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Ex Ptolomeo. Long. Lat	
Iconium	64,30. 38,45.
Damascus	69,0. 33,0.
Vet. Babylon	79,0. 35,0.
Singara vel Senjar	76,0. 37,0.
Nisibis	75,10. 37,30.
Maradin	76,0. 38,15.
Roha vel Edessa	72,30. 37,30.
Malatia	71,0. 39,30.

Ex Geogr. Rubiceni.

A Mosul ad Senjar 57 mil. pass

A Mosul ad Nisibin

Inde ad Amesam 78 m.

A Bagdad ad Amesam 212 m.

A Bagdad ad Raccam 54 m.

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Oscar Brenifier

THE PROBLEM OF LOVE

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Love is a problem for most people, as an occurrence that makes life difficult, even when it is pleasant. So they might want to share their "problem" with others, find a sympathetic ear, in the hope of encountering some compassion and understanding, and alleviate their pain. But they do not view it as a "problem", in the original sense of the word. In ancient Greek, *problēma* referred to something that was "put forth" or "thrown forward", as an obstacle or challenge, essentially an issue or question requiring attention or resolution. As something to think about and analyze, in a rational way. Like a "problem" in mathematics. So it seems to us an interesting endeavor to attempt such a project. One could as well call this essay "A little anthology of love".

Problem A problem is a situation or issue that presents a difficulty, obstacle or contradiction to be understood or resolved. It is defined by a gap between a current state and a desired state, a tension between incompatible elements or requirements, the emergence of uncertainty about how to understand or deal with a given situation. A problem is a theoretically or practically challenging situation. It shows a deficiency or difficulty in reaching an objective or grasping a phenomenon. It arises when there is a discrepancy between what is and what should be, for objective or subjective reasons, raising questions or doubts about how to deal with the issue.

Love as a problem Love is a problem because it creates tensions between desire and reality, generates unrealistic hopes and expectations, gives rise to conflicts between emotions, du-

ties and personal autonomy, and between individuals, it generates tension between reason and passion, because it provokes internal dilemmas or suffering, in oneself or in others, and contradictions between ideal and lived experience.

GENERAL FEATURES OF LOVE

Love, in its broadest sense, can be defined as a deep emotional connection or affectionate attachment to someone or something. It extends beyond the usual concept of romantic relationships to encompass a wide range of feelings and connections to different beings or objects, including love for ideas, nature, art, humanity, or oneself. And as a general proposal, we can affirm that love is a powerful and transformative force that binds us emotionally to what we value or find meaning in. It is a complex and multi-faceted feeling that involves deep care, affection, and a sense of connection toward something, whether it be a living being, an object, an idea, or the world itself. It is characterized by an emotional investment, where the well-being and significance of the loved entity matter profoundly to the person experiencing love.

Let us now identify the main elements of the feeling of love

Affection Love is often characterized by positive feelings of warmth, tenderness, and affection toward the object of its attention. This can manifest as physical closeness, emotional comfort, or simply an intense sense of appreciation and fondness.

In non-personal love, such as love for ideals, causes, or abstract concepts, affection plays a role in creating emotional attachment and motivation to a cause, value, principle, or an

activity. Affection for an ideal or cause inspires action and motivates individuals to work toward realizing that ideal, sustaining long-term commitment. Just as affection in personal relationships brings joy and fulfillment, affection for an ideal or an activity can provide emotional satisfaction. People often find meaning and purpose in working toward something they care about deeply, it gives a sense of belonging or fulfillment in making a positive impact.

The degree of affection can vary in time. it is not a fixed or constant emotion; it fluctuates due to various internal and external factors. For example, one might feel overwhelmed by stress, anxiety, or depression, leading to a temporary decrease in affection, even though the love itself can remain strong. Conflicts, disagreements or distance might cause a temporary dip in affection, while periods of reconnection, joyful circumstances or overcoming challenges lead to an increase. Over time, when it becomes "usual", the initial intensity of affection often gives way to a more steady, but less passionate, expression of love. This leads to moments where affection feels more routine or automatic, and others where it is more intentional and heightened. The amount of "effort" invested into the relationship also affects the degree of affection. When personal or relationship priorities shift, as the relationship evolves, the degree of affection and its expression can shift. Early on, affection is be more intense and overt, while later it becomes more nuanced and nevertheless rooted in deeper connection and care. We have been through difficulties that have been overcome, which strengthens the bond, we have helped each other, and mutual recognition naturally follows. We idealize

less, we project less, we accept the other more as a reality, in its difference.

Commitment Love typically involves a sense of dedication or commitment to the well-being and development of the loved entity. This is the case in relationships with individuals but it applies just as well to love for causes, ideas, or even one's profession. In this sense, love requires effort, support, perseverance and responsibility. Just as affection, commitment is not a fixed attitude, and it can shift due to changes in emotional connection, the nature of interactions, the degree of personal satisfaction, life circumstances, and more. While commitment can decrease during periods of difficulty or through time, it can also increase through shared experiences, personal growth, and a renewed focus on the relationship.

Commitment is an important component of passion, but also, it can offer a "replacement" for love or passion, or it can lead to love or passion. Let us take the example of marriage. In many cultures throughout history, marriage was often arranged out of obligation rather than for love, whether for economic, social, or political reasons. Commitment was prioritized, and romantic love was generally not the foundation. However, over time, in a number of cases, commitment could grow into love in these relationships. Let us examine how this can happen.

In these arranged marriages, based on practical concerns such as social status, wealth, and family alliances, commitment was seen as essential. Couples were expected to fulfill their duties regardless of emotional attachment. In these cases, love, if it developed, generally came later on, built upon

shared experiences, common responsibilities, and mutual respect. Although the initial marriage may have been based on external factors, many couples eventually developed affection, companionship or love, through a mutual willingness to work together within the structure of a committed relationship. This was rather a slow process, as both partners adapted to their roles and learned to care for each other over time. The shared commitment fostered intimacy, trust, and emotional closeness, which sometimes led to a deeper emotional bond. Nevertheless, it also happened that the absence of emotional chemistry or shared interest prevented the building of this deeper bond, giving way to growing distance or lasting misunderstanding. However, the idea that love may or may not be born out of commitment is a testament to the flexibility and subtlety of human relationships.

People sometimes feel a lack of passion or a clear sense of purpose to dedicate themselves to, and this can lead to frustration or a sense of stagnation. In such cases, commitment to an activity or cause, even in the absence of initial passion, can be a functional and transformative approach. Passion doesn't always come first; sometimes it grows as we engage more deeply in an activity. By committing to something, we invest time and energy, and over time, this investment can lead to greater emotional connection and passion. Many people discover a sense of purpose not by waiting for inspiration, but by actively participating in something, and developing skills or knowledge, which then fuels their passion. Through commitment, we develop consistency and dedication, which leads to a deeper understanding of the activity. This process often

gives rise to meaning, and passion naturally follows as we see progress, experience growth, or make a difference in the chosen field. Psychologically, the more effort and energy we put into something, the more we value it, and this can foster passion.

Commitment emphasizes "internal motivation", the drive to persevere despite challenges, as opposed to the "external" excitement that characterizes passion, since it "carries us away". Furthermore, while passion may fade when the novelty wears off or when obstacles arise, commitment helps maintain continuity and even progress. Over time, this can lead to satisfaction and fulfillment, which can be just as rewarding as the initial thrill of passion. Commitment opens doors to learning, personal development, and the discovery of new interests that might spark unexpected passion. Over time, as we gain experience and witness the impact of their efforts, we may develop a passion for the cause or activity that was initially absent. By engaging in an activity regularly, even without a burning desire, we create opportunities for unexpected breakthroughs or moments of inspiration. Many people find that their passion emerges gradually. For example, someone might start practicing a skill or engaging in a cause out of a sense of duty or curiosity, only to later discover a deep love for it. In this way, passion can be cultivated through commitment, rather than needing to be present from the outset.

Like passion, commitment involves making a choice. However, the nature of the choice differs between the two, as these two concepts are driven by different psychological impulses. Passion involves a more emotional and instinctive

choice, driven by an intense attraction or excitement toward something or someone. The choice to follow one's passion is typically influenced by feelings, desires, and a strong inner pull toward what excites or inspires. The decision to pursue passion is real, but it is spontaneous and fueled by the emotional satisfaction that comes with it. The choice is tied to a sense of joy or "overexistence" that passion brings. Commitment, by contrast, is a "cold", deliberate and rational choice that involves willpower and dedication, independently of fluctuating emotions. Committing to something means deciding to stick with it over the long term, even when the initial excitement or passion fades or is absent. The choice to commit is based on values, principles, or long-term goals, rather than immediate emotional gratification. It reflects a conscious decision to remain loyal to a person, cause, or project, even when it is difficult or less rewarding emotionally.

While passion can be an exciting motivator, commitment provides a more stable and reliable foundation for long-term fulfillment. By choosing to commit to something, even in the absence of initial passion, people can find that they cultivate meaning, personal growth, and ultimately, a passion for their chosen activity.

Connection Love fosters a deep sense of connection and often involves feelings of belonging with the loved entity. This can be the feeling of unity in a relationship, a connection to nature, or an affinity with a philosophy, a place or a community. Love bridges the gap between the self and what is loved, creating a bond that transcends separation between the subject and the

object. The variations in the intensity of this bond, or its slackening, is an inevitable feature of connection. This feeling of "fusional" connection can also lead to intoxication, a kind of oblivion of self and limits, leading to disillusionment or regret, addiction or resentment. Nevertheless, this is the principle of love in the religious or spiritual sense: the absence of separation between oneself and God, between oneself and others, between oneself and the world, for all is One. In such a perspective, this is how we become ourselves, by being "capable of God". Or, in another type of religious scheme, such as Buddhism, by recognizing the vacuity of reality, by detaching oneself from the illusory reality of "separate" things.

Love reveals what Albert Camus calls our "divorce" from the world. It reveals our "divorced condition". Man feels separated, isolated, apart: he's a demigod or a monster, but almost never a being like the others. On the other hand, man struggles with reality, whose limits he has difficulty accepting; his capricious will separates him from the course of things. Love, by temporarily abolishing this condition, reveals to us our daily state of separation by overcoming or negating it.

Empathy An essential aspect of love is empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. In love, one strives to understand the emotions, needs, and experiences of the loved entity, which deepens the connection and fosters compassion. Nevertheless, we can distinguish two meanings of the concept: "emotional" empathy and "cognitive" empathy, the former often being privileged in common opinion. Emotional empathy consists in feeling the other person's emo-

tions, as if we were experiencing them ourselves. It is an affective response, a form of emotional resonance that enables us to share the other person's suffering or joy. Cognitive empathy is the ability to intellectually understand another's emotions or perspectives without necessarily feeling them. It is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes on a rational level, to recognize their thoughts and feelings without being emotionally affected by them. Emotional empathy is more about feeling, while cognitive empathy is more about understanding. Of course, when it comes to love, emotional empathy tends to take precedence, which shouldn't exclude cognitive empathy, but too often does.

Empathy can also play a role in love for an ideal, though in a more abstract sense. For example, when we love a value, such as justice, equality, or peace, empathy helps us connect with the people who are affected by the realization or lack of that ideal. For example, love for justice may involve empathizing with those who suffer from injustice, fueling our dedication to that ideal. Empathy can drive our commitment to an ideal because it allows us to emotionally understand the consequences of that idea for others. It is often rooted in our ability to empathize with the needs, struggles, or pain of others, motivating us to uphold those values. Empathy in the love for an ideal extends to a vision of the collective well-being. By empathizing with the needs and experiences of humanity as a whole, we are more likely to dedicate ourselves to ideals that benefit society or elevate collective human experience, such as equality or freedom. Therefore, while empathy in love for an ideal may not involve direct personal interactions, it still functions as a

motivating force that connects our emotional understanding of others' experiences to our commitment to a larger cause or abstract value.

Empathy can make us want to share an activity, especially when that activity aligns with the well-being of others or a common purpose, since it allows us to understand and resonate with the emotions and experiences of others. This generates a desire to engage in shared activities that strengthen bonds, whether it's working together on a project, volunteering for a cause, or simply spending time together. The shared activity becomes a way to express care and understanding. Empathy fuels a desire to participate in collective actions that reflect shared values and contribute to the greater good. It makes us more attuned to the needs or desires of others. When we understand what someone else values or needs, we may feel driven to join them in activities that bring them joy, comfort, or fulfillment, whether that's a recreational activity or a meaningful pursuit like working for a charitable, social or political cause.

Of course, empathy naturally tends to be biased toward those who are closest to us, or those with whom we can easily identify, leading to "in-group favoritism", being less empathetic toward "outsiders" or "strangers", or even "perpetrators". When empathy is directed only toward a particular group or cause, it can fuel polarization and "tribalism". People might empathize so strongly with their own group or cause that they become hostile or indifferent to others who oppose them, thus intensifying conflicts rather than fostering understanding and resolution. Empathy for an individual case might distort

judgment and lead to decisions that are not in the best interest of the greater good, as it encourages emotionally-driven decisions, more immediate, rather than ones based on fairness or general principle, thus it leads to a certain complacency. Furthermore, constant empathy as well leads to emotional exhaustion, resulting in burnout, stress, and even emotional detachment. Some individuals will then exploit others' emotional responses, as displays of emotion or exaggerated suffering tend to elicit an empathetic response used for selfish or deceptive purposes. Empathy alone does not necessarily result in positive moral action, it even induces "empathy-induced inaction", where people are satisfied with their "good intentions".

Selflessness Love often involves a sense of selflessness, where the individual forgets his own needs or desires and prioritizes the well-being of the loved entity, in romantic, familial, or spiritual love. This often means making sacrifices, the act of giving up something valuable, important, or desired for ourselves, for the sake of someone else or for an ideal. It implies acting out of concern for the other or for a greater purpose, without expecting anything in return. Our own person becomes secondary to the object of our love, it is a form of altruism. In this state, the lines between self and non-self begin to blur, as one's own desires, interest and habits become less significant in the face of who we love, of what we love. Although we should remember that "pure" selflessness is a rather rare phenomenon.

A love that doesn't make us generous is not a love, but a possession, because true love drives a person to be generous,

caring and open towards others. If love does not elicit such altruistic feelings or behavior, it is not genuine love, but a form of possession or selfish attachment. Love, in its essence, implies self-giving. It does not seek to take, possess or control the other, but to give freely and share. Being generous in love means being ready to offer time, attention, support, and concern for the other's well-being without expectations of return. If love is focused solely on satisfying one's own needs, or on the desire to control or exert power over the other person, then it is no longer love, but a selfish feeling more akin to a form of possession or dependency. Just like in the love for an activity or an ideal, when we are motivated by showing off, taking power, or other types of personal calculations, this passion is corrupted and its nature is of different order.

Love expands our identity, even deconstructs it. In a sense, it's love that acts, not us. We can see it as an independent or transcendent force that guides and motivates our actions. Rather than acting according to our own will, guided by our personal interests, love becomes the main driving force behind our actions and decisions. This idea suggests that love, as a feeling or higher value, transcends selfishness and personal desires, and leads to altruistic, generous or benevolent actions, beyond individual interests. This thinking is often found in spiritual or philosophical contexts, where love is perceived as a universal or divine force that guides human beings beyond their personal will, towards acts of compassion and selfless service. According to this principle, it's about letting love, and not our personal desires or ambitions, direct our actions, what can be called an enlargement of identity.

Care In love, care refers to actions or attitudes aimed at tending to the needs, the development or well-being of the object of our love. It involves attention, effort and concern for another's welfare. This implies happiness, growth and comfort when it comes to beings, development, improvement and promotion when it comes to an activity or an idea. It is motivated by generosity and compassion, without any obligation and without expecting recognition. Through care, individuals are drawn out of their self-centered concerns, engaging with another's life in a way that expands their own emotional landscape. Thus caring becomes a transformative act, shaping both the giver and the receiver.

Whether directed toward an ideal, a cause, or a community, care drives the commitment to nourish and support what one holds dear. It demands a personal investment, fostering a connection to higher values that pulls us beyond our immediate desires. Care anchors love in action, making it tangible and enduring, a force that deepens our engagement with the world and with ourselves.

Here, we should say a few words about the "Philosophy of care", which emerged from feminist theories in the late 20th century. It is centered around the idea that human relationships and the practice of caring for others are fundamental aspects of a fulfilling and ethical life. It emphasizes the importance of empathy, relational interdependence, and moral responsibility, as our identities and well-being are shaped by our relationships and the care we both give and receive. This concept, often contrasted with an abstract and universal ethic of justice, focuses on responsibilities in specific relationships

rather than formal rules. It suggests that moral actions are those that maintain and nurture caring relationships. Effective care requires the ability to recognize and understand the needs of others, which can vary greatly from one individual to another, from one context to another. It is not about controlling or overpowering those who receive care, but about supporting their autonomy and agency, to enhance their ability to live independently and make their own choices. Care philosophy challenges the dominant cultural narratives of individualism and self-sufficiency by emphasizing interdependence and collective responsibility, as caregiving is considered central to human fulfillment. This philosophy is deeply connected to love, as both concepts emphasize the importance of nurturing, empathy, and commitment to the well-being of others, emphasizing the personal value of supporting and uplifting those around us. They both propose an element of unconditional regard, where people accept and support each other despite flaws or challenges.

Of course, the "Care philosophy" can be criticized, a criticism that applies as well in the love dynamics. It may sometimes overlook the potential for caregivers to overextend themselves, leading to self-sacrifice and burnout, by focusing on the needs of others while forgetting one's own needs, a basic and indispensable egocentricity or egoism. In fact, it could be based on a lack of self appreciation, leading to an obsession with the "other", an existential compensation. Probably, love's greatest challenge is to love ourselves... As well, the "Care philosophy" lacks clear, general guidelines for decision-making, moral, existential and practical, which can make it

difficult to apply consistently across different situations, by acting solely on a case-by-case basis. It can create or reinforce power imbalances, particularly if the caregiver assumes they know what is best for the person receiving care, leading to paternalistic attitudes where the autonomy of the care recipient is compromised, fostering dependency. Then individuals rely too heavily on others for support, rather than being encouraged to develop independence and self-reliance. And it lacks a dimension of distance and rationality that are needed to compensate for the purely emotional dimension of love.

Last point, regarding "doing good," since taking care of others means "doing good for someone". However, there is no love worthy of the name without a constant concern for challenge, both for oneself and for the other, because love is above all an "overflowing," a transcendence of limits, a sort of "thinking the unthinkable." In this sense, "doing good" can have two different, even opposing, meanings. The first is a pleasant and immediate form of "doing good". This is the well-being that comes from instant pleasures or small gestures that bring quick satisfaction, devoid of any real challenge. Spending time with friends, enjoying a good meal, giving a compliment. This type of benefit meets immediate needs and creates an easy sense of happiness, but it is often fleeting. The second is a more ambitious and profound form of "doing good." This type involves investing in actions or experiences that, while requiring more effort and time, have a lasting and significant impact over the long term. It can include personal or altruistic commitments, helping someone selflessly, dedicating oneself to a meaningful project, cultivating challenging

relationships, and inviting others to do the same. This type of benefit promotes more lasting fulfillment and contributes to personal growth and a sense of purpose, engaging in a life guided by deep values and sharing it with others.

Emotional Intensity Love evokes strong and intense emotions, ranging from joy and contentment to longing, sorrow and anger. This emotional intensity is a defining feature of love, whether it's the excitement of romantic love, the enthusiasm for a cause, or the joy found in artistic expression. Such passion generates deep interest, commitment or desire toward activities, goals or relationships. It is characterized by fervor, excitement, and dedication. It can negatively affect the individual when he is frustrated or deprived in their endeavor, when reality is contrary to their expectations.

While emotional intensity is often present in the early stages of the love experience, with passion and excitement, it can evolve into a more stable, enduring form that is less about intense emotions and more about deep connection, commitment, or shared life experiences. The same principle applies to the passion for an ideal or an activity, as it becomes a stable existential need and a meaning of life. For example, companionate love, characterized by affection, trust, mutual respect, and a sense of partnership rather than intense passion. This form of love is common in long-term relationships where the initial emotional intensity has given way to a steady, enduring bond. It can last for years or even a lifetime without the emotional highs and lows associated with passionate love. It is built on shared values, common goals and experiences, emo-

tional security or a deep sense of responsibility to one another, rather than seeking for intensity. In some cases, love becomes more about practical matters, supporting each other in everyday life, managing a household, or raising children. While this may not involve strong emotions, it still reflects a form of love rooted in care and dedication. The shift from intense passion to a deeper, calmer bond is a natural part of many long-term relationships, as it is with the passion for an ideal. Although this lowering of intensity represents a challenge, since the diminishing of passion can lead to feelings of distance, dissatisfaction and depression. Some people prefer a "dramatic" ending to a relationship marked by banality, routine and disappointment. Anecdotally, some have noted a historic paradigm shift in the West, in the 19th century. We went from the marriage of 'reason,' based on common interests, family, and heritage, where "external" lovers were often tolerated or accepted but divorce was socially forbidden, to passionate love, driven by emotional intensity, which demands exclusivity, rejects the presence of "other" lovers, but frequently culminates in divorce.

Desire for Plenitude Love often comes with a desire to see the loved entity flourish. Whether it is helping a partner grow, nurturing a child's development, or cultivating one's own passion, love drives individuals to seek fulfillment and improvement for the object of their love, and for themselves in the process, since both are deeply connected. This development can be emotional, spiritual, relational or material. Love generally seeks completeness, it tends to wholeness and absoluteness,

it desires growth and improvement, and it expects mutual satisfaction. "Unfortunately", it is not easy to experience such moments of plenitude all the time. But a taste for the absolute that is too strong, a feeling that is too demanding, is addictive: we think we have reached it, and we do not want to let go. The desire of plenitude indicates a strong sense of avidity. This rush towards the absolute becomes a trap, and failure to accept the changing nature of love can lead to despair. This feeling of plenitude is basically the essence of spiritual experience, the love of God or the access to the unconditional, an aspiration realized with variable success, that can easily alternate with distress when we face the silence of this absolute.

Respect Respect is a key element of love, where one values and appreciates the uniqueness and worth of the loved entity. This includes recognizing the intrinsic qualities that make the object of love special and holding it in high esteem, whether it's a person, an idea, or a work of art. In personal relations, it emphasizes mutual recognition, equality, and valuing the other person as they are, acknowledging the other person's individuality, boundaries, and specific identity. It fosters trust, communication, and partnership, which are essential for healthy, enduring relationships. Respect is about appreciating someone on a deeper, more enduring level, and it's foundational for true love.

In non-personal contexts, respect for an idea, activity, or cause implies a deep appreciation, understanding, and alignment with its value or significance. For example, one may re-

spect nature, a philosophy, or a profession, meaning they value it, treat it with care, and understand its importance. Respect in this sense is tied to commitment and thoughtful engagement.

Challenge Respect in love implies challenge, as respect represents a commitment to growth. It involves encouraging each other's development, offering honest feedback, and maintaining boundaries, all while upholding the dignity and individuality of the other person. This challenge is not rooted in conflict or dominance, but recognizing the partner's potential, and pushing them gently, sometimes more roughly, but always with support towards positive change. In a loving relationship, partners respect each other enough to offer criticism or feedback, even when it is difficult. A respectful partner might challenge complacency by encouraging the relationship to grow, whether through deeper emotional connection, new shared experiences, or working together to overcome difficulties.

And so it is in non-personal passions, where challenge operates as a key driver of progress, growth, and fulfillment. Whether it is about pushing the boundaries of one's skills, overcoming internal obstacles, challenging the nature of our task or idea - for example a painter criticizing the established canons of esthetic -, it implies embracing risk and uncertainty, as challenges encourage individuals to stretch themselves and deepen their connection to their passion. Just as in personal relationships, challenges in non-personal passions fuel self-discovery, resilience, and the ongoing pursuit of excellence.

Admiration Admiration is a problematic feature of love. It focuses a person in itself, or on their specific qualities or achievements, and it tends to imply a power dynamic, where one person looks up to the other. The person who worships the other either forgets themselves to let the other shine, or compares themselves to the other and tries to copy them, which can constitute a source of "energizing" emulation. In both cases, there's an imbalance in the relationship. While admiration is encountered in love, it is often situational or temporary, and sometimes it does not imply the mutuality that love requires. Admiration for non-personal entities, such as a work of art, an idea, or nature, tends to focus on the aesthetic, symbolic, moral or functional aspects. It often involves a sense of awe or appreciation for excellence but it does not necessarily imply a deeper, sustained connection or engagement.

We admire for example the qualities, strengths or achievements of someone we love, such as their kindness, intelligence, beauty, or resilience. Admiration can deepen emotional bonds by highlighting what we find special or inspiring in the other person. However, love goes beyond admiration, as it involves a deeper emotional connection and commitment even when those admirable qualities may change or fade. When we love an activity, idea, or cause, we might admire its beauty, purpose, or impact. But admiration without action is not love. Thus, someone who loves music may admire the skill and talent it takes to create it, or someone who loves nature may admire its complexity and majesty. But as with relationships, love for a thing or activity often involves deeper

engagement and fulfillment beyond simple admiration, even as this admiration withers.

In fact, admiration can inhibit true love when the object becomes overly idealized and put on a pedestal. As it fosters an unrealistic view of the person, ignoring their flaws, it prevents a deeper emotional connection, since love involves seeing and accepting someone as they are, with both strengths and imperfections, in order to have a constructive relationship. As well it can lead to disappointment when the admired person fails to meet the high standards set by the admirer, causing emotional distance or disillusionment. And when someone is overly admired, the admirer feels intimidated or fearful of showing their true selves, worrying they won't live up to the same standards, which generates a barrier to authenticity, crucial for developing true love. What is more, admiration is passive, whereas love is active. Admiration often makes us live vicariously. It is as if we were affected by the qualities of the person we admire, without having done anything to obtain them.

Joy Overall, love brings joy and a sense of satisfaction, in spite of its ups and downs. Whether it's being with a loved one, engaging in a passion, sharing a common goal or connecting with nature, love brings a profound sense of happiness, contentment, and sometimes even bliss.

But true love can persist even when joy and satisfaction are temporarily lacking, particularly in long-term relationships or projects. So it is with the philosopher or the artist who go through long periods of creative and existential drought, a feeling of powerlessness, poverty and isolation, or the political ac-

tivist, but who keep the course thanks to the strength of their love for beauty, art, justice or wisdom. However, for love to be sustainable in the long run, joy and satisfaction often need to be restored or redefined. Through love, people may stay together through difficult times, even when joy and satisfaction are absent, due to loyalty, a sense of duty, or shared life goals. Love that is based on a strong foundation of trust and commitment can weather periods where the relationship lacks emotional fulfillment, viewing those challenges as temporary or secondary. This works just as well in the pursuit of an ideal or a goal, where difficulties and setbacks can affect us negatively, but our passion remains unaffected and joyful.

Love goes beyond surface-level happiness and satisfaction, especially in relationships built on deep emotional connection, shared values and a good dose of reason, in spite of adverse external circumstances and struggles. Love persists because both individuals are willing to work through hardships with the belief that joy and satisfaction will eventually return, or because their bonding is more important than anything else. Although If joy and satisfaction are absent for too long, love can turn into mere obligation, where the relationship continues out of habit rather than genuine affection or desire. Emotional burnout may set in, and without efforts to revive connection and fulfillment, the relationship may lose its vitality. Thus, in order for love to thrive in the long term, joy and satisfaction are important components that need to be nurtured, be it in personal love or non-personal love. Although some people cultivate pain and drama as the ultimate form of love, as we observe in life and in fiction. And the etymology of

”passion” in latin is after all ”suffering”. But indeed, they rejoice in this suffering, as, for example, the poet does, which might even be a source of inspiration. Another reason for this ”suffering joy” is that suffering also brings a sense of connection. We suffer together, so we feel like we are together, and even understand each other. And if I make you suffer, you think of me, which is better than indifference. But in this case it’s a kind of negative joy, a ”joy for want of anything better”, because we cannot achieve a real connection, but we cannot stand indifference and lack of attention either.

Vulnerability In love, there is an element of vulnerability, because of the willingness to be emotionally open and, at times, to experience pain. It involves taking the risk of being hurt, because the connection is worth the ”potential” cost. To truly love someone, we must open ourselves up, share our feelings, and allow the other person to see our authentic self, including our fears, flaws, and insecurities. This emotional exposure makes us vulnerable because it creates the possibility of rejection, hurt, or disappointment. This vulnerability is essential for building trust and intimacy, since we invite the other person to connect with us on a deeper level. Mutual vulnerability fosters a sense of closeness that strengthens the bond between individuals.

Love makes people vulnerable to pain because the more we care about someone, the more we have to lose, the more we are subject to anxiety. Whether it is the fear of rejection, betrayal, or loss, the potential for emotional pain is inherent, but accepting this vulnerability makes love genuine and mean-

ingful. But through embracing vulnerability, individuals can experience deeper emotional relations, overcome fears, learn more about themselves and their relationships, an important factor of growth and maturity.

This principle applies in the context of non-personal love, such as love for ideals, causes, abstract concepts or an activity, since it challenges personal safety, emotional security, and comfort in pursuit of something larger than oneself. Because one must accept the inherent vulnerability of pursuing something that may not be fully achievable or that could face resistance and setbacks. The individual nevertheless becomes emotionally invested in the cause, knowing that success is uncertain and that the path could involve disappointment, failure, or opposition. Accepting vulnerability also means being willing to give up comfort, face hardships, or endure criticism in order to pursue our vocation. It means being willing to stand up for what one believes in, despite the risk of being judged or attacked for our beliefs and our actions. It involves accepting that the outcome may not be permanent or fully realized within one's lifetime, coming to terms with the fact that efforts toward progress or change may be fragile or undone by future events.

However, if a person is quite vulnerable without maintaining a certain psychological autonomy and strength, they can become overly dependent on their partner for validation, well-being or happiness. This partner then feels overwhelmed by responsibility for the other's emotions. Or, by displaying too much weakness, one gets exposed to manipulation by the partner. And by insisting on their own vulnerability, people show

themselves emotionally fragile, so they feel greater suffering at the slightest sign of rejection, indifference, betrayal or even misunderstanding. Especially if the other person is not ready to expose their own vulnerability. Overall, one develops naturally a tendency to victimhood.

Self-Transcendence Love influences one's identity: it makes us go beyond ourselves, it induces an expansion of the self. When in a close relationship, individuals often incorporate aspects of their partner's identity, experiences, and preferences into their own. This creates a blending of the self, where someone's worldview becomes inclusive or constitutive of another person's life and experiences. Love encourages people to step outside their comfort zones, modify their usual thinking and behavioral patterns. They try new activities, explore new interests, make new experiences, or adopt new perspectives. The desire to support or connect with a loved one can lead to personal growth and new opportunities for learning, as it broadens empathy, compassion, and understanding, thus expanding their emotional range. Just like in the passion for an activity or an ideal, which "forces" us to confront our limitations, rethink our perspectives, and continuously evolve in order to achieve a deeper connection with our purpose or values. In any context or any form, love involves letting go of personal defenses, allowing oneself to be weak, imperfect and vulnerable. This vulnerability can feel like an opening or expansion of the self, as it deepens emotional intimacy and trust. In a sense, the individual is overwhelmed by himself.

Love evokes feelings of transcendence or connection to something greater than ourselves, fostering a sense of unity with others and the world. This sense of interconnectedness can be experienced as a deep expansion of one's being, as a spiritual experience and transformation. Love becomes a permanent and arduous challenge through a desire to accomplish and reach something beyond our limits, even if unreachable. In this way, love pushes us to continuously evolve, embracing uncertainty and growth rather than seeking comfort in established certainties. Such a challenging view of love is of course totally opposed to tendencies like possession, control and security, who rather imply clinging to a rigid, frigid self and relationships.

Driving force Love can be seen as a driving force since it motivates people to act, pursue goals, and overcome challenges. Whether it is love for a person, a passion, or a purpose, it inspires intense emotions, energy, willpower and commitment, it makes us do things, or want to do things. Love incites individuals to connect, to create, to strive for something beyond themselves. It makes us take decisions, modify our behavior, it shapes our life paths. It has the ability to transform both individuals and societies, as it fosters care, compassion, and a desire for fulfillment, just as it fosters possession and control. Love aspires to beauty, to harmony, to unity, whether it be the unity of a couple, of a family, of humanity, or the unity of all, just as it aspires to destruction. Love is a power of being, inviting the soul to soar, challenging us to go beyond our limits, urging us to exist, in the truest sense of the word, as it

can invite us to shrink and run for cover. Love is momentum. Unfortunately, It can push us upwards just as it can push us downwards. Celestial Eros and terrestrial Eros, as the Ancient Greeks opposed them.

In love, there's an "inside" and an "outside", and when passion emerges, the "outside" is transformed. The "inside" symbolizes the intimate space, emotions and thoughts that belong to the inner experience of love. It refers to what is experienced within the relationship, between the two individuals, in a personal and private setting. The "outside" represents what is external to this intimate relationship: perceptions of the outside world, everyday life, and the way in which the relationship influences life outside this intimate circle. This means that love has the capacity to change our perspective or experience of the outside world, even to energize it. After experiencing a profound moment of love, or after being fully invested in the relationship, the way we perceive the outside world changes. Love has an impact not only on the inside of the relationship, but also on the way we interact with the world, transforming this "outside".

Love must act; it does not "want" to merely indulge in contemplation. It must imagine and create. Without this, its vision is sterile and selfish, as a love that does not emerge from itself shrinks. Love cannot be content with remaining passive, in mere dreamy admiration. It must be active, productive, and engage in concrete actions. It cannot be limited to a static attitude, to simply contemplating the other or its own feelings. Contemplative love, while beautiful, is insufficient if it is confined to passive wonderment. It can become empty if

there is no movement, no creation, or action to nourish and explore itself further. True love requires a form of invention and imagination, the ability to imagine ways to explore the relationship, to make it grow, and to enrich the other. This may include acts of care, shared projects, or simply the desire to build something together. If love is limited to a mere feeling, it risks becoming sterile and selfish because it focuses on personal needs and desires rather than on reciprocal interaction with the other. If love is not capable of actively manifesting itself, of stepping out of itself and expressing its power through actions or concrete gestures, it ends up retreating and shrinking inward. For love weakens or withers when it fails to expand and invest in otherness, in reality.

Abandonment The idea that love is an abandonment is based on the notion that, in order to love fully, one must let go somewhat of their identity, their self-esteem, their fears, and their personal expectations. This involves a form of vulnerability, but also acceptance and trust. To abandon oneself in the context of love means to relinquish control and allow the other person to see and know our deepest essence, without barriers or defenses, and to be guided by the partner. From this perspective, abandonment is a total openness to the other, an acceptance that love cannot be entirely controlled or conditioned. It is a form of letting go, where one gives themselves to the other without holding back or keeping reservations, with the faith that the other will embrace this vulnerability and accept us.

The idea that love is both an abandonment and a driving force may seem paradoxical, but these two dimensions complement and enrich our understanding of what it means to love. Abandonment means letting go of control and remaining open to the other. And it is this openness that allows love to act as a powerful driving force. Love, as a driving force, pushes us to step outside ourselves, to make choices and take actions that are not solely centered on our desires or fears, but on the well-being of the other, the relationship, and shared aspirations. Love as a driving force does not imply the expression of an all-powerful personal will, but rather the idea of welcoming an external "force" instead of relying on our own limited will.

In this way, abandonment becomes a necessary condition for love to be a driving force: by setting aside our fears or self-centered concerns, we create space to act more authentically and generously. Love then propels us to act with courage, to surpass our limits, and to engage in a dynamic of building and sharing. It is by abandoning the need for control that we allow love's momentum to unfold fully. In other words, abandonment frees us from inner restraints, and it is this release that makes love a driving force for action, both personally and in our relationship with the other.

Abandonment also means "taking refuge" in the other person, in a positive sense, finding comfort, security or support in one's relationship with someone else, in a healthy and beneficial way. From then on, refuge is not synonymous with negative emotional dependence, but rather with a mutual sharing where both find strength and comfort in the relationship. This

search for "refuge" deepens emotional bonds and establishes a solid connection based on trust, respect and mutual support. It also means that by turning towards the other, we create a space where we feel understood and valued, thus strengthening self-esteem and the relationship. Taking "refuge" in the other in a positive sense indicates a balanced relationship where each can be a pillar for the other, .i.e. abandonment without falling into a harmful form of dependency.

Freedom Love is often viewed as dependency, since it implies responsibility and obligations toward someone else or something else than oneself, taking into account another reality than our own person. But in a way, to remain on this aspect is a reduction of love, as there is an important component of freedom in love. Although it is true that commonly, sadly enough, love is connected to possession and control, antithetic to the very idea of freedom. We call this phenomenon the "lowest form" of love, almost a non-love. In this case, love is about a "concrete" object that we can own, unless we ourselves are being "owned". And that is the "destiny" of many people. They do not realize that we can modify our interests and modify our way of being. They do not understand that in opposition to control, abandon is both relieving and re-living. They want to control, but then they miss the experience of fulfilling love, and in the end, something is missing, and they are depressed or resentful.

Let us propose the idea that a genuine experience of love involves a sense of liberation, and true freedom actually requires

the presence of love. Here are some reasons to defend such a thesis.

In love, people in principle feel free to be their true selves. When someone loves and accepts us, we feel liberated from the need to hide our flaws or conform to others' expectations, since in principle, we are accepted and appreciated as we are. This allows us to express our authentic selves openly, fostering a sense of personal freedom.

Love, at its core, involves choice. True love is freely and generously given, not coerced. When we choose to love someone or something, we exercise our autonomy, which is an essential aspect of freedom. Likewise, the freedom to leave or modify a relationship ensures that love remains a voluntary and meaningful act, not an obligation.

Healthy love encourages personal growth and self-discovery. With the support and encouragement of a loving relationship, or through the involvement in a passion, individuals feel free to pursue their inclinations and interests, explore new facets of themselves, and expand their horizons. In this sense, love acts as a liberating force that empowers personal freedom.

Love respects the freedom of the individuals involved. Rather than seeking to control or possess, love allows each person to retain their individuality and independence. This respect for autonomy enhances both love and freedom, as it fosters a dynamic where the individuals feel valued and free to grow.

Love that respects boundaries and individual freedom creates a foundation of mutual respect and self-love. By honoring each other's personal space and freedom, individuals feel se-

cure and valued, which in turn deepens the connection and trust within any relationship.

Love can help dissolve fears and insecurities that restrict freedom. When we love or feel truly loved, when we are deeply engaged in a passion, we are more willing to take risks, to be vulnerable, and to step outside of our comfort zones. In this way, love acts as a catalyst for freedom by encouraging a more fearless and open-hearted approach to life.

Love and passion break the boundaries we build around our hearts and minds, freeing us from the constraints of self-doubt and fear, or rigid beliefs and presuppositions, of limits we impose on ourselves. In the intensity of love, we dissolve the walls of a fixed identity, stepping beyond our limited person and embracing boundless connections. Passion sweeps us into a flow where we lose ourselves and, paradoxically, discover a truer, deeper part of our being. In love, we transcend our solitary selves, finding liberation in the profound, shared experience that reveals who we are beyond our own perceptions.

Sacrifice The concept of sacrifice is essential to love, although it is rather ambiguous, both in its nature and its motivation, which can make it shift from being a sign of love to something of a very different nature. Let us propose the idea that sacrifice is an expression of love when it is motivated by a genuine desire to support, nurture, or protect someone, or advance a deeply held ideal, passion, or cause, reflecting selflessness and care for otherness. It demonstrates a willingness to prioritize another person's well-being, at a personal cost, which deepens connection and trust in the relationship. Or priori-

tize the advancement of a deeply held ideal, passion, or cause, which strengthens one's connection to that purpose, deepening the sense of meaning and commitment. But strangely enough, a sacrifice is a manifestation of love when it is not conceived or felt as a sacrifice, but as the mere expression of a will or desire, when the "loss" incurred by the person seems "normal" or even "joyous", not even considered a "loss", since it is a "gift" to something or someone considered at the moment more important than the self. Thus one can sacrifice even his life while rejoicing for their contribution to a greater good, for what they love, for example a soldier fighting for his country.

Sacrifice embodies love when it is freely given out of concern for the other person's happiness or well-being, for the development of a cause, an activity or a passion. This means giving up time, comfort, material advantages or personal ambitions to help a loved one or to promote an activity. Such acts come from a place of genuine care, where the person finds joy or fulfillment in contributing to the other's life or to a given entity. Sacrifice reflects love when it reinforces commitment. In long-term relationships, partners might make sacrifices to support each other's dreams, endure hardships together, or make compromises that strengthen their bond. These sacrifices enrich love by demonstrating a willingness to share life's burdens, thus deepening the relationship. Sacrifice reflects love when it reinforces commitment to an idea, a passion, or a cause. For instance to pursue a creative vision, devote time to a social movement, or endure personal hardships in the name of advancing a cause they believe in. These sacrifices demonstrate

dedication and a willingness to shoulder burdens for a greater purpose, thus deepening their connection to the cause and solidifying their commitment over time. In this context, the personal costs are willingly embraced as part of the journey toward achieving something meaningful, much like in long-term relationships where shared sacrifices strengthen bonds. Sacrifice is an expression of love when one sacrifices something out of empathy, understanding the needs or suffering of a loved one, it reflects a compassionate form of love. This kind of sacrifice is not about gaining retribution, but about alleviating the other person's difficulties or fostering their well-being. It shows that one is attuned to the other's existential, psychological or physical needs. Sacrifice is an expression of love for a cause, idea, or passion when one sacrifices out of deep empathy for the greater good, the engagement in a "higher" goal, understanding the needs of a broader community, or a future outcome. It implies for example alleviating suffering or advancing a meaningful mission. It shows that one is attuned to the needs of the cause or idea, willing to endure personal hardships to contribute to a larger purpose, driven by compassion, commitment, and a deep sense of connection to the cause's goals.

Sacrifice is not an expression of Love when it feels like a tiresome burden rather than as a spontaneous expression of love. If it is done out of practical or moral obligation, expectation of a reward, or mere duty, rather than a genuine desire to give. If someone sacrifices because they feel they "have to", or if it leads to resentment for lack of retribution, be it love, gratitude, material goods or recognition, the sacrifice is not

rooted in love. Instead, it might reflect a lack of boundaries, i. e. an excessive sacrifice, the pursuit of greed, or a sense of coercion. Sacrifice can be considered unhealthy if it leads to self-neglect or a loss of identity, although we have to take into account the context and the meaning of the engagement, its degree of consciousness, since it might be seen as positive or as part of a greater purpose, depending on the individual's beliefs, motivations, and sense of fulfillment. Nevertheless, when individuals sacrifice themselves to the point of harming their well-being while affecting their sense of dignity, it indicates an imbalance. Such sacrifices stem from fear, insecurity, or a desire for validation rather than love. Sometimes as well, sacrifice can be used manipulatively, as a means to control or guilt others. If someone sacrifices with the expectation of receiving something in return or to impose a sense of indebtedness, it is not an expression of genuine love. True love does not seek to control or demand reciprocity.

In essence, sacrifice reflects love when it is freely chosen, motivated by empathy, by a genuine desire to enhance the well-being of another person, by the realization of a passion or a cause. When it truly enhances a sense of self, without hidden agendas, regrets or resentment. When sacrifice is driven by obligation, self-neglect, or manipulation, when it is a negation of the self, or when it produces bitter afterthoughts, it diverges from being an expression of love and instead signals dependency, lack of limits, or attempts to control. Therefore, healthy sacrifice can be considered as freedom because it represents a conscious, voluntary choice to give something up for a purpose or value one finds meaningful. It implies "to be

oneself". When a person chooses to make a sacrifice, they exercise their free will and demonstrate autonomy over their actions and priorities. It manifests a capacity of detachment, and therefore an empowerment, an attitude quite compatible with true love.

RELATIONAL LOVE

Let us now describe some key elements that commonly characterize love in terms of the relation between specific individuals. At its core, love between individuals is a deep emotional bond, a powerful connection. It involves feelings of affection, care, attachment and commitment. This includes acceptance and understanding for the other person's flaws and limits, and its particular way of being.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

This emotional connection between other individuals or oneself, can manifest in different forms.

Romantic love It Involves attraction, spiritual and physical intimacy, a desire for closeness and partnership, including or not sexual relations. Romance brings together love, passion, and companionship in a way that helps individuals feel emotionally secure, fulfilled, and connected to someone who shares their values, dreams, and experiences, often with a desire for excitement. Sexual desire is often central to romantic attraction, as people seek to express their love and affection through physical closeness and mutual pleasure, with potentially a desire for reproduction.

Platonic love It is based on deep friendship, trust, and mutual respect, without romantic or sexual elements. The desire revolves around cultivating a deep and meaningful connection built on closeness, intellectual companionship, and mutual respect, without the complexities of romance or physical intimacy. The focus is on fostering a peaceful friendship that nourishes personal growth and provides loyal support.

Familial love The affection and care shared between family members, like parents and children or siblings, which implies identification to the common links, be they consanguineous kinship or affinal kinship. In such relationships, one expects unconditional love, where family members accept each other regardless of flaws, mistakes, or differences, seeking to be valued for who they are. Family members should be a consistent and stable source of support and care throughout life, especially in times of need, offering protection and comfort and guidance, trust and loyalty, understanding and forgiveness. Family love provides a sense of belonging, through a shared history and a common identity.

Self-love Self-love is not a common practice, and is even considered shameful, confused with egotistical narcissism. It implies a healthy regard for one's own well-being, including respect for oneself and one's values, self-appreciation and self-compassion, coupled with an interest in knowing oneself. The first condition is to accept identically our strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, without denying either. It involves embracing who we are without harsh judgment or unre-

alistic expectations, allowing us to feel at peace with ourselves. It implies setting healthy boundaries in relationships, work, and life in general, not tolerating harmful or disrespectful treatment and ensuring that we prioritize our own needs, our own vocation. Our emotional well-being includes temperance, nurturing positive emotions, and taking care of your mental health by being kind to ourselves and practicing self-compassion in times of difficulty. But it needs personal growth, to continuously evolve and develop as a person. This means taking up challenges, pursuing new goals, learning, and fostering our strengths, while engaging in activities that bring meaning and fulfillment to your life.

Self-love implies to forgive and even sometimes forget past mistakes and shortcomings, recognizing that imperfection is part of being human, and allowing room for failures without being overly self-critical. We should build and maintain self-confidence and a sense of self-worth, without compulsive comparison to others. This means believing in one's abilities and recognizing one's value, regardless of external validation or societal standards. In self-love, there is a deep desire to live authentically, being true to oneself, in opposition to being caught in a compulsive and dreary routine. This means acting in alignment with our values, desires, and beliefs, without feeling pressured to conform to others' expectations, moral obligations and societal norms. This leads to a desire for inner peace and contentment, instead of nourishing resentment, guilt, depression and anger. It involves cultivating a sense of calm and satisfaction with who we are and where we are in life,

reducing the constant need for approval, a classical source of anxiety, or perfectionism, a powerful tool for self depreciation.

SUPPORT

Love involves a desire for the well-being and happiness of another person, or other persons, which is shown in different ways.

Acts of support Helping someone through difficult times, offering encouragement, providing moral, physical or emotional assistance, nurturing the relationship and fostering mutual growth through healthy challenges. It implies guidance, protection, and reassurance, sometimes confrontation. Support is often selfless, prioritizing the well-being of the other person, offering unwavering care. And for oneself It signifies engaging in actions, attitudes, and practices that reinforce self-respect, self-compassion, and personal fulfillment.

Loyalty Being devoted to a person or diverse persons implies staying by their side despite difficulties, challenges or changes in circumstances. Loyalty is a cornerstone in all types of love because it builds trust, fosters stability, it reinforces the bond between individuals. It deepens emotional intimacy and helps relationships grow over time. It also plays a critical role in self-love, where loyalty to oneself nurtures personal integrity and well-being. Self-love provides reliability because

it is not dependent on circumstances, it does not rely on arbitrary conditions.

Sacrifice Sometimes love means putting another person's needs ahead of your own, though in healthy relationships, this should be rather mutual. Sacrifice in love is important because it demonstrates commitment, selflessness, and true care, allowing relationships to grow stronger and more meaningful. It helps to create a more enduring bond by prioritizing the needs and happiness of the loved ones over one's own immediate desires, manifesting generosity and self-mastery. It promotes emotional intimacy, trust, and mutual respect, while also ensuring that partners feel valued and supported. Although sacrifice can sometimes be difficult, it is often essential for maintaining balance, harmony, and lasting connection in any loving relationship.

Although sacrifice becomes unhealthy when it is one-sided, calculating, excessive, or leads to the neglect of one's own needs and well-being, leading to the erosion of personal identity, compromising our self-respect. When sacrifice becomes a tool for avoiding conflict, maintaining control, postponing important challenges, or tolerating toxic behavior, it damages both the individual and the relationship.

Strangely enough, sacrifice is very important in self-love. It refers to the deliberate act of giving up certain habits, behaviors, or relationships that are usual and comfortable, but are detrimental to our well-being in order to prioritize our growth, happiness, and self-care. While the term "sacrifice" typically implies a loss, in self-love it often means making difficult

choices that ultimately serve your best interests and foster a healthier, more fulfilling life.

In relation to oneself, self-love requires sacrificing relationships that are emotionally or mentally draining, even if they have sentimental value. This sacrifice is about protecting our well-being and surrounding ourselves with people who support and uplift you. It involves giving up short-term pleasures or immediate gratification, routine and obligations that may feel "nice" or "safe" in the moment, but are harmful in the long run. It means sacrificing the desire to always please others helps us prioritize our own needs. Sacrifice in self-love also means letting go of negative self-talk or harsh inner criticism. It involves sacrificing the habit of undermining ourselves to embrace a mindset of self-compassion and self-respect. In the pursuit of self-love, one should sacrifice the easiness of familiarity and certainty, to pursue the risk of personal growth. This means stepping out of our comfort zone to face new challenges, take risks, or work on self-improvement, even when it feels uncomfortable. And of course it means sacrificing the desire for external validation and approval from others, learning to trust and validate ourselves, even when others might not offer the same affirmation. Lastly, but importantly, it requires letting go of perfectionism, the unrealistic expectation to always perform flawlessly, a good excuse to justify the comfort of inertia. Sacrificing the pursuit of perfection allows us to embrace our imperfections, treat ourselves with more kindness and understanding, and take the risk of truly existing.

In summary, true self-love means sacrificing our immediate and superficial self for a deeper and more substantial one,

abandoning a smaller self for a larger one. That is why we can state that a narcissistic person does not really love himself, because they do not challenge themselves: they only flaunt their empirical self, their immediacy, their appearances. There is no sacrifice, no self-transcendence.

COMMITMENT

Commitment is a foundational aspect of love relationships, serving as the "glue" that holds people together through the various ups and downs of life. It encourages individuals to persevere, trust, and invest in each other, creating a stable foundation for the relationship to thrive and evolve over time.

Emotional Stability Commitment provides a sense of emotional security in a relationship, as partners know they are dedicated to each other. This stability allows them to feel safe, express vulnerability, and develop deeper emotional intimacy. Commitment reassures both individuals that they will be there for one another, even when challenges arise.

Long-term Vision In a love relationship, commitment involves creating a shared long-term perspective for the future. It means investing in the relationship with the intention of building a lasting partnership. This future-oriented mindset influences decisions about how to navigate conflicts, share goals, and make sacrifices to maintain the relationship over time.

Resilience Commitment functions as a source of resilience during difficult times. Relationships inevitably face challenges, whether personal crises, external stressors, or conflicts between partners. When commitment is strong, individuals are more likely to work through issues together, focusing on finding solutions rather than walking away. It encourages perseverance and problem-solving.

Effort Commitment involves a continuous effort to nurture and develop the partnership. It means prioritizing the needs of the relationship, being willing to compromise, and taking responsibility for one's actions. It pushes individuals to invest time, energy, and emotional resources to maintain a healthy and thriving connection.

Mutual growth The idea of mutual growth naturally derives from the concept of commitment, as partners contribute to the continuous development of themselves and the partnership. Through investing time, energy, and emotional resources into the relationship, the partners evolve, learn, and improve themselves. By prioritizing the needs of the relationship and working collaboratively, partners create a dynamic where they can grow together and as individuals. To the extent that mutual challenge is part of the "agreement".

Trust A committed relationship fosters trust and loyalty, as partners commit to being there for one another. This mutual trust allows for deeper emotional intimacy and authorizes vulnerability, as partners feel confident in the loyalty of the other.

In spite of their differences, in spite of their flaws and limits, trust is maintained. Contrary to the common prejudice, in a love relation, trust is not something that should be deserved as it is in business relations, but something that should be generously given, without suspicion or reservation.

Needs Commitment involves finding a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the relationship. While each partner must retain their sense of self, they also commit to growing together and supporting each other's goals and aspirations within the framework of the relationship. Although one should be careful with the "diktat" of needs and maintain a critical distance to them. It is crucial to differentiate between genuine needs, that "have" to be satisfied, and mere desires or wants, more optional. Sometimes we mistake superficial desires, such as material possessions or external validation, for deep-seated needs, leading to unsustainable pursuits or dissatisfaction when those desires aren't met. Overemphasizing certain needs, especially when tied to external sources, can lead to dependency, which reduces personal autonomy and makes us more vulnerable to disappointment or frustration.

Strengthening Emotional Bonds Commitment strengthens emotional bonds over time. It is not just a decision made once but a continuous choice to prioritize the relationship, stay emotionally present, and work through challenges together. This ongoing dedication reinforces the connection between partners, creating a deep sense of unity and shared

purpose. But we should not confuse this bonding with agreement or unanimity. For example, we don't have to agree with our loved ones when we choose our vocation, or when our vocation chooses us. It is quite possible that the family or the partner may disagree, because of a lack of understanding or interest, or because of a difference in existential values. We owe each other to understand, to explain, but we don't have to agree, and above all we don't have to comply, unless such a sacrifice seems necessary. True emotional bonding can sustain and accept fundamental differences between the different partners.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Acceptance True love is rooted in respect and acceptance of the other person for who they are. It involves understanding, recognizing the individuality of the other person, valuing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Acceptance means loving someone despite their flaws, imperfections, or mistakes, without trying to control or change them fundamentally. But acceptance can turn into complacency or passivity if it leads to the avoidance of challenges, or not addressing the crucial issues of the relationship. There needs a willingness to engage and communicate, to take risks, in order to ensure that the relationship remains dynamic and fulfilling rather than stagnant.

Mutual challenge is necessary in any relation, although it can conflict with acceptance. Especially when it turns into systematic criticism, pressure, absence of support, or an attempt

to fundamentally change who the other person is. Such "challenge" becomes damaging and undermines the relationship by making the partner feel unaccepted or unworthy. It makes a partner feel like they are being constantly evaluated, leading to insecurity or resentment, since they feel they are not being accepted as they are, or rejected. This tension or conflict between challenge and acceptance, or devaluation, also exists on a personal level, and can undermine self-love, just as it can undermine the relationship between two people.

Enrichment Love is often described as something that enriches life and encourages personal growth. In relationships, love inspires individuals to improve themselves, fosters mutual development, and creates an environment where both partners thrive emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually.

The opposite of enrichment in love could be described in different ways. Stagnation or monotony, when the relationship becomes repetitive, with no new experiences, ideas, or emotional deepening, leading to a sense of boredom or dissatisfaction, as the relationship no longer contributes to well-being or a sense of fulfillment.

Impoverishment, which refers to a situation where the relationship drains rather than nourishes the individuals involved, where partners feel emotionally depleted or unfulfilled. The lack of emotional reciprocity or growth results in a sense of emptiness or loss of vitality, it stifles ambition, curiosity, and personal development.

Regression, which represents a decline in emotional or intellectual development within the relationship. Instead of fos-

tering positivity and progress, it causes partners to revert to unhealthy habits, insecurities, or emotional patterns. They may experience decreased motivation for self-improvement, or the relationship leads to negative schemes like dependency, resentment, or codependency.

Inhibition, which is marked by constraints, as it restricts individual growth, suppresses self-expression, and prevents personal fulfillment. Inhibiting love may involve control, jealousy, or possessiveness, limiting personal or emotional growth by creating a smothering dynamic.

These negative schemes prevent the relationship from fostering growth, emotional fulfillment, and personal development, instead leaving the partners feeling stuck, drained, or constrained.

Selflessness Love often involves a degree of selflessness and a willingness to give. Whether in terms of time, attention, or care, love prompts people to act with generosity and compassion, sometimes placing the other person's happiness above their own. In a self-centered, selfish approach of the "love" relationship, personal gain and fulfillment take precedence over the happiness and well-being of the partner. Instead of acting with generosity, compassion, and sharing, they focus on their own desires, disregarding the needs and expectations of the other person, which undermines trust, intimacy, and mutual respect. The other person is instrumentalized, through brute force, seduction or manipulation. But of course, there is always a certain dose of such selfishness in any relation, often in an insidious and denied way.

Fluidity Love is complex, contradictory and multi-layered. In the same relationship, we experience different types of love, simultaneously or sequentially, different kinds of love, romantic, familial, platonic, etc. Love changes and evolves over time. It can involve joy and fulfillment but also vulnerability, pain, and sacrifice. Fluidity represents the ability of an individual and relation to adapt to changing circumstances, to the diversity of emotions and needs. Partners in a fluid relationship can adjust their expectations, and evolve as individuals while maintaining and developing their bond. Otherwise the relationship faces stagnation, conflict or disappointment.

Trust In love, there is an element of trust and intimacy, where individuals feel safe sharing their thoughts, emotions, and vulnerabilities. This trust forms the foundation of long-lasting love, whether in romantic partnerships, family or close friendships. Mistrust leads to constant doubt, emotional distance, and a breakdown of the connection between partners, since it prevents openness. Suspicion undermines the foundation of intimacy and can cause emotional strain. When partners feel insecure, they have doubts about their own worth, the other's feelings, or the stability of the relationship, which leads to jealousy, fear of abandonment, or a need for constant reassurance.

PARENTAL LOVE

The issue of children in the love relation bears specific features, since there is an important nurturing dimension. In a family, commitment, trust, mutual growth, and sacrifice, etc. are foundational elements that shape the emotional and developmental landscape for children. These values help children feel safe, loved, and supported, while also teaching them significant life skills. Parents play a central role in fostering an environment where these values are consistently demonstrated, helping children grow into emotionally healthy and capable individuals. At the same time, children contribute to the parents' personal growth, making it a mutually enriching love relationship.

Through the behavior of their parents, children learn the value of commitment, both in relationships and in other aspects of life. They internalize the idea that dedication and effort are crucial to maintaining strong bonds and achieving personal goals. As children get older, parents must also trust their children to make decisions, take responsibility, and navigate challenges independently. By trusting children, parents foster self-confidence and help them learn accountability and independence. This implies providing opportunities for learning, encouraging curiosity, and supporting the children's personal interests.

Raising children is a transformative experience for parents, who grow emotionally and develop new perspectives through the challenges, the pains and joys of parenthood. Children teach parents patience, adaptability, and how to nurture another human being. As parents guide children, both parties can experience mutual progress. Children grow through the

life lessons their parents impart, while parents evolve by constantly adapting their parenting approach to their children's changing needs. Although the parental relationship knows many frustrations, personal growth can feed itself on anger and disappointment.

Children learn the importance of sacrifice through their parents' actions, as a manifestation of love. By witnessing the sacrifices their parents make for their well-being, children learn to understand the importance and value of putting others' needs ahead of their own, of being responsible members of a family and society. Although parents should teach children that such sacrifice should not be one sided, an aspect which periodically is forgotten, because of insecurity or complacency of parents. This shortcoming induces egocentrism in the children, and a lack of love, since by being "loved" too much, children do not learn to love.

Consistent and open communication is vital in a family. Parents need to communicate effectively with their children to understand their needs, fears, and aspirations. Children, in turn, learn to express their feelings and thoughts, which fosters emotional closeness. As children mature, they should learn the importance of support in relationships and develop the skills to support their parents in return, creating a reciprocal dynamic and stronger bonding.

However, we must qualify this idea of "return" or gratitude by arguing that children "owe" nothing to their parents, and have no "obligation" to support them. In this sense, giving is only healthy if it is unilateral and one-way, with no expectations. If there is a return, it will not be in the sense of an obli-

gation or a "debt", but through another "unilateral" gift. Generosity learned by example. Otherwise, children are implicitly made responsible for a life and care they did not ask for, and which they would be unable to repay in any case. Parental love is thus dedicated to gratuity, ready to "accept" ingratitude, without the frustration that comes from expectation.

Discipline Teaching discipline in the family is a vital expression of love, as it equips children with the tools they need to navigate life successfully. Discipline provides structure, helps children develop responsibility and self-control, and fosters mutual respect between parents and children. When administered with compassion and understanding, discipline enhances the family's emotional bonds and creates an environment where both children and parents can grow. Far from being a negative force, discipline is a loving tool that promotes a child's long-term well-being and emotional security.

But we should specify that communication and dialogue are very important in the teaching of discipline. Without communication and dialogue, the discipline becomes a rigid rule, deprived of rationality and understanding, arbitrary, and the child does not know what the discipline is set for. Instead of assuming that the child knows, or presupposing that parental authority is in itself sufficient, we need to help them understand the rationale of the rules. Thus we invite them to carry out the discipline by leading him to think for himself through dialog and mutual questioning. This allows them to internalize this discipline and its grounding, instead of applying it through obligation and fear. In the latter case, either the child

will try to avoid following the instructions, or he might just apply them formally, resentfully or inadequately.

Here are some benefits of teaching discipline.

Providing boundaries Discipline provides children with necessary boundaries, which help them understand what is acceptable behavior and what isn't. By providing boundaries, parents offer their children a structured, safe, and loving environment where they can learn responsibility and self-discipline. This not only helps children grow into confident, capable individuals but also strengthens the emotional bonds within the family, fostering love built on security, trust, and mutual respect, where everyone finds their place and autonomy.

Fostering self-discipline Fostering self-discipline in children improves relational bonds with parents by creating an atmosphere of trust, respect, open communication, and emotional security. Children who can manage their own behavior are more likely to experience harmonious relationships with their parents, as conflicts are minimized and mutual understanding is enhanced. This foundation of self-discipline helps children thrive, while deepening their emotional connection with their parents and their environment.

Promoting independence By promoting independence and autonomy, parents foster a loving, trusting relationship where children feel respected and empowered to grow. This balance between guidance and freedom strengthens the emotional bond within the family, creating an environment where

love is expressed through mutual respect, confidence, and mutual growth. But for this to happen, the parent must not be dominated by anxiety and the desire to control.

Instilling values Discipline is a way to teach children moral values such as respect, honesty, and empathy. Instilling such values through discipline strengthens the parent-child bond by fostering mutual trust, emotional security, and deeper communication. When parents focus on such upbringing, they make the child responsible, while they foster a meaningful connection, emotionally rich. Children feel secure knowing they have been equipped with values that will help them make decisions, which in turn fosters love and respect for the parents who instilled those values. This lasting bond strengthens over time, as children internalize the values taught by their parents, fostering a relationship filled with love, respect, and understanding.

Freedom and control Discipline helps create a balanced environment where children have the freedom to express themselves within healthy limits. Discipline that balances freedom and control fosters a loving relationship within the family by creating an environment of trust, respect, emotional security, and mutual growth. When parents effectively combine both freedom and control in their educative approach, they give children the space to develop their independence while providing the necessary structure to ensure guidance and support. By allowing children to explore and make their own choices within a framework of clear boundaries, parents help them develop

independence, responsibility, and self-confidence, all while maintaining a close, supportive relationship. This approach promotes mutual understanding and collaboration, strengthening the emotional connection and creating a lasting foundation of love.

Fostering respect When discipline is based on mutual respect, children learn to respect their parents' authority and the rules set in place. At the same time, parents respect their children's individual personalities and needs, which fosters a deeper sense of connection and love. Discipline rooted in compassion and empathy strengthens the parent-child bond. When parents explain the reasons behind the rules and offer emotional support during correction, children understand that discipline is not about control, but about care.

Authority Parents enforce rules and boundaries to protect their children from harm. By setting limits, parents show that they care about their child's safety and want to prevent them from making choices that could lead to negative consequences. When parents set expectations and boundaries, children learn to control impulses and delay gratification. Over time, these external rules become internalized, empowering them to regulate their behavior and make thoughtful decisions even when authority figures aren't around.

Children feel more secure when they know their parents are in control and capable of making decisions for their well-being. This stability can foster a sense of trust and support within the family. The experience of authority through the parents

empowers them with their own internal authority, it supports their growth into capable and resilient adults. By observing how their parents make decisions and enforce rules, children learn to weigh options, consider consequences, and make informed choices; they feel more secure in their ability to make independent choices and assert themselves. As they internalize these lessons, they develop a sense of self-responsibility, which strengthens their inner authority and ability to self-manage.

The connection between this form of authority and love lies in the intention behind the guidance and boundaries that parents set. By setting boundaries, providing guidance, and nurturing self-reliance, parents express a form of love that goes beyond mere affection. It is a love that prepares children to face the world with confidence, integrity, and strength. The kind of bond created between parents and children through this form of authority is one of trust, respect, and security. This bond has several profound emotional effects, including fostering a sense of belonging, emotional stability, and mutual respect. It fosters resilience, security, and self-worth, which not only benefits the child but also strengthens the entire family dynamic.

Fear of discipline Some people have a fear or a dislike for discipline. We could state that the fear of discipline is in fact a fear of love, as discipline, grounded in care and guidance, is a form of loving action. Discipline, given with intention and compassion, not as a formal and rigid principle, not as an emotional reaction or a punishment, is meant to guide and protect,

by helping someone develop boundaries, good habits, and resilience, a frightening educational challenge for many parents, complacent, more concerned about being appreciated or loved. Discipline can be "tough", but it comes from a place of love that seeks growth.. This "tough love" can feel uncomfortable because it requires facing our weaknesses or mistakes. The fear of discipline can therefore be tied to a fear of vulnerability, the fear of being truly "seen" and known, which is also an aspect of love. True love, including self-love, involves facing uncomfortable truths, facing reality, and working through it. When someone avoids discipline, they may be avoiding this deeper process of love that involves accountability and self-improvement.

The fear of discipline is linked to the fear of being vulnerable. When I submit to discipline, I accept that I don't know everything, that I'm perfectible, so I acknowledge my imperfection. In front of a person or an authority who invites me to this discipline, I have to show myself as I am, I have to accept to be seen with my flaws, my difficulties, I have to accept this vulnerability, I have to trust. But I can only do this if I have a certain love for myself, a certain confidence in myself, an appreciation of my being. Then I know that showing this vulnerability will not break me or lead to my being rejected, as can sometimes happen in the education process. A child caught at fault often feels rejected, and sometimes, in classic patterns, is indeed rejected.

Admittedly, the relationship between love and discipline is a totally counterintuitive idea for many people. In our collective imagination, discipline is associated with intransigence and in-

flexibility, with an unhealthy and harmful rigorism. It favors "correction" or "taming", rather than growth. It seeks to chastise, even humiliate. It stems from a lack of love, rather than a space for love. In this way, the fear of discipline is a little like the "fear of the wolf": centuries of misrepresentation have forged the belief in a "child-eating" wolf. This is what discipline would then be: a "child-eater", a bogeyman, who would deprive children, or adults, of their subjectivity and freedom.

A "loving discipline" requires trusting someone else's guidance, or a given structure, that challenges attitudes, habits and personal comfort zones. Accepting discipline, for a child or an adult, means relinquishing some control and being open to change or improvement. This can be intimidating, but love itself requires a similar release of control, making one vulnerable to the influence of others. Fearing discipline can express as well a fear of intimacy, a fear of letting others influence us, which is also a part of fearing the vulnerability that love demands.

In the same way, self-discipline is a form of self-love. It involves setting boundaries, making sacrifices, and focusing on long-term benefits over immediate gratification. Fearing discipline indicates a struggle with self-love, as it reflects a reluctance to invest in oneself or take responsibility for one's growth and well-being, to hold ourselves accountable and to prioritize development over comfort. And it is for ourselves as it is for others. Fearing discipline means resisting the transformation that love naturally brings. Love pushes us to improve and evolve, and discipline is a common path to achieving that. The fear of discipline therefore reflects a fear of the trans-

formative power of love, both in relation to others and oneself, as it involves confronting uncomfortable aspects of who we are and embracing the potential for change.

IMPERSONAL LOVE

Beyond love for specific individuals in personal relationships, our yearning can take many forms and have different objects or focuses, less concrete, less physical, more intellectual. Love for an idea, an ideal, or for God, is more thankless, more demanding, because these abstractions remain silent, they don't "recognize" us, they don't reassure us. They have no physical presence or consciousness of their own to actively communicate with us. The idea cannot manifest emotions or direct responses. Everything we perceive, or believe we perceive, comes from our own minds, our own reflection and interpretation. So there's an even greater asymmetry in the relationship with an idea than in any other relationship. We can love it, follow it, cherish it, but it will never respond to us. This creates a one-sided, rather contemplative relationship, where humans project meaning, emotion and even affection onto something that, by its very nature, cannot react. This is where otherness is at its greatest, because it is radically absent. That is where love is the most demanding, the most generous.

Here are some of the different types of love and objects of love that go beyond interpersonal relationships.

LOVE FOR HUMANITY

Love directed toward all of humanity, often expressed through a desire to improve the welfare of others and work toward the greater good. Acts of charity, social work, political engagement or humanitarian efforts where a person feels a deep connection and responsibility for the well-being of others, regardless of their relationship with them. This love can take different forms. Here are different historical examples, with their respective criticisms.

Agape In Christian theology, agape is considered the highest form of love, representing unconditional, selfless love for humans. It is the love that God has for humanity and that humans are encouraged to show one another. It involves compassion, forgiveness, and a commitment to the well-being of others, regardless of personal differences or failings.

The concept of agape can be criticized for its idealistic, relatively disembodied character, problematic in its concrete applications. For it can be seen as a call to total self-sacrifice, to self-effacement, leading to situations of emotional exhaustion, even exploitation, encouraging a form of passivity or submission. It comes into tension with notions of justice and individual rights, by downplaying wrongs or injustices through excessive forgiveness. And it can weigh heavily on those who feel unable to achieve this ideal. In a "human" context, love, even in its most selfless form, must be balanced with self-respect, healthy limits and a realistic understanding of relational dynamics.

Tikkun Olam In Judaism, Tikkun Olam means "repairing the world". It encourages individuals to take responsibility for making the world a better place, through acts of kindness, social justice, and ethical behavior. This concept fosters love for humanity by promoting charity, community service, and justice as part of a sacred duty. Tikkun Olam reflects the idea that caring for others and working to improve society is essential to fulfilling one's personal role in the world.

This notion can create a sense of over-responsibility, where individuals feel overwhelmed by the impossible task of "fixing" a world full of complexities and massive global problems, leading to feelings of guilt or frustration, when the individual feels unable to bring about meaningful change, a moral pressure difficult to sustain. Too much focus on improving society can also distract attention from the importance of inner transformation. In today's world, Tikkun Olam is sometimes used as an argument by social or political movements seeking to justify their own causes under the guise of repairing the world. This instrumentalization distorts the concept by associating it reductionistically with specific political agendas, as a tool for ideological justification, and as a result it loses its original spiritual vocation.

Secular Humanism Secular humanism promotes a love for humanity rooted in rationality, empathy, and a shared commitment to the well-being and dignity of all individuals. This view of love is not based on religious or spiritual beliefs but on the ethical conviction that all humans deserve respect and care simply because they are human. Some argue that morality

and ethics often rely on a spiritual or metaphysical foundation to be truly universal and enduring. Without this transcendent anchor, secular humanism may lack an ultimate framework to justify and uphold its moral principles, making it potentially vulnerable to ethical relativity. For example, its particular conception of human dignity and human rights, which is highly individualistic, is not necessarily universally applicable or accepted across different cultures. Furthermore, trust in human rationality can be criticized as naive or utopian. History shows that rationality has sometimes been used for destructive or oppressive purposes. This perspective may be seen as overly optimistic or utopian. The existence of violence, wars, inequalities, and selfishness in human history contradicts this idealized image by downplaying the contradictions of human nature, particularly its capacity to harm others for reasons of power, perversion, or survival. Additionally, these rational values may not be sufficiently inspiring or mobilizing to generate large-scale social change, as they lack an emotional or transcendent element capable of touching people on a deeper, more intuitive level. We could add here Sartre's critique of humanism, which "denounces" the humanist who loves "all men" but none in particular. The feeling of love is then exercised over an abstract, ideal entity, easy to love. It is quite a different matter to love your concrete neighbor who makes noise on a Sunday morning, or to love other motorists in a traffic jam.

Ubuntu Ubuntu is a concept from several African cultures, meaning "I am because we are." It reflects the idea of shared humanity and emphasizes compassion, interconnectedness,

and the responsibility individuals have toward one another. Ubuntu stresses that one's well-being and identity are intrinsically tied to the community and the greater good. This idea promotes love for humanity through mutual care and respect, encouraging individuals to uplift one another and live in a "natural" harmony.

The Ubuntu concept is not immune to criticism, especially when transposed to modern contexts. The idea that "I am because we are" minimizes the importance of individuality and personal autonomy. The weight given to the community restricts individual expression, limiting the diversity of opinions and behaviors that disagree with majority values. This discourages critical thinking, dissent or necessary societal reform, by prioritizing the maintenance of peace and unity within the group at all costs, to the detriment of innovation or social evolution. In a globalized, capitalist world, where competition and individualism often take precedence over cooperation, the idea of Ubuntu may seem utopian and difficult to put into practice on a large scale. In modern political systems, the absence of a concrete institutional framework to implement these values can make it difficult to apply them in practical situations. Ubuntu romanticizes a past where community solidarity would be the norm, while African societies themselves are faced with problems such as injustice, violence and conflict.

Moral duty For Immanuel Kant, 18th century philosopher, love for humanity is understood as part of our moral duty to treat all individuals with respect and dignity, guided by the

”categorical imperative”, a principle rooted in reason. This means that we should act in ways that we would want everyone to act, promoting the well-being of others as an ethical obligation, and respecting human dignity.

This Kantian ”love” is guided by reason rather than emotion, which contradicts the affective nature of love. Transforming love into an abstract moral obligation strips it of its authentic emotional dimension, making it cold and impersonal, lacking the human warmth and spontaneity that characterize affective relationships. This idea creates a tension between moral duty and natural human feelings. It can be difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to feel genuine love or affection for every human being, simply out of rational duty. The Kantian categorical imperative to act in such a way that our actions can be universalized leads to unrealistic demands. The idea of loving and respecting everyone without distinction comes up against concrete dilemmas in which priorities or moral obligations come into conflict. For example, reconciling universal love for humanity with particular duties towards those closest to us, such as family or friends. This kind of selfless, rational love for all humanity seems unrealistic in situations of conflict or war. Loving or treating with dignity those who violate human rights or act immorally poses a practical and ethical problem.

Sympathy Adam Smith, 18th century economist and philosopher, believed that the feeling of sympathy was a natural, innate part of human nature. It was through sympathy that individuals developed moral sentiments, like compassion, kind-

ness, and love. In this sense, natural love for human beings arises from this sympathetic connection, where we care for others because we can, to some degree, experience their joy, pain, or suffering as if it were our own. Although for Smith, self-interest and the condition of people close to us tend to take emotional precedence over the fate of others.

Adam Smith recognizes that self-interest has a predominant influence on sympathy, especially towards close people, which limits the scope of sympathy, or even contradicts its general principle. This suggests a "partial sympathy", insufficient to deal with broader issues of social justice or global solidarity, where it is necessary to transcend personal interests and restricted circles of relationships. This "natural" sympathy seems inadequate in the face of structural inequalities in society. In systems where there are profound economic and social inequalities, simple sympathy may not be enough to encourage concrete action to correct these injustices. Smith postulates that sympathy relies on our ability to imagine the feelings of others, but this ability remains limited by our own frame of reference and personal experiences. It is difficult for individuals to fully imagine the suffering or joy of others, especially if their living conditions or culture are radically different, which could hinder true understanding and adequate moral action. This approach lacks a framework of universal moral rules that would transcend specific situations and personal preferences, as sympathy, being highly subjective, can lack consistency and coherence.

LOVE FOR NATURE

A deep appreciation and affection for the natural world, including animals, landscapes, and ecosystems. People who feel a profound connection to nature may express this love through environmental conservation, enjoying the beauty of the outdoors, or advocating for the protection of wildlife and natural habitats.

Nevertheless, nature lovers often idealize nature as an unchanging, harmonious, pure and benevolent paradise. This romantic vision obscures the more brutal and indifferent aspects of nature, such as natural disasters or predation, ignoring the fact that nature can be both cruel and implacable. They sometimes suffer from a marked aversion to technology or humanity, seeing it as an agent of destruction, a misanthropic or technophobic attitude through which humans are perceived as invaders. As a result, they tend to ignore certain socio-economic realities. And they easily adopt a posture of moral superiority by criticizing those who don't adhere to their lifestyle or ecological convictions.

Certain radical nature lovers, who hold extreme views about the importance of nature, are inclined to a rather ascetic attitude, practicing self-denial or avoid indulgence in pleasures, particularly those related to human comforts or consumption. Their ideal is to live simply and minimally, in order to reduce their impact on the natural world. They have an "anti-humanistic" attitude, since they prioritize nature to the point of seeing humanity as harmful or inferior in relation to the natural world. They reject human behaviors and societal struc-

tures, for example science, technology and economic growth, that they believe harm nature, viewing humanity's impact on the environment as fundamentally negative. They advocate for lifestyles that minimize human influence and idealize nature in a way that places it above human interests or well-being, for example they prohibit human reproduction. Although it is interesting to observe how those romantic nature lovers often think and behave quite differently from people who concretely work with nature, like farmers, who have to be more realistic and productive.

LOVE FOR IDEAS

A passionate commitment to an idea, philosophy, or cause that inspires action, reflection and dedication. For example, love for justice, freedom, peace, truth, reason, or equality. This can be seen in activists, philosophers, or people who are deeply dedicated to a particular cause or belief system.

Love of ideas, a passionate commitment to certain concepts, can be inspiring and a driving force for change. However, excessive passion for an idea can lead to dogmatism, where the individual becomes closed to contrary opinions or evidence. This makes it difficult to question or evolve beliefs, leading to a rigidity of thought that can be counter-productive, dogmatism or sectarianism. Excessive attachment to ideals tends to obscure reality and concern for the singular, sometimes sacrificing interpersonal relationships, especially when others are perceived solely in terms of whether or not they align with

these ideas. Individuals may be so attached to their ideal visions that they become disconnected from the practical realities and constraints of the real world, or they may adopt a self-righteous or intolerant stance, feeling superior to those who do not share their convictions.

LOVE FOR BEAUTY

A deep admiration for beauty in art, music, literature, or any form of contemplation or creative expression. For example people who find profound joy and fulfillment in engaging with artistic works, whether it's painting, poetry, music, or dance, or amateurs who nourish themselves as spectators. This love often leads to a desire to create, appreciate, and immerse oneself in art.

A strong attachment to beauty can lead to an overemphasis on surface appearances and aesthetic qualities, potentially fostering superficiality, prioritizing form over content. This can lead to the admiration of works or objects that are visually appealing but lack depth, meaning, or moral integrity. It can become a form of escapism, where one seeks refuge in beauty to avoid facing unpleasant realities or engaging with deeper, more challenging aspects of life, being detached from practical and everyday concerns, avoiding meeting essential responsibilities. One might cultivate a sense of elitism, where certain forms of beauty are seen as superior to others, or where people who lack exposure to or knowledge of certain artistic forms are looked down upon. One might become overly focused on

personal pleasure derived, inducing self-indulgence. Love for beauty can lead to an obsessive pursuit of perfection or an idealized view of reality, a dissatisfaction with the ordinary or an inability to accept limits, even within oneself. The artist, captivated by his own power of creation, can feel endowed with a godlike authority and a sense of omnipotence.

LOVE FOR KNOWLEDGE

The desire and passion for acquiring knowledge, learning, education, intellectual pursuits, in order to understand the world or oneself. For example scientists, philosophers, or life-long learners who are driven by a love of discovery, research, and intellectual exploration. This love manifests as curiosity and dedication to expanding one's mind. People who love learning are avid readers, researchers, or students of life.

The love of knowledge, while a source of personal development and intellectual progress, is not without its problems. Those with a passion for knowledge risk developing a sense of intellectual superiority, seeing themselves as more enlightened or wiser than others, leading to intellectual snobbery and a tendency to despise those who don't have the same level of erudition or intellectual interests, a deceptive and destructive vanity. It can lead to an excessive focus on purely theoretical or abstract subjects, disconnected from concrete realities and practical everyday problems, the tendency to live in an "ivory tower", even neglecting oneself. It engenders perfectionism and constant dissatisfaction, because knowledge is in-

finite and uncertain, and it is impossible to know everything, leading to frustration or a feeling of incompleteness in the face of an insatiable need to learn. The "scholar" becomes isolated, losing touch with the simple pleasures of life, a form of alienation as the individual becomes estranged from others and from himself. Curiosity, although generally positive, can become excessive and lead to a dispersion of energies, moving from one subject to another without ever delving deeper, or accumulating information with no real added value.

LOVE FOR SPIRITUALITY

A deep spiritual or religious love, often directed toward a deity, the universe, or a transcendent force. Devotion to God in religious traditions, or a spiritual connection to the cosmos in non-religious contexts. This love is characterized by reverence, awe, and a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself. Such devotion represents the manifestation of a genuine spiritual commitment, necessary for true "self-realization", even if it somewhat blinds the person to other realities by focusing on a single, exclusive path.

Love for spirituality, while it can be a source of comfort, meaning, and deep connection, also risks becoming excessive or exclusive. Intense spiritual devotion can lead to dogmatism, where an individual becomes closed off to other beliefs or perspectives, convinced of having found the ultimate "truth." This attitude can create division and conflict. Spirituality is often used as a form of escapism, allowing one to avoid re-

sponsibilities or the difficulties of daily life, which results in passivity and indifference to practical and social issues. Excessive devotion to a transcendent force can lead to a loss of autonomy, where the individual blindly conforms to teachings or doctrines, sacrificing their own judgment and individuality, making them susceptible to manipulation. Mystical or supernatural explanations are often prioritized over scientific facts and rational evidence, hindering a rational understanding of the world and things, prohibiting critical thinking. Highly devoted individuals may adopt a moralizing attitude, attempting to impose spiritual norms or rules on others. This can lead to feelings of guilt, especially when one feels unable to live up to high spiritual ideals. Some forms of spirituality value the transcendence of the body or material needs, embracing asceticism, which can lead to denial or neglect of bodily and practical needs, potentially impacting health and well-being.

LOVE FOR COMMUNITY

A sense of loyalty, pride, and affection for one's country, community, or homeland. One focuses on serving the group, placing the collective interest above personal desires and working to uphold the community's values, traditions, and welfare. Patriotic individuals who love their country might work for its betterment, defend its traditions, or serve it through military service, politics, or civic engagement.

Criticism of love for community or patriotic love centers around a tendency to foster exclusion, blind loyalty, and an un-

critical acceptance of national or community values. It leads to an "us versus them" mentality, where people prioritize their own community or country to the detriment of others, a mindset that can breed xenophobia, racism, and intolerance toward those perceived as outsiders or threats. A strong sense of loyalty to one's country or community discourages individuals from questioning or challenging harmful practices, doctrines, policies, or historical actions; it enables abuses of power and stifles necessary reforms. It pressures individuals to conform to community standards or norms, even if they conflict with personal beliefs or values, a negation of personal identity. Patriotism often emphasizes protecting or defending one's country, thus justifying or encouraging militarization and aggressive foreign policies, leading to unnecessary conflicts or wars. Love for one's community can foster a belief in its inherent superiority over others, leading to cultural arrogance.

LOVE FOR WORK

A deep passion and dedication to one's work, craft, or profession. Artists, craftsmen, or professionals who find meaning and joy in their work, experiencing a sense of fulfillment and purpose through the act of creating, solving problems, or mastering their craft.

From a critical perspective, an excessive passion for work can disrupt personal life, sacrificing time dedicated to family, friends, or leisure, which leads to social isolation and superficial relationships outside the workplace. It can be driven by

genuine interest, but it is often motivated by a strong desire for financial rewards, status improvements and social recognition, or mere moral obligation. It can induce stress, burnout, and, over time, various physical or psychological health problems due to a lack of self-care. Individuals deeply engaged in their work may neglect other essential aspects of life, such as personal development, hobbies, spirituality, or interpersonal relationships. This results in a narrow view of success and fulfillment, based solely on professional achievements. An intense love for work often fosters a climate of competition and social pressure, where productivity and performance are valued at the expense of life itself. Personal identity becomes intertwined with professional identity, making rest or vacation periods a source of anxiety and posing a serious problem at retirement. This leads to a loss of broader meaning in life or one's role in society. Passion for work instrumentalizes the individual, who may become merely an executor of repetitive tasks, without real fulfillment.

LOVE FOR ANIMALS

A strong affection for animals, whether pets or wildlife, leading to a desire to protect, care for, and enter in relation with them. Pet owners who feel a deep bond with their animals, or individuals involved in animal rights and welfare, who work to protect and care for them. This zoophilia may nonetheless conceal an aversion to our difficulties with human otherness.

We prefer our dog to our neighbor because our dog never contradicts us.

Our criticism of love for animals is dealt with at length in section "Animal Romance".

LOVE FOR ADVENTURE AND EXPLORATION

A constant desire to explore new places, experiences, or activities, often tied to a sense of curiosity and a need for discovery. Travelers, explorers, and adventurers who feel alive when discovering new cultures, lands, and places. This love drives them to seek new challenges and adventures.

The love for adventure, while enriching and thrilling, has a number of drawbacks. A constant drive for exploration can make it difficult for individuals to establish roots, maintain stable relationships, or commit to long-term goals. This nomadic lifestyle leads to a sense of detachment from community and family, creating a superficial connection to people and places. For some, the pursuit of adventure or traveling serves as a way to escape from personal issues, responsibilities, or inner conflicts, as a form of excitement and drunkenness. Rather than confronting challenges at home or in daily life, they continuously seek new destinations or experiences to avoid facing their problems directly. The pursuit of adventure can be costly, requiring significant financial resources. This lifestyle is often accessible only to those with enough privilege or wealth to regularly afford such trips, which can contribute to a sense of exclusivity and even elitism, and therefore a feeling

of frustration and exclusion for the "others". The perpetual quest for new experiences leads to a constant state of restlessness, where individuals struggle to find contentment in the "ordinary", provoking a sense of dissatisfaction with everyday life. Intense tourism leads to the commodification of cultures and contributes to a superficial appreciation of diverse traditions, as it develops a consumer mentality.

LOVE FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A passion for physical activity, competition, or personal physical achievement. Athletes who are deeply committed to their sport, driven by a love of the challenge, discipline, and joy that comes with physical exertion and competition. Or for amateurs who enjoy pushing their physical limits.

Physical activity brings many benefits, but also certain problems. Excessive passion can lead to an obsession with training, where the need to excel becomes compulsive, inducing self-destructive behaviors, both physically and psychologically. It can fuel an excessive preoccupation with body image, which is a sign of low self-esteem, especially when this becomes the essential criterion of personal worth. An excessive quest for performance generates stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion, particularly in the case of regular competitions. The desire to surpass oneself or break personal records engenders an intense competitive mentality, which generally leads to frustration and a loss of pleasure in the activity itself, as performance becomes more important than well-being or pleasure.

Individuals with a passion for physical activity devote a disproportionate amount of their time to training, to the detriment of personal relationships, work or other commitments. Such personal demands can lead to a lack of empathy for people who don't share the same approach or physical abilities. And above all, such an obsession with the body easily leads to neglect of psychological, intellectual or existential needs and realities.

LOVE FOR TECHNOLOGY

A fascination and passion for technological progress, innovation, and the ways in which technology can improve human life. For example innovators, engineers, or tech enthusiasts who are passionate about creating or working with technology to solve problems or enhance the human experience. Or those who want to know everything in this domain, without forgetting the "fan" consumer.

Love for technology, while contributing to the progress and improvement of human life, brings with it certain problems. Excessive fascination with technology leads to dependence on digital devices and tools, which reduces face-to-face interaction and leads to social disconnection. This deprivation of human relationships can be described as digital isolation or technological alienation, when an individual becomes so engrossed in digital devices, virtual environments, or online activities that they withdraw from face-to-face interactions and lose touch with the social connections. This results in a sense of loneliness and emotional detachment, as the individual may

struggle to engage in real-world social interactions, leading to a diminished ability to empathize, communicate effectively, and enjoy shared experiences with others, hindering personal development and reducing emotional well-being.

As well, Increasing dependence on technology to accomplish simple tasks leads to a decline in human skills, such as memory, basic calculations, or even spatial orientation, resulting in a loss of autonomy and a weakening of certain cognitive and physical abilities. This fascination makes it easy to forget the social and personal consequences of implementing and using technologies on a daily basis. For example, on the consumer side, immersion in virtual or digital environments leads to increased isolation and demotivation, particularly among young people. Or the abusive use of cell phones, with their videos, games, and social networks, which for some becomes a compulsive refuge at every moment, with the intellectual, psychological, and social consequences of such an addiction.

LOVE OF GAMES

Playing is a core drive for human beings, and in more evolved animals, as we see in particular with youngsters, somewhat less with adults. Nevertheless, in our treatment of the playing fervor, we wish to distinguish between the pleasure of playing, which can be found in all human activities or relationships, for example in artistic creation, and the more formalized and artificial, more obsessive passion for gaming, the phenomenon that interests us here.

People's love of games stems as a desire for challenge, excitement, and reward, and the joy the activity provides. Games provide a structured environment where they can test their skills, take risks, and experience the thrill of competition in a safe space. The motivation to play is driven by the opportunity to overcome obstacles, achieve goals, compete with others, and receive instant feedback on their progress and success. Moreover, games offer a sense of escape and immersion, allowing players to temporarily step away from everyday concerns by immersing themselves in a different reality. The love for games can be just about fun, but as well it involves developing skills and personality, achievement, and the satisfaction of mastering new challenges.

While games offer a temporary escape, healthy and pleasant, excessive gaming leads to avoidance of real-life responsibilities, relationships, and necessary challenges. Players may become too absorbed in their virtual world, neglecting their actual lives and indulging in the activity to avoid facing real-world problems. The thrill of competition, rewards and achievements, can lead to addictive behaviors, as players develop a dependency on playing for personal satisfaction, which can interfere with other aspects of their lives, such as duties and responsibilities. Although many games offer human interaction online and offline, they can still lead to social isolation. Excessive gaming reduces grounded exchanges and dialogues, weakening relationships with family, colleagues and friends, as players prefer spending time in the gaming environment rather than substantial socializing. Prolonged gaming sessions

can contribute to physical and psychological health problems, as the activity becomes more obsessive and time consuming.

While games offer a sense of accomplishment, these achievements are often confined to the virtual world. This generates a distorted sense of success, leading some individuals to prioritize in-game accomplishments over real-life goals and personal growth, actually more challenging. Many games involve financial costs, and players can easily spend excessive amounts of money on purchases or gambling, which leads to financial difficulties. In some cases, especially with violent virtual games, players become desensitized to violence or risky behaviors. This might affect their attitudes and behaviors in real life, particularly if they fail to draw clear boundaries between the game world and reality.

FOREIGN TERMS FOR LOVE

It is generally recognized that the ancient Greek vocabulary for love is richer and more nuanced than the modern English vocabulary. It had multiple words to describe different forms and dimensions of love, whereas English tends to use the single term "love" to encompass a wide variety of meanings. The same can be said about the Chinese vocabulary for love, as it contains various terms that reflect different aspects of love, emotions, and relationships. So it seems interesting to examine the vocabulary of these two different cultures.

GREEK VOCABULARY

Here are the main Greek terms for love.

Eros (ἔρως) - Romantic or Passionate Love Eros refers to passionate, intense love, often associated with physical attraction and desire. It is the kind of love that involves sexual longing, infatuation, and romantic excitement. Eros can be overwhelming and irrational, representing the emotional and rather impulsive nature of romantic love. It has an objectifying dimension, as it involves a desire for possession and can therefore be applied to objects as well.

Philia (φιλία) –Deep Friendship or Affectionate Love Philia is the love that exists between friends and companions. It is characterized by mutual respect, loyalty, and shared experiences. Philia is less about physical desire and more about emotional closeness, intellectual connection, and companionship. It represents the bond that forms through trust, shared values, and commitment.

Storge (στοργή) –Familial or Parental Love Storge describes the natural affection between family members, such as the love between parents and children, siblings, or close relatives. It is rather seen as unconditional, based on familiarity, and is rooted in duty, care, and long-term connection. Storge is steady and nurturing, reflecting the bond that grows through time and shared life experiences.

Agape (ἀγάπη) –Selfless or Unconditional Love Agape is often considered the highest form of love, representing unconditional, selfless love that extends beyond personal interest. It is the kind of love that is given without expecting anything in return, often associated with spiritual or divine love. In Christian contexts, agape is used to describe the love of God for humanity and the ideal love humans should have for one another.

Ludus (Λούδος) –Playful or Flirtatious Love Ludus refers to playful, flirtatious love. It is the kind of love that involves light-hearted affection, teasing, and fun interactions, often seen in the early stages of romance. Ludus focuses on the enjoyment

of being in love, emphasizing fun, games, and spontaneity rather than deep commitment.

Pragma (πράγμα) –Enduring or Practical Love Pragma is the love that develops over time between long-term partners. It is practical, stable, and built on shared goals, mutual understanding, and deep respect. Pragma involves effort, compromise, and commitment, representing a mature love that grows stronger as partners navigate life's challenges together.

Philautia (φιλαυτία) –Self-Love Philautia is the love of oneself, which can be both healthy and unhealthy. Positive philautia refers to self-compassion and self-care, recognizing one's worth and treating oneself with kindness. However, excessive philautia can lead to narcissism, where self-love becomes selfishness or vanity.

Xenia (ξενία) –Hospitality or Guest-Friendship Xenia is the concept of hospitality or love for strangers and guests. It reflects the ancient Greek custom of showing kindness, generosity, and providing care to visitors. While not romantic or intimate, it is a form of love based on respect and ethical duty.

CHINESE VOCABULARY

Here are the main Chinese terms for love.

爱 (ài) –General Love 爱 (ài) is the most common word for love in Chinese. It can refer to romantic love, familial love,

or love for things, such as hobbies or ideals. The context in which it is used determines its meaning.

喜欢 (xǐhuān) –*Like or Fondness* 喜欢 (xǐhuān) is often used to express liking or being fond of someone or something. It can be used for romantic affection but tends to convey a more casual or lighter form of love compared to 爱 (ài).

恋 (liàn) –*Romantic Love* 恋 (liàn) refers to romantic or passionate love, often used in compound words related to relationships or strong emotional attachment. It is associated with tenderness and deep affection.

感情 (gǎnqíng) –*Affection or Emotional Bond* 感情 (gǎnqíng) refers to feelings or emotional bonds. It is a broader term used to describe emotional connections between people, including love, friendship, and affection. It encompasses romantic love but also extends to family ties or friendships.

疼爱 (téng'ài) –*Deep Affection or Love with Care* 疼爱 (téng'ài) describes a deep, caring form of love, often used to refer to the love parents have for their children or other close family members. It implies affection combined with tenderness and protection.

恩爱 (ēn'ài) –*Loving (Especially for Couples)* 恩爱 (ēn'ài) specifically refers to the deep affection and mutual care between married or long-term couples. It is used to describe a

relationship in which both partners show tenderness, respect, and commitment to one another.

亲情 (*qīnqíng*) –*Familial Love* 亲情 (*qīnqíng*) refers to the love and affection between family members. It is the type of bond that emphasizes family loyalty, care, and emotional support.

友情 (*yǒuqíng*) –*Friendship Love* 友情 (*yǒuqíng*) refers to the love and affection between friends. It emphasizes emotional connection, loyalty, and mutual support in friendships, similar to the concept of *philia* in Greek.

热爱 (*rè'ài*) –*Passionate Love or Enthusiasm* 热爱 (*rè'ài*) expresses passionate or enthusiastic love for something, such as a cause, a career, or an activity. It conveys a sense of devotion and deep affection.

仁爱 (*rén'ài*) –*Benevolent Love (Confucius)* 仁爱 (*rén'ài*) embodies a benevolent and compassionate love towards others, reflecting kindness, empathy, and respect. It signifies a deep affection and care for the well-being of others.

兼爱 (*jiān'ai*) – *Universal love (Mozi)* Like the Confucius' notion of benevolent love, this term is rooted in the idea of care and compassion for others, but it differs in significant ways. It implies that one should love all people equally, regardless of their relationship to us. Mozi's universal love is indiscriminate and applies equally to everyone, while Confucian benev-

olence is based on a hierarchy that starts with family and close relations. Mozi's concept is impartial and pragmatic, aimed at creating a peaceful and just society, while Confucius' idea of benevolence is intrinsically tied to personal morality and social harmony, through fulfilling one's roles in relationships and society. Mozi's *jian'ai* is most closely aligned with the concept of *agape* in ancient Greek thought, as both promote a universal, impartial, selfless love for humanity. However, *jian'ai* is distinguished by its focus on solving social problems and its more pragmatic, utilitarian approach, when *agape* often carries a more spiritual or religious dimension.

PROBLEMS OF LOVE

Love, while often seen as a source of joy and fulfillment, can also bring with it a range of challenges and problems. These difficulties arise from the difficulty to deal with emotions, the complexity of relationships, and individual differences between partners.

Let us present some of the main problems associated with love.

Unrealistic Expectations One of the most common problems in love is having unrealistic or idealized expectations of the other person or the relationship. People expect their partner to fulfill all their emotional needs, solve their problems, or remain perfect, which leads to disappointment and frustration when reality doesn't match these ideals. Media and cultural narratives periodically portray love as effortless or perfect, wonderful or ideal, which generate unrealistic standards. And expecting a partner to be the main source of happiness can place too much pressure on the relationship. Less ambitiously, we could add to the "disappointing" expectations the projections we make for the couple, be it cultural tastes, travel, housing, conceiving and raising children, etc., where some issues, sometimes considered important, are not necessarily shared by the partner.

Communication Issues Effective communication is essential in any relationship, but love and its emotional turmoil make it difficult and heavy. Misunderstandings, miscommunication, strong expectations or a lack of open dialogue lead to conflicts, resentment, and emotional distance. Love makes people more vulnerable, and they may struggle to express their true feelings out of fear of rejection or conflict. Partners assume the other should "just know" what they expect or feel, leading to unmet needs and frustration. "I should not have to tell you!" claims the angry spouse. Love makes individuals all the more vulnerable because it is burdened with emotions, expectations and anxiety. So the more the individual values the relationship, the more fragile they become, the more it puts blinkers on and makes communication difficult. Thus, in order to dialogue in love, it is best to strike a balance between two opposing poles: emotion, attachment and involvement on the one hand, reason and detachment on the other. Which makes this emotional experience particularly difficult but interesting.

Jealousy "Jealousy is the shadow of love," says the proverb. Love easily triggers jealousy, along with the insecurity that accompanies and underpins it; when a person feels threatened by external influences, the partner's interest in other people, the time they spend apart, or when one lacks confidence in their own worth. It stems from excessive possessiveness, considering the other as an "object" rather than a free person, who is thus also devalued. Anxiety can arise from a fear of abandonment or of not measuring up, leading to a desire for control. Jealousy feeds on comparisons with "others," real or imagined,

causing tensions in the relationship in excessive and often unfounded ways, or creating distance. It weakens relationships by establishing an atmosphere of mistrust and compromising communication. It gives rise to unjustified accusations that undermine trust between partners, provoking anger, sadness, anxiety, or depression. "Jealousy sees everything except what is," says a Chinese proverb. Like all other forms of greed, it is rather self-destructive, as it prevents us from appreciating reality, of ourselves and of the other, as well as the relationship, out of fear of losing something that belongs to us or that we believe we deserve. Of course, a little jealousy can spice up the relationship, as we feel more « loved », more desired, when the other one is jealous. We enjoy being "possessed" and "objectified" by our loved one, to a certain extent. But the feeling of jealousy easily overindulges, eroding mutual trust, torturing oneself and the other, leading to conflicts.

Power struggle In some relationships, there may be a power imbalance where one person holds more emotional, financial, or decision-making control. This generates feelings of inequality, resentment, and frustration for the less empowered partner. One partner may use love or affection as a tool to manipulate the other. When one person consistently makes the major decisions, the other feels disempowered or undervalued. But conflict arises as well when both partners have strong power issues, a very natural situation, especially as women are now more empowered.

Indeed, women can now more easily refuse their partner's power, which is a liberation for them, but destabilizes the in-

stituted order where places were well-defined. Nevertheless, power plays are subtle and can be reversed even within a rigid framework. Some women are very good at wielding subterranean power, turning the relationship on its head. For example, they play the role of "child" and the man the role of "protector". The woman given the status of child becomes a princess, and the protector takes orders from her. This is one of the classic inversions described by Hegel in his dialectic of "Master and Slave", where the "slave" actually takes power, as seen in politics, for example, with the "palace coup", that underground or sudden, non-violent shift in power when a "servant" of the ruler overthrows him to take over. In family relationships, we can mention the power of the "weak to the strong", which is very important. For example, that of the baby, who a priori is weak, but who only needs to cry to get what he wants. Some children have very much internalized this system, who have learned to manipulate their complacent and fearful parents for a very long time, through crying, anger, pouting or other forms of emotional blackmail.

Fear of vulnerability Love requires vulnerability, which is worrisome for many people. The fear of getting hurt, rejected, or abandoned leads to emotional walls or avoidant behavior. Some people fear getting too close, which results in emotional distance or reluctance to fully commit. Past experiences of heartbreak and pain cause individuals to hold back in love, preventing deep emotional connections. As well, a common prejudice is the idea that "weak" people cannot be loved, there-

fore one should always pretend to be strong, a major obstacle to any substantial bonding.

Differing Values and Goals In loving relationships, differences in values, life goals, or psychological expectations often create conflict. This could be about money, career aspirations, raising children, or even lifestyle choices. While love brings people together, long-term differences in fundamental values or goals can make it difficult for a relationship to endure. The tension between individual desires and shared goals can be challenging. The limit between acceptable differences and non-negotiable values is often vague and fluctuating.

Loss of Self In some cases, love can lead to emotional or psychological dependence, where one partner becomes overly reliant on the other for their sense of identity, purpose, or happiness. People lose sight of their personal needs, desires, or independence in the relationship, making it difficult to maintain a sense of self. A codependent relationship often leads to an unhealthy dynamic, between "weak" and "strong", where one or both partners rely on each other excessively for emotional support. A certain asymmetry of needs always exists in relationships, a difference which is acceptable and liveable within a certain limit, beyond which there is a form of problematic alienation.

Fear of Commitment For some, love triggers a fear of commitment, making it difficult to fully invest in a relationship. This can result from past experiences, uncertainty about the future,

or a desire to keep one's options open. One partner may be hesitant to commit to a long-term relationship, causing frustration for the other. Some people engage in relationships but avoid deeper emotional connections or long-term planning. Although the problem of the "eternity" of relationships always remains an issue, especially in a social context where a majority of families end up breaking up at some point.

Mistrust Infidelity, or even perceived betrayal, as partners may entertain different perspectives on the issue, leads to emotional pain and a loss of trust in a relationship. Trust issues may arise from past experiences, insecurity, or poor communication. Perceived or actual cheating or dishonesty can severely damage the foundation of a relationship, making it hard to restore trust. Even without infidelity, constant suspicion or mistrust erode the emotional bond. But we have to accept the idea that the desire of "absolute" trust is a myth, or a dangerous illusion, a wishful blindness that often provokes superfluous dramas.

We are all too quick to forget that human nature is imperfect, that communication has its limits, that people constantly evolve over time with the interpersonal differences this can engender, and that a certain residual desire for independence always emerges in others. Nevertheless, we are often driven by the desire for absolute trust, to be able to rely totally on someone. To cope with the anguish of uncertainty or loneliness, to feel welcomed in our vulnerability, or out of a simple desire for control. Unless we accept that trust is above all an attitude in ourselves, with no need for external proof or expect-

tations. Otherwise, strangely enough, even a god can give us the impression of betraying our trust. In fact, our children's vocation is to betray us sooner or later.

Emotional Burnout Love requires effort, attention, and emotional investment, which can sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion or burnout. This happens when the demands of the relationship become overwhelming, causing stress, frustration, and fatigue. When one partner gives too much of themselves, or when they think that they do, they may feel drained and resentful over time. As well, constant emotional highs and lows, in unstable relationships, lead to emotional burnout. Lassi-tude describes that feeling of emotional or mental fatigue that leads to a loss of passion, which happens when an activity becomes monotonous or when a person is exhausted by repeated efforts without much satisfaction.

This exhaustion can also set in over time, as can be observed in some "old couples". They no longer seem to be fuelled by passion; they seem united primarily by routine, boredom, irritation or anger. Nevertheless, what holds them together can be invisible and deep-seated, a dynamic difficult to grasp, especially for "young couples" driven by passion. In the case of "old couples", there may be symbiosis, in the biological sense of the term: a lasting, mutually beneficial association between two living organisms. This durability can find its source in hardships endured side by side, assets acquired in common, such as a house, or children raised together. But it can also be explained by a form of subterranean loyalty, where each implicitly recognizes what he owes to the other. For ex-

ample, an anxious person finds balance with an emotionally stable partner, who in turn finds gratification in soothing the other. It may seem like a "worst-case scenario" for a relationship, but there's a certain meaning to it, even grace, to this human symbiosis.

Emotional Baggage Individuals may carry emotional baggage or trauma from past relationships, family dynamics, or unhappy personal experiences into new relationships. These unresolved issues contribute to erecting barriers to intimacy and trust. Past hurts or trauma are projected onto the current partner, erecting misunderstandings and conflicts. People fear repeating negative patterns from previous relationships, leading to hesitation or self-sabotage. Others are compulsively caught in repetitive unhealthy patterns. And then there are those who "fail" by lack. To know how to love, one must first have witnessed such an experience of love, worthy of the name, if not actually lived it. But for some, this is entirely foreign to their existence."

External Pressures Love is also strained by external pressures such as societal expectations, family involvement, or financial difficulties. These outside influences or practical problems complicate the relationship and create additional stress. Family or cultural pressure regarding marriage, children, or lifestyle choices provoke tension as well. Money problems can exacerbate relationship issues and create friction between partners.

Love, while fulfilling, presents numerous challenges such as unrealistic expectations, communication breakdowns, trust

issues, power imbalances, or emotional vulnerability. Navigating these problems requires effort, mutual understanding, and a willingness to grow together. Without addressing these challenges, love can lead to frustration, emotional pain, and relationship difficulties, or it can become impossible.

Apathy Apathy refers to a state of indifference, where a person no longer feels interest or emotion toward something that would normally engage or inspire passion. This term is often used to indicate a general lack of motivation or vitality, or a lack of passion, as the etymology of the word suggests: "a" (absence), "pathic" (passion). We feel it necessary to specifically address this issue, which hinders or prevents any passion.

Some people complain about not having passion in life, or about not finding a romantic partner. They believe that this depends on chance, an unexpected encounter, or a mysterious and uncontrollable "love at first sight." They fail to realize that it might simply be enough to make a choice and commit in order to overcome this feeling of lack. Indeed, it may seem easier and simpler to give in to passion, because one is driven by the intensity of emotions, making the person somewhat passive. On the other hand, commitment is difficult and complex, as it requires thought, decision-making, and being proactive. These individuals hold romantic fantasies about passion and love. Just as they expect "the lover" destined for them to suddenly fall from the sky in a splendid carriage, they expect "their passion" to show clear signs and impose itself.

More often, it's simply that they are not "disposed" to passion, as some people are more prone to it by nature or habit

than others. But the ability to commit plays a crucial role here. Instead of waiting for an ideal love or a sudden romantic spark, one could consider that love is partly a conscious choice. It involves deciding to invest in a relationship, even if it doesn't start with a blazing passion. This means choosing to give value to a person with whom you share interests and common goals, rather than waiting for the "perfect" encounter. Commitment means making a voluntary effort to cultivate and nurture a relationship. Love isn't just about strong and instantaneous emotions, but requires an "active decision" to invest and build something lasting. Once the decision is made, feelings may strengthen over time through continuous interaction and shared experiences.

Those who wait to "find" love without acting may end up frustrated. While adopting a proactive attitude by choosing to commit to a relationship and work on its development can lead to emotional and relational satisfaction. The same applies to engagement in an activity. Just like with love, some people wait to be "struck" by immediate passion for an activity or project. However, this approach can lead to frustration, as passion does not always come spontaneously. They fail to realize that it involves generating a dynamic process, by being active, making choices, and, above all, persevering.

Rather than waiting to feel intense motivation or overwhelming passion to start an activity, it is more productive to deliberately choose an activity or field that moderately attracts us and commit to it regularly. In other words, passion does not always precede commitment; often, it develops thanks to that commitment. Just like in a romantic relationship, inter-

est in an activity can grow as one dedicates time and effort to it. Regular practice and immersion in a field allow for the deepening of skills and understanding, which can then spark an authentic and lasting passion. Many people find their true passion after committing to an activity, driven by curiosity or discipline. Willpower, effort, and consistency can transform a simple curiosity into a genuine passion. Passion grows through commitment, time, and perseverance.

But some people who don't find satisfaction, whether in love or in an activity, suffer from the "it's never good enough" mentality. This mindset stems from "perfectionism", an inability to fully commit because they are constantly looking for something better, or from chronic dissatisfaction tied to unrealistic expectations. Such people are always searching for the ideal, whether in a relationship or an activity. They think there is always something better that could come along or that what they are currently doing is never up to the standard they imagine. This prevents them from committing and finding satisfaction in what they already have or do.

This can also be described as "chronic dissatisfaction". Such individuals suffer from an inability to appreciate the present moment or find contentment in what they experience. They are constantly seeking an ideal or a better alternative, which makes it difficult to build a lasting relationship or persist in an activity. By always searching for an unattainable ideal, these people avoid fully committing to a relationship out of fear of being disappointed or losing their freedom. This perpetual quest for perfection becomes an obstacle to their own happiness.

In a world where social media constantly showcases idealized images of others' lives, some people fall into the trap of "comparison". They believe that what they experience never measures up to what they see in others, reinforcing the idea that "it's never good enough" and fueling ongoing dissatisfaction. They forget that in many social, physical, or virtual interactions, individuals often tend to present an idealized image of themselves, which reinforces the negative impression of comparison in others. A lack of gratitude for what one already has can also contribute to the feeling that nothing is ever enough. People who fail to appreciate what they have are often in search of something "better," without taking the time to appreciate what is already within their reach.

Thus, those who suffer from the feeling that "it's never good enough" often deprive themselves of the opportunity to find satisfaction or happiness in the present. Whether in love or in a passion, this quest for perfection becomes an obstacle to their personal fulfillment. Learning to accept and fully commit to what they have, rather than always seeking more, would help them overcome this difficulty. But for some people, such an attitude seems boring, pathetic and meaningless: they are addicted to the grandiose, in spite of its illusory dimension.

Surrogate Happiness The idea that love could be considered a "substitute" for happiness suggests that sometimes love is sought or maintained not as a simple goal or activity in itself, but as a replacement for a broader sense of well-being or "general" happiness, like a sort of "substitute". Such a phenomenon is particularly relevant when a person or a given cul-

ture perceive life as harsh, cruel, meaningless, dreary, oppressive or despairing. Thus the individual tends to overinvest in their passion, seeing it as a panacea for all their existential concerns, the key to all their problems, which inevitably leads to certain problematic consequences, starting for example with the pressure it exerts in a love relationship. Once someone believes that their happiness is exclusively realized in a specific passion, everything else becomes boring, insignificant or meaningless, a rather unhealthy perspective. This explains for example why some persons become totally attached to some guru, spiritual, political or else, in whom they put all their hopes and emotions, becoming totally dependant and manipulable, since they grant excessive power on themselves to this person. But a more common phenomenon is the overinvestment in career, when people are convinced that their success, by bringing wealth and social recognition, satisfying their ambitions, will definitely bring them happiness. A passion that will consume them until they realize in time that it is insufficient, that something important is lacking in their life. This is how happiness substitutes often give rise to "mid-life" crises, that great existential doubt that arises out of "nowhere".

Love, or passion, can serve as an "psychological compensation" when a person feels a lack of happiness or satisfaction in life. For instance, someone might seek love to fill a void or insecurity, believing it will lead to complete happiness, when in reality, love is often only a temporary or partial solution to such deeper issues. This applies to relational love as well as love for an idea, ideal, or passion, such as a political cause, career, spiritual practice, or artistic vocation, which can also

act as substitutes for happiness. Some people dedicate themselves entirely to a passion or idea in the hope that it will bring complete satisfaction. This can be an attempt to fill an existential void or compensate for an absence of broader happiness in other areas of life, such as human relationships or personal stability. For example, a person may devote themselves to a career or project with such intensity that it becomes a substitute for other forms of happiness.

In each case, it is about trying to fill a broader lack of happiness with intense attachment to a relationship or ideal, often in the hope that it will provide lasting satisfaction, even though this tends not to be sufficient for achieving "complete" happiness. Some people desperately seek love, thinking it will save them from feelings of discomfort or loneliness. Love then becomes a substitute for well-being, but this quest is often disappointing because love alone cannot fulfill all aspects of personal fulfillment. Love, while it may bring joy, is not necessarily enough to ensure lasting happiness if other areas of life, such as personal achievement, meaning, or professional satisfaction, are not also fulfilled.

The idea is that love or passion, though important, is not the only component of happiness. If one bases all their happiness on a romantic relationship, this relationship can turn into emotional dependency, where love becomes an illusory substitute for other forms of realization. Love is one element among others that contributes to overall happiness, but it cannot alone guarantee a feeling of completeness. This invites reflection on the balance between love and other sources of satisfaction in order to achieve true and lasting well-being.

Nevertheless, someone may choose to pursue their passion as a primary source of satisfaction, at the expense of their own happiness. This situation is common among certain artists, social activists, or individuals dedicated to a cause, who place their devotion to their art, ideas, or mission above their personal well-being. These individuals choose to make their passion or mission the absolute priority in their life. Their main satisfaction comes from the accomplishment of this mission, even if it comes at the expense of personal happiness, such as human relationships, material comfort, or even emotional health. For example, artists may dedicate everything to their art, despite financial difficulties or personal suffering, because they find a sense of fulfillment in completing their work.

In the case of social activists or people devoted to a cause, personal sacrifice may be seen as a form of altruism, where the well-being of the community or society takes precedence over their individual contentment. They may endure suffering, deprivation, or personal sacrifices to serve a greater cause, even if it means giving up certain aspects of personal "bliss". They are driven by a passion for justice or an ideal, which they consider more important than their own well-being.

Such people find that their passion is a form of fulfillment in itself, even if it does not directly bring about "general" happiness in the traditional sense, such as comfort, stable relationships, security, etc. For example, an artist who suffers in their personal life may still feel great satisfaction in their creative process, even if it does not equate to constant happiness. Some even appreciate, for themselves or for others, the romantic vision of the "cursed" artist, destitute, isolated in his mis-

ery, living on the margins of society, excluded and forgotten, engrossed in the act of creation while living in the solitude of a poor and despised existence, when only his work bears witness to a struggle against the indifference of the world. This illustrates the difference between personal fulfillment, the realization of one's potential or the pursuit of a meaningful quest, and happiness in the broader sense, with its accompanying emotional and psychological satisfaction.

For some people, there is also the illusion of "deferred happiness." They think that if they achieve a certain goal related to their passion, such as completing a major work or accomplishing a social mission, or gaining the recognition their work "deserves", they will then access "total" happiness. However, this happiness is often postponed and never truly reached, as new goals or challenges arise, the satisfactions obtained are never enough, maintaining this endless quest, which leads to disappointment or frustration.

It is thus possible for individuals to pursue their passion with a sense of satisfaction that is not necessarily linked to "global" personal happiness. Their commitment to their art, cause, or mission may be so deep that they are willing to sacrifice their personal well-being to pursue what they consider greater or more important. This reflects a tension between the quest for meaning, driven by love or passion, and the pursuit of happiness. The key is to be aware of the challenges brought by this passion, understanding the consequences, and avoiding illusions about "happiness."

Exhaustion Exhaustion or withering in love stories refers to a gradual process of the emotional bond and initial intensity of the relationship deteriorating over time. It occurs when the relationship is worn down by routine, unresolved tensions, diverging interests, or simply the passage of time. Partners may feel emotionally drained, lacking the energy to nurture the relationship, or even bored by the repetition of the same conflicts, the same habits. This leads to a lack of genuine communication, an exhaustion of emotional energy, where feelings are repressed, and love turns into mere coexistence rather than a true exchange. A kind of wilting or gradual decline sets in.

In a romantic relationship, withering can manifest as a slow loss of passion, intimacy, and emotional connection. Moments of complicity and sharing become fewer, the relationship loses its vibrancy, becoming dull, like a plant that wilts from lack of nourishment. This process is often silent, insidious, and may not be immediately noticed by the partners, until the relationship becomes a shadow of what it once was. These phenomena reflect an emotional and existential disconnection, where the energy and attention that once sustained the relationship fade away. Love has not necessarily totally vanished, but it becomes invisible, eroded by small neglects, unspoken words, and the gradual emotional distancing of the partners.

Sometimes, one resists acknowledging this crumbling, refusing to admit it to oneself, let alone to the partner. For in a relationship that is withering, there is also the "forbidden" admission that one has failed, or perhaps made a mistake, or

even invested a part of oneself "for nothing". Breaking up might imply having to start all over "from scratch" with someone else. Thus, one clings to the relationship out of inertia, fear of the void, and maintains a boring, even lifeless, status quo. It can be striking to observe certain strange "old couples" who seem to be united primarily by boredom, irritation, or anger. Anything seems better than loneliness, it appears.

Sunk cost fallacy In relationships, the sunk cost fallacy leads people to stay in unhappy or unfulfilling partnerships primarily because of the time, energy, and emotional investment they have already put in. The mentality is more or less, "We have been together so long, it would be a waste to end it now." even when the relationship no longer brings happiness or interest. As if the time spent was in itself an argument for pursuing it, when it could be just the reverse, because of tiredness, estrangement or drifting apart.

Here is how the sunk cost fallacy operates in this context and keeps people tied to relationships that may not serve them well.

In relationships, emotional investments run deep. Partners may feel that their years together create an unbreakable bond, leading them to stay to "honor" that attachment, even if the relationship isn't fulfilling anymore. This attachment can cloud judgment, leading them to focus on past emotional investments rather than current and future happiness. They feel that ending a long-term relationship equates to admitting that the time spent together was "wasted." The desire to salvage something out of those years makes it difficult to let go, as

they fear that leaving the relationship would invalidate those shared experiences, even though moving on might ultimately be more fulfilling. It could indeed be better to remain with good memories rather than sabotaging the past through an unpleasant present. And the idea of "wasting the past" can be viewed as a very illusory and anxiogenic mental construction.

Similar to financial investments, individuals often experience a psychological bias toward not wanting to "lose" the relationship. The fear of experiencing emotional "loss" makes people more willing to accept dissatisfaction or compromise their well-being to avoid breaking up, thinking that staying will somehow redeem or justify their emotional investment. Just as gamblers believe a win is just around the corner, people stuck in stagnant relationships might convince themselves that things will improve with a bit more effort or time. They feel that, having already spent so many years together, a breakthrough or positive change is bound to happen if they just hold on, despite evidence to the contrary. Hope then becomes a false friend, since it is not grounded in reason or empirical evidence.

Ending a long-term relationship can carry social implications, like bothersome questions from friends and family, societal judgment, or a sense of perceived "failure." The idea of "starting all over" is daunting, and people may feel pressure to make the relationship "work", in order to avoid the stigma or disappointment that might accompany a breakup. Often, staying due to "sunk costs" fear requires sacrificing personal needs and growth. The fallacy leads people to deny their own self-development, focusing instead on maintaining the rela-

tionship to justify the years already spent together. This can result in lost opportunities for self-discovery, happiness, and fulfillment outside of the "past" relationship. This past then becomes a heavy handicap on our freedom.

Moving beyond the sunk cost fallacy in relationships requires a shift in perspective, focusing on future potential rather than anterior investments. This implies centering on whether the relationship brings satisfaction and joy now and whether it is likely to in the future. Understanding that growth sometimes means moving on, even if it's difficult. Viewing a relationship as valuable because of what it taught or shared, rather than feeling it must last forever to be meaningful. Recognizing that it's never too late to find happiness, even if it means starting fresh by taking on new risks. Ultimately, healthy relationships are those that bring joy, growth, and fulfillment in the present. Holding onto the past simply because of the time invested can prevent individuals from experiencing a better, more fulfilling future. But of course, this freedom comes at a cost.

LOVE AND IRRATIONALITY

THE CAUSES OF IRRATIONALITY

When people are in love, they can seem irrational due to the powerful combination of emotions, hormones and psychological factors that affect judgment, decision-making and behavior.

Here are some reasons why this happens.

Chemical Changes in the Brain Dopamine: Falling in love activates dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. This makes people feel euphoric, excited, and focused on their partner, in a similar way to the effects of addictive substances. This can lead to impulsive decisions and a tendency to overlook negative aspects of the relationship.

Oxytocin: Known as the "love hormone," oxytocin promotes bonding and trust, but it can also cause people to become overly attached and blind to potential problems.

Serotonin: Love can cause a temporary drop in serotonin levels, a decrease linked to the obsessive thoughts and intense focus people experience when they first fall in love, with anxiety and excitement. This explains why people in love are so

preoccupied with their partner, leading to seemingly irrational focus and behavior.

Emotional Intensity Love triggers strong emotions like joy, passion, and desire, which can override logical thinking. When emotions are intense, they tend to drive behavior more strongly than rational thinking does. This emotional intensity can make people act in ways that seem irrational, such as making rash life decisions or overlooking potential red flags in a relationship.

Romantic Idealization In the early stages of love, people often idealize their partner, focusing on their positive traits, or amplifying them, while minimizing or ignoring their flaws. A person thinks they love another, but in reality, what they love is very different. In fact, we are in love with a certain image of the other person, an illusory idealization of this person, or the image of myself that the other person reflects back to me, or the lifestyle that the other person offers me... A pattern that's bound to be lost, either through slow wear and tear, or through a brutal irruption of reality, a painful realization. But in the moment, this induces distorted perceptions, where the loved one or the relationship is seen through a "rose-colored lens". As a result, judgment is clouded, and people make evaluations and take decisions that seem irrational from an outside perspective. This idealization persists in some lovers, for diverse reasons, such as compensation for low self-esteem.

Fear of Loss Love provokes the fear of losing the partner, leading to anxiety and insecurity. This fear can prompt irrational behaviors such as jealousy, possessiveness, or excessive efforts to maintain the relationship, even when it might not be a healthy one. This fear of losing the other person also leads to emotional dependence, where self-esteem becomes closely tied to the partner's validation. This brings the acceptance of unreasonable compromises or neglect of one's own needs in order to preserve the relationship. Paradoxically, this anxiety can end up undermining the relationship itself, by creating tension or suffocating the other person.

Reproductive Drive From an evolutionary perspective, love is linked to reproductive success and survival. This biological drive can override logical thinking, as people become focused on forming bonds that will ensure the continuation of their genes. This instinctual motivation, conscious or not, can make individuals act in ways that prioritize their emotional attachment over practical concerns.

Cognitive Biases People in love are prone to cognitive biases, like the "confirmation bias": focusing on information that supports their positive feelings, and "halo effect": believing that a person's overall qualities are flawless because they excel in one area, or because of their charm. These biases strongly skew judgment and rationality. Love is even blind, as the proverb claims.

THE VARIATIONS OF IRRATIONALITY

The irrational effects of being in love, particularly those driven by intense emotions and chemical changes in the brain, tend to be strongest in the early stages of a relationship, but they don't usually last indefinitely. However, the duration varies depending on the individuals and the relationship.

Let us examine these diverse situations.

Infatuation The most intense irrational behavior typically occurs during the early stages of love, the "honeymoon phase" or infatuation stage, usually short-lived. This period is characterized by heightened emotions, obsessive thinking, and a strong desire to be with the partner. It is driven by high levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, which can last anywhere from a few months to around two years. During this time, people tend to idealize their partner, believe in perfect and eternal love, overlook flaws, believe their love story is absolutely unique, and make decisions based more on emotion than logic.

Companionate Love After the initial intensity fades, most relationships evolve into what is called "companionate love". This is marked by deeper emotional bonding, trust, more calm, a long-term process. The irrational behavior typically decreases as levels of dopamine return to normal, but other hormones like oxytocin and vasopressin, which promote bonding and attachment, take over. Although the irrationality diminishes, emotional attachment and the drive to maintain the relation-

ship continue, which bears its dose of irrationality, although in general more temperate. This phase can last for years or even a lifetime, depending on how the relationship develops.

Persistence In some cases, irrational behavior persists for a longer time if the relationship remains highly emotional, volatile, or if one partner has strong attachment anxieties or other emotional vulnerabilities. For example, people who experience insecure attachment may continue to act irrationally due to fear of losing the relationship or a heightened need for validation. Additionally, some people may experience "cycles" of infatuation where intense feelings resurface at different points in the relationship, especially during important milestones or periods of renewed closeness. External stressors, such as life changes, crises, or challenges, can reignite irrational emotions in the relationship. While love tends to stabilize over time, external factors might lead to periods of emotional intensity and irrational decision-making.

Some people maintain a high emotional level in relationships due to a combination of psychological, emotional, and interpersonal factors. While most relationships tend to settle into a more stable emotional state over time, certain individuals and couples continue to experience heightened emotions throughout their relationship.

Here are some reasons why this might happen:

Attachment Insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious attachment, can lead to consistently high emotional levels in a relationship. People with anxious attachment often fear aban-

donment and seek constant reassurance from their partner, which keeps them in a heightened emotional state, rather contagious. Their need for closeness, combined with fear of rejection, can lead to emotional highs and lows. Avoidant attachment can also contribute to emotional intensity through the "push-pull" dynamic, an intense, frequent and sudden alternation between needing intimacy and resisting it, provoking an permanent tension.

Personality People with intense emotional personalities, such as those with high levels of neuroticism or sensitivity, naturally experience relationships with more emotional highs and lows. They are more likely to react strongly to relationship events, perceive changes in emotional closeness more acutely, and feel the impact of minor conflicts or changes in sentimental expression in an exaggerated way. Romantics, or people with idealistic views of love, maintain high psychological intensity because they are deeply invested in the emotional and passionate aspects of the relationship. They might expect constant emotional expression and they "need" permanent excitement.

Passionate Love Some couples continue to experience passionate love throughout their relationship, rather than transitioning to companionate love. They value the excitement, intimacy, and intensity of romantic feelings, and they may intentionally cultivate situations that sustain these emotional level. They tend to engage in activities that foster excitement,

novelty, and adventure, keeping the relationship emotionally charged.

External Stressors Relationships that face frequent challenges or external stressors, such as financial difficulties, job instability, long-distance situations, etc., may experience high emotional levels as a response to these stressors. The couple may go through cycles of emotional highs and lows as they navigate these challenges together. Additionally, life events such as new jobs, relocations, or having children can introduce emotional intensity into a relationship, sometimes sustaining it for extended periods.

Volatility Some couples have a volatile relationship dynamic, where they experience frequent conflicts followed by intense reconciliation. This "permanent drama cycle" can lead to consistently high emotional levels because emotions fluctuate rapidly between anger, hurt, love, and affection. In these relationships, the intensity of the emotions—whether positive or negative—can fuel a sense of passion, even if it is often unhealthy.

Need for stimulation Certain individuals crave emotional stimulation and excitement, and they create situations that sustain emotional highs, consciously or not. They might engage in behaviors that provoke emotional responses, such as teasing, provocation, flirting or arguments, in order to maintain a sense of engagement and emotional involvement in the relationship.

Biological Factors Some people are biologically predisposed to experiencing higher emotional arousal due to hormonal differences or brain chemistry. For instance, individuals with higher levels of dopamine, the "reward" neurotransmitter, might seek out more emotional excitement in relationships. Others may have naturally high levels of oxytocin, the bonding hormone, making them more emotionally connected and reactive to their partner.

Fear of routine For some, the fear of emotional complacency or routine in a relationship may drive them to maintain a heightened state of excitement. They may believe that settling into a calmer phase of the relationship is a sign that love or passion is fading, a sign of abandonment, and they resist it by keeping emotions intense and dramatic.

Mutual reinforcement In some relationships, both partners mutually reinforce each other's emotional intensity. This dynamic becomes self-sustaining, where one partner's emotional reactions trigger similar responses in the other, leading to a continuous loop of heightened emotions. This may happen in both positive situations, such as shared enthusiasm, and negative ones, like conflict escalation.

Thus, maintaining high emotional levels in a relationship can be a result of attachment style, personality traits, emotional stimulation needs, and relationship dynamics. For some, this heightened emotional intensity is a source of passion and closeness, while for others it may reflect underlying insecurities, conflicts, or again an intentional desire to keep

the relationship exciting. While some individuals thrive in this emotionally charged environment, others may eventually seek greater stability as the relationship matures. Such intense dynamics can lead to maintaining the relationship just as they can be a cause for breakups.

LOVE AND ROUTINE

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment in a relationship when love turns into mere habit, as this varies for each couple, or in each family, in each type of relationship. However, several signs can indicate that the bond between people relies more on routine and habit than on true love.

Let us identify a few clues that may reveal this shift.

Absence of passion When gestures of affection, passionate exchanges, excitement and emotional closeness diminish or disappear, the couple may be held together more by routine than by deep love. If the relationship becomes purely functional, it is a sign that love has weakened.

Superficial Communication In a loving relationship, communication is essential for sharing ideas, feelings, and dreams. If conversations are reduced to practical or mundane topics, when deep emotional exchanges become rare, this indicates that the couple is being held together by habit rather than love.

Absence of efforts If neither partner makes an effort to spend quality time together, surprise each other, take initiatives or reignite the spark, it means that habit has taken over. Loving partners usually make efforts to maintain the relationship

and keep it alive, while in a routine relationship, these efforts disappear.

Absence of shared goals A loving couple tends to have common projects and goals, of whatever nature, to project themselves in the future. When the couple stops planning together or projecting ahead, when they just live day by day, the relationship becomes stagnant, which reflects a situation where habit sustains the relationship more than love.

Absence of Intimacy Intimacy, whether emotional or physical, is a key component of love in a relationship. If these moments become rare or nonexistent, if they are not desired or expected by either partners, or even feared, we can conclude that the couple or the family remains together out of comfort or habit rather than love. Even if it is expected by one of the partners and not the other, by wear and tear, routine tends to set in, unless conflict breaks out. For example, the word love has disappeared from any conversation. Or it is used as an "automatic" meaningless word, like the American "love you", an interjection deprived of any grammatical subject.

Fear of loneliness Sometimes couples or families stay together not out of love, but out of fear of loneliness, the unknown, or the upheaval that separation might cause. In this case, habit becomes a safety mechanism, and the partners continue the relationship to avoid the personal destabilization, practical or psychological, that a breakup could cause.

Perception of a Stagnation When partners feel that the relationship is no longer evolving, that emotions are stagnant, and that nothing new or stimulating is happening, but they maintain the relationship, it indicates that the relationship has settled into a routine. In this case, love has given way to a mere minimal attachment, or a form of comfort tied to habit.

Material comfort In some cases, economic, material, or even practical dependence, such as children, home, shared finances, etc., can keep a couple together, even when love is no longer the primary driver of the relationship. A family can stay together for the same reasons. Habit is then reinforced by external factors rather than by an authentic emotional connection.

Absence of conflict A relationship can become monotonous when conflicts are systematically avoided, since it implies the avoidance of any real discussions. Simultaneously, the enthusiasm, joy, and excitement of sharing moments together also fade away. This indicates that the partners have settled into a form of emotional neutrality, where habit dominates the interaction.

Social image The connection between social image and love as routine lies in the pressure to maintain appearances and conform to societal expectations, which can lead couples or families to maintain relationships that are sustained more by habit than by genuine affection or passion. The relationship revolves around the pressure to conform to the environment,

maintain stability, and project an appearance of success or decorum, even when the emotional or passionate aspects of the relationship have faded.

Therefore, it becomes difficult to talk about true love when the relationship is primarily sustained by habit, basic attachment, comfort, or fear of change. This is not necessarily a negative situation for all couples, it has its own legitimacy as it provides a form of superficial stability and comfort, but it reflects a major change in the emotional dynamic. The moment when one can say that habit has taken over varies from couple to couple, but it is often marked by a weakening of passion, reduced communication, diminished intimacy, and emotional disengagement. And what is true for couples is true as well for any type of relation, for example between children and parents.

At the same time, it is possible and legitimate for someone to evolve away from traditional romantic or family relationships toward a more personal identity focused on new interest or passion. Such an evolution reflects a shift in priorities or self-understanding, it can happen for various reasons, including life experiences, personal reflection, or changes in values. In this case, maintaining past relations becomes rather formal and rather meaningless.

LOVE AND THE SELF

TO DO ONESELF GOOD

Self-love presupposes "doing good for oneself," but to what extent is this good "real"? Indeed, as the hedonistic saying goes, "There is no harm in indulging yourself." However, there is a need to specify what this entails, as it can easily become limited, questionable, or even dubious. Does it mean dipping your toes in a river, seeking pleasure without concern for consequences, or fulfilling one's vocation? Can "real" well-being bypass a certain level of asceticism and challenge?

The concept of "doing good for oneself" is problematic because the idea of "good", and therefore "well-being", can easily become superficial or misleading.. The "good" one procures is illusory, artificial if it is based on immediate, fleeting pleasures, on actions that provide temporary relief without offering real fulfillment or lasting benefits.

Epicureanism invites us to savor the pleasures of daily life and appreciate moments of happiness, however fleeting. It emphasizes the ability to fully live in the present without being dominated by future worries or past regrets. Taking care of oneself means giving oneself the freedom to enjoy pleasant and enriching experiences while avoiding excessive plea-

asures that lead to negative consequences. For this philosophy, it is essential to find a middle ground, to adopt a temperate life, and to cultivate well-being through simple and reasonable pleasures.

Certainly, one must admit that this immediate "good" has its own legitimacy; it provides moments of joy, it is pleasant and appealing, otherwise, we wouldn't concern ourselves with it. The issue lies in its seductive, easy, and reductive aspects, from which it draws its power. Activities that "feel good" in the short term, or when taken in moderation, like consuming food, alcohol, or other substances, provide instant pleasure. But as a focal point over the long term, they are not very "nourishing" and don't contribute to authentic or substantial well-being, or at least they are insufficient on their own. They risk undermining overall well-being, as they easily lead to excess, even dependency. The same applies to the consumption or possession of material goods, which face similar issues. "Doing good for oneself" can easily become a way to escape difficulties or uncomfortable emotions instead of confronting them. For example, distracting oneself to avoid thinking about a significant problem can bring temporary relief, but often leads to a form of denial or avoidance that, ultimately, resolves nothing and does not confront oneself. The concept can also be shaped by social norms or trends, where one adopts practices perceived as beneficial but which, in reality, do not match our real needs, by following fashion in order to gain social approval. Indeed, we must "do this" or "see that", according to opinion polls or expert advice.

The concept of "self-care" or "taking time for oneself" is highly valued today in the context of personal development. It primarily serves as a response to a pervasive model of utilitarian, productivity-driven, functional, competitive, restrictive, and alienating system. Nevertheless, if we are not careful, this notion can favor a retreat into oneself, an excessive priority given to "personal needs" at the expense of relationships and solidarity with others, encouraging a somewhat selfish and self-centered attitude. It is often presented as a way to manage stress but can become a form of avoiding challenges or responsibilities, leading to a kind of infantilization or psychological regression. Moreover, this "self-care" is often co-opted and instrumentalized by the "wellness industry," promoting the consumption of unnecessary products and services. Self-care becomes reduced to buying beauty products or indulging in abusive or expensive activities. In the long term, this type of practice inhibits the capacity for commitment, leading to social isolation, or light, ephemeral relationships, as well as a certain impotence or dilettantism. Paradoxically, self-care can also become a source of pressure, where the individual feels obligated to constantly optimize their well-being, as if it were a new field of personal performance. This generates a new form of stress and additional guilt if one fails to take care of themselves "properly," to be as "fulfilled" or "happy" as popular standards demand, as portrayed by popular cosmetic, stereotypical, and inaccessible models. Ultimately, this scheme implies a practice of privilege, excluding those who face economic or familial constraints that don't allow them this freedom, becoming yet another source of frustration.

SELF-LOVE

The French language commonly uses the expression "amour-propre" (self-love), often translated in English as self-esteem or self-respect. It refers to the sense of one's own worth or value, and the respect one holds for oneself. Like in French, it can have positive connotations when balanced, but it can become problematic if it turns into excessive pride or vanity. So, this amour-propre reflects a healthy self-regard, though it can also carry the risk of becoming negative if it tips over into arrogance or egotism. In English, the term "self-esteem" or "self-respect" generally emphasizes respect and value for oneself, rather than the idea of "love" for the self, which is more explicit in the French concept of amour-propre. In French, "amour" directly suggests a form of love or affection for oneself, while in English, the focus is more on the concept of esteem or regard rather than explicit "love." In order to express the idea of love for oneself in English, we might use phrases like "self-love" or "self-compassion", less used. These terms emphasize a more affectionate and nurturing relationship with oneself, similar to the nuance of amour-propre in French, which carries both the sense of love and respect for oneself.

Adequate self-love allows one to love themselves while respecting others, whereas an excess can harm relationships and personal growth. It is essential for healthy self-esteem, respect for one's own dignity, and emotional well-being. Having self-love means being able to assert oneself, recognize one's worth, and live in alignment with one's needs and principles. Self-

love refers to the feeling of esteem and respect a person has for themselves. It involves an awareness of one's value and the right to be treated with dignity. Self-love is connected to how one perceives themselves and evaluates their qualities, achievements, and even their flaws, all while maintaining an attitude of kindness toward oneself. Unlike pride or vanity, which involve an exaggeration of one's importance, self-love is a balance between accepting one's strengths and acknowledging one's limitations. It expresses a global appreciation and acceptance of oneself. It includes a desire for challenge and self-improvement. It contributes to self-confidence and emotional well-being, allowing for balanced relationships with others, without excessive dependence on their approval. It is a form of self-respect that enables one to live in accordance with their values while cultivating a positive attitude toward oneself.

Self-love, as a concept, is therefore not inherently negative. It represents a healthy balance of self-esteem and respect for one's own dignity. However, it can become problematic or take on a negative connotation when it crosses into certain excesses, characterized as follows.

Pride When self-love is exaggerated, it can transform into pride or arrogance, where one overestimates their value and feels superior to others. In this case, it leads to condescending or self-centered behavior.

Hypersensitivity An excess of self-love can make a person overly sensitive to criticism or failure. Consequently, they

struggle to accept their mistakes or face challenges, which reduces their ability to grow and improve.

Need for Validation If self-love is fragile, it can lead to excessive dependence on others' approval. Such a person seeks validation primarily through external affirmation, leading to insecurities or manipulative behaviors.

Narcissism When self-love becomes excessive, it can foster narcissistic traits, where an individual focuses solely on themselves, neglecting the needs and feelings of others, resulting in abusive and toxic relationships.

Healthy self-love allows one to love themselves while respecting others, whereas an excess can harm relationships and personal growth. It is essential for healthy self-esteem, respect for one's own dignity, and emotional well-being. Having self-love means being able to assert oneself, recognize one's worth, and live in alignment with one's needs and principles.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Love in principle encourages personal growth and transformation because it challenges individuals to step outside their comfort zones, confront their insecurities, and invest emotionally in another person.

Let us examine different reasons how and why love can lead to personal growth and transformation.

Self-reflection In a loving relationship, people often reflect on their behavior, thoughts, and feelings to better understand themselves and their partner. This process of introspection leads to self-awareness and insight into areas that need growth or improvement. By recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, individuals can work on becoming more emotionally mature, empathetic, or patient, more available to their partners.

Vulnerability Love demands emotional vulnerability, meaning individuals must open up, share their deepest feelings, express openly their fears and weaknesses, and trust someone else. This admittance of our vulnerability can be challenging but is crucial for personal growth. Through recognizing this vulnerability, people learn to overcome fears of rejection, abandonment, or betrayal, becoming emotionally stronger and more resilient during the process.

Self-challenging Love often pushes individuals to think beyond their own needs and desires. It challenges the self to widen its horizon, by requiring compromise, cooperation, and consideration of the other person's feelings and needs. By reducing selfish and egotistic tendencies, love teaches humility, compassion, and the importance of seeing things from another's perspective, helping people grow into more self-conscious, thoughtful individuals.

Responsibility In a mature, loving relationship, individuals take responsibility not only for their own well-being but also

for the well-being of their partner. This requires emotional maturity, accountability, and a willingness to support each other. Through this discovery of otherness, people learn to be more dependable, understanding, and caring, fostering personal growth in areas like patience, emotional regulation, and commitment.

Empathy Love encourages people to deeply understand their partner's emotions, experiences, and struggles, fostering empathy. This ability to emotionally resonate with another person's feelings can be transformative. Empathy helps individuals develop a broader, more compassionate worldview. It leads to personal growth by enhancing emotional intelligence and the ability to connect meaningfully with others.

Boundaries Love pushes people to confront their fears, insecurities, and emotional boundaries. It involves facing past trauma, addressing intimacy issues, working through personal barriers to emotional closeness, or modifying established routines and habits. By facing these challenges, individuals grow emotionally, learning to trust, forgive, and connect more deeply with others. This process fosters profound emotional and psychological transformation while overcoming one's existential limits.

Mutual Growth In a healthy relationship, love provides an environment where partners support each other's development. They encourage each other to pursue their personal goals, learn new things, and strive for self-improvement. This mu-

tual encouragement creates a positive feedback loop, where each person's growth inspires and motivates the other, leading to continuous self-improvement and transformation. The relationship can be a factor of growth just as it can reinforce the worst aspect of the partners, pulling each other down.

Resilience Love is not always easy. It often offers challenges, conflicts, and moments of doubt that must be worked through. Navigating these difficulties requires resilience and emotional strength. Overcoming relationship challenges helps individuals develop endurance and adaptability, problem-solving skills, rationality, and a stronger sense of self, ultimately fostering personal growth.

Emotional Support A loving relationship offers a safe space where individuals feel supported and understood. This emotional support creates an environment where people can explore their own potential without fear of judgment. With this support, individuals feel more confident in pursuing personal growth, trying new things, taking risks that lead to transformation, and learning to overcome themselves.

Expands Perspective Loving someone means seeing the world through their eyes. Partners share their experiences, ideas, and views, which can challenge one's existing beliefs and open new perspectives. This broadening of perspectives fosters personal growth by helping individuals become more open-minded, adaptable, and understanding of the diverse experiences of others.

Therefore, love encourages personal growth and transformation by promoting self-reflection, vulnerability, and empathy, while challenging individuals to overcome their insecurities, broaden their perspectives, and build emotional resilience. In a healthy relationship, love provides a supportive environment for both partners to grow and evolve, leading to deeper self-awareness, emotional maturity, and personal fulfillment.

Being in a loving, reciprocal relationship can positively influence self-love and self-esteem. When we experience love from someone who accepts and values us, it helps reinforce our own sense of worth and encourages us to see ourselves through their positive lens. This kind of relationship serves as a mirror, reflecting back our strengths, qualities, and potential, which we might not always see clearly on our own, that we often underestimate. Additionally, feeling loved fosters a sense of security and belonging, which are important for emotional well-being. Knowing that someone cares deeply for us can reduce self-criticism, allowing us to be kinder and more compassionate toward ourselves. This supportive relationship also provides a safe space for self-exploration and growth, making it easier to address insecurities or doubts. However, for this, external validation necessitates internal self-acceptance. While love from others can certainly enhance our self-love, ultimately, the journey to loving ourselves must come from within. Cultivating a healthy sense of self-esteem independent of external factors helps ensure that self-love remains resilient and sustainable over time, regardless of external circumstances. And of course, reflecting on our love relationship and dialogue should help us to reconcile with ourselves, despite

our worries, fears and uncertainties, because the process does not necessarily happen by itself, "naturally".

Probably the most challenging form of love is self-love. One of the reasons is that others are always "something", but we can be "nothing". "Meaninglessness", "nothingness", or "worthlessness" are feelings attached primarily to our own being. The ghost of emptiness that haunts each one of us. The inherent feeling of imposture when we experience our personal sense of finitude, more striking and pervasive within our own self than in relation to anything else. But a powerful love is confident, autonomous, unconditional. Then how to live or develop this self-love that does not stop when external love or recognition stops? A self-love that does not "need" external love to manifest, a self-love that is complete in itself, that thrives on its own, without needing validation or affection from "elsewhere". Actually, this self-love is the condition for any other love: love for someone else, for something else, is a mere transfer or extension of self-love to an external object, an external being. Self-love is the condition for "reaching" the outside. It provides access for our "desire of unification", this aspiration which is the essence of love, its power and actualization: an unquenchable thirst for "oneness". At the same time, of course, internalizing external love can help reinforce this autonomous self-love.

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Furthermore, we can claim that love can make us transcend ourselves, an idea found in both philosophical and psychological perspectives.

Let us examine how love can be a factor of transcendence.

Selflessness In love, people become more selfless, putting the needs and happiness of others ahead of their own. This selflessness pushes individuals beyond their own egos and desires, leading to actions that are more compassionate and generous. By caring deeply for another person, we move beyond the narrow focus on our own needs and interests, which can be seen as a form of transcendence.

Sacrifice The sacrifice in this context refers to the act of setting aside one's own person, desires, or individual interests in favor of caring for and prioritizing another person's needs and happiness. In general, this means that individuals give up certain aspects of their independence, psychological or practical comfort, goals, or self-centered focus to support and nurture the relationship or the well-being of their loved one. This sacrifice is not necessarily material or external, but rather internal, as it involves sacrificing parts of one's personal desires, time, or ambitions, or psychological needs, in order to put the relationship or the other person's well-being first. In such a voluntary surrender of personal needs, ego, or desires, a more altruistic mindset develops in order to create a deeper connection with someone else.

Ideal Love can connect us to a feeling of oneness or unity with others, whether in romantic love, familial love, love for ideals, love for humanity, etc. This sense of connection can make people feel part of something larger than themselves, transcending the boundaries of individuality and fostering a sense of shared experience and purpose towards a greater goal than themselves.

Personal growth Love often encourages personal growth and transformation. Being in a loving relationship challenges individuals to confront their flaws, fears, and insecurities, promoting emotional development and maturity. Through love, people reach new levels of understanding, patience, and emotional depth that they might not achieve on their own. It provides them motivation and opportunity to transcend themselves.

Empathy Love fosters empathy and compassion, helping individuals to deeply understand the experiences and feelings of others. This capacity to emotionally resonate with someone else's joy or pain expands a person's emotional and spiritual horizons, transcending the limitations of self-centeredness, an experience which gives us access to something more universal.

Boundaries In love, people often surpass their perceived limitations. Love motivates individuals to achieve things they might have previously thought impossible, whether it's enduring hardship for a loved one, overcoming personal challenges,

achieving goals inspired by the support and encouragement of a partner, or being involved in some meaningful endeavor.

Love can break down emotional and psychological boundaries, allowing people to see and experience the world from perspectives they hadn't considered before. This broadens their understanding of the world and their place within it, leading to a form of transcendence that is rooted in emotional connection and shared experience.

Spiritual Transcendence In some spiritual traditions, love is thought as a pathway to transcendence, particularly when this love is directed not only toward other people but also toward the divine or the universe. For example, in certain forms of mystical thought, love leads to a union with the divine, where the individual transcends their ego and becomes one with the greater cosmic or spiritual reality.

Therefore, love can lead to self-transcendence by encouraging selflessness, growth, empathy, and a sense of connection to something greater than oneself. It has the power to move individuals beyond their personal limitations and foster a deeper connection with others and the world around them, expanding their consciousness and emotional capacity.

Care of the self In addition, here is a presentation of Michel Foucault's concept of "care of the self", which can be seen as an expression of self-love, albeit treated indirectly as such.

For this philosopher, "care of the self" is a central concept that refers to the attention and practices individuals apply to themselves in order to know themselves, transform,

and achieve a form of personal fulfillment. It involves learning to govern oneself through reflection, introspection, self-examination, and the moderation of desires. This care requires constant attention to one's thoughts and behaviors to better understand oneself and enable self-transformation.

The care of the self is an ethical act, as it allows the individual to establish themselves as a subject and develop a conscious relationship with themselves, a practice essential for living freely and authentically while being guided by personal principles. By taking care of oneself, the individual is no longer dependent on norms or expectations imposed by society but instead develops their own understanding of what constitutes a good and fulfilling life. This means liberating oneself from certain external constraints in order to exercise power over oneself.

It is not merely a return to oneself, but rather a continuous process of transformation. This practice must be dynamic, allowing the individual to modify their thoughts, attitudes, and actions to evolve constantly. Unlike narcissism, which is centered on self-admiration, Foucault's care of the self is a thoughtful and ethical work aimed at self-mastery and personal improvement. It involves openness to others and engagement with the world, the very opposite of complacency, which seeks the comfort of immediate pleasure and settling into a comfortable routine.

EGOTISM

Egotism is the excessive focus on and inflation of one's own self-importance, often accompanied by a lack of consideration for others. An egotist is someone who is self-centered, constantly speaks about themselves, and tends to believe they are superior to others in terms of talents, intelligence, or achievements. Egotism is typically characterized by a strong sense of self-obsession, a desire for recognition, and the belief that one's needs and opinions are more important than those of others. Therefore it implies self-centeredness, excessive self-promotion, lack of empathy, and inflated self-image.

In order to specify self-love and distinguish it from egotism, we will compare it with two concepts: selfishness and narcissism.

Selfishness Loving yourself does not mean that one is selfish, unless selfishness can be taken in a positive sense, as a legitimate care of the self, and not as a moral flaw or a psychological weakness. In fact, "self-love" is an important aspect of emotional well-being and healthy relationships.

Self-love involves recognizing our own worth, taking care of our emotional and physical needs, and having compassion for ourselves. It means setting healthy boundaries with others and the environment, practicing self-respect, and fostering self-esteem. It enables us to know our limits, express our needs clearly, and take care of our own well-being without neglecting others. Self-love encourages personal growth and self-compassion, which ultimately allows us to be more giving and supportive in relationships with others. Selfishness, on the other hand, refers to prioritizing your own desires and needs

at the expense of others. It involves a lack of concern for other people's feelings or well-being. Unlike self-love, selfishness is self-centered and harms relationships.

By practicing self-love, we build "emotional resilience", which allows us to handle challenges with confidence and strength, thus we are better equipped to show compassion and care for others, we are open to the outside, we are available. Selfishness, in contrast, tends to ignore others' needs and focuses only on self-preservation, it generally reveals anxiety. When we love ourselves, we are "emotionally fulfilled", there is a feeling of "abundance", which allows us to give to others without feeling depleted, cheated or resentful. This is different from selfishness, where the focus is solely on personal gain and competition, deprived of any empathy, where others are neglected or manipulated in order to meet the selfish person's needs.

Someone who loves themselves is able to both "give and receive" in relationships, they practice mutual trust. They take care of their own needs but also support and uplift others, creating a balance between personal fulfillment and contributing to the happiness of those around them. A selfish person is focused primarily on "receiving" more than giving, he begs, forces and manipulates. They take advantage of others' generosity without reciprocating or showing appreciation, without any gratitude, expecting others to meet their needs without offering anything in return.

The motivation behind self-love is often personal growth and well-being, instead of possession, control and ambition. Someone practicing self-love wants to "be their best self", to

use an expression fashioned by the self-help movement, not just for their own sake, but also to contribute positively to their relationships and their community. A self-loving person is generally open to others, willing to reflect on their behavior if it affects others negatively. They can acknowledge their mistakes and seek to improve themselves. A selfish person reacts rather defensively or dismissively to criticism, refusing to take responsibility for how their actions affect others. They tend to avoid accountability and focus on preserving their self-image.

Self-loving people have a more secure sense of self and don't need constant validation from others. They are comfortable in their own skin and don't feel threatened by others' successes or opinions. Selfish people act out of a desire to exclusively satisfy their needs, control situations to ensure they feel superior, or be in charge in order to get what they want. We will see that selfishness is quite related to narcissism.

Narcissism We should first deal with a common illusion that presupposes narcissists love themselves excessively. While they appear self-absorbed or obsessed with themselves, their behavior is rather driven by insecurity, an excessive doubt, a lack of genuine self-esteem, and a need for recognition, rather than healthy self-love, which is why they fear rejection or criticism. Self-love on the contrary implies a stable sense of identity and self-confidence, independent of external validation.

A key trait of narcissism is a lack of empathy for others, they do not consider how their actions affect others. This is often accompanied by a sense of entitlement, believing they deserve

special treatment. In general, they feel undervalued, and they suffer as a result.

Narcissists often engage in manipulative behaviors to maintain their self-image or gain control over others. They may charm or deceive people to get what they want, until they discard their victims. They are highly reactive when they feel threatened or frustrated, when real self-love implies authenticity.

Narcissists require constant praise and admiration from their environment in order to maintain an apparent self-esteem, to concoct an image. They need to be the center of attention; when they don't receive the recognition they crave, they feel empty, they become angry or upset. People who love themselves are not obsessive about their own needs, thus they are capable of forming strong emotional bonds without dominating or exploiting others.

Narcissists often present a "false persona" to the world, appearing more confident, successful, or superior than they actually feel inside. This "mask" is used to protect their fragile self-esteem. People who love themselves don't feel the need to project perfection and are willing to show vulnerability.

Tension between self and others Balancing personal aspirations with family responsibilities or relationships with close people can be challenging, especially when the others feel neglected. However, in spite of the tension, it is possible to establish some type of parity between one's self-interest and other's expectations by setting boundaries, communicating effectively, and making mindful compromises.

Let us now examine some parameters of the issue.

Communicating clearly and openly It is better to share with our close ones our interests, our passions, our préoccupations, our needs, and how they contribute to our well-being. We should not presuppose that our inclinations are obvious for others, so we should explain to them the "what", "why" and "how" those favorite activities enrich our life, in order to foster empathy and reduce criticism. But it is important to listen to their concerns about feeling neglected and acknowledge their needs as well, in order to create understanding and show them that their feelings are valued.

Let us take an example. The case of a family, where a mother enjoys reading a lot. She can establish specific times, in order not to interfere with family activities, like after dinner or early in the morning. Setting a clear boundary allows her to enjoy her passion without compromising family time. Once these schedules are clear, it tends to reduce any feelings of neglect. But, while it is important to pursue her passion, she may need to adjust her reading schedule when the family has immediate needs, showing flexibility and demonstrating that she nevertheless grants importance to the well-being of the family. She can as well include the family in her passion. Depending on the family's interests, she could involve them in her love for reading by sharing stories, reading together, or discussing interesting books, connecting her passion with family bonding.

By pursuing her passion for reading, the mother teaches her family the importance of self-care and personal growth. This

can help normalize the idea that everyone needs personal time for activities that bring them joy and fulfillment. Such an attitude encourages each family member to explore their own passions, fostering mutual respect for personal time and personal space.

When spending time with her family, the mother should aim to be fully present and engaged. This reassures her family that, despite her personal interests, her relatives remain a priority. She can plan fun, meaningful activities that involve the whole family, creating strong emotional connections and reducing any sense of competition with her passion.

Avoiding guilt is crucial, yet it's a trap that many mothers easily fall into. She should not question the legitimacy of her passion. Pursuing personal interests is healthy and can make her a more fulfilled, balanced, and happy person, which benefits the family in the long run. But she can periodically check in with her family to ensure they feel supported and cared for, making adjustments if needed to maintain the balance. But she should remind herself that demonstrating the importance of self-care through reading can be a valuable lesson for the family, especially children. It teaches them the importance of the principle that everyone in the family deserves time to pursue their own passions.

By communicating openly, setting clear boundaries, being both inflexible and flexible, and involving as much as possible others in their passion, one can achieve a healthy balance between personal fulfillment and relationships. This balance not only nurtures personal well-being but also strengthens the bonds by showing that personal passions and relationships are

both equally valued. But we should learn to accept that disagreement is part of the love relationship. What is more, we need to be able to recognize and peacefully accept that at some point, for some people, family activities no longer have any meaning or interest.

One important difference between a selfish attitude and self-care is in the nature of the activity. The selfish person engages in competitive activities, where his interest is contrary to the interest of others, for example when motivated by greed. Self-care does not in itself exclude others, one can share his endeavor, even if sometimes the individual is on his own to realize his activity. But we have to accept that within a relationship, not all partners share the same interest. To share interest, even to show some interest, just like to share values, sometimes represents a real challenge, for example in the family.

But we should keep in mind that the personal growth of an individual benefits others. For example, acquiring knowledge on a personal level leads to a greater understanding of the world, which, in turn, can benefit others. A person who spends time learning may be better equipped to share valuable insights, make informed decisions, and contribute to the well-being of society or their community. In this sense, seeking knowledge can be seen as a selfless investment in becoming a more capable, rational individual who can help others. Intellectual fulfillment is not selfish, as it is important for the emotional and mental well-being of a person, and it nurtures its potential for others. By dedicating time to learning, individuals can inspire others to pursue knowledge and growth. This

encourages a culture of curiosity, education, and progress, fostering collective improvement rather than just personal gain.

In sum, while the practice of self-care appears to be focused on the person, it has far-reaching benefits that extend beyond the individual, making it a constructive and positive pursuit for both the person and those around them. But the persons we relate to might not understand or appreciate our interest, just like their interest might seem strange to us, a reality one has to accept and deal with through dialogue and tolerance, to the extent possible. Therefore self-love can be a very challenging and ungrateful endeavor, where one can feel rather lonely.

RELUCTANCE TO COMMITMENT

Some people have difficulty with mature, committed relationships for a variety of reasons, often stemming from psychological, emotional, or situational factors. These challenges can manifest in different ways, such as fear of intimacy, difficulty with trust, or struggles with commitment. Let us examine some of the main reasons why certain individuals find it hard to maintain or engage in mature, committed relationships.

Fear of Vulnerability Long-term relationships require accepting emotional vulnerability, a challenge which can be difficult for some people. They may fear being hurt, rejected, or abandoned, making them avoid deep emotional connections. This fear leads to emotional distance or avoidance of intimacy, causing them to struggle with deepening the relationship or fully committing to their partner. Therefore either they do not get involved in any relationship, or they start relationships but quickly move on when it becomes "serious".

Attachment challenges The way a person forms emotional bonds in childhood affects their adult relationships. People with insecure attachment styles, for example "avoidant" or "anxious" attachment, may have trouble navigating the dynamics of a committed relationship. "Avoidant attachment" is when individuals distance themselves emotionally and avoid

commitment to protect themselves from perceived threats to their independence or fear of being overwhelmed by closeness. "Anxious attachment" is when individuals cling to their partner but fear abandonment, leading to erratic and contradictory behaviors that create instability in the relationship. These problematic attachment styles make it difficult to establish trust, feel secure, or maintain long-term emotional stability in relationships.

Losing Independence Some people associate commitment with a negatively viewed loss of independence or freedom. They may feel that being in a relationship will require them to sacrifice their autonomy, hobbies, or personal space. This fear causes individuals to resist entering a relationship or pull away when they feel the relationship is becoming too serious, even if they care about their partner. They have difficulty envisaging any modification of their existence.

Past experiences People who have experienced emotional suffering in their relationships, such as betrayal, abuse, or a painful breakup, may struggle to trust others or fear being hurt again. This emotional baggage creates barriers to intimacy and commitment. They avoid getting too close, put up emotional walls, or sabotage relationships to protect themselves from potential pain.

Idealization Some individuals enter relationships with unrealistic expectations or an idealized notion of love. They expect constant excitement, a perfect idyll, for their partner to fulfill

all their needs, a perspective which is unsustainable for both. When reality does not match their idealized vision, they become dissatisfied, disengaged, or still hope to find the "perfect" partner, leading to difficulty in maintaining long-term relationships.

Fear of commitment Some individuals have a fear of commitment, due to a reluctance to settle down, or to the idea that committing to one person limits their options. This fear may be rooted in anxiety about the future, fear of making the wrong choice, or simply discomfort with long-term emotional investment. They avoid committing to a partner or engaging in strong relationships, preferring casual or short-term connections.

Insecurity Individuals with low self-esteem or deep-seated insecurities may feel unworthy of love or fear that their partner will eventually leave them for someone "better." They constantly seek reassurance, which can strain the relationship, or they withdraw to protect themselves from a supposed rejection. These insecurities lead to dependency, jealousy, or emotional distance, making it difficult for the relationship to thrive.

Emotional unavailability Some people are emotionally unavailable, either because they are afraid of intense feelings or because they are too focused on other areas of life, such as career or personal goals. They struggle to express their emotions, communicate openly, or engage in the emotional depth required for a committed relationship. Such emotional

unavailability create frustration and distance in relationships, as the partner feels that they are not receiving the emotional connection they need.

Conflicts Committed relationships require effective communication and the ability to handle conflicts constructively. Some individuals struggle with conflict resolution due to poor communication skills, defensiveness, or fear of confrontation. Avoiding conflict or handling it poorly lead to unresolved issues, resentment, and relationship breakdowns, making it hard to sustain a mature, committed relationship.

Family Patterns Individuals who grew up in dysfunctional or unstable family environments may fear repeating the unhealthy relationship patterns they observed. If they witnessed divorce, infidelity, or emotional neglect, they feel unsure of how to form a healthy, stable relationship. This fear leads to avoidance of long-term commitments, anxiety in relationships, or paradoxically to engage in the very patterns they fear, due to unconscious influences.

Personal ambitions Some people prioritize their career, personal ambitions, or individual growth over relationships, feeling that a committed relationship could interfere with their goals. They avoid serious relationships or fail to invest time and emotional energy into a relationship, leading to difficulties in forming deep, long-term commitments.

Societal Influences Societal pressures, such as expectations to marry, have children, or follow a traditional path, can cause resistance in individuals who feel that these expectations do not align with their personal values. This resistance to societal norms may manifest as a reluctance to commit, as they fear losing their individuality, or being constrained by conventional roles.

Fear of failure Some people are afraid of entering a relationship because they fear that it will ultimately fail, leading to pain, embarrassment, or disappointment. This fear of failure can be rooted in perfectionism, past breakups, or a general fear of uncertainty. This fear can lead to avoidance of relationships altogether or a hesitancy to fully invest in one, even when things are going rather well. Therefore, people who struggle with mature, committed relationships often face challenges related to fear of vulnerability, attachment issues, past trauma, or self-esteem concerns. These difficulties may prevent them from fully opening up to or committing to a partner, making it hard to form stable, long-term relationships. Overcoming these challenges often requires personal growth, emotional healing, and learning to navigate intimacy, trust, and communication in healthier ways.

APOLOGY OF NON-COMMITMENT

In our changing world, non-commitment has gained popularity. It probably has its own legitimacy, as the human being

is a polymorphous animal. Therefore we cannot conclude this part without giving it some space, in the form of a short apology for non-commitment, considered not as a short-coming but as a "way of being", an existential choice. Or even as a societal choice, insofar as such an attitude fits in well with today's prevailing libertarian pattern, where one tries to avoid as much as possible anything resembling obligation. It can as well be viewed as a realistic and practical way of avoiding the diverse problems we have mentioned at length. Even though the problem remains, to determine whether love without commitment can still be called "love", as this looks a bit like consumption. Dating site applications are a good illustration of this idea of consumption. We see the product and its description, we click or pass, and we ourselves are a product to be consumed or not.

This way of being together is congruent with the modern times, when people easily relocate or change their profession, where "anything is possible", where we are supposed to satisfy our desires and are almost obliged "to be happy". Committing therefore becomes obsolete, as it limits one's freedom. In a world where options seem endless, many people hesitate to commit out of fear that they might miss out on someone or something "better". Such flexibility provides a way to keep exploring potential connections without feeling tied down.

However, the archetypal Don Juan, or Donjuanism syndrome, is not new, and is periodically encountered in literature. It refers to behavior characterized by a relentless quest for amorous and sexual conquests, without any real emotional commitment. People with this syndrome constantly seek to

seduce, not out of a desire for a deeper relationship, but out of a need for validation, ego or to escape emotional intimacy. Each new relationship becomes a challenge, but once the "conquest" is achieved, interest rapidly wanes. This behavior may be attributed to a fear of commitment, a lack of self-confidence, a quest for power and control in relationships. Nevertheless, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus), Camus comes to Don Juan's rescue, asking: "Why should one love rarely in order to love much?" He makes a surprising argument, explaining, "There is no generous love except that which knows itself to be both fleeting and singular... It is precisely because he loves them with equal enthusiasm and each time with all himself, that he must repeat this gift and its deepening." It is as if a fleeting passion were no less profound and committed, quite the contrary.

Therefore, non-committed love relationships, whether short-term or involving multiple partners, can offer a unique form of emotional fulfillment and personal growth. For some individuals, these types of relationships allow for greater freedom and self-discovery. Rather than being bound by the expectations and obligations of long-term or unique commitment, non-committed relationships offer the chance to explore different facets of love, desire, and intimacy. They can also foster authenticity, as partners are free to be themselves without the pressure of meeting traditional relationship milestones and conditions. Additionally, non-committed love can promote emotional independence, teaching individuals how to find balance between personal needs and romantic connections. For some people, short-term or non-exclusive relationships can be

a healthy way to experience affection and companionship without the constraints of long-term commitment and exclusivity, allowing them to better understand their own emotional desires and boundaries while respecting those of others. Unless again romantic attachment actually does not have much sense for them, it just represents some side-comfort life provides, without any real meaning or significance. They have better things to do!

UNHEALTHY LOVE

When we observe certain relationships, romantic or others, we observe many types of behaviors that seem rather problematic, or "unhealthy". They are thus qualified because they lead to emotional, psychological, or even physical harm for one or both partners. An unhealthy relationship undermines the well-being, autonomy, and happiness of the individuals involved, generally causing stress, insecurity, depression and conflict. Through possessiveness and control, compulsive jealousy, ignorance of personal boundaries, emotional manipulations, strong insecurity, etc. Then we can ask ourselves to which extent this type of love with such characteristics can still be called love. All the more as love sometimes harbors the most sordid or villainous thoughts and actions. How many crimes or baseness have been committed in its name. Love seems to justify every behavior. Indeed, for some, it replaces everything, be it reason, morality, society or any of the other usual criteria for judgment. It seems to extend its glorifying, saving or embellishing aura over all kinds of intentions, thoughts and gestures, which would otherwise be devoid of legitimacy or interest.

THE DIFFICULTY OF THE ASSESSMENT

The question to determine if a relation qualifies as love or not, if it is a healthy relation or not, is often a rather difficult question to answer. There does not exist any established clear cut red line that distinguishes "healthy love" and "unhealthy love", "love" from "not love". In a way, since human beings are not perfect, any love relation contains some unhealthy tendency or pattern, there is always some form of excess or neurotic behavior in a given couple. Then, what is a "good" relation for someone will be considered "bad" by another, simply because individuals are not looking for the same thing in a relation, they are not fulfilled by the same partner's behavior. Actually, we often want from a partner something that we do not have, and not all individuals have the same needs and shortcomings. For example, some people expect a very emotional behavior from their lover, because they lack this emotional dimension, when others expect a more calm and settled person. Some people want their partner to be jealous, because they need to feel needed, when for some others this feels very bothersome.

Love is often intense and emotional, and people might consider intense emotions, like jealousy, possessiveness, or obsession, as signs of deep love, even when these emotions can be considered unhealthy and harmful. Love is often idealized, and some people think that love should overrule all obstacles, it should be beyond conflict or pain. This idealization leads to the belief that even when love is harmful, it is still valid because of the intensity of the feelings involved, a perspective that blurs the line between real love and dysfunctional love.

Love relationships often involve mixed emotions, positive experiences like affection and care can coexist with negative ones like control or manipulation, making it difficult to label the relationship as something entirely different from love. These conflicting experiences can create ambiguity, where the positive aspects of the relationship make it difficult to recognize or acknowledge the unhealthy elements. Or the judgment is determined by a sense of "adequate" proportion, the degree of intensity and the frequency of the problem, a very slippery slope, a very subjective assessment.

Emotional dependency and attachment can make people hold on to unhealthy relationships. When someone is deeply attached to a partner, even toxic behaviors may be rationalized or accepted as part of love, especially when they feel "they cannot live without this partner". Often, this unconditional attachment is used as a criteria for deep and true love, by the partners or by the observers.

All these reasons make it very difficult to objectively assess what is "true" love and what is pathological behavior, and even more to determine if this is really really love or not love. The partners in a relationship often have a different view than the outside observers, and the former can be satisfied in a way that will be quite surprising for the latter. Therefore, we observe some relations that look very strange to us, but seem to relatively function and last a long time. Of course, we can still observe that some relations are clearly unhealthy when one or both partners are in a visible way emotionally, mentally, or physically harmed. A priori, healthy relationships are built on mutual respect, trust, communication, and support,

whereas unhealthy relationships display a lack of these crucial elements. Lack of respect between partners, moral or physical abuse, neglect and lack of freedom, anxiety and fear, chronic dissatisfaction, are criteria that can still be used in a rather objective way. And in healthy love, joyful passions prevail over sad ones, the relationship contributes to the fulfillment of both partners, increasing their power to exist.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNHEALTHY LOVE

Deep emotional bonds and strong feelings for another person can in themselves be considered as distortions of love when they lack essential components like trust, respect, freedom and empathy, as they can cause harm to both partners and undermine the health of the relationship.

Let us now examine some characteristics of what can be qualified as unhealthy behavior in love.

What is more, although we are focusing this analysis on couple relationships, the problems we identify can just as easily apply to other types of relationship, particularly between parent and child.

The reader will notice that some of these characteristics might easily overlap.

Possessiveness Possessiveness arises when one partner treats the other as an object or possession rather than as an autonomous individual. The possessive person may seek to control the partner's actions, feelings, and relationships out of a fear of losing them or a desire to dominate them. Such a tendency stems from intense emotional attachment, insecurity, or fear of abandonment, which can be confused with love because it involves strong emotions and a desire to stay close to the other person. In principle, love respects the autonomy and freedom of the other person. Possessiveness is rooted in anxiety, fear, and control, which leads to emotional suffocation and a lack of respect for personal boundaries.

Jealousy Jealousy is the fear or suspicion of losing a loved one's attention, affection, or commitment to someone else. It can manifest as possessiveness, distrust, or attempts to control the partner's interactions with others. It arises when someone cares strongly about another person and fears losing them, which can feel like a form of love because it reflects emotional investment. While mild jealousy can be natural, even stimulating, excessive jealousy leads to mistrust, paranoia, and controlling behavior, it damages the relationship and causes emotional harm. It undermines the foundations of a healthy relationship, which normally implies trust, respect, and mutual understanding.

Control In relationships marked by control, one partner tries to dominate or unduly influence the other's thoughts, actions, and behaviors. This manifests through restrictions, manipulation, or coercion, often disguised as concern or love. A controlling partner might rationalize their behavior as protecting the other person, as caring, or keeping the relationship secure. The controller is the guarantor of the "good". From their biased perspective, controlling behavior can be seen as a way to consolidate the relationship or prevent problems for the other person. Control is the opposite of trust and respect, which are key components of healthy love. A person who controls their partner undermines their independence and sense of self, leading to emotional manipulation or abuse rather than true love.

We should specify that there are two types of control: "harsh" and "manipulative".

Harsh control involves direct, overt attempts to dominate or control a partner's actions, thoughts, or decisions; it is aggressive, forceful, or authoritarian. One partner makes demands and expects full compliance without considering the other's feelings or desires, there is no room for negotiation or compromise. They may use threats, intimidation, or even physical violence to maintain control over the other person. They employ shaming, name-calling, or belittling to exert dominance. They may forbid or restrict their partner from seeing friends or family, limiting their social interactions to keep them isolated and dependent.

Manipulative Control is subtle, covert, it involves using psychological tactics to influence or manipulate a partner's behavior, often without them realizing it. This type of control is deceptive and can be more difficult to detect. For example, they use emotional blackmail, such as threatening self-harm or playing the victim, in order to control the other person's actions. It can involve indirect criticism, silent treatment, passive-aggressive strategies, subtle blame or seduction, to get the partner to act in ways that align with their selfish desires. Or they act vulnerable, fragile or suffering, to keep their partner constantly attending to their needs, creating emotional dependency. Manipulative control erodes self-esteem and confidence over time, making the victim feel trapped, confused, constantly questioning their own reality. The subtlety of manipulative control often makes the victim feel responsible for the relationship problems.

Attachment In psychology, an unhealthy form of love is more accurately described as "attachment" rather than genuine love, because it does not involve the same intense, joyful or passionate emotions. Attachment implies dependence, a need for security, closeness and comfort, dependency, neediness or clinginess, a psychological hold, where one person's sense of self-worth is tied mainly to the relationship. It might look like love because it involves strong emotional bonds and a desire to be close to the other person, but it is rather based on fear of being alone or unmet psychological needs, which turns into dependency rather than mutual, selfless care. Healthy love allows for independence and growth, while unhealthy attachment becomes stifling and leads to emotional imbalance.

A typical example of attachment is when a parent says to a child, "You are the only thing in my life that matters.", "You are everything to me", or some other similar phrase. Admittedly, this is well-intentioned, as it intends to show love for the child. But, unconsciously, it puts terrible pressure on this child, who becomes the parent's exclusive psychological "support". And on the other hand, true or false, it shows a definite weakness in the parent, an existential void that they are desperately trying to fill with the child. Without realizing it, such a sentence conveys a sickly worldview and excessive anxiety to the child.

Neediness A "needy" person in a relationship is someone emotionally deprived, who requires an excessive amount of attention, presence, reassurance, comforting, emotional support, or validation from their partner. Their emotional dependency

provokes a feeling of imbalance in the relationship, as they rely heavily on their partner to meet most, if not all, of their emotional needs. They become anxious, depressed or angry when not receiving enough attention, they have a great fear of being abandoned or left alone, they tend to be overly clingy and possessive. For example, they frequently ask if their partner loves them, is happy with them, or will eternally stay with them, seeking ongoing confirmation of the relationship, with a strong addiction to "sweet words". Or they blame the partner with strong accusations such as "You don't really love me", "You never pay attention to me", "You're hiding something from me", "You don't appreciate me", "You're losing interest in me", etc.

Such a person relies on their partner to provide all their emotional support and validation, at the expense of their own independence or self-worth. They struggle with feelings of low self-esteem or insecurity, which drives this desire for constant reassurance. They are jealous when their partner spends time with other persons, feeling threatened or worried about losing them. This puts strain on a relationship, as the partner may feel overwhelmed, suffocated, or unable to meet all the emotional demands, a dynamic which over time leads to frustration and emotional exhaustion for both individuals.

Codependency In a codependent relationship, one or both partners become excessively reliant on each other for emotional support, self-esteem, and identity. Codependency involves a dynamic where one partner is overly controlling or nurturing, while the other is overly dependent or passive. It leads to a

loss of individuality, where both people sacrifice their own emotional needs for the sake of maintaining the relationship. This results in an imbalance of power and emotional exhaustion for both partners, as one becomes the "caretaker" and the other the "taker", a relation that easily becomes one of "perpetrator" and "victim"

Obsession Obsessive love occurs when one person becomes fixated on another to the point of emotional and psychological compulsion. The obsessive individual may idealize the other person, focus on them constantly, and feel consumed by thoughts of being in permanence with them. It is an unhealthy fixation that causes extreme behaviors like stalking, possessiveness, and an inability to cope with rejection. The person disregards the autonomy of the partner, and is driven by an unhealthy need for validation or control. A common aspect of the phenomenon is the person who can never be satisfied autonomously, who doesn't like themselves, and who can only find their "happiness" in the other, through the other. This is often accompanied by a certain "glorification" of this other, which of course alternates with disappointment and frustration when the other fails to live up to expectations.

Fusional relationship In a fusional relationship, individuals lose their individuality and seek to be constantly united, to the point of becoming emotionally dependent on each other. Partners tend to lose themselves in each other, wanting to share everything and be constantly together, to the point of sacrificing their individuality. This type of relationship leads to

difficulties, including a lack of autonomy, unrealistic expectations and mutual pressure from one each partner to fulfill all emotional needs. As in obsession, a strong emotional dependency is created, but fusion usually involves a dynamic of reciprocity. Fusion is more common in parental relationships, because during the first years of life, a certain amount of fusion is natural, even necessary for the child's proper emotional development. But as the child grows, it is crucial for the relationship to evolve towards greater autonomy, which is difficult for some parents, and some children.

Indeed, one of the classic issues related to identity porosity within the family is the lack of psychological separation between a parent and a child, an emotional fusion that is quite common. This separation is crucial to allow the child to build their own identity, autonomy, and emotional independence. However, we often notice an excessive, exclusive, and intrusive mindset in the use of possessive pronouns when referring to a person as "my son," "my daughter," or even "my baby," long after they have passed that biological stage. This possessive qualifier is an implicit expression of an eternal, absolute, and unconditional right. Sentences like : "I know my son, I am his mother" are rather common. When ironically enough, being the mother, or a father, is often an obstacle to knowing one's child. An illusion which is the source of many surprises and disappointments. Other popular fusional clichés include "You are everything to me" and "Whatever I do, it's for you." And, of course, there is the suspicion toward the childless person who dares to criticize motherly excesses: "You don't have any children; you cannot understand!" Even the father might

be challenged with, "You don't know him, you didn't carry him in your womb!".

From a slightly different angle, is filiation conceived as a prolongation of parental existence, a "need" often unconscious or not admitted by many parents, the child as "another self". For example when a son is attributed the same forename as his father. Or in some cultures, a patronymic name is used, rather than a family name, or along with it, a principle that is still commonly applied in some countries. The child thus feels pressured to match the image or values associated with his father's name, even if these don't align with his own values or desires. The usage of patronym emphasizes the filiation, which from a psychological standpoint limits the individuality of the child, who feels defined or reduced by their link with the father. And we should not forget that quite often, having a child is what provides a "real" social status to a person, as if the child was an added existential feature of a person.

As a result, the child struggles to differentiate their own thoughts, emotions, and desires from those of their parent; they don't truly know who they are outside of this relationship. There is an implicit pressure to conform to parental expectations, which hinders personal growth, stifles the development of autonomy, and leads to issues with self-esteem and relational difficulties. This is the concept of emotional incest, or psychic incest, where the parent-child relationship takes on an excessive, passionate, and overwhelming form, often to compensate for a "weak" relationship within the couple.

This phenomenon is commonly observed in single-parent families, where the remaining parent tries to establish an

"equal" relationship with the child, acting as a friend or even as a "couple." Once again, we see how the concept of love, however sincere, can be distorted, creating an unhealthy confusion of roles. This compels the child to meet the emotional needs of the adult, depriving them of their own space for growth. The child is burdened with concerns they are not equipped to handle, leading to a sense of excessive responsibility.

A milder form of fusional relation is a parent that thinks most existential issues and life experience in terms of the relation with the children, or a spouse that wants to think everything in terms of partnership, though a systematic "we". Psychologically, the idea of a separate "I" is either abandoned, denied or just rather forgotten. And the finitude of the relationship becomes unthinkable or too painful to consider. Therefore a compulsive attachment is produced, that hinders the development and freedom of all the members of the partnership, through a permanent implicit emotional pressure, generally unconscious. The nature and consequences of the phenomenon will appear more clearly only during some important shifts in concrete life changes, when one feels betrayed or abandoned by the other one, or strongly frustrated and disappointed, since they were totally unprepared for this new situation. In the meantime, they just pursue their routine of permanent intrusion and mutual preoccupation, amplifying anxiety, and losing focus on more substantial existential issues.

Love Addiction Love addiction is a condition where a person becomes addicted to the intense feeling of being in love, of-

ten permanently seeking out new relationships to experience the emotional highs associated with infatuation. They may cycle through intense, passionate relationships but have difficulty maintaining long-term, stable connections. They manifest emotional volatility, as the individual constantly chases the initial excitement of a new relationship without cultivating deeper emotional bonds. It prevents them from forming lasting, mature relationships and leads to feelings of emptiness or dissatisfaction once the "honeymoon phase" ends.

Unrequited Love Unrequited love occurs when one person has strong romantic feelings for another who does not return those feelings, either because they never had them, or moved on to something else. While in a lighter form this is a common experience, some individuals can become stuck in such a scheme, continuing to pursue the other person despite clear signs that the feelings are not mutual. Unrequited love leads to deep emotional pain, as the person experiencing it feels a sense of rejection, inadequacy, and longing, and cultivates this dreadful state of affairs. The desire for reciprocation may grow into obsession, causing the individual to ignore the reality of the situation. In some cases, this leads to unhealthy behaviors such as idealizing the other person or sacrificing one's own well-being in the hope of winning their affection. Over time, unrequited love erodes self-esteem and makes it difficult to move on, trapping the person in a cycle of emotional frustration and unfulfilled desire.

An acute case of such behavior is erotomania, a psychological condition in which an individual holds a delusional belief

that another person, typically someone of higher social status or a celebrity, is in love with them, despite clear evidence to the contrary. The person with erotomania believes that the object of their affection is secretly communicating feelings of love through subtle signals, such as gestures, body language, or the media, even when no such communication exists.

Persisting in unrequited love leads to emotional pain, obsession, and an inability to move on. The person neglects their own needs or becomes fixated on an unrealistic fantasy, preventing them from engaging in healthier relationships.

Although the problem of unrequited love can as well be examined from the perspective of the "other side", where it is as much of a problem, for example when a relationship starts dwindling for one of the partners. In love, we are not supposed to lie, says common morals. So when facing this "I love you", we can say "me too", because we don't want to hurt the other person's feelings, or maybe because we would like it to still be true. Out of gratitude, simply because it is always nice to be loved. Out of pity, because we still somewhat care for the other one, or for the elegance of the gesture, because we are carried away by the declaration we receive. Or because we refuse to accept the brutal break with reality that would be implied in answering "Well not me!", or even more softly, "I am afraid I do not feel the same way.". We lie because "the most dreadful torture a man can experience, I now know, is to be loved in spite of oneself. And it is a torment like no other, this guilt in innocence", writes Stefan Zweig in *Dangerous Pity*. We can feel guilty for not loving, or for not loving any

more. Such is the case with those relationships that wither away in silence, yet still speak volumes of truth.

Martyrdom In this form of unhealthy love, one partner consistently sacrifices their own needs, desires, and well-being for the sake of the relationship, often without receiving reciprocation. They see themselves as a "martyr" for the relationship, believing that suffering or enduring emotional neglect is a necessary part of love. Even if the person is rather content with this sacrifice, martyrdom generally leads in time to emotional burnout and resentment. It creates an imbalanced dynamic where one person is continually giving without receiving, which erodes self-worth and leads to long-term dissatisfaction.

Emotional Blackmail Emotional blackmail occurs when one partner manipulates the other by using guilt, fear, or threats to control their behavior. This can include menaces of self-harm, break-up, or making the partner feel responsible for their emotional problems. It is a form of manipulation and control that undermines trust and respect in the relationship. It places undue emotional pressure on the partner being manipulated, leading to feelings of entrapment, anxiety, and fear.

Transactional Love In transactional love, the relationship is based on an implicit or explicit exchange of benefits, such as financial support, social status, practical exchanges or material goods. One or both partners are primarily motivated by what they can gain from the relationship rather than by genuine

emotional connection. Transactional love lacks depth and can lead to exploitation or dependency. The relationship becomes more of a "deal" than a bond based on affection, trust, or mutual respect, and it often falls apart when the transactional benefits are no longer available. It is frequently characterized by anger or frustration, since the real expectations are not sufficiently satisfied.

Periodically, such arrangement occurs in older couples that lost any real mutual interest, and that remain together only for practical reasons, such as housing, financial stability, or to deal with the children. But it often leads to loneliness, resentment, boredom, or a feeling of emptiness, since all communication revolves around practical matters rather than emotional sharing or personal growth, leading to strained interactions or coldness. It may be a momentary functional solution, but often it may be unsustainable in the long term due to the lack of personal fulfillment.

For some people, a love relationship is an investment. When threatened with a break-up, they say "I gave you my best years", or even "I gave you everything", implying that it is now "pay back" time, capital and interest. The relationship was therefore a sacrifice, which must not have been made in vain. Clearly, they have worked hard, and there is nothing joyful about the whole thing. These people are actually objectifying themselves, and they don't want to be "thrown away" like a worn-out vacuum cleaner. The irony is that these people objectify themselves, only to criticize their partner for treating them like an object. Furthermore, they use the argument of years spent together as a reason to maintain the relationship,

when it could just as easily be the opposite: the argument of investment versus the argument of exhaustion. The logic of "business" love relationships is sometimes strange.

Narcissistic Love In this dynamic, a person may show affection or pursue a relationship primarily for their own self-esteem or ego validation, rather than out of true care for the other person. The narcissistic partner seeks admiration and attention, neglecting or manipulating the other partner's feelings and needs, as such a love is self-centered and imbalanced. Such an individual manipulates the relationship to maintain control or to feed their ego, leaving the other person globally neglected, or even in time "dump" them.

Conditional Love Conditional love occurs when one person only loves or shows affection toward another if certain conditions or expectations are met, such as physical appearance, success, or some specific behavior like obedience. Love is contingent on the fulfillment of these imperatives rather than unreserved affection. Conditional love creates emotional instability because it makes the other person feel like they are only valued for specific traits or achievements. This can lead to anxiety, low self-worth, and a lack of genuine emotional connection. These conditions are often linked to social expectations imposed by the person who imposes them on the partner, who is primarily concerned with projecting a "positive" image of their couple or their family.

Fear In fear-based love, the relationship is primarily driven by fear: fear of being alone, fear of rejection, or fear of losing the other person. This type of love is rooted in insecurity and anxiety, with one or both partners staying together out of a need for emotional security rather than genuine affection. Fear-based love prevents individuals from experiencing a healthy, balanced relationship. It leads to clinginess, dependence, and sometimes emotional manipulation to avoid abandonment. This dynamic stifles personal growth and emotional fulfillment.

Love-Bombing Love-bombing refers to the practice of showering someone with excessive attention, affection, compliment and gifts in the early stages of a relationship, through enthusiasm or to create emotional dependence. This often happens quickly and intensely, leading the recipient to feel overwhelmed by all this affection. Love-bombing, consciously or not, is a manipulative tactic used to seduce or gain control over someone. It creates an illusion of deep connection early on, but once the other person is emotionally invested, the love-bomber generally tends to interrupt his manifestation of "affection", leaving the other person confused and vulnerable. Love-bombing is hard to resist. The recipient feels obliged or overwhelmed, when facing this overflow of interest or love. Love-bombing drunks its victim, it numbs them, they don't dare to refuse. They only realize the effect or the trick when it stops. Although it might be a relief.

Romantic delusion Romantic delusion is a relationship where one partner is never satisfied due to an idealized view of romantic relationships, with unrealistic expectations. It describes a dynamic in which one person's romanticized and unattainable standards make it difficult for them to appreciate or engage with the realities of an actual relationship. It is often based on fantasies or media portrayals, movies or books. Thus the individual forms an emotional connection to an idealized version of the relationship rather than to the actual person or the real dynamics of the partnership. It evidently leads to constant dissatisfaction, as reality never measures up to their romantic ideals, since such an individual tends to idealize love and expect a perfect, flawless relationship, leaving them perpetually disappointed with their partner and the relationship itself. Such a delusion can as well prohibit someone of ever engaging in any relationship, since any potential candidate is quickly discredited. Sometimes, the romantic delusion is connected to a "first love" that remains an unrealized romance, but that carries on as a powerful and idealized phantasm. We can also entertain a romantic illusion about the family. This idealized vision is based on unrealistic expectations and idealized images that do not correspond to the reality of family dynamics. The individual imagines the family as a place of unconditional support, perfect harmony and unshakeable love, free from conflict and tension. In this scheme, the family is perceived as a protective refuge, an ultimate and constant source of happiness and security. For some, this is the case when life's ups and downs have disappointed them, and they hope to find comfort, a reason to live, an occupation. Obvi-

ously, this vision ignores or tries to ignore the real complexities of the family: the conflicts, personality differences, diverging interests, relationship difficulties, individual challenges faced by each member. Here too, the media, popular culture and social expectations contribute to this idealization. For example, films and advertisements frequently show families as united, smiling and problem-free, creating pressure to achieve this perfect model, or at least to hope for it.

Refuge Relational love can become an existential refuge, in the sense that a person seeks to find meaning in life or to soothe existential anxieties through a loving relationship, couple, family or even friends. The relationship becomes the space par excellence where the individual can feel accepted, understood and secure, thus escaping loneliness or existential emptiness, practical or psychological existential difficulties. This presents a number of risks. If a person sees this as their only source of meaning or bliss, they become dependent on the relationship for their well-being, leading to a loss of autonomy and unrealistic expectations of partners. Love as a refuge prevents the person from confronting their own anxieties and doing the personal work of reflecting and acting on their existence, so the relationship becomes an avoidance strategy. And when we seek refuge in a relationship, we tend to idealize the other person or the relationship itself, placing too much responsibility on this relationship to fill deep-seated gaps.

Animal Romance Some people entertain the idea of a "romantic" relationship with an animal. This type of relationship is based on a projection of human emotions onto the animal, creating a form of intense and idealized attachment. One of the most common aspects of the idealization of a relationship with an animal is the perception that the love an animal offers is unconditional, pure, and free of judgment. Unlike human relationships, which can be marked by conflicts or misunderstandings, animals are seen as loyal companions, offering constant and unwavering love and fidelity. Animals are objects of comfort. We wish humans were as convenient and comfortable, ready to satisfy our desires. A kind of slave at our disposal. They would so much like a love relationship to be like this, satisfying their needs, without rebellion or betrayal.

This romanticized view of the human-animal relationship makes the animal an emotional refuge, a silent confidant. People can idealize their pets by attributing human qualities to them: wisdom, compassion, or even a form of emotional intuition. The animal becomes an almost mythical figure, fulfilling emotional or affective needs that human relationships don't always meet. The animal is seen as perfect, free from human flaws, and this idealism creates a kind of emotional "romance." Some people feel such a strong connection with their pet that they believe they share a deep, almost "mystical" mutual understanding. They entertain the idea that the animal "knows" or "understands" their emotions without the need for words, which reinforces the illusion of a "powerful" bond. Of course, our dog spends his time observing us. In a sense, he knows us; he can sense our emotions from the way

we talk, move, even smell. But what he perceives is limited to what concerns him directly, to what falls within his rather limited "cognitive" field. Certainly, animals express emotions or behaviors that can be interpreted as affection or attachment. There is a perceptible interaction and reciprocity in the communication between a human being and an animal, whether in gestures, looks or behavior. But we're a long way from qualifying this as love in the human sense of the term.

Often, animals are perceived as loving their owners without conditions or judgment. This form of relationship, free of criticism or social expectations, is particularly appealing to those seeking relief from the tensions or disappointments that human relationships can bring. This bond is idealized as simple and uncomplicated, in contrast to the complexity of human relationships. And it offers simple compensation for our disenchantment with the world.

Certainly, animals have feelings and instincts, but the human conception of love is not something an animal can truly offer, especially because it lacks real freedom—its relationship with the "owner" is instinctual and largely submissive. Such enthusiasm often reveals the relational and existential shortcomings of the person, an issue commonly seen among older individuals, who are more affected by loneliness or seeking emotional stability after a tumultuous or disappointing life.

For some, the animal represents an extension of family life, a "member" in their own right. Those who have had children or spouses may find in their pet a form of familial love that they no longer receive as intensely from their human family. In this sense, "animal romance" can be justified by the fact

that the animal serves a quasi-therapeutic function: it helps reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, while giving structure and meaning to life.

The overinvestment in animal relationships is a current phenomenon that is growing immensely, a sign of the times, perhaps. The animal becomes a being in its own right, just as a human. Some people take anthropomorphism to its extreme, for example when their dog is adorned with "pretty" clothes, expensive jewelry, or even consults a dog psychologist. Certainly, animal relationships possess therapeutic virtues, which the rapidly growing field of "animal-assisted therapy" utilizes in places like hospitals or with the elderly, aiming to improve the well-being of vulnerable and dependent individuals. However, let's review the reasons why the concept of "love" in this context can be criticized.

Love involves mutual challenge, which is absent in a romance with an animal. Taking care of another living being can indeed be a real challenge for some people, such as those suffering from mental health issues or children whose parents give them a pet to foster responsibility. It's true that training a dog can also represent a challenge: the owner must show authority, consistency, and perseverance in this endeavor. Without forgetting the empathy needed to communicate with the animal. However, this necessary discipline is often forgotten or even denied, deemed ungrateful by owners who primarily seek to be loved by their four-legged companions and to please them, and especially to please themselves. Strangely, when they go out, they prefer the ease of the leash, which is highly symbolic of the relationship with the animal, which is thus

under control. And the animal thus becomes a receptacle for our "affection". A relationship filled with "cuddles," bringing comfort and sweetness, without pushing us outside our comfort zone.

Love requires substantial communication between beings, which again is absent here. Genuine communication with animals remains a matter of human projection and fantasy. We imagine that the animal "understands us." The animal feels and communicates certain things in its own way, but we cannot reasonably claim that it truly understands us.

Love implies the freedom of both parties; however, our pet, even if domesticated, is still driven by its instincts and is not truly free. Here again, the relationship is tinged with fantasies and projections: we imagine that the animal freely offers us its love, when in reality it licks the hand that shelters and feeds it, as it is entirely dependent. Horses, for instance, often evoke great enthusiasm from their owners, and this animal may indeed have its own personality. Yet, this doesn't equate to a genuine reciprocal relationship; the horse remains constantly at the owner's disposal for walks or competition. We can be a "friend" of horses, of course, but the horse will never be really a friend. Some people use animals to compete in dressage, beauty, agility or speed contests, thus enhancing their image and pleasing their narcissism. We are delighted when someone compliments our dog or cat: it is so beautiful, cute, affectionate, original or obedient. And some people adorn their pet, as if an animal could appreciate jewels, frills or a fancy trimming. Nevertheless, they will claim that this is called "love".

Love forces us to expose our vulnerability, to open ourselves to the other, to reveal our flaws and weaknesses, risking rejection. The unconditional love we attribute to the animal leads us to overlook this dimension of vulnerability. "My dog loves me as I am", implying that all humans should do the same! But a dog does not have the liberty of thinking critically, he only likes or does not like what concerns him, the rest does not really matter.. Genuine love involves a risk of rejection, which we attempt to avoid through a fusion-like relationship with an animal. People often say, after the death of a pet: "I'll never get another cat; it hurts too much when they're gone." Such statements may suggest that the person loved their animal to the point of vulnerability. In reality, they reflect an attachment, a dependency on the animal relationship, rather objectified, and a refusal to accept our own finitude, that of humans and animals alike.

Thus, while animal relationships have their benefits, the "animal romance" is merely a mirage that masks a profound existential difficulty, perhaps revealing a significant relational impotence, often related to the fear of rejection and refusal of vulnerability. This relationship involves the caring dimension inherent in love, as the pet owner learns to recognize and meet their companion's needs, ensuring its survival and well-being. It forces the owner to step outside themselves in favor of another living being for whom they are responsible. However, such an endeavor remains limited on an existential level. And this doesn't even take into account animals kept in cages, like canaries or reptiles, which have very little interaction with humans, even if the owner is deeply attached to their pet.

Superficial Friendships Aristotle proposed a classification of different types of friendship based on the motives and nature of the relationship. He identified three main types of friendship, each founded on specific criteria: utility, pleasure, and virtue. In friendships based on utility, the relationship is grounded in the benefits or interests each person gains from it. People are friends because they find mutual advantages, whether material, social, or otherwise, which is common in professional or business relationships. According to Aristotle, this type of friendship is short-lived because it lasts only as long as the utility persists, and without that, it collapses. In friendships based on pleasure, the connection comes from shared activities, entertainment, or simply the joy of being together. This type of friendship is also fragile and temporary: it lasts as long as the pleasure is mutual but fades when interests or sources of enjoyment change, or when any difficulties arise.

The most noble and enduring form of friendship, according to Aristotle, is founded on virtue. In this case, both people appreciate each other for who they are, for their moral qualities, and for shared values. These friends come together out of a love for goodness itself, not for superficial reasons. This form of friendship is rare, as it requires that both individuals have morally good character and are committed to developing virtue, which involves mutual challenge rather than complacency. This type of friendship is stable, lasting, and fulfilling because it is based on deep and unchanging values, marked by mutual respect and genuine goodwill. However, it takes time to develop and is demanding. It may even begin with a more superficial connection at first.

Thus, many friendships are superficial and lack depth. In the age of social media, friendships are often based on light interactions or surface-level interest, without true emotional connection or support. This type of relationship lacks authenticity and doesn't offer the comfort or intimacy that a real friendship should provide; it should simply be light and pleasant. There is often a hidden personal interest, as friends "use" each other for specific, practical, or psychological advantages, making the friendship a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Some closed friendships also reinforce preconceived ideas or group behaviors that are not constructive, limiting openness and social diversity, and encouraging favoritism. There can also be implicit pressure to conform to the norms or expectations of the friend group, which limits an individual's ability to express differences or pursue their own interests, for fear of being rejected or misunderstood by their friends.

Complacency Regularly, partners or diverse partners in relationships start to feel very settled down, be it the couple or a family. The initial intensity and excitement is gone, the relationship turns into routine, affection or passion have vanished. At this stage, people tend to take the other one for granted, they become "part of the furniture" for each other, or even cumbersome. They stop expressing gratitude to each other, they do not make efforts to spend time together or organize any new activities to engage in, they do not engage into any substantial dialogue anymore, they are not really interested in each other, etc. They of course stop challenging each other, considering each other solely as a "comfort pillow". Conflicts

are avoided for this same reason, in order not to disturb an established order, thus the dynamic becomes predictable and stagnant. At this point they might even assume that the relationship will last forever and nothing will change, it is a given. Although most likely, because of the absence of mutual interest, and the lack of value granted to the other person, irritation will easily manifest, as such a « balance » is very fragile.

THE NON-NECESSITY OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Numerous people think it is obvious that everyone needs to have a romantic relationship in order for their life to be fulfilled. Especially for those who are convinced that their own personal life could not be satisfying without such a partner, and project this powerful feeling on others. Yet, some human beings do not need or seek romantic love, and this remains rather legitimate. Human beings have diverse emotional and relational needs, and for some, romantic love may not play a significant role in their sense of fulfillment or happiness.

There are several explanations for such a behavior or tendency.

Aromanticism Aromanticism is a psychological orientation where a person does not experience romantic attraction to a person. Those individuals may still form close relationships with others, or even engage in sexual relationships, but they do not feel the need for or desire romantic love in the conventional sense. Aromantic people prioritize other types of connections, such as friendships, family bonds, or intellectual connections, and they can live fulfilling, meaningful lives without romantic love.

Alternative Personal Fulfillment Some individuals may find fulfillment through other forms of love or engagement. For

example friendship, which can also provide emotional closeness, support, and intimacy. Passion or career, when they feel deeply fulfilled by their work, creative endeavors, service to others, pursuit of knowledge, or hobbies, finding purpose and meaning in their favorite activity. Self-love and independence, when they prioritize their autonomy and self-care, feeling content and whole by themselves, without needing a love affair. They enjoy their own private company and the pleasant freedom it provides, in order to explore the means of their personal growth, self-improve, lead a peaceful and interesting life, and find happiness, without any external commitment.

Cultural or Personal Beliefs In some cultures or for some individuals, romantic love is not seen as essential to a fulfilled life. Instead, love for family, for a community, or for spiritual devotion may take precedence. As well, they forgo romantic relationships due to personal values, such as a commitment to celibacy, religious or spiritual beliefs, or simply preferring to live independently.

Fear of Pain Some people may avoid romantic love due to a fear of vulnerability, of the existential turmoil involved in such a relationship, of emotional pain, or past trauma. They may have experienced heartbreak, betrayal, or emotional hurt in the past, and they prefer to avoid romantic relationships to protect themselves from potential pain. While this may not mean they do not desire love, they choose to distance themselves from romantic relationships as a coping mechanism.

Focus on non-romantic love Many people place a higher value on platonic or familial love, which can offer deep emotional fulfillment. Close friendships, family ties, and community involvement can provide the sense of connection, support, and intimacy that others find in romantic relationships. They prefer the stability and comfort of these non-romantic relationships and find them more satisfying. For them, meeting a sexual partner is simply the means to establish a family and have children.

Temporary Phases of Life Some people do not need or seek romantic love during certain phases of their life, such as when they are focused on personal growth, a particular project, their career development, or when they are healing from past relationships. This can be a temporary state, where romantic love is not a priority, though it may become important again later in life.

Asexuality Asexual individuals may not feel sexual attraction to others, and while some of them nevertheless experience romantic attraction, others do not. For aromantic asexuals, the lack of desire for both sexual and romantic relationships is a natural and fulfilling way to live. These individuals may form deep relationships based on friendship, intellectual affinities, or shared activities, without the need for romantic involvement.

Satisfaction with Solitude Some individuals simply enjoy their solitude and find contentment in living alone or with minimal

emotional ties. These people feel fulfilled in their lives without seeking romantic connections, and they do not feel lonely or incomplete without such a partner. The preference for solitude is not necessarily a sign of general emotional detachment or a psychological problem, since it can be a deliberate and healthy choice for those who thrive on independence.

Nonetheless, there are still questions to be asked about this somewhat unusual "aromanticism". Has such a person really found an alternative fulfillment? Can they claim to be thus satisfied, when those around them perceive loneliness and frustration in their way of being? Is this non-necessity the expression of a legitimate desire, or just a last resort that doesn't say its name? No doubt we need to take a closer look at each situation on a case-by-case basis. And even if it were a stopgap or a last resort, a form or other of compensation for an existential disorder, would that deprive this way of being of its own legitimacy?

OBSTACLES TO LOVE

Often, when people talk about love, their concern is rooted more in the desire to "be loved" than in the action and emotion of "loving" itself. They often neglect this difference either by not thinking about it, or by conflating both concepts, active and passive, as if they were inseparable. But when we investigate the phenomenon with them, it is visible that their concept of love is more about receiving than about giving, a rather common feature of "love enthusiasts".

In order to understand their choice, their preference, we should first examine why love is sometimes difficult, why for this reason it becomes arduous or even impossible for certain individuals. As a starting point, we can state the general idea that, although love is a very natural passion, there are many psychological and existential difficulties involved in exercising it, that are rooted in human fears and insecurities. Loving someone requires facing emotional vulnerability, practicing self-awareness, and developing the ability to navigate internal conflicts, all of which can feel rather daunting. This analysis applies actually to all forms of love, not just romantic love.

Let us now identify the primary psychological and existential challenges involved in the love engagement, in the risk-taking that such a gesture represents.

INHIBITIONS

Fear of Vulnerability Love requires opening oneself up emotionally, which can feel risky. Vulnerability exposes people to the possibility of rejection, betrayal, or abandonment, which are deeply rooted fears for many. The fear of being hurt can cause individuals to guard themselves psychologically, preventing them from fully giving or receiving love. At its core, love involves uncertainty. By choosing to love, people confront the unpredictability of life, knowing that love might change, fade, or end. This existential uncertainty can make love feel fragile and risky, especially when considering the impermanence of relationships, a common phenomenon today.

Fear of Rejection Many people fear that if their true selves are unveiled in a relationship, they won't be accepted, or they will be repudiated. This can stem from past experiences of rejection, or a personal feeling of inadequacy, which in their mind makes them unlovable. Furthermore, the pain of past emotional wounds can make it hard to trust or love fully, as the fear of experiencing rejection again feels overwhelming. Loving someone is a deep affirmation of one's desire to connect, but there is always the fear that this connection may not be reciprocated or maintained. But loneliness after a rejection is actually more painful, because of the comparison effect. This highlights a permanent human anxiety about loneliness and isolation, which is at the heart of existential dilemmas about love. Therefore it is safer not to risk exposure through the love gesture. Although paradoxically, if the wound comes from the

relationship, it is also through the relationship that it can heal. The idea is counter-intuitive, since the natural tendency is to withdraw and protect ourselves after a wound. The person who feels wounded undoubtedly relies on isolation and time to heal, to forget. A passive posture that often only makes the situation worse, as you brood, dwell on bitterness and make yourself suffer, without being able to forget. But to really turn the page, it is better to take new risks, even if it means "losing" again. Because it is the freedom of action that sets us free.

Insecurity People with low self-esteem or a poor sense of self-worth may struggle to love because they don't believe they are worthy of being loved or that their love is valuable. This can lead to an internal conflict where they crave connection but push it away, fearing they'll never be good enough. The question of worthiness in love brings up larger existential issues about identity and the human condition. Feeling unworthy of love can stem from a deeper existential fear that life itself is meaningless, or that one's existence is insufficient, thus making it hard to fully embrace the act of loving another.

Loss of Control Love involves a surrender of self-control, which is redhibitory for people who need predictability and certainty in their lives. Being in love means being open to the influence of another person, to decenter on them, which can feel destabilizing or threatening to one's sense of independence and control. On an existential level, love forces individuals to confront the unpredictable nature of human relationships and the uncontrollable aspects of life, such as change,

finitude, and time. This loss of control is a reminder of the limits of human autonomy and can intensify our anxiety about life's unpredictability.

Fear of Loss The potential for loss, whether through death, separation, or the natural end of a relationship, make people hesitant to love fully. This fear of future grief or possible abandonment thus leads to emotional withdrawal, making it hard to fully commit to a loving relationship. Love brings people face to face with mortality, with a "depressing" sense of finitude. The realization that every loving relationship will eventually end, whether through death or separation, underscores the transient nature of life. This existential awareness can make love seem both precious and terrifying, as it reminds us of our ultimate vulnerability to loss.

Loving Unconditionally Contrary to a common illusion, to a complacent belief, human beings naturally tend to love conditionally: we generally await "something" from the loved one, not always consciously. For example, we expect reciprocity, we seek validation through love, we seek psychological and material security. A parent often expects respect, gratitude and recognition from his children. Thus, true unconditional love, loving without expecting absolutely nothing in return, is difficult or impossible to achieve, because it requires selflessness, consciousness, patience, and a great psychological maturity. Unconditional love confronts the ego and forces individuals to transcend self-interest. It raises existential questions about the nature of human relations and whether it's possible

to love the other purely for its own sake, as a mere "giving", without needing any fulfillment for oneself. This challenge of transcending one's ego is a core existential struggle in love, a limit that will periodically impose itself and challenge our "love". That is why some people claim that the concept of "agape", pure love, only befits a divine being.

Fear of Authenticity Love requires intimacy and authenticity, which means being open about one's true thoughts, feelings, and desires. However, people often fear that if they reveal their authentic selves, they will not be accepted or loved. This fear of intimacy can cause individuals to keep a psychological distance, hindering the development of significant, meaningful love. Authenticity in love demands confronting the truth of who one is, which can be existentially unsettling, already in the relationship to oneself. Love reveals and amplifies not only the best but also the worst parts of ourselves. This confrontation with one's full identity, both light and shadow, is a source of existential discomfort, as it forces one to grapple with self-acceptance and the embarrassing nature of human imperfection.

Lack of Self-Love Loving others can be difficult if a person doesn't love themselves. People who feel unworthy may not have developed the necessary self-compassion or self-acceptance to fully embrace love, both in receiving it and in offering it to others. They often believe they don't have enough or nothing to give because they do not see their own value.

Love is about giving, but we don't believe we can give anything if we do not already appreciate ourselves.

Autonomy Loving someone requires combining the desire for closeness with the need for personal freedom. Some individuals struggle with this tension, either losing themselves in the relationship or keeping too much emotional distance in order to preserve their autonomy. This opposition mirrors the larger existential tension between the self and the other. In love, individuals must navigate the challenge of maintaining their own identity while deeply connecting with another. This reflects the general human struggle with individuation versus union, self and society, which is at the heart of existential dilemmas about love and relationships. Absurdity of Love On a broader existential level, love brings up questions about the meaning of life itself. Some may struggle to love because they question the point of love in a world where everything is transient. The fear that love, like life, might not have a lasting or meaningful impact can create existential despair or nihilism, making it difficult to embrace love as a meaningful pursuit. Love therefore looks like "a business that doesn't cover its costs", a vain effort, in view of all the difficulties we have to face without any real "reward".

Desire for Permanence People often seek permanence through love, a desire for eternity, hoping that it will provide them with a lasting sense of purpose, happiness or fulfillment. However, love, like all things in life, is fragile and impermanent. This existential confrontation with the fleeting nature of all things

can lead to anxiety, as people realize that love cannot provide the eternal security or the lasting meaning they seek. Engaging themselves in love can therefore only constitute a source of disappointment and pain.

Inertia Inertia refers to a tendency to remain in a current state or resist change due to a lack of motivation or energy to take action. In the context of love and relationships, "emotional inertia" leads to a reluctance to actively engage in love or seek out emotional connections, to back away from passion. Such a passive attitude can be a powerful factor in someone's reluctance to love, as it fosters emotional and behavioral stagnation. Love brings with it a degree of uncertainty, including the possibility of emotional highs and lows, thus it threatens the stability one finds in their current emotional or lifestyle patterns, and this stability "has to be protected".

This resistance to change, combined with a desire for comfort and predictability, leads to passivity, making it difficult for someone to actively engage in love or pursue a relationship. This can manifest as waiting for the "right moment" to engage in love, constantly looking for the "right" person, a form of perfectionism, or simply avoiding making emotional efforts, which leads to missed opportunities for new connection, or the simple abandonment of an ongoing relationship. Overcoming inertia requires a renewed awareness, a deliberate effort to break out of customary patterns, to embrace emotional risks, and to invest in the dynamic nature of relationships.

Fear of abandonment The fear of abandonment is a significant factor that causes people to avoid love. It often stems from past emotional pain, attachment issues, or a desire to protect oneself from the vulnerability and uncertainty that love entails. It reveals difficulties with self-esteem and trust, trusting oneself and trusting others. Such people choose psychological self-preservation over the risk of vulnerability and suffering. They either cling to relationships out of fear of losing them, or they avoid getting close to people to prevent the pain of separation. They may avoid love altogether because they are convinced it will inevitably end in disappointment or abandonment. Individuals with a fear of abandonment might "self-sabotage" relationships, either by pushing people away or by fleeing, withdrawing emotionally before they get too attached, believing that if they don't let themselves be trapped in love, they can avoid suffering.

THE DESIRE TO BE LOVED

Let us now examine the different reasons why numerous people seek more to be loved rather than loving itself.

Validation and Self-Worth For many, being loved provides the ultimate feeling of validation. It reassures them of their value and reinforces their self esteem, which can be tied to deeper insecurities or feelings of inadequacy. Instead of focusing on giving love, which is more risky, where they must confront the anguish of self doubt, they "beg" others for proof of their love, as a way to feel complete or worthy. When individuals struggle with self-worth, they feel unworthy of giving love or that their love isn't valuable. As a result, they seek love from others to compensate for their internal sense of inadequacy, finding it easier and more natural to focus on demanding and receiving love, rather than offering it. They may crave love to prove to themselves that they are "lovable", worthy of love, since they don't truly believe in their own worth and do not love themselves.

Fear of Rejection The excessive desire to be loved often stems from a fear of rejection or abandonment. Love is always endowed with fear, it is inescapable, since there's an attachment and therefore an anxiety. But when this fear dominates, the need for love becomes more about securing affection, approval, and security from partners rather than cultivating a loving connection. Sometimes, past traumas or unresolved emotional issues make it difficult for someone to open up and love freely.

They may have been hurt in previous relationships, romantic, familial, or platonic, which creates emotional barriers. These individuals long to be loved to heal their wounds and struggle to extend their love outward. If someone feels unworthy of love, they fear that if they try to love someone, they will be rejected or abandoned. This prevents them from fully opening up or expressing love, as they assume others will not accept them as they are, so they focus on getting love from others, hoping it will soothe their fears.

Conditional Love People may equate love with how others consider them, expecting that love means being treated a certain way. In this case, love becomes more about their own needs being met, rather than a mutual exchange or selfless caring for a partner. They have a rather reductionist conception of love, "business" like. And when someone feels unworthy of real love, they often see love as something conditional, some type of recognition they must earn through achievements, appearance, or pleasing others. As a result, they fixate on being loved by finding a way to be useful, appreciated, accepted. Obviously, he has trouble with the concept of unconditional love, because in his mind, nothing is free.

Emotional Dependence For some, the craving to be loved reflects emotional dependence. They rely on others to fulfill emotional needs, often because they have difficulty nurturing themselves or fostering internal security. The focus becomes "Who will love me?", "Do they really love me?", rather than "How can I give love?".

Cultural and Social Influences Many societies and cultures idealize the notion of being loved as a measure of success or happiness, loved by someone or loved by everyone. It is all about being popular, a trend greatly amplified by social media. This can create pressure to seek love from others rather than cultivating the ability to love. The emphasis is mainly on "attracting love", be it romantic, familial, or social, rather than learning how to love deeply or unconditionally. The issue is all about pleasing, rather than giving.

Control Loving someone deeply involves giving up a degree of control, as emotions and connections can be unpredictable, we become dependent. Some people prefer to seek love from others rather than give it, because being loved allows them to feel more in control. They practice seduction to excess, in various forms, as a relational strategy.

Avoidance of Vulnerability Loving someone can feel risky, as it implies vulnerability, openness, and sacrifice. Wanting to be loved feels safer because it places responsibility on the other person, who must "initiate affection" and "take the risk", while avoiding the potential pain or vulnerability that comes with giving love, such as the danger of rejection. As well, people who have been hurt in the past, who have not really experienced being-loved, or do not remember it, who therefore fear rejection, will hesitate to fully love someone, focusing instead on being loved as a safer emotional stance. Love requires opening oneself up to another person, which can feel risky. If someone believes they are unworthy of it,

they guard themselves against intimacy or vulnerability, assuming that any love they give will not be reciprocated. This emotional distance prevents them from engaging fully in love, leading them to seek safety in being loved instead.

Emotional immaturity Some people have not learned how to love in a healthy, selfless way. They may not have had role models who demonstrated what it means to love unconditionally or how to build deep, meaningful connections. As a result, they focus more on what they can get from love rather than what they can give, a rather infantile posture, an ungenerous, rather primitive and infantile attitude. The interest in understanding others, the pleasure of caring for them, the capacity for abnegation, are foreign to them.

Narcissism In some cases, individuals struggle to love because they are primarily focused on their own needs and desires, they are obsessed with themselves. Narcissistic tendencies lead to viewing relationships as opportunities for validation, recognition and admiration, rather than as opportunities for mutual affection and care. But we should remember that such people, who ostentatiously flaunt their greatness, have in general a terrible self-conception, do not love themselves, and therefore need to be loved, even though they belittle or quickly reject the person who falls into their manipulative trap.

Mistrust Trust is fundamental to love, and anxious people, with trust issues, find it hard to really love. They fear that giving love will lead to betrayal or disappointment, so they

seek love from others as a way to secure emotional safety rather than exposing and risking their vulnerability. Actually, they do not trust themselves, they do not value their own person, as much as they do not trust others.

Self-Sabotage Those who struggle with feelings of unworthiness often want to be loved, desperately. But they unconsciously sabotage their ability to receive love and of course to give love. They push people away or avoid emotional intimacy because they believe that, deep down, they don't "deserve" love, which reinforces a cycle of loneliness and insecurity. And they get frustrated, angry or depressed for not receiving the love they actually need, the love they hope for, the love they think they should get, without necessarily admitting it to themselves, an attitude that makes them even less lovable, in a self-destructive way. Thus some people, children or adults, display a rather aggressive attitude, in order to attract attention and love, but their behavior has the opposite effect. What is more, the people around them often don't understand the deep-seated motivation that drives them: a strong desire to be loved, hidden behind a posture of rejection.

THE SKILL OF BEING LOVED

Receiving love is not always obvious or a given, being loved often requires inner work, in order to allow others to love us. But some people seem to be "talented" at ignoring, spurning or rejecting love, without realizing it. The main reason is often

that they struggle to believe that they are "lovable", therefore they misunderstand the "language" of love, or they are deaf to it. The main symptoms they display are for example to dismiss compliments or positive gestures, to distrust affection or the expression of this affection, to sabotage closeness through unwelcoming behavior. Being loved requires the skill of tolerating intimacy, trusting another's gaze and gestures, and not folding into self-doubt. It takes a certain psychological maturity and inner peacefulness to receive love without shrinking, trying to control, or running away. We can infer that in order to be loved, we should believe we are worthy of love, but for some persons, such a belief does not always come naturally.

Another condition for being loved is to let ourselves be seen in our reality, as we are, with our limits and shortcomings, without faking of pretending, what can be called humility. Because love is not about being admired, although we expect it sometimes as a normal feature in the eyes of our "other". But it is primarily to accept to be "seen", to be "known". And to be understood in a way that might not correspond exactly to the way we want to be understood. This implies sharing vulnerability without shame, not performing but being present, allowing ourselves to be witnessed, not necessarily curated. Such a behavior requires "emotional skill", an adequate attitude, in order to let someone enter our world without "managing" or controlling their perception of our person.

A common obstacle is the natural temptation to "distort" the love we receive, to misinterpret its expression. Unconsciously, we project a lot, our subjectivity takes its toll. If someone is suspicious about love, for lack of much positive ex-

perience of it, they may for example interpret care as control, see tenderness as manipulation or overstepping, and therefore confuse distance with safety. Being loved often means unlearning old patterns and retraining our emotional reflexes, refraining some natural reflexes, it is neither passive nor objective. We need discernment and courage to receive love as it is, not as our "history" perceives it.

One element which is often overlooked, is that in some way we shape how others love us. The fashion in which we behave "teaches" others how to treat us. A kind of expectable phenomenon, since love makes one sensitive to the behavior of the person they love. We adapt to the other, in order to love them "better". For example, we should remember that if we reject help, as it is the tendency for certain "lovers", the others will stop offering it, which can be a source of disappointment. For this, we have to be more flexible, more open to other's initiative, even if they seem initially awkward and uncomfortable to us. As well, if we don't express our needs, if we are too proud or too meek for this, others may not even try to meet them, as they do not even know or will forget. Therefore, being loved involves the skill of making space for others' care, even inviting them to do so, and responding positively instead of deflecting, although obviously setting boundaries so that let real love, not an abusive one, is realized.

Lastly, we should know that "love language" is a skill. Being loved means we must recognize how we are being loved, even if it does not correspond to our preferred or ideal form, as it can take strange forms or limited forms. If only because the others are different from us, or they are "clumsy" on this topic. So

we have to be able to respond to what reaches us, understand it as much as possible, and remain open when someone loves us in a way unfamiliar to us. This can be called "emotional literacy", another form of skill.

Love is not just given, as it is received, interpreted, and allowed. Therefore, to be loved is not just a blessing, it is a practice.

EVOLVING THROUGH LOVE

PLATO'S CONCEPTION

Plato's idea of love is explored primarily in his dialogue, the *Symposium*, where he presents a "gradation of love", developed by Diotima, the feminine tutor of Socrates. Ironically, she suspects that Socrates, in spite of his wisdom, lacks a decent understanding of love. She challenges him to rethink his views on the matter, and to ascend from a limited perspective of physical attraction to a more profound and transcendent understanding of love as a force for spiritual and intellectual growth.

Here is a summary of the stages in Plato's gradation of love:

Physical Attraction (Love of a Single Body) At the most basic level, love begins with the attraction to a beautiful body. This form of love is driven by physical desire and sensual pleasure. At this stage, the individual is focused on the immediate, pleasant aspects of love and beauty.

Love of All Beautiful Bodies As the lover matures, they begin to recognize that physical beauty is not unique to one person. This realization allows them to appreciate the beauty in many

bodies, not just one. This stage encourages a broader appreciation of physical beauty in itself, beyond the individual.

Love of the Soul Moving beyond the physical, the next stage involves loving the soul rather than the body. At this point, love becomes more focused on character, virtue, and the qualities of a person's inner self, such as their intellect, values, and moral beauty. This is a deeper and more meaningful connection.

Love of Practices and Institutions As one's understanding of love continues to evolve, the next step is to love noble practices, values, and institutions that contribute to the common good. This stage is about appreciating the beauty in actions, justice, and virtuous living, rather than in individual people.

Love of Knowledge The next stage in the gradation of love is the love of knowledge and wisdom, which is in fact the original meaning of the term philosophy. This is where love becomes more intellectual and less empirical, as the individual seeks to understand universal truths, ideas, and principles that underpin reality.

Love the Divine At the highest level, love transcends all physical, concrete and personal attachments and is directed toward the "Form of Beauty" itself. This is an abstract, eternal, and unchanging ideal of beauty that exists beyond the material world. According to Plato, this is the purest form of love, as it involves contemplating the divine, the true essence of beauty,

wisdom, and truth, which ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of reality, as for him Beauty is one of the most fundamental concepts, along with the Good and Truth.

A CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION

The principle of progress in love, as outlined by Plato in his "Ladder of love", can be more or less applied to modern relationships and personal development in several ways. Though Plato's framework was rooted in metaphysical and philosophical ideals, the core idea of "evolving love" from physical attraction to higher, more meaningful forms of connection remains relevant today.

Here is how this progression can be understood in contemporary terms.

Physical attraction and initial chemistry In modern relationships, love often begins with physical attraction and the excitement of "romantic chemistry". This corresponds to Plato's first stage of being drawn to the beauty of a single body. In the early stages of a relationship, people are often focused on physical appearance, compatibility, and the immediate emotions they feel for someone. This is commonly referred to as the "honeymoon phase," where initial attraction is strong but often shallow. While important, physical attraction and immediate perception do not sustain in themselves a long-term relationship.

Appreciation of broader qualities As a relationship is nurtured and deepens, partners begin to appreciate not just the physical attributes but also the personality traits and qualities of each other. This stage involves developing a connection based on shared interests and values, in spite of their respective dif-

ferences, and emotional compatibility. At this point, one realizes that beauty is not just about physical appearance but includes emotional quality, the personality and intellectual connections, as they develop trust, respect and mutual goals.

Emotional intimacy In any relationship, emotional intimacy is crucial to long-term success. This stage may correspond to Plato's concept of loving the soul rather than the body. In modern terms, it refers to a psychological proximity, an open and authentic rapport, which involves trying to understand the other person's inner self, be it their fears, dreams or values. This means practicing dialogue, and ensuring mutual support for personal and emotional growth. This stage reflects the transition from superficial attraction to a more meaningful, lasting bond.

Shared Values and Life Goals An important aspect of a lasting relationship is the alignment of ideals, goals, and practices. This relates to Plato's stage of loving "noble practices" or "institutions". In modern terms, this could involve shared beliefs about family, career, ethics, and how partners contribute to society. Relationships thrive when couples share values about what they find meaningful in life, whether that is starting a family, working toward a common cause, implementing an ideal, or supporting each other's life projects.

Intellectual Growth and Mutual Development A meaningful love generally involves intellectual stimulation and personal growth. Partners who can develop together intellectually,

share new experiences, and challenge each other's perspectives tend to develop a deeper bond. This stage corresponds to Plato's love of knowledge and wisdom. Couples who support each other's growth, whether in terms of career, learning, or life experiences, often form a stronger connection.

Shared Vision and Purpose Love beyond the personal, Plato's final stage, the love of the "Form of beauty", can be interpreted in modern terms as developing a love that transcends personal needs and focuses on shared purpose, such as contributing to the well-being of society, creating art, or leaving a legacy. Some modern couples pursue higher ideals together, whether it's through philanthropy, spirituality, or working toward a larger vision of life.

Universal Love As love evolves, it may move from romantic or passionate love toward Platonic love or "universal love", a love that is less about possession or exclusivity and more about mutual respect, friendship and acceptance. This could also apply to the love of family, friends, or humanity as a whole. Over time, love may become less about romantic excitement and more about deep companionship, respect, challenge and the willingness to support each other's higher aspirations. Some couples also experience this shift in their intimate relationship when they focus more on the community, society or the passion for some enriching activity

Metaphysical Romanticism The danger, or for some, the allure of an overly spiritual stance and an excessive love of the tran-

scendental, is "metaphysical romanticism". This concept marries the characteristics of romanticism, such as intense emotion, idealization, and ecstasy, with an interest in "spiritual objects", like the soul, the absolute, ultimate reality, and so forth, preferable to human relationships and feelings. Thus, the individual is fascinated by what goes beyond the visible and tangible world, seeking answers to the mysteries of existence. They are drawn to what makes the human being unique and to its connection with a higher or divine reality. This involves a mystical approach, where everything becomes a means of reaching spiritual or divine truths, valuing intense inner experiences as pathways to a higher understanding. Like classical romanticism, but with an emphasis on the spiritual, metaphysical romanticism opposes materialism and rationalism, favoring intuition, the irrational, and the transcendent. Of course, it tends to overlook concrete and specific reality, seeing natural elements only as symbols of larger realities and mysteries to be explored. And no doubt as a result of the world's disenchantment, the mystical mode, especially of Oriental inspiration, is very much in vogue today, as we see with the multiplication and popularity of gurus of all kinds. Actually, passion for spirituality or esoteric tendencies tends to promote a more ego-centric and disconnected type of love, where no actions are taken towards ensuring the well-being of others. One takes a rather distant perspective, explaining why something happens through karma, a powerful fatalist principle, past lives or some other metaphysical causes.

Thus, in this "ladder of love" proposed by Plato, the reverse path also represents a challenge: from transcendence

to emotional intimacy, to relationships with specific and tangible beings and things, to an experience of finitude. For some people, the pursuit of higher knowledge or spirituality serves as a refuge, allowing them to avoid confronting reality. This is the principle of "spiritual bypassing". They avoid confronting existential difficulties, like relationship problems, by using the quest for the divine as a pretext, as an alibi, or as an escape, whether consciously or not. People lacking a healthy emotional grounding, an identity or function in the world, for the reasons mentioned above, may find compensation, consolation, or refuge in the search for the absolute. Thus, the "return to the earthly" can be long and painful for them. As a result, they remain "stuck" in transcendence, much like others get "stuck" in romantic love, idealizing a person or a relationship. They fail to descend, to "take root," to become grounded. The adherent of transcendental romanticism fears rejection and disappointment so much that they take refuge in the absolute to avoid embodying who they are and what the world is.

It is interesting to note that Plato's "hero" in the "Allegory of the Cave", after blissfully contemplating the absolute, cannot resist descending among his "own people" to bear witness, a "natural" human vocation where he meets his demise. He faces misunderstanding, skepticism, hostility, and rejection. He is mocked for his awkwardness, persecuted, and subjected to violence, with Plato alluding to Socrates' death sentence in this way.

The same is true of Nietzsche's hero, Zarathustra, who, after ten years of hermitage and exile, descends from his moun-

tain to share his spiritual wisdom with humans. He encounters deep incomprehension, indifference, mockery, or contempt when he invites them to reject traditional values and recognize the death of God. They see him as a madman, for his ideas are too bold and distant from established beliefs. He is a stranger whose ideas are not taken seriously. Thus, he understands that the crowd is hostile to change; it prefers the security of established values to the adventure of new conceptions of life and morality, they flee the fundamental freedom of elaborating their own values. Frustrated by humanity's inability to understand or accept his message, Zarathustra oscillates between a desire to withdraw again into solitude and the hope of finding a few rare companions worthy of his teaching. He realizes that he can reach only a small number of individuals, those capable of transcending conventions to follow the path toward the *Übermensch* (the "overman").

We can therefore understand that the metaphysical romantic, aware of his own discrepancy, prefers to remain within his idealized framework, dooming himself to a debilitating powerlessness, which inevitably leads to isolation or ostracism that, over time, becomes painful.

Nevertheless, religious belief, a rather popular activity, can be qualified as "metaphysical romanticism", as it proposes an "out of this world" or "beyondly" perspective, contrary to philosophical or thinking activity, which is more thoughtful and deals with the reality of the world, in spite of its degree of abstraction. That is the reason why religious passion easily falls into radicalism and dogmatism. We can therefore wonder why Bouddha and Jesus got much more success al-

ready in their lifetimes, and especially after, than for example Socrates, whose following, in spite of its historical importance, remained rather limited. Jesus or the Buddha offered structured teachings and paths to salvation or enlightenment, they made "promises", and their message of relation to the absolute was relatively easy to grasp, more immediate, at least in a superficial way. Socrates focused on the pursuit of wisdom and the examination of moral and philosophical concepts, questioning people rather than preaching a doctrine, challenging people's life and especially their thinking. He didn't offer a clear doctrine or promises of spiritual rewards, which limited his appeal to those seeking concrete answers, spiritual guidance or illumination. Socrates' teaching method, the elenchus (examination or refutation), was challenging and confrontational. He questioned people about their beliefs, exposing contradictions and encouraging them to rethink their assumptions. While this approach was effective for fostering critical thinking, it did not attract large numbers of devoted followers because it could be uncomfortable and was often perceived as antagonistic. It was a rather "anti-romantic" and "anti-climatic" approach to the absolute, much less seductive to simple and complacent individuals. Therefore the "metaphysical romanticism" of religion compensates its "out of the world" singularity by appealing to large crowds who gather in communities. From there, the very term of "religion", which etymologically implies "to unite", both in the uniting to some transcendent principle, and to a large group of people. Socrates, on the other hand, was all about connecting with the singular, with oneself and with an interlocutor, the famous "know

yourself”, rather than forgetting oneself and drowning in the unconditional. Jesus sends his disciples to eternal life, Buddha sends his disciples to enlightenment, and Socrates sends his disciples back to themselves, which is obviously less glorifying and less exciting. It is easier to trust and love God than trust and love your neighbor, the latter is more unpredictable, more risky; at least God remains silent and leaves you alone. It is harder to find by oneself the infinite in the finite, than to be provided a ready made infinite. The former demands more passion and abandon.

STATIC LOVE

Many people find themselves rather ”stuck” in the personal and limited love for someone, or a few people, be it romantic love, family relation or else; they seem not progress to more ”transcendent” forms of love, such as love for ideals, a passionate activity, or a higher purpose, for a variety of reasons, including psychological, emotional, or cultural factors. While love within a couple or family, or friendship is undeniably important, limiting the passion to such personal relationships can restrict empathy, compassion, intellectual and moral growth. To criticize this narrow perspective incites individuals to extend their capacity for love to the broader world, fostering altruism, social responsibility, curiosity and personal development that go beyond the self-contained love of intimate relationships.

Limiting love to a small group of people can lead to ”insularity”, where one remains ignorant, becomes indifferent or

even dismissive of the needs and struggles of others, those outside of "our" social group or community. Love confined to a couple or family tends to become exclusive and self-centered. People prioritize the well-being of their own relations over broader ethical considerations. Thus, a strong focus on one's own family inadvertently leads to favoritism or nepotism, or discrimination, while ignoring broader social justice or community engagement, inducing a narrow worldview.

Love in broader contexts, such as for humanity, ideals, or social causes, leads to personal growth by helping individuals develop a sense of purpose, self-transcendence, and moral development. People who experience love only in the context of a couple or family tend to prioritize emotional comfort over engaging with broader challenges. The intense focus on reduced personal relationships keeps them indeed in a state of emotional safety, avoiding the discomfort and uncertainty of broader challenges. Nevertheless, focusing exclusively on romantic or familial love leads to attachment and possessiveness, where "passion" becomes centered on control, egocentric expectations, even a sense of ownership. This type of love, rather than promoting growth and freedom, fosters dependency and limitation. In contrast, love for ideals, for an activity or for humanity, is rather selfless, allowing for broader, less possessive forms of care that focus on collective well-being and general improvement rather than individual attachment.

Let us examine some of the reasons why this reductionist modality of passion can impose itself.

Cultural emphasis In many cultures, there is a strong focus on personal love as the highest form of fulfillment, either romantic or family relation. Media, literature, music and societal norms often present those relationships as central to happiness and personal identity, they find themselves glorified.. This makes it difficult for people to imagine that there are other, equally meaningful forms of love, such as love for ideals, activities, or intellectual pursuits. The cultural narrative can make people feel as if they have "failed" if they do not achieve or sustain romantic or family love, thus prioritizing it over other forms of self-fulfillment or transcendence.

Emotional Attachment Personal love involves intense emotional attachment, which engenders feelings of dependence on the loved ones for emotional support, personal validation, and happiness. This attachment can become so powerful that it becomes difficult for individuals to focus on anything outside of that relationship. When people feel emotionally dependent on their partners, they may hesitate to explore other forms of love or interests because they fear losing the comfort, security, or identity they derive from the relationship, and they do not find any attraction for "something else", they do not wish to "go further".

Fear of the Unknown Moving beyond personal love in order to pursue something more transcendent, like a passionate activity or love for an ideal, requires stepping outside one's comfort zone. This challenge involves embracing uncertainty, change, or even solitude. Most people fear this unknown, they prefer

the stability and predictability of a personal relationship, even if it doesn't fully satisfy them on a deeper level. Fear of change or the danger of unfamiliar territory prevents individuals from exploring new forms of fulfillment, leaving them "stuck" in a narrow definition of love.

Idealization Some people idealize their partners, lover or family, to such an extent that they believe their love is the ultimate or only source of meaning in their lives. This idealization can make it difficult to shift focus away from the partners to something more abstract or transcendent, such as a higher purpose or a creative passion. This idealization generates a psychological barrier to recognizing other more fulfilling pursuits, as the individual believes their partners alone can provide them the "ultimate happiness", the meaning of their life, thus such relationships become a goal in itself. For example, the speech about the family which represents "everything" is a fairly classic refrain.

Lack of Self-Knowledge Progressing toward more transcendent forms of love, such as love for ideals or a passionate activity, requires a higher degree of self-awareness, of understanding of one's inner desires, values, and aspirations. Some people may not have developed this level of self-consciousness, which keeps them strongly focused on external relationships rather than on internal growth. Without a strong sense of personal identity or existential project, individuals struggle to move beyond personal love to pursue more significant or fulfilling forms of self-accomplishment.

Societal and Personal Expectations Many people experience pressure from family, friends, or society to focus on personal relationships as a key marker of success or fulfillment. These external expectations reinforce the idea that romantic or family love is the pinnacle of human experience, making it difficult for individuals to leave room to self-development, spiritual growth, or intellectual passions. These societal norms prevent people from exploring other paths to fulfillment, leading them to remain fixated on personal love even when it inhibits their own development

Fear of Loneliness The prospect of moving away from personal love can evoke a fear of loneliness. Many people view those relationships as a primary source of companionship and emotional security, thus they are reluctant to pursue ideals or activities that do not provide immediate interpersonal connection, and that might even prevent them. Fear of loneliness can keep individuals anchored to personal love, even if it no longer brings them deep satisfaction, because confronting solitude, being "confined" to oneself, is one of the most anguishing human experiences.

Emotional Intensity Personal love, especially the romantic type, involves emotional intensity, drama, and passion, which is highly stimulating. This emotional charge easily becomes addictive, leading people to stay focused on the ups and downs of their relationship rather than seeking a more stable, transcendent form of love. The allure of the emotional "yoyo" in relationships prevents people from finding fulfillment in more

”peaceful” forms of love, which may seem less exciting in comparison. Deeper passions often seem more tedious, because they involve real work on oneself, patience and abnegation.

Need for validation Personal relationships provide an immediate sense of validation and approval, as the partners enjoy declaring their value and importance to each other. This external validation becomes a primary source of self-esteem for some individuals, making it difficult for them to move toward self-sustained passions or ideals that do not necessarily provide immediate feedback from others. They can even bring doubts and criticisms. When partner validation becomes a crucial part of one’s self-esteem, it can limit the ability to pursue personal growth and fulfillment through other forms of passion, such as engagement in social, creative, intellectual or other activities. Certainly, the two forms of interest could combine, partners could encourage each other to go beyond themselves to accomplish their project, and this happens periodically. But for a variety of reasons, practical, psychological and intellectual, one’s passions tend to clash at some point with personal relationships. What is more, short-term validation, more reliable, doesn’t cohabit very well with long-term validation, more uncertain.

Lack of exposure to higher ideals Not everyone had the opportunity to be exposed or to be encouraged to pursue ”higher ideals”, such as love for knowledge, art, or social practice. Without role models or inspiration, provided by education or the environment, it can be difficult for individuals to recognize

that there are other, more transcendent forms of love that can provide a significant fulfillment beyond romantic or family relationships. Without any initiation to alternative forms of love or purpose, individuals may remain fixated on personal love as the primary source of meaning, apart from the more instinctive, primal pursuit of material goods. And often their interpersonal love is anyhow modeled on a very primal sense of possession.

LITERATURE

Literature deals extensively with love. It is one of the public's favorite subjects. Love, in its various forms, romantic, familial, platonic, often tragic, is a universal theme that crosses cultures and eras. So we thought it would be interesting to take a few emblematic texts on this theme, and examine what they tell us.

ROMANTIC STORIES

Eros - Greek mythology In Greek mythology, it is told that Eros, commonly known as the god of love, desire, and attraction, is the son of Poros and Penia. Poros, which means resourcefulness or plenty, is described as masculine. He represents abundance, wealth, and the ability to find solutions, he has the ability to provide.

Penia, meaning poverty or lack, is depicted as feminine. She personifies deprivation, need, and scarcity. In the myth, Penia is portrayed as seeking a way to alleviate her poverty, which leads to her union with Poros, when the latter is sleeping, intoxicated with nectar in a party.

Therefore Eros inherits traits from both of his parents. From his mother, he is always in a state of lack, yearning for what he does not have. He has no permanent dwelling, symbolizing

the restless pursuit of fulfillment. He is used to hardship, being resilient and persistent. From his father, he is resourceful, clever and capable of devising means to obtain what he desires. He is bold, courageous in pursuing his goals, even reckless. He seeks beauty and wisdom, striving towards higher understanding.

But even though he is divine in nature, Eros is neither mortal nor immortal, but exists in an intermediate state, what is called in Greek mythology a daemon. This positions him as a mediator between gods and humans, symbolizing how love bridges the gap between the earthly and the divine. The myth illustrates that love is not about possessing beauty or goodness but about desiring and moving towards it. Love propels individuals to seek what they lack, driving personal growth, the pursuit of transcendence and wisdom.

Romeo and Juliet - English medieval legend The story is primarily known through William Shakespeare, but he did not completely invent the story of Romeo and Juliet, as it was based on an older tale with a long literary history. The story of tragic lovers dates back to earlier sources, which Shakespeare adapted and transformed into his famous play.

This iconic story revolves around the intense love between Romeo and Juliet, two young lovers from feuding families in Verona. Their love, however, is doomed by their families' animosity, leading to a tragic ending where both lovers die. The story highlights themes of passionate love fighting against the destructive force of arbitrary conflicts, the culture of violence, and social constraints. This evokes the classical theme of "for-

bidden love”, since passion, taken as a positive value, is often in rupture with society, its norms and its rules, which by nature seeks to maintain order and stability by imposing moral and social frameworks, a tendency that paradoxically engenders violence and conflict. This opposition engenders a tragic fate, as individuals moved by their ideals often are not strong enough to take on society. Although the heroes generally have their part in the failure, in this case the tragic consequences of miscommunication between the lovers, a typical problem of love relationships.

Tristan and Isolde - Celtic medieval legend This medieval legend tells the story of Tristan, a knight, and Isolde, the princess betrothed to King Mark of Cornwall, the lord of Tristan. After accidentally consuming a love potion, Tristan and Isolde fall in love but are bound by duty to keep their love hidden. Eventually, their affair is discovered, leading to conflict and separation. Tristan is banished from Cornwall, and Isolde remains with King Mark. Tristan is wounded in a later battle, and he longs for Isolde to heal him. He sends for her, but due to misunderstandings and delays, she arrives too late. Tristan dies from his wounds just before she reaches him. Heartbroken, Isolde dies shortly afterward, collapsing beside him. In some versions of the legend, they are buried together, and their love is symbolized by intertwining plants that grow over their graves. Their passionate but tragic love affair reflects the conflict between personal desire and social obligations, leading to betrayal, loss and death. Once more, love is opposed to duty, to social obligations. Without forgetting the responsi-

bility of the lovers in their own doom. Indeed, they seem to have a problem with reality, with action, time and space, since things happen "too late". The role of fate is as well important, as this love happens by accident, which means that it has its own rationale, unpredictable and uncontrollable. But love in a way will vanquish, as the intertwining plants symbolize, since it will remain in posterity, beyond death.

Lancelot and Guinevere - Chrétien de Troyes - France, 12th century

This Arthurian legend tells the story of Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur of Camelot, and Sir Lancelot, one of Arthur's most trusted knights, who engage in a secret love affair. Camelot represents a utopian kingdom, where Arthur and his knights uphold the values of honor, bravery, loyalty, and the quest for the mythical Holy Grail, which represents divine connection, spiritual enlightenment, and moral purity, therefore the quest for meaning and redemption. The illicit relationship between the lovers ultimately leads to the downfall of Camelot, as their betrayal of Arthur brings about internal strife and weakens his reign. This story shows the opposition between loyalty, a moral principle, and passion, emotions and subjectivity, the conflict between duty and desire. Love leads to betrayal of honor, entailing tragic consequences.

This story presents quite a problematic view of love, both positive and negative. On the positive side, the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere is depicted as genuine and deep. Despite the consequences, their love reflects the authentic, passionate nature of human relationships, which are rarely straightforward, as they are filled with challenges, misunderstandings, conflicting emotions, and external obstacles. Love, even when genuine and intense, is usually complicated by factors like personal flaws, societal pressures, or moral dilemmas, and it requires navigating these difficulties. But their bond transcends the political and social constraints imposed by their roles, suggesting that love, in its purest form, can exist independently of societal expectations. Lancelot, known as the greatest knight, is portrayed as a nearly perfect

warrior, but his love for Guinevere introduces vulnerability and complexity into his character. This love makes him more relatable, revealing his humanity, and showing that even the noblest figures are subject to emotions and desires that can challenge their ideals. In this sense, love humanizes Lancelot, grounding him in significant emotional experiences.

Throughout their relationship, Lancelot demonstrates extreme devotion to Guinevere. His willingness to sacrifice everything, even his reputation and standing among the knights, is a testament to the veracity of his feelings. This level of commitment shows that love, even in challenging or morally gray circumstances, can inspire selflessness and fidelity. The enduring nature of their passion, even in the face of impending disaster, highlights love's transformative power. It compels characters to challenge their circumstances and their destiny, and pursue personal happiness, even when it comes at great cost. In this way, Lancelot and Guinevere's love demonstrates the strength of human passion, which cannot easily be extinguished by duty or societal obligations. The story of Lancelot and Guinevere resonates through centuries as a powerful tale, showing that love, even in its most flawed form, has the power to inspire creativity and reflection across generations.

On the negative side, this illicit love affair leads to the downfall of Camelot, suggesting that love, when it involves betrayal and dishonor, has a detrimental or tragic dimension. The secret love affair is seen as a betrayal of Arthur and his ideals, it directly undermines the chivalric code of loyalty and honor that the kingdom is built upon. The fact that their relationship remains hidden for so long creates an atmosphere of deception

and dishonesty within Arthur's court. When their affair is revealed, it causes division among the knights of the Round Table, between those loyal to Lancelot and those loyal to Arthur, a feud ultimately triggering the fall of Camelot. This leads to a civil war that weakens Arthur's reign, allowing external enemies to exploit the political instability. The disintegration of trust in the court is symbolic of how passion, when unchecked, can erode even the most idealistic of societies. Lancelot and Guinevere's love is portrayed as tragic, not inherently evil but deeply flawed because it violates the social and moral order. It suggests that while love can be beautiful, it can also lead to devastating consequences if it clashes with morality and the greater good. Their love, though genuine, leads to guilt, destruction, and sorrow. While love in Arthurian legend is often celebrated, for example the initial love between Arthur and Guinevere, the affair with Lancelot represents a corrupting influence. It shifts from personal fulfillment to selfish desire, creating instability in the kingdom and eventually shattering the ideals of Camelot. Their love stands as a warning about the dangers of passion without control.

Layla and Majnun (Nizami Ganjavi - Persia, 12th century) The tale of Layla and Majnun tells the story of Qays (later called Majnun, meaning "madman") who falls desperately in love with Layla. Despite his profound love, they are unable to be together due to societal restrictions. Majnun actively seeks out Layla, expresses his love in poetry, and abandons society to live in the wilderness, consumed by his longing. His madness and extreme actions dominate the story, making him

the more visible and active agent of their love, while Layla remains more passive, confined by her circumstances. Majnun's love becomes an all-consuming devotion, blurring the lines between earthly love and divine connection, an allegory for spiritual longing and the intensity of unattainable love.

Layla's passivity is a reflection of the societal norms of the time, which placed significant restrictions on women. She could not actively pursue Majnun or defy her family's wishes in the same way a man could. She is ultimately forced into marriage with another man, but she remains faithful to her love for Majnun in spirit, refusing to consummate the marriage. Though she does not take dramatic external action, Layla exhibits emotional resilience and loyalty. She nurtures her love for Majnun in silence, silently bearing the weight of her inner torments. Her passivity is more reflective of her situation than her character, since she remains deeply in love in spite of all. She becomes more of a symbol of unattainable love and spiritual purity. Majnun's passion is largely idealized, and Layla represents the object of his desire rather than an equal partner actively shaping the narrative. Her passivity amplifies Majnun's role as the "madman" driven by all-consuming love. Layla's passivity, her lack of outward action contrasts with the passionate, desperate longing. Thus it serves a thematic purpose, emphasizing the tragic and unfulfilled nature of their love.

Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Traditional chinese tale) Zhu Yingtai is the only daughter of a wealthy family. As women are discouraged from taking up scholarly pursuits, Zhu man-

ages to convince her father to allow her to attend classes disguised as a man. Then she meets Liang Shanbo, a scholar. They chat and feel a strong affinity for each other right away, so they take an oath of fraternity. They study together for the next three years, very successfully. Zhu gradually falls in love with Liang, but Liang fails to notice her feminine characteristics. Zhu tries different strategies to seduce Liang who finally understands that she is actually a woman. So they mutually declare their love and make a vow to the effect of "till death do us part". But Zhu is forced to marry a rich merchant. Liang is heartbroken, his health deteriorates and he dies. On the day of the marriage, Zhu leaves the wedding procession to pay her respects at Liang's grave. Suddenly, the grave opens with a clap of thunder. Without hesitation, Zhu throws herself into the grave to join Liang. But their spirits emerge in the form of a pair of butterflies who fly away together, never to be separated again.

The enduring power of love transcends social boundaries, familial obligations, and even death. Despite Zhu being promised to another man, her devotion to Liang is unwavering. Their love endures beyond life, as symbolized by their transformation into butterflies, a representation of eternal unity. Thus, "true love can never be broken", not even by the strongest societal or familial pressures.

Zhu Yingtai's disguise as a man to pursue her education reflects the gender inequalities of the time, where the woman is condemned to marriage as an existential goal. Her determination to challenge these norms shows the importance of pushing against societal constraints, a passion to exist fully

and grow. However, her eventual fate also highlights the limitations imposed by her sex, as her family arranges a marriage for her despite her wishes. The story depicts the struggles of women to assert their own desires in a patriarchal society, making it a reflection on the roles and limitations imposed on individuals based on gender. But unlike in many other love stories, the woman here is the main agent of the narration, she seems more powerful than her partner, showing how passion can overcome traditions.

Another moral of the story centers around the theme of "unfulfilled love". Despite their passionate commitment, Zhu and Liang cannot marry due to the interference of fate and societal duties. This underlines the idea that life's circumstances are not always within our control, passions encounter many obstacles. Therefore true happiness remains elusive, since we are bound by duty or external expectations. Societal rules and family obligations can stifle personal desires, leading to emotional suffering.

Zhu's final act of joining Liang in death suggests that sacrifice is a necessary component of love. Her willingness to die in order to be reunited with her lover illustrates the idea that some bonds are stronger than life itself. The couple's reunion in the afterlife, symbolized by their transformation into a couple of butterflies, offers a bittersweet commentary on the inevitability of death, but also the hope that love can be eternal, as love transcends the physical realm.

Madame Bovary (Gustave Flaubert - France 19th century) This novel tells the tragic story of Emma Bovary, a young, beauti-

ful woman, steeped in romantic ideals.. She marries a simple and well-meaning country doctor, believing that marriage will bring her the excitement and passion she longs for. However, she soon becomes disillusioned with her dull and monotonous life in a small provincial town. Longing for a more glamorous and passionate existence, Emma indulges in romantic novels that fuel her fantasies of wealth, adventure, and love which are beyond her reach. As her dissatisfaction grows, Emma embarks on a series of love affairs which fail to bring her the fulfillment she desires, as they are ultimately shallow and fleeting. In her desperate attempts to escape her unhappiness, Emma also engages in reckless spending, buying lavish goods and accumulating debts far beyond what the family can afford, luxury and beauty products, rich gifts for her lovers, etc. Though she remains in denial about the consequences, trapped in a cycle of despair and unfulfilled desires. Eventually, unable to pay off her creditors and facing public humiliation, desperate, she consumes arsenic and dies a slow, agonizing death.

Madame Bovary is a powerful critique of the bourgeois society of the time, exploring themes of unfulfilled desires and the illusions of romanticism to compensate for existential misery. Emma's tragic fate serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of escapism and the harsh realities that come from chasing unattainable dreams. Her obsession with romantic fantasies and her constant dissatisfaction with her ordinary life lead to her downfall. Chasing unrealistic ideals, whether in love, wealth, or status, can lead to ruin. Emma's refusal to accept the realities of her life causes her to seek escape through affairs and excessive spending, none of which bring her lasting

happiness. Modern culture that Flaubert embodies, unlike traditional stories, provides here a more critical view of love and romanticism.

Emma's fixation on luxury and her desire to live a glamorous life above her means highlight the destructive nature of materialism, the passion for possession and appearance, as her increasing spendings ultimately contributes to her tragic end. Flaubert critiques how material desires can blind people to the deeper, more meaningful aspects of life.

A broader theme in the novel is the disillusionment with everyday existence. Emma constantly dreams of a more exciting, fulfilling life, but every time she pursues these dreams, she is met with disappointment. This suggests that reality seldom lives up to the fantasies people construct, and the pursuit of such unattainable desires often leads to suffering.

Emma's struggles illustrate the limited role and options available to women in 19th-century French society. Trapped in a mundane life, without a real existential project, totally dependent, as if she were a child, Emma feels stifled and seeks "meaning" and excitement through her fantasies. Especially since society does not offer a "real" role for women, left with the traditional "wife" function, a very unsatisfying role.

Thus these love stories, spanning various cultures and eras, reflect universal themes like forbidden love, loyalty, power struggles, betrayal, and the tension between personal desires and societal expectations. Their enduring appeal lies in how they explore the difficulties of human relationships and passions.

TRAGEDY

Most famous love stories end tragically, as they reflect deeper philosophical and existential ideas about the nature of love, human imperfection, and the tension between idealism and reality. Let us explore several reasons why love stories often end badly, and the ideas behind them.

Imperfection Love in literature often symbolizes an ideal, but human life is inherently flawed and limited. Tragic endings in love stories underscore the tension between our desires for perfect, eternal love, our desire for absolute, and the reality of human frailty, mortality, the imperfection of the world. Stories often emphasize how external circumstances, such as family feuds or societal expectations, and internal flaws, such as jealousy or miscommunication, lead to the downfall of love. The tragic ending highlights that love, no matter how pure or passionate, is often at odds with the limitations imposed by human existence.

Sacrifice Many love stories depict love as something that requires sacrifice. The ultimate form of sacrifice is death or the loss of one's beloved, love is always filled with obstacles and ambushes, illustrating how true love often comes with immense personal cost. In this view, love becomes a test of the lovers' commitment and endurance, where suffering is seen as intrinsic to the depth and authenticity of the relationship. The lovers' sacrifices, whether their lives, their comfort or

their honor, suggest that love is never without significant consequences, emphasizing its harsh and often painful nature.

Idealization Some stories suggest that true love cannot fully exist in the imperfect, material world. Ideal love is never realized in a physical or material sense, thus it becomes an allegory for spiritual endeavor, a love that transcends the earthly realm. Tragic endings imply that love in its most idealized form can only exist in an abstract or spiritual domain, not in the practical, everyday world. The tragic outcome serves to elevate love into a higher, almost divine state, where its purity is preserved in its unattainability.

This idealization is a kind of sublimation: sublime lovers, whose love implies sacrifice, fatality and death, know nothing of the "primary" impulses experienced by ordinary couples, such as the sex drive, practical problems or the instinct to reproduce. Their love is not anchored on earth, in the flesh; it is projected directly to the highest level, where nothing can reach it or thwart it. It offers an escape from our finitude. We don't want to imagine Romeo and Juliet spending peaceful days together, washing their dishes and raising their children. Their happiness is less important to us than their eternity, to make us dream. It is also interesting to note that these "great" love stories don't take place in the homes of peasants, as if "great" love were a luxury, accessible only to the nobility, an exclusive and aristocratic activity. True love thus becomes an extravagance, a flamboyant and glorious aspiration, freed from the worries of survival and necessity.

Fate Tragic love stories often involve themes of fate or destiny that the lovers cannot escape. Lovers are described as "star-crossed", thwarted by destiny, suggesting that their fate is sealed from the beginning. Tragedy arises not from the nature of love itself but from external forces, such as fortune, society, or the universe, that conspire to prevent the love situation from flourishing. These stories reflect the idea that love is vulnerable to forces beyond human control, reinforcing the tragic inevitability of certain outcomes.

Ethical conflicts Some tragic love stories explore the conflict between love and moral or societal obligations. These narrations serve as a cautionary warning about the destructive potential of love when it conflicts with duty, honor, and ethical principles, which is often the case, since love is not a rational phenomenon. Tragic endings suggest that love, when it clashes with higher responsibilities, can lead to chaos and ruin, even though it might be powerful enough to sublimate these issues.

Catharsis In classical tragedy, the purpose of a tragic ending is often to provoke catharsis, the emotional release of fear and pity in the audience. The way spectators can take part and connect to the narration. The death of the lovers or the failure of their relationship allows the audience to experience a profound emotional reaction, which in turn leads to reflection on the nature of life, love, and suffering. The tragic ending gives the story emotional weight and prompts the audience to consider the deeper implications of love and its challenges

Human fragility Tragic love stories often highlight the fragility and vulnerability of human relationships. The diverse lovers' personal and social struggles emphasize how difficult it is to maintain a love that is strong enough to withstand external pressures. The fragility of love is a recurring theme, reminding us that love, while powerful, can be easily broken by circumstances, misunderstandings, or conflicting priorities.

The tragic endings of many love stories are not merely about despair or suffering. Instead, they often reflect deeper truths about the human condition, the nature of love, and the tension between ideals and reality. These stories suggest that love, while a powerful and transformative force, is also subject to the vagaries of life, mortality, sacrifice, societal pressures, and fate, which can lead to heartbreak and loss. The tragedy tries to elevate the meaning of love, making it both precious and fleeting, and emphasizing that its greatest beauty precisely lies in its struggle and fragility.

Although we should mention that we encounter some exceptions in the literary tradition, particularly in folklore and fairy tales, where love triumphs and the story ends in "happily ever after" endings, as seen in stories like Cinderella, Snow white, or Beauty and the Beast. Those narrations reflect a simpler, more idealized and romanticized version of love. They tend to be lighter, "moral" stories where good prevails over evil, often written more for children.

The Hollywood shift In contrast to the tragic literary tradition, which often explores the inevitable suffering and fragility of love, the Hollywood movie industry has developed a prefer-

ence for happy endings, with some effects on global culture. This modern shift reflects not only a change in storytelling but also a shift in cultural values and expectations regarding love, life, and fulfillment.

In classical tragedies, love is often depicted as a powerful but fleeting force, subject to external constraints like fate, societal pressures, or personal flaws. The tragic endings emphasize that love, while transformative, cannot escape the harsh realities of life, highlighting themes of sacrifice, mortality, and the inevitability of loss. These stories elevate the significance of love precisely because it is fragile and difficult to sustain, making its fleeting nature part of its beauty and depth.

However, in modern Hollywood narratives, love is rather portrayed as something that triumphs over all obstacles. Happy endings provide a sense of closure and emotional fulfillment, offering the audience reassurance that love can conquer the challenges of life. This shift can be seen as an expression of the optimistic, individualistic culture that prizes the idea that personal happiness and fulfillment are attainable goals, that all obstacles can be vanquished if we are determined enough.

Let us examine a few reasons behind such a contemporary shift.

Hollywood has long understood the value of providing audiences with an escape from the difficulties of reality. Happy endings in romantic films create a sense of comfort, allowing viewers to believe in the possibility of a "better" world where love always prevails. Thus, over time, audiences have come to expect happy resolutions from mainstream films, romantic ones and others. Tragic endings can feel too heavy or dis-

satisfying for modern audiences who are often seeking entertainment that leaves them feeling uplifted. Tragedies delve into the complexities and nuances of human emotions and relationships, exploring the tension between ideals and reality. In contrast, Hollywood's happy endings tend to simplify these complexities, offering neat resolutions that provide a sense of closure, where love is rewarded, and conflict is resolved.

The shift toward individualism in modern Western culture, particularly in the U.S., emphasizes personal fulfillment and the pursuit of happiness as central goals in life. Hollywood reflects this ethos by constructing stories where the protagonists overcome adversity and find lasting love, reinforcing the belief that thanks to passion, happiness is attainable, which is reassuring. The "self-made man", the archetype of the strong, independent individual, is inseparable from Hollywood cinema. The modern American hero, unlike the tragic hero, rides the wave of fate with ease, ignoring the weight of external conditions. Family and social pressures, the burdens of the past so present in tragedy, have no real effect on him. He is fully autonomous, he owes his success to himself alone. The "American way of life", with its apology for individual freedom, prosperity, success and mass consumption, is contrary to the victim principle of tragedy.

While classical tragedy imbues love with a sense of profound meaning through suffering and sacrifice, Hollywood's version of love tends to be idealized as a drive that can overcome any hardship. This creates a different kind of emotional engagement, where the focus is on romantic fantasy and fulfillment rather than on exploring the heavy existential truths of the

human condition. As a result, love in Hollywood is often portrayed as attainable and eternal, pleasant and comfortable, in contrast to the fleeting, fragile nature of love in tragic stories. This highlights the cultural and narrative differences between the traditional tragic love stories and Hollywood's preference for happy endings, illustrating how modern storytelling has shifted to meet the emotional needs and expectations of contemporary audiences.

PASSION STORIES

Just as we reported stories of romantic love, it seemed interesting to explore some classical narratives focused on impersonal passion. Here are a couple of such classical stories.

Faust - Traditional German legend - Passion for knowledge There are various written versions of the Faust legend, but the most famous ones are by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Christopher Marlowe. His story tells about a scholar who has studied enormously, but remains dissatisfied with human knowledge and worldly experiences, as it has not made him a happier or better person. He remains unfulfilled and is frustrated by the limits of human understanding, its uselessness and lack of purpose. Despite his vast learning, he feels no closer to true wisdom or contentment. He desires more power over life and the universe, trying to escape his feeling of futility, searching for deeper meaning and fulfillment. Thus he makes a pact with the devil, Mephistopheles, in exchange for greater pow-

ers and pleasures, in order to find true satisfaction and happiness, and a deeper understanding of life. So he turns to dark magic. Faust will gain unlimited knowledge, magical powers, and worldly pleasures for a set period of time, in return, after this time, Mephistopheles will claim Faust's soul and he will be damned to eternal torment in hell. However, as the end of his pact draws near, Faust becomes filled with regret and fear. He tries to repent but is ultimately unable to escape his fate, and he is dragged to hell by demons. Although in Goethe's version, there is an added focus on the possibility of redemption through personal progress, love, and divine grace

In this story, the criticism of knowledge centers around its limitations in providing true meaning, substantial utility, fulfillment, or happiness. Faust, a scholar who has spent his life studying and mastering various disciplines, philosophy, law, medicine, theology, etc, becomes deeply disillusioned with the uselessness of academic and intellectual knowledge in answering life's fundamental questions. This theme underscores one of the central conflicts: the gap between intellectual knowledge, and emotional or existential fulfillment. Faust's dissatisfaction with life and desire for more knowledge and experiences reflect the human quest for meaning beyond the material world, an infinite desire to know, and reach the absolute.

Faust feels that despite his vast learning, he is no happier or more fulfilled. He has acquired much intellectual knowledge, but it has left him emotionally empty and unsatisfied. In his view, learning has failed to provide him with the answers to existential questions or a sense of personal contentment. Over

time, he realizes the illusion or vanity of gathering knowledge. His frustration demonstrates how his intellectual pursuits have done nothing to bring him joy or a deeper understanding of the world. He realizes their ineffectiveness and uselessness, for himself and others. He criticizes knowledge for its inability to effect real change in the world. He is frustrated by the sterility of academic knowledge, which, in his view, fails to address the human experience or provide any tangible impact on life. His studies have only brought him theoretical knowledge, with no real power to affect the world around him or the human condition. He realizes that no matter how much he studies, there are still mysteries of the universe, nature, and existence that elude him. Intellectual pursuits, though vast, are incomplete and do not allow him to transcend human imperfection, since there are limits to what humans can know through reason alone. Faust is unsatisfied, his thirst unquenchable, he seeks a deeper, more spiritual or experiential knowledge, something beyond what books and formal studies can offer. He also criticizes knowledge for its failure to satisfy spiritual or emotional needs. Despite his intellectual achievements, Faust feels a spiritual void, a sense that mere earthly knowledge is insufficient to give life meaning or provide a sense of purpose. Thus he turns to Mephistopheles in search of deeper experiences, both worldly and mystical, given that mere formal intellectual knowledge cannot lead to true fulfillment. The story critiques as well the Enlightenment-era belief in rationalism, the idea that reason and knowledge can solve all of humanity's problems. Faust's despair over his intellectual pursuits reflects a rejection of this idea, suggesting that

reason alone is insufficient for understanding the complexity of reality. Instead, Faust seeks a more global, experiential, and emotional approach to life. Thus his relentless pursuit of knowledge and power, of a deeper meaning of things, leads him to make a pact with Mephistopheles, sacrificing his soul in exchange for unlimited knowledge and pleasurable worldly experiences. This illustrates the danger of overreaching ambition, the idea that the quest for knowledge and power can lead to moral compromise, a kind of psychological regression, ultimately leading to self-destruction.

The Faust story criticizes the idea that passion for knowledge, especially in its intellectual or academic form, is sufficient for a fulfilled life. Faust's dissatisfaction with knowledge represents the human longing for something beyond reason and learning, like spiritual meaning, personal experience, and emotional fulfillment. The story questions the value of knowledge when it is detached from life's deeper mysteries and emphasizes the limits of human understanding in the face of the universe's vastness. The thirst for gathering knowledge, although it can provide an existential project, tends to ignore other dimensions of reality, a drawback that has consequences on the peace, stability and happiness of the individual.

Faust expresses that, even though he has mastered many disciplines, he has not gained true wisdom or the power to affect the world in a meaningful way. He is disappointed that the knowledge he has acquired doesn't answer life's deeper questions or give him control over his destiny. He feels that despite his intense study, he is no closer to understanding the mysteries of existence, nature, or the divine. He concludes

that academic knowledge is sterile and disconnected from real life. He believes that all his years of study have brought him no closer to truth, and he is embittered by the realization that the world remains beyond his intellectual grasp.

He longs for knowledge that goes beyond academic learning, something that will give him insight into the fundamental truths of life. Faust's desire to transcend human limits illustrates the common theme about the dangers of excessive ambition, the idea of hubris. Faust's pact with Mephistopheles symbolizes moral compromise and the dangers of sacrificing one's soul or ethics for temporary gain. But he wants to go beyond bookish learning and experience something more profound and meaningful. His thirst for greater knowledge and power pushes him toward making the fateful pact with Mephistopheles, where he seeks to explore both the immediate pleasures and the deeper truths of life, even at the risk of losing his soul. The story of Faust has become a symbol of the vanity of knowledge, the dangers of unchecked ambition, excessive desires and expectations, the human condition's struggle with moral and ethical dilemmas, and the perils of an insatiable yearning for erudition, power, and transcendence. Thus the passion that has driven his existence and ensured his success is now leading him to his downfall, insofar as it remains uncontrolled.

Antigone - Greek mythology - Passion for justice Most famously told in Sophocles' tragedy, the tale revolves around Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, and her moral and personal struggle for justice against the king of Thebes, Creon, as she defies his

orders in the name of family loyalty and divine law. Antigone has two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, who are involved in a civil war, and both die in battle. Creon decrees that Eteocles, who defended Thebes, will receive a proper burial, but Polyneices, who attacked the city, is to be left unburied, his body left to rot as punishment for his treason. This is considered a dishonor in Greek culture, as proper burial rites were essential for a soul to find peace in the afterlife. Antigone is horrified by Creon's edict, as she believes that the gods' laws, which demand that all bodies be buried, are higher than the laws of man. Despite the royal injunction and the threat of death, Antigone resolves to bury her brother out of love, morality, loyalty and religious duty. When Creon learns of her defiance, he is furious. He has her arrested and condemns her to death by being sealed in a tomb, despite the warnings from the prophet Tiresias, who foresees that Creon's actions will bring disaster upon Thebes.

Antigone believes the gods' laws of justice, especially regarding burial rites, and moral principles, take precedence over the edicts of a king, setting up the main conflict between personal morality and state authority. Antigone's devotion to her family and justice drives her actions, which outweighs respect for authority and fear of death, which is generally viewed as courageous and heroic. As with many Greek tragedies, Antigone is about the tension between individual agency and the overarching power of fate. Her story raises profound questions about the nature of justice, the conflict between the state and moral principles or individual beliefs, and the consequences of pride and tyranny. Antigone herself

has been seen as a symbol of civil disobedience, standing up for what she believes is right, even in the face of death.

But Antigone can be criticized for her stubbornness and a rigid adherence to her own principles. While her commitment to family and divine law can be considered noble, her inflexible stance may be seen as extremism, leaving no room for compromise or dialogue. She is frontal, not very thoughtful. This unwillingness to bend or consider alternative solutions contributes directly to her tragic fate. Her insistence on unilaterally defying Creon's decree demonstrates a lack of practicality and an overly idealistic approach to morality.

Antigone prioritizes divine law and familial duty over human law or the laws of the state. Her personal actions undermine the legitimate authority of the government. In a structured society, the rule of law is important to maintain order, and Antigone's defiance risks chaos. From a civic perspective, Antigone's actions are self-centered because she places her personal beliefs above the collective well-being of society, threatening the stability of the kingdom.

Antigone's behavior verges on recklessness or even a death-wish, since she seems to accept, if not seek, martyrdom. She is willing to face death for her beliefs, when she could have acted with more strategic foresight or sought peaceful means to achieve her goals. Her impulsiveness in rushing to bury her brother without trying to work within the system might be seen as a form of self-destruction, as a deeper psychological need for "self-immolation", rather than purely by a sense of duty.

Antigone's morality is absolute and binary: either we follow divine law or we do not, an overly simplified view of morality. By treating her cause as completely just and Creon's law as entirely wrong, Antigone may be guilty of moral absolutism, and criticized for her rigidity and lack of nuance. Her commitment to a strict code of familial honor may be interpreted as an overinvestment in traditional customs rather than an effort to address the broader implications and consequences of her actions.

Antigone's defiance, while brave and heroic, leads to devastating consequences for those around her. Not only does she seal her own fate, but her actions indirectly cause the deaths of others, like her fiancé Hemon, who will commit suicide. Her determination to follow through with her personal beliefs could be seen as selfish because it results in grief and loss for others who love her, leading to unnecessary tragedy.

She exhibits hubris, excessive pride, a common tragic flaw in Greek tragedy. Her refusal to consider any path other than her own, combined with her belief that she is unquestionably right, could be seen as a form of arrogance. She never doubts her decision, even though it leads to her own demise and the downfall of others. While often viewed as a hero, Antigone's unwavering belief in her own righteousness can also be seen as overconfidence, and her tragic end could be interpreted as a result of her hubris.

She can be accused of egotism, as she overemphasizes personal honor at the expense of the greater good. Her willingness to die for "her" cause might seem disproportionate when weighed against other, more pragmatic and open solutions.

While Antigone is often admired for her passionate side and her moral courage, her character is not without flaws, and her actions invite criticism for their inflexibility, their disregard for authority, their excess and their lack of pragmatism. Her idealism, though noble, results in unnecessary suffering and raises questions about the tension between personal conviction and societal responsibility, making her both a symbol of resistance and a figure whose choices can be questioned. Passion here is in tension with reason and humility, and the ability to see beyond personal convictions, since it can lead to tragic outcomes when it becomes uncontrollable or rigid.

Thus passion reveals both its power and its dangers. It embodies a driving force capable of inspiring courageous, ambitious action, but it can also lead to destruction. For its tendency to excess, the lack of control that characterizes it, blurs the line between determination and obstinacy, between commitment and blindness. These stories show that passion, while essential to personal fulfillment, as it answers a pressing personal calling, comes into conflict with reason, reflection and humility, resulting in a tragic dimension. This raises questions about the relationship between passion and personal fulfillment, and about the legitimacy of ignoring limits, as a factor of both strength and destruction.