

# AFTERWORD

## SOME ONTOLOGICAL THOUGHTS ON FRIENDSHIP

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• JARRETT ZIGON •

In raising the question of the relation between the two experiential modalities of friendship and morality, this collection of essays has opened a clearing for novel ways of doing and thinking friendship anthropologically. The path revealed by means of this clearing parallels that of the order of the essays in this collection. Simoni and Buchberger open the question of friendship by disrupting one of our perhaps most closely held assumptions: that friendship—so-called true or pure friendship that is—is only possible over the *longue durée* of non-instrumental affective relationality. In the borderlands of touristic experiences—be they in the resorts of Cuba or on the couches of the Maghreb—this assumption is regularly put to the test in experimentations aimed at becoming otherwise (unless of course one is simply being ripped off). From this clearing, paths of conceiving and thinking and analyzing emerge and Mattingly and Throop lead us down them toward not-quite-yet knowable destinations. Reminding us that *philia*, the Ancient Greek term used by Aristotle, and which is so often translated as friendship, was also used by the Greeks to signify familial relations, Mattingly provides an intimate portrait of how loving familial friendship provides the moral-existential basis for a family to overcome a traumatic event that threatened its very existence. Friendship is here conceived as familial love and as a moral resource—a path well worth exploring anthropologically and personally. And yet can we ever write about friendship in any way that captures the experience of being-there, caught-up, in the midst of the overwhelmingness that is friendship? Throop's equivocal answer of yes/no may be the reply that leads us down a path to yet another clearing or returns us by a different route to the original one. For the yes/no with which Throop concludes may open the possibility to return once again, but this time from another direction, to the original disruptive question with which this collection began. If the essays of this collection provided us with ontic—that is, empirical—descriptive analyses that led us down new paths of thinking friendship, then perhaps the yes/no disclosed by Throop returns us to the clearing in a new way, in that from this trajectory the clearing, while the same, appears quite different. What is revealed by the journey along Throop's path, what the yes/no points us toward, is the ontological question of friendship and morality such that the original ontic disruptive question of friendship becomes an ontological question of being-in-the-world.

The ontological question provoked by friendship immediately moves us away from reliance upon any particular set of assumptions about kinds of subjectivity, and in particular moves us away from the common assumptions often bundled with friendship such as autonomy, individuality, and choice. This is of course not to say that actual, real, bodied persons do not ontically experience, feel, live-out, pursue and so on, friendship in their worlds. Rather the ontological point is that there is a more originary experience to those ontic experiences that are usually and for the most part mediated socio-culturally. Anthropology has long avoided such ontological investigations with the consequence that too often we end up writing as if we (and perhaps many of us actually do) fully subscribe

to a radical view of cultural and/or historical relativism, but regularly do so through the lenses of our own socio-historic-cultural concepts. The bundled assumptions of friendship, autonomous individuals, and choice are just one such example. The bundled assumptions of morality, individuals, and such concepts as good, right, duty, responsibility and so on is another.

Friendship provides a unique entrance into the hermeneutic questioning of the ontology of sociality. Perhaps the first thing to notice about what is called friendship is that in fact there is no choice. As with love, friendship, which on second thought may be just another word for love, falls upon us and makes a demand. We get caught-up-in a friendship; it is already happening before we recognize it and once we do, it is too late—we are already friends. But what is this ‘we are friends’ or ‘to be friends’? It is an ontic articulation that points to an ontological mode of being-together-in-a-world. ‘We are friends’ or ‘to be friends’ articulates the singular plurality of being. The ‘I’s’ who are friends can only be derivatives of the multiplicity of this form of being we name friendship. Friendship, like love, transforms our very being-in-the-world by further entangling our relational-being into deeper and tighter multiplicities. And this perhaps suggests why the phrases ‘I have a friend’ or ‘I have friends’ sounds so inappropriate; for these phrases render the friend a possession that is over and against oneself out there in the world of things.

Having been caught-up-in-friendship, having become a new singular plural, we are able to dwell. To dwell is not simply to be at home in the world, but is to be in the world in such a way that one’s existential openness to possibilities is available. Humans have incredible adaptability to all conditions in which they can become attuned and be as if at home. But to dwell is to do so such that one’s capacity for openness to being is not reduced to such a degree that being-in-the-world becomes something like ‘trapped in a world’. Friendship, so it would seem, is one of the ontological conditions for realizing the existential imperative to dwell.

The at-homeness of friendship is perhaps most obviously revealed by Throop in his description of sitting silently enjoying betel nut, beer, and coffee on the porch with Maffel. But would this at-homeness, as pleasant as it is, even be possible without the openness that came with it? Could this pleasurable at-homeness ever arise without the openness of new possibilities made available through friendship such that Throop, for example, came to learn the virtues of humility, confidence, and affective control that he describes, as well as the transformations of Maffel that Throop could not describe and may never know? Could friendship be a moral resource in the way Mattingly describes—an ontological condition for morally transforming one’s very way of being-in-the-world—without the openness to possibility it is? This, of course, is not to reduce all ontic experiences of friendship to the same. Such reduction is impossible as the ontic world is by definition a world unfolding as differences. The point is simply that when we think beyond the ontic and recognize that friendship as dwelling is one clearing onto possibility, we can begin to think about the ontological conditions of being-with. In other words, the ontic diversity of what we call friendship discloses the ontological conditions of being-in-the-world. The clearing Simoni and Buchberger provide with their disruptive question allow us to see that perhaps friendship does more than simply name an intimate relationality between two persons on the ontic level. For as these occasional thoughts have allowed me

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to consider, perhaps this clearing opened us to the recognition that friendship may be the name we have come to give the ontological condition of being as singular multiplicity, and the openness to possibility allowed by becoming caught-up-in this form of being-with.

JARRETT ZIGON, Ph.D.  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM  
j.zigon@uva.nl