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WHAT IS LOVE?



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INTRODUCTION

What Is Love?

Philosophy has the capability to demonstrate that sometimes the simplest questions may have the most difficult answers. Despite “love” being known to human beings, for centuries people **engage** to try to **instigate** the opinion of **sages** to solve the simple question: what is love?

For some people, love can be the idea of having someone or something, while for others it could be the idea of wanting to have someone or something. The **slight** difference between both concepts is that in the first scenario you love what you already have, however in the last one, you love the idea of something that you still do not **possess**.

Some might say that love is to care, so when a mother takes care of their kids she is demonstrating love. But following the same reasoning, an egoist who only loves themselves would also be able to experience true love. So this idea raises another question: is love something **altruistic** or can love be completely **self-centered**?

That’s why over the centuries so many great minds have dedicated themselves to work on the **pursuit** to find a solid explanation for what love really is. From the Plato’s school of thought all the way to Nietzsche, love has been the main topic on many books.

CHAPTER ONE

Love Is Desire

One of the most relevant books by Plato is *The Symposium*. In this narrative he presents a dialogue between Socrates and his friends about love. In the occasion, many of the speakers talk about the idea that love is something that encourages them to follow good examples that are going to be defined by the people they love. In this situation, knowledge is a highly attractive characteristic that a person could have.

“Love has supreme power to provide **virtue** and happiness” - said Phaedrus during the conversation.

According to his point of view, when a person is in love, they try to act in the best way possible, in order to avoid feeling shame in front of the people they feel **affection** for. Thus, love motivates good actions and self development.

Also, Phaedrus mentions that love is not focus on one's ego, on the contrary, love is **selfless**. To follow his argument, he talks about how in Greek Mythology many **tales** are about people who are **willing** to sacrifice themselves in order to save the ones they love.

Next, Aristophanes takes the lead to say that love is the search to be whole. He explains that humans must return to their original state and that, in order to do so, they need to reunite with their other half. To sum up, in his perspective, love is able to make a person feel complete. His idea is used until today in

popular culture.

After listening to his friends, Socrates decides to present his idea on love. Initially, he suggests that his friends were concerned about the effects of love, not its nature. As a consequence, he talks about the god Eros, who is the personification of love in greek mythology:

“Have we agreed that Eros loves what he lacks and has not?” - Socrates said.

What Socrates was trying to say with his approach is that “love is desire”. For this reason, a person who loves is going to seek that qualities and virtues that they still do not have.

The main **takeaway** of the conversation amongst Socrates and his friends is that love is as search for something a person desires. If a person seeks wealth, it means that they still don't have it. However, in the moment that they become wealthy, they are not going to search it anymore.

People don't want what they already have. And this idea is also applied to love, according to Plato in The Symposium. Basically, a person is going to search in another partner something that they still do not possess.

Another **compelling** point in Plato's writing is that “love is immortal”. It's possible to find this argument in his books, for instance when they talk about how love remains **unaffected**:

“Love is constant and eternal, not attractive nor repulsive — that their **coming to be** and **ceasing to be** don't increase or **diminish** at all, and it remains entirely unaffected.”

This quote refers to the fact that love is something that is always constant. A person can experience love in a beautiful way or can suffer because of love, but it doesn't change the fact that love is love. Love has always been love, and it will always be love, despite of how people experience it.

In short, love as a feeling is **ephemeral**, while love as an entity is eternal. Hence, people must not mistake the feeling of love with the act to love. A person should always seek what they desire, and love will simply be a consequence.

Another point **worth mentioning** is when Plato writes about what is true beauty. Of course, Plato agrees that the feeling of attraction or **infatuation** often begins on the outside, when a person considers only the physical **traits** of their lover. However, he presents the concept that the true beauty is going to be found on the intellect of a person, **therefore** true beauty lies on the inside, not the outside. A person's **appearance** is **certainly** going to change over the years, but their intellectual beauty is going to be the same or even evolve.

“To start with the infatuation of the physical body and then transcend into the beauty of intellectual **endeavors** (...) so that you finally recognize true beauty.” - Plato, when talking about true beauty.

In short, a person love what they desire, this is the basis for platonic love. Maybe they will **fulfill** this desire and live real love, maybe they'll never have what or who they desire. But the compelling argument raised by Plato is that if a person truly follows what they desire and **wholeheartedly do it**, love will also follow them during their lives. **For** love is eternal, and not just a feeling.

CHAPTER TWO

Love Is Acceptance

Nietzsche talks about the concept of “Amor Fati”, which means “love for one’s fate” in Latin. The concept is mostly discussed in his books *The Gay¹ Science* and *Ecce Homo*.

For Nietzsche, Amor Fati is the love that a person is able to manifest for their own life, almost in a **sense** of acceptance and adoration. It is the **sentiment** and the attitude against the tendency to live a life of regret.

It’s rather common for people to fall into a **path** of “what if...” when they reflect about their past choices. This path can lead to a negative feeling that is going to **nurture** regret later in life. And that’s where Nietzsche’s philosophy **come to light**. Instead of asking “what if”, a person must follow a path of love for life exactly how it is today. By doing so, despite facing good and bad moments, success and failure, people would still be able to feel happy for being who they are.

“My formula for human greatness is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not in the future, not in the past, not for all eternity.” - Nietzsche.

According to Nietzsche philosophy, even though there were different options to choose when a person looks back into their past, they must be able to love and accept the version of who they are in the present.

¹ “Gay” means “Happy” or “Carefree”, according to some dictionaries. Although, it is considered an outdated term, since nowadays it has a different meaning.

The idea of amor fati makes it clear that a person must accept who they are and avoid the feeling of regret. Not all the things that happened to a person were under their control, and for that they should not feel regret, but actually love. They should feel love for being who they are, despite of all the situations that they went and that were not under their control.

A person is going to be able to love who they are when they are able to accept what happened to them, even though it was a **painful** experience. Also, they will love themselves when they are able to love what is still going to happen to them, even though it is **unknown**.

In such a way, one would be able to find the beauty of life as it is in the moment, instead of **pondering** about how life could have been different. The **resentment** of what has happened is only going to bring misery **upon** a person's life. In short, according to Nietzsche, the true challenge of life is to fall in love with what life is in the moment and with what it will be in the future, **regardless** of the fact if it is good or bad.

"I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I **shall** be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love **henceforth!** I do not want to **wage war** against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And **all in all** and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer." - Nietzsche wrote.

In conclusion, even in moments of sadness and grief, by practicing amor fati a person is going to be able to accept what happened and still feel grateful, other than resentful.

What is scarier than an opponent that smiles while being beaten? **Perhaps**, when we “yes, I love it” it could be an expression of resistance to all the difficult moments that life makes a person go through. This simple idea gives people the action of overcoming, instead of giving up.

To summarize, if love is desire, according to Plato, what do you desire?

And if love is acceptance, according to Nietzsche, do you accept who you are?

MAYA'S FINAL NOTES:

Highlighted words

- **Engage:** To participate or become involved in.
- **Instigate:** To provoke or incite someone to do something, often something negative.
- **Sage:** A person who is wise, often someone respected for their insight and judgment.
- **Slight:** To insult or treat as unimportant.
- **Possess:** To have or own something.
- **Altruistic:** Showing a selfless concern for the well-being of others.
- **Self-centered:** Preoccupied with oneself and one's own needs; egocentric.
- **Pursuit:** The action of following or chasing something.
- **Virtue:** A quality considered morally good or desirable in a person.
- **Affection:** A gentle feeling of fondness or liking.
- **Selfless:** Concerned more with the needs and wishes of others than with one's own; unselfish.
- **Tale:** A narrative or story, often containing imaginary events.
- **Willing:** Ready, eager, or prepared to do something.
- **Takeaway:** The main point or lesson learned from a discussion or event.
- **Compelling:** Evoking interest, attention, or admiration in a powerful way.
- **Unaffected:** Not influenced or changed by something; genuine and sincere.
- **Coming to be:** The process of becoming or beginning to exist.

MAYA'S FINAL NOTES:

Highlighted words

- **Ceasing to be:** The process of ending or no longer existing.
- **Diminish:** To make or become less in size, importance, or intensity.
- **Ephemeral:** Lasting for a very short time; fleeting.
- **Worth mentioning:** Deserving to be noted or remembered.
- **Infatuation:** An intense but short-lived passion or admiration for someone or something.
- **Traits:** Distinguishing qualities or characteristics, typically belonging to a person.
- **Therefore:** For that reason; consequently.
- **Appearance:** The way that someone or something looks or seems.
- **Certainly:** Without any doubt; surely.
- **Endeavors:** Attempts or efforts to achieve a goal.
- **Fulfill:** To carry out a duty or role as required, or to satisfy a requirement or condition.
- **Wholeheartedly:** With complete sincerity and commitment.
- **For (explanation):** Used to introduce a reason or cause.
- **Gay (archaic):** Lighthearted and carefree; joyous.
- **Sense:** The faculty by which the body perceives an external stimulus; a feeling or perception.
- **Sentiment:** A view or attitude toward a situation or event; an opinion or feeling.
- **Path:** A course of action or way of achieving a specified result.
- **Nurture:** the process of caring for and encouraging the growth or development of someone or something.

MAYA'S FINAL NOTES:

Highlighted words

- **Come to light:** Revealed or made known.
- **Painful:** Causing physical or emotional discomfort.
- **Unknown:** Not familiar or identified.
- **Pondering:** Thinking deeply or considering.
- **Resentment:** Feeling of bitterness or anger about something.
- **Upon:** On or immediately after.
- **Regardless:** Without being affected by; in spite of.
- **Shall:** Will (used to express future action or intention).
- **Henceforth:** From this time forward.
- **Wage war:** Engage in or conduct a conflict.
- **All in all:** Considering everything.
- **Perhaps:** Possibly or maybe.

Story written by Maya Furtado

