

PHILOSOPHY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS

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My article is dedicated to philosophy of the relationships between people. I think it is one of the most interesting, important and serious problems. It is so because we live in the century of the IT and all kinds of work and duties people try to charge to the modern technologies and this process has gone too far that we do not imagine ourselves without it. People have changed mentally a lot. Moreover changing of priorities has led to the loss of veritable meanings of such words as love and friendship.

I have become acquainted with different sources dedicated to this theme and in my article I will try to go carefully into true meanings of these human phenomena and understand them. The problem of the relationships relates to the so-called eternal problems in philosophy. So there are not unambiguous interpretations of it. The sources of this problem go back to the Antique Philosophy exactly to Plato's, Aristotle's and Socrate's works and I am going to clear up the nature of these phenomena using the ideas of these philosophers and some modern conceptions.

When approaching the notion of friendship, our first problem is, as Graham Allan has commented, that there is a lack of firmly agreed and socially acknowledged criteria for what makes a person a friend. In one setting we may describe someone as a friend, in another the label may seem less appropriate. We may have a very thin understanding of what friendship entails. For example, Bellah, drawing upon Aristotle, suggest that the traditional idea of friendship has three components: "Friends must enjoy each other's company, they must be useful to one another, and they must share a common commitment to the good". In contemporary western societies, it is suggested, we tend to define friendship in terms of the first component, and find the notion of utility a difficult to place within friendship.

Many contemporary writers in the west tend to present friendship as private, voluntary, and happening between autonomous individuals. According to this view "friendship becomes a special relationship between two equal individuals involved in a uniquely constituted dyad" (Bell and Coleman). This contrasts in key respects with the classical view, and, as we will see, derives from a particular view of selfhood. Furthermore, as Graham Allan has argued, relationships that are often presented as voluntary, informal and personal, still operate within the constraints of class, gender, age, ethnicity and geography – and this places a considerable question against the idea that friendship is a matter of choice.

Two classical views of friendship

Aristotle provides us with one of the great discussions of friendship. He distinguishes between what he believes to be genuine friendships and two other forms: one based on mutual usefulness, the other on pleasure.

There are three kinds of friendship.

Friendship based on utility. Utility is an impermanent thing: it changes according to circumstances. So with the disappearance of the ground for friendship, the friendship also breaks up, because that was what kept it alive. Friendships of this kind seem to occur most frequently between the elderly (because at their age what they want is not pleasure but utility) and those in middle or early life who are pursuing their own advantage. Such persons do not

spend much time together, because sometimes they do not even like one another, and therefore feel no need of such an association unless they are mutually useful.

Friendship based on pleasure. Friendship between the young is thought to be grounded on pleasure, because the lives of the young are regulated by their feelings, and their chief interest is in their own pleasure and the opportunity of the moment. With advancing years, however, their tastes change too, so that they are quick to make and to break friendships; because their affection changes just as the things that please them do and this sort of pleasure changes rapidly.

Perfect friendship is based on goodness. Only the friendship of those who are good, and similar in their goodness, is perfect. For these people each alike wish good for the other qua good, and they are good in themselves. And it is those who desire the good of their friends for the friends' sake that are most truly friends, because each loves the other for what he is, and not for any incidental quality.

Some modern views of friendship

A good deal of sociological comment about friendship is based on the assumption that a traditional society characterized by face-to-face and largely convivial relationships has been replaced by a more competitive and individualistic one. In this respect the work of Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) is often cited. He saw friendship (along with kinship and place) as one of the three pillars of traditional community that were disrupted by the rise of the more impersonal forms of society associated with industrialization, urbanization and capitalism. Just whether traditional communities were of this nature is, however, doubtful. There are significant indications that friendships in the periods prior to large-scale industrialization in countries like England were often instrumental. Relationships were frequently characterized by considerable caution and suspicion. Ray Pahl draws upon the innovative analysis of the emerging commercial-industrial society by Allan Silver to demonstrate that while there was a significant shift amongst many groups in society in their experience and appreciation of friendship.

The experience of friendship today

It might be thought that with the vast numbers of community studies and ethnographies that appeared in the twentieth century that we would have, by now, a rich appreciation of the developing state of friendship within different societies. Unfortunately, with just a few exceptions, much of the research undertaken has involved the use of fairly rudimentary tools and models and the basis of our knowledge about the contemporary situation is relatively slim. We can, however, make a number of fairly obvious points. These tend to run from a central appreciation that friendship is wrapped up with other aspects of people's social and economic lives. Friendship tends to be a product of time and place. Here it is important to note three points.

There are significant differences in the ways that different social groups organize their "friendlike" ties. Research studies tend to highlight, for example, contrasts in the way that those in the middle and working classes name and develop their friendships.

Whilst there is the possibility of over-emphasizing gender differences in friendship patterns and content, there do, nevertheless, appear to be some important differences.

Our experience of friendship alters with age.

Friendship can be viewed as personal and freely entered into – but it is formed in particular social, economic and cultural circumstances and this has a very significant impact upon the people we meet, and our ability to engage in different activities. It is of profound social as well as individual significance. Through friendship we gain practical and emotional support, and an important contribution to our personal identities. Friendship also helps us to

integrate us into the public realm and act as a resource for managing some of the mundane and exceptional events that confront us in our lives.

The philosophical treatment of love transcends a variety of sub-disciplines including epistemology, metaphysics, religion, human nature, politics and ethics. Often statements or arguments concerning love, its nature and role in human life for example, connect to one or all the central theories of philosophy, and is often compared with, or examined in the context of, the philosophies of sex and gender. The task of a philosophy of love is to present the appropriate issues in a cogent manner, drawing on relevant theories of human nature, desire, ethics, and so on.

The nature of love: eros, philia, and agape

The philosophical discussion regarding love logically begins with questions concerning its nature. This implies that love has a “nature”, a proposition that some may oppose arguing that love is conceptually irrational, in the sense that it cannot be described in rational or meaningful propositions. For such critics, who are presenting a metaphysical and epistemological argument, love may be an ejection of emotions that defy rational examination; on the other hand, some languages, such as Papuan do not even admit the concept, which negates the possibility of a philosophical examination. In English, the word “love”, which is derived from Germanic forms of the Sanskrit *lubh* (desire), is broadly defined and hence imprecise, which generates first order problems of definition and meaning, which are resolved to some extent by the reference to the Greek terms *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*.

The nature of love: further conceptual considerations

Presuming love has a nature, it should be, to some extent at least, describable within the concepts of language. But what is meant by an appropriate language of description may be as philosophically beguiling as love itself. Such considerations invoke the philosophy of language, of the relevance and appropriateness of meanings, but they also provide the analysis of “love” with its first principles. Does it exist and if so, is it knowable, comprehensible, and describable? Love may be knowable and comprehensible to others, as understood in the phrases, “I am in love”, “I love you”, but what “love” means in these sentences may not be analyzed further: that is, the concept “love” is irreducible, an axiomatic, or self-evident, state of affairs that warrants no further intellectual intrusion, an apodictic category perhaps, that a Kantian may recognize.

The epistemology of love asks how we may know love, how we may understand it, whether it is possible or plausible to make statements about others or ourselves being in love (which touches on the philosophical issue of private knowledge versus public behavior). Again, the epistemology of love is intimately connected to the philosophy of language and theories of the emotions. If love is purely an emotional condition, it is plausible to argue that it remains a private phenomenon incapable of being accessed by others, except through an expression of language, and language may be a poor indicator of an emotional state both for the listener and the subject. Emotivists would hold that a statement such as “I am in love” is irreducible to other statements because it is a nonpropositional utterance, hence its veracity is beyond examination. Phenomenologists may similarly present love as a non-cognitive phenomenon. Scheler, for example, toys with Plato’s Ideal love, which is cognitive, claiming: “love itself... brings about the continuous emergence of ever-higher value in the object – just as if it were streaming out from the object of its own accord, without any exertion (even of wishing) on the part of the lover”. The lover is passive before the beloved.

Love: ethics and politics

The ethical aspects in love involve the moral appropriateness of loving, and the forms it should or should not take. The subject area raises such questions as: is it ethically acceptable to love an object, or to love oneself? Is love to oneself or to another a duty? Should the ethically minded person aim to love all people equally? Is partial love morally acceptable

or permissible (that is, not right, but excusable)? Should love only involve those with whom the agent can have a meaningful relationship? Should love aim to transcend sexual desire or physical appearances? May notions of romantic, sexual love apply to same sex couples? Some of the subject area naturally spills into the ethics of sex, which deals with the appropriateness of sexual activity, reproduction, hetero and homosexual activity, and so on.

In the area of political philosophy, love can be studied from a variety of perspectives. For example, some may see love as an instantiation of social dominance by one group (males) over another (females), in which the socially constructed language and etiquette of love is designed to empower men and disempower women. On this theory, love is a product of patriarchy, and acts analogously to Karl Marx's view of religion (the opiate of the people) that love is the opiate of women. The implication is that were they to shrug off the language and notions of "love", "being in love", "loving someone" and so on, they would be empowered. The theory is often attractive to feminists and Marxists, who view social relations (and the entire panoply of culture, language, politics, institutions) as reflecting deeper social structures that divide people into classes, sexes, and races.

We have touched on some of the main elements of the philosophy of love and friendship. It reaches into many philosophical fields, notably theories of human nature, the self, and of the mind.