

# The philosophy of love philosophy essay



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The philosophy of love transcends so many sub-disciplines including religion, epistemology, human nature, metaphysics, ethics and even politics. In most times, statements and arguments referring to love, its role in humanity for instance connects to the central theories of philosophy. It's often examined in either the philosophy of gender or sex (Singer 34). This paper gives a discussion about personal love by first distinguishing the various types of love. For instance, the manner in which a man would love his wife is very different from the kind of love he would have for his pet or child. This paper gives explanations from philosophical analysis of various kinds of love as explained by various Greek philosophers and authors. As part of my argument about the philosophy of love I will also divide love into four major types: love as emotion, love as union, love as valuing and love as a robust concern

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The meaning of love differs from one situation to the other. For instance, the love for football may only indicate that I like football so much. On the other hand if I said I would love to be a father, it means that I would really love to engage in the activities of fatherhood. This could also mean that I value fatherhood. However, if I said that I loved my pet or I loved my spouse, it indicates something totally different from the previous two kinds of love that I have mentioned. This is a different kind of concern that one could not easily relate to anything else. This might therefore imply some feeling of caring about another person (Wagoner 14). The philosophy of love mostly focuses on this kind of love just like the personal love which is the main focus of the paper. Within the same personal love, there are three kinds of love that have

been discussed by various Greek philosophers. These are love philia, agape and eros.

Eros originally referred to the kind of love where one feels some passionate desire about some object. In most cases it required to sexual passion. Eros could also be referred to as the love of desire making it an egocentric kind of love. Eros is a response to the being beloved or selfish. This description seems to have distanced itself from the sexual aspect. Plato also encourages such an understanding of eros in the ' Symposium. Here Socrates believes that sexual desire is a deficient response to beauty (Soble 256).

Eros love is in contrast with agape love which does not respond to an object. Agape love primarily comes from Christian tradition where it refers to the kind of love that God has for human beings. This is therefore some kind of unconditional love which is shared among everyone. It is spontaneous and unmotivated. God loves each human being in the same proportion and manner. There is no individual who is more loved than others before the eyes of God. Agape love is also an extension of the kind of love we should have for one another. Agape love creates value in its object rather than responding to love in the object. It is therefore supposed to create some fellowship between man and God (Soble 258).

Philia love on the other hand originally meant that kind of love towards someone's friends, family, business partner, or even country. Just like eros, philia love is also generally responsive to good qualities in an object or somebody. Could sexual intimacy be the sole difference between friendship and romantic love?(White 30). It even becomes more difficult to distinguish

between philia and eros when Soble diminishes the idea of sexual attachment in eros. When we put into consideration the contemporary theories of love which include friendship and romantic love, it becomes even harder to distinguish between eros, philia and agape love.

It is equally important to carefully differentiate love from other forms of positive attitude people could have towards one another such as liking. As a matter of fact, the difference between love and attitudes such as like is in the depth in love. Some philosophical analyses distinguish between loving and liking by explaining what liking amounts to. Liking is all but a matter of desire which only involves instrumental value (Singer 62). However, this is surely inadequate: there is a difference between loving a person and having some desire in her as an object. For instance, it is possible for one to care about some one but not necessarily love her.

The best way to distinguish between liking and loving is by the virtue of the depth of love. For instance, loving someone means that you identify yourself with him. There is no such thing as identification when it comes to liking. One could feel the potential love he might have towards another person and decide to dedicate his life to this value (Nussbaum 316). Liking does not have such kind of a depth where one would sacrifice so much to be with someone he likes. Love could tentatively be divided into four major types: love as a robust concern, love as emotion, love as union and love as valuing.

#### LOVE AS UNION

This view of love claims that love exists in the desire to form important kinds of union. The idea of 'we' is as a result of love. Union theories have been

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trying to explain the origin of the 'we' aspect and whether it has been in existence ever since, or whether it is only metaphorical. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Hegel and Montaigne are some of the earlier variants of this view. Its proponents include people like Scruton, Delaney, Solomon and Nozick (Nussbaum 319).

In his writing about romantic love, Scruton claims that the existence of love comes too soon in life, as soon as the differences between interests of people are overcome. The idea here is that the union formed is as a result of the concern people might have for one another. This means that any decisions made by either party are not for his own sake but for the sake of the union. This implies that they bring together all their concerns and emotions and think as one. Any decision made is therefore for the good of both of them. Scruton therefore feels that there has to be some actual union of the concerns of the lovers (Nussbaum 330). This makes it clear that they view love in terms of a relationship and not just as a mere attitude people might have for one another.

Solomon's view on the union of love relies on the idea of fusion of two souls. This indicates that through love, partners redefine their interest and identities and begin thinking in terms of a relationship. The end result is that partners end up sharing their interests, virtues and values to achieve what used to be individual goals. This is however achieved by allowing each partner to play a crucial role in the relationship. Nozick's view on union is somewhat different from all the rest. He believes that the most necessary issue in love is the desire to become one and form a 'we' by putting together the desires reciprocated by a partner. He also explains that once partners

unite they acquire a new identity that might come in various forms. For instance, they would want to be seen as a couple by the public, or sharing some kind of division of labor.

There are two major criticism of the union view of love. First, opponents argue that union does away with individual autonomy. For instance the husband could be in control of all the decisions made by his wife. This means that the wife has to do away with all her individual thoughts and begin thinking in terms of herself as part of a family. Union theorists however defend this by arguing that losing of autonomy is a desirable feature that each union would very glad to achieve (Soble 266).

The second form of criticism is about the fact that loving someone means having concerns for the person's sake. Union views try to eliminate such concerns by making them unintelligible when in real sense doing away with the differences between interest of two lovers makes either of them turning their lovers interests into theirs and vice versa (268).

Love as a robust concern

Critics of the union of love indicate that most people consider caring about ones partner for her sake as the main idea of loving her. It is for this reason that the robust concern takes this aspect into consideration. It therefore argues that if an individual loves another, it means that there are some benefits that she wants to get from her partner because she believes that he has them. The satisfaction of these wants is therefore considered as an end rather than a means to an end. The robust view therefore objects the idea of formation of ' we ' as the main idea behind love (Frankfurt 129).

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For this reason, Frankfurt is of the idea that loving someone has very little or nothing to do with the opinion he holds about them or how things make him feel. This account explains the idea that caring about someone is in some way part as a result of what happens to him. There is no way we could leave out other emotional responses when dealing with love in terms of the desires. For instance if one of my strong desires is negatively affected, I will definitely get emotionally crushed. The same will also happen when things go bad for my partner. This is for this reason that caring for ones partner would make him vulnerable to issues that might affect her (White 71).

Critics of the robust view argue that it provides a very thing understanding of love because robust concerns also includes other features of love like emotional responsiveness to ones partner as effects if love rather than a continuant of it. Robust view therefore only considers love as an idea of focusing towards some end (Velleman 338).

However, he also argues that sometimes love can have nothing to do with the desires. He even gives an example of love in troublemaking relation where one is in a union with someone she does not really want to be with. Such a view of love is mysterious in the sense that how one could still claim to be in love with someone even after his death (Badhwar 72). Defining love to be a desire means that it could only exist if there is something missing in ones life. However, this is not usually the case. Sometime we still feel love even if we have so much in our lives and we desire nothing.

Either way, the robust view as it stands does not really account for love in its intuitive depth and also fails to clearly distinguish between liking and loving.

Although, it has the capacity to make some sense in regard to how the lover's identity could be altered by his partner. This gives an understanding of the effects of love but not the real part of what love really consist of.

## LOVE AS VALUING

Love could also be understood to be some mode of valuing an individual. There are two ways in which this could be addressed: the view of lover appraisal of value and looking at her as bestowing value.

### Appraisal of value

Velleman provides an appraisal view to love where he understands love as a matter of acknowledging and responding to the value of one's partner in a certain distinctive way. For this to be understood full, there is a need to consider the kind of partner's value to which one responds (Velleman 339).

Moreover, distinctive response to the value ought to be considered.

However, it should ne understood that is not all about the mere fact that love is viewed to involve some appraisal that makes an account to be of appraisal view. There are many more accounts that do so as reflected by robust concern accounts.

In describing the value in love, price and dignity should be distinguished. To have price means having a value that could be compared to values of other goods and services in terms of price. This makes it possible to exchange items that are equivalent in value without making a loss. On the other hand, having dignity refers to having some value that could not be compared to any relative value because it renders it meaningless (Velleman 365). People



are said to have dignity while material goods are said to have value. There is no way you could exchange someone with another person and keep the same values he had. This means that you will lose some incomparable worth if you make such as substitution. The dignity of human beings therefore exists in their rational nature. Similarly one way in which human beings exercise their rational natures is through respect to the dignity of other people. A response could be termed as respectful if it does not treat one as a means to an end.

For this reason, love is only but a response to someone's dignity (Velleman 371). It is therefore this dignity that justifies love. Nonetheless, respect and love are responses that refer to same value but in different forms: love arrests our tendencies towards self protection of our emotions from others rather than our self-love. This renders concerns such as sympathy and attraction that most people associate with love to be effects of love and not constituents of love.

### Bestowal of value

Singer contradicts with Velleman's view and explains love to be fundamentally an issue of bestowing value upon a partner (Singer 43). This fact also helps distinguish between liking and loving. It considers loving as an attitude that has no clear objective and liking to be an inherently technological aspect. For this reason, there might not be any standards of the exact and correct manner in which such value could be bestowed making love different from personal attitudes such as generosity, gratitude and condescension. Loves reflects the importance of an objects regardless of

how much it might be worth. Bestowing value therefore is some kind of commitment and attachment to a partner by treating her as an end so that he could also respond to different ends, concerns and interest in his life. Bestowing of value therefore reveals itself when we care about the interests and needs of our partners, by being happy for their achievements and wishing to protect or benefit them.

For me to be considered to have been bestowed value on a partner, I need to respond to his values appropriately (Singer 46). This can only happen if I understand his values and what his well being is all about so that I could act upon that. However, this also calls for me to understand what his strengths and weaknesses are for me to appraise in various ways. Bestowing therefore calls for really seeing a partner and attending to his needs.

## EMOTIONS VIEWS

Considering that there are various problems concerning different accounts of love like valuing, it might be necessary that we consider the emotional aspect of love. Emotions are mere responses to some object. They combine motivation, evaluation and other phenomena surrounding the attitude of love. Most philosophers including Badhwar and Baier claims that love is an emotion (Badhwar 52). There is no way you could convince someone that love and hate are not emotions because it won't be true. The difficult aspect of this view lies in the fact that the emotion refers to no specific homogeneous collection of states of the mind. This has led to various meanings of the word love. There are basically two kinds of emotion view: emotion proper and emotion complexes.

Emotion proper is a kind of response to an object based on evaluation and motivation. There are several objects associated with emotions. For instance, the target of an emotion refers to an object upon which the emotions are directed. The formal object on its part is the nature of evaluation directed at a specific target (Badhwar 59). However, emotions are not only about evaluation of a target, they can also motivate an individual to act in a certain manner. Moreover, emotions are also understood to refer to passions towards an object. In general we could therefore say that emotions are abnormal changes in the body that are caused by the changes in the evaluation or appraisal of a situation or an object that the agent considers to be of concern to him.

The emotion complex view on the other hand considers love as a complex emotional attitude directed at another person. Considering the emotional interconnections between people, this view could offer the best account of depth in love. It could also offer an understanding of love as an evaluative issue without singling out formal objects of love. Love does not only refer to an emotion felt by people towards other (Badhwar 122). It involves other different emotions tied together which are shared between two or more people. To some extent it could also include sympathetic emotions for instance in a way that one would feel disappointed when his lover fails and rejoice when he succeeds.

## CONCLUSION

Regardless of the different views presented by different philosopher, love has to much to do with robust concern about an individual. As philosophers

like Franzen put it, love is not always about the concern for a union. You can care about an individual but this does not really mean that you have to form a union. Similarly, you can form a union with someone and yet you do not love him. For instance, there are several occasions where people are forced to enter into a marriage not because they love one another but because of the mere fact that they had a baby together. It might have been accidental but it ends up forming a union. Unions are therefore never a strong consideration when it comes to definition and existence of love. On the contrary, you would care about someone to an extent that if any negative thing happens to her, you become disturbed. In as much as you might be a union, this is more of love than formation of a union. Robust concerns are therefore a very important aspect of love.

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