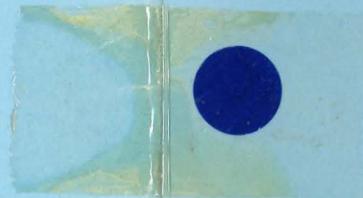


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**PROUST: HUMAN SEPARATENESS
AND THE LONGING FOR UNION**



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PROUST: HUMAN SEPARATENESS AND THE LONGING FOR UNION

Inaugural Lecture

Delivered at the College on May 6, 1986

by

İlham Dilman, B.A., Ph.D.

Professor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA

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PROUST: HUMAN SEPARATENESS AND THE LONGING FOR UNION

Tonight I would like to speak about a philosophical problem that is dear to my heart, and about a literary writer, namely, the French novelist Marcel Proust, who has raised that very problem in his great novel A La Recherche du Temps Perdu.

One peculiarity of philosophy is that its problems always and inevitably presuppose in the person for whom they are problems a knowledge of what poses them. This knowledge, in the case of the problem I wish to consider, is a form of pain: no one who has not been hurt, in some personal relation, by what I call the 'separateness' of the other person will see any problem here - I mean any philosophical problem. For there are plenty of people who go through life without being troubled by this separateness in any way. They have come to terms with it so well that they are as little aware of it as the air they breathe. They are perhaps the lucky ones.

But what is this separateness? Is it something inevitable and, if so, in what sense? What implications does it have for personal relationships between human beings - personal as opposed to institutional, though the two often overlap? These are the philosophical questions I wish to explore in my talk. They centre round a problem which, though different from the traditional problem of solipsism, is nevertheless closely connected with it. This is the problem of whether something which seems to characterize our existence as individuals, what I have called 'human separateness', makes it impossible for human beings to make contact with each other,

the kind of contact which brings them together, so that without it we should live alone.

1. OUR SEPARATENESS AS INDIVIDUALS

In the Symposium Aristophanes tells a story of how human beings were originally hermaphrodites, or more accurately combined three sexes, and how self-satisfied and arrogant they became in this state. Zeus decided to put an end to their arrogance and cut them into two. From then on each yearned for the half from which he had been severed. 'When they met they threw their arms round one another and embraced in their longing to grow together again.' However 'they perished of hunger and general neglect of their concerns because they would not do anything apart'. So Zeus took pity on these human beings and moved their reproductive organs to the front so that reproduction could take place by the intercourse of the male with the female.

'It is from this distant epoch (he says) that we may date the innate love which human beings feel for one another, the love which restores us to our ancient state by attempting to weld two beings into one and to heal the wounds which humanity suffered. Each of us (he says) is the mere broken tally of a man, each of us perpetually in search of his corresponding tally. What everybody wants (he continues) is that he should melt 'into his beloved, and that henceforth they should be one being instead of two. The reason is that this was our primitive condition when we were wholes, and love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole.'

In this myth Aristophanes treats sexual love humorously, but there is a good deal in what he says that I find of interest. Indeed in Freud we find a modern, revised version of this myth, namely that in the beginning of each individual's life there is a symbiotic relation between mother and child in which the child does not yet have a separate identity as a person. Acquiring such a separate identity in the course of one's development is a painful business. It involves coming to terms with painful experiences and relinquishing pleasurable illusions, such as that the mother does not have a separate life and that there is no place for anyone else in her affective life. The discovery that this is not so is Freud's famous Oedipus complex. Those who are unable to grow out of this undifferentiated state in their deepest feelings (the modern story goes) will, when they are adults, seek to return to it in their sexual life. Love for them, as for Aristophanes' human creatures, will be 'the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole' - the whole in the modern story being the mother-baby whole, and the love what Freud calls 'narcissistic love'.

I am sure that Marcel Proust, a contemporary of Freud, would have agreed about love being a pursuit of the whole. His distinct contribution lies in his emphasis on the unattainability of this end. Certainly the setting for the scene of the loves he portrays in his great novel is what I would call 'human separateness', and this (as I said) is my present philosophical theme.

My first question is: what kind of separateness is this? I do not mean just the separateness of the sexes, but the separateness of human beings with distinct identities as persons or individuals which love, at least adult sexual love, presupposes. How is this

separateness bound up with what we are willing to assume responsibility for, and what does that amount to?

Let me try to elucidate. We sometimes say of a person: 'His decisions are not his. His actions are not really his, they do not come from him. He is not himself.' There is nothing paradoxical about such statements if only we understand them rightly. Take the sentence: 'His decisions are not his.' It is the second 'his' in this sentence that is relevant to the uniqueness of human individuality which concerns us here, not the first, and it is used in a stronger sense than the first. For to say of a particular decision that it is 'his', in the first sense, is to attribute that decision to a particular person, one we can identify by name or other description, or which he can identify for us. For instance: 'Who was it in the Board of Directors whose decision to agree to a deal with a rival company saved the firm from bankruptcy? Answer: It was the President himself.' When the President refers to this decision as 'mine' he assumes responsibility and takes credit or blame for it. What he does is not to identify it for himself - as he may identify one of his old garments in a jumble sale, one which he may not have recognized at first. But though one may have no reason to doubt the President's words, one may have reason for questioning his right to assume any credit for the decision: To what extent was that decision really his? One's question concerns the extent to which it came from him, the extent to which he was behind that decision as an individual, with his own judgments and convictions, and standing where the reasons he gives for it suggest. Perhaps he was manipulated to agree and it was only by luck that the deal turned out to be to the benefit of the firm.

A person who in most of his decisions merely gives in to pressure, or simply conforms to or copies others, or is dictated to by ulterior motives which he does not recognize and take responsibility for, is only externally related to the considerations which support what he does. Such a person does not really care for the values which sanction his actions. What we meet in our interactions with him does not, therefore, bring us in contact with him. It does not do so because he is not to be found in the actions and responses we meet in those interactions. Or, as Kafka would put it, what we find there is not him¹. In them he simply reflects what is external to him, outside forms of conduct and behaviour. Or they are expressions of a 'character armour', as Wilhelm Reich calls it², sustained by the aim of avoiding fears which remain unowned. In either case these make him what he is.

In contrast, to the extent to which a person makes his own what comes to him from outside, he becomes what he makes of himself. In the case of the man whose conduct is primarily defensive, the first step towards his finding himself would involve shedding his defences. But this would only be a first step, and it is worth repeating that what he 'finds' ultimately, if he succeeds in finding himself, is still what he makes of himself. When we meet such a person, whether as friend or foe, we know that he exists in his own right; he is nobody's replica, dummy, extension or shadow. He may please,

1. The Diaries, vol.i (1910-13), p.25, ed. by Max Brod (Secker and Warburg 1948)
2. Character Analysis (Vision Press 1950)

oblige or obey us, and even sacrifice himself for our sake; but only because that is what he wants to do, or believes to be right - because of his love, devotion, or commitment. The point is that he won't do just anything, and he won't be bought or pushed. Nor, in the opposite case, will he only do what is dictated by an inner necessity external to his will, unable to take account of the claims made on him by others. The will we come in contact with in his love, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, sorrow, or penitence, especially when we are its object, is something that cannot be manipulated, something to be reckoned with, and it stands out as such.

Such a person does what he wills. Whatever he does for me, he does because he wants to, because he cares for me and is not indifferent to my needs. It is this that makes me appreciate what he does for me. If I thought that he does what he does only because it suits him, or because I know how to pull his strings, it would not have the same value for me. It would not be something I could be grateful for. So when I am grateful to him, this involves an acknowledgement of his separateness from me. Where this acknowledgement is absent my gratitude turns into a form of self-congratulation: I am pleased by my good fortune.

When in my gratitude I acknowledge the other person's separateness I do not feel this separateness as a distance between us, it does not appear to me as something that divides us. And why should it? It is only when his interests or principles stand in the way of what I want from him, so that he cannot oblige me, that I may feel it as such a distance. But when I do so, it is because, from my

ego-centric perspective, his interests and principles appear as mere obstacles to my desires. If I were less rooted in this perspective, if I could genuinely respect his convictions and his needs, I would not only appreciate his separateness but stop experiencing it as a form of separation. Indeed, insofar as I am tempted, however impotently, to manoeuvre or manipulate the other person when he will not or cannot oblige me, I cannot be said to acknowledge his separateness from me - not fully at any rate.

What it means for two people to be separate individuals, for each to be who he is, shows itself in the impossibility of your taking my decisions, facing my difficulties, feeling my distress, loving or dying in my place, and vice versa. But what sort of impossibility is this? You could, of course, make a decision for me. In one kind of case I ask you to decide for me how to invest a sum of money I have inherited. Here I take responsibility for what I do, namely for putting my trust in your judgment and following your advice. So, despite the fact that you decide where I should invest my money, the decision to do what you tell me remains mine, and I still do what I decide. In a different and contrasting case, I turn my problems over to you and submit to your decision. Here the decision you take for me is not my decision, and what I do as a result does not come from me. Since that decision does not engage my responsibility, it remains true that in this second case too you have not taken my decision. Here there is no decision that is mine. So in neither of these two contrasting cases would we say that you had taken my decision. Where I assume responsibility for what you tell me to do, what I do comes from me; and where I don't, the actions in which I conform to your will are not 'mine' in the strong sense under consideration. We

could say that what I am willing to take responsibility for determines the boundaries of what comes from me.

Similarly, you can give me not only advice, but sympathy and support, put yourself out for me; you may even hold me together when I am falling apart. But you cannot make me whole. Whatever it is that I owe to other people, my wholeness, like my convictions, has to come from me. And if you wish me to accept something, a gift or a proposition, then I accept it only if I want to, only when I am genuinely persuaded. Then and only then am I the one who says 'Yes' or 'Thank you'. This too marks our separateness in the sense under consideration.

We could say that there is necessarily a limit, a logical limit, to what another person can do for me, and I for him or her. I may actively seek to realize what is in his best interest, for instance, but if I am to succeed he must see what is in question as being in his best interest and want it for that reason. Even if he does, however, he may still say, 'I would rather achieve it without your help and for myself'. This need not be an expression of ingratitude.

He may, on the other hand, not do so, he may take the easy way out, even make a habit of it. Such a person has given up the struggle for autonomy, the struggle to establish himself as an independent person. A child who does so, especially if there is collusion with one of his parents or with both, remains undifferentiated from them, becomes a mere extension of or appendage to his parents. To the extent to which a person is someone's

shadow, in this sense, especially when he harbours no resentment for it in his heart, he is not a separate being. His life is not his own.

So human beings are necessarily separate from each other insofar as they are individuals in their own right and have separate identities. But insofar as they can sink their identity, return to an early form of relationship dating back to the time before they had been emotionally weaned from their mother, then that far they will not have a separate identity to assume in their personal relationships. So anything there that brings the other person's separateness into prominence will be experienced by them as underlining their separation. They will not be able to apprehend it as anything other than a form of separation.

2. PROUST AND SOLIPSISTIC LOVE

But, and this is my second question, is it impossible to apprehend it any other way? Is human separateness something that cannot but separate people from each other? Does it constitute an unbridgeable gulf between them? Proust's narrator Marcel thinks so. Indeed he is acutely aware of this separateness, especially in the women he loves, and he experiences it as a form of separation which he finds agonizing.

His first anguishing experience of this separateness takes us back to the time when his mother, detained by guests, was unable to come up to his room as usual to kiss him goodnight. In that kiss, he tells us later, he used to find 'that untroubled peace which no mistress, in later years, has ever been able to give me, since one

doubts them even at the moment when one believes in them, and never can possess their hearts as I used to receive, in a kiss, my mother's heart, whole and entire, without qualm or reservation, without the smallest residue of an intention that was not for me alone'. In that kiss, the giving of it and its reception, we have a relationship in which the participants remain undifferentiated, at least in Marcel's mind and feelings.

When his mother is unable to give him that habitual kiss Marcel becomes aware that she does not live wholly for him, that she has a life of her own, one which involves other relations, other intimacies, and so contains much that is unknown to him. It is this realization that he finds shattering, all the more so because the way he has been over-protected has deprived him of the opportunity to differentiate himself from his mother, and from his grandmother too, to develop a separate identity - 'I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my soul'. It is as if the constant support which has prevented a child from learning to stand on his feet were suddenly withdrawn. Marcel's anguish when his mother is unable to kiss him goodnight is the spiritual counterpart of the terror which such a child would feel.

It 'migrates' into his later loves and carries with it there the whole state of mind and pattern of attitudes and responses of which it is a part:

It was no longer the peace of my mother's kiss at Combray that I felt when I was with Albertine on these evenings, but, on the contrary, the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me goodnight, or even did not come

up to my room at all, either because she was cross with me or was kept downstairs by guests. The anguish ... which for a time had specialized in love and which, when the separation, the division of the passions occurred, had been assigned to love alone, now seemed once more to be extending to them all, to have become indivisible again, as in my childhood, as though all my feelings, which trembled at the thought of my not being able to keep Albertine by my bedside, at once as a mistress, a sister, a daughter, and a mother too, of whose regular goodnight kiss I was beginning once more to feel a childlike need, had begun to coalesce, to become unified in the premature evening of my life which seemed fated to be as short as a winter day.

This state of mind, pattern of responses, is resurrected by features in the opposite sex which, in Marcel's awareness, brings into prominence the other person's separateness from him. This reminds him, not in words but in his emotions, of his own incompleteness, and arouses in him the desire to merge his identity with that of the other person. This experience is, Proust argues, what we call 'being in love'. Thus just as it is not the attraction of water that make a man thirsty for it, but his experience of its lack in him that make him crave for water, so it is his thirst for what he finds inaccessible, the experience of his own incompleteness, that inspires his love. What inspires it thus is not anything outside his soul. Marcel describes it as 'a mental state' which has 'no real connection' with the beloved. It is, in this sense, solipsistic: 'not so much a love for her as a love in myself'. It brings him in touch with himself, with those aspects of his soul it resurrects, but veils the beloved from him.

The person on whom this love is directed is thus not so much the real person as a creature of Marcel's phantasy. The real person,

like a magnifying glass, only serves to focus his phantasies on one point. The image which belongs to these phantasies comes between him and her. He cannot see her independently of this image and so feels he cannot touch her: 'Just as an incandescent body that is brought into proximity with something wet never actually touches its moisture, since it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation'. Consequently, he cannot hold Albertine's interest, find in her the response for which he craves, and only succeeds in touching what is 'no more than the sealed envelope of a person'.

In short, the 'direct object' of Marcel's love is a creature of his phantasy, and the real woman only its precipitating cause, a catalyst which serves to start the series of reactions I have tried to summarize: 'showcases (as Proust puts it) for the very perishable collections of one's own mind'.

A certain similarity exists (he writes), although the type evolves, between all the women we successively love, a similarity that is due to the fixity of our temperament, which chooses them, eliminating all those who would not be at once our opposite and our complement, apt, that is to say, to gratify our senses and to wring our hearts. They are, these women, a product of our temperament, an image, an inverted projection, a negative of our sensibility.

The love which develops this negative is 'pre-existent and mobile'. It comes 'to rest on the image of a woman simply because that woman will be almost impossible of attainment... A whole series of agonies develops [then] and is sufficient to fix our love definitely upon her

who is its almost unknown object. Our love becomes immense, and we never dream how small a place in it the real woman occupies.'

In 'The Fugitive' he reflects:

A man has almost always the same way of catching a cold, of falling ill; that is to say, he requires for it to happen a particular combination of circumstances; It is natural that when he falls in love he should love a certain type of woman, a type which for that matter is very widespread.

In this sense, he writes, 'my choice of a woman was not entirely free', it was 'directed in a manner that was perhaps predetermined'. But it was directed 'towards something more considerable than an individual, towards a type of woman, and this removed all necessity from my love for Albertine'. Proust's argument is that the object of Marcel's love, what I have called its 'indirect object', was not unique. 'She is legion (he writes). And yet she is compact and indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other.' He continues:

The truth is that this woman has merely raised to life, by a sort of magic, countless elements of tenderness existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has assembled, joined together, bridging every gap between them, and it is we ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it arises that even if we are only one among a thousand to her and perhaps the last of them all, to us she is the only one, the one towards whom our whole life gravitates.

Proust is arguing that to the person in love the beloved appears as unique and irreplaceable, but that this is an illusion created by the affective perspective of such love. The particular combination of attributes which precipitates the state of soul in us we call 'being in love' is repeatable. A chance meeting with another woman who has them could have started in us that same complex process of reactions which could have made her, this other woman, the phenomenal object of our present love.

Proust thus depicts and gives us an analysis of a particular form of love, one in which while we are in constant interaction with the beloved person we are not in real contact with her. This lack of contact which takes the form of 'introversion', or turning inwards on oneself, coupled with a haunting sense of the beloved person's inaccessibility, is part of the momentum of such love. It fuels the longing which is at the heart of it.

This is a longing to unite one's life with that of the beloved, 'to penetrate another life', but Marcel feels that it is doomed to be defeated by the separateness that characterizes the existence of human beings as individuals. Thus on his first encounter with Albertine, whose name he doesn't yet know, he reflects:

If we thought that the eyes of such a girl were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we sense that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition; that it is the dark shadows, unknown to us, of the ideas that that person cherishes about the people and places she knows the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the

plans that she is forming or that others have formed for her; and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will.

Marcel is speaking here of what makes a person fully a person, one who has a life such as only a creature who speaks a language can have, a person as opposed to a thing, and as such the particular person he or she is. It is this which makes for the inevitable separateness of human beings from one another, that separateness which in the case of those he loves and needs fuels Marcel's imagination and yearning:

I knew (he says) that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire, a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be fulfilled.

It is the fact that she has a life of her own, one in which he can at best have only a partial place, that awakens this yearning in him, one he knows to be doomed to turn into anguish. The fact that he finds her 'impregnated with so much that was unknown, so apparently inaccessible' sustains it.

To possess what was in Albertine's eyes means to know every thought of her, everything she has known, experienced, enjoyed, and to become part of it. Hence later when he discovers that 'she existed on so many planes and embodied so many days that had passed' her beauty becomes 'almost heartrending'. Beneath her rose-pink face he feels 'there yawned like a gulf the inexhaustible

expanse of the evenings when I had not known Albertine'. So he compares her to 'a stone which encloses the salt of immemorial oceans or the light of a star'.

To possess what was in her eyes also means to keep her thoughts, her interests, her will directed to him. Yet to try to do this is like trying to freeze a smile or domesticate a wild beast; and this is an impossibility. For a smile is a smile only when it moves. Freeze it, through a paralysis of the face, so that it no longer varies with the circumstances, and you no longer have a smile. By the same token, domesticate a wild beast, tame a lion, and it will no longer have that about it which keeps you in awe of it.

It is the same with a person. For, as Proust puts it, 'a person does not stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourselves, like a garden at which we gaze through a railing, but is a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love'. A person too is mobile. He can take us into his confidence, share his hopes and worries with us, take an interest in and respond to our hopes and worries, or he may move away, turn to us the cold face of indifference. He may even try to deceive, cheat or make use of us. This is something you cannot make otherwise without killing the spirit in him or driving him away. You can, of course, trust him, build a relationship in which you put your faith in him. But the fact that you cannot have a cast-iron guarantee while he remains alive, mobile and free, does not make such trust impossible - any more than the fact that the kind of

justification which the philosophical sceptic seeks cannot be obtained make knowledge impossible.

3. IS OUR SEPARATENESS A FORM OF SEPARATION?

So far I have commented on Marcel's personal response to the separateness of human beings as individuals. He was intensely aware of it, as we have seen, and it led him to discover an authentic form of love of which Proust has given us a penetrating analysis, one that is conceptual in character and, therefore, of philosophical interest. I now turn to the question I raised earlier but have not yet answered: Does the separateness of human beings from each other constitute an unbridgeable gulf between them? We have seen that it can, and also how it may come to do so. My question is whether it must. Proust's answer is in the affirmative.

The bonds between ourselves and another person (he writes) exist only in our minds... Notwithstanding the illusion by which we want to be duped... we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying.

His view is that if we cannot find oneness or reciprocity in the intimacy of love, there is no hope of finding it anywhere. He says:

We think we know what things are like and what people think for the simple reason that this doesn't matter to us. But the moment we burn with the desire to know, like the jealous man does, then it is a dizzying kaleidoscope where we no longer distinguish anything.

Proust understands well that we can only know others in the contact we make with them, and he is right in thinking that neutrality and 'objectivity' are not the way to such knowledge. On the other hand, because in his mind the desire to know has come to be entangled with the desire to possess or appropriate, the only way of coming to know another person seems to him to be irremediably blocked by the inevitable separateness of the knower from the known, of the lover from the beloved. This is one reason why he thinks that we cannot know people in the sense of touch them affectively and in turn respond to them in a way that brings us together. I put in this last proviso because we can make contact with other people in conflict and enmity too. But hatred and conflict separate people, and Proust is interested in what, if anything, can bring two people together. If nothing can, then indeed we are alone.

Proust's whole novel is pervaded with this sense of isolation. The thought that the closer we come to another person the more clearly we see the distance that separates us is everywhere in the novel. It is only when we are at a distance from others that we fail to perceive this unbridgeable gulf. Proust thinks so because he identifies all interest in another person and desire for intimacy with the desire to possess him or her, to fuse one's identity with his or hers, to appropriate it. But there is no reason to suppose that everyone's soul burns with the same desire. I mentioned Freud at the beginning of my talk who claimed that those who are unable to grow out of their early undifferentiated state will seek to return to it in their adult sexual life. Love for them will be the name for the desire and pursuit of this original symbiotic whole. But Freud did not claim that this is so for everyone. Whether or not it is so turns,

in his view, on whether or not a person has been able to resolve his 'Oedipus conflict', that is differentiated himself from his mother and come to terms with his feelings of rivalry with his father - that is in the case of the male child. But the female child too has to come to terms with being weaned from a similar relationship with her mother, even if from then on her development takes a somewhat different course.

There is certainly a sense (as we have seen) in which each of us necessarily is outside the life and responses of any other human being, however close we may be to one another. For it is he who lives that life, not us, and if those responses do not come from him he will not be in them. What we receive from him as a result of manipulation cannot, therefore, be what he gives us. If what we want from him is something to which he is related externally, like his money, then this poses no problem, provided we know how to get it and possess the means to do so. But if what we want is something to which he is related internally, such as his love, regard, esteem, confirmation, or co-operation, then what we obtain by manipulation, deceit or force will not be what we want. Indeed we cannot have what we want from him without his consent or on false pretences; and if we get his consent and freely receive from him what we want, there is still no way of ensuring that we shall keep it.

But what follows from this? Only that for there to be reciprocity we must care for each other, have a common purpose, work for the same things, or have the same values and ideals at heart. There is, however, nothing about the logic of human existence which rules this out. What we must recognize is that while any of the above

conditions can obtain, none of them is something we control. That another person reciprocates my love or friendship, for instance, is something gratuitous. I may appreciate this while I have it; but if I am losing it I can easily come to feel impotent despair or anger, though I need not, of course, do so. If I think that what is outside my control is beyond my reach then I shall come to think of the heart and will of other people as inaccessible to me. I might consequently feel cut off from them. It is when I am under the sway of what Freud called 'omnipotent thinking' that when I am losing the love of the person I love, her inevitable separateness from me takes on the appearance of a gulf that separates us. Indeed the more I struggle against it the more will I succeed in turning what is only an appearance into a reality by driving her away. Paradoxically, it is I who am secreting the distance that is opening up between us by trying to control the relationship.

What we need to appreciate - and here there is much that a philosopher can elucidate - is that the separateness I have been commenting on far from being a gulf between us, unless of course we make it so, is in fact a necessary condition of friendship, love and human give and take. Just as my left hand cannot take what my right hand is giving, or my right hand give it to my left hand, so equally I cannot really love someone with whom I have identified myself to the extent that I do not feel her to have an identity apart from mine. The wonder of friendship and the magic of love depend on the separateness of friends and lovers; it is this which make their response to one another a gift, something they can treasure. Without it, where the other person becomes a mere shadow or extension of one, one only loves oneself in her; and in the opposite case, where

one has become no more than an extension of her, one merely participates in her love of herself. There are relationships which approximate these two extremes. The complementarity we may find in them is not real reciprocity, but only collusion. It does not involve real give and take.

I have distinguished between contact and interaction between people. I said that in the form of love which Proust depicts the lover is in constant interaction with the beloved without being in real contact with her. For there to be real contact each person must have an independent identity, and each must be sufficiently autonomous to allow, accept, and indeed welcome the other person's independence, his or her separateness from him. It is through such acceptance that human separateness becomes the space in which personal bonds may be forged. This acceptance is what the Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran sings in his poem about marriage:

You were born together, and together you shall be for
 ever more.
 You shall be together when the white wings of death
 scatter your days.
 Aye, you shall be together even in the silent memory of
 God.
 But let there be spaces in your togetherness.
 And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

To allow spaces in one's togetherness: this, for some people, is the most difficult thing on earth, as it was for Marcel in Proust's novel.

It is only when one cannot accept the other person's separateness, give him or her space in which he or she can be



himself or herself, that this separateness turns into something that separates. Of course, it is not enough that one should be able to accept it; the other person too must be prepared to do the same. Much has to come together, therefore, if what Marcel is depicted in the novel as seeking in vain is to be found. To that extent Proust's pessimism is justified and comes from a deep knowledge of mankind. On the other hand, to see the possibilities which his philosophical reflections led him to rule out one needs to return to and struggle with his philosophical problems. But to discover and realize these possibilities in one's own life is, of course, another matter. And one question is: to what extent is it possible to win through to any philosophical insight here without the kind of personal struggle that calls one's own life into question?

4. CONCLUSION

I do not have the time to answer this question in any detail and so I shall offer the merest indication of an answer to finish with.

I have argued that the separateness which characterizes our existence as adult individuals need not separate us. On the contrary, it underlies the possibility of all forms of intimacy in which we make contact with another human being - in sexual love and in friendship. But the reaching out for another soul which characterizes these forms of intimacy is often defeated by the desire for a kind of union which does not recognize or respect this separateness. To purge one's soul from such a desire, however, is not to turn away from love, but to open oneself to it. It remains true that while one is in the grip of such a desire - and Aristophanes

is right in his speech in the Symposium, it goes very deep in our love life - one cannot appreciate that the alternative to this 'pursuit of the whole' is not self-isolation. Therefore, if one who craves for such a union comes to see, as Marcel did, that it is impossible of attainment, he will either come to suspect that the way he is in himself has something to do with the isolation he cannot overcome, or it will seem to him that inevitably 'the most intimate contact is only of surfaces'. Yet the more entrenched he is in the affective orientation of which this craving is an expression, the less likely he is to be aware of it as something to which there is an alternative. The greater the frequency with which he meets it in other people the more will this confirm him in his view that it reflects something which belongs to the very structure of human existence. He will thus see the separateness of human beings, so firmly fixed in his consciousness, as a form of separation, and be led to think that 'we mortal millions live alone'.³

Here we have a philosophical thought sustained by a particular affective orientation in the person who thinks it. Hence to be purged of it he would have to be prepared to have his soul turned inside out. Only this could shunt him into seeing that his own isolation, seen as duplicated in other people's lives, is conditioned by a very special orientation of self which is not itself inescapable. But even if, as a result, the philosophical thought loses its hold on his thinking, it does not follow that his understanding will have undergone a philosophical transformation.

3. Matthew Arnold, 'Isolation: To Marguerite'

That can only come about with philosophical work; his understanding of the philosophical issues raised by this thought can only be furthered by a consideration of the philosophical issues themselves: What is this union which so many of us crave for in love? Why is it impossible of attainment? Does that impossibility imply that we live in isolation from each other? And may there not be a different kind of oneness, or at least reciprocity, which is compatible with the separateness of human individuals? 'A hand is laid in ours.... and what we mean we say and what we would we know.'⁴ To pursue these questions means working through from conceptual confusion to philosophical clarity. And this is very different from the kind of self-reflection which changes one's affective orientation to people in one's relationships.

We see then that philosophical problems and personal difficulties can come together and intermingle, as they did for Proust. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in his novel depictions of the vicissitudes of the human heart and also philosophical reflections on human existence arising from these depictions. I hope I have been able to give you a sense of the way Marcel's personal problems, depicted in the novel with real psychological insight, turn into Proust's philosophical problems. We have seen that where this is so, to win through to philosophical insight one needs to come to terms with one's personal difficulties. But this does not mean that one's personal struggle will of itself yield philosophical insight. Such a struggle may be necessary, but it is no substitute for philosophical work. That is something that stands on its own feet.

4. Matthew Arnold, 'The Buried Life'

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