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THE PROUSTIAN MIND

Edited by Anna Elsner and Thomas Stern

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each volume. At the time of writing, other major anglophone editions are either obsolete or incomplete.

Precise matching of page numbers from one edition to another is not possible. However, as a rule of thumb, the rough page number for the Modern Library edition can be obtained by multiplying the Vintage page number, given in this volume, by 1.178. This will usually be accurate to within a dozen pages, often far fewer. Correspondence between Vintage and Penguin is weaker, but the intrepid reader can multiply Vintage page numbers by 0.845, and then flick forward a few pages.

A more accurate, automatic page number converter between various editions of the novel, including Pléiade, Vintage, Modern Library and Penguin, can be found at <http://sterntom.com/proust-page-number-converter/>.

Other abbreviations used in The Proustian Mind

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References to *Jean Santeuil* are abbreviated as JS, followed by a page reference to the translation of *Jean Santeuil* by Gerard Hopkins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 [Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955]). They are followed by a reference to *Jean Santeuil précédé de Les Plaisirs et les jours*, edited by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). If only one page reference is provided, this indicates untranslated material from the French edition.

References to Proust's correspondence (abbreviated as *Corr*, followed by a volume and page number) refer to Philip Kolb's 21 volume edition *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, Paris, Plon, 1970–1993. If not stated otherwise, translations from the correspondence and all other untranslated French material are by the author of the chapter in question.

INTRODUCTION

Proust as Philosopher?

Marcel Proust (1871–1922) is one of the most well-known and influential twentieth-century writers. Yet, when Proust started to work on *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*; henceforth RTP) in 1908, he wrote the following question in his notebook: 'Should I make it a novel, a philosophical study, am I a novelist?' (*Le Carnet de 1908*, p. 61). Given that the young Proust was an avid student of philosophy, the oscillation regarding the genre of the writing he was about to undertake is unsurprising. The work ended up being a novel, but one that references many philosophers and explores major philosophical themes and ideas. These are not merely mentioned in passing, but are explored persistently, both directly by Proust (or his narrator) and indirectly in the structure and narrative of the novel itself. Proust himself was drawn to philosophy just as much as his writing has seduced and challenged philosophy, in turn. RTP has, since its publication, sparked the interest of prominent twentieth and twenty-first philosophers, such as Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Lévinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as, more recently, Judith Butler and Martha Nussbaum, to name but a few well-known figures.¹ Some, such as Deleuze, have dedicated book-length studies to him, while for others, such as Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, Proust's novel constituted either something against which philosophers defined themselves, or a continuous point of reference as well as a kind of temptation to which they intermittently returned.

The Narrator's Philosophy at First Glance

Proust's relationship to philosophy cannot be reduced to RTP alone: his *Correspondence* is a testament to the continuous presence of philosophers in his thought and his early writings, essays, pastiches and translation do much to highlight the general importance philosophy played for him from a young age. But to understand the mutual affinity between Proust and philosophy, it is important to scrutinise the philosophical aspects of RTP. The novel offers the most sustained and certainly longest elaboration of what might be called a philosophical position and it is to RTP that philosophers have primarily turned.

On the face of it, the narrator of RTP structures his story around a philosophical outlook which is the task of his novel both to defend and to illustrate. Thus, if someone were to ask, 'in what sense is Proust a philosopher?', the obvious way to bypass the mire of debates about who counts as a philosopher, about philosophy's relation to fiction and so on would be to

reply: his novel puts forth a philosophy, which is recognisable as such. While such a response would not satisfy a dogged sceptic, it has the advantage of giving the rest of us something more tangible to get our teeth into.

What is this philosophical outlook? The following is an attempt to answer this question clearly and neutrally, before considering various challenges and complications. The philosophical outlook focuses primarily on a theory of the self, but the theory of the self in question is closely related to a corresponding theory of (good) art. The most accessible bridge between them, though there appear to be others, is a theory of time, which mostly rests on his understanding of the phenomenon of involuntary memory. While the self, art, time and memory are the mainsprings of the narrator's theory, it draws on, and has implications for, his views on other philosophical topics. Among these related topics are knowledge, love, death, subjectivity, beauty, identity and various other themes treated in this volume.

The theory of the self is as follows. Each of us has, or most really is, an extratemporal being or self. The extratemporal being or self has three features worth noting. First, it is what we really or truly are. It is 'our true self' ('notre vrai moi'; TR, 224; IV 451). It is true (or real), that is, in comparison with what the hero of the narrative, the narrator as a younger man, has – wrongly, as he realises at the end – taken throughout the course of the novel to be the self. The untrue or less true self was the apparent subject (or many subjects within one human lifespan, the narrator sometimes suggests) of ordinary, everyday experiences, unfolding and changing over time. Second, the extratemporal self is always there but largely hidden from view: it 'seemed dead, but was not entirely' (IV 451, our translation; TR, 224). Third, not only has it always been there, but, being extratemporal, it does not have any fear of the future or, consequently, of death (TR, 223; IV 450). It is 'an extra-temporal being, therefore untroubled by the vicissitudes of the future' (IV 450, our translation; TR, 223; also TR, 225; IV 451 and TR, 218; IV 446). The discovery of the self outside time reassures the narrator that his real self will not die, but it also motivates him to try to finish his book before his biological death because, as we shall see, his real self is best expressed and communicated through a work of art. The image of Bergotte's books outliving Bergotte himself further links the self outside of time to the thought of immortality on which the narrator's aesthetic theory hinges, even if he also knows that books themselves tend, eventually, to be forgotten.

The narrator's discovery of his self outside time is presented as arising out of instances of involuntary memory. In the paradigmatic cases, such as the taste of the madeleine or stepping on uneven flagstones, the prerequisite is that the narrator has two similar but not identical experiences (at one point, he calls them a kind of miraculous 'analogy' (TR, 223; IV 450)), separated in time. These can be experiences of tastes, sounds, touches, bodily positions and so on, and the narrator's emphasis tends to be on sensations, broadly construed. In the most prominent cases, the memories which surrounded the first experience flood the second, analogous experience and their combination is associated with a profound feeling of joy. As the narrator describes it, the later experience invokes or calls into being the earlier one, not merely by recalling the fact of it to mind, but in such a way that the earlier experience is superimposed upon the latter, creating an experience of something wholly or exclusively belonging neither to one nor the other – something he also calls their shared essence. In such instances, he experiences two times and places at once, the past and the present. But, on the narrator's telling, it is the extratemporal being which is the subject of both experiences and which forms the link between them. The crux of it is expressed as the narrator compares the analogous experiences, noting that in each case, the common feature (the sound, smell and so on) was something that, as he puts it,

I was experiencing at the same time in the present moment and in a far-off moment [...], so that the past was made to encroach upon the present, so that I was made uncertain in which of the two I found myself; in truth, the being in me which was enjoying this impression was enjoying, in the impression, that which it had in common between a day past and now, that which was extratemporal about it, a being which only appeared when, by means of one of these identities between the present and the past, it could feel itself in the only environment in which it could live and take pleasure in the essence of things, that is to say outside of time.

(IV 449–50, our translation; TR, 222–3)

Tasting the madeleine as an adult, the experience of involuntary memory allows him no longer to 'feel mediocre, contingent, mortal' (SW, 52; I 44). This is because, as he explains, 'the being that I had been was an extra-temporal being' (IV 450, our translation; TR, 223) and he later refers to the joy itself as 'extratemporal joy' (TR, 231; IV 456) and the 'joy of the real, found again (*retrouvé*)' (IV 458, our translation; TR, 233). It is the being within him, outside of time, which 'alone had the power to make me find (*retrouver*) the old days again, the lost time (*le temps perdu*) [...]' (IV 450, our translation; TR, 223). It is, therefore, here that time is found again (or regained) and the search is seemingly complete – at least until the experience of involuntary memory subsides.

These are condensed passages which do not provide a thorough or unified argument in favour of a self outside time. But there appear to be three possible lines heading in that direction. First, between the two analogous instances of madeleine-tasting (to take the most famous example), one as a child and one as an adult, there must be something in common, and there must be some kind of subject which accesses and appreciates this something in common. Since the common factor is restricted to neither the earlier nor the later instance, and since it is in fact restricted to no single temporal instance at all, this common factor lies outside time. Hence: 'Nothing but a moment of the past? Much more, perhaps; something which, common at once to the past and the present, is much more essential than both' (IV 450, our translation; TR, 223). And since the subject accesses and appreciates this extratemporal aspect, it, too, must be outside time. Second, using a similar approach but proceeding directly to the subject, we might say that the subject of the mix of past and present is obviously not merely the child madeleine eater, because it is aware of a state in which the narrator is an adult and the experience is somehow purer and more joyous than it had been in childhood. It is equally not merely the adult madeleine eater, because 'the moment I was reliving [i.e. from the distant past] seemed to me to be the present moment' (IV 447, our translation; TR, 219). Hence, the being that is the locus of this compound experience lies beyond time. The third, most indirect argument relates to joy in the face of death: the suggestion appears to be that, because involuntary memory is associated with both joy and indifference to death, it would make sense for the being in question to be extratemporal.

The self outside time is presented as an important aspect of the resolution to the narrator's quest, throughout the novel, to find a meaningful kind of satisfaction. While the considerations so far have been drawn almost exclusively from brief sections of the first and final volume, the parts in between (which Proust in fact wrote later) implicitly present a series of candidates for fulfilment, arising organically throughout the story. These include love, social status, travel and art. With the partial exception of art, on which more in a moment, these prove immensely disappointing. Experiences of involuntary memory, by contrast, are (typically) genuinely joyous. We have already noted that the self outside time does not fear death and presumably cannot in fact die, if death requires a change within time. But the narrator

offers a further explanation. One can only imagine that which is not present to the senses; the narrator can only take pleasure when he is imagining things; therefore, he can never take pleasure in anything which currently exists and is present to his senses (see Kubala, in this volume, for a discussion of this argument). However, in instances of involuntary memory, that which is absent (the first sensation and its contingent surroundings) and can therefore be enjoyed in imagination is at the same time currently existent and, as it were, subject to live, present experiences (TR, 223–4; IV 450–1). In anachronistic terms, one might compare this to a virtual reality simulator, which is simulating a real experience from the subject's past: the subject can use her imagination, because the simulation is not real; yet, she can respond, in real time, to her actual (virtual) surroundings. A major difference, of course, is that the narrator does not treat the reborn past as *virtual* in the sense of not really existing. Instead, he speaks, as we have seen, of a shared essence between past and present, which the self outside time is able to access and enjoy. Involuntary memory and its associated pleasure are a 'contemplation of the essence of things' (TR, 229; IV 454). The past – or its essence – is not simulated, but really found. The narrator's satisfaction can be further accounted for when we have sketched his theory of art.

The narrator treats the production of art as one way, perhaps the best and only way, to expose, preserve and communicate the deeper reality, and corresponding joy, which has been encountered in experiences of involuntary memory and in certain other revelatory experiences which are not straightforwardly memories of any kind (TR, 231–3; IV 456–8). Indeed, he claims that the work of art itself is the '*only way* of finding lost Time again [de retrouver le Temps perdu]' (IV 478, our translation and emphasis; TR, 258). The 'essence common to both past and present sensations' is said to convey to us certain 'impressions, outside time' (IV 477, our translation; TR, 257–8). Such impressions bypass everyday experience, which is typically a matter of chasing after various futile pleasures. They also bypass what he calls the 'intellect' or 'intelligence', our ordinary critical faculties, and, by extension, intellectual pursuits in general. The intelligence is not set up to access, describe or perhaps even make sense of the deeper reality in question and, he sometimes suggests, it obstructs or frustrates our efforts to do so (TR, 232–3; IV 457–8). A further claim is that the intelligence treats what is generally accessible, common to all, whereas reality's deeper impressions are unique to the individual (TR, 233–4; IV 458–9). Thus, to encounter a genuine work of art is to engage on a deeper level, with the artist, than would be possible in everyday interactions. We will never know the real people we love in the way that we can know an artist through a work of art. Thus, 'artistic sense' is equated, in the end, with 'submission to interior reality' (IV 461, our translation; TR, 237). 'To make a work of art' (IV 457, our translation; TR, 232) just is a matter of, to adapt his phrasing, extracting something ideal, intelligible or intellectual (though not by means of everyday intellect) from a sense impression that reality has made upon the individual (TR, 232; IV 457). The impressions that reality makes bypass the intellect and are not chosen by the artist. Involuntary memory is one profound instance of this process, for we cannot seek these memories out and, when we get them, they are not experienced as rationally explicable. But the narrator supposes that other impressions made by reality are also available to us. His example is the Martinville steeples, the view of which he has experienced as deeply profound but not as a form of involuntary memory (TR, 231–3; IV 456–8), because there was no analogous past experience in that case, and so nothing to remember.

Art, theorised in this way, rounds out both the satisfaction available to the narrator at the end of the book and the contrast with the false hopes of love, travel, society and so on.

(Art itself has until the final volume been hit-and-miss, because he has not understood what he is looking for.) In love, for example, failure is guaranteed: on the narrator's account, the lover wishes to possess, fully know and (in his case at least) control the beloved, but such possession, knowledge and control remain necessarily evasive (see, in this volume, Ladenson, Moran and Buijs). Art, however, as theorised above, is as close as we get to genuine knowledge of another, a knowledge love cannot offer. It is also a truer form of 'travel'. When I travel from one place to another, I see a different place, while remaining essentially the same kind of person. When I 'travel' using a genuine work of art, I experience the world in a completely different way, with 'new eyes' (III 762, our translation; C, 291), that is, as the artist does (compare C, 188; III 676 with TR, 254; IV 474).

In addition to a general account of what the artist is trying to do, the narrator draws some conclusions regarding the form and content of his planned work of art. For one thing, he rejects the ideal of the novel as 'cinematographic parade [défilé cinématographique]' (IV 461; TR, 237), that is, as the equivalent of a procession of images depicting perceived reality accurately from the outside. There would be no connection between that kind of novel and the preservation of reality's impressions upon the self. Equally, he needn't pay attention to people telling him to write about 'great workers' movements' or 'noble intellectuals' rather than about 'insignificant members of the idle rich' (IV 460, our translation; TR, 235–6) – RTP, to be sure, is largely about the latter, in terms of its main characters. If the work of art is the extraction of the unique impressions made upon the artist's self by a deeper reality, then, at best, paying attention to which kinds of people are depicted (workers altering the course of history, rather than idle aristocrats) will miss the point. It would be to focus on what he calls 'appearance', rather than 'depth' (TR, 237; IV 461 – see also TR, 256–7; IV 476–7), and it would guide the artist towards what is common to all rather than what is unique to the artist herself. He also suspects such theorists (and the artists who follow them) of bad faith: the difficulty of attending to the impressions of reality makes it tempting to abandon the true artistic calling, in favour of easier, less instinctive, more intellectual and therefore less authentic and truthful projects. While there is some critical debate about whether we are supposed to identify the narrator's planned work of art with the novel we have just finished reading, RTP looks consistent, at a minimum, with these aspects of the theory of art associated with the narrator's final view.

The aesthetic theory encapsulated in that view also hinges on a largely redemptive understanding of art (Bersani 1990), one that is built on a continuous collision between ethical and aesthetic considerations (see Ellison in this volume for discussion of this argument). The narrator describes his aesthetic 'method' (TR, 264; IV 482) as consisting in drawing out the universal, extratemporal character of his particular experiences, emotions and the relationships that have made up his life, before making use of them in his work of art. Although the work of art may be an act of genuine communication to an appreciative reader, the connection between art and life (on which see Greene and Gary Kemp in this volume) is narrowly utilitarian when it comes to those who are close to the artist: they have 'in the long run done no more for [the writer] than pose for him like models for a painter' (TR, 264; IV 482) and the suffering they have caused the artist provides 'raw material' (TR, 270; IV 487) for his work. As 'ideas are the substitutes for sorrows' (TR, 268, our translation; IV 485), this material affords the writer deep insights. This exploitation of others – justified, in part, because they have little else to offer him – is central to the narrator's aesthetic theory, and as part of this, death, grief and loss play a particularly valuable role in his economy of artistic production (see Huddleston, in this volume, for discussion).

Proust and Philosophy: Some Notable Interpretations

Given that the view just described is plainly philosophical, and that it appears to illuminate both the content and the form of RTP, we should immediately make a further point clear: philosophers usually don't like it. Philosophically minded commentators, both in this volume and in general, tend either to attack it along various lines, to ignore it altogether or to modify it substantially. As a result, though many philosophers writing about Proust wish to take him seriously as a philosopher of some kind, most of them steer the reader away from focusing on the philosophical outlook which apparently sustains the narrator and his narration. Some have pointed to passages in the novel, or aspects of it, which, they claim, cast doubt on Proust's or the narrator's commitment to these ideas (in this volume alone, see Forster, Guerlac, Hagberg and Panaioti). Others simply find the view so implausible that we are better off looking elsewhere (see Dancy 1995). Philosophical analysis is free, of course, to hear what it wants to hear and disregard the rest. But a notable line of philosophical criticism seeks either to downplay or to contextualise what we might call the openly philosophical passages of the book. Two of the most influential philosophical treatments of Proust proceed in this way.

In *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992 [1987]), the philosopher Vincent Descombes challenged the view of what essentially is a kind of unmediated presence of a philosophical subtext guiding the novel. He claimed that it was pointless to look for a coherent philosophical theory in Proust. Descombes understands why such readings are tempting and cites a letter to Jacques Rivière in which Proust himself stated that he hoped that *Time Regained* would 'clear up' the misunderstanding that the previous volumes created. But while this kind of evidence may sustain the idea that the final volume contains something close to a final, philosophical view, Descombes warns that 'the thoughts expressed in *Time Regained* were never really conclusions' (Descombes 1992, 7). Instead, his view was that if we want to read Proust philosophically, we paradoxically must take *The Search* seriously as a novel.

What Descombes calls 'the philosophy of the novel' (Descombes 1992, 10) means acknowledging that 'the Proustian novel is bolder than Proust the theorist' (Descombes 1992, 6). He concedes that RTP 'does at times seem to be a book of philosophy, a dogmatic treatise on Time and Essence', but that it is a book that is 'philosophically instructive because of the concepts the novelist brings into play in order to build his story' (Descombes 1992, 10). What Descombes effectively advocates in his study goes beyond Proust in the sense that his larger claim is that philosophers should be able to engage with works whose form diverges from philosophical writing, pithily bemoaning that 'it is a pity that philosophers do not talk a great deal more about the novels they read' (Descombes 1992, 8–9).

Joshua Landy's *Philosophy as Fiction* (2004) can be seen as following in Descombes's footsteps in an attempt to treat RTP as a philosophical novel in its own right and beyond particular affinities to specific philosophers. Landy's work links Proust with Nietzsche, but he makes no claim for direct influence. Instead, it is the distinction between author and narrator which is central to Landy's approach and his argument that Proust the author could understand 'more clearly than Marcel [the narrator] the instrumental and transitional roles of fiction writing, its function as a stepping-stone on the path to becoming who one is' (Landy 2004, 126). To be sure, Landy, like Descombes, is invested in grappling with Proust's distinctive philosophical ideas, ideas that cannot be separated from the literary form in which he has opted to present them (both of them use the same Rivière letter as an epigraph!). But unlike Descombes and others, his focus on the connection between literary form and philosophy puts an emphasis on the role of fiction. His claim is that it is only if we take RTP seriously

as a work of fiction that we will be able to 'extract a consistent, powerful, and original philosophical system' from it (Landy 2004, 8).

A different and complementary approach to Proust and philosophy looks at his ideas in the light of his philosophical context. It was the work of the literary theorist Anne Henry, and particularly her 1981 study *Marcel Proust – théories pour une esthétique* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1981), which constituted the starting point, here. Henry argued that the aesthetic theory driving both *Jean Santeuil* and *In Search of Lost Time* was largely based on Friedrich Schelling's and Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy of art. Indeed, she went as far as claiming that Proust's novel was a kind of literary translation of distinctly attributable philosophical ideas. Linking Proust's philosophical project with a more traditional philosopher – Schopenhauer, for example – has the advantage of supplying conventional philosophical support to the narrator's claims. But, philosophically speaking, it is not without cost: there aren't many Schopenhauerians around these days.

Henry's most ambitious conclusions have since been challenged by those who have sought to follow her lead in placing Proust in philosophical context. In this category, Luc Fraise's 2013 study of what he calls Proust's 'philosophical eclecticism' remains the most comprehensive guide to the historical groundings of the interactions between Proust and philosophy. While he highlights, like some of his predecessors, affinities between specific aspects of philosophical theories and their presence in Proust's writing, his work takes seriously Proust's own studies in philosophy. Fraise's point of departure is that 'it is a fact that the mature Proust remains permanently connected to his former studies in philosophy' (Fraise 2013, 13). Fraise seeks to demonstrate that for Proust, 'philosophy did not simply constitute a compulsory step in his studies; philosophy offered him a permanent home' (Fraise 2013, 13). His aim has therefore been not so much to give an account of Proust's philosophy but rather to reconstruct 'Proust's philosophical culture' (Fraise 2013, 7). This means presenting how Proust interacted with a range of philosophers, including some of his teachers, and how his novel pays tribute to their thought. At the same time, Fraise is opposed to the idea that any one extended engagement with a particular philosopher or philosophical idea can be singled out in what is essentially a multifaceted construct of interactions with philosophy and philosophers. Fraise's Proust makes a relentless use of philosophy, but in a piecemeal way which resists systematic reconstruction.

A comprehensive genealogy of scholarly philosophical readings of Proust would need to include many more figures.² Yet, those we have briefly sketched here are exemplary in that they constitute radically different approaches that have either traced the presence of a particular philosopher or particular philosophical currents in Proust's work, have tried to develop a Proustian philosophy in its own right based on his work's novelistic form and/or the novel's fictional character or have developed a historical approach that takes seriously Proust's own training and exposure to philosophy. In doing so, they all move beyond what we might call the narrator's official philosophy.

In bringing together this volume, we did not limit ourselves to any one of these approaches. We hope, instead, to pay tribute to the manifold forms the *reciprocal interactions* between Proust and philosophy have taken since the publication of RTP. Yet, it is also grounded in a more practical reason, namely that despite Proust's own engagement with philosophers and philosophy, and despite wide-ranging engagement with Proust by subsequent philosophers, the present-day Anglophone reader has no place to look for a comprehensive analysis of Proust's philosophy and of the philosophical study of Proust. In this volume, readers can find entries on his relation to particular philosophers – those who influenced him and those he influenced – as well as studies of his particular ideas.

The chapters collected here thereby seek to provide a systematic overview of Proust's philosophical context and of the key themes and concepts in his works. repetition of 'thereby' thereby avoided (see previous and next sentence). *The Proustian Mind* thus complements and fosters the interest in Proust's contribution to philosophy, providing a comprehensive resource in English, the first of its kind, for exploring key aspects of his thought. The diversity of themes gives a sense of the richness and fecundity of Proustian thought – be it when RTP is taken to put forward a philosophical position on a specific theme, when the influence of or affinity with specific philosophers on Proust's thought is traced or when RTP has itself become a point of departure for a subsequent philosophical engagement.

An Overview of *The Proustian Mind*

The volume is divided into seven subsections: *Life & Works*, *Metaphysics & Epistemology*, *Mind & Language*, *Aesthetics*, *Ethics*, *Sexuality & Gender* and *In Conversation with Predecessors, Contemporaries and Successors*. In addition to its primary goal of helping the reader to know where to look on any given subject, the choice of subsections was intended to demonstrate the breadth and depth of Proust's engagement with different areas of philosophy. It is also an invitation to read Proust in relation to traditional philosophical categories. While *The Proustian Mind* is not the product of any particular interpretative school or ideological agenda, the volume is intended to provide a fresh approach to Proust by allowing the reader to access his work through the voices of philosophers – some of whom write on Proust for the first time, while others have a longstanding interest in his thought – as well as literary scholars whose work foregrounds the philosophical aspects of Proust. In calling on the scholars assembled here, and in structuring the volume this way, we have tried to allow readers both to get an overview of the key philosophical themes in Proust's thought and to highlight his thought's continued relevance for debates in contemporary philosophy.

The first section on *Proust's Life and Works* features two chapters which allow readers to understand the origin and genesis of Proust's interest and engagement with philosophy from an early age. **William Carter** explores how, as a young man, Proust thought of himself as a philosopher rather than a future novelist, foregrounding in particular the role played by Proust's philosophy teacher at the lycée Condorcet, Alphonse Darlu and his philosophy professor at the Sorbonne, Emile Boutroux. **Luc Fraisse** provides a detailed overview of Proust's philosophical training, highlighting that, behind the apparently decorative references to philosophers in RTP, Proust entertained throughout his writing career an intensive and diverse dialogue with key areas and thinkers of Western philosophy.

The Proustian novel is at its core concerned with scrutinising the nature of reality, questions of existence and the epistemic possibilities of human experience. *Metaphysics and Epistemology* consists of six chapters that acknowledge how Proust's work engages with these fields. In his treatment of the novel's signature theme, time, **Garry Hagberg** reads Proust's work alongside Henri Bergson, Ludwig Wittgenstein and the American pragmatist George Herbert Mead. This exploration of how Proust connects, disconnects and reconnects the construction/composition of the past and composition/construction of the self sets up RTP as a 'massive case study' on the workings of memory but also as a blueprint for thinking about philosophy in literature. Space is a category often sidelined compared to the role that time and memory play in Proust's thought. **Anna Elsner** explores the role RTP plays in Jeff Malpas's philosophy of place and proposes that while the concepts of space and specific

places are central to understanding interconnection between memory, imagination and self-identity, they are also riddled with uncertainty for the Proustian narrator.

Some of the novel's key scenes are concerned with death and dying – the death of the grandmother, Albertine, Swann, Saint-Loup, Bergotte and Elstir are some of the most prominent examples, as is the narrator's anticipation of his own death at the end of *Time Regained*. Reading Proust alongside Derek Parfit's idea of 'timeless' characters, **Andrew Huddleston** singles out Proust's philosophy of death as a condition for consolation in the *Search*. Proust's narrator is fundamentally concerned with questioning the structure, consistency and continuity of selfhood. The word 'moi' ('self' or 'me') occurs on average 1.1996 times per page, as computational scholarship has shown (Bowie 1998: 2). **Ben Colburn** examines three different models for the Proustian self, eventually defending one which reads the epiphanies of the final volume as transcendental arguments. **Adam Watt** focuses on different modes of knowing in Proust's novel. He questions what constitutes 'Proust's knowledge' as well as 'knowability' more broadly and offers close readings of scenes that drive Proust's economy of knowledge. It is the epistemic expressions of that economy that constitute the topic of **Richard Moran's** chapter. His chapter highlights why the stakes of knowing and not knowing are so decisive and the essential role deferral and self-defeat play in resisting possession and maintaining uncertainty.

In the following part, *Mind and Language*, we engage with how Proust explores what constitutes mental states, consciousness and thoughts, how meaning is created and what the interpretation of language and speech acts reveals about the functioning of the Proustian mind. **Simon Kemp** examines Proustian memory as a double experience, as part of which involuntary memory unlocks the essence of experience while at the same time, by overlaying and fusing multiple instances in one image, it uncovers open laws about human nature and the mind. **Tom Stern** focuses on the theme of habit in RTP – a major philosophical topic in Proust's day – highlighting how that tradition and Proust's re-conception of it shapes the Proustian self, its connection to the external world and other people. In his chapter on subjectivity, **Robert B. Pippin** scrutinises what he defines as one of the key aims of the Proustian narrator: to escape subjectivity while remaining a subject. **Michael Lucey** reads RTP as a critical ethnography of the function of talk among certain social groups. Drawing on linguistic anthropology, his chapter explores the novel as a text that lays open multiple different language ideologies, the uncovering of which provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and mind.

As the *Aesthetics* section makes clear, RTP does not only put forward a theoretical hypothesis about the genesis of literature. It explores music, the visual arts and theatre, offering theories about the relationship between the arts, questioning the role of beauty and exploring the connection of art and life, which preoccupied Proust ever since the writing of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. **Virginie Greene** argues that the novel's aesthetic theory is constantly undercut through Proust's own life as well as the life of the reader. **Julia Peters** and **Anna-Lisa Sander** focus on Proust's understanding of beauty, which they read through the lens of psychoanalysis. **Jennifer Rushworth** charts a development from a Schopenhauerian hierarchy of arts to a more inclusive approach inspired by the Wagnerian model, as part of which it also questions the privileged but not unchallenged role that literature plays. **Gary Kemp** juxtaposes Proust's involuntary memory to Wittgenstein's idea of aspect-perception, represented by the famous Duck-rabbit drawing. His reading excavates the symbolic character of Proustian involuntary memory, allowing readers to re-evaluate it as an aesthetic phenomenon that conspires beneath ordinary language and experience and sheds light on the multi-dimensional dynamics of perception.

Compared with his landmark discussions of time, the self or art, Proust's narrator does not linger on reflections in conventional moral philosophy. Nonetheless, the *Ethics* section brings out and explores important ethical themes. **Martin Buijs** examines love in RTP, offering a reading which, among other things, defends Proust against some of Martha Nussbaum's moral objections. **David Ellison**'s analysis of lying in RTP, beginning with some of Kant's famous remarks, reveals Proustian connections between ethics and aesthetics. **Roos Slegers** argues that RTP broadens philosophical readings of vulnerability by revealing that to be vulnerable does not only mean being susceptible to harm. Instead, vulnerability becomes the very condition for love, wonder and relationality. **Scott Lerner** examines the representation of the other in Proust's writing from the perspective of an originary mother-son relation, drawing on both Derrida and Levinas.

The section entitled *Gender and Sexuality* examines three central aspects of this topic. Key to questions of sexual and gender identity is an understanding of identity and how processes of identification work. **Justine Balibar**'s chapter explores RTP as a work essentially concerned with enabling and resisting identification. She proposes that two distinct logics are at stake in Proust's project of challenging the concept of identification itself: the logic of inversion which switches the codes of identification or the logic of subversion which plays them off in a confused and ambiguous way and ultimately turns identification into an impossible and never-ending process. **Robbie Kubala** examines the workings of desire in RTP, as well as the relationship between desire, desire satisfaction and agent satisfaction. He focuses on the role of the imagination in the formation of desire, the distinction between hypothetical imagination and the imaginativeness that is involved in the perception of beauty. **Elisabeth Ladenson** situates jealousy as the nexus for philosophical, psychological and existential discourses in Proust's novel. Arguing that all jealousy – whether heterosexual or homosexual – in RTP is general rather specific, the chapter lays open how jealousy is the condition for all love relations as well as the precondition for the narrator's turn to writing.

Proust's own readings in philosophy were broad. They started during his school years, blossomed during his studies of philosophy and endured throughout his work on RTP. Proust's influence on twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy is as rich and multilayered as his own philosophical context. *In conversation with predecessors, contemporaries and successors* begins with **Michael N. Forster**'s chapter, which charts the common ground that exists between RTP and German Romanticism, drawing parallels, and noting differences, in particular with Herder, Goethe and Hegel, as well as the Schlegel brothers and Schleiermacher. **David Bather Woods** lays open the varied interpretations of Schopenhauer's influence and presence in Proust that have been put forward, ranging from the view that RTP constitutes a literary translation of Schopenhauer to the philosopher being cited as mere decoration. Henri Bergson, a contemporary of Marcel Proust and cousin of his by marriage, is another key figure frequently held responsible for having shaped Proust's thought on time and memory. **Suzanne Guerlac** focuses on Proust's ambiguous relationship to Bergson's thought, whose influence he openly rejected, to explore affinities in their aim and method beyond influence. While the first three chapters treat likely influences on Proust, the fourth takes a different approach. Proust certainly mentions Nietzsche, but writers who have linked the two have tended to focus on their affinities, regardless of influence. **Antoine Panaïoti** scrutinises these readings, and especially the idea of self-fashioning. An idea prominent in both Nietzsche and Proust, the chapter points to a way that allows the Proustian 'true self' to exist for the narrator while simultaneously constituting a or fiction for its author, which Panaïoti presents as consistent with the spirit of Nietzsche's endeavours.

The following three chapters of the anthology offer readers the possibility of exploring how Proust's work and legacy after his death have shaped the thought of four twentieth-century French philosophers: Merleau-Ponty; Sartre; de Beauvoir and Deleuze. **Anne Simon** explores Merleau-Ponty's fascination with Proust – a fascination which lasted a lifetime, led to repeated engagements with RTP and as part of which the phenomenologist was particularly taken by the way Proust transforms existential duration into novelistic language. **Lior Levy** also acknowledges the proximity of Proust to phenomenology, turning to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in her chapter. She explores Sartre's troubled relationship to Proust which she reads as pointing to tensions in Sartre's own thought, and draws parallels between Proust and de Beauvoir with regard to their conceptualising of grief and loss. **Patrick French** and **Thomas Baldwin**'s chapter on Gilles Deleuze explores the substantial role of RTP in Deleuze's philosophy. Their chapter proposes that Proust's novel offers Deleuze a paradigmatic example of a work of thought that fundamentally reconfigures Deleuze's understanding of philosophy by allowing art, philosophy and other regimes of knowledge, including madness, to co-exist on the same terrain of invention. In the final chapter **Sebastian Gardner** returns to the question of philosophical influences. He proposes that nothing can be proven regarding any narrow academic philosophical influence; yet, in a revival of Anne Henry's study, he upholds that RTP is a 'philosophical novel' because the expression of the idea at the heart of the novel has a philosophical character.

At the culmination of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the narrator recounts several experiences at a party which add up to something both significant and banal: he is an old man now. One of these experiences is reported as follows:

When someone, hearing that I had been ill, asked if I was not afraid of catching the flu which was prevalent then, another benevolent person reassured me by saying: 'no, it mostly attacks those who are still young. People of your age are not greatly at risk.'

(IV 507, our translation; TR, 296)

Proust is referring to what is still known, not altogether accurately, as the Spanish flu pandemic. This conveniently dates the party to the second half of 1918, at the earliest – though other, conflicting passages make precise dating impossible. Based on one recent study, the narrator's interlocutor is largely accurate: older people like the narrator were less likely to die from an infection compared to a young man, and, most importantly, much less likely to get infected in the first place.³

When we started this project, Proust's lines would have been much less salient than they are now. Most of us have since become charged with the nervous energy of gathering in the midst of a deadly pandemic, with its age-stratified risk calculations and well-meaning reassurances based on incomplete understanding of incomplete data – even if, in the most recent outbreaks, the young have been less, not more vulnerable than the old.

In practice, with regard to this volume, the pandemic meant several significant delays and even cancellations, limited access to libraries and resources and the swift abandonment of a plan for a conference. Needless to say, these are very minor costs in the grand scheme. Still, just as the narrator cannot separate the stiffness of one particular towel from all of its contingent environment, 'the whole instant of my life' which surrounded it, so we are unlikely to think of this collection of chapters without calling forth the early stages of the

COVID pandemic. We therefore take the opportunity to thank various people for their help, patience and perseverance: all our contributors; Josh Torabi, who provided invaluable editorial assistance; and our editors at Routledge. And we wish them, and our readers, the best of health.

Notes

- 1 Others include, but are not limited to, Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, Theodor W. Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin.
- 2 This would include, for example, recent works by Michel Ferraris, Mauro Carbone, Erika Fülöp, Miguel de Beistegui, Anne Simon and Martin Hägglund.
- 3 See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3310443/> (accessed 25 April 2022).

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PART 1

Life and Works