

Professor Lee Perlman

CC.112 Philosophy of Love – Paper 1

Head Over “Feels” in Love: The Emerging Synthesis of “Love as Feeling” and “Love as Intention”

If people nowadays were asked to describe “love,” their replies would most likely range from “Love is the feeling of butterflies fluttering in your stomach” to “Love is that warm feeling in your heart.” Contrary to the modern notion that love is a “feeling,” many philosophers and writers across time have disputed that love is actually a conscious choice – an intention that leads to action. What is the relationship between “love as feeling” and “love as intention”? Can a synthesis of the two be constructed, and if so, what would this fusion entail? Some intellectuals claim that “love as feeling” and “love as intention” bear a hierarchical relationship, in which one form of love develops into the other. However, I venture to claim that these two opposing forms of love, in fact, bear a mutually dependent relationship.

In this paper, I will first examine the natures of “love as feeling” and “love as intention,” using examples drawn from literature, film, essays, and philosophical ideologies. I will then examine the two most intriguing views on the relationship between “love as feeling” and “love as intention.” One view is that “love as feeling” is a nascent form of love that develops into “love as intention.” The second view entails almost the opposite. It claims that “intentional” acts of love actually generate “feelings” of love. Taking these two views into account, I will then explore how the synthesis of these two forms of love results in two

components of human growth: the appreciation of sensuality, and the pursuit of beauty. My ultimate goal is to demonstrate that “love as feeling” and “love as intention” bear a mutually dependent, cyclic relationship. If I can then adequately refute possible objections to my argument, I will consider my thesis substantiated.

“Love as feeling” is essentially characterized by three elements: It is passive in nature, is heteronomous, and embodies Eros. The passive nature of “love as feeling” is manifested in Western film and literature. In *Casablanca* and *Tristan and Iseult*, the pairs of lovers are brought together primarily due to external circumstances. In *Casablanca*, these external forces are symbolized by World War Two, and in *Tristan and Iseult*, the “wine of love” (*Tristan and Iseult*, p.37). Due to this passivity, this form of love is essentially heteronomous. As the excitement of Tristan and Iseult’s affair is ignited by the obstacle that is King Mark, and the flame between Rick and Ilsa is fueled by the threat of the ongoing war, the passion that accompanies “love as feeling” is governed by external factors. Similar to the way Tristan is helplessly cast adrift by the sea many instances in his life, “love as feeling” is an overpowering emotion that is beyond human control. Furthermore, “love as feeling” often embodies Eros, for it is bodily and entails intense “desire [that is] greater than mortal will” (*Tristan and Iseult*, p. 41). It is this passive, heteronomous, and bodily “love as feeling” that many people nowadays are perhaps familiar with.

“Love as intention,” on the other hand, is active in nature, is autonomous, and embodies Agape. “Love as intention” encompasses a will that is strong enough to be translated into action. As this form of love stems from one’s own will, it is autonomous in nature. Peck especially condones this form of love, as he defines love as “an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action... [that] also implies choice” (Peck 1978, p. 83). “Love as intention” is

often a recurring element in religious and political ideologies that preach non-violence and forgiving, Agapeic love.

Now that the natures of these two forms of love have been distinguished, we may examine the two perspectives regarding the relationship between the two. One view exhibited in Western culture is that “love as feeling” is a nascent form of love, which matures into “love as intention.” This view is embedded in Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* as well as Scott Peck’s *The Road Less Travelled*.

Casablanca illustrates the development of “love as feeling” into “love as intention.” In the opening of the film, Rick is portrayed as a bitter man who still peels at the scabs of his emotional wounds from a long-lost love. However, when Ilsa reenters his life and declares she has remained steadfast in her love for him, Rick transforms from a narcissistic cynic to a noble hero who sacrifices his happiness for the good of the Allied war effort. The love between Ilsa and Rick begins as Eros – an intense and passionate “love of feeling” during their honeymoon-like days in Paris – but matures into Agapeic “love of intention” that brings about constructive good for their society. Curtiz portrays “love as intention” as a mature form of love that, by transcending earthly pleasures and selfish desires, brings good to both the lovers and the world they live in.

Peck also contends to the idea that “love as feeling” matures into “love as intention” in *The Road Less Travelled*. This is apparent in his description of the process of how “falling in love” transforms into “real love” (Peck 1978, p. 94). The Peckian notion of “falling in love” coincides with that of “love as feeling.” He elaborately describes it as a “sex-linked erotic... feeling of ecstatic lovingness” (p. 84-85), making it explicitly clear that it is neither “an act of will” nor a “conscious choice” (p. 88). However, Peck proceeds to claim that “falling in love”

can indeed develop into “the work of real loving” (p. 88). The temporary collapse of ego boundaries can result in a permanent extension of those boundaries; the familiarity with another’s private soul can enable true compassion towards one’s lover; the illusion of unity may gradually grow into true attachment that nourishes the spiritual growth of both lovers. Similar to a temporary architectural scaffold that is later demolished, “love as feeling” is the indispensable first stage of what will mature into a truer “love as intention.”

Whereas the claims we have just examined view “love as intention” as a derivative of “love as feeling,” other intellectuals argue the complete opposite. Another view on the relationship between the two forms of love is that “love as intention” gives rise to the actions that actually induce “love as feeling.” This perspective is manifested in various religious and philosophical ideology, most notably that of Sivananda.

Sivananda’s philosophy on Ahimsa claims that acts of “love as intention” can actually generate “love as feeling.” In *Bliss Divine*, Sivananda commands that Ahimsa be practiced by “try[ing] to control the physical body and speech first” (Sivananda, p. 3). Only once one has successfully carried out these intentions will he “enjoy the highest peace, bliss and immortality” (p. 4). According to this philosophy, an initial “feeling” or emotion does not propagate the action of love, but quite the opposite. An intentional, loving act implants the seeds in one’s soul, from which feelings of love subsequently grow. It is important to note here that “love” in this context takes on a slightly different nuance than “love” as portrayed in Western film and literature. “Love” in the context of Ahimsa is perhaps better interpreted as a selfless love directed towards all of humanity. In the ideology of Sivananda, “love as intention” generates “love as feeling.”

Abraham Lincoln once declared, “When I do good, I feel good... That’s my religion.”

Despite the simplicity of this statement, I find from personal experience that it rings with much truth. In high school, I undertook a challenge in handling a classmate who had been unpleasant towards my friend and me for the previous two years. I decided to act lovingly towards him. One day, I cheerfully greeted him, to his mild surprise. A few days later, I offered assistance for a homework problem he was struggling with. Soon the classmate ceased to emanate the hostility that had been there for so long, and we embarked on the beginning of new friendship. Surprisingly, I also found that a warm sense of peacefulness and love had arisen within me. The act of willingly practicing “love as intention” gave rise to “love as feeling,” not only towards my classmate, but also within myself.

So far we have examined two perspectives on the connection between “love as feeling” and “love as intention.” Although these two views do contain an element of truth, they ultimately fall short in creating an organic synthesis between the two forms of love. This is primarily due to the fact that these arguments imply a hierarchal relationship between the two forms of love. In one view, “feeling” can mature into “intention.” In the other view, “intention” can generate “feeling.” However, in neither view do the two forms of love converge. I venture to claim that both “love as feeling” and “love as intention” are mutually dependent, and bear a cyclic relationship. I will explore how the synthesis of the two forms of love produces two components of human growth: the appreciation of sensuality and the pursuit of beauty.

One of the products of the synthesis of “love as feeling” and “love as intention,” is human sensuality. Literature across time has portrayed the inherent connection between sex and love. Contrary to common belief nowadays, the act of sex does not involve solely the physical act, but also encompasses a spiritual aspect. As Patrick Lee and Robert George define in *What Sex Can Be*, sex is a “unitary, multi-leveled personal communion” (George & Lee, p. 19). Due

to its intrinsically bodily and entangling emotional nature, sensuality embodies “love as feeling.” However, it also involves “love as intention” between the two lovers, for the consequences of this act are profound. It is an act of completely exposing oneself to another, and more importantly, is the act of implanting the seeds of human life. The role of love in sensuality is portrayed in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The dichotomy of the “mind” and the “machine” is painfully highlighted in Connie’s society, in which the upper class coldheartedly exploits laborers to satiate their materialistic greed. Connie is suffocated by the “nothingness... of words” (Lawrence), which demonstrates that love cannot be sustained through solely an intellectual connection. There must be an active component to the love, a “love of intention,” which is lacking in Connie and Clifford’s relationship. Mellors, on the other hand, is a classless individual who possesses characteristics of both the “mind” and the “machine.” He is educated and intelligent, yet refuses to join the upper class and prefers manual labor. He symbolizes the emerging synthesis of minds and machines: the living human body. This draws a parallel with the fact that he also represents the synthesis between “love as feeling” and “love as intention.” Love is the interaction of living bodies. Thus, solely having “intentions” like an inert machine, or solely having “feelings” like a disembodied mind, is not sufficient to achieve this love. As Mellors synthesizes the mind and the machine, true love only comes about through the synthesis of feeling and intention. This synthesis of “love as feeling” and “love as intention,” in the Lawrencian world, produces the sensuality that allows Connie to survive in the dehumanizing atmosphere she struggles in.

Another significant product of the synthesis of “love as feeling” and “love as intention” is the pursuit of beauty. Jane Campion portrays this through Baines’ love for Ada in *The Piano*. At a first glance, Baines’ love appears to be far from true love, and even seems to verge on infatuated, manipulative lust. The scenes in which Baines coerces Ada into exposing her body

in exchange for her access to the piano present “love as feeling” at its highest intensity, almost to level that is disconcerting. However, if one observes Baines more closely, one realizes that underlying this seemingly barbaric “love as feeling” is actually an Agapeic “love as intention.” The synthesis of the two forms of love is manifested in his pursuit of the beauty that Ada expresses through her masterful piano performance. Having been confined to the rigid world of utilitarianism all his life, Baines is appalled when he first glimpses into Ada’s world of pure, unsullied beauty, as he listens to her perform on the seashore. Immediately driven by a longing for this beauty, he makes every effort to come closer to the beauty Ada embodies. His pursuit encompasses both Erotic “love as feeling” and Agapeic “love as intention.” The latter manifests itself through all his acts of compassion: taking tender care of the piano, complying with Ada’s wish to throw it overboard when leaving New Zealand, and crafting Ada a silver index finger when beginning their new life. Campion demonstrates that the synthesis of “love as feeling” and “love as intention” embodies the pursuit of beauty – a beauty that is otherworldly, captivating, and magical to Baines.

One may object to my claim by arguing that “love as feeling” and “love as intention” are such starkly conflicting entities that they cannot coexist. One may believe that is contradicting to say that one can be passive and active at the same time, or be autonomous and heteronomous simultaneously. However, I refute that this is not a contradiction, but is rather a manifestation of the complexity of human relationships. Whether it is a relationship with a loved one, a friend, or an enemy, one can be passive and active, or autonomous and heteronomous, all at once. In my relationship with my mother, I have no control over the fact that I am indebted to her and have passively received her love all these years – yet I have the power to love her back and try to repay her loving in any way I can. When I feel attracted towards another being, I have no control over my intense admiration and yearning to become

closer to them – yet I have the power to channel that energy into performing small acts of kindness to brighten that person’s day. Our emotions may be outside our control, but how we decide to respond to those emotions is our conscious choice. We humans are inherently a curious blend of passivity and activity, of dependence and independence, and of internal emotions and external actions. It is only natural that both love as “feeling” and as “intention,” despite their contradictory natures, can both arise within oneself.

Despite the fact that they are both forms of love, “love as feeling” and “love as intention” oppose one another in almost every way. “Love as feeling” is passive, heteronomous, bodily, and Erotic. “Love as intention,” on the other hand, is active, autonomous, mental, and Agapeic. Writers, artists and philosophers across time have conceived of various views on the possible relationship between these two forms of love. Some believe that “love as feeling” is an immature form of love that develops into “love as intention,” while others affirm that “love as intention” is responsible for giving rise to “love as feeling.” Both perspectives certainly contain an element of truth, but the true relationship between the two forms of love lies within the synthesis of the two. When the two forms of love converge, two components of human growth emerge. Sensuality transforms one into a living being, and the pursuit of beauty propagates them towards a life-long goal. As such, I believe that “love as feeling” and “love as intention” go hand in hand. The two forms of love mutually reinforce one another. An intense “feeling” of love drives us to perform acts of “intentional” love, which in turn enlarges our tender “feelings” of love even further. The organic relationship between “love as feeling” and “love as intention” is therefore perhaps cyclic, and elevates us towards the pinnacle of human growth.

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