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I have long been an admirer of Jackson's work: his 2002 book *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* revolutionized my thinking about anthropological theory, method and the anthropological project. *Between One and One Another* (2012) is another significant stepping stone in Jackson's continuing argument for the development of an existential anthropology and it reengages with concerns that have been apparent in his writing since at least the late 1980s: phenomenology, intersubjectivity, radical empiricism, experience, behavior, agency, and action, as well as the centrality of ethnographic writing for greater anthropological understanding and better theory-building. This book has cross-disciplinary appeal, at minimum because it inspires the reader to rethink theory, method, and the reasons why there is an anthropological discipline at all. In thirteen chapters, the book succinctly summarizes the trials, tribulations, and ethics of anthropology and its engagement with the world and the people with whom its knowledge is constructed.

Jackson weaves the chapters together with thoughtful, poetic, and deeply personal reflections on some of his past relationships and associations. We meet various people important in the development of Jackson's thinking and discover how they helped shape his theorizing at the same time that they helped shape his life. Indeed, these relationships are the cornerstones around which the book is structured: the eleven body chapters each focus on a different time, place, person, or theme. Anecdotes from undergraduate study in New Zealand sit beside stories of a family vacation in Greece. The epistemological difficulties with writing about the complexity of life are situated alongside musings on mortality, immortality and the nature of death. Fieldwork in Sierra Leone is juxtaposed with academia in Australia and a childhood in New Zealand. In this book, ethnography meets autobiography and poetry meets philosophy and literature. The very attempt of combining these disparate elements of existence is admirable; because he (mostly) succeeds in this attempt, Jackson makes visible an alternate frame of writing, reading, and thinking about the complexity of human existence.

Preceding and following the body chapters are more generalizable arguments developing the theoretical basis and need for an existential anthropology (Chapter 1: Preamble) and demonstrating methodologically how this anthropological engagement can be practiced (Chapter 13: On the Work and Writing of Ethnography). These are both significant in terms of quality and innovation, and provide a useful introduction and summary for any budding phenomenological or existential anthropologist, as well as for anyone wishing for a relatively light introduction to Jackson’s oeuvre.

The focus of these chapters centers on the problems stemming from Jackson’s humanistic definition of anthropology as ‘the systematic application of analogical thought to a pluralistic universe, a way of understanding the other as oneself in other circumstances’ (p.8). Such a definition exemplifies the aims and arguments put forward throughout the book, a book which, in its title and arguments both, explicitly attempts to understand the ‘anxious relationship between the will to separate and the will to unite’ (p. 20) and ‘capture the shifts
among personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal modes of apprehending reality’ (p. 21). Jackson further argues that the problem with the standard anthropological focus on cultural uniqueness can blind us to underlying existential universals (p. 2). Thus we must attend to the everyday hopes, fears, and concerns that shape individual existential imperatives in an inherently social world.

Jackson’s answer to all these problems lies in ethnographic writing that prioritizes accurate and vivid descriptions of life as locally and individually lived, felt, and experienced (p. 172). For Jackson, this form of ethnographic writing answers the question ‘why existential-phenomenological anthropology?’ Here it is worth quoting at length Jackson’s philosophy for this project:

Rather than the analysis or interpretations of texts, we also look to the contexts in which texts are produced, used, abused, or invoked. Rather than the life of the mind, we also consider the life of the body, the senses, the emotions, the imagination, and…material objects…Rather than assuming that our experience of the world may be directly inferred from the ways in which we represent the world…we focus on the lack of fit, the slippage between our immediate experience and the conceptual forms whereby that experience is mediated. Rather than isolate the human subject as an arbiter of meaning…we switch our attention to what transpires between subjects and the ways in which our sense of self is contingent…Rather than speak of stable and indefinable entities…we prefer to deconstruct such categories, exploring the mutable and multifarious character of our actual being-in-the-world…Our focus is the human struggle for being…But life is always lived within limits (p.173).

Thus, this book has much to recommend it. Nevertheless, despite the book’s interesting structure and provocative arguments, I ultimately found the book’s substance somewhat less stimulating than what was promised by the excellent introductory and concluding chapters. The names, theories, and philosophies are familiar from Jackson’s other writing. They are also, perhaps, too familiar: the more I read, the more I felt I had read it all before. Indeed, some of the quotes and many of the arguments are repeated elsewhere. By the end, even the argument on the ethnocentrism of Western epistemologies and the need to ground knowledge in empathetic and embodied understandings of other peoples’ lifeworlds seemed somewhat redundant. I remarked earlier that the book serves as an excellent introduction to Jackson’s work; to one long familiar with his arguments, the book is considerably less exciting.

Furthermore, ‘the book shows a distinctive and disappointing tendency to slip into solipsistic modes of thinking and theorizing. Too often the book seems to be an essay about Jackson rather than anthropology or humanity in general. Too often it seems an autobiography with ethnographic or philosophic elements rather than vice versa. As someone familiar with much of Jackson’s recent work, this is unfortunate, as Jackson obviously has the ability to deliver much more.

In the end, one could say that ‘Between One and One Another’ is a book about the ontology of human engagement: with life, with the world, with ourselves, with each other; ‘Of being a part of and being apart from the world’ (p. 2). In this, as always, Jackson delivers. It

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1 R.D. Laing, Henry James, Hannah Arendt, Dewey, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, etc.

2 For example, throughout Jackson’s other works Paths toward a clearing (1989), At home in the world (1995), Minima ethnographica (1998), and Existential anthropology (2005).
also makes a cogent argument for the increasing incorporation of existential anthropology into the disciplinary mainstream. In so doing, Jackson demonstrates the veracity of alternative methods of writing and theorizing. It is just a pity so much seems repeated or unnecessarily self-focused.

**Author Biography:** Ryan O'Byrne is a PhD candidate in social anthropology at University College London (UCL). He is currently on fieldwork in South Sudan where he is researching the cultural logics and significance of Pentecostal conversion within a post-conflict village community. His interests also include refugee-related issues, cosmology, and kinship.

**References**

Jackson, Michael