Sameness &Difference Between Two Participants

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When there is a meeting between two people something appears in the world which had not existed before. The two people are Hubert and Joseph. They had never met before. Hubert has met many people and has several friends whom he knows but this meeting of himself and Joseph differs from any other meeting he has had with anyone else. No two meetings are ever the same. They may look similar viewed by an observer watching the encounter but if he could X-ray Hubert's inner soul he would see something that he has never seen in the many X-rays he has of Hubert's meetings with other people. I used the word 'soul' but the better word would be 'person'. Joseph does not meet the same person that Roger, Guy or Donald had met when they encountered Hubert. Hubert is a different person in this meeting with Joseph as he was in those meetings with Roger or Guy or Donald. An aspect of personhood is that its colouring, its surface or its shape is not a stable constant. The meeting with a person brings something to the surface in Hubert that had never surfaced when he was with Roger, Guy or Donald. It is an amazing fact that no two people look exactly the same although there are seven billion people on the planet. So, although each individual, man and woman, has two eyes, two ears, a nose, a chin, a forehead and hair yet no two are exactly the same and when Hubert walks into the room I see that he is different from Joseph or Roger, Guy or Donald. Just as I can see this difference and therefore, in some sense, my definition of him differs due to my perceptive awareness so also my personhood is different with each individual person with whom I am in an engaged encounter. A crucial defining factor in personhood is that it changes, has to change, with each new person encountered; otherwise there would be no meeting. The person creates the change necessary to enter into relations with this new arrival. In order to relate I have to create what is there and it is **my** creation or, more accurately, it is a creation arising from a unique togetherness, a unique relation. In the way that we can sometimes see that a child bears characteristics of both his mother and his father so also in every personal encounter there is a tonal quality that comes not just from one person but from each or both. We could define person by saying that it differs from terms like 'soul' or 'mind' or 'self' in that it is individually created on the occasion of a true meeting whereas 'soul', 'mind' or 'self' are constants. The person comes into being through a psychological act that brings the meeting and the person into being. If I am looking at the Houses of Parliament in London from across the river at St. Thomas's Hospital they are different each minute as the light changes as the sun's angle changes and the effect of light when the clouds, blown by the wind, change the light from the sun from moment to moment. This is why when, in 1870 Monet stood with his paint-brush at St. Thomas's, he depicted the Houses of Parliament on 200 different canvases. Each one depicted the Houses of Parliament but no two were the same because the colouring was different on each one. The changing scene due to the sun and the clouds is an analogy for the changes in Hubert when he meets Joseph as opposed to when he met Roger, Guy and Donald. The constant is the Houses of Parliament in the analogy; this in Hubert is his soul, his mind or the self. The different colouring of each canvas is the person; either Hubert with Roger, with Guy, with Donald or with Joseph.

No analogy is perfect. It points to just one aspect of the issue but there is another that this analogy can accomodate. When Monet takes out his palette of different colours and then he goes into action, he creates a scene on this canvas that is different from any scene on the other 199 canvases. Each of the 200 canvases is a creation. A creation occurs when Hubert is with Roger, a different creation occurs when he is with Guy, a different one again when he is with Donald and also different when he

is with Joseph. Is it Hubert that creates? It is at this point that our Monet analogy breaks down. The creation that occurs in the meeting that happens between Hubert and Joseph is a co-creation. It is created by both of them.

In the Monet example there is the painter as a subjective presence but the Houses of Parliament and also the sun, river, clouds and sky, though in movement, are not personalities that imagine, think and talk but when Hubert is with Joseph the two men are in a shared medium. This is more than two bodies in the same geographical space: two bodies enclosed by the four walls that constitutes the room. There is an invisible communicative medium encircling the two people; like two fish in the same water. If there were no water the two fish would be dead. If there be no communicative medium there would not be two persons but two robotic entities. The term 'communicative medium' is awkward and clumsy so I propose to fashion a new word to describe this: *regether.* I choose this word as a shrinking of 'relating together'. This is an invisible medium that has no sensual qualities. I have started by talking of two men Hubert and Joseph and have avoided initially talking of Hubert and Antonia: a man and a woman. The sexual trace that may flow between them is sensual; it is within the arena of the senses but *regether* refers to an invisible entity. Because it is invisible we tend to think that it is not real but a relation is real though without any bodily components. If I say 'My right hand is in front of my left hand' the two hands are visible but the 'in front of' is real but is not a body. A relationship has no bodily component. How do we define a reality that is not physical? What word do we use to describe it? Mental? Spiritual? or Emotional? 'Mental' does describe satisfactorily the reality that has no bodily component. The word 'spiritual' also refers to a reality devoid of any physical component but, because it is so generally associated with religion, it is better not to use it except in a religious context. We come finally to the word 'emotional'. This refers to a relation existing between two persons. When we are talking of Monet in relation to the Houses of Parliament this relation is correctly described as a 'mental' reality but if a man called Gustave arrives and engages in a relation with Monet then we have a reality that is 'emotional'.

I said above when talking of Hubert and Joseph that they were together in a shared medium and I fashioned the word *regether* to describe this medium but I want now to examine how this comes about. *Regether* is fashioned not by Hubert alone, not by Joseph alone but by the two people in intercourse with each other. *Regether* comes into being through two creative acts occurring in conjunction with each other and because it is made by these two particular people, Hubert and Joseph, this *regether* is not the same as the *regether* that comes into being when Monet and Gustave are engaged with each other or when Helen and Maria are with each other or when Teresa and Peter are together. I am deliberately putting in two women together as well as two men and also a man and a woman together. I want though to emphasize that *regether* refers to the non-bodily medium in which two people, two persons, share. The bodily component of which the sexual is an aspect is separate from *regether*. It may be that *regether* is never totally isolated from bodily touch but it is its own reality whose defining feature is communication. I think it probable that this medium which I am associating with the instance when two persons come into engagement with each other is a particular individual instance of what the neo-Platonic philosopher, Plotinus, referred to as the World Soul. Plotinus categorized the universe under three headings: the Ultimate, the World Soul and the World of Sensation. So the bodily, the sexual, is carved out of the World of Sensation whereas *regether* is a particular instance of the World Soul. The World Soul is that medium that allows communication to occur between human beings worldwide. This is communication at the foundation and exists at a more basic level than language.

This communicative medium, the sharing of which by individuals within it, is called the world of emotion. When two individuals are within it I refer to it as *regether* which has itself no qualities of

sense. It is constituted by a sharing of minds. St. Augustine made this point:

> " We communicate truth not by verbal or non-verbal signs but by an interior experience of a sharing of minds." [1]

There are several different categories expressing this non-sensual reality: paintings, drawings, sculpture, music, poetry, architecture. All of these different forms point to this communicative core but they are not the thing itself because this cannot be seen, touched or heard.

What I am saying here is that the **World Soul** that Plotinus categorizes is not part of the world of sensation but is it in what he refers to as Ultimate Reality? To answer this I have to ask that when St. Augustine refers to a sharing of minds is this the world of sensation. I think it is not. Communication between one human and another is not in the world of sensation. A man is telling me of his trip across the Atlantic in a small sailing-boat but I do not believe him. I believe he is spinning a yarn. He has never been in a boat across the Atlantic so I connect not to his words but to something else. What is this 'something else'? I sense that he is constructing this picture of himself in a boat crossing the Atlantic but believe that this is not something he has in fact done. It seems that there is a faculty in me that distinguishes between the real and the fictional? I know the difference because I am part of 'the real'. The I or the Me is in the real. The I or the Me is transient. When I die this I, this Me, will be no more and yet, while still alive, is part of the real. The real just is. The universe just is. It could not have not been and yet is part of that which is. This is an antinomy which the mind cannot grasp. Kant emphasized that our minds are limited in their capacity to resolve such contradictions.

So there is a sameness in the two persons but, at the same time, a difference. This antinomy is difficult to grasp and yet it is fundamental to our daily experience of creative meetings that constitute our lives.

[1] Chadwick, Henry. (2009). *Augustine of Hippo – A Life*. Oxford University Press, p.46.