

www.essayandscience.com

# **I love, therefore I exist.**

## **Love and the philosophers.**

Manuel Cruz

Translated by Gabriel Baum  
ModernLanguages.com

### REFLECTION: TO LOVE AND TO BE LOVED

"Do you understand the world?" a journalist asked a Spanish philosopher a while ago. "I have better days and worse days" was the latter's answer in a display of sharpness. Overwhelmed by such wit, the interviewer barely managed to formulate this new question: "So then, how does a philosopher survive?" which in turn resulted in this new answer: "It depends on the type of philosopher. The stoic survives with patience, the vitalist with enthusiasm, the nihilist pessimistically and so on. To a philosopher, the business of surviving is as bearable (or as intolerable) as it is to the rest of mortals"

Our thinker was reasonably correct. It's a shame that his thoughts were so abbreviated. The effort to understand the world is as old as humanity though it has not always stumbled against the same obstacles and, above all, neither has it resolved the issues in the same way. That which defies our ability to understand has changed with time throughout history. We have adjusted to the lack of moderation in nature, we are hardly disturbed by our understanding of the intimate structure of matter, we have calmly jettisoned the language of individual freedom to progressively accept ourselves, without excessive trauma, as the result of anonymous underlying structures etc.

Though one has to admit that there still are certain experiences that shock us, that radically put our intelligence to the test. They are experiences, the intensity of which appears to very much exceed the discursive structures with which one is

accustomed to try and explain them, whose force cannot be repressed in the eyes of the protagonists by the trivial containment walls of inherited categories. So whoever lives through an amorous passion for the first time (or lives through it with an inner violence that utterly shakes him to the core) tends to see himself as the first human being to whom such an event happens, while what others who have gone through the same circumstance might tell him is barely any help at all.

Nevertheless that resistance to what in reality is shaping the experience is not so much a resistance to the thing itself but to the way in which it is being lived by the affected person. The thing as a whole allows itself to be treated through abstract resources which we have available to clarify it and, to the same extent, make it more *livable*. Almost certainly, a platonic philosopher would say: it is in no way a matter of renouncing the intensity but more a question of ensuring that it turns into an ally of life rather than an enemy. Because of that, the experience to which we apply our schemes is an asset to be looked after, not an obstacle to be overcome. This is not for altruistic or beneficial reasons but for the welfare of one's own thinking. Only what has been born from one's own experience can, when represented, display the warm and vibrant colors of life.

This tension between what is thought and what is lived, this eventual maladjustment between lessons that are transmitted and experience that appears to resist learning from them allows me to ask a question that came to me a while ago when reading André Breton's book *El amor loco*<sup>19</sup> [Mad love]. The last chapter is dedicated to his daughter Aube and ends with these words: "I wish for you to be loved madly". I admit that I was left totally astonished on reading the phrase which, in addition, ends the book. Is it so important to be loved? Would it not have been more appropriate that he might have wished that his daughter were the active protagonist in that passion, with her being the one who loved madly? Because what's the use of being loved if one is not capable of loving?

What now matters to me most is not the always complicated subject of reciprocity. Of course if someone would set it out for me as a dilemma, having to choose between loving and being loved, I would have no doubt as to my answer: what is truly important is to love. What from the outside—that is by someone who is not in love—can be seen as generosity or detachment, really represents a constituent dimension of love. Love does not demand for itself as a prerequisite that it should be required. Under no circumstances would someone who loves say to his or her lover "look what I've done for you" because he does not make his love depend on the reply. Maybe it would be clearer if we use the giving of a present as an example. To express it in few words, what the loved one enjoys is giving, not being given, a present. When someone truly gives a present he is thinking of the happiness of the other. *What* is given is subservient to *who* gives. On the other hand when one is expecting a present, what is important is to receive that particular object independently of whoever is giving it. What is important is the *what*, not the *who*. (Of course the person who is loved also likes receiving gifts. But when he or she receives a gift from his or her lover, the only thing that is important is the light in the giver's eyes at the moment it is handed over).

Maybe the example might also be used as a criterion to distinguish between love in a strong sense and other registers that sometimes illegitimately claim the same term

for themselves. One very clear case of this is love for oneself which on so many occasions hides behind the other so as not to show its true face. In reality it is not a case of love for another; what there is, to use an illustrative phrase, is love for oneself through an intermediate person.

Because of this, it would be right to affirm that compared to the one who loves, an egoist is not *bad*, he is *ignorant* (and therefore *poor*) to the extent that he is ignorant of one of the major registers of the human being. In effect, in his ignorance the egoist is satisfied with very little. He perseveres in a lesser register that I would not hesitate to qualify as immature. He is content with that appearance of happiness symbolized by the child that allows herself to be loved, who licks her lips contented with all the attention, especially with the cup of warm chocolate with biscuits that her mother or her aunt take to her in bed without expecting anything in return, not even a thank you. Someone who is not prepared to run the risk of forgetting his own ego, even for a moment, and who quantifies his ideal of happiness as being the permanent object of care and attention, is not going to learn about passion.

As opposed to that figure, the one who loves certainly takes risks, which evidently means that final success is in no way guaranteed. The range of setbacks that one can suffer from loving is very great. One of them of course, is that of not being loved in return. But there are more. When one loves someone (“even when one only thinks intensely of her”, Benjamin writes<sup>20</sup>), her face appears everywhere, there is not a book in which one does not find her portrait, a film in which one does not recognize her profile or a passerby that doesn't remind one of her. That person becomes omnipresent, tinting the entire world with its plea, coloring it with personal tonalities. But at the same time, so much presence necessarily brings with it multiple absences. He who declares “I only have eyes for ...” simultaneously recognizes his blindness for almost everything else. Yes, I know, “love is blind” as the saying goes. But we should not state things in such a way that the only options available that we have to choose from are to be blind or to be one-eyed. Maybe we should learn to love in another way. But let's not rush to suggestions so soon when we have hardly started on the subject.

## REFLECTION: SOLIDARITY AND CHARITY

Though this might appear strange to someone who is not very familiar with philosophical-political literature, it has been precisely the category of charity that has evoked the greatest amount of interest lately, when attempting to interpret what generically is known as the validity of the Augustinian approach. Why? Because *caritas*, that can never be confused with love in the singular sense of the term, fulfills the function of providing a space in which all human beings, with no exceptions, have a place in which no one is excluded. From this perspective, in Augustine one can find the fundamentals of the modern Democratic fraternity and its principal of equality, that is of its universality.

Having established that, we may now find ourselves in a position to bring this question to the present. Maybe one good way would be by contrasting the category of charity with another one which one could say has replaced it, that of solidarity. In the

stock market of words, there are few doubts that “solidarity” is a term on the rise, while it is not very risky to state that “charity” is clearly on its way down. Nevertheless, it's worthwhile asking: in the stock market of real events or actions, is it also like that? Is it true that we are witnessing a spectacular increase in supportive behavior and a decline in that which is charitable? If we define charity as selfless love for another, for anyone needing help, and solidarity as the unity maintained by those who share common interests, there would be something shocking in the situation. How is it possible that, in a period of fierce individualism and decline of the great discourses of emancipation, we could be witnessing such a boom in solidarity?

First one must say that the subject is not clarified by the mechanical identification of charity with Christian charity (with the concomitant caricature of the bejeweled fur coated lady giving out charity at the gates of the church after the 12 o'clock mass), just as the charge of generosity that is often associated with solidarity also confuses the situation. If one maintains the misinterpretation of both words, there is no problem of choice: the first term is from a certain perspective a disposable piece of junk compared to the second which decorates itself with all the beneficial and progressive qualities that we can possibly conceive. Problems arise the moment that the subject is approached in a less prejudiced way and questions are formulated such as whether it makes sense to talk about secular charity or, on the other hand, one points out the inadequacy of a solidarity that in the end has been defined as an intelligent and communitarian way of being an egoist. Then the comparison doesn't appear to work so well to the extent that the result could even be reversed.

Since the discussion should not be about words but about deeds, it would be convenient to set out what it is that in effect is happening, that is to what extent the campaigns and the proposals that tend to appear today that are subsumed under the heading of “solidarity” (humanitarian activism of NGOs, volunteerism, solidarity with the Third World), are really an expression of solidarity or whether another label would be more appropriate. Because within them we will not find the elements necessary to articulate the terms of an effective rebellion against injustice or the materials with which to construct a project for a better future. Norbert Bobbio<sup>16</sup> has written: “charity leaves things as they are, it alleviates suffering but doesn't implement any action to overcome its causes”. But this limitation has an almost perfect parallel in the area of solidarity which in its turn has historically demonstrated its lack of capacity to take the baton from charity. Bobbio himself has referred to “secular weakness” when remarking on the fact, in his eyes incontrovertible, that lay people cannot boast of the same merit as Catholics when it comes to the focus on the suffering of others.

The alternative to egoism is seen as altruism and it is appropriate to define the problem in these terms. To use terms already discussed, it is probably convenient to attempt to also provide an “intelligent and communal” approach to altruism to distance it both from its identification with certain religious beliefs and from its interpretation as a mere alibi to cover the acquisition of narcissistic self-gratification. Thus solidarity must contain a certain altruistic component without reducing itself to that same level because in that situation it would turn into philanthropy.

The altruistic component that has been mentioned would become part of solidarity through the concept of justice which would come to mean the development,

on a superior plane, of that which love represented within the concept of charity. Against the traditional Christian approach that maintained the superiority of love over justice—in the sense that love is afforded to all human beings regardless of their merits, as we have already seen in St. Augustine’s writings— it would be necessary to move towards a richer concept of justice, one that would incorporate a good number of the elements that in the old analysis of charity were seen exclusively as attributes of love. More concretely, when considering the approach that love’s precepts fulfill, exceed, and give one's fellow man more than what he strictly owns, now one would say that a complete and appropriate development of the concept of justice succeeds in integrating within a collective sense that which used to appear as gracious prerogatives of the individual (moral) conscience.

Nevertheless, it would not be correct to leave the current commentary unbalanced, leaving unresolved a consideration that was hardly enunciated earlier, that of the possible differences between charity and Christian charity or, put another way, the distinction between the idea of charity as such and the uses to which it has often been put. At least it would be worthwhile to leave open the possibility that, in the same way that solidarity can be conceived of in terms other than that of mere organized egoism, equally charity will allow for a secular interpretation. In the end, it is what authors such as Slavoj Žižek or Alain Badiou have proposed. A new reading in which emphasis would be placed on the universal character of the individual and on overcoming the most immediate and close links to the benefit of a new type of community that would accept within it all those who in some way are abandoned or excluded because they don't belong to any group. A reading, finally, that appears to presage a concept of democracy that, paraphrasing Bataille’s words, could be defined as the community of those who do not have a community. Thus the best part of the concept of charity is the emphasis that the moral obligation of helping another, transcends the *natural* limits within which the individual develops.

The *cosmopolitan* exhortation which includes the principal that we also owe attention to those who are not part of our family, our group or our nation, appears to be especially relevant at a time such as the current one in which the course of events unmistakably appears to point towards a future in which it will make no sense to speak of a community other than the one that is made up of all elements of humanity. Maybe it was that that St. Augustine didn't dare to think about. Or, more accurately, that he was in no condition to think about.

## REFLECTION: LOVE BETWEEN BODIES

They are two people by mistake. The night corrects that.

Eduardo Galeano

The purpose of the reflection that follows is simple. Starting with what has been considered, it is a matter of noting the unsettled relationship with one’s own body and with other bodies (particularly with those that are objects of desire) imposed by the passing of time, a perspective that for reasons indicated in the chapter, our protagonists didn't even have the possibility of considering.

In an initial very general overview of the subject, one thing that would immediately be noticed by someone who was questioning the place and the importance of the body in our lives is the fact that over the years the body loses its role of *opportunity for pleasure*, an attribute that it possesses almost spontaneously during one's youth, and, in its place, it increasingly and unstoppably acquires the role of obstacle to the peaceable development of one's very existence. With the passing of time, the body in effect turns precisely into that which resists us, which agitates us and reminds us of its existence through symptoms such as pain, discomfort or, of course, illness. In his book *The Arc of Words*, Andrés Trapiello<sup>23</sup> has expressed this thought with a brilliant aphorism: “The body is like style: the less noticed it is, the healthier it is”.

In other terms, if we agree to call age that specific time that speaks through the body, one could affirm that the greatest characteristic of youth with regards to the relationship that it maintains with corporal physicality is precisely its fluidity, its immediacy, its transience. In this sense, a young person is someone who can call on his or her body with the knowledge that the body will rapidly return the call. On the other hand in a mature age everything is slow as Coetzee has pointed out, sometimes even extremely slow. So much so that even words end up acquiring this calm and slow rhythm and they take time to reach our lips. As I understand it, it was what an old friend of his commented to the great Fernando Fernán-Gómez, remembering the old times nostalgically: “Do you remember when we spoke rapidly?”.

Nevertheless, if it were only that, one could reassuringly maintain that in the last resort living is finding an accommodation —even if paradoxically it is an *uncomfortable accommodation*— in one's own body. The problem, at least with respect to one of the subjects that our society thinks about with greatest difficulty (in this regard I could give as an example any of the novels of Michel Houellebecq), lies in the fact that in addition to that intra-subjective dimension to which I have just referred and which each one of us has to take on, there also exists a specific and particular material inter-subjectivity one of whose most prominent expressions is shown through desire.

I note that the most forceful commentaries these days tend to judge with an attitude that to my taste is frankly hypocritical —somewhere between indifference and paternalism— specifically the older the bodies involved are. It looks as if the maximum threshold which those of us who have definitely left behind the condition of *glorious bodies* find correct to accept, is that of tenderness barely covered by a gentle pastel color of residual passion. But maybe the body responds to a logic that is totally missed by those commentaries. Maybe just like the word remembers the soul, desire preserves the memory of the body.

Or maybe it is that the body has its own memory and is capable of seeing in the body that lies next to it what it was, even though now it may no longer be; it rescues from obscurity the shine of the past and it brings it with loving delicacy to the present, redeeming it from the ravages of time, the unmerciful punishment of evolution. Those who believe that bodies accept, are resigned, agree with what is handed to them are wrong. No. The body *remembers* the fulfillment that the other, with whom it is now melding with, had. The body preserves the memory —its own memory— of what it knew, of what once was its own. I am not referring to a dreamlike state or a fantasy. All those who do not know this experience: the feel of the violent stab of lust on recognizing in

this body that has changed so radically, that almost in no way resembles that of the past, its contours lost, the fresh scent that identified it gone, the now faded smoothness of the skin, all of them should avoid smiling disdainfully, *plentiful* in their ignorance. Only from that *memory of body* which I have been referring to can such a revealing experience be understood. Those who do know it will not only know with perfect exactitude —with total precision— what I have been talking about. They will also enjoy an additional privilege: they will understand the deep significance of what is happening to them and, to a similar extent, maybe they will be able to reconcile with it, discarding in one fell swoop the sense of shame and blame that this society insists on placing on their consciences for committing the crime of desiring freely.

To summarize, I have never been able to understand why people limit themselves to swear eternal love to each other (though they do so less and less; that I do know). They ought to have the courage in certain circumstances to swear *eternal desire*. With luck and sensibility they might even be able to keep their promise. Certainly the mystics believed that. And, much closer to us, André Gorz expressed it at the beginning of a long letter that he wrote to his wife soon after finding out that she was ill, with some moving words embedded with sensitivity and tenderness:

You have just had your 82nd birthday. You have shrunk 6 cm, you don't weigh more than 45 kg and you continue to be beautiful, elegant and desirable. We have lived together for 58 years and I love you more than ever. Once again I feel in my breast a consuming emptiness that is only eased by the warmth of your body next to mine<sup>24</sup>.

#### REFLECTION: ON A BAD WAY TO CLAIM THE “YOU”

I'm sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody.

J.D Salinger, *Franny and Zoey*

Let us place ourselves blatantly in the present. To be more exact, in a region of the present that might surprise more than one reader because of its apparent banality. But the reader will soon see that the foray aspires to have a meaning that should end by connecting with what we have just discussed regarding our need for the other. Let us go there. Among the most salient merits of what are called *magazines of the heart* (a category that can be extended to what are known as *programs of the heart*, so characteristic of current television) is that of being able to generate a very characteristic type of famous person. They are the famous people of whom one does not know the real reason for their fame other than the very fact of them appearing in that type of media. To find the reason for their first apparition (which is the one that might need an explanation) one has to go far back, to some distant prior wedding, a first or second degree family member, a youthful friendship or some other such similar event. Some time ago, they were interviewing one of these people on one of those television programs dedicated to such matters. It was a middle aged woman who had come through a not an appreciable number of marriages and *sentimental unions* (to use of the then current

euphemism). It appeared evident that her notoriety came from this since the focus of the conversation was precisely to evoke her successive partners.

What first caught my attention —no doubt professional obsession on my part— was a purely formal aspect. Faced with the recurring question “what influence did ... (here came the appropriate name from the list) have on your life?” The answers of the woman —who certainly did not manage the *tempo* of the interview very well—, were obviously losing steam: “he was my first love”, “he taught me authentic passion”, “we maintain a good friendship, after all, he's the father of my sons”, “he helped me in some very difficult moments”, “he has a very good sense of humor”, etc. while I listened to her, noting that the story was getting long, I thought that she had started too strongly —she had exhausted her creative reserves far too soon— and that as she was arriving at the present she would start to have serious problems in maintaining her initial rhetorical emphasis. Effectively, when the moment of valuing the importance of her current partner arrived, things got difficult for her. Doubly difficult in fact. On one hand she had already used the most noteworthy arguments. On the other —as I could deduce from the malicious comments that had been made by an off-microphone voice at the beginning of the interview— her current companion appeared to be a not very praiseworthy individual without a known trade or contribution to make. (Maybe an analyst who was more experienced in these matters than me, would be of the opinion that what the individual in question was trying to obtain from the relationship was the initial legitimization to include himself in his own right in that peculiar wheel of fame which I referred to at the beginning, but the accuracy or otherwise of that interpretation does not affect the following argument).

The fact is that after stuttering and long hesitations, the expression on the face of the interviewee changed. She dropped the show of profound concentration that she had maintained for too many seconds and her face slackened, already relaxed. It was obvious that she had hit on an idea that was making her feel at the same time relieved and satisfied. “What does (and here was the name of the subject) mean to me?”, she repeated, “well look, I'll tell you in very few words: he is someone who is *very special*”. I admit that the phrase left me astounded. I couldn't understand what that statement might reasonably mean. If, for example, she was trying to establish a difference from previous evaluations, I was not able to perceive where the demarcation line was. Did that woman mean that her previous partners were not *special*? Was it that this one was *more special* than the previous ones? But if this was her correct answer, from it inexorably followed the following question: what the hell does it mean that someone is *more special* than someone else?

Since I couldn't find a way to get out of the state of astonishment that I had got myself into with my inappropriate questions, I opted as usual for translation. I arrived at the thought that with that vacuous and pompous language, what the famous person was trying to do was to attribute to her latest partner some variant of what philosophers or historians preferred to call *unrepeatability*. Certainly a vain attempt. She was unaware that the difficulty that she was facing was not because of her clumsiness in finding the precise words, but in the end was an almost metaphysical problem: she wanted to attribute to that individual an impossible and contradictory feature. We are all inevitably repeatable and non-repeatable at the same time. There are no magic

solutions, nor is there a way of avoiding the commonplace so as to elevate oneself to the heights of an absolute exception.

Days later, in the newspaper that I normally read, I accidentally found an advertisement that —I thought— maybe offered the appropriate and forceful formulation of this question. It was from a Catalan radio chain which used as its campaign slogan an undoubtedly well-chosen phrase: *we are singular because we are plural*. Which is probably the same as saying that we are all made from the same matter, designed in an extremely similar way; the only thing that changes between one and another as Henry James would have said is the imperceptible *figure in the carpet*<sup>19</sup>. There is no wish that is more widespread than that of wanting to be different and, as a consequence, neither is there a more fragile basis on which to establish a personal relationship than to search for that specification. The main character of *American Beauty* —embodied by the most worthy Kevin Spacey— spelt it out with bitter lucidity when, while having a cocktail, the person talking to him apologized for not having recognized him. “Don't worry, I wouldn't remember myself either”, he answered with a smile. In the same way, if the interviewee who gave rise to this modest end-of-chapter reflection had been capable of telling herself “what I most like about him is his perfect, absolute vulgarity” (which, as an aside, was the case), maybe she would not have felt better but she would have certainly placed herself on the right path. Which doesn't lead to happiness (a subject which will be alluded to in the conclusion), but at least moves away from deceit.

#### REFLECTION: REGARDING THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LOVE, AS IMPOSSIBLE AS IT IS INEVITABLE

Only those who love, fly.

Miguel Hernandez

Ortega, an author who was unequivocally influenced by Nietzsche, wrote: “To love something is to insist that it exists; to not admit, insofar as it depends on oneself, the possibility of a universe where that object is absent”, an affirmation that evokes the one of Gabriel Marcel that is used as the opening quotation of this book (“ To love someone is to tell them: ‘you will never die’”) and that he follows with a comment in even more interesting terms: “But it should be noted that this is the same as continuously giving them life intentionally, *to the extent that it depends on us*. To love is a perennial revitalization, *intentional* creation and preservation of that which is loved”<sup>33</sup>.

Nevertheless, someone capable of thinking at this level regarding the nature of love, steps back when it comes to analyzing the experiences of significant profundity of love, such as the desire experienced by lovers that their passion should be eternal, scorning its importance and giving the impression of being blind to the perception of what is in play (that even Plato did not miss). An offer that Catullus expressed to Clodia in beautiful words: “I will never ever be able to conceive of a love capable of foreseeing its own end. Love is of itself eternity. Love is, in every moment of its existence, all of time, the only glimpse of the essence of eternity allowed to us”<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, as long as it

is maintained, sincere love is eternal by definition, even though we know that in practice, one day it will cease to be so. To speak of sincerity is pertinent here because it is the lover who commits himself, not love itself—even if the lover likes to appear as its guarantor—. And the moment that he commits himself, he naturally commits himself “forever” not to love more than one woman, he renounces love for other women “forever”.

What has to be considered is not that the oath is not kept, (“Drunken oaths!”— writes Jankélévitch sarcastically—. The [...] ironic philosopher that contemplates it, knows that it is provisional [...]. Brilliant love and because of the brilliance so different from serene friendship, will give way one day to a new choice, to a new decision”<sup>35</sup>), which obviously is a matter of fact—and in addition easy to prove—. What has to be considered is what happens, what is seen or what consequences does the breaking of the promise have. In other words, the least important matter is which of Ortega’s toes is stepped on in this kind of situation. We have hints that allow us to suspect that this author, who in the last resort is in favor of a robust ego (maybe too robust?), does not find it difficult to accept that “it is quite frequent that a man [*sic*] may love several times in his life”, but he is genuinely uncomfortable at the self-perception that is left with the subject after the end of each genuine passion (or might it be that according to him there aren't so many of those as opposed to infatuations?).

If for one moment, instead of feeling the astonishment provoked by a broken oath, we located ourselves at the initial moment of each new passion, maybe we would obtain a code to begin to understand things. Because just as someone in love is incapable of thinking of the end of his love (in this case, of the love that is beginning) neither can he think that before this one, which he now lives through as absolute, unique, exceptional, could there have been another one that he perceived in exactly the same way, and he tends to consider the previous one not as prehistoric but as merely a pale shadow and an involuntary failed general trial of what now is shown to be an unbeatable, irrefutable, incomparable peak.

What all this shows is not a mere epistemological paradox or a simple discursive inconsistency. If it were only something like that, the situation as described would not beg for clarification so strongly with such violence. The primary reason why, to use Proustian terms, when we are in love, we are incapable of acting as adequate predecessors of the people that we will become when we stop being in love, or we shift around uncomfortably when we have to remember a previous love, is related to a structural dimension of our own identity. Because if we are terrified to imagine the future without the sight of the faces or the sound of the voices that we love it is because we intuit that such losses constitute the cipher, the sign of a loss that is at the limit of what we feel we are able to support. It is a much more cruel pain, it is the pain of not experiencing pain, of feeling indifferent towards that which, on the other hand, we cannot forget marked our lives with fire. Then we realize that what we really would have lost on the way is a very piece of ourselves. Our own ego would have changed, which is like saying that the previous ego would have died. As Proust pointed out, it is a matter of “in a real sense the death of ourselves, a death followed, it is true, by resurrection but in a different ego, the life, the love of which are beyond the reach of those elements of the existing ego that are doomed to die”<sup>36</sup>.

The matter goes further than the known fact that my relationship with others provides the opportunity and the medium to acquire information of myself, or even that the only way of gaining experience of myself is given to me through another. We would be affirming that in reality it is the others —and especially those others in whom we abandon ourselves in the experience of love— who represent us, who form us, who make us precisely that which we are. So much so that when they go, when we lose them, when they disappear from our lives, they take with them something substantial, something basic, from our personal reality. Their death is our death or —if it was our decision to end that link— our suicide.

The thoughts are not an attempt to wield the rhetorical cudgels or slide into sentimental grandiloquence. Of course we are talking about the symbolic sphere, but the centrality that it occupies in the human existence is hardly debatable. To lose an ego that is continuous, permanent and stable (an option which Nietzsche appears to be so in tune with), substantially alters the mental layouts that we were accustomed to working with, equally so in the matter of love. If we move on to speak in terms of the discontinuity of the ego or, going one step further, of multiple egos throughout our life, most of the regulators which we worked with to administer our relationship with the future and with the past appear to scatter in the ether. How could one be nostalgic for a past that we can attribute to an ego that is different from the current one? Or melancholic for what could have been and wasn't... for another? Would looking forward to something that might await someone who might not even be *me* make more sense?

Maybe the most worrying dissolution of the ego is not the one that takes place at the summit of passion, in the climactic moment of amorous frenzy; after all we had plenty of notice of these alleged dissolutions via the Romantics —who in the process calmed us down, letting us know their *reversible*, somewhat *jocular* character—. The torrential and exalted writer who tells us how he lived through that experience in which he thought he lost his ego in other arms, can do this precisely because he got it back (and comes back to tell the story). The cold sadness of the one that swore eternal love in vain is, on the other hand, the slow story of the breakdown of intensity. The chronicle of a disappearance that takes with it the storyteller. The map of an impoverished world.

## REFLECTION: THE DEBATE OVER PATERNALISM

We said that emotions erupt at the point where awareness draws back, where the individual perceives himself incapable of supporting the *coefficient of adversity* with which the world punishes him, opting to take refuge not so much in the concept of injustice as in a variant of magical thought. He who is immersed in an emotion is not *outside awareness*. Even the wildest passion cannot make us lose awareness of everything, precisely because the very emotion is an aspect of awareness which comes into being from the starting point of a conspiratorial reflection. Thus it is not someone who is immersed in emotion who, for example, cannot argue or provide reasons for his acts but someone who from the point of view of a third party is in optimal conditions to make adequate decisions. What should one therefore do in the situation in which that person, clearly *diminished* by an emotion —but not made incapable of giving an account

of his behavior because of it—, is at the point of making a decision that from the outside looks as if it is totally mistaken?

If, in answer to the question, we are inclined towards the option of intervening to avoid that mistake taking place, we would find our behavior coming under the heading of paternalism. We understand that a mode of behavior (or a rule) is paternalism if, and only if, it is done (or established) in the first place for the purpose of achieving a positive result for a person or group of persons and, in the second place, it is done without the acceptance of the person or persons who are affected (that is to say the presumed beneficiaries).

The person affected by paternalistic behavior is, according to the expression of Ernesto Garzón<sup>59</sup>, a *basic incompetent*, that is to say someone who is not in a position to decide what he needs or what is best for him.

It's difficult to find unequivocal cases of basic incompetents. It is a given that a nurse will administer the appropriate medicine to an old man with senile dementia who is refusing to take it and this will not cause a problem even to the most scrupulous among us. But this apparent clarity should not hide the fact that there are other situations, clearly more nebulous, that might expose the mechanism that drives the concept of paternalism and to that same extent allow us to challenge it.

For a start we can state that throughout history the type of people that for one reason or another have been considered to be basic incompetents has varied, and varied shockingly. And if there are degrees of shock (and there are) we can present the case of the interminable, non-ending (to the point that today, in many parts of the planet, it is a long way from having ended) period of time in which half of humanity, that is to say all women, were considered to be, to all effects, a collective of basic incompetents.

Who is it who establishes the condition of basic incompetence? Because even though one might try by all possible means not to fall into arguments that are too categorical, that might appear to be demagogic to the extreme, it is impossible not to state that in the past, mental clinics were crammed with people that today, under no circumstances, would be admitted into such places. Or that it was the ecclesiastic power that passed judgment regarding the condition that we are discussing, ascribing it to people with anomalous behavior (with the aim of sending them to burn at the stake).

It thus appears clear that the exercise of paternalism is an effect of —while at the same time providing a basis and giving content to— authority. The exercise of authority tends to find legitimacy by covering itself with the cloak of paternalism or, saying the same thing in other words, by clinging to the old argument of “it is for your own good...”. Of course this is without forgetting the other side of the coin, that is that at many moments in history it has been a paternalistic attitude of the powers that be, that has allowed the correction of inequalities, injustices that if they had been left to the risk of the decisions of individual wills would probably have been perpetuated indefinitely. Examples? As many as are wanted. Without going any further, all those impacted by policies of “positive action” (better known as “positive discrimination”).

Do these last considerations distance us from the initial purpose of the current reflection? What did we mean when we said at the beginning of this section that emotional situations (notably amorous ones) may be analyzed in light of the questions

raised in the debate regarding paternalism? It was probably Michel Foucault, an author we will discuss in a later chapter, who has provided the most useful materials to answer both questions, examining from an historical perspective figures such as the *madman* that today, apparently *spontaneously* we tend to consider almost as the paradigm of the basic incompetent. He has not only observed the nature of the relevant social construction of the concept of madness, but above all the different signs, the different public consideration that at varied moments in history both the madman and other analogous characters have had. We started to see elements of it when talking about Plato, but now we can reprise that idea with greater understanding: the Greek's *mania* was associated with the process of falling in love, with poetry and with religious practices. It was not only the figure of the priestess or the poet who appeared endowed with considerable social prestige, but also that of the person in love. Yes, they were mad, but they were mad people chosen by a God who had driven them out of their minds. As a result, their madness was passion, inspiration, prophetic delirium.

In this light, probably the most accurate thing that one can say to point out the difference with respect to the current situation is that we cannot work out which road to take, with the exception of the case of mental illness which has been well covered in the discourse of psychiatry. But if we consider the case of lovers, it appears clear that our society tends to consider them basic incompetents or not, depending on the consequences of their actions rather than on the actions themselves. If the actions turned out to be institutionally acceptable, errors of perspective by the protagonists tend to be viewed not only as being innocuous but even as necessary (not to say positive). So much so that for example it would not worry anyone during a wedding ceremony that the bride and groom, blinded with love, believe that they see in one another interior or exterior gifts that an impartial observer might find more than doubtful. In such a situation that observer would almost certainly state in a display of consequential condescension: "as long as they are happy...". If, to the contrary, that same blindness caused by love leads them to behave *madly*, that is turning their lives upside down, breaking up a household, risking their goods or other similar catastrophes, the most probable action of our above-mentioned impartial observer could even be to attempt to incapacitate them (that is to declare them basic incompetents from a legal point of view). In effect, in this respect our society does not appear to know what card to play regarding lovers. But in any case, society accepts that outward facing mental doors may be pulled open while showing a total lack of trust in inward facing ones. Certainly, in his books, Sartre appeared to show a total lack of trust. With everything that he had lived through. Or maybe it was precisely because of that?

## REFLECTION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOLITUDE

"To be an adult is to be alone", said Rousseau. Here we have one of those emphatic, unequivocal, categorical affirmations that overwhelm the reader with their truthful excess and that maybe, precisely because of it, require a little precision to shed some light on the correct meaning. To this end let's start with the question: is solitude by any chance a condition that is part of us or, on the contrary, is it a circumstance that occasionally occurs and which some people fight and others revel in? Depending on how

it is discussed, there are no lack of arguments to maintain equally that it is impossible to be by oneself or that it is impossible not to be so. The first argument is supported by our unavoidably social, communitarian, collective nature.

Reinforcing this theme with a different type of argument, one could also observe that the evolution of contemporaneous societies has mostly moved away from the concept of individual isolation. Of course those who maintain that it is impossible not to be alone are not short of arguments either. Maybe the most telling is the one that refers to the radically solitary nature of certain experiences. As the reader will have guessed immediately, I am thinking about death, which has been presented by a good number of philosophers (with Heidegger at the head of them) as the most incontrovertible proof that solitude is the starting point to think correctly and clearly about the profound nature of human beings. But in the end, our social collective communitarian nature does not deny that we can be alone. More so, it is probably that that best explains the painful way in which one can live in solitude. It is because we are intimately interrelated with others that their absence can become intolerable.

Maybe it is this thread that is worthwhile following to try and unravel the small skein of intellectual wool. In effect, when seen from this last perspective, it would be possible to define solitude as the experience in which *we do not matter to those who matter to us*. The person who describes to someone else their feelings of solitude is not indulging in a gross contradiction (how can someone be alone when they are talking to someone else about their loneliness?) Because the basic assumption is specifically that qualitative selective dimension of solitude. It would even admit one further turn of the screw: we feel alone when we don't matter *in the way that we would like to matter* to those who matter to us. The adolescent deeply in love with his desk companion, is not consoled in the slightest if she tells him that she feels deep affection for him or that she considers him her best friend and, if anything, he experiences a feeling of deep solitude because his emotions are not corresponded.

Naturally the notion of *matter* is a long way from being clear or unequivocal. There are things that matter that are given (in many ways) while others completely depend on ourselves. A mother or a father did not decide that their children are important to them (and if they stated it in those terms we would probably say that they are *unnatural* parents), while in the case of different type of relations all one can do is affirm that they necessarily imply a significant degree of construction.

It's not only that one may choose, for example, one's friends but that the very relationship of friendship is, as is often said, *cultivated*, that is it requires attention, care, and even temperament. One could state the same regarding a loving relationship. But in all cases there is an unavoidable quota of solitude that goes with the very fact of living with others. The adolescent in the previous example who we can imagine to be attentive, sweet and affectionate with her friend who is in love with her, very regretfully inflicts a quota of pain on him. There is no way of getting around that reality; in the same way that we will know the experience of being alone, similarly with some frequency, people to whom we might be extremely important do not matter to us to the extent that they would wish. There is no other option than the apprenticeship of solitude, the significant inner effort not to identify solitude with being abandoned and the acceptance that the company of others is expressed in many ways.

In my first draft of the current reflection, I concluded by pointing out that in the end —to change the tone (and in the process go back to an early argument)—, no one is more alone than he who writes and, at the same time, no one can expect better company than that provided by literary material. Then affectionate voices warned me of the danger that stating it this way would evoke romantic-idealist-subjective conceptions of writing. I then decided to subject myself to the authority of Arendt and remembered what she wrote when considering the man who loves goodness: “when living with others he must hide from them and cannot even trust himself to witness what he is doing”. In summary “he is not solitary, but lonely”<sup>78</sup>. Radically lonely, if there is any need to stress the point.

#### REFLECTION: MORBID, A TRICK WORD

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud quotes the following dictum of Plato: “The virtuous man is content to dream what a wicked man really does”<sup>46</sup> to point out the secret envy of those who are capable of acting on their perversions. And if we said at the end of the chapter dedicated to Nietzsche and Lou Andreas-Salomé that it was not necessary to forbid what no soul desires, now, precisely at the moment that we end the one dedicated to an author who has helped us more than most to understand the less visible dimensions of the human soul, maybe it would be interesting to spend a little time discussing one of those elements which normally comes under the heading of *morbid*.

The etymology of the word “morbid” does not contain any great mysteries. Morbidity is what causes illnesses or is related to them. Nevertheless, it appears clear that in spite of such a specific origin, the most extensive use of the term is metaphoric rather than political. We say that something is morbid because it appears twice as sinister, sordid, twisted or linked to dark (and negative) dimensions of the human being. The dedication with which a few decades ago many people read those popular weekly *event* magazines (such as *El Caso* or *¿Por qué?*) was morbid as was the way that for a long time the first channel of TVE [Televisión Española network] dedicated the half hour preceding the most widely watched news program to address those same themes.

Metaphors that end up in use, often hide some assumptions that if they were explained, many people would not share. Because the concept of illness has as a necessary counterpoint its polar opposite meaning, that of health, which in this way remains identified with the rule (and that is why a parallel distinction to that of morbid/healthy is a that of normal/pathological). But the significance that we must attribute to the word “health” is very far from being something that is evident in its own right. During the Franco period, it was normal in religious schools for the priests to refer to the children that in addition to studying dedicated themselves to sport, leaving aside pernicious concerns about sex, as *healthy children*. The *unhealthy ones* were the ones that as well as not studying, wasted their time in a disastrous *totum revolutum* which, as well as women, was composed of billiards, tobacco, dance and alcohol. On the other hand, today even parents in the most conservative families refer without significant concern to the obsession of their adolescent children for sexual subjects with blasé phrases such as “raging hormones” or similar ones and it would never occur to them to

describe them as morbid for attempting to free themselves of such restrained energy. That is when they don't openly use the expression *healthy sexuality* (as opposed to the priests of yesteryear who at the most spoke of *tidy sex*: note the difference, not at all irrelevant).

Nevertheless, and as paradoxical as at first it might appear, maybe this usage of language shows a certain progress (at least if we compare it to previous usage and the assumptions that were being slipped in). In the end, speaking in terms that are taken from medicine certainly implies using language with naturalist connotations that, however much it may be referring to negative dimensions, recognizes that everything that is labeled is something within us —let us say, belongs to the human condition—. Stating it from the opposite point of view: it is neither diabolical nor a disaster nor is it associated in any way with absolute evil. If it were an evil, it would be an evil to which we are all exposed, precisely because it is an evil that in principle lives in every one of us.

As is obvious, this line of thought, which undoubtedly presented a positive inflection compared to the imaginary preceding collective noun (tinged with religious thought), may result in situations that in practice are as undesirable as the previous ones. To make myself clear: in principle it certainly constitutes an advance to consider that someone is not *possessed*, but is simply *mad*, to use a concept most typical of Michel Foucault. A further advance is to abandon the term *mad* and, with no further ado, start talking about *mentally ill*. But if later the assumed mentally ill person is confined to a psychiatric clinic such as —in an example that someone might consider a little over-the-top but that in any case was absolutely real— what was done with any dissident in Stalin's Soviet Union, it would be necessary to agree that the supposed advance would be very questionable. Or, if we return to another example that was also broached in this chapter: as incredible that it might appear to the young, there was a time —not even very long ago— when some people, trying to appear to display tolerance and breadth of knowledge, liked to repeat in a sententious way, a cliché that nowadays makes our hair stand on end: “there are two types of homosexuals; those that are that way due to vice, and those that are that way due to illness”. The consequence that followed from such a *liberal* position was that those affected by this judgment would have to receive different treatment: the former would have to be sent to jail (or for a time to a holding pen), while the latter *only* to a specialized hospital (or immediately to be examined by a doctor). In the end, once again it is what Humpty Dumpty said in Alice in Wonderland: the question is not the meaning of words; what is important is which is to be master. And how it exercises its power, of course. A particularly important reminder, since we were just speaking about Foucault.