Graham M. Smith, Heather Devere, John von Heyking (eds.)

Friendship Studies

Politics and Practices

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Printed in the EU

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Towards a Friendship Studies

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What is friendship and why is it important?

If one person were to come to a point of sincerely posing this question to another, then it would be a cause for deep concern. The posing of such a question indicates that something has gone awry in the life of the enquirer. The questioner might well be suffering from some personal loss or psychological illness. For an individual to question friendship in this way reveals a fundamental disconnection from the world of mutuality, recognition, sympathy, and sharing. To ask the question is to disclose a disruption in the experience of binding of self with others, and with what sustains selfhood and identity. It is the question posed by one who is fundamentally detached and adrift. If such a question were asked in earnest on a personal level, no definition or explanation could be forthcoming—at least not one that would likely make sense to the questioner. Asked in the course of a human life gone astray, this question can only be responded to by being a good friend. It is not discussion but demonstration which is required as an answer.

No doubt this is an extreme case. Nevertheless, it also points to something of significance: the experience and practice of friendship is ubiquitous. Indeed, perhaps friendship is so ubiquitous that its complexities and possibilities are not sufficiently noticed or appreciated. It pervades our shared world so extensively that we do not even see it anymore. It has become commonplace. Perhaps because of its ubiquity and the fact that it is taken for granted, friendship also points to something very deep about the human experience. Indeed, it might well be a part of our basic ontology insofar as it appears to be a necessary component of the human condition. It is difficult if not impossible to imagine our world without it. That is what makes the question of 'What is friendship and why is it important?' so difficult to address. What this extreme case draws our attention to is the fact that friendship of some variety is necessary

not only for a successful and flourishing life, but for the common life of human beings to be sustained at all.

It is no doubt true that personal friendships—the kinds of friendships which everyone seeks and which are welcome sustenance in the lives of billions—can be analysed in such a way as to bring coherence to our question as a part of a scholarly enquiry. In so doing, personal friendships are shown to cross the borders of a number of concerns. Personal friendships are never *just* personal. Although they might be thought of as private and individual, focusing on a unique identification between the friends and set of personalized emotions, reflection shows that our friendships are in part defined by, and transcend, the things which 'border' them. Personal friendships already contain implications for politics, ethics and philosophy, sociology, economics, and culture. This list could be expanded. Each of these fields raises fresh questions and identifies new puzzles about friendship. Each of these fields also brings forth fresh insight and understanding of friendship as a personal, intimate, and perhaps even unique bond between persons. Such insights are likely to enhance and inform the experience of friendship as it is lived between persons.

It is evident that personal friendships have implications for realms beyond what is immediate to the friends. Further reflection indicates the possibility of a wider and deeper perspective with friendship taken as a concern which expands beyond the personal instance and example and on to something more generic. Approached in this way we focus on the foundations, dynamics, and value of friendship. Friendship as a site of serious intellectual enquiry encompasses this, but it does not rest with the model of personal friendship (which is to say, it recognizes that the personal model of friendship is already complex and variegated). A concern with friendship includes the personal, but just as an account of personal friendship must consider wider dimensions, so too does the study of friendship move beyond the personal into these wider dimensions. This takes the study of friendship beyond the personal model. As a site of study, scholars are concerned with not reducing friendship to a single instance (the personal), but to exploring the diversity and variety of this phenomena. Thus, a concern with

friendship also begins to touch upon the deeper questions of which personal friendship is simply one response. Understood in its most basic form friendship is a relation, and thus to be exploring and explaining friendship is to be engaged with the bonds between person and person, group and group. To be interested in these bonds is to be concerned with what is somehow shared between people; it is to be interested in how they act together, and how they understand each other, their ideas and ideals. However, it is not just about what is shared. What the relationship of friendship points to is something more than mere identity and sameness. It is also a way of being with others. That is to say, friendship is as much about the relationship of otherness and difference as it with self and sameness. It is the relationship which is shared — the selves of the friends are kept distinct from each other. The friends attend to their friendship, they are not friends without it, but crucially they do not misidentify as each other. They do not need to become each other. They share the friendship, but do not need to possess, change, or control their friend.

Thus, friendship has a personal dimension to be sure; but it also points to something wider and more complex than this. Every instance of friendship is an instance of a wider dynamic which enables a connection between self and other, sameness and difference, structure and freedom. In this way, friendship is personal but it is also something more than the personal. Friendship is a relation, practice and activity which is connected to the social and political structure itself. It enables coherence whilst ensuring the possibility of change. It allows identification whilst preserving difference. It is a way of navigating self and other in a shared world.

In this light, to think about friendship again is to begin to re-engage with a tradition which has been obscured by Western modernity, but which also holds great promise for the times towards which we are heading. It is to focus again on what binds person to person, group to group. It is to focus again on that sharing and basic connectedness which provides the fabric onto which the social, cultural, religious, and political world is woven.

An outline of the contributions in this book

This book is a contribution towards the study of friendship. Each of the essays in this collection attend to some aspect of friendship. In so doing they show the way that friendship penetrates disciplines, interconnects with other concepts, and crosses cultural borders and systems of thought.

The first half of the book treats friendship conceptually and has a special focus on its political and societal aspects. The opening chapter by **P.E. Digeser** starts by thinking about how we can conceptualise friendship given its diversity. This is a crucial question as it is both a philosophical/theoretical question about what friendship is, and it is a question which recognises the historical, geographical, and cultural variety of the practices that are called friendship. The problem here is that 'friendship' becomes tormented on the horns of a dilemma. If the variety is recognised and friendship is defined very broadly then everything becomes friendship and it loses its conceptual value. If it is defined too narrowly then not only is the (cultural) variety of friendship ignored, but that friendship might become so precise that no existing relationship meets its criteria. Digeser proposes to answer this question by thinking about friendship in terms of 'family resemblances': friendships share overlapping characteristics, but they do not al share the same (limited set) of characteristics. Digeser proposes that friendship is 'a set of social practices in which certain norms and expectations govern not only the actions, but also the motivations of the friends'. This approach immediately recognises the diversity of friendship. Digeser focuses on what how the friends understand their relation and what they seek to do. For Digeser, friendship is a practice, or 'set of shared rules or norms to which participants must subscribe if they are to partake of the activity in question'. Although the practice of friendship is 'plastic' and can be shaped by the people involved, nevertheless, for it to be meaningful as a practice the friends must recognise that they are engaged in it. There could be various different ways of motivating friendship. There could also be various different things that the friends do together (and how they do them). However, in trying to identify friendship, and to distinguish

it from other relationships, Digeser argues that: 'A friendship … is a social practice in which the friends mutually recognize the appropriate motivations in one another and act in a manner than is consonant with expectations of how friends should act'. It is this idea of friendship as a practice—something that people understand themselves to be doing with each other—that is reflected in the conceptual essays which follow and this collection as a whole.

The next five chapters discuss the relationship between friendship and aspects of politics. The relationship between friendship and justice is an important one, although one dominant Western conception of friendship and justice is that they are opposed. In this view, justice (understood as an impartial procedure) is what is needed precisely because individuals have partial preferences motivated by emotional concerns. However, the relationship between friendship and justice has not always been seen in this way. Indeed, some form of friendship seems necessary to motivate a concern with justice. Friendship might be considered to be necessary as a grounds for any form of justice. For similar reasons concerning impartiality and rationality, friendship has also been neglected and even dismissed as a way of conceptualising relations between citizens. However, it is far from clear that what has replaced friendship is really fit to structure large and diverse groups (be that a fragmented and individualised citizenship, or identity with the state or nation). Nor is it the case that friendship should be thought of as a private relation serving individuals outside of the political sphere—and political freedom.

Preston King provides a chapter which considers what it is that binds us together and causes us to act in a just way. The essay shows that this cannot be truth—either believing that we hold it, or being committed to seeking it. Holding the same beliefs as others (whether they be true or not) does not bind us to others as our positions and actions in relation to those truths might be very different. Holding the same beliefs is coincidental, it does not mean that we *share* something. If we are seeking truth then (by definition) we do not know truth. It is the case that we can commit to finding the truth—but then it is our commitment to finding the truth, and not the truth itself, which has bound us (but does this common search

provide the grounds for substantive relation?). King argues that for social justice to exist something other than the love of truth is needed. What is needed is 'a minimal, even primal, foundation, one of mutual affection among fellow creatures'—in a word: friendship. Such a friendship facilitates the discussion of truth and the development of community and culture, not the other way around. As King writes, although beliefs and customs may change over time: 'friendship is perceived as constant; the ideas contested qualify as secondary. The baseline of friendship does not oppose counterargument, but warmly welcomes it. It does not deflect from truth, but nimbly facilitates it.'

Seow Hon Tan approaches friendship and justice from the perspective of law. The basic problem here is that there needs to be some background association that enables us to resolve the ambiguities of policies and procedures (this approach thus has correspondences with the claims King advances about friendship being a background condition for other enterprises). Tan notes that these background associations are increasingly difficult to find in pluralistic societies. Tan's chapter argues that friendship provides the model for understanding these background obligations. Tan notes that friendship 'has a norm-generating effect as parties relate in a long-term reciprocal relation that is both reactive and voluntary and as parties treat each other as non-fungible. Not only is friendship norm-generating, an unspoken reflective and dialogic methodology exists that enables friends to work out their obligations to each other'. Friendship, then, does not need agreement about all things, but does presuppose some common enterprise which generates obligations. Ultimately Tan goes on to show that this is not an issue that should concern philosophers—it is of direct concern to the practitioners of law too.

The chapter by **Sibyl A. Schwarzenbach** starts from the assumption 'that social and political justice requires some form of community or commonality between citizens'. The question the chapter addresses is what form this should take in pluralist democracies. Here the notion of civic friendship is proposed and contrasted to both fraternity and solidarity. In summary, the problem with both of these notions (and their practice) is that they are

quickly gendered and lead to understandings of bonding that are militaristic and combative. Ultimately this is not only exclusionary, they are also likely to reproduce the very fragmentation and division we hope to overcome. Furthermore, taken to the extreme, they can also lead to oppressive and totalitarian forms of politics. Instead Schwarzenbach argues that attention should be given to the idea of civic friendship which provides a model of ethical praxis. Friendship is focused on the reproduction of flourishing relations for their own sake. This also brings those activities that have (traditionally) been associated with women back into the polity. However, civic friendship must be adapted to the 21st century and not be a return to the past. As Schwarzenbach writes, the social vision here: 'is the model of an ethical labour and reproduction of relations of *philia*, a model which now centrally includes women and other overlooked groups'. The model of the democratic citizen therefore moves away from militaristic and economic models, and towards reciprocity, goodwill, and compromise. Schwarzenbach concludes that 'the norm of democratic citizenship ought to be that of a civic friend: a model rich in suggestions of how to resolve the claims of self and other, and even the eternal conflict between the values of liberty and equality themselves'.

In the chapter by **Ruairidh J. Brown** friendship is used to understand the relations between citizens, focusing primarily on obligation and the state. This is insightful as clearly friendship creates obligations for the friends, but friendship is also thought to be a voluntary relationship and one of mutual aid and mutual deliberation (these obligations and deliberative aspects also discussed by Tan). In order to explore the possibilities of a connection between friendship, obligation, and the state, the chapter contrasts the idea of friendship as a model of the state to that of another influential model: the family. As Brown notes, the family model of the relations between citizens and state has appeal because in both instances 'one is born into a social group one did not choose, yet, despite this lack of choice, one still feels a sense of obligation to the other members of this group'. The state-as-parent analogy also encourages us to think of the state as both a benevolent provider and an authority which should not be challenged. This view has been

criticised by feminists as it is predominantly understood in gendered and patriarchal terms, and it ignores the emotional and reproductive labour (traditionally) carried out by women (also discussed in Schwarzenbach's chapter). Furthermore, it also seems to deny the agency of the citizens (they are treated like children) and seems to lead to the conclusion that the state should be obeyed simply because it is the state. In contrast to this model, the chapter argues that friendship is a more appropriate model. Although 'chosen' the choice of friends is nevertheless curtailed by geographical location. Friendships are characterised by shared experiences. It is the interactions between friends that create moral obligations. Using this model the chapter shows how citizens can consider the state (and each other) friends who are involved in a cooperative enterprise of world-building. This world building is a shared enterprise and creates obligations, but it also allows for flexibility and freedom.

In **Shay Welch**'s chapter the relationship between friendship and freedom is discussed. In so doing, the chapter connects friendship to one of the most prominent and recognisable political concepts and ideals in the Modern Western tradition of political thought. The chapter focuses on liberal notions of freedom as its starting point. In liberal notions of freedom, the role of the state is to constitute two related spheres: the public and the private. Many would assume that friendship belongs to the private sphere. Indeed, the revival of friendship in Western political thought has been a move against the assumption that friendship is individualised and private and has no (legitimate) role in the theorisation of the public life of the polity. The chapter advances this work by arguing that in addition to the public and the private there is a third sphere of freedom: the social. In contrast to the liberal understanding of the private sphere which characterises as individualised, the social sphere is where individuals pursue projects which cannot be achieved individually. It is a sphere of *interaction* and not just action. It is here that we find friendship. The chapter conceptualises such friendship as being flexible. Friendship is a free social relation. It stretches from relations with strangers to the more intimate. Crucially it does not predetermine ways that friends are to connect with

one another. Thus, in the social sphere, Welch writes that 'individuals function more as persons than in roles'. The chapter argues that those who wish to enhance their social relations (and thus their social freedom) would benefit from working towards such forms of friendship. Friendship is thus practical in providing a liberatory model, and an inspiration to act together.

The chapter by **Ana Romero-Iribas** and **Consuelo Martínez-Priego** is both unique and timely insofar as it approaches the concern with atomisation and social connection from the perspective of a recent event: the Covid-19 pandemic. This has had a fragmenting consequence for both individuals and institutions, leading to loneliness and isolation. The chapter considers civic friendship to be a remedy to this. Civic friendship involves other-orientated emotions. It is a concern for both self and others, and aims at collective goods. However, it is not just emotional—it also has a rational component. Thus conceived, civic friendship offers a solution to the problems of fragmentation from three perspectives. From the point of view of the sociological, 'it is a relationship that is based on trust between citizens and cooperating to promote shared interests'; from the point of view of political theory, it offers a defence to totalitarianism by promoting freedom; from a psychological point of view, civic friendship binds other-orientated emotions. Thus this chapter also illustrates how friendship transcends disciplines as the topic and discussion is situated between political philosophy and social and emotional psychology. Civic friendship cannot be reduced to the emotions—but it cannot exist without them either. According to Romero-Iribas and Martínez-Priego, civic friendship is characterised by other-orientated emotions. The action which results from these emotions is guided by concern for the shared life of the subject and the other. These emotions are therefore not utopian or altruistic (self-sacrificing), they are rational emotions and wholly suited to political life. In discussing civic friendship in these terms, this chapter does much to free the emotions from being confined to the personal view of friendship which would view than as idiosyncratic and irrational, and to put them on a rational and generalized basis in politics and society as a whole.

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With the essay by **Astrid H.M. Nordin** the book refocuses its approach to the study friendship—one that begins to look at how friendship is structured by, and structures, the local and global relations in which it is embedded. Furthermore, whilst the preceding essays have looked at friendship from a largely Western focus, the essays which form the second half of the book explore friendship as methodology, theory, and practice beyond the West. However, Nordin's chapter (like the other chapters found here) does not seek to dismiss the work that has been done in the 'Western' tradition. Instead, by extending inquiry into friendship beyond 'the West', Nordin's approach allows both Western and non-Western traditions to attain a mutually enlightening interface, and to further our knowledge and conceptualisation of friendship in a decolonised and more radical way. In this way Nordin's chapter highlights some of the dominant assumptions in 'Western' ways of thinking about friendship, and thus to show the cultural specificity of that way of thinking, how that specificity leads to limitations, and how things could be thought otherwise. Focusing on International Relations, Nordin uses visions of friendship from beyond the West to propose three alternative assumptions to those which structure Western thought: (1) that friendship is a central category for theorising global political relations, and is not best understood in binary relation to enmity; (2) friends need to be significantly other to the self; and (3) we can have positive friendships with an unstable, flexible, and fluid sense of self. Nordin argues that these alternative starting points not only bring what is excluded back in, they also show how Western ways of thinking about friendship continue to structure global relations. Thus, Nordin's call for a postcolonial friendship studies is more than a call for diversity. As Nordin writes 'the project is not simply one of creating more diversity, it is an active process of engagement and change in the ways that we think and the things that we privilege'. Our understanding and practice of friendship are central to this.

The chapter by **Heather Devere**, **Kelli Te Maihāroa**, **Maui Solomon**, and **Maata Wharehoka** is an example of both the theory

and practice of cross-cultural research on friendship that is identified by Nordin as a way to both challenge the dominance of Western models and to enhance our understanding of friendship. It explores the possibility of relating the methodology in the work of Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, kaupapa Māori (also introducing here kaupapa Morimori) to the principles of friendship developed by Professor Preston King in his essay 'Friendship and Politics' published in 2007. Thus, this chapter is not only about cross-cultural friendship and decolonised methods, it is an *act* of cross-cultural friendship. In other words, the decolonial aspects of the approach are performative in the friendships of the researchers. The chapter achieves this by identifying eight principles of kaupapa Māori and Morimori research methods which are then compared to the ten principles of friendship proposed by King. In this way not only are new insights generated, but they are achieved via a decolonizing methodology that allows for sensitive material to be revealed in a way that avoids some of the harm research can cause to communities that have already experienced a painful history. This is also an example of how Western and non-Western views of method and friendship can work in a productive way together, and can be understand to be cooperative and restorative rather than mutually exclusive.

In the chapter by **Eric Anton Heuser** some of the philosophical ideals behind Javanese friendships are discussed. In the spirit of interdisciplinary and decolonial approaches to the study of friendship, Heuser draws from the history of friendship within anthropology to show how this has led to a marginalisation of friendship historiographies from the Global South. As Heuser writes: '…we need more in-depth analysis of philosophies from the Global South to gain a broader understanding of the different ideals of friendship that exist, across cultural boundaries and across different historical epochs'. Focusing on asymmetrical friendships in patronage or embedded in business contexts and homosocial friendships, Heuser finds that the intersections between friendship and other social relationships echo particular socio-cultural boundaries, which define contemporary friendship practices in Java. Fieldwork in Java has shown that friendships are highly flexible and oscillate between

different moral-social poles provided by their 'neighbouring' relationships. The chapter concludes that to understand friendship on a more comprehensive level then attention needs to be paid to the local construction and meaning of those intersections that shape the social realities of friendships. This research is therefore an example of how non-Western forms of friendship map onto, but also challenge, Western constructions and practices.

The chapter by **Chiung-Chiu Huang** considers the possibility of the relations between Vietnam and China as being one of 'friends'. Despite the shared characteristics of the two countries (in terms of culture, political system, and shared ideology), certain dynamics prevent them from truly being friends. The chapter argues that Vietnam and China could hardly become friends due to the historical fact of the Sino-centred tribute system, the nature of the relationships between/among socialist states, and Vietnam's feeling of inferiority when comparing itself to China. At the core of the inability to become friends appears to be a deep and persistent inequality and the presence of hierarchy. This would appear to chime with some of the assumptions typical in Western theories of friendship (e.g. that the friends have to be equal), but also some of the themes from Confucian views about friendship (e.g. that friendship was the fifth relationship based on equality, and thus the relationship which sat least well with the other four hierarchical relationships considered normative). However, the chapter draws attention to a different epistemology from that of the Western literature which would emphasise sameness in friendship. In so doing, it offers a sharp contrast to expectations that friendship is about like attracting like, or sameness. Indeed, the inability for Vietnam and China to become friends (despite their similarities) draws attention to the specificity of the Western model (as Heuser's chapter has also emphasised in the case of Java). This also helps to explain why Vietnam views its relations with China in a more structural and role-based terminology: comrades and brothers.

The final chapter, by **John von Heyking**, connects both China and the West, and the global with the local. Focusing on political friendship, the chapter compares Plato and Aristotle for the West, and Confucius for China. Although there are differences in the

approaches of the Ancients, *philia* for the ancient Greeks and *ren* for Confucius, are regarded by both traditions as the culmination of virtue. As Heyking writes: 'By comparing the two traditions on friendship, one compares the whole of their moral possibilities in microcosm'. The chapter explores these similarities under three rubrics: friendship as the genesis of political order; friendship as ideal of political order; festivity and political friendship. Crucially, the local and the global are linked in both traditions as they maintain that the good regime depends upon the friendships of those who are virtuous. Friendship is present and flows through all levels of political activity and organization. However, not only is friendship essential to the development of personhood, it is also the foundation for *homonoia* or harmony. This means not that we must agree, but that we must seek a foundation that allows for diversity and disagreement. This has consequences not only for individuals and regimes, but the relations between regimes themselves, which leads us back to the potential for more friendly and harmonious relations between China and the USA.

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Taken as a whole, these essays demonstrate that the study of friendship is an important concern—indeed, it might well be vital to our times. To think about friendship is to re-engage with what might be thought of as a fundamental question—a question that is likely to generate many answers. *What is friendship?* Friendship is a relationship between persons which forms of complex of self and other, sameness and difference. *Why is friendship important?* Friendship is important because no recognizably human world is possible without it, and the possibility of a shared world of freedom would be extinguished.