

The significance of
love, as gleaned from
clive staples lewis
and jean-luc nancy ...



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Love connotes many things for different people. The discussion of love in literature is endless and oftentimes exalted. Specific chapters of the works of British writer C.

S. Lewis and French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, the former on “ Friendship” and the latter on “ Shattered Love,” bring into focus two different types of love with a common element – both are not relegated to the self and are bound to blossom or achieve fruition only when not shackled. There is romantic love and there is what many people refer to as platonic love, or friendship. Romantic love and friendship, as C. S. Lewis said, may co-exist (Lewis 67).

“ But very few modern people think Friendship a love of comparable value or even a love at all... To the ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it” (Lewis 57). In essence, Lewis expressed that friendship as a special kind of love, as accepted by ancient society, is oftentimes not viewed in the same way by people in the contemporary world. C.

S. Lewis likewise stated that friendship is “ the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious and necessary (Lewis 58). Yet while people may feel they can go on living even with few or with no real friends at all or regard it as not that essential, there are others who “ would say that Friendship is extremely useful, perhaps necessary for survival” (Lewis 69). Indeed, the very term “ friend” may connote entirely different things to two different

persons. It is open to many different interpretations based on how people see it, or want to see it.

C. S. Lewis states matter-of-factly that “ Friendship is in reality a love, and even as great a love as Eros” (Lewis 67) but that the term ‘friend’ ought to connote something more than an ally or companion, even if friendship does arise out of ‘mere companionship’ (Lewis 65). Friendship is the act of discovering a kindred soul with whom one shares a common ground or interest.

“ The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends” (Lewis 66). Hence, it ceases to be self-centered and focuses on a common aspiration, for instance, or a common targeted goal in life, which creates a bond between two human beings. In other words, there seems to be a chord that ties the two living and breathing souls together. After all, as Lewis countered, “ Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers” (Lewis 67). Friendship, however, may not be the imperfect thing many of us fervently hope or expect it to be.

It can either be “ a school of virtue...(or) “ a school of vice” (Lewis 80). Generally, though, friendship can be a most sublime thing, because “ it is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others” (Lewis 89). Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of love, on the other hand, is one which always poses itself as that which is not self-love (Nancy 94). Love, in Nancy’s view, is also “ the extreme movement... a being reaching completion... arriving at a final and definitive completion (Nancy 86). Nancy’s “ Shattered

Love” is better explained in a 2001 roundtable discussion with the celebrated philosopher. In an online article, “ Love and Community: A Round-table Discussion with Jean-Luc Nancy, Avital Ronell and Wolfgang Schirmacher,” Nancy stated: to love means to give what is behind or beyond any subject, any self.

It is precisely a giving of nothing, a giving of the fact that I cannot possess myself. This is to abandon, because in that case I would say that to same as to abandon...To give is to give up. So, yes, perhaps that could be meaning of “ shattered” – that is that to love means in one way to give the self as possession, the self as present to itself, and in another way to give and to abandon to the other something that the other himself has, to say that it is in the same way for himself because he is as well a self. In other words, love is to share the impossibility of being a self.

As to why love for oneself and for another being ends up shattered, Nancy powerfully wrote, “ Love re-presents I to itself broken (and this is not a representation)...For the break is a break in his self-possession as subject; it is, essentially, an interruption of the process of relating to oneself to oneself outside of oneself. From then on, I is constituted broken. As soon as there is love, the slightest act of love, the slightest spark, there is this ontological fissure that cuts across and that disconnects the elements of the subject-proper – the fibres of the heart. ” (Nancy 96). This highlights the very vulnerability of love. It connotes that when one experiences love, there is bound to be something that is ruptured.

In satisfying the other human being, the relation to self of the person in love tends to be interjected with bouts of ecstasy, or sheer joy, or feelings of disappointment and even pain, and being suffused with these feelings, that same person loses a sense of self, albeit in a wondrous way. What Jean-Luc Nancy expressed as finding joy in the other is something many people can relate to. It brings into focus the transformative powers of love. I agree that an all-consuming love leads to losing oneself in the beloved, which is not akin to losing one's identity, though.

This extent of being so bound to the other, particularly in the case between husbands and wives fulfilling their duties to each other, is the moral type of love. Because two individuals start out as two distinct entities, who soon discover and lose themselves in each other, there is to a certain extent an injurability that the human beings in love must live with. The subject is, as Nancy puts it, "broken or fractured" and "the break is the break in his self-possession as subject" (Nancy 96). In other words, it is 'the break itself that makes the heart' (Nancy 96).

Love, as Nancy also expressed, "cuts across finitude, always from the other to the other, which never returns to the same... Love offers finitude in its truth; it is finitude's dazzling presentation (Nancy 99). I can identify with the thought of love "cutting across finitude" and being "finitude's dazzling presentation" (Nancy 99) considering the context with which Jean-Luc Nancy wrote this – with two people in love being part of a "community of others" (Nancy 15). Overall, I find Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of love a little

complicated. Love, I think, ought to be easy and natural, but at the same

time perplexing, while predisposing two souls sharing it to innumerable hurts
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but which, when conquered, elevates the experience to a new and more profound level.

I am also more inclined to believe that a really caring and selfless love is one that makes whole again whatever it is – individuality or a sense of self — which was shattered or injured by love. As for C. S. Lewis' take on friendship, I half-heartedly agree with him that “ those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travellers” (Lewis 67).

I acknowledge that friendship, in itself, is a journey, best experienced by those who share something in common, particularly two human beings who may share things and even learn from each other without the romantic agenda that characterizes Eros. On the other hand, friendship may still be experienced by those who do not even have anything in common. One may simply be drawn to the other for reasons outside common interests or activities, and still strike a friendship of some sort. This may, however, not fall in the category of friendship C.

S. Lewis set forth, but it can still fall under the broad definition of friendship nonetheless. What I totally agree with is that “ friendship is in reality a love” (Lewis 67) mainly because from friendship, two or a greater number of people rediscover themselves and oftentimes turn out to be better people, due in large part to the special connection and affection they share. It is “ this love, free from instinct, free from all duties” (Lewis 77) that can make life very meaningful.

While friendship can be that uplifting, I tend to disagree, though, that it can be “as great a love as Eros” (Lewis 67) because romantic love is of another level that lets individuals united as one soar to new heights. While friendship, as C. S. Lewis puts it, has “nothing throaty about it; nothing that quickens the pulse or turns you red and pale” (Lewis 58), it does have its limits, and while the bond between two real friends can be very deep, I feel that romantic love, which may have had friendship as foundation, eclipses all other loves in so far as experiencing all-encompassing joys – from sensual and emotional to spiritual, is concerned. Finally, friendship as “the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others” (Lewis 89) may be true to a large extent.

When two people enjoy a real friendship that is allowed to blossom in its own time and on its own accord, its beauty reflects the very magnificence that represents something God-given. All other things become easy to live with, and to appreciate. However, when a friend turns into a foe, the situation negates the idea of the relationship as a way by which God reveals the beauty of others. We are, however, living in an imperfect world where people who find joy in the friendship of others can learn to be selfless and be more tolerant and forgiving of the other’s flaws and faults.

Such may also be the test of real friendship. In both the chapter on friendship by C. S. Lewis and Jean-Luc Nancy’s “Shattered Love” it will be gleaned that human beings are capable of leaving the self behind to experience something transcendent. Both texts likewise attest to the great power of two different kinds of love.