

George Eliot and Marcel Proust: The Religious Feeling and the Paradoxical Temporality

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From a philosophical and literary viewpoint, George Eliot (1819-1880) and Marcel Proust (1871-1922) have not been influenced by the same philosophers and writers. However, Proust was fascinated by Eliot's realistic novels. Eliot lived in the Victorian period. Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* was mainly published from 1913 to 1927 (five years after Proust's death). Proust lived during the First World War and was aware of the beginnings of the "Roaring Twenties". Eliot and Proust did not belong to the same literary period. Eliot was close to Romanticism, while Proust was the most important representative of the "stream of consciousness" literary technique (the other main representatives included Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James). Nonetheless, Eliot and Proust shared some concerns for love and happiness. However, they did not embrace the same philosophical approach, although they shared the same interest for Leibniz's philosophy. On one hand, Eliot deepened the dialectics between generosity (and compassion), religious feeling, and anxiety. However, the religious feeling is then closely linked to the possibility of disappointed faith. Anxiety and anguish have conscious and unconscious dimensions that we must learn to unveil in our daily life. On the other hand, Proust developed a dialectics between temporality and the human quest for love, happiness and truth. However, temporality is then paradoxical. It does not have any theoretical self-consistency. In Eliot's novels, we will see how the religious feeling (and the disappointed faith) plays a major role for the development of the dialectics between generosity, religious feeling, and anxiety. In Proust's novels, we will examine how the paradoxical temporality plays a decisive role in the dialectics between paradoxical temporality and the quest for love, happiness, and truth.

George Eliot: The Dialectics Between Generosity, Religious Feeling, and Anxiety

Important events can bring us a new self, and thus a very different existence. However, pride can make us distort the true importance of our own self (Eliot 1986, 551, 625). Eliot (1960, 591) described two opposite modes of existence: either "an easy floating in a stream of joy" or "a quiet resolved endurance and effort". "Floating in a stream of joy" is efficiently coping with our existential predicament, while having "a quiet resolved endurance and effort" involves the path of existential struggles. Eliot (1986, 802) believed that a spiritual life is based on the capacity of thought and especially on joy. Joy expresses our pleasure for others' success and happiness. It allows us to be detached from material goods. Generosity and compassion can be applied in the two opposite modes of existence, since they constitute the basic components of human existence. "Floating in a stream of joy" requires deepening our religious feeling and disappointed faith. Having "a quiet resolved endurance and effort" unveils the conscious and unconscious dimensions of our anxiety/anguish.

The Basic Components of Human Existence: Generosity and Compassion

Generosity and kindness are not enduring passions. They can easily disappear from our mind and heart (Eliot 1960, 10). "Life never seems so clear and easy as when the heart is beating faster at the sight of some generous self-risking deed. We feel no doubt then what is the highest prize the soul can win; we almost believe in our power to attain it" (Eliot 2013c, 1018). Compassion allows us to release ourselves "from the bondage of false concessions" (Eliot 1986, 570). Those concessions are often purely egoistic. Compassion can allow us to deepen our sense of humility. Without compassion and goodwill, we do not necessarily fall into the trap of malevolence. However, we emphasize the experience of egoistic pleasures (Eliot 1986, 660, 759). Egoism can be deeply passionate (Eliot 2013b, 490). Eliot denounced the destructive and pernicious impact of egoism on others' wellbeing (Gatens 2009, 84). Her realistic novels attempted to enhance sympathy and compassion towards suffering people (Greiner 2009, 307). There is a hidden beauty in the "secret of deep human sympathy" (Eliot 2013, 102). Sympathy can be "self-renouncing" (Eliot 2013, 203). It can also be "agonized" (Eliot 2013, 247), or "regretful" (Eliot 2013c, 851). Sympathy is often enthusiastic and passionate. It is especially the case when we deepen our awareness of the "great drama of human existence" in which our own life is a part (Eliot 2013c, 977). Compassion is sympathy towards others' pain (Eliot 2013c, 998). Sympathy can be mixed with generosity, kindness, or melancholy (Eliot 2013, 13, 132; 2013b, 673). "It is in the nature of all human passion, the lowest as well as the highest, that there is a point where it ceases to be properly egoistic, and is like a fire kindled within our being to which everything else in us is mere fuel" (Eliot 2013c, 909). Vices make an integral part of our individual life. We should look at vices in concrete lives rather than abstractly, since they are involved in individual existence (Eliot 1986, 412). In a Rousseauist perspective, Eliot believed in the basic goodness of humankind. However, it does not mean that every thought, word and deed is always impregnated with goodness and generosity. Moral education is required to develop virtuous ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and behaving (Rousseau 1966, 306-309; Eliot 1960, 26; 1986, 37). Eliot asserted that "pity and faithfulness and memory are natural", since they make an integral part of human existence. We can be "haunted by the suffering" we have caused because pity is a natural trend in humankind. Any lack of pity reduces our capacity for unconditional love (Eliot 1960, 552).

"Floating in a Stream of Joy": Deepening our Religious Feeling and Disappointed Faith

Our reason can define the various forms of religious feeling. Newton (2012) explained that in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot emphasized the will and the reason as means "to overcome inclination in regard to moral choice". So, Eliot enhanced the separation of faith and morality from philosophy and science. According to Gatens (2012, 80), the main threat for the growth of human knowledge is "the tendency for a reductively conceived science to fill the gap left by the crisis of faith". Eliot (1906, 14) believed that some people can have a religious feeling without being able to rationalize it. Religion makes human being overcoming his "animalness" (Eliot 1986, 590). In *Middlemarch*, Eliot focused on feeling rather than theoretical reflection (Fay 2017, 120). Appearances can hide the fact that there can be unfulfilled potentialities in our mind and heart (Guth 1999, 923). "Religion can only change when the emotions which fill it are changed" (Eliot 2013b, 596). Love can hardly be distinguished from religious feeling (Eliot 2013, 22). In any religious

feeling, we can identify an aspect of love. In any expression of love, there is an expression of religious feeling.

Eliot (1906, 14-15) unveiled the “anguish of disappointed faith”: when we are subjected to false ideas and beliefs, then our faith will become anxious. A faith-related hope is then transmuted into an existential dread (Eliot 1906, 21). A “disappointed faith” has lost its own grounds. A spiritual dread makes long-lasting uncertainties and doubts arise in our daily life. Believers are then cut off from their original faith. Their energetic certainties are transmuted into doubts (Eliot 1906, 23, 54; 1986, 94, 96, 98, 567; 2013a, 229, 246). Emotions and beliefs are full of energy (Eliot 2013c, 962). Energy is not equivalent to a will. Rather, it is the foundation of any will. Energy is involved in any existentiell decision (Eliot 2013b, 480, 571, 694). “In any case, one can hardly increase appreciably the tremendous uncertainty of life” (Eliot 2013b, 490). The uncertainties of life impact the past, the present, and the future (Eliot 2013b, 547). Our mind and heart could find refuge in our existentiell doubts (Eliot 2013c, 995). However, doubt makes perfect love impossible (Eliot 2013, 297; 2013c, 1013). Doubts can make us fall into a “threatening isolation” (Eliot 2013c, 1018). Eliot (2013b, 660) suggested that pathological doubts can be transformed into groundless moral doubts. Moral doubts can be groundless because of our existential finitude. They can also be groundless, since they have been separated from rationality. Eliot distinguished the realm of mystery and the realm of knowledge. Mystery implies the absence of any reliable knowledge, while knowledge can be partially grounded on realities (Eliot 2013, 29, 120). Faith involves mysteries (Eliot 2013a, 88). It presupposes that the power of mysteries is greater than the power of facts (Eliot 2013b, 650). Human beliefs can never be totalized. There seems to be a strong reluctance to crystallize our beliefs into a stable system (Eliot 1906, 212). Passionate beliefs can radically influence our motives and actions (Eliot 1986, 572). Passions express strength. However, any strength is not necessarily developing our existentiell freedom. “Strength is often only another name for willing bondage to irremediable weakness” (Eliot 2013a, 41).

Faith in God (the “Unseen”) can allow people to better cope with suffering and afflicted emotions. It can be used for controlling our passions and reducing our wants and desires. This is what Eliot called a “self-renouncing faith” (Eliot 1960, 167, 330-331). A self-renouncing attitude requires to neglect our self-love and thus to avoid any egoistic thought, word, and deed. A “crucifixion of our selfish will” is needed to deepen our faith (Eliot 2013b, 640; 2013c, 963). This is the only way to develop the serenity of mind and heart, that is, an “inward peace”. A self-renouncing attitude can have various positive impact on our mind and heart. It can get rid “vain imaginations, evil perturbations, and superfluous cares”. Our “immoderate fear” and “inordinate love” will disappear (Eliot 1960, 353-354, 357). A self-renouncing attitude requires not to “seek my own happiness by sacrificing others” (Eliot 1960, 552). Eliot (1960, 611) knew that a self-renouncing attitude is not an easy way to live. However, denying the possibility to adopt a self-renouncing attitude is falling into the trap of uncontrollable passions. Disliking religious issues reduces the consciousness of our existential limitations and spiritual constraints. Our conscience is built up by various sensibilities and memories (Eliot 1986, 94, 570). However, any “exaggerated sensitiveness” can give birth to illusions (Eliot 2013b, 369). Eliot denounced all forms of superstition as distorted feelings. Superstitions can make us neglect or forget any rational distinction between good and evil (Eliot 2013b, 362). “But in complex a thing as human nature, we must consider, it is hard to find rules without exceptions” (Eliot 2013, 202; 2013a, 215). Any rational distinction between good

and evil takes for granted that human nature is fallible. Human nature involves long-lasting passions, feelings and desires (Eliot 2013a, 147, 154). “Human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth; it does not wait for beauty – it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it” (Eliot 2013, 102). Vicious words and deeds make the frontiers between good and evil fragile (Eliot 2013a, 193). Eliot (2013, 103) asserted that our moral behavior is grounded on feelings rather than ideas and thoughts. We can easily identify the influence of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume 1985) and Rousseau’s *Émile ou de l’éducation* (Rousseau 1966). Feelings provide a specific kind of knowledge (Eliot 2013, 297). However, the various feelings and emotions are not necessarily compatible with each other. There can be a “conflict of feelings” (Eliot 2013b, 565).

Superstitions convey a “blind faith” and create a feeling of wretchedness (Eliot 2013b, 365; 2013c, 915, 941-943, 956, 977, 1074, 1082). Eliot (2013, 224) identified the possibility of contradiction between the feeling of wretchedness and the feeling of exultation towards our own life. The feeling of wretchedness could make us lose the courage to face our own death, while the feeling of exultation strongly enhances our state of “being in life”. The feeling of wretchedness can be dreadful. It can affect one’s spiritual condition (Eliot 2013b, 621, 640). Eliot (2013, 195) referred to “convulsive, motiveless actions by which wretched men and women leap from a temporary sorrow into a lifelong misery”. Eliot (2013c, 784) quoted Epictetus (Arrien 2000, 68): “For men are disturbed not by things themselves, but by their opinions or thoughts concerning those things”. Adopting a new attitude opens the way to new interpretations (Eliot 2013b, 574). The religious life can provide us the highest refuge from personal trouble (Eliot 1986, 507-508). Our soul is “a temple of remembrance where the treasures of knowledge enter and the inner sanctuary is hope” (Eliot 1986, 555). God is the Invisible and the Inexplicable (Eliot 1906, 3, 101). God is the Omnipresent that makes all beings, things and phenomena interconnected (Eliot 1986, 812). People who do not have any “enthusiastic religious faith” may use their imagination to develop and strengthen their desires and hopes. However, their reminiscences from the past can nurture their existential fears (Eliot 1906, 3-4). Faith is a strong power to resist self-despair (Eliot 1986, 867). We should remain humble, when deepening the “mysteries of God’s dealings” (Eliot 2013, 104). God can be understood as “a supreme and righteous Ruler” (Eliot 2013c, 874). Everything comes from God. Our capacity for love and inner peace is grounded on God’s Will. God is the ultimate ground for our own soul. God’s Will is “holy, just, and good” (Eliot 2013, 16, 19, 27). God is the “loving, infinite Presence” in our own soul (Eliot 2013, 22, 69). The infinite Presence is “the presence of the living God” and “the Unknown towards which we have sent forth irrepressible cries in our loneliness” (Eliot 2013, 261, 284). Eliot (2013c, 912) believed that only a just and loving soul can counterbalance the radical effect of existential loneliness. According to Eliot (2013c, 937), faith gives us a “large freedom of the soul”. Faith requires the strong belief that “the being who is nearest to us is greater than ourselves”. In a Schleiermacherian way (Schleiermacher 1944, 143-205), Eliot (2013c, 890) referred to “the passionate sense of the infinite”. Faith is thus inherently passionate (Eliot 2013c, 963). That is why a “loving faith” is possible (Eliot 2013b, 300).

“Having Quiet Resolved Endurance and Effort”: Unveiling Conscious and Un-conscious Dimensions of Anxiety/Anguish

Eliot (1986, 791) defined the strength of humankind as “the balance between separateness and communication”. Separateness implies differences, while communication re-

fers to commonalities between all human beings. Eliot's ethics reflected the emphasis on both aspects of human predicament (Albrecht 2012, 392, 399). Being with others is exercising our existential freedom "in-front-of-others" and "in-the-world". Nemoianu (2010, 77-78) explained that our releasement from any form of existential bondage gives birth to freedom. However, such existential freedom is never unconditioned. It is rather determined by various conditioning factors. It is especially the case with any revolutionary cause that involves ideological thought. Having a revolutionary spirit is working "all our life long against privilege, monopoly, and oppression". Any revolutionary spirit attempts "to correct the moral rules of the world" (Eliot 2013a, 95, 97). It is basically an issue of social justice (Eliot 2013b, 554). We need to check to what extent our ideological thoughts and beliefs can be criticized from a moral viewpoint. "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (Eliot 2013b, 595). Criticizing ideologies is unveiling its inner contradictions. In our world, we can perceive many contradictions. However, it does not mean that such contradictions are real. In concrete life and ideological thoughts, apparent contradictions may arise from our misunderstanding of events, situations, and phenomena (Eliot 1986, 267). Some words can "cover different meanings to different minds" (Eliot 2013b, 328). Thus, we should criticize our own interpretations/reinterpretations of worldly events and phenomena. According to Langland (1994, 90-91), Eliot's literary realism emphasized "narrative probability" rather than simple possibilities. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot unveiled realities as they are reflected in the observer's mind. She did not presuppose that the meaning of realities is constantly changing. Eliot (2013, 165) referred to "an ingenious web of probabilities – the surest screen a wise man can place between himself and the truth".

Our skills can be unconscious. Dreaming is being unconscious of concrete efforts and requirements for a given behavior. We can be unconscious of others' influence on our own way of thinking, speaking, feeling, and behaving (Eliot 2013, 17, 24, 57-58, 64). We could be unaware of realistic dangers and threats as well as our surrounding environment (Eliot 2013, 166, 238; 2013c, 987, 995). Our actions and attitudes can be unconsciously driven (Eliot 2013, 259; 2013c, 929). Tressler (2011, 484) explained that double consciousness refers to "the state of semi-conscious reverie in which conscious thought is temporarily suspended". Eliot's realistic novels unveiled the probability of double consciousness in our daily life (Eliot 1986, 691). Self-consciousness has corporeal effects (Eliot 2013c, 1015). We usually attribute consciousness to some thoughts and emotions (Eliot 2013, 60). "Prudent resolution" can be grounded on our self-consciousness (Eliot 2013, 72). Eliot (2013, 90) explained that a "confused self-consciousness" can give birth to an excess of indifference. Eliot (2013, 113) insisted on our consciousness of some past events, since those events can still influence our way of thinking, speaking, feeling, and behaving. Our emotions are subtly connected to our remembrance of things past. We can then understand why Proust loved Eliot's novels. Proust and Eliot shared the same interpretation of our "living past". We can "enrich our present with our most precious past" (Eliot 2013, 287). However, we can be subjected to the power of some past events. If so, then we lose part of our freedom (Eliot 2013b, 581). The intensity of our self-consciousness can be determined by the "outward stillness" (Eliot 2013, 175).

Even without memory, the life is bound into one by a zone of dependence in growth and decay; but intense memory forces a man to own his blameworthy past. With memory set smarting like a reopened wound, a man's past is not simply a dead history, an outworn

preparation of the present: it is not a repented error shaken loose from the life; it is a still quivering part of himself, bringing shudders and bitter flavors and the tinglings of a merited shame (Eliot 2013b, 593).

We should never wish to get rid of the past, when looking at our own future. Our future can never arise without “the ties of the past”. Those ties are not equivalent to reminiscences from the past, but rather to “feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds” (Eliot 1960, 545). If ties of the past do not exist, then our duties are groundless. We would then be subjected to the requirements of the present moment. The ties of the past allow us to build up our moral duties and to comply with such duties (Eliot 1960, 585). Our past experiences are true experiences that can still influence our present and future (Eliot 1906, 16). Eliot (1906, 191) asserted that we can become fully aware of the basic unity between our past and our present. Consciousness is closely linked to Time, particularly to the present (Eliot 2013, 260). Sometimes we can feel “the wide distance between our present and past self” (Eliot 2013c, 961).

Anxiety depends on promise and hope. Being anxious is “making an indefinite promise to an indefinite hope” (Eliot 1986, 765). Anxiety can arise, when being in touch with others (Eliot 2013, 26, 31, 45-46, 89, 176, 243, 256-257; 2013a, 224, 23; 2013b, 374). Anxiety can also be related to a troubled mind and heart (Eliot 2013, 53). The arising of anxiety can be caused by a changing environment (Eliot 2013b, 688, 692). The object of anxiety lies in the powerful character of our future feelings and deeds (Eliot 2013, 181, 256, 269). Anxieties are often expressed through corporeal effects (Eliot 2013b, 592; 2013c, 783, 827, 853). They can reflect lived experiences in given realms of social life (Eliot 2013c, 896). However, anxiety can become excessive anxiety as a pathological form of anxiety (“overanxiety”: Eliot 2013, 27; 2013c, 884) or as an existentiell anguish. We can identify various objects, beings, events and phenomena that make us anxious. However, being anguish seems to be groundless. We can never reach the true origin of such encompassing feeling (Eliot 2013, 245, 247). Someone can accept to feel existentiell anguish, since such feeling opens the way to a “great end”. It is then a conscious self-sacrifice (Eliot 2013c, 756). Unlike anxiety, anguish does not necessarily provoke corporeal change (Eliot 2013b, 687). Anguish is a deep feeling we can try to strongly repress (Eliot 2013c, 856). Anxiety seems to prepare our mind and heart to develop a mode of anguish. Being anxious does not necessarily give birth to a psychological state of anguish. However, being anguish requires prior experiences of anxiety. Existentiell anguish can never be isolated from the growing development of anxious experiences in our daily life. There can be conscious and unconscious dimensions in every anxious experience. Even the state of existentiell anguish is not necessarily conscious throughout our life. Eliot rightly explained the connectedness between anxiety and anguish. She did not address the existentiell issues related to anguish. However, Eliot knew the difference between anxiety and anguish.

Marcel Proust: The Dialectics Between Paradoxical Temporality and the Quest for Love, Happiness and Truth

In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the notion of Time is constantly developed in various ways. It is clearly the focus of that novel. However, living “in-time” is not described in a linear manner. There is a basic flexibility between the past, the present, and the future. A non-linear conception of temporality unveils how the past can still influence our present and how the future can play a decisive role in our present choices and decisions. In one's life, there is an interconnectedness between the past and the present,

between the present and the future, and even between the past and the future. But such non-linear conception of Time has deep (and paradoxical) consequences for the way we live "in-time". It is especially true for the way we pursue our quest for love, happiness, and truth. Proust enlightened how the non-linear dimension of human temporality affects our existentiell search for love, happiness, and truth.

The Paradoxical Temporality

In every human life, Time passes (Proust 2001a, 502). Daily time is elastic. Our passions make our temporality expand. But the passions we inspire to others make our temporality radically shrink (Proust 1987, 295). In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, we can identify five basic components of our "paradoxical temporality": the meaning of our existence "in-time" is that our being is "in-time", while having a "timeless being"; Time is simultaneously creative and destructive; our "future-oriented past" and our "here-and-now" are interconnected; existing is becoming oneself "in-front-of-others"; time and memories have limited power on human existence.

First Component: Living "in-time" Means that Being "in-time" is Having a "Timeless Being"

Memory makes our past emerging in the present moment. In doing so, it inevitably attempts to change the past. Nonetheless, such illusory attempt annihilates a great dimension of Time, that is, our capacity to reinvent the past in our here-and-now (Proust 1972, 422). Our past is remoulded and actualized in our present. We are not always deeply aware that our past is still present in our present moment. The process of internalization allows us to reach the depths of our changing self. Some past events are still living in our self (Proust 1972, 428, 440-441). Our memories reflect a meaningful past that emerges from the events themselves. Events and phenomena constitute the conventional and crystallized reality that is prone to deny the existence of any other meaningful past. Crystallizing the past is reducing the set of meanings drawn from past events and phenomena. The meaning of our daily life needs the meaningfulness of our past events and memories (Proust 1972, 257). The essence of things, beings, events and phenomena is not external to our own self. Rather, it is our own self (Proust 1993, 55). We "are" the essence of external things, beings, events and phenomena, since our own self continuously internalizes them. This is equivalent to the awareness of "a timeless being within oneself", said Dancy (1995, 22, 26). According to Proust (1972, 259), an enduring part of our self overcomes the superposition of our identity-related layers. Everybody who lives "in-time" is also a "timeless being". This is the first component of our paradoxical temporality.

The Second Component: Time Creates Renewal, While Making Everything Degenerate

Time creates something new for every existing being. Time can make forgiveness, forgetfulness and indifference coexist (Proust 1972, 321, 323, 353). Time modifies circumstances (Proust 1972, 267-268). We could even consider that Time is an artist, said Proust (1972, 306). If so, then the works of art are the only means to recover lost time (Proust 1972, 262). Nonetheless, Time gives birth to forgetfulness. Forgetfulness makes our notion of Time change. Beings, things and phenomena always deeply affect the notion of Time. Beings, things and phenomena always remain perishable (Proust 2001, 174, 248). Forgetfulness is the realm of nothingness, while memories constitute the realm of reality (1987b, 118-119, 251). The world in which we live is the realm of nothingness (Proust

2000, 264-265). If everything is perishable, then it is "going-to-nothingness". Death opens the way to the infinite and to nothingness (Proust 2001a, 872).

Clock time is a distortion of human temporality (Proust 1987c, 151). According to De Renéville (1985, 228), Proust have described time as an integral part of human existence. He did not refer to the "objective clock-time". Time is something that we cannot own, since we are "in-time". De Renéville suggested that Proust's notion of time is quite close to Heidegger's concept of time. However, Proust has not analyzed time as an existential-ontological category. Proust's and Heidegger's perspective converge to a point: the measurement of time makes it public. So, every form of "nowness" can be compared to multiple others. As Heidegger (1962, 470) rightly said, public time unveils "a present-at-hand multiplicity of nows". The flow of time is the archetype of degeneration. We usually live as though Time could not affect us. Nonetheless, Time is continuously degrading our own existence (Proust 1987, 144). Time destroys every being, thing, event, or phenomenon. It continuously causes a radical change in the essence of all beings, things, events, and phenomena (Proust 1972, 300; 2019, 135). From a chronological viewpoint (clock-time), Time is the infinite succession of "nows". Every instant is constantly dying and giving birth to the next moment. If the flow of time expresses degeneration, then every temporal being, thing, event or phenomenon is also constantly degenerating. Time is essentially degeneration. That is why Eternity cannot be a dimension of Time. Eternity excludes any form of degeneration. Every temporally based being is perishable, while an "Eternal Being" can never degenerate. Perishable beings, things and phenomena are ever-changing and degenerating. Degenerating things, beings and phenomena can never be totally seized, since their "essence" is constantly changing. We always attempt to grasp "reality-as-it-is". Unfortunately, we are continuously finding nothingness. Time makes things, beings, events and phenomena degenerate. This is the second component of our paradoxical temporality.

The Third Component: Our "Future-Oriented Past" and Our Here-and-Now Are Interconnected

We always imagine that our present experience is radically different from our past experiences (Proust 1995, 429). Consciously or not, the future inhabits our mind and heart (Proust 1987b, 106). Nonetheless, something seems not to be absorbed by nothingness, argued Proust (1995, 395). Reality seems to be reluctant to be absorbed by nothingness. It is particularly true for memories. Nothingness is contradicted by the reminiscences of past events. If nothingness were overwhelming, then there would never be any reminiscence of past events. Memories deny the overwhelming power of nothingness (Proust 1987b, 251). Reminiscences of past events are constantly moving. When the past (our present memories) were the present (as a living experience), it was oriented towards the future. Due to the flow of time, this future has become the past. A "future-oriented past" has been safeguarded in our memory, insofar as it has not been realized until now. Such future has been transformed into a past (Proust 2001, 71, 139). Preserving the future cannot be realized by the immediate joy of the present moment. The "future-oriented past" can only be preserved through the wise thoughts that come from the past (Proust 1987a, 201). A "future-oriented past" can be still a "possibility-to-be", that is, a choice that allows us to become "who-we-would-like-to-be". It can be realized in our personalized "here-and-now". Focusing on the present moment cannot preserve such "future-oriented past". We can avoid the degeneration of our "future-oriented past" in reminding the "lessons of wisdom" we have drawn from past events. Some past events

are intrinsically related to our “future-oriented past”. We have learned a lot from such events. Reminding such learning could make our “future-oriented past” arise in our personalized “here-and-now”. Durán (1991, 77) rightly suggested that Proust’s notion of “lost time” implies that the past still exists. If the past still exists, then it can be “recovered” or “recaptured” in a very different way. The loss of time is actuated by the search for our lost time, said Earle (2002, 950). We cannot know the existence of our lost time before searching for it. We do not have to subject ourselves to past events, since we must continuously decide “who-we-would-like-to-be”. Nonetheless, our “future-oriented past” could give us new possibilities-to-be. It can even provide and strengthen relevant “world-dreams” for our personalized “here-and-now”.

The “future-oriented past” in the here-and-now is qualitatively different than its original substance and scope. We cannot actualize the “future-oriented past”, while safeguarding the past as time period. We “live-in” a personalized “here-and-now”. The context has changed. The way the “future-oriented past” will be realized cannot be compared to the probable way it would have been actualized in its “original present”. Everything that has existed is prone to reappear (Proust 1993, 377). However, when something reappears, it is never the same as the way it has appeared in the past (Proust 2000, 70). Events have a threefold temporal structure: (1) the temporality of their historically based breakthrough: every event conveys its “having-been” that is historically induced, (2) the temporality of the future-focused orientation: every event reflects “what-it-is”, (3) the temporality of retrospective outlook: every event can make the past arise in the present (Proust 2000, 386). The future could already inhabit our mind/heart, even unconsciously. Our thoughts and words could make such future more decisive in a short delay, or in a very long-run (Proust 1987b, 106). The third aspect of our paradoxical temporality is the interconnectedness between our future-oriented past and our here-and-now.

The Fourth Component: Existing is Becoming Oneself “In-Front-of-Others”

“Existentiell decisiveness” requires choosing our “future-oriented past” as our utmost possibility-to-be. Being “in-time” is being a “self-in-a-world”. Every self is made of innumerable selves that successively die. Every self is made of an overlay of successive states of mind/heart (Proust 1965, 207; 1972, 259-260; 2001, 14, 126). In a Leibnizian way, Proust asserted that there is a very long distance between our intelligence and our heart (Proust 1987c, 85; Leibniz 2008). The superposition of identity-related layers is not immutable. Rather, it is always changing. Some layers are suddenly crystallized, while others are degenerating (Proust 1972, 375; 2001, 126). We are continuously becoming who-we-are. Human being can never go out of himself/herself, except when he/she is loving someone (Proust 2019, 72). Even imitating someone is not becoming him/her. It is only a way to renew our “becoming-oneself”. It is a mode of “becoming-oneself”. Internalizing processes allow us to deepen our self-understanding and to improve our understanding of others’ self (Proust 2001, 34). There is a gap between our self-image and others’ perception of our own self (Proust 1995, 277). We absolutely want to avoid self-contempt (Proust 1987c, 35). Our self-identity is influenced by the discrepancy between our desired self-projection and others’ perception of our self. Our self-identity is created “in-front-of-others”. We need others’ self-identity to define our own. We can even allow others to become who-they-are. Everything in our inner life is intertwined and overlapped (Proust 2000, 241). We are always involved in a movement of self-transcendence (Proust 1993, 97). Choosing our thoughts, words, feelings, attitudes and actions is ex-

ploring the depths of our “becoming-oneself”. However, any self is “in-a-world” and “with-others”. We cannot identify our own self without being “in-front-of-others”. Our “in-the-worldliness” is closely linked to our existentiell “being-in-front-of-others”. Such existentiell positioning could eventually provoke misunderstandings and conflicts as much as understanding and peace. Everybody is temporally conditioned and existentially “being-free”. The existentiell-ontic expressions of our being-free imply temporally based choice of possibilities-to-be. “Existentiell decisiveness” unveils such temporally based choice of possibilities-to-be. Those choices are crucial for our existentiell project-to-be. They allow us to create our self-identity. The fourth component of our paradoxical temporality is our becoming-oneself in our world and with others.

The Fifth Component: Time and Memories Have Limited Power on Human Existence

We can never know our whole self (Proust 2000, 140). Sometimes, we need to leave our own self and be in touch with others’ self (Proust 1995, 148). But we cannot leave our self since we “are” our own self. We know others through our self’s perspective (Proust 2001, 34, 148). Language cannot express the depths of our soul (Proust 1987, 223). Education reflects part of our soul (Proust 1987b, 153). Our memories about past events extend to the future. They let room for the various conditioning factors that precede those past events. Memories about past events have modified them (Proust 2000, 386). Our “total soul” would then include our unconscious or forgotten memories (Balsamo 2008, 457). Our “total soul” can never be totally recovered (Proust 1987b, 237). The “unknown realm” within the depths of our soul gathers our memories of past events and phenomena (Proust 1972, 258; 1987b, 238). Our own self and life remain unknowable. Proust (1972, 368-369) defined the “limited” power of Time and the “limited” power of memory. Time can modify our own self. Such power of impairing our self is not affected by our memory. However, Time can never change others’ perception of our own self. The crystallized power of memories reduces the power of Time on our daily life. When we are not subjected to doubt, then our expectation of future pleasures requires the multiplicity of anticipated representations. Time is divided in very small temporal units (Proust 1995, 393). Throughout the whole History, human being expresses the same angry, sadness, and courage, regardless of changing situations and successive generations. Such emotions make an integral part of our humanity (Proust 1970, 97-98; 1972, 317). But unlimited courage, infinite hope and devotion for others’ wellbeing are also noble components of human life (Proust 2019, 107-108). The elapsed time makes us forget our past antipathy and disdain. We even forget the true grounds for such antipathy and disdain. Everybody feels that he/she has an unceasingly increased temporality. However, our place within Time can never be precisely measured, since it is highly subjective (Proust 1972, 375, 439-440). We can recover past experiences and representations. However, nobody can never destroy Time (Proust 1987c, 41). We can recover the sensations related to our past experiences. Nonetheless, Time can hinder us to identify the nature of such sensations (Proust 1965, 59). The fifth component of our paradoxical temporality is the limited power of Time and memories.

The Quest for Love, Happiness and Truth

From an existentiell-ontic perspective, our self-identity is related to the existentiell search for love, happiness, and truth. The quest for love, happiness and truth unveils two basic types of relational interconnectedness: the interconnectedness between love,

desire/imagination, and happiness; the interconnectedness between happiness and the search for Truth/morality. The paradoxical temporality is involved in both types of interconnectedness. Pleasure lies in every present moment. Imagination is related to the past and the future. Future is involved in desires and expectations.

The Interconnectedness Between Love, Desire/Imagination, and Happiness

Love seems to be at the heart of human relationships. It is the basic power of human life. We could love anyone, although we usually do not know why we love him/her. That is the mystery of love, said Proust (1995, 232). Love is multidimensional, and thus ungraspable. Respect is the *sine qua non* condition for love, argued Proust (1970, 172). Mutual understanding arises from our capacity for unconditional love and compassion. Understanding others' emotional life is grasping the various expressions of their love. At the very least, being loved requires to be understood by others. The search for mutual love is an intrinsic component of human relationships. Nobody wants to be hated. Everyone wants to be loved because he/she loves others (Proust 2001, 78). Only people who love could know they are hated, said Proust (2001a, 812). Hatred and love are interconnected. The more intensely we love someone, the less we are prone to hate him/her. The more intensely we hate someone, the less we can love him/her. The lack of hate strengthens love, while the lack of love nurtures the power of hatred. Hatred is intrinsically related to vengeance (Proust 2001a, 262). In some situations, we love what we do not own. We love the object of our desires and expectations (Proust 2000, 369-370). Such love can make jealousy arise in our mind and heart. In other situations, we hate what we do not want to own. We can imagine what is absent, that is, "what-is-not-in-front-of-us" (Proust 1972, 229). In some cases, the power of imagination can give birth to love, while in others it can open the way to jealousy. Without love, we could always "live-in" misunderstandings and conflicts. Love makes us search for happiness and social harmony in daily life.

The desire for happiness is always a desire for a specific happiness. A "general happiness" is not a true happiness, since it is not related to an existentiell quest for happiness. Only a specific notion of happiness can allow us to be "in-quest-for-happiness". Being aware of happiness strengthens our desire to live (Proust 1987a, 22-23). It is well-known that Proust's notion of desire was grounded on Schopenhauer's philosophy (Souday 1927, 87; Duplay 1972, 42). Schopenhauer (2009, 587) asserted that desires come from a basic lack or dissatisfaction. However, any satisfaction is always fragmentary. That is why fulfilled desires produce further desires. Desires nurture our personal growth. But the thirst for earthly goods (objects, renown, power) wilts everything (Proust 1979, 179-180). Desires are rooted in beliefs (Proust 2001, 93). They can enlighten our search for truth and even the frontiers between good and evil. We can only desire what we believe to be substantially existing. However, our desires are not always convergent. Sometimes they contradict each other. Desires can never be promises of happiness, said Proust (1987, 152). The way we meet our desires does not open the door to sustainable happiness, since further desires inevitably arise. Moreover, opposite causes and conditioning factors are strengthened by other desires. Things, beings and phenomena do not have any intrinsic power. Desiring them can never allow us to become happy in the long-term. At any time, human being defines the power and meaning of things, beings, events, and phenomena (Proust 1972, 211).

Our sense organs can corrupt our imagination (Proust 2019, 62). Pure imagination is much less egoistic than memories (Proust 1987b, 235). Imagination makes us define the

basic characteristics of happiness. However, those characteristics come from a prior analysis of our utmost desires. We believe that some desires could lead to happiness. Such belief is the ground for all characteristics of happiness. It does not say a single word about the nature of happiness (Proust 1987a, 13). The object of our imagination is nothing but absent things, beings, and events (Proust 1972, 229). Imagination makes us desire what we cannot own (Proust 1987a, 87). It distorts the essence of some things, beings, events, or phenomena (Proust 1987a, 265; 2002, 39). Imagination always goes beyond reality (Proust 1987c, 159; 2001a, 735). Any pleasure that is not subjected to our imagination is empty (Proust 1987a, 180). Our suffering can make imagination and thought deeply influence our behavior (Proust 1972, 273). Imagination makes us regret past events and expect the arising of future events (Proust, 1979, 86). It can release us from the power of past and present, as though our own being were totally timeless, that is, without any past and present. Imagination is then related to a non-religious form of eternity. It expresses our “timeless self”. Imagination does not have any experience, since it is full of hope. It conveys an idealized perception of reality (Proust 2001a, 130-131, 465). The power of imagination is inherently linked to truth-claims. Nobody can give us Absolute Truth. Rather, truth-claims mirror the way we create Truth by ourselves (Proust 1970, 229).

Every path to happiness expresses a possibility-to-be that can be chosen. Such multiplicity of possible lives (or possibilities-to-be) enhances our personality. But most of possible lives will never be actualized, argued Proust (1965, 87, 90-91). We are continuously choosing given possibilities-to-be, while excluding others. In doing so, we choose a given path to happiness/unhappiness. Living a happy life makes every relationship, event or phenomenon become a source of happiness. The presence/absence of happiness lies at the bottom of our heart/mind (Proust 2001a, 166, 593). Being happy should be the only objective of our life. It necessarily excludes egoistic attitudes and behaviors. Egocentrism can only give birth to unhappiness. Altruism never makes someone unhappy. Rather, it nurtures our happiness as well as others’ happiness. Happiness is intrinsically linked to unconditional love, harmony and peace. Living for-others is the only way to be happy in our own life.

The Interconnectedness Between Happiness and the Existentiell Search for Truth/Morality

Giving meaning to things, beings, events and phenomena can never be based on empirical facts. Human being is not an inquiring subject, but rather a subjective thinker (Kierkegaard 1974). Empirical facts can be useful for understanding the nature of beings, things, events, and phenomena. However, “giving-meaning processes” are not objectively oriented. Rather, they mirror our subjective existence. Facts are unable to make beliefs arise/disappear (Proust 1993, 159, 195). Rather, they are related to empirically observable things, beings, events, and phenomena. Only the inquiring subject is infinitely concerned with empirical facts. Beliefs are rather linked to intuition, imagination, hope, and desires. The subjective thinker is ultimately concerned with his/her own existence. Every belief is subjected to existentiell doubt, said Proust (2001a, 519-520). The subjective thinker cannot have any belief without taking his/her existentiell doubts into account. Everything is existentially uncertain. Every existentiell questioning is endless. Philosophical doubt is among the most important characteristics of human nature. Too often, we believe that the present state of things can never be different. We then exclude all other possibilities-to-be (Proust 1995, 462-463). Human being is “in-quest-for meaning”, since he/she is “being-who-interprets-reality”.

Searching for Truth and defining morality are inextricably linked with each other. Proust referred to Descartes' conception of truth (Descartes 1979, 151-159): certainties driven from evidence constitute the basic criterium for truth. Proust (2001a, 345, 658). The existentiell quest-for-meaning can be either a search for Truth or a quest for morality. In traditional moralities, meanings are related to an Absolute Truth (Truth-itself). They are not objective. But they aim at an absolute and knowable Truth. Since the Enlightenment, traditional moralities have been strongly criticized. Meanings are rather closely linked to truth-claims. Meanings are then subjectively defined. They are not related to any Truth-itself. So, we must take our existentiell "quest-for-Truth" into account. Traditional moralities presuppose the existence of Truth-itself. Searching for Truth is thus appropriating Truth-itself. Post-modern philosophers and writers generally promote the existence of relative truths (truth-claims). Searching for Truth involves exchanging our truth-claims with others. In moral worldviews, we can connect ourselves to Truth-itself. But post-modernity strongly affirms that there is no Truth-itself. Traditional moralities do not seriously take existentiell uncertainties and doubts into account. If it were the case, then any preconception of Truth-itself would be radically shaken. Doubting requires accepting the possibility that we follow a wrong path. Being uncertain and doubting are cognitive and moral attitudes that undermine the existence of Truth-itself. Existentiell uncertainties and doubts make the frontiers between good and evil fragile. There is nothing absolutely good/evil. Good and evil are always changing. Every action has morally good and wrong consequences. Truth is never absolute, said Proust (2001a, 137, 267). We can never define good without evil, and vice-versa. Evil makes good deploy itself in the very long-run (Proust 1972, 177). It does not mean that Evil is historically needed. Rather, the existence of Evil mirrors the necessity to orient ourselves towards the Good. Truth can never be reduced to "what-we-can-imagine". Events and phenomena are determined by unknown prior realities, argued Proust (2001a, 727).

Human being continuously searches for morality. Being in quest for morality requires listening to our mind/heart. Everybody imagines that he/she is the one who listens to his/her own words, said (Proust 1987, 295). Self-listening is being involved in dialogical processes. Listening to the voice of our own self is talking to an "ideal/external I". In doing so, we develop our existentiell passions, emotions, and sentiments. We can subjectively know others' passions. But such knowledge is always limited. Listening to others can allow us to better know "who-we-are". Others' passions could make us internalize our own feelings and passions. Everybody tries to find motives behind his/her passions (Proust 1993, 139, 423). We cannot uproot our existentiell passions. However, existentiell passions are risky, since they can make us neglect others' well-being. Existentiell passions are rarely altruistic. In some situations, existentiell passions can reduce our capacity for universal/unconditional love and compassion. In other situations, they allow us to deepen the meaning and implications of unconditional love, altruism, and compassion. Unconditional love is not related to self-understanding. It does not depend on the way we can understand others' self. Unconditional love does not depend on anything at all. Others' self remains unknowable for us. Our representations of others' "self-in-a-world" are always partial, useless, and irrelevant. Unconditional love makes us forget others' weaknesses. We usually hate whoever looks like us. We are unable to see our own weaknesses from an external viewpoint (Proust 2000, 54, 99). Our greatest challenge is to change our "self-in-a-world" and to abandon its self-idealized form. Unconditional altruism and love can be influenced by existentiell passions. Any existentiell

search for morality is compatible with unconditional altruism and love. However, self-control is very important. Otherwise, existentiell passions can reduce our capacity to express unconditional altruism and love. If existentiell passions are rationally controlled, then they can strengthen our path to unconditional altruism and love.

Conclusion

George Eliot has described how generosity and compassion constitute basic components of human life. She has also identified two modes of existence: either “floating in a stream of joy” (having religious feeling and a disappointed faith) or “having quiet resolved endurance and effort” (unveiling the conscious and unconscious dimensions of anxiety/anguish). In Eliot’s novels, the religious feeling was much more important than the issue of human temporality. Marcel Proust explained how the non-linear conception of Time gives birth to a paradoxical temporality. He put the emphasis on the connectedness between the paradoxical temporality and the human quest for love, happiness, and truth. In Proust’s novels, human temporality is much more emphasized than the religious feeling.

Future research could compare Eliot and Proust, from a philosophical viewpoint. Their common interest for Leibniz’s philosophy is certainly an area for further research. Above all, future research could examine how Eliot and Proust have chosen very different philosophical approaches. Eliot was basically influenced by Aristotle and Spinoza, while Proust was deeply influenced by Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer. Those philosophical approaches can have a very important impact on the way a writer deals with social, cultural, political, economic, and even religious/spiritual issues. Choosing a philosophical perspective for analyzing their novels could enlighten how Eliot and Proust did not really share the same worldview.

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