

On Love and Awareness

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Scholars organize their views on love by referring to teleological motives, idealistic romance, subject-object relations, ownership, etc., thereby creating categories that reflect their own understanding of love. For example, love is seen in the context of sexuality and erotic pleasure (*eros*), or it is seen as divine love of intellect (*agape*). Furthermore, love appears as friendship and recognition of others (*philia*), or it is seen as spiritual conformity (*nomos*).¹ In spite of different descriptions of love, there appears to be a common structure to the theoretical recognition of love. Alan Soble suggests, for example, that we consider that the concept of love in the *eros* tradition is property-based and reason-dependent, whereas love in the *agape* tradition would not depend on such qualities.² Such structural views on love help us to clarify our understanding of the subject matter, although the question still remains whether they can really explain the phenomenon of love? Robert Solomon would deny such a claim. For him, love is simply the experience of an emotion. But it is an experience that is based on choice.

Our emotions are [...] intelligent constructions, structured by concepts and judgements that we learn in a particular culture, through which we give our experience some shape and meaning. [...] we do not 'fall in' love at all. Quite to the contrary, the fall is rather a creation, which we have been taught to make by a thousand movies, stories and novels; its most essential ingredient [...] is personal *choice*.³

If there is validity to the assumption of personal choice, then we must also give due consideration to the social dimension of love. In a social context, love is used as a means to justify morality based on loyalty-exhibiting virtues: "marital fidelity, love of one's own family and kin, friendship, allegiance to various communities and institutions, and patriotism."⁴

Given the many metaphors that we can use to describe aspects of love, it appears to be an impossible task to give a precise, unanimous definition of love. Irving Singer suggests that we discuss elements of love in either idealist or realist terms.⁵ Idealist topics would include, for example, romanticism, courtly love, Platonic love, or concepts of merging and oneness. Realist topics, on the other hand, would include the sociobiology of altruism and selfishness, behavioral biology, sexual drive, libido theory, or social anthropology, to mention only a few.

¹ Compare Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love. Vol. 1: Plato to Luther* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 162-311.

² Alan Soble, *The Structure of Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 8.

³ Robert Solomon, *Love. Emotion, Myth and Metaphor* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1981), pp. XXVI f. [emphasis is in the original].

⁴ Compare David B. Wong, "Universalism versus Love with Distinctions: An Ancient Debate Revived," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 16/3 and 4 (September/ December 1989), 251-272.

⁵ Compare Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love. Vol. 3: The Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 8.

In this paper, I will discuss some aspects of a humanistic perspective on love which includes both idealistic as well as realistic elements of love. I will argue that any experience of love is directly affected by the level of self-awareness in an individual, that enables him to recognize the origins of his feelings and allows him to act upon them in an intentional manner. I use the term "awareness" in a similar way as, for example, the Jungian psychologist Arnold Mindell. He describes awareness as the capacity of a living human system which is connected to other minds to discover and to use the perception modality.⁶ There is a common element to all feelings which is directly related to the self-awareness of an individual. It is the truism that feelings or emotions accentuate a clear picture of an individual's traits of character. Emotionality without self-awareness is a rather burdensome experience for the transmitter as well as it is for the recipient of an emotion. With this I do not refer to rational control of emotionality. Rather, I refer to an existential human condition, in which the consequences of an individual's action must be realized and accepted by oneself. Through such realizations, an individual can remain an autonomous actor, utilizing one's knowledge of oneself to explore one's emotions beyond the limits of social restraints. For it is the authentic experience of one's emotions that enables a rational person to master the so-called existential absurdity of one's existence. We must recognize that advanced technological societies do not encourage such challenges for an individual. Authenticity is gained through self-awareness. It enables an individual to transcend the experience of existential absurdity towards an experience of existential access. The term "existential access" specifies the message flow between perceptions and the act of perceiving.

Social conditions of sexual love

One's most common immediate association with love probably is related to sexual or erotic love. The act of procreation, itself, normally does not cause any conflict for us in our understanding of its necessity for species survival on a biological level. Rather, it is the moral domain on a social level of discourse, that gives us reasons for different evaluations of sexual love. Roger Scruton sees sexual desire as a social artefact which is nevertheless also part of human nature. He argues that

there is no sense to the idea that sexual fulfillment or sexual desire are located *outside* society, in a state of nature to which we must, in the sexual act, return. On the contrary, outside society there is nothing distinctively human, and all values are annulled.⁷

Scruton contrasts a fictional *homo faber*, "a creature in whom the normal human potential has been frozen or destroyed," in opposition to a cultured person with "sex integrity" who recognizes himself in a *Lebenswelt* which is shaped by social artefacts that create meaning for the citizen in a public world.

⁶ Arnold Mindell, *The Year One. Global Process Work* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1989), p. 148.

⁷ Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire. A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p. 348.

Meaning, for common humanity, lies in a constant confrontation with the sacred. And in this confrontation man rehearses the transcendental illusion, that his personal existence in the world is possible only because he is not of the world. 8

Scruton emphasizes the role of the sacred in an ideal *polis*. He claims, that "sexual integrity will flourish in a society in which religious institutions and customs also flourish and retain their authority."⁹ He favours such religious institutions that view marriage as a "sacrament," thereby endorsing public acceptance of erotic privacy. The cultured person, Scruton argues, will consider the marriage ceremony as one of his most important events in his life.

At such moments, man is confronted with his fragility and dependence. As at the moments of death and birth, he is beset by awe. This feeling of recognition of the sacred: of the intrusion into the human world of obligations that cannot be created by an act of choice, and which therefore demand a transcendental meaning. 10

Contrary to Scruton's glorification of social institutions as mediators for sexual desire, I do question whether his Victorian defense of marriage and authorized erotic love can provide any justice for an individual's sense of sensuality based on self-awareness. Rather, it appears to be a perfect background for a grand-scale soap opera which includes themes such as adultery, private ownership, and perversion. For example the stereotypical glorification of adultery is based on an unchallenged assumption that "love-making" in marriage is inferior to "passionate love" with a partner outside of marriage. Such an assumption is meaningful only if marriage has become a fossilized social institution without respect to an individual's sexuality.

Marriage may be a means to something else, and valued for no intrinsic reason. Love, however, is never a means, and contains its virtue intrinsically. 11

Within the context of private ownership, "the exclusive erotic relation fights also for its exclusive territory."¹² From here it is only a small step to the so-called irregularities of neurotic sexual life. Sexual fantasies, too, become private property, "which I can dispose according to my will, with no answerability to the other whom I abuse through them."¹³ Along with this culturally-conditioned privatization of love also comes the freedom to rebel against sexual norms which is then called "perversion." Scruton's argument that the concept of sexual desire has to be placed into an intersubjective description of the *Lebenswelt*, starts in his description of sexual human nature. However, his conclusion rests no longer in the individual, but in political conservatism. It may be a difficult task for him to sustain his argument in view of findings in cultural and social anthropology, and it is perhaps a hopeless task in the context of radical feminism.

⁸ Ibid., p. 352.

⁹ Ibid., p. 355.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 357.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 359.

¹² Ibid., p. 360.

¹³ Ibid., p. 345.

For example, the anthropologist Leslie White sees very little love or sexual desire in the institution of marriage. He would argue against Scruton that marriage as an institution finds its explanation in terms of sociocultural progress. While for Scruton marriage is seen as a "sacrament," for White, marriage is rooted in economic reasons.

No culture could afford to use such a fickle and ephemeral sentiment as love as the basis of an important institution. Love is here today but it may be gone tomorrow. But economic needs are with us always. 14

An individual's autonomy in sexual performance not only is endangered through societal demands, but it is also questioned in the context of psychoanalysis. There is no doubt that Sigmund Freud initiated a powerful metaphorical language to research the sexual behavior of a traumatized people. The association of sexual pleasures with Judeo-Christian concepts of guilt and sin, and the rise of industrial society with -- as Marx termed it -- a process of alienation for the individual, both provided a unique scenario for Freud's libido theory. In addition, social role models for male and female behavior had been irrevocably challenged by an emerging feminist critique. For example, Lou von Salomé was an outspoken feminist thinker who belonged to the "inner circle" of Freud's pupils in Vienna. Another feminist writer of this time, Karen Horney, broke with Freud's doctrines and emphasized the importance of social categories for a successful application of psychoanalysis. Also Emma Goldman, a radical feminist activist of this era commented with great insight on the tragedy of women's emancipation.

Erich Fromm sees psychoanalysis as "a characteristic expression of Western man's spiritual crisis."¹⁵ Freud's own spiritual crisis gave rise to a celebration of scientific leadership, in which the analyst must maintain a superior position and serve as a model and teacher to the patient.

Readers of Freud's papers are constantly reminded that 'science has shown,' that 'the evidence has conclusively established,' that 'there can no longer be a shadow of doubt'; and those who question are told that they are 'resisting' a truth that is uncomfortable to them. 16

In societies organized according to hierarchical principles, human passions need to be re-directed from an individual's experience of autonomy towards his acceptance of political authority in order to complement the demands of leadership. Philip Slater suggests that

the idea of placing restrictions on sexuality was a stunning cultural revolution, as important as the acquisition of fire. 17

¹⁴ Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture. A Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1949), p. 321.

¹⁵ Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki, and Richard de Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 80.

¹⁶ Scruton, p. 208. Compare also Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt not be Aware. Society's Betrayal of the Child* (New York: Meridian, 1986), chapter 15: "The Father of Psychoanalysis." In this context, also see the different viewpoints about Freud's scientific integrity as presented, for example, by Gerasimos Santas, *Plato and Freud. Two Theories of Love* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 188. Opposite to Santas, we can read a different account on Freud's scientific integrity in Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), p. 158.

By making sex scarce, leadership can rechannel sexual energy into jobs and production. Slater believes that it is the illusion of romantic love that creates scarcity for an otherwise unlimited sexual resource.

Romantic love asks us to create the illusion of a self-willed subject, detached from his or her social setting, to whom we swear our allegiance. But individual, well meaning women and men, fall in love only to find their 'unique' relationship inexorably shaped by the expectations and beliefs of those around them. 18

Sexuality can be used as a tool for controlling others. It is easy to find numerous examples for religious, political, or domestic abuse of sexuality. However, there are other aspects to human sexuality more appropriate for personal growth. I refer to our ability to utilize sexual energy for one's increase of receptivity on a journey towards inner peace. Such a journey is associated with an individual's recognition of the primordial necessity for tending to one's self-awareness.

In the Western tradition, the Socratic pledge of "know thyself" in a context *sub species aeternitatis*, is a widely recognized philosophical necessity for an individual's development of self-awareness. Just like different forms of spiritual meditation can lead an individual towards transcendence, sexuality, too, can be used by an individual to transcend stereotypical role behavior. Sexuality can be a strong mediator for our search to comprehend our existence. For example, Mircea Eliade describes sexuality in the context of an individual's spiritual development, where sexual union of human beings can lead to a state of being "which surpasses the structure and the limits of the human condition."¹⁹ Sexual intercourse becomes another means to the intended goal of transcendence toward inner peace.

By liberating himself, man creates the spiritual dimension of freedom, and 'introduces' it into the cosmos of life - that is, into blind and tragically conditioned modes of existence. 20

It would reach far beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail some of the sexual practices that can be employed by a couple to approach such states of awareness. Instead, suffice it to say that one passage from Eliade's book on yoga, gives us a brief reference about the kind of practices men and women can employ to revivify their autonomous existence.

When the prayer is finished, the men will keep (their minds fixed on) their loins, firmly pressing the Essence and distilling the Breath, which follows the spinal column and rises to the Ni-huan against the current; this is what is called 'causing to return to the Origin,' huan-yüan; the women will keep (their minds fixed on) their hearts, nourishing the spirits, distilling an unchanging fire, making the Breath descend from the two breasts to the loins, whence it again mounts through the spinal column and also

¹⁷ Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness. American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon Press 1990), p. 78.

¹⁸ Andrea Nye, "The Subject of Love: Diotima and her Critics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 24/2 (April 1990), pp. 150 f.

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 13* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 185.

²⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga. Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 100.

goes to the Ni-huan: this is what is called 'transforming the real,' hua-chen. [...] If one practices (this procedure) for a very long time, [...] one traverses the centuries. This is the method of not dying. 21

Of course, Eliade is referring to tantric practices of preserving sexual energy. For example in the Taoist tradition, the transformation of sexual energy into life-force energy is a desired outcome of sexual practice. Such practices cannot be placed into the categories mentioned earlier to define love. Categories such as erotic or even *erosic* love, *agape*, or *pistis* (faith),²² do not capture the meaning of the method of not dying. Instead, they follow a relational pattern that can be expressed as follows: (x)(y)(Lxy) states the love of y by x. If it should be necessary to include any conditions for loving, an appropriate conditional statement would express such a relation. Utilizing love in the context of self-awareness would require an individual to experience his existential access. This existential relation can be expressed in the rather awkward looking identity statement (x)(y)(Lxy iff x=y), without introducing a third variable z, while x and y designate two different persons.

What are the empirical consequences of an individual's unconditional exposure to one's existential access? I will briefly address this topic with reference to parental love.

Parental love

Conditionality often becomes a readily accepted attribute of love. Even if love is seen as a virtue, as for example Aristotle specifies it in his account of the different types of friendship (*philia*), it requires reciprocated goodwill to exchange goods for each other.²³ The different kinds of goods to be exchanged indicated to Aristotle the different kinds of friendship involved. Robert Solomon puts this reciprocity into clear terms: "Love must be *earned*."²⁴ The different tokens for love then can be found in utility, goodness, sex, neurosis, dependency, attraction, etc., to mention only a few.

I reject such views of conditionality in love, since they magnify the differentiation between a lover and the "object of love." Awareness-centered love does not occur in an objectifying environment. A disputed objection to conditionality in love is the assumption of unconditional parental love. Some references can be found to support unconditionality in mother love, while others attribute it to father love.²⁵ In either case, the principle of reciprocity is not considered a required condition for parental love, at least not in the early years of a child. As the child grows towards adolescence and maturity, parental love declines again towards conditionality. Aristotle gives a peculiar account of the parent-child relationship:

21 Ibid., pp. 412 f.

22 Soble, p. 21.

23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 1156a.

24 Solomon, p. 84.

25 Compare Soble, pp. 13f.

A son is not free to disavow his father, but a father is free to disavow his son. For a debtor should return what he owes, and since no matter what a son has done he has not made a worthy return for what his father has done for him, he is always the debtor. 26

Such a statement suggests to me that during Aristotle's time any form of meaningful communication between a parent and their infant was not recognized. Such communication is described, for example, by Frederick Leboyer.²⁷ When awareness-centered communication takes place, no superiority can be considered. The gift of life is not a parental creation but a parent's ongoing discovery of life in the parent-child relation. Referring to the biological mechanism of procreation, or referring to the social conditioning of consumer dependencies is not a necessary condition for parental love. As I mentioned earlier, unconditional love takes place in an awareness-centered environment. The parent's self-realization then becomes the sufficient condition for parental love, regardless of any concerns about reciprocity. In an awareness-centered environment, the relationship between a parent and his child leads to a genuine respect for each other, combined with the parent's and child's desire for meaningful communication. Nietzsche's Zarathustra states this discovery in poetic terms:

You shall build over and beyond yourself, but first you must be built yourself, perpendicular in body and soul. You shall not only reproduce yourself, but produce something higher. 28

Love as a mediator for inner peace

By now it should be sufficiently clear that I view love as having very little in common with emotions. Emotionality is a social category that is expressed by referring to a liking or disliking of something, while love is an existential category that is recognized through a state of self-awareness. Since self-awareness is a recurrent theme throughout this paper, I will now try to delineate this concept more precisely. Firstly, I do not consider it possible of reify awareness. Secondly, I reject any identification of awareness with religion, consciousness, or reason. Charles Taylor points out that the assumption of a "higher" virtuous life that is ruled by reason, goes back to Plato.

[...] reason itself is defined in terms of a vision of order, in the cosmos and in the soul. The higher life is one in which reason - purity, order, limit, the unchanging - governs the desires, with their bent to excess, insatiability, fickleness, conflict. 29

²⁶ Aristotle, 1163b20.

²⁷ Frederick Leboyer, *Birth without violence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990). With unforgettable pictures, Leboyer documents the communication that can take place between a newborn infant and his parents on the day of the infant's birth.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press Inc., 1978), p. 69.

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 20.

Taylor sees awareness represented in the knowledge of an agent. However, it is a form of knowledge that is based on "radical reflexivity." A reflexive stance becomes radical, Taylor argues, if I adopt a first-person standpoint which makes my experience of my activities, thoughts, and feelings, entirely different from anyone else's experience.³⁰ Taylor demonstrates that placing awareness into the context of radical reflexivity, will lead an observer to an Augustinian concept of god, or a Cartesian concept of reason. In a different cultural context, however, Taylor's "radical reflexivity" might cease to have any meaning whatsoever. For example, in Theravada Buddhism, the concept of "self" is structured in such a way that it would lead an individual to realize himself beyond "selfhood."³¹

Any discussions about awareness become fruitless intellectual exercises, if they are not performed in a state of awareness. In some instances, meditation can lead an individual to one's realization of awareness. In philosophy, however, meditation is viewed often as a purely rational exercise, such as, for example, Descartes' *Meditations*. Theoretical discourse cannot compensate one for direct experience. Most philosophers are aware of the fact that there are other forms of meditation that involve not only an individual's reasoning abilities, but include also, for example, breathing exercises, movement, sitting postures, asceticism, etc..³² Meaningful communication in a state of awareness can take place only if there is a desire for such communication. In adult life, inner peace starts with meditation.

Conclusion

Love cannot be seen as the problem of humankind. The association of suffering, pain, and destruction with images of love certainly has a long historical tradition. Its origins can be found in mechanisms of social control. However, it is the absence of self-awareness that eliminates love and thereby causes pain to the individual. Moreover, each individual has the capacity to choose intentionally whether he wants to activate a meaningful state of self-awareness or whether he wants to conform to the demands of socio-economical hierarchies. For, if I use my intellect to develop social hierarchies in state level societies, then I will also have to establish social norms that regulate how much "love" should be given to whom and under what conditions. It does not require much imagination for us to recognize that such a basic scenario will set the stage for suffering. My intentional choice at times will take place at a conscious level, but it will often cause an unconscious conflict when I was not able to evaluate a given situation properly. My socialization process in regard to emotionality can be seen in terms of my learning when to like or fear someone, when to be indifferent, and when to manipulate someone as a means of obtaining some personal good.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 130 f.

³¹ Compare Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons. Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³² Compare Frederic Underwood, "Meditation: An Overview," in Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 9 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 324 -31.

Social scientists claim that self-awareness is based on social structuring. This may very well be the case, indeed. Nevertheless, it is still an unresolved question as to whether the dominance of social norms on an individual is identical with that individual's ability to find a center of awareness that is shaped by but not limited to such norms.

If I have not found inner peace in my search for self-identity, I can easily confuse social expectations about love which may have very little in common with what I do actually experience. However, I leave it to the reader's choice to reject transcendent thoughts on love, or to find inner peace in considering them.

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