Hospitality and companionship: friendship as an analogue for good alliances

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ABSTRACT

Taking its starting point in an ancient understanding of hospitality and guest friendship, the paper offers a philosophical interpretation of the ethical dimension of alliances. Entering into an alliance presupposes certain ethical dispositions. First is trust, which allies develop over time by offering each other testimonies of trustworthiness and by keeping promises. Insofar as the alliance is developed further in order to last, the allies will have to adjust to changes, prevent conflict, and solve problems together which imply, above all, joint critical thinking. The paper argues that friendship can serve as an analogue for good alliances, in which the parties involved do not only think about furthering their own projects, but they take into account and question possible flaws and future consequences, for themselves and for others outside the alliance.

Introduction

Etymologically, 'ally' can be traced back to the Old English term *alien* and 'alliance' to two or more parties' liaison with each other (Partridge 2006, 1779). A bond between two people individually is usually not called an alliance, which implies a connection between different groups or associations of people, who remain distinct from each other as long as the alliance lasts. The whole issue of allying each other and the challenges involved in building an alliance ultimately comes down to striking the right balance between liaison and otherness. It seems obvious that if allies end up merging into one, then there will be no alliance anymore, or it will be transformed into something else. The same happens, if they move too far away from each other without bridging the gap and mediating their otherness.

The paper is structured in three parts. Based on an ancient understanding of hospitality and guest friendship, the paper argues in the first part that receiving each other in trust constitutes the ethical basis of any alliance. Drawing on the significant role which Aristotle assigns to trust in his vision of friendship, the ethical dimension of alliances is explored in a discussion with modern positions. Following up on this discussion, the paper shows in the second part how allies are called upon to adjust to changes, prevent conflicts, and solve problems by accompanying each other in order to make their alliance last. The relevance of this dynamic understanding of alliance building is elaborated further in the third part, which draws on Hannah Arendt's conception of political plurality and Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of hospitality with a view to rethinking good alliances in a modern global context.

Hospitality and trust: the basis for a good alliance and its ethical implications

Three historical examples will serve as starting points for a philosophical reflection on how an alliance comes about in the first place, and which ethical dispositions are entailed in the parties' attempt to mediate their differences. The first example is taken from the first Book of the *Old Testament*, *Genesis* chapter 18, where the Lord visits Abraham, who sits at the entrance of his tent beneath the trees of Mamre. He appears before Abraham in the guise of three strangers, apparently to see if Abraham will receive him as is expected of a good host ([2] Genesis 18). Remembering that testament in the Biblical sense of the word means pact and that Abraham is seen as representing his people, the passage can be read as a testimony of how the Jewish God, Jahwe, seeks to form an alliance with the whole people of Israel through hospitality. As is well-known, Abraham lives up to the ideal of hospitality and offers his divine guests to stay, sharing with them some food from his household.

Throughout history humans have experienced otherness, both in relation to the wholly other and among themselves, as an unsettling strangeness which they have tried to mediate by receiving each other. Many alliances have been forged around a table by allowing the parties to share something with each other without merging into one. An alliance is literally a liaison with the other, the alien, who comes from outside the already established society. In the *New Testament*, Jesus Christ emphasizes that his disciples received him as a stranger ([3] Matthew 25, 35–38), although the spiritual bond of love, *agape*, which he conveys to his disciples represents much more than an alliance, as it extends to humanity as a whole and even beyond life. Still, hospitality plays a foundational role in the formation of the Christian community, patently expounded in the Easter scene of the last supper, where Jesus and his disciples are received in a house and consolidate their bond of love ([4] Luke 22, 7–23; Hiltbrunner 2005, 156–170).

The third historical example is the one which comes closest to the modern meaning of alliance as a strategical and often temporary arrangement between parties having an explicit agenda of reaching a common goal together: Most of the ancient Hellenic city-states were, to a greater or lesser extent, built on alliances of guest friendship. Gabriel Herman has offered a thorough mapping of the ancient Greek world as being 'criss-crossed with an extensive network of personal alliances linking together all sorts of apolitical bodies (households, tribes, bands, etc.)' (Herman 2002, 6). People of the same household or city–state were not considered to be allies, as alliances gave rise to connections across the already established limits of the city-states and across borders by bringing strangers together, who would enter into a ritualized form of friendship with ethical obligations towards each other.

What the three ancient examples show is, first of all, that before an alliance has been built or even envisaged, the other meets us as a stranger or as an alien, 'a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such', as the German thinker Hannah Arendt has put it (Arendt 1976, 301). In critical moments, when guest friendship turns into enmity, as it happens in the Greek tragedies, or when the disciples betray Jesus, the frightening effect of alienation threatens to destroy every possibility of communication. An alliance is a fragile relation. Yet, it is meant as a way of overcoming the differences between the parties appearing as strangers to each other and so make their presence less 'frightening' and their interaction with each other beneficial.

For this transformation to come about and make the alliance work, the allies need 'tokens of trust', *pista*, as the material items and signs of trustworthiness are called in Greek (Herman 2002, 46–50, 147–149; Konstan 1997, 33). The ancient Greek word for trust is *pistis*, which is also employed in the *New Testament* as having faith in God, who relies on hospitality in order to establish an alliance with humans, who cannot relate to the wholly other, but only as He appears in his alienation, in his coming forth as other. The two initial examples from the Bible clearly constitute asymmetrical relationships between God and humans, whereas alliances in the ancient Greek world were portrayed as liaisons of reciprocity between equals. Still, any alliance, whether interpreted religiously or ethically, springs from receiving and showing trust in the alien other.

It is within this social context of hosts and guests, receiving and offering each other gifts, that the virtues of trust and hospitality made sense in the ancient Greek world. Aristotle finds trust embedded in the human relationship most akin to an alliance, *philia* or friendship:

> As the saying goes, you cannot get to know a man till you have consumed the proverbial amount of salt in his company; and so you cannot admit him to friendship or really be friends, before each has shown the other that he is worthy of friendship and has won his confidence. (Aristotle 1934, 1156b)

In this passage, in which Aristotle employs *philos* for friend and a derived word of *pistis* for confidence, the term *philia* is not unrelated to the networks of ritualized alliances analysed by Herman, who underlines that 'the semantic range' of *philos*, the Greek word for friend, is sometimes so wide that it also covers strangers, guests and allies (Herman 2002, 10).

Like an alliance, friendship is founded on trust, which only comes about over time. By drawing on proverbial wisdom, Aristotle calls attention to a well-established fact among ancient Greeks that it takes more than a summer to build a solid friendship, and he indirectly points to the setting, in which the founding act of friendship usually takes place: The house where the friends supposedly meet to sit down and have a meal together. Although Aristotle's analysis of *philia* covers other more personal relationships than alliances, his reference to an old saying in the quoted passage implies a more ancient social context constituted by guest friendship and ritualized alliances.

Argandoña has argued that in a dynamic relation, such as an alliance, which permits allies to cooperate in some areas while competing in others, mutual trust between the parties lays the basis for furthering their joint project, agreeing on common terms and coping with problems of coordination (Argandoña 1999, 220–221). Without trust, which is the good intention and sustained attempt by all parties to communicate, negotiate, and bridge differences, the alliance is in danger of breaking apart at any time. Even in the most pragmatically conceived alliance, established exclusively for short-term functional purposes, the allies need to see beyond their own pragmatism and trust each other, not merely as a means to something else. If the other is not seen as trustworthy in herself, distinguished by integrity and good will, then she will just be one more exchangeable 'good' in the bargaining, and there is nothing stable to which the bond of the alliance can be tied. Trust is the ethical cornerstone of an alliance, which is not up for negotiation. Allies offer each other signs of trust as a gift through testimonies of truthfulness and by doing 'something good for another, solely for the other's good (personal development: the transcendent dimension), thus inviting trust from the other party' (Argandoña 1999, 223–24).

Aristotle coins a similar insight when he states that there is an ethical form of friendship based on utility, which friends do not enter into through a contract, but it is a gift that they offer each other (NE VIII, 13, 1162b). Despite being merely friends of utility, which Aristotle regards as inferior to being good friends, they still deposit trust in each other in order to maintain their relation, and they may also wish each other well accordingly. The terms of the relation are not fixed from the start, as in a legal form of utility-friendship, but are left open by the parties, who want to give each other some leeway when it comes to settling how much each is supposed to make up for or repay in relation to the other. More than close friends, who want to get to know each other independently of any shared business, the partners become allies through this form of utility-relation, in which they may do things for each other's sake, yet they remain keen on doing something useful together, which pays off or furthers their joint project. Each has decided to enter the relation freely and is therefore also free to leave it again, when it has either come to a natural end or proven not to pay off. In either case, they may also stay together and redefine their relationship by envisioning a new common objective.

Although Aristotle centers on business and trade in his discussion of this sort of utility-partnership, he emphasizes that the partners want to convey to each other a certain liberal spirit of generosity and of giving freely without counting every contribution that they make to their common course. While they are clear about wanting their share of the bargain, the partners still stand together and work for their common course. At the highest level of development of moral utility-friendship we can imagine the friends maintaining a common pool of resources, which they are free to draw from as expedient and expected to replenish and expand as appropriate. At this point the friends are no longer separate traders bargaining against each other, but *partners* on the same side bargaining in common for their good against third parties (Alpern 1983, 313).[1]

The partners in this sort of good alliance do not necessarily oppose or bargain against third parties, although it may come to that. Still, the tension between an ethos of generosity, on the one hand, and a pragmatic concern for producing useful results, on the other hand, appears to be inherent in any alliance and is one of the principal causes of conflict between the parties involved. Each party may tend towards being more ethically noble or more pragmatically realistic, and if this difference or tension in how they view their relation and what they expect from it is not negotiated or resolved, it will probably lead to disillusion and rupture.

In the good alliance the allies share an ethical outlook, based on trust and acts of hospitality, which makes the relation into a gift, offered in generosity more than pure utility. Utility is still a concern in a good alliance, which means that a tension remains, but it is the thesis of the paper that it can be resolved through a joint critical dialogue, which the allies should be willing to engage in, if

they want their alliance to last. Before we reach that stage, we shall see how Aristotle incorporates the ethical aspects of hospitality into his definition of what is good in friendship.

Like an alliance, utility-friendship is extendible to larger groups and city-states, Aristotle remarks, and is most often a relationship of opposites which prove to be more useful than what is alike: 'In a way too friendship of the opposite is for the good, the parties desiring each other because of the mean. Like tallies, they desire each other because in this way a single mean is created from the pair' (Aristotle 2013, 1239b).

Aristotle compares the parties to pieces of the same gift item, tallies (*symbola*), which is the term for the tokens of trust shared by guest friends since ancient times. Yet, by viewing the friends themselves as tallies, Aristotle moves the attention from the things shared, the tokens, to the persons desiring to meet and share their lives together in trust. They themselves are like strangers to each other, limited and potentially menacing, but through an alliance built on hospitality, which Aristotle also categorizes under friendships of utility, they get to complement and balance each other's extreme tendencies.

Each piece taken on its own may appear, to use Arendt's characterization of the alien, to be a 'frightening symbol of difference as such', yet taken together, in friendly interaction with each other, they can each reach a balanced state. Jonathan White has framed this argument as a defense for the intrinsic value of an alliance: 'By fostering the encounter of diverse views and encouraging compromise between them, an alliance helps curb the excesses to which each constituent party may be prone, thus raising the quality of their decisions' (White 2018, 599). However, the problem with this kind of argument, White argues, apart from assuming that parties cannot curb their own excesses without establishing alliances, is that it frames partisanship as being overly limited and 'one-eyed'.

It is true that parties of whatever kind can also embrace diversity and reach compromises outside alliances. Yet, Aristotle's thoughtful simile of the friends being complementary tallies highlights an ethical dimension of allying others, which disappears if we focus exclusively on 'fostering the encounter of diverse views and encouraging compromise' in alliances. Like friendship, the good alliance entails more than that. In order to complement each other, allies will have to learn from each other and recognize, as they go along, their own limits or weak points. Allies are not necessarily prone to 'excesses' nor are they extremely 'short-sighted', as White seems to suggest, but they are still limited and tend to see everything from within their own circle, which is also why any party entering into an alliance would usually expect more from an encounter with other allies than just diverse views and compromises.

Companionship and critical thinking: ethical challenges in good alliances

In order to explore further the ethical dimension opened up by these initial reflections, the discussion of the intrinsic value of alliances will be taken into the next phase: The focal point of an alliance in the first phase is on opening the door to receive other parties, mediate differences by offering testimonies of credibility and compatibility so as to prepare the way to reach a mean through agreements. In the second phase, insofar as the alliance is developed further, allies will have to accompany each other in order to adjust to changes, prevent conflicts, solve problems together, and possibly renegotiate some of the conditions on which their alliance was originally built, if they want to keep the alliance alive. In practice the two phases are intertwined: Building trust is not consolidated once and for all in the first phase, but it is developed over time which involves from the start continuous adjustment and problem solving. Still, in the first phase the allies center more on otherness internally in the alliance and on how to bridge the gap between each other in order to establish a basis for their common course, whereas in the second phase they stand more alongside each other facing otherness outwardly in relation to others.

Once more, Aristotle's outline of the ethical significance of friendship proves to be pertinent for our modern discussion of the intrinsic value of good alliances. And again, when touching upon the purpose of accompanying each other in friendship, Aristotle quotes an ancient proverbial phrase: 'to those in prime of life, to assist them in noble deeds – "when twain together go" – for two are better able both to plan and to execute' (Aristotle 1934, 1155a). The phrase, 'when twain together go', is pronounced by Diomedes in Homer's *Iliad* to underscore the advantage of accompanying each other on a mission, because if a warrior goes on his own, he will see less and may not act satisfactorily in time, whereas if an ally is there by his side, one of the two will see what is best ([5] Iliad X 224–226).

Diomedes is clearly not thinking of a deep-felt friendship, but of the sort of alliance or companionship, which enables two or more people to see things more clearly. Aristotle presents a philosophical reinterpretation of this passage by putting emphasis on the expansion of the friends' practical and cognitive capabilities as they go together and accompany each other along the way. He underlines that the two friends are in their prime, yet a full-fledged companionship, such as the one he describes, gives them a chance of reaching even higher and becoming more competent in action and thinking than if each of them had been on their own.

White takes this to be one more argument in favor of the intrinsic value of alliances: On this account, a good alliance enriches the outlook of all parties involved and allows them to see beyond their own limitations. Taking his starting point in a political

context, White develops a double argument against this account: It is difficult to see why the parties should not merge and become one single party, given that 'the pooling of their resources allows this type of epistemic advance' which leads to 'an enlightened consensus'. Furthermore, compared to the reflexive and complex vision of reality to which a successful alliance gives access, partisanship appears to be so 'incomplete' that it takes away the *raison d'etre* for any traditional political endeavor which is committed to defending a party's ideals and its voters' principles (White 2018, 599–600).

Notwithstanding White's counterarguments, highlighting the intrinsic ethical value entailed in establishing an alliance does not necessarily result in a picture of partisanship as being so 'one-eyed' that party members could no longer also see for themselves and meaningfully defend their views. Although an alliance, analogously to friendship, may help heighten the allies' awareness of their own actions and thinking, it remains limited in its own way and does not solve all the problems of the allies. With regard to White's first point of critique, it could be argued, based on the understanding of alliances developed in this paper, that parties merging together will no longer benefit from the complementary standpoint coming from outside which the other ally represents. It is precisely because allies do not merge into one, but instead mediate their otherness that they can keep thinking critically and acting better than they would have if left to their own devices.

Aristotle develops this point further in his reflections on what good friends contribute, when they are together. If they are so excellent that they possess all the virtues required to act and think well, what could they possibly have, Aristotle asks himself, to offer each other? He finds an answer in the insight which he had already presented by reinterpreting Diomedes' words on companionship: 'We are better able to observe our peers than ourselves, and their actions better than ours' (Aristotle 1934, 1169b). Because of this asymmetry in human relationships, allies can receive and give information about each other which is not easily accessible for any of them on their own. Like friendship, a good alliance broadens the horizon of the allies and promotes their critical thinking so that what one of them may not see or realize becomes better observable and clearer when they go together, correct each other, or share a common vision.

Eventually, White leaves behind the arguments for the intrinsic value of alliances and focuses instead on the instrumental value of alliances as 'an extension of the partisan project rather than something that calls it into question'. He recognizes that 'the fact that the parties are publicly working together in pursuit of common goals gives an ethical dimension to their ties' (White 2018, 605), but as he views alliances as something merely temporary without a lasting impact on the allies, the ethical dimension does not really change anything in the parties' outlook, and they basically remain the same.

Although sympathetic to White's well-argued vision of partisanship and alliance building in politics, we shall argue that the ethical dimension, proper of an alliance, entails a relationship to the other as other which implies trust and critical thinking. If the other merely becomes an extension of myself, then I will hardly learn anything new from my allies, and the alliance becomes limited to what I could have learned on my own. Such alliances will surely end sooner than later without leaving much of an impact. White may be right that if an alliance jeopardizes a party's primary commitments and puts into question its core values, then it may do more harm than good. Still, if an alliance is supposed to meet ethical challenges responsibly, the allies should make room for dissent and critical thinking to negotiate differences and curb excesses; not merely with a view to its own improvement, but as much to be mindful of possible flaws and future consequences for others outside the alliance. In our global context today, the test for how good an alliance is should not only look at the internal coherence and strategic advantages for the allies, as White asserts, but also take into account the externalities which he explicitly leaves out.

Rethinking good alliances in a modern global context

Considering that globalization exposes still more people all over the world to alien others, good alliances may prove to be feasible ways of establishing bonds between people in all their plurality by inviting them into 'spaces for respectful and open dialogue both within and across borders' (Bandy and Smith 2005, 12). Such a dialogue would also entail critical, especially self-critical, thinking which challenges stereotypes, indifference, and inhumane ways of acting and thinking by exposing all parties involved to human plurality.

Hannah Arendt once claimed that plurality is the law of the earth. If that is true, then it is a law which has been violated so many times and in so many ways that nobody could ever have kept count of it. Arendt herself became a first-hand witness of one of the most inhumane regimes ever seen on earth, The German Nazi Party, which sought to eradicate human plurality as such, turning every stranger into an enemy, as Primo Levi once stated (Levi 1996, 9). What would be the opposite of Nazism? How safeguard plurality against attempts of reducing humanity to a homogenous singularity and treating the rest of humanity as unworthy 'races'?

Arendt defined plurality by its 'twofold character of equality and distinction' which she claimed sprang from human speech and action as such (Arendt 1998, 175):

> With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth […] It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it

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is never conditioned by them. (Arendt 1998, 176–177)
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What she ignores in this passage, however, is that it is not up to every newcomer, however resourceful he or she may be, to be inserted into the human world. At birth, be it the first or the second one, every newcomer is in the hands of others and needs to be received, if she is to lead a life among other people, whose presence and company is not merely stimulating, but absolutely necessary for human plurality to emerge.

In some passages of her work, Arendt seems to be reluctantly aware of this, especially when she speaks of every newcomer being a stranger and claims that '[T]he world becomes inhuman, inhospitable to human needs', when it dissolves and loses all permanence (Arendt 1970, 11). Arendt knew that a person may distinguish herself through speech and believe that she is equal to everybody else, but if there is no one there to recognize and realize this, or even worse, if the majority of people were indifferent or violently tried to undermine her humanity in the name of a totalitarian order, then equality and distinctness remain abstract, unrealized potentialities.

Notwithstanding her awareness of the world becoming inhospitable to millions of people, who became aliens, neglected and abandoned under and after the Second World War, she never found a place for hospitality and ethics in her thinking. It was left to French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to find the ethical formula for an antidote against the xenophobia, diagnosed by Levi, who saw it as a latent infection in all people. Levinas found an antidote in 'the power of welcome, of gift, of full hands, of hospitality' (Levinas 1991, 205), which makes the 'insertion' of humans into a plural world possible in the first place. According to Levinas, ethics begins by becoming aware of the other as a stranger and receiving him or her in the spirit of hospitality, which means to receive the other in such a way that he or she is not turned into an object or a possession to be manipulated. The other remains a guest, an alien other, who transcends the host's economy of consumption and appropriation by calling it into question.

In *Totality and Infinity*, which reads like 'an immense treatise on hospitality' (Derrida 1997, 70), Levinas follows two different roads to present the crux of his book, subjectivity as hospitality. Along both lines of thinking, it is the other, who offers every subject the power to receive in hospitality. According to the first line of thought, which Levinas follows most often, the alien other speaks to every host from a transcendent position comparable only to God. This revelatory act, as Levinas calls it, is reminiscent of the scene at Mamre, where Abraham finds himself obliged to receive the three godsend guests, who arrive at his tent. Following this religiously inspired understanding of ethics, the Other breaks irresistibly through every kind of egoism and demands to be received. The Other can be ignored, but only because He has already made his presence felt.

However, there is another way into Levinas' ethics of hospitality, which may not be completely separable from the first one, but it opens up another way to a more dialogical relationship that could lead into a critical rethinking of alliance building. The first road into Levinas' ethical thinking leads to an ambiguous one-way relation to the Other, who appears to come both from above like a godsend visitor, and from below like a poor widow. It is both a relation and a non-relation in which the ego is forced without force to offer hospitality (Levinas 1991, 47). Within the context that concerns us, it is difficult to see how an enduring alliance can be established on an essentially asymmetrical relation in which the parties involved remain distant and separate.

Yet, when Levinas lets the separate terms of the ethical relationship, the I and the Other, approach each other, he opens up another way into his thinking that relies on ancient Greek thinking: The other remains present in his speech and offers a key, as Levinas says with references to Plato and Aristotle, to unlock his own speech which turns into a critical dialogue, when I respond to the words directed at me (Levinas 1991, 97). In this context, Levinas views the Platonic conception of oral dialogue as a surplus of significance, and the Aristotelian analysis of the intellect as enabling the human soul to go beyond its own content (Levinas 1991, 51). By opening myself up to the other, I let myself and my own lifeform be questioned. If I go one step further and invite the other in, I respond by offering more than what I already contained which constitutes, according to Levinas, the critical potential of true responsibility. Offering more than what you thought that you contained and thus transcending your contained thoughts is a sign of the true goodness of 'friendship and hospitality' (Levinas 1991, 305), as Levinas concludes in *Totality and Infinity*.

In his reflections on the ethics of trust in alliances, Argandoña already pointed toward the transcendent dimension of giving 'solely for the other's good (personal development: the transcendent dimension), thus inviting trust from the other party'. However, Levinas barely touches on the parties' response to the signs of trust which they offer each other, i.e. he stops short before a friendship or an alliance is developed. Arendt, on the other hand, draws on ancient traditions of alliance building and elaborates on the pledges and promises which bind together the allies:

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The mutual contract by which people bind themselves together in order to form a community is based
on reciprocity and presupposes equality; its actual content is a promise, and its result is indeed
a 'society' or 'cosociation' in the old Roman sense of societas, which means alliance. Such an
alliance gathers together the isolated strength of the allied partners and binds them into a new
power structure by virtue of 'free and sincere promises'. (Arendt 1990, 170)
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Despite ignoring or taking for granted the initial acts of hospitality in alliance building, Arendt develops further the implications

of these first founding acts which entail the making and keeping of promises between equals, who 'combine and enter into lasting alliances without losing their identity' (Arendt 1990, 171). This means that the allies remain distinct and thus safeguard the two-fold character of human plurality. The basis for remaining distinct is laid in the hospitable reception of the other, and Arendt adds an important aspect to this part of the relation between allies: She compares it to the Aristotelian concept of political friendship, which embodies a respect for and regard of the other person from the distance (Arendt 1998, 243). The other part of the relationship, which safeguards human plurality, is the bond between the allies, built on mutual confidence through reciprocal 'combining and covenanting', which furnishes their equal status.

Arendt's approach to alliances is explicitly political, and she bases her understanding on documents of early American history, whose authors conceive of their shared enterprise of building a 'New World' as growing out of 'the joint confidence we have in each other's fidelity and resolution' (Arendt 1990, 173). The early Puritan view of compact and consent relied heavily on the *Old Testament* and 'the covenant of Israel', yet, as we have seen, and as Arendt also underscores, the asymmetrical relation between God and man, who receives and consents to the law coming from above, does not lead into an alliance built upon distinctness, equality, and reciprocity. Only a Commonwealth, whose representatives are 'freely chosen by the consent of loving friends and neighbours' (Arendt 1990, 176), safeguards human plurality, which needs such ethical dispositions as trust and respect in order to shine forth. In the end, plurality is not given as a law but emerges through the sort of human interaction exemplified by friendship, which becomes an analogue for the good alliances analysed in the paper.

Conclusion

Based on a reinterpretation of the Aristotelian notion of friendship, the paper has outlined the ethical dimension of good alliances: They are founded on trust, which the parties offer each other as a gift that transcends the pragmatic exchange and calculus of costs and benefits. Giving noble testimonies of trustworthiness in generosity and receiving the alien other in hospitality lays the foundation for the good alliance, which the partners enter into in order to achieve results and reach a common goal. Yet, insofar as they share an ethical outlook, which goes beyond mere utility, they can mediate their otherness in a joint critical dialogue, in which they communicate, negotiate, and resolve their possible differences.

The intrinsic value of alliance building lies in the allies' potential of balancing, enriching, and transcending each other's ways of acting and thinking through a critical dialogue, which is analogous to the interaction between friends. In rethinking alliances in a global context, Levinas and Arendt end up employing friendship as an analogue for the sort of good alliance, which respects the otherness of the other while at the same time opening the parties up to questioning their own and each other's lifeforms. Receiving the alien other is an opening up to every other as a stranger. A good alliance safeguards human plurality which is not given as a law. In order for plurality to shine forth, it needs ethical dispositions which embrace it in its two-fold character of distinctness and equality.

Disclosure statement

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