique pertaining to neuroscientific methods, research practices, and concepts - since it also includes the ‘psy’ sciences (psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis). For critical neuroscience, see Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby, eds., *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience* (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Keith Ashman and Phillip Barringer, ed., *After the Science Wars: Science and the Study of Science* (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro*, 236.

goodwill - this article proposes to explicate the concept further and elaborate a broader framework for a constructive ethos - indeed 'ethic' - to approach, investigate, and examine science in an increasingly complex and challenging world.

### THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded in early 2020, I reviewed the first few books that were written by some of the prominent thinkers of our time.<sup>10</sup> Some were written in English, others in French. All were written in a hurry and with a sense of urgency. The list is by no means exhaustive, nor were these books definitive in their postmortem assessment of the first few months of the pandemic. But some interesting insights could be gleaned from them about the persistent suspicion of state intervention in times of crisis, about the lack of trust in science and expertise, about the retreat of democracy, about socioeconomic inequities within and across countries, and about the lack of transparency in decision-making. At the same time, one could also make interesting observations of key departures with previous pandemics; the pervasive use of 'big data,' AI and other bio-tracking technologies, new forms of local solidarity (and conversely the erosion of global solidarity), the shifting nature of capitalism ('digital capitalism' gaining more terrain), and a popular push for open and collaborative decision-making in the face of adversity (within and across the artificial divide between the so-called 'Global North' and 'Global South').

But, as I also wrote in this early reflective essay, many concepts and preconceived ideas seem to have been deeply challenged by this new global health crisis. For the late Jean-Luc Nancy (whose last short meditative book on the Covid pandemic appeared before he passed away in 2022), the Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated how scientific expertise is itself precarious and how a biopolitics based on scientific expertise can be imperfect, sometimes even dangerous to health. This made the concept of biopolitics more "dubious" given that the assumption was one of rationalities of government based on unambiguous expertise, techniques, and technologies.<sup>11</sup> If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed how life and the politics of life were equally ambivalent, complex, and elusive.

Foucault's oft used (and abused) concept of biopolitics is not the only concept to have been criticized in this pandemic. So, too, has the concept of the "state of exception." Introduced originally by Carl Schmitt, the German conservative jurist and Nazi supporter, the concept of the state of exception was used by Giorgio Agamben in the context of this public health crisis to refer to the imposition of restrictions on movement and the suspension of daily activities in Italy, the first European country to have been severely hit by the novel coronavirus.<sup>12</sup> But can Italy today, a democratic country, and a European Union member state, be compared to Nazi Germany? Besides, as Frédéric Worms rightly argued, public health emergencies are not necessarily dystopian states of exception and can be

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<sup>10</sup> Joelle M. Abi-Rached, "The Covid-19 Caesura and the Post-Pandemic Future," *BioSocieties* 16:1 (2021), 142–56.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Un trop humain virus* (2020), 18-19 and 81-83.

<sup>12</sup> Abi-Rached, "The Covid-19 Caesura and the Post-Pandemic Future," 143. Also see, Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now?: The Epidemic as Politics* (2021).

justified in democracies as long as they are temporary as well as convincingly and openly deliberated.<sup>13</sup>

In his acerbic social critique, the prolific Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han likewise (and long before the Covid crisis struck) reached the conclusion that some theories or concepts, notably biopolitics or the idea of “the sovereign power” (both of which were deployed ad nauseam in the context of this pandemic) had become anachronistic for a post-neoliberal age marked by atomization, fragmentation, and a shift away from the “disciplinary society” to one in which the “achievement self” of late capitalism regulates itself in the absence of a centralized surveillance apparatus.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as much as Byung-Chul Han’s critique is compelling, it remains unsatisfying. Why should one reject a priori or even a posteriori calls for more open data and more transparency for fear of the eventual exploitation of our personal data and our submission to the imperative of transparency of advanced neoliberal democracies? What if, as the Covid-19 crisis has plainly demonstrated, transparency was vital for decision-making in times of crisis and uncertainty?<sup>15</sup> The difference between a democracy and an authoritarian regime is precisely accountability. In the case of this global sanitary crisis, it was up to democratic governments to demonstrate that virus containment could be managed through democratic and transparent means, and precisely not through a perpetual “state of exception.”<sup>16</sup> It was also up to democratic governments to demonstrate that medical and scientific expertise were reliable and not manipulated by big pharmaceutical interests.

Has critique run “out of steam” then, as the late Bruno Latour asked almost two decades ago?<sup>17</sup> What is more, there have been many calls for interdisciplinary engagements before and after Covid-19. But something went amiss in these calls. For one thing, the fact that the French scientific committee was only convened by President Emmanuel Macron just before the first lockdown was declared in March 2020<sup>18</sup> (when it was already too late) or that the United Kingdom’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) committee, when it issued its first guidance in January 2020,<sup>19</sup> had no anthropologists, historians or sociologists, shows how ‘advanced democracies’ never took interdisciplinarity seriously. It was relegated to the confines of academia, away from politics and policymaking.

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<sup>13</sup> Frédéric Worms, “La grippe aviaire entre soin et politique. Une catastrophe annoncée ?,” *Esprit* 3–4 (2008), 28.

<sup>14</sup> See, Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* [2014] (2017); Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence* [2011] (2018).

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, Ole F. Norheim et al., “Difficult Trade-Offs in Response to COVID-19: The Case for Open and Inclusive Decision Making,” *Nature Medicine* 27 (2021), 10–13.

<sup>16</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (2020), 76.

<sup>17</sup> Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30:2 (2004), 225–48.

<sup>18</sup> “Qui compose le conseil scientifique Covid-19, créé pour aider le gouvernement face à la crise ?,” *Le Monde*, March 26, 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2020/03/26/qui-compose-le-conseil-scientifique-covid-19-cree-pour-aider-le-gouvernement-face-a-la-crise\\_6034505\\_1650684.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2020/03/26/qui-compose-le-conseil-scientifique-covid-19-cree-pour-aider-le-gouvernement-face-a-la-crise_6034505_1650684.html) (accessed May 30, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> “Precautionary SAGE 1 Minutes: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response, 22 January 2020,” GOV.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/precautionary-sage-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-22-january-2020> (accessed May 30, 2023).

This begs the question, are critique and policymaking necessarily antipodal and mutually exclusive? In a newly edited version of his *Discourse on Philosophy (Le discours philosophique)* written in 1966 and published in May 2023, Foucault, for one, seems to believe that they are. He argues that philosophy has nothing to offer besides “diagnosing the present.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as a “physician of culture” (*médecin de la culture*), the philosopher has the peculiar task of diagnosing without proposing a remedy.<sup>21</sup> We might ask then, what is the point of diagnosis? It consists, Foucault tells us, in providing an “awareness” (*prise de conscience*) of the underlying - hidden and unaccounted for - conditions of possibility of knowledge: “their soil of possibility, the forms which determine them, the limits and horizons which they cannot go beyond, the actions [or practices] that constitute them.”<sup>22</sup>

While I do acknowledge the inherent tension between “critiquing/diagnosing” and “governmentality” (as rationales or rationalities underlying the practice of governing a society),<sup>23</sup> between say the ‘philosopher’ and the ‘statesman’ (or the ‘policymaker’), I believe that it is still possible to reconcile them precisely if the task of diagnosing is to provide a ‘*prise de conscience*.’ And, while at it, why not also provide a ‘*prise de position*’? Not for the sake of diagnosing the present but out of civic duty; the diagnostician being after all part of ‘the commons.’ Here, I find it useful to borrow Stengers’s line of reasoning on what it means to think in the wake of collapse, in the wake of “living in the ruins,” as she put it. For Stengers, it means providing a “middle voice.”<sup>24</sup> I suggest it is more than just that - it consists in providing a *critical* middle voice. What form does this *critical middle voice* take is what I address later in this article.

What transpired from the early diagnosticians of the Covid-19 crisis is that a new militant form of democracy was needed, one in which we could no longer afford to be mere consumers and spectators of democracy. Perhaps, this is the conclusion of this article: we need a return to the true meaning of politics in the Greek sense of the word. Citizenship demands active participation in the political process (and not only accountability), and this in turn requires openness and transparency not for the sake of more surveillance or (self)-exploitation (as Byung-Chul Han rightly deplores)<sup>25</sup> but for the sake of better policy and decision-making. I suggest in the following reflections why and how critical friendship can be a mode of thinking in times of collapse to bridge critique and common-sensical governance, which is necessary for any democratic renewal.

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *Le discours philosophique*, ed. François Ewald, Orazio Irrera and Daniele Lorenzini (2023), 267. The phrase is by Irrera and Lorenzini; Foucault uses “diagnosis” and “actuality,” not “diagnosis of the present” per se.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 67 (my translation).

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Stengers, *Making Sense in Common*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* [2010] (2015), 35.

## WHAT IS CRITIQUE?

In his 1978 lecture delivered at the French Philosophical Society, Foucault sketched the genealogy of what could be called “critical reason” or, as he put it, “critical attitude” (*une attitude critique*).<sup>26</sup> While he acknowledged that critical reason might have an older history, he pointed to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period that witnessed an explosion of interest in “the art of governing” (*l’art de gouverner*) in all aspects of society; education, politics, economics and so on.<sup>27</sup> Along with this new interest came a new kind of worry and a new form of resistance and counter-intellectual movement. An earlier movement, which resisted a certain reading of the holy scriptures and of the hegemony of religious reasoning, was to be found, for example, in mysticism. This new way of questioning authority and the doxa more generally came through a second turn or set of attitudes that resisted the ways in which populations had been governed.

Critique in this Foucauldian rendering is hence an attitude or mindset which resists a certain politics of life; a certain way of governing populations. In other words, critique is *what resists power or a regime of truth*. It is also an attitude that resists a certain “politics of truth” (*politique de la vérité*).<sup>28</sup> Critical reason hence purports to interrogate the relations between power, truth, and the subject, or the ways in which power is exercised, how it draws on regimes of truth, and how it influences or shapes subjectivity and even the process of subject-making or subjectivation. As Foucault wrote, critical reason interrogates truth on its effects on power and, vice versa, it interrogates power on its discourse on truth.<sup>29</sup>

Foucault seems to insinuate, then, that critique is by definition incompatible with the ‘art of governing’ or what we could call today, at least in one of its iterations (and for simplicity’s sake), policymaking. But are these two tasks incommensurable? Or is there a way to reconcile them? Before addressing this thorny point, one can contest the anachronistic interpretation of critique that Foucault proposes. The German historian Reinhart Koselleck shows how the Greek term “critique” (*κριτικός*) was intimately related to the term “crisis” (*κρίσις*).<sup>30</sup> Both derive from *κρίνω*, “to differentiate, select, judge”; all of which fall today under “criticism.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the term “crisis” was originally a medical term before gaining this polysemic meaning that came to encompass all aspects of society, from politics to phenomenology.<sup>32</sup> Crisis meant a “turning point of a disease or a critical phase in which life or death was at stake and called for an irrevocable decision.”<sup>33</sup> Crisis then referred to a moment of insight and clarity when the symptoms come together and

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *Qu’est-ce que la critique ?* (2015), 35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* [1959] (2000), esp. the long footnote 15 on pp. 103-104.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 104; Reinhart Koselleck, “Crisis” [1972-97], *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67:2 (2006), 357–400.

<sup>33</sup> Janet Roitman, *Anti-crisis* (2014), 15.

diagnosis becomes possible.<sup>34</sup> This latter definition of ‘crisis’ as a critical juncture when judgement becomes *possible* seems to be antipodal to Foucault, for whom critique seems to entail, according to Judith Butler, a “suspension of judgement” (though Foucault does not put it this way).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as per Koselleck, the problematization of the state (what Foucault argues was the defining feature of critique) became prominent only in the eighteenth century, not as a means to critique the state’s politics of life (as Foucault alleges) but in the sense of either allowing a decisive judgement to be made or to point to “fundamental changes in constitutions in which the alternatives were the survival or demise of a political entity and its constitutional order.”<sup>36</sup> So much for the genealogy of critique.

Foucault’s own attitude has been less openly critical in the very meaning he himself gives to critique. He seemed sometimes biased towards a critique of power at the expense of truth. In an interview with *Le Monde* in 1961, for instance, Foucault divulged candidly, if revealingly, his motivation behind his critique of psychiatric practice: “*La bonne conscience des psychiatres m’a déçu*,” he told the journalist.<sup>37</sup> His critique of psychiatric power can hence be seen as an inflexible strategic *parti pris* against psychiatrists rather than a genuinely disinterested investigation into regimes of power and truth-making. His romantic bias for madness, well-illustrated in his *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* [1961], was deconstructed by Derrida in a now famous paper and ensuing long-lasting dialogue of the deaf between these two intellectual rivals.<sup>38</sup> What Derrida contested was precisely Foucault’s “opportunistic” interpretation of the Cartesian Cogito as necessarily exclusive of forms of madness or unreasonableness, as “confining” and exiling madness.<sup>39</sup> Derrida decried this instrumentalist interpretation to fit a certain “project of history.”<sup>40</sup> Derrida also questioned the exclusion of psychiatrists and their “confinement” in Foucault’s “archaeology of silence.” “Does it suffice to stack the tools of psychiatry neatly, inside a tightly shut workshop, in order to return to innocence and to end all complicity with the rational or political order which keeps madness captive?” asked Derrida.<sup>41</sup> He further added, “The psychiatrist is but the delegate of this order, *one delegate among others* [my emphasis]. Perhaps it does not suffice to imprison or to exile the delegate, or to stifle him; and perhaps it does not suffice to deny oneself the conceptual material of psychiatry in order to exculpate one’s own language.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Edgar Morin, *Sur la crise* (2020), 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> Judith Butler, “What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue,” *Transversal Texts*, <https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/butler/en> (accessed May 29, 2023).

<sup>36</sup> Koselleck, “Crisis,” 369.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Weber, “‘La folie n’existe que dans une société’, nous déclare Michel Foucault, qui s’est fait son historien,” *Le Monde*, July 22, 1961 [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1961/07/22/la-folie-n-existe-que-dans-une-societe-nous-declare-michel-foucault-qui-s-est-fait-son-historien\\_2266412\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1961/07/22/la-folie-n-existe-que-dans-une-societe-nous-declare-michel-foucault-qui-s-est-fait-son-historien_2266412_1819218.html) (accessed May 30, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Cogito et histoire de la folie,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 68:4 (1963), 460–94.

<sup>39</sup> Derrida, “Cogito et histoire de la folie,” 478.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Revel, “Foucault, Derrida: The Effects of Critique,” in *Foucault/Derrida Fifty Years Later: The Futures of Genealogy, Deconstruction, and Politics*, ed. Olivia Custer, Penelope Deutscher, and Samir Haddad (2016), 128.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [1967] (1978), 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

This is where I see critical friendship departing from Foucault and neo-Foucauldians. The main epistemological premise I propose is neither a suspicion towards the motivations and intentions of psychiatrists (and scientists by extension) nor their exclusion or banishment, as if they were a priori perverted, untrustworthy, naïve (captured by the decisive way in which Max Horkheimer speaks of scientists as “savants”)<sup>43</sup> and driven by an *idée fixe*, namely the need to reach an objective and purified ideal-type of truth, decontextualized and ahistorical. Not only are psychiatrists and scientists more broadly speaking “delegates among others” worth listening to, but they are also necessary partners and “political friends” in the democratic project. I will come back later to this definition of “political friendship,” as Aristotle calls it.<sup>44</sup>

For Didier Fassin (who along with Bernard Harcourt edited a book entitled *A Time for Critique* just before the Covid-19 pandemic began), the question is not *what* is critique (though as I show in this article the question itself is not unproblematic) but *how* is critique.<sup>45</sup> Fassin’s argument is that the way in which critique deploys its arsenal is situated in particular contexts and that the context in turn determines the condition of possibility of critique. Stated differently, critique is dialectical, that is, always in *reaction to* a specific configuration of knowledge and power. I agree on this broad depiction of the nature and form of critique. As I wrote earlier, Rose and I felt the need to describe a “critical friendship” approach *in reaction to* what we believed was a counter-productive polarization of the debate around the neurosciences. However, beyond the contingent nature of critique, it also carries a more general assumption about history and time itself. Not only is critique the product of history but it is also itself a reflection of *a certain philosophy of history* or, as Judith Revel puts it, a certain “project of history.”<sup>46</sup>

What both Koselleck (who proposed a conservative critique of the Enlightenment) and Foucault (who proposed a postmodern critique of the Enlightenment) fail to consider, however, is another form of critique which is neither reactionary (for the former) nor mere resistance (for the latter). What if the task of critique was nothing more than a way of exposing a problem, an object of study and concern, and rendering it visible, discernable, judgeable? Not “bring into relief the very framework of evaluation itself,” as Butler puts it,<sup>47</sup> but *bring into relief the very framework tout court*. What if the critic operates the way a forensic anthropologist studies the corpse of a victim or a crime scene, or the way an archeologist gathers the evidence and tries to reconstruct a certain narrative about a site, indeed a period? Sometimes, the early Foucault, like in his *Discourse on Philosophy*, seems to verge towards a less radical definition of critique; the philosopher’s mission being, as mentioned earlier, to provide a critical diagnostic grid, so to speak. This is why Foucault characterizes philosophy as “the discourse of discourses” (*le discours des discours*).<sup>48</sup> It is

<sup>43</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* [1972] (2002), 134.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* [c. 322 BCE], ed. and trans. Brad Inwood and Raphael Woolf (2013), 1241a30.

<sup>45</sup> Didier Fassin, “How Is Critique,” in *A Time for Critique*, ed. Didier Fassin and Bernard Harcourt (2019), 13–35.

<sup>46</sup> Revel, “Foucault, Derrida: The Effects of Critique.”

<sup>47</sup> Butler, “What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue.”

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Le discours philosophique*, 254.

itself a historically situated discourse and a discourse on other discourses. This less power-centered definition of critique as exegesis<sup>49</sup> is what Gilles Deleuze would call “perspectivism.”<sup>50</sup> As Paul Klee famously put it, a perspectivist endeavors “not to render *the* visible” but “to *render visible*.”<sup>51</sup> Critique, accordingly, when detached from polemics can serve to make judgement possible rather than being *ex ante* judgmental. As we saw earlier, in its original Greek meaning, critique refers to the ability or power to *discern* and judge. Curiously, *diagnosis* (διάγνωσις) also means to “discern, distinguish, perceive” (from διαγιγνώσκειν).<sup>52</sup> Hence the medical definition of diagnosis as the “determination of the nature of a diseased condition; identification of a disease by careful investigation of its symptoms and history; also, the opinion (formally stated) resulting from such investigation.”<sup>53</sup> Critique therefore rejoins diagnosis in this discerning and discriminating task.

If critique in the end consists in diagnosing the here and now (the triad: “*je-ici-present*”), as Foucault seems to have originally thought in his unpublished 1966 manuscript,<sup>54</sup> then could it not be reconciled with a more prescriptive or descriptive but useful engagement with the art of governing? In other words, could it regain its lost therapeutic functions as well? Its ability not to cure the sick necessarily but at the very least participate in the discussion around treatment, that is, in the “management” of the ailing body politic, perhaps even in the prognosis of the malady (to exhaust the medical terminology)? I suggest it can.

### HOW CAN CRITIQUE BE PERFORMED?

In contrast to what could be called a “vertical” critical epistemology of an earlier historiography that viewed history in triumphalist, teleological, and whiggish terms as a linear and progressive form of progress towards some kind of unifying “truth”, a “horizontal” epistemology does not view science as a continuous series of discoveries and inevitable progress but as a series of ruptures, and “transitions”<sup>55</sup> in modes of thinking, which, though different in kind, are situated on the same ontological plane.

A horizontal epistemology comes in different shapes and mediums; “rhizomes” (Deleuze), “networks” (Latour), “trading-zones” (Galison), “translational platforms” (Rose and Abi-Rached), “problems” (Biagioli), “experiments” (Bachelard, Hacking) etc.<sup>56</sup> All these conceptual variations share many ideas anticipated in Horkheimer’s 1937

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* [1988] (1993), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* [1981] (2003), 56.

<sup>52</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. “diagnosis.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Discours philosophique*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), 58.

<sup>56</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972] (2004), 3-28; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005); Peter Louis Galison, *Image and Logic: A Material Culture of Microphysics* (1997), 781-844; Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro*, 241; Mario Biagioli, “Postdisciplinary Liaisons: Science Studies and the Humanities,” *Critical Inquiry* 35:4 (2009), 820; Gaston Bachelard, *Le rationalisme appliqué* (1949); Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (1983).

manifesto “Traditional and Critical Theory.” In it, Horkheimer talks about the ways in which science is “socially conditioned,” that there is nothing called a pure “objective event,” and that “facts” are constructed by continuous “revision, simplification or elimination of contradictions,” in other words, that they, too, are “social” in so far as they are part and parcel of “social activity” and cannot be reduced merely to formulas.<sup>57</sup> As Horkheimer further put it, the role of critical theory is to show how an idealist framework that considers theory independent of its social context and material conditions is deeply flawed.

Given the current Covid-19 pandemic, a complex crisis that requires a candid, open, transparent, inclusive, collaborative, and inter-disciplinary approach, one can think of ‘crisis’ itself as the excuse, pretext or indeed the existential or historical moment that brings together various experts and disciplines to inform policies and decision-making. This is how I ended up collaborating with colleagues from various fields and disciplines (philosophy, political science, law, medicine, public health, history etc.) on a World Health Organization (WHO) technical report on trade-offs and decision-making in times of uncertainty.<sup>58</sup> Not only was this a useful and rewarding exercise on a personal level, but had the WHO called for such an exercise long before the crisis hit, and had governments performed this kind of interdisciplinary conversation on how public health crises ought to be managed in an open, transparent and equitable way long before they felt the need to create impromptu committees and subcommittees when it was already too late, perhaps some of the errors, blind spots, and missteps could have been averted. And perhaps more lives could have been saved.

Social scientists (including myself) who ended up writing about the pandemic, making recommendations, and taking the risk to analyze the pandemic amid so much uncertainty felt the need, indeed the duty, to *translate* critique into useful policy-relevant recommendations or at least share with the larger public our concerns about questionable and unacceptably opaque governmental decisions.<sup>59</sup> While we were not critically useful during the emergency response, we knew from the history of public health something crucial about the behavior of epidemics and above all what to expect from state authorities, institutions, public health interventions and populations in the face of adversity, fear, and uncertainty. Both our belief to make power accountable and our need to partake in the decision-making process stemmed precisely from an ethos that I am calling here post hoc ‘critical friendship.’ As the anthropologist Janet Roitman argues in her insightful book *Anti-crisis*, crises engender certain types of critiques.<sup>60</sup> In this case, ‘critical friendship’ can also be

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<sup>57</sup> Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 201, 204, and 209.

<sup>58</sup> Norheim et al., “Difficult Trade-Offs in Response to COVID-19.”

<sup>59</sup> I ended up writing other policy recommendations on the Covid-19 crisis in the context of the Middle East and Lebanon, a country that was plagued by many concomitant crises (financial, banking, economic, humanitarian, and sanitary). For example, see Joelle M. Abi-Rached, “The Case for COVID-19 Public Inquiries for the Arab World,” Middle East Institute (Washington, DC), December 7, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/case-covid-19-public-inquiries-arab-world> (accessed May 30, 2023); Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Ishac Diwan, “The Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Lebanon: A Crisis Within Crises” (June 2020).

<sup>60</sup> Roitman, *Anti-crisis*, 85.

seen as a certain type of performing critique that became more visible during this specific pandemic crisis.

### CONCEPTUAL SIEVES

A *horizontal critique*, so to speak, aims to capture a historical configuration of knowledge, power relations, various actors with their discourses and practices in particular societies and particular periods. The aim is to delineate a so-called “conceptual scheme,” which William James interestingly defined as a “sort of sieve”:

“... in which we try to gather up the world's contents. Most facts and relations fall through its meshes, being either too subtle or insignificant to be fixed in any conception. But whenever a physical reality is caught and identified as the same with something already conceived, it remains on the sieve, and all the predicates and relations of the conception with which it is identified become its predicates and relations too; it is subjected to the sieve's network, in other words.”<sup>61</sup>

Curiously, according to Kosseleck, “crisis” and “critique” share the same root “cri-”, which is also found in the French word “crible,” i.e., sieve.<sup>62</sup>

While in a *horizontal epistemology* judgment is still possible, it is neither triumphalist nor teleological. Instead of totally rejecting and condemning the past at the expense of the present (what Nietzsche calls a “critical kind of history,” ironically),<sup>63</sup> the past is examined for the *sake of* the present.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Alexandre Koyré, for instance, who uses “*types de pensée*” (types of thinking) in lieu of a conceptual scheme,<sup>65</sup> does not restrain himself from judging Aristotelian physics as being “false, of course; and utterly obsolete,”<sup>66</sup> nor does he withhold his view that “we modern” would consider Galilean and Cartesian conceptions of movement as basic.<sup>67</sup> Yet, these are precisely indications that “we” belong to different “types” of thinking, and it is by studying the “*structures*” [my emphasis] and grammar of these mental operations that we come to a better understanding of the philosophical and scientific revolutions of our own time.<sup>68</sup> This was said long before the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which Thomas Kuhn introduced the concept of “paradigm” to describe what Koyré otherwise called “types of thinking.”<sup>69</sup> Likewise for Kuhn, “the Eureka moment ... came when he looked out the window of his Harvard rooms and

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<sup>61</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* 1 (1890), 482.

<sup>62</sup> *Critique and Crisis*, 103.

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* [1874] (1980), 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *Études Galiléennes* (1939), 10; Alexandre Koyré, “Galileo and Plato,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4:4 (1943), 406.

<sup>66</sup> Koyré, “Galileo and Plato,” 407.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>68</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (1966), 5.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [1962] (1996), 187.

realized that Aristotelian physics was as wrong as wrong could be, but that it *worked*, that it was coherent."<sup>70</sup>

A horizontal epistemology thus allows the delineation of a conceptual scheme, or shall we say a conceptual sieve, with all its elements, "its predicates," the relations between them, what makes the sieve/paradigm coherent and sustainable, its inner logic, its actors, and the underlying forces and processes at play. To use James' reasoning: the shape of the "sieve" reflects its underlying "network," which in turn determines the shape of the "physical reality."

### MATTERS OF CONCERN

In an attempt to bring back steam to critique, given the urgency that the climate crisis imposes, the late Bruno Latour suggested separating the task of problematizing "matters of fact" from "matters of concern."<sup>71</sup> The task of critique, he argued, is not to debunk but "to assemble," not to show the conditions of possibility of a phenomenon (though this is debatable) but to show how it is sustained by what processes and what networks of actors (curiously à la William James).<sup>72</sup> And that, in a sense, it is wrong and counter-productive to debunk well-established 'facts,' which are by definition resistant to critique.

Of course, this latter claim is highly contentious. Certain 'matters of fact' do deserve closer scrutiny. The history of medicine and psychiatry is replete with apposite illustrations. Take homosexuality, for example, which was considered a mental disorder and hence a 'matter of fact' for most of the nineteenth century and until the 1970s, and yet we know from the history of deviance how this way of pathologizing sexuality and behavior is not only highly biased and prejudiced but also far from being an established and objective biological fact.<sup>73</sup> Latour is, nevertheless, right in the sense that it is useless to deploy critique in the face of certain well-established facts, for instance that Covid-19 is caused by a virus and not, say, by the wrath of God. Why? Simply because, according to Latour, the critic should not be "the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather."<sup>74</sup> This is exactly where 'critical friendship' has a role to play: it is the mindset, the attitude or ethos that aims to create a common epistemological "arena" that invites a reasonable critical approach to science and medicine.

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<sup>70</sup> Steven Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as If It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (2010), 6.

<sup>71</sup> Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,"

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>73</sup> Jack Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," *Behavioral Sciences* 5:4 (2015), 565–75.

<sup>74</sup> Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," 246.

## ZONES OF CRITICAL PROXIMITY

In more recent reflections on the politics of climate change and the Anthropocene, scientists have used notions such as “critical zone observatories” and “critical zones.”<sup>75</sup> The former refers to the collaborative engagement vis-à-vis earth-related processes and observations. The latter in the singular form refers to the most superficial layer of life, which is the product of complex geophysical reactions. For Latour and colleagues, the Critical Zone (CZ) designates “the (mostly continental) layers from the top of the canopy to the mother rocks, thus foregrounding the thin, porous, and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter by activating or catalyzing physical and chemical reactions. Those complex biogeochemical reactions generate a kind of skin, a varnish, a biofilm whose reactivity and fragility have become the central topics of multidisciplinary research around the disputed concept of the Anthropocene.”<sup>76</sup>

In other words, a critical zone is the area of right proximity to the most primordial form of life, i.e., to its conditions of possibility. I borrow Latour’s notion of “critical proximity” (*proximité critique*)<sup>77</sup> and apply it to a broader range of subject matters and objects of investigation. Critical friendship in that sense can offer a *zone of critical proximity* or, to put it the other way around, a critical zone where the critical observers (“us” social scientists) are at the right distance from the object of investigation (science, medicine, technology, the planet, and life itself).

While a horizontal epistemology or zone of critical proximity is useful, it is not enough. It requires some reflexivity or as Anthony Giddens put it a “reflexive appropriation of knowledge.”<sup>78</sup> Any epistemology, any theory of knowledge, indeed any sociological analysis or historical inquiry requires some form of introspective critique. An approach that involves diagnosing, exposing, and describing the various layers of a conceptual scheme, and the very conditions of life itself necessarily entails a more flexible and a more open starting point. Such a posture contributes to what Horkheimer calls “the construction of the social present”<sup>79</sup> and the “transformative activity [one might say power or potential] associated with critical thinking.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Alexandra Arènes, Bruno Latour, and Jérôme Gaillardet, “Giving Depth to the Surface: An Exercise in the Gaia-Graphy of Critical Zones,” *The Anthropocene Review* 5:2 (2018), 120–35; Susan L. Brantley et al., “Designing a Network of Critical Zone Observatories to Explore the Living Skin of the Terrestrial Earth,” *Earth Surface Dynamics* 5:4 (2017), 841–60; Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, ed., *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (2020).

<sup>76</sup> Arènes, Latour, and Gaillardet, “Giving Depth to the Surface,” 121.

<sup>77</sup> Bruno Latour, *Où suis-je ? Leçons du confinement à l’usage des terrestres* (2021), 41.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1991), 37. Also, Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (2004); Pierre Bourdieu, *Science de la science et réflexivité: Cours du Collège de France 2000-2001* (2007).

<sup>79</sup> *Critical Theory*, 211.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

## WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

“Friendship” does not only mean sympathy, amicability, goodwill or a state of mutual trust and support. For Aristotle, friendship, or *philia* (φιλία), was the condition of possibility of political reason and political action.<sup>81</sup> It is a virtue. But it is also what “hold cities together.”<sup>82</sup> In Aristotelian terms, it is an exchange that leads to a community of living beings or, as Agamben puts it, “an existential sharing.”<sup>83</sup> Sharing common interests and a common sense of purpose and fate; in other words, what gleans democracies together. This cooperation requires some aspect of “like-mindedness,” which brings communities together by aligning the personal with the political in the good and just governance of the city. It enables “concord” in a state and society, and this is why Aristotle speaks of “political friendship” (*philia politike*).<sup>84</sup> It is in that latter sense that I view friendship as being necessary for the political project of the polis.

According to Aristotle, there is an inextricable link between friendship, community (including the small nucleus of the family), and justice. Man is not only a “political animal,” Aristotle reminds us, but he also forms a “household.” And it is in the household that “we first see the origins and sources of friendship, political regimes, and justice.”<sup>85</sup> But as there are many kinds of justice, so with communities and friendships.<sup>86</sup> Yet they all “border on each other.”<sup>87</sup> What Aristotle calls “political friendship” is not a disinterested form of friendship, for the “utility” here is concord, as mentioned above, i.e., the condition of possibility of a “political community” and hence a city or a state. And the finality of this political community is to “advantage the whole of life” based on justice and equality. This dynamic is antipodal to the tyrannical or oligarchical forms of regime, which feed on enmity and hostility.<sup>88</sup>

Friendship for Aristotle allows a renewal of the political, of what makes communities and political regimes hold together. This is what Derrida demonstrates in *Politics of Friendship* (*Politiques de l'amitié*), a long meditation on a line attributed to Aristotle (by way of Montaigne), *o philoi, oudeis philos* (“Oh my friend, there is no friend”).<sup>89</sup> Derrida believes that in that space of coexistence, there is the possibility of democratic renewal.<sup>90</sup> Derrida’s meditation on the politics of friendship is, in the end, a response to Schmitt’s politics of hostility that depends and feeds on the perpetual existence of the “total enemy.”<sup>91</sup> In contrast to a politics of hostility, Derrida argues for a politics of hospitality “without reserve,”

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<sup>81</sup> Edouard Thoumire, *Le boisseau de sel: Qu'est-ce que l'amitié politique ?* (2017), 19-48.

<sup>82</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [340 BCE], ed. and trans. Roger Crisp, (2014), 1155a.

<sup>83</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *L'amitié* (2007), 29 and 40.

<sup>84</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1241a32.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1242a40-42.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1241b16-17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1241b17.

<sup>88</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1160a; 1167b.

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié: Suivi de l'oreille de Heidegger* (2017).

<sup>90</sup> Hubert Faes, “Une amitié sans fraternité ?,” *Transversalités* 113:1 (2010), 89.

<sup>91</sup> Christian Ferrié, “La politique de Derrida contre l'hostilité schmittienne,” *Les cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* 39 (2016), 193.

which is at the heart of the “democratic promise” and of history itself.<sup>92</sup> For without such a messianic promise of unconditional hospitality, there would be no new comers (*arrivants*), no new inhabitants, no new citizens, and so on. This is why Derrida writes that a “hospitality without reserve” is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of any democracy.<sup>93</sup> So, with friendship, it is both necessary and potentially destructive for the democratic project.

### WHAT IS “CRITICAL FRIENDSHIP” THEN?

It is not an overstatement, especially in these times of polarization within and across societies, to invite social scientists to engage in more constructive, self-reflective, ‘hospitable,’ and more productive conversations rather than polarized debates between the sciences and the humanities or even between the sciences. This, too, is an exercise in what Aristotle calls preserving the “common good.”<sup>94</sup> As the Covid-19 pandemic has plainly demonstrated, global scientific collaboration is needed more than ever to tackle future pandemics, the ongoing environmental degradation, and the unfolding climate crisis. At the same time, geopolitics and rivalries between global powers are endangering such vital international collaborative efforts.<sup>95</sup> The alternative is strife, enmity, hostility, and a counterproductive and individualistic pursuit of knowledge. Yet for Aristotle, friendship is an essential element for both individual and collective flourishing; that is, for both the good life and the good society.<sup>96</sup> Knowledge, in the end, should also be about praxis. After all, is it not the aim of living together in a city, society, state, or community, a kind of “second life,” a more public life, as Hannah Arendt puts it, or the *bios politikos* that Aristotle talks about?<sup>97</sup> And is it not the purpose of that public life to “look out for the common interest” before it is “ruined”?<sup>98</sup>

Friendship entails trust, complicity, and an ability to speak truth no matter what.<sup>99</sup> This is where critical friendship differs in its posture vis-à-vis both truth and power. It is not a form of what could be called ‘total friendship,’ at the same time it is not a form of ‘total critique.’ As we saw earlier, ‘critical’ has various meanings from condemnatory and censorious to a more balanced attitude. In its obsolete meaning, critical means “involving or exercising careful judgement or observation; exact, precise; scrupulous; punctual.”<sup>100</sup> This more moderate posture of careful observation and judgement may be related to the original medical usage of the term ‘crisis.’

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<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* [1993] (1994), 81-82.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>94</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.

<sup>95</sup> “Protect Precious Scientific Collaboration from Geopolitics,” *Nature* 593:7860 (2021), 477.

<sup>96</sup> John M. Cooper, “Friendship and the Good in Aristotle,” *The Philosophical Review* 86:3 (1977), 290–315.

<sup>97</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958] (1998), 24.

<sup>98</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1167b.

<sup>99</sup> Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, 72.

<sup>100</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. “critical.”

At the same time, the role of friendship is to enable fierce criticism, expressed with passion, that can still be contained within collegiality. Perhaps an in-between position between critique and friendship is what is captured by ‘critical friendship;’ the missing *critical middle voice* that does not merely critique from afar but has a say and a stake in the making of the polis. It is to borrow, the way Arendt puts it, a “friendship without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem.”<sup>101</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As the current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, some of the concepts that had marked twentieth century intellectual thought have become inadequate or obsolete for an age of compounded crises and a worrisome decline of democratic commitment across the world. Critical and social theory need to be renewed. How can ‘critical friendship’ be part of a more “combative form of democracy” or “militant democracy” (to use an older term) that will be necessary in the post-pandemic future?<sup>102</sup> This article argued that a critical friendship attitude or ethos can play a role in the way in which we rethink democracy and examine science, medicine, and technology, especially amid an alarming decline in trust in scientific expertise.<sup>103</sup>

Critical friendship tries to reconcile both a healthy dose of skepticism that is needed for a self-reflexive science and a social science perspective that is genuinely and from its outset open to a serious and meaningful engagement with the sciences (not a priori in confrontation with its ‘objectivity,’ and ‘reality,’ nor ex ante suspicious of the motivation and intention of its actors). A horizontal epistemology of critique, or *zone of critical proximity*, as I have called it, is an approach that is more attuned to an epistemology of “co-production of knowledge,”<sup>104</sup> which already characterizes scientific practice and will define its future even more.

Critical friendship is perhaps this critical missing middle voice, which could play a vital role in sustaining and renewing what Aristotle calls a “political community.”

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<sup>101</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 243.

<sup>102</sup> Jacques Attali, *L'économie de la vie* (2020); Karl Loewenstein, “Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I,” *The American Political Science Review* 31:3 (1937), 417–32.

<sup>103</sup> See Thomas M. Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (2017).

<sup>104</sup> Albert V. Norström et al., “Principles for Knowledge Co-Production in Sustainability Research,” *Nature Sustainability* 3:3 (2020), 182–90; S. Redman et al., “Co-Production of Knowledge: The Future,” *BMJ* 372 (2021), n434.

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