

The Law of Autoimmunity.

Chris Lloyd

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I. Introduction.

The Politics of Friendship is a seminal text within the apparent ‘ethical turn’ in Jacques Derrida’s work, in which it has been argued that ‘the social and the political,’ and the ‘ethical and juridical,’ became the focus of his attention.¹ However, Derrida’s own thoughts on this ‘turn’ render it dubious as an accurate description of his *oeuvre*.² And yet, contestation over the ‘ethical turn’ aside,³ *The Politics of Friendship* does illustrate Derrida’s thoughts on various juridico-political concepts: in particular his critical account of ‘the political’ (in French, *le politique*)⁴ which was so prominent in his work of the 1980s. This chapter concentrates on this aspect of Derrida’s work.

¹ Peter Salmon, *An Event, Perhaps: A Biography of Jacques Derrida* (London: Verso, 2020), pp. 222, 229.

² Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 39: ‘...there never was in the 1980s or 1990s, as has sometimes been claimed, a *political turn* or *ethical turn* in “deconstruction,” at least not as I experience it.’

³ See Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac, ‘Introduction: Derrida and the Time of the Political,’ in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, eds. by Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 1–37.

⁴ Philippe Raynaud, ‘Politics,’ in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by Barbara Cassin (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 803–804.

This chapter also reads the works published under the name *The Politics of Friendship* as representing Derrida's entire, 'collected,' ⁵ 1988–89 seminar series *Politiques de l'amitié*.⁶ Whilst this is *perhaps* an unorthodox reading of Derrida's work – which will be explored below – it provides initial support for this chapter's two theses (*PF*, vii).⁷ The first is that *The Politics of Friendship*, qua the 1988–89 seminar series *Politiques de l'amitié*, houses the inaugural appearances of the concept of 'autoimmunity' in Derrida's work. The second thesis is then that these appearances are best explained not by reference to 'biological or physiological' readings of autoimmunity but rather by readings which acknowledge the juridico-political themes which have, for millennia, been attached to the concept of immunity.⁸

With the context set, and the reading undertaken explained, we can now move to unearth autoimmunity's inaugural appearances in Derrida's 1980s work on *le politique*.

II. *Politiques de l'amitié* and *le politique*: the 're-treat.'

In the fourth session of *Politiques de l'amitié* Derrida builds upon his argument from previous sessions which had focused on Friedrich Nietzsche's re-reading of Aristotle's habitual phrase, 'O my friends, there is no friend!' This leitmotiv of *Politiques de l'amitié* is re-read by Nietzsche in *Human All Too Human*, becoming:

Perhaps to each of us there *will come* the more joyful hour when we exclaim:

'Friends, there are no friends!' thus said the dying sage;

⁵ Salmon, *An Event, Perhaps*, p. 229.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994), Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. by George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997).

⁷ Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. vii: 'an address ... [of] *only the first session of a seminar* conducted with this title, "Politics of Friendship," in 1988–89.' Emphasis added.

⁸ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 109.

‘Foes, there are no foes!’ say I, the living fool.⁹

For Derrida, this re-reading is a ‘seismic revolution in [Aristotle’s] political concept of friendship’ (27). Specifically, it revolutionises the Aristotelian conception of ‘*the political*,’ as per the distinction in French between *le* and *la politique*: ‘the political’ and ‘politics’ (8). The differences illustrated between these two variations of the noun *politique* establish the juridico-political scene for all which follows in this chapter. ‘The political,’ *le politique* (or *du politique*, as per *Politiques de l’amitié*),¹⁰ ‘is endowed with a dignity superior to that of politics, either because it is distinguished from everyday politics, or ... is the specific object of philosophy and grand theory.’¹¹ Whereas ‘politics,’ *la politique*, encompasses ‘everything that concerns public debate, competition for access to power, and thus the “domain in which various *politiques* [in the sense of ‘policy’] compete or oppose each other.”’¹² It is upon this distinction that Derrida’s deploys Nietzsche’s re-reading in order to disrupt Aristotelian metaphysics whereby ‘the *very work of the political* [*du politique*],’ is a ‘*properly* political act or operation’ which ‘amounts to creating (to producing, to making, etc.) the most friendship possible’ (8). Derrida then ‘ups the ante’ of this disruption – *surenchère*¹³ – by utilising the Nietzschean ‘*perhaps*’ featured in the re-reading.¹⁴ Nietzsche’s thought becomes an ‘antithesis’ against ‘the “metaphysician of all ages”’ and structural accounts of *le politique*, thus aligning with the openness of other Derridean concepts such as the ‘*à venir*,’¹⁵ or ‘*la*

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 149.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 25: ‘Cette opinion concerne l’œuvre même du politique.’

¹¹ Raynaud, ‘Politics,’ in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 804.

¹² Ibid. Raynaud quotes Raymond Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, trans. by Valence Ionescu (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 3–4.

¹³ See Samuel Weber, ‘La Surenchère – (Upping the Ante),’ in *Le Passage des Frontières: Autour du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994), pp. 141–149.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Marion Faber (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), p. 6: ‘Perhaps! ... We must wait for a new category of philosophers to arrive ... they will be in every sense philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps.’

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 78.

démocratie à venir'(34).¹⁶ As Derrida explains, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics combats the rigidity of the Aristotelian *le politique* with the '[u]nheard-of, totally new, that very experience which no metaphysician might have dared to think' (29).

This critical account of *le politique* draws on Derrida's earlier work which had been so influential for Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's and Jean-Luc Nancy's complete rethinking of *le politique*.¹⁷ They opposed a totalised metaphysical schema of *le politique* and were influenced by Derrida's call for 'a kind of retreat,'¹⁸ thus 'think[ing] in terms of *re-treating the political*': a 're-tracing,' a 're-marking' of *le politique* opposing totalisation.¹⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe endorsed Derrida's critique as ethos and Nancy acknowledged a debt to Derrida's thinking.²⁰ Thus, autoimmunity's appearance in *Politiques de l'amitié*, as a critique of a totalised metaphysical schema of *le politique*, matched other aspects of Derrida's hugely influential earlier work:

one recalls Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's remarks ... what is at stake is the 'traversing and displacing of the "political" and its "meaning."' And it is precisely this traversal and displacement that, following Derrida, they call the retreat.²¹

At this point, with the juridico-political context set, we can return to the fourth session of *Politiques de l'amitié* to unearth the inaugural appearances of autoimmunity.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides,' in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 85–136 (p. 120).

¹⁷ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les Fins de l'homme: À partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. by Simon Sparks (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Les Fins de l'homme*, p. 527: 'Il a indiqué, par une espèce de retrait ...'

¹⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Opening Address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political,' tr. by Simon Sparks, in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, pp. 107–121 (p. 112).

²⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Les Fins de l'homme*, p. 494; Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Political and/or Politics,' trans. by Christopher Sauder, *Oxford Literary Review* Vol.36(1) (2014), 5–17 (p. 7).

²¹ Simon Sparks, 'Introduction: *Politica ficta*,' in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, pp. xiv–xxviii (p. xxvii).

III. The appearance of autoimmunity.

First appearance.

After Derrida deploys the Nietzschean ‘*perhaps*’ to oppose the Aristotelian account of *le politique*, he then ‘ups the ante’ again by introducing the concept of autoimmunity. Derrida states:

The modality of the possible, the unquenchable *perhaps*, would, implacably, destroy everything, by means of a sort of self-immunity. (75–6)

The English above is found in George Collins’ 1997 translation. However, in the original French publication of *Politiques de l’amitié* from 1994, the same sentence reads as follows:

La modalité du possible, l’insatiable *peut-être* détruirait tout, implacablement, par une sorte d’auto-immunité... ²²

Here, the original French supports the argument that the English translation *should have* featured the word ‘auto-immunity,’ not ‘self-immunity’.²³ Consequently, it is argued that this is the first appearance, in Derrida’s *oeuvre*, of the concept of autoimmunity. This is contra to, for example, Francesco Vitale’s argument whereby autoimmunity does not appear until some five years later.²⁴ Instead, it is argued that *Politiques de l’amitié*’s fourth session of 1988–89 houses the first appearance of autoimmunity, illustrating the radical, unconditional potential

²² Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 94.

²³ Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 129, note 10: ‘in 1994 in PF, Derrida wrote: “The modality of the possible, the unquenchable perhaps, would, implacably, destroy everything, by means of a sort of autoimmunity [auto-immunité]” ...’ And see Samir Haddad ‘Derrida and Democracy at Risk,’ *Contretemps*, 4(29) (2004), 29–44 (p. 31, note 10): ‘In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida speaks of the “modality of the possible, the unquenchable perhaps, would, implacably, destroy everything, by means of a sort of self-immunity [auto-immunité]” ...’

²⁴ Francesco Vitale, *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, trans. by Mauro Senatore (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), p. 173: ‘The first occurrence of the term can be found in *Specters of Marx* (1993)’. Vitale references Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L’État de la dette, le travail du deuil, et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), p. 224: ‘Le moi vivant est auto-immune, ils ne veulent pas le savoir.’

through which an entity or a concept – such as *le politique* – could entirely reinvent itself, even to the point of self-destruction, via an openness to radical alterity: ‘a sort of auto-immunity from which no region of being, *phúsis* or history would be exempt.’ (76)²⁵

Second appearance.

Then, on the same page in the original French, there is a second appearance of autoimmunity. There, Derrida uses ‘*d’auto-immunité*’ to further critique the Aristotelian conception of *le politique*.²⁶ Again, Collins’ English translation does not feature the word ‘autoimmunity’ but the argument above carries with regards to this second appearance. Thus, via the modified English translation offered by this author, Derrida states:

The imminence of a self-destruction by the infinite development of a madness of auto-immunity. (76)²⁷

It is argued that the sentence above more accurately translates Derrida’s original French, below:

Imminence d’une autodestruction par développement infini d’une folie d’auto-immunité.²⁸

This second appearance of autoimmunity continues to develop Derrida’s radical reimagining of *le politique*. Autoimmunity is utilised to complicate ‘a cool, directly logical analysis’ of the Aristotelian account of *le politique* (76).

Then, the fourth session of *Politiques de l’amitié* also includes a third appearance of autoimmunity. However, this third appearance in the 1988–89 seminar series can only be

²⁵ Translation modified.

²⁶ Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 94.

²⁷ Translation modified.

²⁸ Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 94.

unearthed *ex post facto*, in an operation conducted some fifteen years after the seminar was originally penned and presented.

Third appearance (*ex post facto*).

Later in the fourth session Derrida asserts: ‘no deconstruction without democracy, no democracy without deconstruction’ (105). Accordingly, democracy is only *democratic* – thus subject to ‘question, to criticism’ (105) – *if* it oscillates between two fundamental positions. The first is ‘the conditional,’ ‘enclosing the effective practice of democracy,’ and the second is ‘the unconditional,’ ‘inscrib[ing] a self-deconstructive force in the very motif of democracy’ (105). In detailing this oscillation, Derrida’s original French describes the second position with reference to ‘*une force auto-déconstructrice dans le motif même de la démocratie*’ and thus lacks the word autoimmunity.²⁹ Rather, the French contains ‘*auto-déconstructrice*,’ rendered as ‘self-deconstruction’ by Collins in the English translation (105). This suggests an act whereby ‘the self, the *autos*’ of a given entity is subject to deconstruction.³⁰ However, this is *not* the last word on this account of democracy’s self-deconstruction. Because nearly fifteen years after this account was originally penned in *Politiques de l’amitié*’s fourth session, Derrida revisited this passage in a 2002 lecture.

Derrida’s lecture – published in 2003 in French in *Voyous: Deux Essais sur la Raison* and in 2005 in English in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* – re-evaluated his argument pertaining to democracy’s ‘self-delimitation’ (‘*auto-déconstructrice*’ in the French) (105).³¹ In his re-evaluation, as Haddad has superbly shown, Derrida ‘cites himself from *Politics of Friendship*’ but with some small amendments:³²

²⁹ Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 129.

³⁰ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 45.

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003), pp. 17–161, ‘La raison du plus fort (Y a-t-il des États voyous?).’

³² Samir Haddad, ‘Reading Derrida Reading Derrida: Deconstruction as Self-Inheritance,’ *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.14(4) (2006), 505–520, (p. 510).

no deconstruction without democracy, no democracy without deconstruction). ... the unconditional, which, from the outset, will have inscribed a self-deconstructive force [I could have in fact said “autoimmune” force] in the very motif of democracy.³³

In re-reading and self-citing himself, Derrida comments that in *The Politics of Friendship* he ‘could have in fact said’ autoimmunity: ‘[j’aurais pu alors dire «auto-immunitaire»].³⁴ Here, Derrida’s re-reading is not unexpected: given that he *had already* utilised autoimmunity, *twice-over*, in the original French in the *same session* of *Politiques de l’amitié*, it is unsurprising that he believes he could have replaced ‘self-deconstructive’ (‘*auto-déconstructrice*’)³⁵ with ‘autoimmunity’ (105). As Haddad argues, this ‘interjection’ suggests ‘that at the time of writing *Politics of Friendship* Derrida could have just as easily used “autoimmune” instead of self-deconstructive – that this vocabulary was then available to him. And in fact it was.’³⁶ Here, whilst I am in overall agreement with Haddad’s insightful thesis, it may not be as accurate as it could be, in light of this chapter’s reading of *Politiques de l’amitié*. For Haddad argues that autoimmunity was ‘available’ for Derrida to use because he had *already* used the concept prior to the 1994 French publication of *Politiques de l’amitié*.³⁷ Here Haddad cites Derrida’s 1993 publication, *Spectres de Marx: L’État de la dette, le travail du deuil, et la nouvelle Internationale*, published one year prior to *Politiques de l’amitié*, in which Derrida stated:

Le moi vivant est auto-immune, ils ne veulent pas le savoir.³⁸

³³ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 90. Here Derrida cites Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 105, with his comments added via the square brackets.

³⁴ Derrida, *Voyous*, p.130.

³⁵ Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié*, p. 129.

³⁶ Haddad, ‘Reading Derrida’, p. 512.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1994).

³⁸ Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, p. 224.

In the 1994 English publication, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf's accurate translation renders this as follows:

The living ego is auto-immune, which is what they do not want to know.³⁹

In *either* French (1993) *or* in English (1994) this text contains the first appearance *in print* of autoimmunity, as Haddad notes.⁴⁰ This I agree with. But contra Haddad it is submitted that autoimmunity was 'available' in Derrida's 2002 *ex post facto* re-reading⁴¹ *not* because of *Spectres de Marx*'s use of the concept but because Derrida *had already* utilised autoimmunity, *twice-over*, in the original French for the *same session* of *Politiques de l'amitié*, in 1988–89, to describe the deconstructive critique of *le politique*: '*Imminence d'une autodestruction par développement infini d'une folie d'auto-immunité*.'⁴²

Recall that this chapter reads the works published under the name *The Politics of Friendship* as the 'collected' 1988–89 seminar series *Politiques de l'amitié*, 'writ[ten by Derrida] ... from the first word to the last'⁴³ – whether by 'typescripts, with manuscript annotations and corrections' ('1970 to 1988') or by 'electronic files and printouts' ('1988 to 2003')⁴⁴ – to read in the seminars.⁴⁵ Consequently, the material in the seminar series *is* the material in the latter publications, as evidenced by Derrida's 1988 publications and presentations containing the material later found in *The Politics of Friendship*.⁴⁶ Thus, it is the strong presence of the

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 177.

⁴⁰ Haddad, 'Reading Derrida,' p. 513.

⁴¹ Recall Derrida stating: 'j'aurais pu alors dire «auto-immunitaire»' ('I could have in fact said "autoimmune" force'). Derrida, *Voyous*, p.130.

⁴² Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, p. 94.

⁴³ Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013) p. 443.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. 1*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. x.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi: 'the *text* of the seminar, as *written* by Jacques Derrida *with a view* to speech ...'

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida 'The Politics of Friendship,' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Nov., 1988, Vol. 85, No. 11, 632–644; Jacques Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship,' lecture delivered at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 3rd October 1988, and 'The Politics of Friendship,' conference paper delivered at 85th Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, Sheraton Washington Hotel, Washington, DC, 30th December 1988.

autoimmunity in the fourth session of *Politiques de l'amitié*, and *not* its singular lack-lustre appearance in *Spectres de Marx*, which explains the concept's 'availability' to Derrida in his 2002 re-reading. As argued above, the fourth session features Derrida's critique of *le politique* in which autoimmunity features in 'the reconstruction of the political' (104). This involves a 'genealogical deconstruction of the political' (104) which is necessary in order to 'think, interpret and implement another politics, another democracy' (105). It is not – as Haddad argues on the one hand – that the concept's appearances in *Politiques de l'amitié* were 'brief mentions' and thus unimportant but rather – as he argues on the other hand – that their extreme political intensity regarding *le politique* elevates their status ensuring that they are 'the proper point of reference for all subsequent uses'.⁴⁷

Having now unearthed the inaugural appearances of autoimmunity appearing in the *Politiques de l'amitié* 1988–89 seminar series, we can now move to decipher the significance of this 'strange and paradoxical revolution' in Derrida's thought.⁴⁸

III. The general law of autoimmunity.

Within Derrida's *oeuvre*, autoimmunity appears with increased frequency following his self-declared attempt to 'formalize the general law of this autoimmune process in "Faith and Knowledge" [The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone]'.⁴⁹ In that essay – written and presented in 1994,⁵⁰ published in French in 1996,⁵¹ and thereafter in English in 1998⁵² – Derrida defined autoimmunity as a process by which 'a living organism ...

⁴⁷ Haddad, 'Reading Derrida,' pp. 513, 515.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁰ Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (Fordham University Press 2012), p. 1.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Foi et savoir,' in *La religion*, ed. by Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), pp. 9–86.

⁵² This chapter references the most recent English publication: Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone,' trans. by Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 40–101.

protect[s] itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system.’⁵³ As brilliantly argued by Eszter Timár, Derrida’s definition is not entirely aligned with the definitions offered by immunologists:

autoimmunity here is not identified in the way biomedical discourse discusses autoimmunity, that is, as a process in which the immune system attacks components and tissues of the organism it ought to protect, but rather as the very opposite.⁵⁴

However, notwithstanding Derrida’s ‘[mistake] regarding the medical meaning of the term,’⁵⁵ ‘Faith and Knowledge’ nevertheless contains his most ‘substantial’ account of autoimmunity and has received lavish attention from scholars.⁵⁶ Derrida draws on immunological, philosophical, and juridico-political registers to theorise a ‘general logic of autoimmunization,’ culminating in a general law of radical alterity.⁵⁷ Derrida shows that an entity – or ‘self’ – which immunises absolutely against all other entities – all that is ‘non-self’ – guarantees itself only death, without the chance of survival. He explains that ‘life can only subsist beyond the present living being’ and that an ‘auto-immune and self-sacrificial supplementarity’ which ‘ruin[s] the principle of self-protection’ is ‘silently at work in every community, every *auto-com-immunity*’; ‘Community as *com-mon auto-immunity*: no community <is possible> that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity.’⁵⁸

Derrida’s work convincingly argues that an entity’s survival beyond any given present moment is dependent upon its ‘open[ness] to something other and more than itself’.⁵⁹

⁵³ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ p. 80, note 27.

⁵⁴ Eszter Timár, ‘Derrida’s Error and Immunology,’ *The Oxford Literary Review*, Vol.39 No.1 (2017), 65–81 (p. 67).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁶ Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 54.; Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, p. 131, Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, pp. 206–209, Timár, ‘Derrida’s Error and Immunology,’ pp. 77–78, and Haddad, ‘Derrida and Democracy at Risk,’ p. 31.

⁵⁷ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ pp. 80n27.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87. Note the French contains ‘auto-immunitaire,’ ‘*auto-co-immunité*,’ and ‘*auto-immunité*.’ See Jacques Derrida, ‘Foi et Savoir: Les deux sources de la «religion» aux limites de la simple raison,’ in Jacques Derrida, *Foi et Savoir suivi de Le Siècle et le Pardon* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), pp. 9–100 (p. 79).

⁵⁹ Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ p. 87.

Accordingly, *only* an autoimmune entity *can* survive through the ‘chance and threat, threat as chance’ of the other,⁶⁰ whereas an absolutely immune entity *cannot* survive and would consequently cease to exist: ‘Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity nothing would ever happen or arrive’.⁶¹ Consequently, Derrida posits laws of autoimmunity which apply to *all life*: firstly, ‘autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil,’⁶² and secondly, it is ‘... the self, the *ipse*, the *autos* that finds itself infected [by autoimmunity].’⁶³ Said somewhat differently, *everything is autoimmune by necessity*: ‘[w]ithout autoimmunity, the organism would have, in short, no future before it.’⁶⁴ This is Derrida’s theorisation of a ‘general law’ of autoimmunity.⁶⁵

IV. Conclusion: juridico-political rather than bio-physiological.

Most contemporary Derridean scholarship focuses on how autoimmunity, *qua* immunological, operates within Derrida’s philosophical *oeuvre*.⁶⁶ It is argued that this methodology is, overall, an error. Indeed, Derrida explicitly warned against such biologically-themed musings:

<EXT>Why did I think it necessary ... to formalize this strange and paradoxical revolution to privilege today something that might look like a ... biological or physiological model, namely, autoimmunity? It is not, you might well imagine, out of some excessive biologicistic or geneticist proclivity on my part.⁶⁷</EXT>

⁶⁰ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 52.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 152.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁴ Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, p. 82.

⁶⁵ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ See Vitale, *Biodeconstruction*, p. 173: ‘... Derrida’s turn to the autoimmunitarian lexicon is neither metaphorical nor merely formal but refers instead to the biological conditions of the organization of the living as they are reproduced without limits beyond the living itself according to the law of general textuality.’ As an exception, see Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 9: ‘... I want to point out that I am not concerned with the relation between how Derrida uses the term “autoimmunity” and how it is employed in biological science.’

⁶⁷ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 109.

In fact, given Derrida's declared connections between autoimmunity and the *pharmakon*,⁶⁸ and the *pharmakon* and *différance*,⁶⁹ autoimmunity is evidently another lynchpin concept⁷⁰ within an infinite chain of 'Derrideophemes or deconstructo-nyms' critiquing the metaphysics of presence.⁷¹ This accords with autoimmunity's appearance in *Politiques de l'amitié* where it de-totalised the Aristotelian account of *le politique*: 'auto-immunity from which no region of being, *phúsis* or history would be exempt' (76, translation modified). From this conceptual framing of autoimmunity, and aligned with the status it holds as a 'general law,' we can now fully comprehend it as a *juridico-political*, and *not biological*, concept within *Politiques de l'amitié*.⁷²

In utilising autoimmunity in *Politiques de l'amitié* Derrida wielded a concept which, prior to its appropriation by the natural sciences in the nineteenth century, had been a juridico-political concept for a millennia before.⁷³ The entire *oeuvre* of the Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito explores this: *Communitas*, *Immunitas*, and *Bíos*.⁷⁴ And it is also clear that Derrida knew this.⁷⁵ In his radical critique of the Aristotelian (and Schmittian) significance of 'friend' and 'enemy' within *le politique*, Derrida – via *surenchère* – utilised a juridico-political concept known to keep entities *inviolable and separate* to achieve precisely the opposite, by

⁶⁸ Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides,' p. 124: 'The *pharmakon* is another name, an old name, for this autoimmunitary logic.'

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Différance,' tr. by Alan Bass, in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1–27 (p. 12): '... the chain in which *différance* lends itself to a certain number of nonsynonymous substitutions ... to the *pharmakon* ...'

⁷⁰ See Vicki Kirby 'Autoimmunity: the political state of nature,' *Parallax*, Vol.23(1) (2017), 46–60 (p. 54): '... [in] Rogues, ... the term "autoimmunity" is deployed in a way that resonates with his use of other neologisms, such as "supplementarity" or "différance", terms (or non-concepts) that defy precise definition ...'

⁷¹ Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, p. 135.

⁷² Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 35.

⁷³ See Alfred I. Tauber, *The immune self: Theory or metaphor?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁷⁴ Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. by Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. by Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. by Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge,' p. 80, note 27: 'The "immune" (*immunis*) is freed or exempted from the charges, the service, the taxes, the obligations (*munus*, root of the common of community). This freedom or this exemption was subsequently transported into the domains of constitutional or international law (parliamentary or diplomatic immunity) ...'

way of an ‘illogical logic’ (83–106).⁷⁶ Thus, immunity turns against its *raison d’être* and contributes to *complication and contamination*: ‘slippage and inversion: the friend (*amicus*) can be an enemy (*hostis*)’ (88).

Consequently, autoimmunity *should* be understood, first and foremost, as an intensely juridico-political concept, strongly aligning with the thematics of *Politiques de l’amitié* (arguably the first text it appeared in). Therein, Derrida’s critique of *le politique* was so radical precisely because it inverted the trajectory of a juridico-political concept, ‘think[ing] the limit of the concept,’⁷⁷ to posit the ‘thesis’ of ‘moving out *beyond this* politics’ and enacting a ‘de-naturalization of fraternal authority’ (159).

⁷⁶ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 123.

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, *For What Tomorrow ... A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 5.