Introduction: A Tribute

ANTONIO CALCAGNO and DIANE ENNS

It is a daunting task to write a tribute to one who gave an inestimable gift to intellectual life since the publication of La voix at le phénomène in 1967, and the presentation of "Les fins de l'homme" in New York in 1968. There are too many texts to refer to, too many themes to address, and too many words of admiration that fall short of their mark. What is left but to continue what Jacques Derrida believed was the work of the future philosopher, the coming philosopher who is not necessarily a professional but a practitioner, one who is above all concerned with justice and politics:

who, in the future, reflect[s] in a responsible fashion on these questions and demand[s] accountability from those in charge of public discourse ... who analyzes and then draws the practical and effective consequences of the relationship between our philosophical heritage and the structure of the still dominant juridico-political system that is so clearly undergoing mutation.1

The impetus for this issue was to honor Derrida’s life and work by focusing on an idea that preoccupied him especially in later years, the seeds of which we find at the very beginning. Derrida was both a profoundly political thinker and politically engaged, as the contributions in this issue attest; deliberating, negotiating, unsettling, lingering, and at the same time taking a position, scrutinizing, rushing—always attentive to this double bind, yet never paralyzed by it. The "to come," ce qui vient, refers to the unforeseeable, the unpredictable, the incalculable, which calls for and exceeds my responsibility. It is the event, the coming of that which comes but not of a recognizable figure—not necessarily another human, my fellow creature, my neighbor. It is perhaps also a life or a specter, of an animal without being an animal, or of the divine without being God. "The one who or which comes," Derrida remarks, "exceeds any determinism but exceeds also the calculations and strategies of my mastery, my sovereignty or my autonomy."2 His mindfulness of and commitment to the "to come" is manifest in his later work especially as "democracy to come" and "autoimmunity," concepts elaborated in the last years of his life.

Already in his lecture "Les fins de l'homme" we can hear Derrida’s commitment to the political import of philosophy that inspires democracy to come when he states that every philosophical colloquium "necessarily has a political significance"—a political import that "burdens" and "aggra-
vates” the a priori link between philosophy and politics. In the same lecture, as Len Lawlor points out in this issue, Derrida introduces democracy to come when he states that democracy is not adequate to the idea of democracy. We can look for further elaboration of this provocative notion in “Faith and Knowledge,” Politics of Friendship, Specters of Marx, in his tribute to Mandela, his reading of Plato’s Republic in Rogues, and finally in his palpable anxiety over current global politics in Philosophy in a Time of Terror. In these texts we repeatedly witness the political aggravation of philosophy that Derrida called attention to in 1968.

Given both his untimely death and the evolution of his own thought in this regard, the democracy to come remains an area of investigation that needs to be further mined by scholars and philosophers. To this end, this volume seeks to achieve two things. First, it wishes to gather in one place scholarly articles that both engage and explain the legacy or heritage of the democracy to come. Second, the articles seek to open questions or create possibilities, always understood within the double bind that so animated Derrida’s own philosophy, about coming politics, philosophy, and even deconstruction itself. We asked for a broad interpretation of the notion of democracy to come that would take us beyond a mere critique or appraisal of democracy as we know it, and received responses that provocatively invoke the politics of autoimmunity, the human-animal relation, justice, feminism, temporality, normality, and globalization.

The writers in this issue all attest to the immense and rich possibilities of Derrida’s work and the diverse paths he inspired us to take. Bernhard Waldenfels rethinks the questions of borders and normality through recent political events and changing global structures. Antonio Calcagno focuses on time and politics, making the argument that critics of Derrida’s democracy to come must read Derridean time not as making political decisions impossible. Rather, Derridean time brings to the fore the simultaneity of the constitutive moment of the double bind. Jane Mummery inquires into the role of faith within the democratic project by exploring the democracies to come of both Derrida and Rorty, projects that she argues share the need to transform the traditional grounding of democracy in knowledge, truth, and rationality into a democracy that makes room for a certain conception of faith. Thomas Seguin explores the possibility of a democratic vitalism, drawing on thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, and Agamben, to argue that a democracy to come must make room not only for autoimmunity and différence but also for life understood in its most basic sense and in its variety of forms. This understanding would necessarily and simultaneously include and transcend human life.

The next four papers draw on concepts related to democracy to come and its practical implications, pointing both to the possibilities and limitations of these ideas. Len Lawlor draws attention to the link Derrida makes between the thought of democracy to come and the age of mondialisation or globalization, and to the new violence this age has unleashed—opening the question of life itself, as well as that of suicide and autoimmunity. Lawlor takes us through Derrida’s writings on animals, which reveal that no response to the current global “war of the species” is sufficient—the relation between humans and animals must change—and attempts to find a more sufficient response to this violence. Women and sexual difference also make an appearance in Derrida’s later discussions of democracy, terrorism, and rogue states, in fascinating and contradictory ways, as Penelope Deutscher demonstrates. In a discussion that elaborates the notion of autoimmunity and its susceptibility to either “perfectibility” or “pervertability,” she argues that Derrida ducks the issue that feminism must itself be autoimmune as he becomes increasingly focused on the autoimmunity of equal rights discourse in later years. Diane Enns tackles the very possibility of Derrida’s irreducible democratic project, asking whether deconstruction can continue to be a democracy to come given that it seems immune to its own critique of autoimmunity. Finally, Karen Houle’s essay takes the Derridean double bind and applies it to the question of abortion. She asks whether there is both a political and personal undecidability that necessarily conditions coming debates and decisions surrounding abortion.

We believe that these essays bring to the fore new and significant contributions to scholarly discussions concerning Derrida’s political engagements and writings in general, and to the notion of democracy to come in particular. They thus continue the work of burdening and aggravating the a priori link between philosophy and politics that Derrida urged us to do already in 1968. We offer this issue of Symposium as a tribute to Derrida, in appreciation for his tireless commitment to philosophical inquiry and political practice; for his devotion to philosophers, writers, artists, scholars of numerous disciplines, and a multitude of admirers around the world; and for the gifts of his person. We trust that our readers will both enjoy and dialogue with the philosophical ideas herein advanced.

Notes
