

FROM EROS TO AGAPE. A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE ON LOVE

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretical approach that aims to try to highlight the multiple meanings of love. I take the risk of analyzing a much too analyzed concept, of being reproached that there was nothing more to say, that too much has been written about love, but too little has been understood and even less has been done. I take the risk of being reproached that, as a matter of fact, it is the lack of love that is a social problem, not the lack of analysis, theories about love; and if this is the case, what good is all the effort? The implied idea in the introduction is that the imperative of love is not a restriction but a premise of freedom. 'If you love, you can do what you want!', because you can only do good. After the introduction, the present study aims to treat love as one of man's basic needs. Synthetizing some reference points in this domain, the next chapter intends to achieve a multidisciplinary approach to love, not only from the perspective of Christianity, but also from those of philosophy and psychology.

Keywords: *love, basic need, eros, philia, agape.*

Introduction

According to St. Augustine, the invention of morality and law had as its main cause, the absence or insufficiency of love in the world. As man was not able 'to love his neighbor as himself', hence not able to fully perform the Good in relations with others, the invention of a set of rules, moral norms, laws was necessary so that man's behavior could be guided. Failure to comply with the rules was to be sanctioned.

The introduction of morality and the law did not have the expected effects: people continued to ignore the Good, often committing many evil deeds. St. Augustine's conclusion is that regulations and sanctions, no matter how many and well-designed they might be, will not result in the eradication of evil in the world. Then what is to be done, how do we overcome the impasse? St. Augustine's answer urges us to: 'Love and do what you want!'¹⁶ You can do whatever you want because, out of love, you cannot do harm, you only do good. He who truly loves cannot and does not want to do something unjust, something that causes the suffering of others. He lives in truth and justice. Only by loving will mankind choose to truly live under the imperative of the Good.

Let us not misunderstand St. Augustine's aphorism. He does not say 'do what you want and love', but 'love and do what you want', that is, to put love in everything you do, to give meaning to your life.

But if people are not capable of such 'true love', what is to be done? We are in a vicious circle: we invented morality and the law because there was too little love in the world and good was not done. Morality and the law have not solved the problem and then, we go back to the leaving point, that is the need for love.

Love, a basic human need

Why do we need love so much? Why is the need for love considered one of man's basic needs?

If God is love, and we humans love too little, we will hardly reach God. Perhaps this is what St. Augustine wanted to suggest in his '*Confessions*' when he stated, 'In me you were my Lord and I was outside myself (...) and we did not meet.' Therefore, we understand that 'the man who is outside himself' is the man who turned his back to God, the man deprived of love. Being in this state, the man is experiencing sorrow, for not being able to reconcile with himself or with the others. He is lost!

In Maslow's view, the need for love, the need to give and receive love occupies a very important place in the hierarchy of human basic needs. In Maslow's Pyramid, the needs of

¹⁶ Henry Chadwick, *Augustin*, Humanitas Publishing House, 1998, p.116

love and belonging (social needs) follow the physiological (elementary) needs, and the needs of safety and security are followed by the needs of esteem (recognition) and the needs of self-realization (self-fulfillment). We cannot achieve self-fulfillment if the need for love is not satisfied.

We need love, because, 'love keeps us alive, it is the one that gives meaning to everything we do.'¹⁷

The following three paragraphs from the First Epistle to the Corinthians of the Holy Apostle Paul (Chapter 13) express the man's need for love, in a suggestive and impressive way:

1. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

For man, 'lack of love is hell! (...) You love love or you are lost, doomed to hell.'¹⁸

We need to give and offer love, because only in this way can we meet God. In other words, 'we will feel the true goodness of God only when we feel the infinity of love within ourselves.'¹⁹

A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Love

In my opinion, Christianity puts us face to face with the most beautiful and emotional description of 'love in truth', love as an authentic state:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

¹⁷ Persida Năneștean, *Puterea dragostei* (The Power of Love), Scriptum Publishing House, p.10

¹⁸ Andre Comte-Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.248

¹⁹ Sorin Cerin, *Culegere de înțelepciune, opera completă de aforisme* (Wisdom Collection: Complete Works of Aphorisms), Reference Edition 2019, p.143

*Love does not delight in evil (...). It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*²⁰

In the Christian view, love is the highest of commandments and the highest of virtues. It is about man's love for God, and God's love for man, for His creation, and man's love for the others.

God's love for man is boundless: 'God's love for the greatest sinner is greater than the love of the greatest saint for God,' said Father Arsenie Boca.

Which of these loves would be more important: man's love for God or man's love for the others? Which would be the superior one?

Although Christ says 'anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10: 37-38), I do not think He intends to establish a hierarchy between the two kinds of love.

That is so because, you cannot truly love God if you do not love the others, the reciprocal being valid. In this sense, the pious Ioan Colov said: 'No one builds a house from the roof down, but from the foundation up. The foundation is the neighbor, so that one may use him first, for on him hang all the commandments of Christ.'²¹

The conclusion is that we must begin the exercise of God's love with the 'foundation', with the one next to us.

In Christianity, love is a commandment, a holy duty!

'A new command I give you: Love one another,' says Christ, Our Lord (John, 13:34).

If we are so poor that we do not find love in our souls, then let us seek it, strive with all our being to find it. 'God knows that we are weak beings, He does not judge us by our weaknesses and inabilities, but by our efforts.' It is a word of instruction received from the wonderful Father Ioan, who is now with the Lord, a servant until recently at St. Dumitru Church in Bucharest.

Let us fulfill the divine command! Let us love out of duty!

There are many thinkers who show great reluctance to love on order, as well as to man's ability to 'love his neighbor as himself.' Biologists believe that the instinct for

²⁰ *Epistola întâi către Corinteni a Sfântului Apostol Pavel, Capitolul 13:4-8* (First Epistle to the Corinthians of the Holy Apostle Paul)

²¹ Parintele Teofil Paraian, *Aproapele* (Your Neighbour), <https://www.biserica-ortodoxa-berna.ch/aproapele/>

conservation does not allow us to love the other as we love ourselves! In their opinion, this kind of love is almost impossible. First us, then the rest!

Nevertheless, when it is about special relationships, such as the relationship between parents and children, this becomes possible. Moreover, parents can love their children more than they love themselves.

Let us go back to Chapter 13, Paragraph 8 in the First Epistle to the Corinthians of the Holy Apostle Paul: *'love never fails'*.

How can we explain this paragraph?

We could say that *'love never fails'* because *'God is love'* and He will never leave His creation.

We could say, sharing Sorin Cerin's opinion, that *'love can never die, because it cannot be born, as it is eternal, somewhere, there, in a corner of destiny.'*²²

On the other hand, if we leave the Christian paradigm, it will be extremely difficult to provide sound arguments for this statement. How could psychosociology argue that *'love never fails'*, as long as social reality refutes it so often?

The overwhelming number of conflictual relationships that exist in contemporary society (excessive violence, the high rate of divorce and separations, the frequent phenomenon of becoming lonely etc.) leads us to the opposite idea: love too often and too quickly fails.

If we refer to interhuman relationships, we can say that *'love never fails'* when it is about real, authentic love. And yet, this is so rarely to be found.

Next, I suggest that we move on to understanding love from other perspectives as well. The philosophical perspective offers us a wealth of interpretations and meanings of love. I will refer only to a few of them. For the French philosopher Andre Comte Sponville, *'love represents the good itself! It is the alpha and omega of all virtues.'*²³

He thus denies Nietzsche who argued that *'What we do out of love is always beyond good and evil.'*²⁴

²² Sorin Cerin, *Culegere de intelepciune, Opere complete de aforisme* (Wisdom Collection: Complete Works of Aphorisms), Reference Edition 2019, p.143

²³ Andre Comte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.248

²⁴ «Nietzsche - Dincolo de bine și de rău, Aforismul 153», in Andre Comte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.244

Another interpretation – which we find in I. Kant – proposes the understanding of love as the opposite of duty. I. Kant delimits himself from the Christian vision of love as a divine commandment, as a duty. He claims that ‘*love is not commanded, it commands.*’ Love is not a commandment, it is an ideal: ‘*the ideal of holiness.*’ This ideal guides and enlightens us. Love cannot be a duty: duty is a constraint, ‘*a yoke*’, Kant stated in his *Critique of Practical Reason*; duty is sad, while love is spontaneous and joyful. ‘*What we do out of coercion we do not do out of love*’²⁵ and, of course, the reciprocal is valid.

Love has also been understood as ‘man's attempt to come out of himself (...); we are trapped within our limits, our body, our individuality. But, at the same time, we are endowed, as human beings, with the tendency to somehow get out of ourselves. This is probably the basis, the foundation or the beginning of love – the tendency to transcend ourselves, to come out of ourselves, to come out of us. And the other provides a kind of foothold for this exit from ourselves.’²⁶

For Eckhart Tolle, ‘love is a state of the Human Being. It is not outside ourselves, but it is to be found deep within ourselves. We can never lose it and it cannot leave us. It is not dependent on another body, on an external form. It is the peace of our presence (...). Look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of unity. This is love.’²⁷ In his opinion, the ‘forms that separate us’, which do not allow us to truly love and which determine us to see in the other either a potential danger or an instrument of satisfying our own interests are ‘name, wealth, social role, failures, successes, appearance, etc.’²⁸

To the question of what love is Andre Comte Sponville gives three different answers: eros, philia and agape, emphasizing that ‘none was invented by him’.

‘Eros is love as passion, lack, possession. It is devouring love.’ Love of oneself and for oneself. It is rather ‘the disease of love: it is jealous, envious, greedy, possessive love (...);

²⁵ «Principiile metafizice ale teoriei virtuții, XII, Despre dragoste față de oameni, în Scrieri moral-politice», in Andre Comte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.244

²⁶ *About love, with philosopher Aurel Codoban*, Sinteza, Revista culturala si de gandire strategica, <https://www.revistasinteza.ro/iubesti-ai-iubit-citeste-si-iubeste-despre-iubire-cu-filosoful-aurel-codoban>

²⁷ Eckhart Tolle, *Puterea prezentului* (The power of the present), Curtea Veche Publishing, Ediția a VI a, 2013, P. 185

²⁸ Ibid.,p.214

the one who loves does not want the good of the loved one (...). The lover loves the other 'as wolves love lambs.'²⁹

Philia is love that is not reduced to passion, Aristotle warned us in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It presupposes the transition from mad love to wise love (...); the two lovers learn to deepen love, to increase it, to increase its truth.³⁰ Philia is shared joy, but in a mutual way.' It is the joy that he / she exists (as he / she is, not as you want ...). It is also an assumed choice, pleasure, mutual trust; it can also be marriage. Love (philia) between husband and wife is the most important form of friendship that obviously includes a sexual dimension, says Aristotle³¹. It is a point of view that rehabilitates conjugal love not only in the eyes of philosophers, but also in those of young people (we hope as many as possible), who love reading and philosophy. Family is the greatest success of love. 'To believe in the family means to believe in the most comprehensive, the most open, the most generous, and the freest love (...). The family hones love, controls its excesses and perpetuates it.'³²

Agape is the third answer to what love means and refers to the love of others. It is Christian friendship (Gr: philanthropy), it is selfless love. Agape is 'abandoned joy, offered at a loss' (because it addresses strangers and enemies alike). It is the need for charity, for goodwill towards others.³³

As a conclusion, A.C. Sponville states that there are three kinds of love: lack (eros), joy (philia) and love of people (agape). The first is like a hunger, the second like a laugh and the third like a smile.³⁴

Next, I will try a brief analysis of the feeling of love from a **psychological perspective**. Probably, psychologists feel even more justified, and more able to analyze the feeling of love than philosophers, poets or sociologists are. Nevertheless, I believe that everyone has their role, their contribution worthy of being taken into account. The feeling of love is so deep, so complex that only a multidisciplinary approach can contribute to deciphering, never completely, the enigmas that this feeling entails.

²⁹ «Primul discurs al lui Socrate in Phaidros, 240 e-241 d», in Andre Compte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.261

³⁰ Andre Compte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.284

³¹ Aristotel, *Etica nicomahica*, VIII, 14, 1162 a, 16-33, apud. Andre Compte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.281

³² Andre Compte Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți* (Concise Treaty of Great Virtues), Univers Publishing House, 1998, p.288

³³ Ibid., p.307

³⁴ Ibid., p.320

From this perspective, I will focus on the conception of love put forth by the American psychologist Robert Sternberg. He approaches love both psychologically and culturally. Sternberg has found that over time, the conception of love has taken different forms. In certain ages, 'love and passion have been dissociated; for example, in a certain historical period, it was believed that love is a noble, asexual experience.' Today, says the above mentioned author, love is seen as 'a method of self-discovery.'³⁵ He emphasizes the importance of love in the development of each person and tries to clarify the role of the different stages of life (childhood, adolescence, youth) in forming preferences for a certain type of partner.

Robert Sternberg proposes a 'triangular theory' of love based on three components: passion, intimacy and commitment. Intimacy involves feelings of closeness and connection; passion involves feelings and desires that generate physical attraction, romance, sexuality; commitment involves traits that cause a person to stay with someone and to move toward common goals. Sternberg concludes that there are seven types of love: friendship, crazy love, 'empty' love (lack), romantic love, companionate love, love full of love, perfect / true love.³⁶

In the following, I will briefly present these seven types of love. *Crazy love* refers to the strong attraction that two people who barely know each other feel towards each other. At this stage, the partners do not know if they fit, but they stay together. Many couples remain only at this level of love. In *friendship love*, the two are linked by the same interests, the same conception of life and the feeling of being understood. The intimacy component is present, but the passion and commitment are missing. 'Empty' love is characterized by the existence of a commitment in the absence of passion or intimacy. An explosive love can turn into an 'empty' love. It can be the other way around: a relationship without love, started as a commitment, in time, can turn into a love relationship. Those who experience *romantic love* are attracted to each other, feel good together, have deep conversations, but they are not yet ready for long-term commitments. *Companionate love* is a relationship which is stronger than friendship as it contains commitment and intimacy, but it lacks

²⁰ Robert Sternberg, *Săgeata lui Cupidon. Cursul dragostei în timp* (Cupid's Arrow. The Course of Love Through Time), Trei Publishing House, 2010, pp:12-24

³⁶ *Teoria triunghiulară a lui Sternberg și cele 7 tipuri de iubire* (Sternberg's Triangular Theory and the 7 Types of Love) <http://ea.md/specialistii-in-psihiologie-au-definit-7-tipuri-de-dragoste-putini-sunt-cei-care-o-intalnesc-pe-ultima/>

passion. During this type of relationship there is a strong sense of attachment between partners. This type of love is often found in marriages where, even though the passion has been consumed, the couple continues to have a deep affection or a strong bond together. It can also be love between very close friends and family members. *Love full of love* includes commitment and passion. It is the kind of love that exists when two people who are attracted to each other and are ready to follow certain traditions (an extravagant wedding, vows, etc.), but they never reach real intimacy. They cannot see a friend in their life partner. *Perfect love* includes all three elements: passion, intimacy and commitment. It represents the ideal relationship. Each member of the couple cannot imagine being with anyone else. They cannot be truly happy without their partners. The two partners manage to overcome differences and cope with life's difficulties together. They love each other immensely, they enjoy marriage, they live together. It is a rare relationship.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the specialized literature offers us a wide variety of perspectives, definitions, typologies of love, one more interesting than the other. As far as I am concerned, I did not have the intention to make an exhaustive presentation of all of them, which, in fact, would have been a great utopia. My goal was a much more modest one. I intended to bring some clarifications on understanding the notion and types of love from multiple perspectives: Christian, philosophical, psychological, and I hope I have succeeded. In this way, I have laid the foundations for a future and more complex, theoretical construction on the relationship of dependence in the couple. I intend to carry on further research aimed at analyzing the causes and consequences of dependence in the couple. How one gets from love to addiction? In order to answer these questions, the clarifications brought by this paper will be very useful.

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