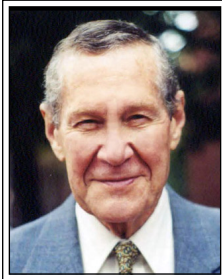


FACETS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE



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PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE: A PARTIAL SUMMING-UP

This book is a partial summing-up in several ways. It is partial because I have written it as an expression of my own preferential involvement with the philosophy of love. Here, as in my other writings on this topic, the philosophers I discuss reflect my personal sense of their importance as well as my individual estimation of what to be accurate in my assessments, as in my descriptions, I make no pretensions about definitive objectivity. Though at times I may seem to think of the history of the subject as leading to myself, I do not believe that I or anyone else can be its ultimate destination. I offer my writing only as the embodiment of what I have learned as a contemporary philosopher studying other authors in this field and trying to go a little further.

The present work is a summing-up twice over: first, in being a selective condensation of the ideational panorama that I draw upon and to which I have already devoted many published pages. Readers who may be plausibly deterred by the unpoetical character of this book might be comforted by the realization that more probing and more enlarged treatment of the issues occurs elsewhere in my writings. In places I mention their titles and some of their contents, but I refrain from duplicating what I have put into the original presentations.

The second form of partial summing-up pertains to the fact that I do not consider philosophy to be a subject that can have a culminating outcome or comprehensive solution to the varied questions it poses. No summation

can therefore exclude ongoing and more fruitful addenda worth attaining. Reflecting on what I myself have done, I see only a string of approximations and reconsiderations without any reason to think that I am either closer to or more distant from an all-inclusive statement. I do not believe that love, or life for that matter, lends itself to either eventuality.

The text is intentionally more informal and less didactic than other books of mine that are related to it. I have wanted to offer a general perspective that readers without technical interest can readily digest and possibly enjoy. Toward that end I have avoided the use of footnotes, and references to remarks by other writers are normally reproduced in my own paraphrase rather than being quoted verbatim.

The material for this effort originated in a series of interviews I gave to a radio producer that sometimes turned into more of a monologue than a conversation. The casual setting of these discussions accounts for the colloquial character of what I have now put into words on a page. The unstructured format often elicited ideas that I could not previously bring to the surface. As a result, the book contains, within its occasionally amorphous framework, both new and old ideas of mine whose presentation here may be pleasing to some readers but unsatisfying to others. At the end of the manuscript, I recommend research that would involve cooperation between biological science and various humanistic approaches, yet I offer few intimations about the findings that might occur. This shortfall is particularly notable with respect to women's studies, in which very promising work is now beginning to emerge. I leave these areas to investigators who are more competent than I am, but also with a hope that my ruminations may somehow contribute to their empirical and likely impressive discoveries.

Finally and briefly, I want to place this book in the context of the decades of my personal cogitations that preceded it. As I say later on, I began my labors in the philosophy of love at a time when hardly any reputable philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon world considered that subject professional or even respectable. My working at it cut me loose from the mainstream of American philosophical analysis. Since I had nevertheless been trained as an analytical philosopher, I naturally (and naively) thought I would write a book that systematically examines in very precise detail the elements and the problematics that adhere to the ordinary use of the word love. As in almost everything I have undertaken intellectually, I was motivated by anxieties, confusions, unresolved ambivalences within myself as a human being and not merely as a thinker. Idle abstractions meant little to me then, or do so now, and I felt that I could overcome the dilemmas in my own affective life by a careful, albeit plodding, analysis of what matters to everyone.

In making the attempt, however, I found that the chapters I wrote were just dreary and unproductive. In my desperation, I thought that the history of ideas in philosophy and the arts might help me get restarted. What I unearthed was an immensity of speculation and aesthetic output that

reached wholly beyond the parameters I had been trained to consider truly philosophical. My resultant trilogy, *The Nature of Love*, tried to make sense of this historical progression of thought and inspiration within a framework of distinctions that I myself imposed and that reflected whatever analytical talent I might still have.

By the time I finished the trilogy, I began to feel that my conceptualization was too sketchy, too narrow and incomplete. I realized that understanding love or its related conditions required an investigation into problems about meaningfulness in life as a whole and the human creation of value in general. After another nine years, that perception led to my second trilogy, *Meaning in Life*. All of that deals obliquely with the nature of love, and the second volume in it, subtitled *The Pursuit of Love*, is structured as a more or less nonhistorical treatment of questions about love that I was unable to confront before.

Even so, there still lingered problems about the relation between love and imagination, idealization, consummation, and the aesthetic. In the last few years I have grappled with them in books, notably *Feeling and Imagination: The Vibrant Flux of Our Existence* and *Explorations in Love and Sex*, that are organically derivative from my earlier studies on the nature of love. In their own way, something similar is true of my recent adventures in the philosophy and phenomenology of film as well as my current writings on the nature of creativity

The summing-up that you are about to read scans that entire trajectory. It is an apologia *pro mente sua*, and an illustrated miniature of my life as a thinker or would-be philosopher.

I. S.

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Is Romantic Love a Recent Idea?

When I started my trilogy *The Nature of Love*, many scholars believed that the concept of love as a romantic, sexual, or interpersonal phenomenon originated very recently—within the last two hundred years or so.¹ I felt that this view did not correctly elucidate the history of ideas about these or any other kinds of love. In some respects it is true that the notion of romantic love as we know it today can be considered fairly novel. Nevertheless the received conception about it is far too incomplete. What we call romantic love belongs to an intellectual development that starts with the beginning of romanticism in the modern world. To that extent, the relevant idea is rightly designated (and capitalized) as “Romantic” love. It arose toward the end of the eighteenth century and began to flourish at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But

even at the time, few people realized how traditional though also innovative this notion was: it stemmed from an evolutionary process in which theories about love had existed throughout two millennia.

To someone doing the kind of research I did, it was apparent that many elements of nineteenth-century Romantic love derived from sources in ancient Greek philosophy and literature, in Hellenistic fables, in the burgeoning of Christianity, in the reaction against Christianity during the Renaissance, and then in a diversity of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century modes of thought. You can't really separate this continuum into two periods, the first of which was prior to any ideas about Romantic love and the other consisting in the thinking of the last two hundred years with its great focus on it. The claim that Romantic love is an invention of the latter period is therefore of limited value, and, on the face of it, mistaken.

Yet there was clearly something important and very special that did happen in this modern movement, and we are still living with its ongoing development. It's passed through several phases, some of which I have spent hundreds of pages writing about. The second volume of *The Nature of Love*, for instance, is subtitled

Courtly and Romantic. When I get to Romantic love in the nineteenth century, I distinguish between a type of optimistic romanticism, what I call benign romanticism, and a totally different kind, very prominent about 1850, that I label Romantic pessimism. Earlier there had been foreshadowings of both forms of ideology in the plays of Shakespeare. In various ways he spoke as a critic of what we nowadays call "courtly love," which blossomed in the Middle Ages and for almost five hundred years. As against courtly love, Shakespeare articulated concepts that ultimately turned into nineteenth-century Romantic views about love, both the benign and the pessimistic. Shakespeare was an important contributor to their formulation.

While writing this second volume of my trilogy – a long book, over five hundred pages in length – I didn't calculate in advance where to put Shakespeare. But as it turned out, and as I discovered when the chapters were finished, he ended up right in the middle. In fact Shakespeare is a pivotal figure. Being a thinker whose mentality issues out of courtly love and against courtly love, he anticipates, but does not fully announce, what will later become Romantic attitudes toward medieval philosophy of love. As in many other ways, Shakespeare is a very rare type of genius, one whose artistic creativity became a primal force in Western intellectual history. Though Romantics in the nineteenth century often treated him like one of themselves, he is not a full-fledged adherent to romanticism. Without being a Romantic philosopher or theorist, he is nevertheless a precursor of those who were.

As illustration, take the play *Much Ado About Nothing*, which Kenneth Branagh made into a popular movie. It is structured in terms of two kinds of love. One is the relationship between Claudio and Hero, the young man and woman who have a courtly relationship based on very little understanding of

themselves or of each other, and not including much more than their awareness that they have both fallen in love. Though they strongly feel they love each other, Shakespeare demolishes the authenticity of their attachment. He shows how Claudio falsely accuses Hero of infidelity, while he himself isn't faithful since, instead of handling whatever problems he may have with this woman, he immediately condemns and humiliates her. Their bond therefore comes out as emotionally suspect. The other relation is the bellicose but ultimately loving tie between Benedick and Beatrice. They have a natural attunement that shows itself in ways that are typically Romantic. Romanticism frequently presupposes a basic hostility between male and female. It takes this to be a deeply innate tendency resulting from the fact that, being differently programmed, the sexes do not see the world in the same manner. As a consequence, each is natively suspicious of the opposite gender, and in a state of constant warfare with it.

There's support for that view in work that recent biologists have done, for instance, with herring gulls in the mating season when the female arrives on an isolated island by herself. She maps out her terrain and waits for the males to come. But as soon as one of them enters her property, she attacks him. Only after a period of what scientists call "equilibration" do they work out some mutual understanding, and she realizes that he is what she has been wanting for reproductive purposes. She then lets him onto her terrain, and they become a romantic couple. Well, the same kind of thing happens to human beings within the Romantic frame of thought, and it's what happens to Beatrice and Benedick. They are born enemies, ridiculing each other at first, but then, because of a quirk in the plot that Shakespeare artificially but deftly arranges, they overcome their initial belligerence.

Having done that, the two who are now one are able to help their friends – the courtly lovers who can't make things work out by themselves – and in helping them, their own bond becomes stronger. Beatrice and Benedick act together in a companionate and fully satisfying alliance. Even though they joke about their mutual animosity, they experience a consummate love. Both pairs get married, but we surmise that Beatrice and Benedick are much more likely to succeed in marriage than the other couple. Only the embattled ones understand each other, and, having survived their initial animosity, they are capable of attaining wholesome unification. For them the inherent disdain among people of different genders has been successfully overcome.

Despite the bumps and quarrels and all the tribulations that occur in the marital state, we feel that Beatrice and Benedick may really live happily ever after. We can't be sure what it will be like for Hero and her young man – the other pair. That confrontation between courtly and Romantic is presented in the works of Shakespeare better perhaps than in almost anyone else's. And most of the elements in his thinking, processed over an expanse of three hundred years, enter into the residue of Romantic love that still exists today. The common belief that true love as conceived in the nineteenth century was all sweetness and light is a fallacy.

Even in the benign phase there was recognition of the difficulty in obtaining authentic oneness, apart from any outside interference from social expectations about marriage and courtship and, of course, from parental control. It was understood that males and females were significantly unlike each other, and even incompatible in many ways. But there remained the hope, the dream, that those difficulties could be surmounted. This typically Romantic view is what Shakespeare had portrayed. It is why I think of him as a great pivotal figure. All the same, he is only one among many others who constructed ideas about the human search for love that have been developing in the last two thousand years and more.

Plato

As the beginning of my historical approach, I start with Plato. I have always felt that he is the greatest philosopher who ever lived. And he is the father of philosophy, if you don't count Socrates, who never wrote anything. Plato is certainly the beginning of the great exploration in the philosophy of love that occurred in the Western world. But Plato was very complex as a philosopher. For instance, consider the androgynous couples described in *The Symposium*, one of his middle-period dialogues. The person in that work who recites the relevant myth is not Plato himself, but Aristophanes. Moreover, *The Symposium* is just one of various works that Plato wrote at the time, some of which are very different from it.

The crucial thing about the hermaphroditic creatures in Aristophanes' fable, as reported by Plato, is there being three types after the gods split them. Originally only a single kind existed, but when the gods divided each of the hermaphrodites into two halves (because they were getting overly arrogant) there resulted three modes of reunification for which they strove. One was a bonding of males and females looking for each other. In addition, there was the attachment of two females, making a lesbian couple, and also the craving for oneness between two males. In other words, you already have implied in Plato the questioning about same-sex as distinct from opposite-sex affiliations that recurs in all the present controversy about marriage in America and elsewhere.

Aristophanes says that, among these three arrangements, the best combination is the one of two males. Athens was a male-dominated society, and the little cluster that Plato belonged to at that time was largely homosexual—a gay nucleus within the Athenian and Greek community. Not all Greek states were as tolerant of homosexuality as Athens was, and it was surely not universal in Athenian society either. So people who have thought that everyone in Athens was gay are not right at all. But Plato in his youth probably did belong to a homoerotic group of one sort or another. Though some members may only have been friends or mentors, many must have had overtly sexual relations.

Even so, the later Plato takes a very different stand. Once you come to *The Lazos*, which is an important book that Plato wrote toward the end of his life, when he was almost eighty, you find that he attacks homosexuality. He says that the only kind of family that the state should encourage is a biological unit in which there is a marriage between “one man and one woman.” He can even be cited in support of the constitutional amendment about the nature of marriage that some people in the United States are trying to enact. Consequently, Plato’s final ideas were quite unlike anything he had said in *The Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and other dialogues. Also, in *The Republic*, which is perhaps the greatest book ever written in Western philosophy – certainly one of the few greatest books – Plato talks about sex and love in a manner that goes beyond his remarks in *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, and even in *The Lazos*. In *The Republic*, he asserts that we are all designed to search for the Good. And when we are in love, the body is used in that endeavor as an agency of instinctual, reproductive forces. These are what Freud would call libidinal urges toward heterosexual lovemaking, coital sex. That is fine and natural, according to Plato, but not the ultimate goal of humanity. The point is to get beyond bodily imperatives in order to pursue the Good, as the only means through which people can fulfill their spiritual being and find what is of value and truly beautiful in life.

How do you make that transition from sex-driven impulses as a young person to having other, more elevated, interests? By throwing yourself into meritorious endeavors, Plato claims – into art and the appreciation of the aesthetic, into the formation of a desirable society, into the quest for scientific truths, and into other cognitive means of revealing an ultimate reality that is not reducible simply to sex. The proper response to sexual instinct itself, Plato argues, is promiscuity. Have as much sex as you want, he says, as early as you want with anybody you choose, regardless of who it is and whatever the gender of that other person may be. You will discover that the particular objects of sexual activity are all alike. Having fully sampled sex, he predicts, you will have then outgrown it.

My older brother, when he was young, hated the idea that he loved hamburgers. He cured himself by gorging on them once, and the appetite disappeared.

He never wanted to eat hamburgers in later life to the extent that he did before, because he had made himself sick on them. That was Plato’s advice about sex—that you gorge yourself, at an early age, as much as society allows. The situation is very much like South Sea Island attitudes that the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski encountered at the beginning of the twentieth century. He observed that the young could do whatever they wished, and the parents didn’t care. It was only sex. It was of no great significance. Plato’s idea is that once you have cleansed yourself of the fanatical drive caused by those hormonal instincts that are surging during adolescence to prepare you for

reproductive necessities of the species—once you have had all that you can stand of that, you won't be driven by sexual need, and, in any event, it won't be a prime motivation for you.

Instead you might start thinking about love, and even fall in love with some individual. But there too, Plato asserts, you may eventually get beyond personal attachment – interpersonal romantic love – and this liberation will initiate the course of education that can enable you to perceive the Good, which is fundamental in the universe and which is what in Christianity becomes the principal attribute of God. The “Good” is the highest form of being in Christianity: by his very nature as divinity, God is perfectly good, perfectly beautiful, and the supremely perfect origin of reality. That whole part of Christianity comes directly or indirectly out of Platonism.

But see how this implicates a kind of love that differs vastly from what arises in primordial nature. You might end up with spiritual love, religious love, the love of God, however you interpret these words, and that will be far from where you started biologically. In between there might be the love of the truth that the philosopher has, the love of factual and theoretical investigation that scientists have, the love of one's people, one's country, one's nation, such that you devote yourself to making laws that are fair and equitable for everyone in the state. Likewise there may be the love that a warrior has, showing his devotion to his homeland by fighting and possibly dying for it. All of that takes you beyond sex, while also remaining part of the same continuum since sex too has to be understood as a product of our search for the Good and Beautiful as the basis for any love a human being can attain.

This Platonic doctrine is, I believe, the most fertile and powerful single body of thought about love that anyone has ever created throughout Western civilization. Out of it came not only Christianity but also the reaction against Christianity, together with all sorts of Neoplatonic as well as anti-Platonic views introduced by philosophers like Aristotle, who approached these ideas as a pupil of Plato but dealt with them differently. Platonism is a momentous stage in the mind of man that every educated person should be schooled in. It is worth studying endlessly.

Beyond Idealism

Whether or not I am right in this opinion, we still have to recognize that history – the history of ideas in this case – doesn't march in a linear fashion. Ideational changes are like the fluctuations in the stock market. They go in one direction and then there is a reaction against them. The greatness of Hegel consisted in his sensitivity to this dialectic among ideas. In fact he used it as a mode of understanding all of reality. I don't agree with him on that, any more than I agree with Plato, but I do think that the notion of a fluctuating dialectic helps us comprehend how, in the passage of time,

you get schools of thought among the anti-Platonists that delineate love in alternate ways while also being responsive to what Plato and the platonistic philosophers said.

It is in this context that one should see the work of David Hume. He did not believe in metaphysics of the type that Plato proffered. Nor was he a Romantic. He was a pre-Romantic empiricist. A modern-day existentialist, or pragmatistic humanist and pluralist, which I am, also approaches things from an empirical point of view that doesn't fit the Platonic mold and yet, particularly in my case, can appreciate the seductiveness in that kind of thought. For Hume and his successors, the lowest rung in the ladder of Plato's vision, the one that focuses on the world of experience and materiality that everyone inhabits, is quite sufficient for its own philosophical comprehension. Instead of having to think about the Platonic trajectory, which is a vertical concept about ascending to transcendental heights above and beyond what is natural, we prefer more horizontal perspectives. They in turn enable us to understand love in terms of diversities within nature itself.

I feel very strongly about this, because I think that humans, and their fundamental types of relations – such as love – are ineluctably plural. I am convinced that studying different features of our being at an empirical level close to the facticity of nature is probably the best we can hope for. I'm not a Platonist because Plato assumes that there is one answer to the universe, that he knows what it must be, and that it involves the idealistic analysis he advocates. In my derivation from thinkers like Hume and John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, and modern empiricism in general, I believe that instead of looking for one answer, especially of the transcendental type that Plato seeks, we should ask questions about reality and what is valuable in it as persons who recognize the variegated character of their involvement in nature.

My work as a whole is of that sort. Someone asked Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great twentieth-century philosopher, what he did for a living, and he replied, "I'm a maker of analogies". It is actually true to what he did do; he showed a good deal of insight into his own talent. In the same vein, I would say that I'm a maker of distinctions. And the more distinctions I make, the more varied are the aspects in which I am able to think about the nature of love. I don't promote any a prioristic or overarching theory. I'm very suspicious of that. I don't think that large-scale terms like love, happiness, meaning of life, meaning in life, sex, beauty, and such, are able to have any one definition. These phenomena are so enormous within our human nature – and the same is true of what we even mean by human nature – that we cannot justifiably constrict them within a single, fixed and all-embracing, definition of the kind that Plato sought. The most we can do is to clarify them with ever-finer analysis or dissection, and to engage in further explorations through new though possibly sequential distinctions. Only then can we correlate and combine our ideas by means of the creative speculations that will issue forth without there being any one and only principle that draws everything into itself. There will always be realities of feeling and experience that do not fit.

Concepts of Transcendence and Merging

Though Plato had the greatest cumulative effect of all Western philosophers, his mode of philosophizing was rejected by Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century in a fashion that seems to me very telling. Repudiating the Platonic kind of thought, Nietzsche also reviles Socrates for being what he calls the “archetype of the intellectual man.” He attacks him in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of Music*. Nietzsche thought that Greek tragedy deteriorated once the intellectual man, represented by Socrates, dominated the culture. I feel that’s mistaken, and I have criticized Nietzsche accordingly in my book *Feeling and Imagination*. But I think that his rejection of Plato is inspiring. He didn’t adequately understand the importance of Socrates’ work, while I myself am happy to think that I am basically a Socratic philosopher.

Socrates argued that we all know what reality is. We all know concretely what such deep concepts mean, though we are confused in our thoughts. The job of a philosopher is therefore to help us make our ideas clear. That’s what I also try to do. But in the process we have to give up the notion that there can be a conclusive answer to “the human problem.” Something along those lines may exist in mathematics – if you don’t give the right answer, you don’t get the correct sum for 2 plus 2 equals – but life is not a mathematical problem. And, consequently, one should not look for a unitary solution to the nature of love or expect to find, for example, that the modern age is or is not out of touch with the great realm of being that Plato and medieval Christianity claimed to discern. Instead of asserting anything like that, we need to see and appreciate what has been happening in the world of human searching for one or another solution. Only as we pinpoint the contents of this pursuit can we have viable ideas about some particular facet of our reality – which is to say, our nature as ever-questing beings.

In that attempt, I examine two major themes in Plato’s philosophy that were to have a large effect upon all later thinking: the notions of transcendence and of merging. I am an opponent of both. I don’t believe that human love can be explained in terms of a transcendence into a higher reality. We are products of the manifold forces that operate on this planet. Love is limited to that, and it cannot be explained by reference to a metaphysical domain beyond our earthly condition. Neither do I agree with the idea that merging of any kind is what we are really interested in when we talk about love. In general, I am an enemy of the common belief in merging. It is not true about human capacity, and in fact it is a very dangerous idea.

This is not to say that merging is impossible. It occurs in salt every day – in the conjunction of sodium and chloride. And it happens when rivulets come together and make a stream. In each case, once the interpenetration has taken place, you can’t tell the elements apart. They’ve merged. We often use that word, and in those circumstances it’s a perfectly normal mode of speaking. Also there is a musical occurrence in which the notes merge and make a new

and interesting combination. If you strike a chord on the piano, you cause a merging in the sound. My argument is that this is not true to what it is to be a person, to be a living creature like us. We, as human beings, and in our attempt to love others, do not exist as rivulets, but rather as different individuals. In our personhood we do not merge; we cannot merge. The most that can happen is that because you think you're merging, you end up falsifying ingredients in the reality of your relationship.

As a result of their desire to merge – and it's a feeling that some people find very attractive – men and women distort themselves in one respect or another. This alone justifies the doubt that love can ever be an actual merging. There is a kind of romanticism that predicates a basic hunger in everyone for some such fusion. Without denying the frequency of this aspiration, I see little reason to think that it is characteristic of all forms of romantic attachment, and I'm sure that it is not fulfilled in any actual instances of love. In the history of philosophy one can find more plausible descriptions. They refer to other forms of relationships, usually Aristotelian and not Platonic. They rely upon concepts of people who interpenetrate; who have a bond that is interpersonal; who may be interdependent upon each other's personality; who are companionate; who share their separate selves; who each discover someone who is significantly different and with whom one neither submits nor blindly subjects oneself to whatever the other is and wants.

In those circumstances, both persons recognize that they are indefeasibly not the same. But out of this recognition of diversity, and in the mutual acceptance of it, can come a sense of oneness. Something similar applies to concepts like "the United States" or "the United Nations". Those were great ideas that arose at the end of the eighteenth century and along the lines I am describing. It isn't that everybody in every state and every nation becomes identical because they have all fused together in accordance with some ideal pattern of merging. But rather there is an acknowledgment of real disparity, depending on the region, the history, and the individual type of governance to which human beings revert while also being united in crucial ways. That seems to me to be what love is like most definitively. In those countries in which everyone is forced into a single mold, totalitarian countries in particular, the nation tries to live up to an icon of conformity that is comparable to treating love as merging. I consider those totalitarian nations inferior, and the congruent affective philosophies erroneous about the nature of love.

The notion of merging was especially prominent at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When people speak of romantic love being a recent occurrence, they do so because merging took on greatest importance at that time. The Romantic theorists treated merging as central to the conception of love they had in mind. The doctrine also issues from other views in the history of ideas. Medieval Christianity was perennially divided by a controversy about merging. Some illustrious thinkers were burned at the stake because they thought that men or women could merge with God. In Islam, too, there

was a great philosopher who was executed because he said, "I am God". What he meant wasn't that he was part of the personhood of a supernatural being. He meant that he had merged with God in the sense of total unity, at oneness, with him. Taken literally, that idea was heretical for Islam as it was for Christianity. It might also have been troublesome in Judaism except that the relevant conception is very remote from the Jewish idea of loving God as a unique and separate being. In Catholicism, with its platonistic origins, the notion posed a pervasive puzzlement.

In Catholic theology, you find the assertion that God is in the world. Scholars and fathers of the church disagreed about how this could be the case. Some said that God is in the world because he is present throughout nature. But then that sounds like pantheism – as if God is the same as nature, inseparable from it. Christianity did not tolerate an approach of that sort, since it runs counter to the basic tenet that God has a different and more sublime being. God was inherently beyond nature, and nature itself was impure and imperfect – possibly evil. The body was to be contrasted with the soul, and therefore God couldn't be literally in the material world. He belonged to a spiritual realm toward which we mortals could only aspire. If we were lucky enough to have divine grace, or perfected ourselves through good works, we might nevertheless be admitted to the supernatural domain. That was all the ruling dogma in Christianity allowed. At the same time, many people did think that God was somehow also in us and in the world as a whole. This, however, created the massive problem for ecclesiastical authorities that centers around the question of merging. As against this notion, the more moderate concept of "wedding" was often invoked.

Throughout the Middle Ages there existed references to man wedding God – being wedded to God. The human soul was the bride, and God was the bridegroom. This theme recurs in a good deal of medieval religious poetry. The two beings were conjoined not in the sense that they merge but rather because they get wedded or even welded together. They communicate and ultimately interpenetrate without losing their individual substance. The finite human being could thus achieve a kind of oneness that saturates the soul with the goodness of God while he or she still remained separate from the deity. That was common parlance in the Middle Ages, and it is in this vein that I also talk about wedding. It is intelligible as opposed to merging.

If you look at the poetry of St. Teresa, you'll see that a lot of it sounds as if she may well have believed in merging, or at least was entertaining it as a possibility. But that was not the orthodox view, and even today it is not accepted at face value by the Catholic Church. It is normally taken as a form of idolatry akin to loving another human being with the kind of religious love that only God merits.

Nowadays the love between men and women, and men or women, is sometimes treated as if it alone were religious love. This attitude, which many Romantics in the nineteenth century openly defended, is a disposition that

the church always feared: if people had quasi-religious love of each other, they would be enacting a disservice to God and not living up to his commandment about being loved uniquely. Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, and with all thy soul. But you can't do that if you are going to love your girlfriend or your boyfriend that way. Consequently, the very suggestion was heresy in the Middle Ages. Out of that conflict between the orthodox view and the heretical attachment to another person, particularly if you think you are merging with this person and having the feelings the church said mortals should have toward God, there arose the kind of medieval and courtly myth that is present in the legend of Tristan and Iseult. Because of the love potion, the two people love each other with a total giving of themselves and with explicit belief in the goodness of merging with one another. That myth is especially evident to us in Wagner's opera, which was written in the Romantic period but was preceded by hundreds of related versions of the legend in earlier centuries.

The church was concerned that its mission would be impaired by any human love that mimicked the devotion you should have for the deity. The love potion could only be an evil that leads to a tragic ending. And, indeed, in many nations, the love of God may have become in our age less pervasive than the search for love of another man or woman. Statistics about how many people go to church indicate that in the United States a large number do, in Spain very few, and in France and other European countries hardly any. It is difficult to know what is happening among the young, and whether they are emancipating themselves from the dominance of the traditional faith by trying to find in another human being something equivalent to the love of God. But disillusionment about supernatural beliefs has surely increased. Moreover, those who exist in the modern world are aware of how imperfect any interpersonal arrangements must be under actual conditions, and therefore how hard it is to live up to the older ideals of love. And, even if you follow established mandates, it can all be a big mistake, since you may not get what you really want. You undergo anxiety and misery, individuals as well as institutional teachings delude you, and you run the risk of being betrayed by an idealistic ideology that mattered to you.

In relation to merging, Nietzsche states in one place: "If there are Gods, how is it possible that I'm not one of them?" As facetious and humorous as he was trying to be, Nietzsche touches a profound explanation of the search for merging. If you believe in God as perfection, you as a human being will not only snuggle up to him in the hope of getting his protection, Nietzsche suggests, you will also want to be what he is. Sartre develops this very far in *Being and Nothingness*. Man is a futility, he says, because man wants to be God, and there is no God. But what lurks beneath this conception is why someone would want to be God, to merge with God. It's because one has the image of a perfect being. There may conceivably be such a being, and the human imagination that goes into thinking about this possibility is itself a

very high achievement that I do not wish to demean in any way. The ideal entity is something you would want to merge with just as you would want to be perfect on your own. A man or woman might, in principle, acquire this perfection simply by merging with it.

That's one understanding of the origin of the quest for merging. Another is the fact that we all begin with a kind of merging. It happens when the sperm and the egg collide. They don't just shake hands and say, "Let's live together and survive however well we can," as in the ending of *Candide*, the musical by Leonard Bernstein: "We're neither pure nor wise nor good. / We'll do the best we know. / We'll build our house and chop our wood / and make our garden grow".

That may be the highest goal, the highest love that *Candide* can hope for after all the calamities that he and Cunegonde have been through. Even so, the advent of human love cannot occur by biological means alone. In the act of reproduction, the sperm throws itself into the egg, and the zygote is made in a flash of merging. It's a chemical event just like salt being made out of its components. But the reproductive occurrence is only a prelude to the human story. One reason that I believe in the morality of abortion is because those who attack it say, "Oh, you're killing a person." Well, the zygote isn't a person. And once personhood comes into the individual development of men and women, we've moved beyond the possibility of merging. It was once a part of us, just as the food we've eaten all our lives is a part of us. But, as persons, we become something more, and no longer capable of merging in the way that cells or molecular elements do.

A hope of this latter sort may underlie the reasoning of people who say or feel: If only I could return to some kind of primordial, biologically programmed state, my amatory problems would all disappear. It's like people wanting to return to the womb, which is a notion of Freud's—his belief that all men want to do so. I wonder why he didn't say the same about women. They also came out of a womb. In any event, these notions about merging are sports of the imagination that can be very intriguing, and the aesthetics of their formulation throughout the history of ideas has always fascinated me. So I am not suggesting that one shouldn't even think about merging. The thought of it is an integral feature of our mentality as creative beings, inasmuch as it issues from speculation that makes us inventive and imaginative. But the concept itself is not true to our reality, what we are as human beings. The nature of love must therefore be elucidated in other, less fanciful, ways.

Courtly Love and Its Successors

Returning to ancient Greek philosophy, we should always remember that it issues from a society and culture that was very narrowly specified. It's not only that the ideas focused upon people who were upper-class, and not only because they were males, but also because they were members of an elitist state

in which women were subjugated. There were also 400,000 slaves in Athens, and they too had no voice. We have no means of knowing what their ideas of love were. Daily life was very remote from the democratic ideals that have emanated out of it indirectly, and that most Americans espouse. The Greek city-states were not only sexist and class-ridden but thoroughly autocratic as well. I think they were probably a very peculiar phenomenon in human existence. It just happens that there were many geniuses among those people, or at least many outstanding men among them, from whom we can learn a great deal. But as far as their thinking about love is concerned, it reflected an outlook that was alien to the views we have nowadays. I would put it into its historical place instead of using it as a model.

With the advent of courtly love in the Middle Ages, things began to change. But before that there was the emergence of Christianity out of Judaism and Greek thought. When I wrote my love trilogy, the chapter that I liked most of all at the time was the one on agape, the Christian idea of God's bestowal of his love. That is a momentous concept in world history. My own thinking about bestowal initially resulted from reading Bishop Nygren's book *Agape and Eros*. It seemed to me that his conception of agape was misguided inasmuch as it maintains both that love originates from God and that it originates only from God. I have always considered love a projection of what people do, or are trying to do all the time, and that only if we accept the reality of this kind of projection can we construct an adequate theory of human love. In other words, I wanted to stand the Christian notion on its head, or (if I'm right) on its feet. But while I don't agree with the way it was presented by Nygren, and is still affirmed by Christians, I see the conception of agape as a fertile occurrence in human-kind's ability to understand what love may be.

Courtly love has a role to play because it was an effort to humanize Christian thought in the Middle Ages. The attempt is very meaningful to me. It is based on a love of nature, not merely as God's product but as in itself worthy of love. There were Christian courtly thinkers and there were non-Christian courtly thinkers. Much of the difference between them depends on how the relationship between God and nature is interpreted.

But the idea of humanizing love – the belief that love is something that one can have not only in relation to God, but also and magnificently with another human being, particularly a person of the opposite sex—that belief about what is valuable in life is a development beyond the thinking that preceded it. It's not the case, as some writers have said (Denis de Rougemont, for instance), that the idea of romantic love was created in the Middle Ages. In the Hellenistic period, there were descriptions of heterosexual romantic love that were comparable. The point about courtly love is that it occurs after the growth and widespread dominance of Christian ideology. And so it's a mechanism for relating to another person with the same kind of attachment that the church ordained in the love of God. This alone was a major achievement, which went on for several hundred years, from about the end of the

twelfth century or beginning of the thirteenth to the time of Shakespeare in the sixteenth and seventeenth century – with all sorts of ups and downs and complex fluctuations.

Throughout this period, love between human beings was given ever greater social and political importance that reflected what was happening in the history of ideas. As a general rule, creative minds don't operate in a vacuum; they come out of living soil and then contribute to it willy-nilly, depending on what exactly has gone before and what is happening and fruitful in the present. You could have a prodigy who is alienated from his origins, but he probably won't be remembered; he won't have any effect. But the promoters of courtly love were very much in touch with their environment, and so the outlook was able to exist and to flourish for those several hundred years. It doesn't much remain in the modern world.

At the same time, courtly love contributed directly, and in its own fashion, to the democratization of love with which we are now familiar. It was, for the Middle Ages, democratization in a very narrow sense. While the Greeks thought of the elite, the philosophers, the philosopher-kings, as people who were able to love – and the only ones who were – the courtly period tended to include other human beings as well. Of course, they weren't just ordinary folk. They were the feudal lords and ladies, the aristocrats in the Middle Ages, and not participants in anything similar to the intellectual life of fourth-century BC Athens. This shift was, however, a move in the direction that eventually culminated in the idea that almost anyone could love, and do it well. It was part of the democratization that has happened in Western history in many aspects of life and over several centuries.

As I previously remarked, we do not know what was happening affectively at the lower levels of medieval society. Occasionally a woman of higher rank had a lover who was socially inferior – possibly a poet who celebrated her beauty and charm. But I wouldn't want to define courtly love in only those terms. The period in history lasted a long time and spread across Europe and the Near East. The men, the rulers, the princes, the warriors went off to conquer other countries. They were away on the crusades, while their wives remained at home with the job of running the state. Women like Eleanor of Aquitaine and some others became very powerful within their own little principality or kingdom. And certainly that gave them greater allure that could be extolled by the itinerant poets who wrote verses for the ruling female, whom they also claimed to love.

As a further complication, there were divergent kinds of courtly love. It was not the same in the north as in the south. In Southern France the poets were expected not to be adulterous with their queen or princess. One doesn't know what the truth was, but the facade maintained that they were merely entertainers writing love poetry for and about the monarch. Those were the troubadours. The concept relevant to them is called "fin' amors", which means pure love. In the north, among the trouveres, there was another tradition, in which love that was adulterous or carnal and fully sexual had its place as well.

Consequently, there were very different perceptions of what the nature of the “courtliness” was. There isn’t any single notion of courtly love. I always try to make distinctions in order to see the variability in all of these gross and simple-minded ideas that find their way into schoolbooks. The reality is usually much more complicated. Particularly in terms of love, all the different streams and rivulets intertwine at every moment, regardless of any preconceived definition.

In my chapters on courtly love in volume 2 of the trilogy, I analyze several respects in which it differed from what preceded it. There are things one can say about courtly love itself that equally pertain to its different varieties. One was its tendency to dignify human relations between a man and a woman to a degree that had not existed when marriage was just an institutional device to bring families together for political or financial purposes, or to live up to the church’s sanctified method of regulating reproduction. In courtly love, it is the ardent connecting of the right man and woman that ennoble them both and puts each in a superior condition. This could happen apart from wedlock, but married people were not necessarily excluded from having courtly love for each other. You didn’t have to be adulterous or unmarried – as de Rougemont and C. S. Lewis claim – in order for there to be this kind of love. You could have both courtly love and monogamous marriage. In principle they were separable but also capable of coexisting in one way or another.

Though the women were sometimes dominant, or more knowledgeable about what a lover should be, the medieval romances often tell another type of story. The fourteenth-century tale of Aucassin and Nicolette is a good example. In it, Aucassin is a young boy, an aristocrat, who falls in love with a slave girl named Nicolette whom his father owns. He shocks his parents when he says he wants to marry her. They retort, “What do you mean, marry? You can do anything you want with her, but you have to marry someone who belongs to your social class”. Aucassin can’t take that, and so he runs away with the girl and they cohabit. They live together like married people and have exploits that cement their relationship. They are separated when a band of Muslims captures them. Aucassin doesn’t see Nicolette for a long time, during which he has many adventures on his own. Eventually he is taken prisoner by a Muslim prince, whose wife turns out to be Nicolette. She recognizes Aucassin and still loves him. They cooperate and finally contrive to get free of the man with whom she has been living. The couple go back to Burgundy, where it all began. Aucassin’s parents have died, and he becomes the ruler. He inherits the wealth and position that are rightly his, and he and Nicolette live happily ever after.

That is a typical medieval romance, and in many details it fits the pattern of courtly love. It is particularly interesting because the most heroic figure, or rather one of the two heroes, is a woman, and a slave girl! You don’t find an exact equivalent in ancient Greek writings. There are inklings of it in Hellenistic fables, but the medieval depiction is part of a different and much larger perspective that was spreading throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and eventually fed into Western romanticism.

Before this occurred, there were intervening movements within seventeenth-century Puritanism and Rationalism, both of which reevaluate what would count as romantic love (with a little “r”). They derive only partly from ideas that were characteristic of the courtly period. Though the Puritans were not what we call “puritanical”, they wanted to have a sensible approach to human sexuality and emotion within a religious framework that was coherent with their Protestant beliefs. These in turn showed the influence of Luther, whose views were inimical to the basic humanism of courtly love. In the case of the Rationalists, many of them questioned the goodness of love to begin with. They held that people should devote themselves to making their thoughts clearer and more cogent, instead of giving themselves to emotional excitement that inevitably undermines the power of reason.

Shakespeare comes on the scene as someone post-Luther who is aware of a good many of these countercurrents and who organizes them in terms of his splendidly dramatic dialectic on the stage. After Shakespeare there are theorists who carry further his kind of approach, though they don’t envisage him as a philosophical source. The prevailing progression moves away from courtliness while also allowing a remnant of it to emerge in a version that is more suitable to later European society. In the nineteenth century, and under the influence of the French Revolution, whose ideas of equality, fraternity, and liberty encouraged people to love whomever they wished without parental interference, romanticism came into being. It brought together varied strands of thought and tried to construct an ideology by which individuals, particularly young men and women, would be able to attain an affective state of being that might variably amalgamate the previous views in the history of ideas that we have been discussing.

In this context, the role of women greatly changed. Female egalitarianism that is so important nowadays is a realization of what many Romantics believed in at the beginning of the nineteenth century. After the French Revolution, women were emancipated in some of the ways men were. Throughout the eighteenth century in Europe, there had been a great deal of freedom of sexual behavior, usually on the part of the men, though the women also could decide whom they wanted. They had access to greater sexual liberty than there had been for them when the church was all-powerful. In the nineteenth century, women strove for complete freedom. The Empress Josephine, and various prominent women, saw no reason why they couldn’t have lovers just as their menfolk did. In more recent history, women have asserted themselves as having other capacities for which they don’t need romantic love in order to achieve their personal goals, or at least not as much as was previously thought. And if they did experience romantic love, they would do so as free and autonomous agents rather than as persons who have to obtain their liberation by means of their love.

Yet that too is a fulfillment of the original conception of Romantic love. It was to happen through the equality that women are starting to have only now. In the current world women have shown that in most of the areas in which

men excel, women can do so equally, and often better. As a result, women don't have to submit to romantic love as a means of satisfying some dominant male. What results, at least in principle, is thus a greater ability to indulge in romantic love for women who so desire, together with a greater freedom from the necessity to love in order to demonstrate one's inherent value. Both patterns of romanticism are therefore accentuated. Women can freely have romantic love as much as men can, but women can also do without it if they choose since they don't have to justify their existence in that manner or yield at all to the male's craving to have female lovers whenever he wants. I think we are going through a very exciting era, the two hundred years since the Romantic revolution having shattered affective and interpersonal molds that prevailed throughout the world. I don't despair of the future, except perhaps in having to live through the creation of it!

Varieties of Romantic Love

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is an important figure in relation to one kind of Romantic love, what I call Romantic puritanism. Though Rousseau was largely puritanical, he promoted the glorification of feelings and a gamut of vaguely sentimental ideas about love. That approach typifies a major segment of romanticism. It maintains that you can be a true lover even if you never have sex with anybody, or if you never marry your beloved, just by living in a hazy dream of oneness that typifies an early stage of individual maturation. Many adolescents or prepubescent boys and girls have such experience, and then most of them get over it. In Rousseau's type of romanticism, the benign sentiments suffice to make your life meaningful. And if they are puristically puritanical, they might not lead to anything else. Rousseau was a great prophet for this attitude, while living differently himself, since his whole life was not given over to the mere expression of sentiment. But there were other variations of romanticism as well.

Here again we encounter the value of pluralism that alerts you to expect diversity, while also keeping your eye on some unique historical circumstances in which the diversity occurs. If you compare Rousseau with Stendhal, as I do in a couple of chapters, you find two distinct types of romanticism. Though love, as Stendhal realistically portrays it in his novels, is always deceptive, he also affirms that human happiness cannot occur unless one succumbs to the illusions it creates. And there are other writers in this period who say something similar but whose ideas I didn't go into as thoroughly as I would have liked. One of them is Alfred de Musset – the poet and playwright – who in the middle of the nineteenth century transitioned from benign romanticism to Romantic pessimism, combining both in his literary productions. Though being very sophisticated about the disasters that are latent in Romantic love, he was also aware of how powerful and exhilarating it can be. He tries to work out some form of harmonization between these alternatives, but he usually ends by giving up in despair.

In its totality, Musset's approach differs from either Rousseau's or Stendhal's. In the twentieth century it leads into the negativism of Proust – who is nonetheless sensitive to the aesthetic wonderment of Romantic love, emanating as it does from an extraordinarily fertile use of the imagination. All the same, Proust thinks that, since it is based on an illusion, Romantic love is always doomed. The only love he truly accepts or appreciates, and I think the only one he really understands, is the love of art. He has a kind of Romantic view of art. Despite this limitation, Proust is probably the greatest philosophical novelist who ever lived, mainly because he is so perceptive about the contrasting values in the human struggle for love and tries so persistently to be honest about them.

As I have said, the idea of merging with another person comes to the fore in romanticism. That is a primal component in it. Romantic theory also partakes of Platonism, Neoplatonism, sometimes Aristotelianism, and also pantheism – which many scholars have deemed uniquely Romantic: the idea being that passionate love is sacred in itself and therefore justifies one's intense experience; or else, that Romantic love is not just loving someone passionately but may also include a deified version of what Schopenhauer calls "loving-kindness". The latter is not the same as passion.

In Schopenhauer, who was a pessimist and who best represents Romantic pessimism, sexual passion is always an illusion-making device that nature employs to get people to engage in marriage, and therefore coitus, for the sake of reproducing the species. For the men and women who are in love and give themselves to it completely, passion is the greatest thing in life and they are sure it will lead to happiness. In reality, according to Schopenhauer, it is just a cunning self-deception created by nature to get people to procreate. This idea was picked up by Tolstoy and many other writers at the end of the nineteenth century, and also by Freud in the early twentieth century. They thought that passion enables our existence to be affirmative and vibrant, at least bearable, but always severely marred by emotional deception.

Nowadays when people treat Romantic love as the only kind of love, they tend to assume that passionate attachment alone makes life worth living. That is a wholly Romantic idea. It does not exist in the medieval conception of courtly love. In courtly love there may be sex, and even passionate sex – Tristan and Iseult is a story of adultery. The troubadours had to avoid that, or pretend to, but the trouveres and other adherents to courtly love didn't fudge the fact that their experience involved carnal indulgence. At the same time, the medieval writers rarely assert that the oceanic feeling of sexual passion justifiably frees one from the bonds of ordinary morality. In the Romantic period, that is exactly what was meant. Passion of this libidinal and erotic sort appears in the glorified abandon and complete yielding of oneself that is then defined as the nature of truly romantic unity between man and woman, and as the basis of all love in general, indeed the only thing that creates meaning and goodness in life.

Bernini's statue of St. Teresa shows her in a state of ecstasy, with her eyes rolling, while she is half-unconscious, or maybe wholly unconscious, but undergoing a passionate love of God. That is how the church was willing to represent religious love – the passionate and total surrender of oneself to the deity. If you take this work of art in isolation from its social setting, let's say if you're a Martian who comes in and looks at that statue, you might see it as something out of Playboy. (Well, actually, Playboy doesn't show passion. It shows seductiveness. The nude women are not usually in a state of passionate release, but rather experiencing delight and sensuous pleasure designed to arouse male passion.) The notion of Romantic love, extolling the supremely passionate, concentrates entirely upon the overwhelming and quasi-religious emotionality that men and women may get from love, particularly sexual love. This view of interpersonal possibilities predominates throughout the history of romanticism in the modern world.

That attitude may also account for the greatly varied acceptability of different objects of love, which is characteristic of our current predilections, above all in our very recent past. The so-called sexual revolution in the 1960s and 1970s was predicated upon the belief that whatever gives you the requisite kicks, whatever excites you very much, is equally good. The concept is an adaptation, or rather modification, of the Romantic belief that by itself and in itself only passion provides the most essential, the most desirable, goodness in life. If so, why should it matter where or how you get the needed stimulus? From this perspective you can also derive the liberation, the acceptability as never before, of homosexual behavior. Across the ages in the Western world, there has been a homophobia that condemns all such inclinations as evil, sick, degenerate, even criminal. Freud refers to homosexuality as an "arrested development." But if passion determines what is good and what makes life worth living, and if you get your passion with a person of the same sex, why should anyone care about his or her gender? It's the passion that matters most.

A significant tie thus exists between gay liberation and the growth of romanticism under the alternate parameters related to differing social conditions. These always come into play, of course. Our erotic and amatory beliefs are not simply ideational. They are also a function of societal, economic, and environmental circumstances. With all that in mind, one can see how the present turmoil about same-sex marriage has its roots in the Romantic upheaval that took place many years ago. Needless to say, its consequences had never been foreseen.

Identification of Love and Passion

In addition to the ones I have mentioned, there are other versions of the Romantic approach to love. While it remained a dominant theme, the identification between love and passion altered from country to country. Whether it

may or may not have been typically American, it was very strong in the United States during the twentieth century. In England or Western Europe, and certainly in Eastern Europe or Asia, there existed a somewhat different climate of opinion. Nevertheless, the adoration of passion endures as a touchstone that pervades the varieties of romanticism.

Having said this, I want to emphasize that ideas alone never create feelings. And by themselves feelings never amount to ideas, because each of them must be processed cognitively as well as affectively. The two aspects of human nature always interact, but their intersection is so subtle that we often cannot say which is predominant. For some persons in some societies, passion may be a sign of mental illness. Psychotics can be very passionate about things that therapists and other rational people would consider unwholesome. From the point of view of individuals who are healthy but unfulfilled for whatever reason, and then undergo a moment of passion (this is a typical Hollywood script), life can suddenly start to glitter for them. One might occasionally want to say that the before and after ways of life are both sick: the individuals just hadn't been aroused to the degree that a passionate experience awakens, but satisfies only momentarily.

Human beings differ greatly in that respect. Some people don't need much passion. Some need a lot. Most of us have it only in a particular phase of our lives. It's noteworthy that in many marriages – including good marriages – the participants outgrow passion and yet are able to develop into a kind of love that results from having gone through the earlier period of passion. Remember that within a lifespan all sorts of physiological changes occur. There are variations in the level of hormones; differences in the strength and deterioration of the body, or if not actual deterioration then alteration in what the body can do; intellectual developments, mental advances or the opposite that one undergoes; and, of course, there is simply the course of daily events that belong to the marital relation itself.

As separate men and women, we all have highly diverse modes of access to life, and sometimes we learn from them. We may even learn how to improve in matters of love. People often fail at this and suffer miseries because they never know what they really want. That would affect the nature of their feelings, the character of their needs for one another, and the kinds of relationships they enter into, which may or may not be passionate. Everyone has a capacity for friendships that, for one reason or another, never issue into passion but can nevertheless be the most rewarding part of a person's life.

The same holds for an individual's art or profession, social involvement, mission as a political force or leader of one's people. Men and women do not have to have much emotionality, and surely not a great deal of romantic passion, in order for those avenues of our existence, those patterns of love, to flourish to some degree or other. To be an ardent teacher does not mean that you seduce your pupils. It means you love the activity of helping them in the ways a teacher can. It has a little, but not very much, to do with sexual ro-

mance. Freud would say it's sublimation, and that it always comes down to libidinal frustration or repression. But why? Human nature is extremely broad, and very intricate. There are many social and biological vectors at work within it. I don't think that Freud understood even the biological part, and I see no need to reduce all forms of love to either passionate love or some Romanticized inclination related to it.

In terms of the popular media, you do see massive evidence of a longing for the Romantic. I am not a sociologist, and I don't pretend to know what direction different societies will follow, or how the future in general will compare with what has happened in the past. I have no authoritative knowledge about that. But I can imagine the affective dimensions in the life that many people lead. I often think about the immediate experience of creative persons. An artist may fall in love with his art. He is driven by a kind of self-love that is wholly appropriate for what he does professionally. He loves himself so much that he learns how to express his being through his technique and through an attachment to, and affection for, the tools of his trade, the materials of his craft, the limiting parameters of his art.

This kind of love explains why a musician lives in terms of sounds. He or she hears them all the time. A painter lives with the emotionality of his pigments. I am a word artist, and much of my active life goes into writing. I am constantly attending to phrases and complete sentences that are meaningful to me. Some-times the ideas that come forth are not very interesting, yet they are attuned to other ideas, and what matters is the reforming and reshuffling of these concepts throughout the flood of language that flutters within my mind. I spend a lot of time walking by myself. While observing my surroundings, I hear and silently recite words, some of which end up in my prose. It is all a kind of love that cannot be reduced to passionate or romantic love of any kind. Whether or not an artist's experience is thought to be based on narcissism, repression, idealization, or sublimation – tough rarely is there a sublimation of anything – it aspires to an aesthetic fulfillment of the human being he or she has become.

At the same time, an artist's love life consists of other affective outlets, some of which involve romantic interests that any person might have, or would like to have, or may have once had. This truism manifests the plurality in our existence. There isn't any one thing that defines us exclusively, and so we inevitably experience different types of love. The job for the philosopher is to help us make our thinking clear about that disparity and to some extent organize it through reasoning, but not in a way that contravenes the reliance upon empirical and naturalistic factuality.

In the course of discussing the ideas of romanticism, my love trilogy includes a lengthy chapter about thinkers whom I call "anti-Romantic Romantics". The three that I deal with most are Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Tolstoy. Their views arise from conceptual constructions that were native to nineteenth-century romanticism. They rebel against them and try to supplant the

commonplace notions of Romantic love. But in the process they create a new kind of romanticism without which we cannot understand the importance of love as we conceive of it at present. In the case of Nietzsche, the new version articulates his ideas of the superman and of “eternal return,” which frequently occur in Romantic theory. And also the notion of “amor fati” – the love of everything, love of all reality. As if human beings can have such a love! As if we know what all of reality might be!

In *Feeling and Imagination*, the more recent book to which I have already referred, I systematically attack the belief that we can even understand what it means to ask what reality is in its totality. In itself this question seems to me indicative of a quasi-religious perspective that some scientists have had (fewer and fewer nowadays) about the basic ability of science, and of properly regulated rational activity in general. It is a faith that seeks to put together all the pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of nature. The assurance it entails is accompanied by the further idea that at some point in the future we will find the solution.

For me what's more pertinent is the anecdote about the computer in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The computer says the meaning of life is 42, and when the investigators are astonished and infuriated by that after generations of waiting for it to provide them with its final answer, the computer replies, “Perhaps your problem is that you don't know what the question means”. I agree. We don't really know, and for that reason the Romantic extrapolating to the suggestion that one could have love for everything is grounded in a similar confusion. How could we ever know what the “everything” might be? And if we did, how could we possibly have a passionate love that would transcend the obvious limitations in our capacity to love anything?

Though this part of Nietzsche's thinking is typically Romantic, it stems from his rejection of the usual romanticism and a refusal to go back to a pre-Romantic stage, as represented by Kant's philosophy. Kant has a theory of married love in which he talks about joint submission to the personhood of the other individual. Nietzsche says of that: If the two people are always submissive to each other, what is there left between them? Possibly nothing? I think that is very shrewd as a critique of the pre-Romantic attitude about love that Kant exemplifies. But Nietzsche ends up with a type of postromanticism that is even more Romantic than what the Romantics believed, because it tries to extend itself to all there is and to do so in terms of a very mystical and obscure form of cosmic love, very hard for human beings to comprehend, let alone achieve. I will return to this in a later section.

The Role of Creativity

There are other explorations that are related to these thoughts and that may take us a little further. I'll mention one that is very strong in my life at the moment. It results from my realization that in trying to make sense out of the

rather amorphous concept of bestowal, which has occasioned a great deal of struggle on my part, I continually find there is more that needs to be done. Each time I return to the issue, my thinking seems to have altered a bit. Perhaps this is what I should have anticipated, since I myself keep changing. Nevertheless, I sense a coherence in what I write, and I surmise that the successive explorations may occasionally be enrichments in the vital continuum that my reading of Dewey taught me to seek.

What I am now beginning to appreciate is the fact that bestowal must be treated as a pervasive and imaginative component of human creativity. I dealt with that slightly in *The Harmony of Nature and Spirit*, and then again in *Feeling and Imagination*. But I failed to portray the detailed manner, and extent, to which imagination is related to creativity. I did not establish how greatly the concept of creativity underlies the distinctions I have lumped together as helpful for understanding the nature of love, perhaps because I presented them as one perspective after another without any desire to achieve a grandly unified theory. A solution of that sort – comparable to the computer's answer in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – would have been worthless. I didn't want it, and I'm still not interested in it.

Even so, there is an extensive view that I have been skirting, or dealing with obliquely, but now wish to articulate in a straightforward fashion. It addresses the role that creativity plays in all our experience. The issue is central to traditional thinking about love, whether it be God's love, agape in Christianity, or any form of love among human beings. The search for creativity manifests itself in the desire to love God – as understood by each of the major Western religions as well as others, such as Zen Buddhism and Hinduism – and likewise in most of our theories about the kind of interpersonal love that ordinary people have access to. I find the idea of creativity difficult to work with, but only by striving pluralistically with concepts like it can one truly elucidate what the nature and pursuit of love is. Sex, which is interrelated, of course, I approach in a comparable though still incomplete form in the expanded version of my book *Sex: Philosophical Primer* and also in *Explorations in Love and Sex*.

In these books I introduce analyses that eluded me in earlier stages of my writing. I try to show how pluralism provides new modes of dealing with both creativity and love. I specifically have in mind my distinction between compassion and sex, or you might say compassion and passionate sex. The distinction I made in *The Goals of Human Sexuality* between «the passionate» and «the sensuous» is relevant here. By sensuous I meant the way in which we enjoy our body, often through contact with some other person. We then gratify ourselves through our senses and for the sake of sensory consummation. The second dimension, the passionate, I described as a powerful need, a strong feeling of ardor or yearning, normally but not necessarily for another person. Sensuous is cool and passionate is not, but they're both aspects of sexuality, unlike one another, though often compatible with each other. When I

got to *The Pursuit of Love*, I tried to deploy similar insights about other kinds of love. And then in *Explorations in Love and Sex*, I returned to the original distinction and amplified it within the framework of a distinction between passion and compassion.

The latter of these two I depict as a type of love, since if you feel compassion for another person you bestow value upon him or her in a very special relation that requires its own place within the spectrum of loving attachments. In studying that niche, I distinguished between compassion and pity. This distinction goes back to Kant, but I conceived of it anew, and with an awareness of how faulty Rousseau was when he talked about the two as if they were the same. I treated compassion not only as different from pity but also as distinct from the passionate, whether sexual or otherwise, as well as from the sensuous, which is limited to enjoyment of one's sense organs.

Compassion interweaves with kindred types of love – the love of humanity, for example. In some traditions, Buddhism above all, the divine is envisaged specifically in terms of compassion. Christianity is more complex since God acts compassionately in sending down the personhood of himself that is called his Son. The Son forgives out of compassion, but it is sinfulness that elicits his bestowal. In Buddhism compassion results from the mere existence of suffering, and that means more to me than any concept of sin. My thoughts about compassion are therefore closer to those in Buddhism.

At the same time, my conception attempts to be inclusive, combining pluralistic views of love, compassion, and sex with the distinction between the passionate and the sensuous, which may be applicable as well to sexless interpersonal bonds that are either passionate or sensuous – or rather the two of them, since most people wish to experience both. In all these matters there is no one simple solution that one should be looking for, or even hoping to come across. Moreover, the issues are further complicated by the fact that, for me at least, all of the acceptable distinctions – for instance, between the sensuous and the passionate – serve to determine not only what love is but also the nature of creativity as a whole.

It was toward that end that I wrote my book *Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in Their Operas*. In it I examined Beethoven's inspired thinking about the nature of passion, with all the religious overtones in God's giving of himself through the passion of Christ, and likewise the carnal passion embodied in marriage and its preliminaries. Mozart had some insight into the varieties of passion but was generally more concerned about the ramifications of the sensuous.

There are thus different types of creativity, different affective modes that may be approachable through the basic distinction between the sensuous and the passionate. Notice, however, that we are now talking about a distinction between aesthetic elements operating in works of art, musical masterpieces in this case, rather than between a man and a woman or any other pair of living individuals. That alone makes the analysis more intricate, and thus more elusive.

Future Prospects for the Philosophy of Love: Science and Humanistic Studies United

In turning to the nature of creativity itself, I had yet to find – and still continue to search for – some means of progressing along these intellectual branches, these ventures up the tree of the human spirit, and out on one limb or another. In a sense, that is what I have been doing in the present book, by providing these very limited descriptions. For me they all emanate from a vague totality that is my being as the person I am, expressing myself with whatever conceptual piety I can muster toward my life and its past. Still, as Renoir kept saying about his many films, whether any single product is in fact good or bad doesn't matter as much as the artist's ability to keep on doing his work.

I hope I'll be able to. If I can, I would like my further speculations about love to amalgamate some of the research now occurring in neuroscience and in cognitive studies. As in other great American universities, MIT has encouraged the idea of interdisciplinary research between scientists and humanists, philosophers in particular. But thus far little has been achieved in that direction.

At MIT there is quite a large faculty of people in the humanities who are treated with respect by the Institute as a whole. Nevertheless a relative lack of coordinated research exists between them and the scientists. The problem is compounded if we distinguish, as I do, between the humanities and what is humanistic. You can be a practitioner of the humanities and a superior scholar in some branch of them without being humanistic. Epigraphical work in Greek linguistics is part of the humanities, but it isn't especially humanistic, any more than geology is. They both have their rightful role in a university, but to effect the harmonization that is sorely needed at present, given the fact that biological and cognitive studies have advanced so well, one would have to integrate that type of knowledge more overtly, and more intimately, with concerted investigations of an affective sort. And those largely depend upon the humanistic aspects of the humanities.

Poetry, music, literature, theater, film, and other visual arts – all these are thoroughly concerned with human values, emotions, feelings, in short, affect in its entirety that lies beyond the explicit subject matter of the sciences. The humanities can benefit from science, but they suffer badly when reduced to its methodologies, regardless of where the money comes from. Nowadays it often comes from scientific endeavors. There isn't much money in our society at the moment for purely humanistic work. For thirty years brilliant minds have been charging ahead with great success in cognitive and related scientific efforts. But they may now be reaching an impasse that requires a different kind of tactic.

The importance of the humanistic dimension was taken for granted in earlier centuries. And it excelled in creating beautiful love poetry and great works of art based on love and humankind's inspired search for it. Mozart,

Stendhal, Verdi, Proust, and many other great artists were not scientific at all. Now we have many great scientists but we're falling behind by not sufficiently including the arts and the humanities, above all in those areas of humanistic thought that could benefit the sciences directly as well as indirectly.

When I first undertook what has become the core of my intellectual life, there wasn't an established profession that I could rely on, since so little was being done by either philosophers or scientists to study the nature of love and sex or the meaning of life, or even the aesthetics of film. The people who counseled me to avoid such flimsy subjects were often very cultivated, but they too were convinced that all investigation along those lines was suspect and surely fruitless. What I've learned is that, regardless of anything I or others have done since then, the need for such work is even greater now than it was before.

The idea is not to put us back into the mindset of the Middle Ages, or even the seventeenth century, or to better appreciate the achievement of St. John of the Cross, for example, a wonderfully imaginative and perceptive poet, or the nineteenth century, where there were brilliant playwrights like Musset and priceless novelists like Stendhal and Jane Austen. The problem is contemporary, so the output must be contemporary. But within the current actuality, there will have to arise new art forms and new branches of science that can deal with many of the unsolved issues that have been placed on the overloaded shoulders of cognitive science and brain or cell research. The latter have borne up under their burdens, but possibly in ways that are less applicable to the problems of ordinary life than if they had been sustained by prolonged cooperation with the humanistic approach in the humanities. That doesn't happen at MIT now, and I don't think it happens anywhere else. Yet the seeds are there.