



EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE AS MEANING OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

After Marxism the major philosophy that has affected the social thinking and cultural transformation is Existentialism. According to this philosophy, life is meaningless but a quest in human being exists to impart it a meaning. Majority of people think that happiness in love can quench the thirst of quest. Thus, quest for meaning is actually quest for love, which can make our life happy. In Existentialism the joy of love is when we feel secure in our possession of one another and find the meaning of our lives in and through the other person. Love may be authentic or unauthentic. Inauthentic love is an Existential Threat. If lover wants to merge his/her individuality in the beloved it is Bad Faith since lover does not want to evade the responsibility that love requires. Romantic love is an illusion. Sincerity expressed by lovers as a desire for total unity is catastrophic. Romantic love is 'Being-for-others' oriented. The being-for-others is how I see myself when I feel the gaze of another. It is not 'one's being as it exists in the consciousness of another. In the play No Exit by Sartre is a dramatic embodiment of the problem of being-for-others and the project of love. Mere physical possession of the Other is no gratification, the lover expect the beloved to direct his/her consciousness in a particular way and reduce other's freedom. If one continually chooses itself to be possessed or the lover wants to be loved by Other by possessing his freedom is inauthentic love. The beloved wants to be the nucleus or the meaning and purpose of the life of the Other. A purpose so high that he is ready to forgo his freedom for that. Like romantic love the hate is also Other related. It is another aspect of being-for-others. To be isolated by indifference is an ideal adopted by Hindu ascetics also. Romantic love is not a candle light dinner only it is source of distress and delights both. "An authentic love is based on "reciprocal recognition of two freedoms"(Beauvoir). In the core of romantic love lies sexual desire. Kierkegaard identifies love with caring. Love can be understood in relation to a deeper existential structure.

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INTRODUCTION

Authentic love is comradeship in which both parties recognize each other's freedom, and pursue aims and interests outside of their relationship. A true comrade would never deprive his fellow being his independence and make his wishes subservient to his own. All individuals have different quantum of quest for search of meaning and each has to find his own since there is no universal meaning that can be assigned to life. Instead, each is an independent whole who freely chooses the other anew with every day without trying to possess them entirely. Love is not a mutual itching but a mutual consideration. Romantic love arises out of frustrated desires, now with advent of permissive society desires are easily fulfilled so the romantic love has become obsolete.

Skye Cleary has successfully undertaken an existential quest to understand the meaning and nature of heterosexual romantic loving relationships through a study of five philosophers namely Stirner, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre and Beauvoir. These philosophies put together with the focus on love explain the importance of existential love over romantic love. We can say the definition of romantic love has changed over a period of time. There seems to be a lack of literature in psychotherapy that focuses specifically on the topic of romantic love and existentialism. The complexities and flaws of romantic love despite the ideals and assumptions of modern lovers may need serious investigation from artists, writers, philosophers, social scientists and clinical psychologists. That would also help in finding the answers of the questions like, can romantic love be authentic? Does romantic love provide a relief in anxiety and thus can create meaning in life.

Love can be understood in relation to a deeper existential structure. Goethe's axiom 'Be a whole or join a whole' explains it. When self-actualisation or Being-need is achieved, one can say 'Others are hell' like Sartre. If we are searching for relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, in your quest for providing a larger meaning to life, than the absurdity of entire cosmos is revealed. In *Nausea* the protagonist is in search of perfect time when he meets his ex-lover. He believes one has to transform privileged situations into perfect moments. He considers it as feeling adventure to see one's beloved grow old and feel yourself growing old with her. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains love as a strategy for achieving control over "being-for-others," the objectified aspect of the self imposed by others' defining looks. Two fictions by Sartre, *The Room* and *Dirty Hands*, expand the notions of love and of being-for-others as impossible project. The fictions enlarged perspective on human love and on being-for-others provides a framework for ontological categories presented in *Being and Nothingness*.

Friedrich Nietzsche thought love is "the most angelic instinct" and "the greatest stimulus of life.". But lovers all too often act like "the dragon guarding his golden hoard" and treat a



beloved like an exotic bird—“as something also which must be cooped up to prevent it flying away.” Nietzsche ridiculed the efforts of lovers in securing love and wondered how could people vow to feel in love till 'death do us part'. Such a vow is a self - deception or bad faith. It snatches freedom to have the possibility to change course, redefine yourself, and overturn others' images of what you should be. If lovers define themselves by choosing to love each other both now and in the future, it is the paradox of love. How can they know what they will be like in the future? To make a commitment is to tie down a future self is its own denial of freedom.

As Heidegger writes to Hannah Arendt “we could only say that the world is now no longer mine and yours – but ours ... and every unforced, authentic act is *our* life.” Freedom is attunement and love as genuine solicitude. Kierkegaard also identifies love with caring. At the root of the flow of emotions, longings and desires is the wish for the best for the beloved. He thought it was easier to love than to be loved. Love has a central similarity to faith. Kierkegaard's dilemma was between self - love and neighbor love. He thinks self-love and neighbor-love should be symmetrical, similar in kind as well as degree. This again is a paradox if examined from his Christian existentialist point of view. We are supposed to be lenient, charitable, and forgiving when dealing with others which is quite contrary to when dealing with ourselves.

Why do lovers seek to control one another? Sartre says possessive love is built upon a contradiction. It never simply fulfills its function. Here love object is glorified and dehumanized at the same time. Love is expected to bestow some extraordinary power while depriving each other the basic need of freedom and choice. Possessiveness is so fundamental to the experience of love, Sartre thought that to overcome the desire to possess a lover might be to overcome love itself. The control is a kind of inauthenticity, and enhances the desire to control. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre says " The tyrant scorns love, he is content with fear. If he seeks to win the love of his subjects, it is for political reasons; and if he finds a more economical way to enslave them, he adopts it immediately. On the other hand, the man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved (Sartre 367). He further says "The total enslavement of the beloved kills the love of the lover. The end is surpassed; if the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone. Thus, the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a thing; he demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess a freedom as freedom (Sartre 367). Thus, the lover has a paradox, he demands a pledge, yet is irritated by a pledge. He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free.

Love is an enterprise. It is a project of himself. All project leads to conflict. The beloved has no will to love and the lover seduces her. Soren Kierkegaard in his book *The Seducer's Diary* presents the main character Johannes as a seducer of many girls. The novel is about his



project of enticing a young woman Cordelia. While reading we find that it has some similarity to Valdimir Nobokov's *Lolita*, but subtle message of existential love gives the story an edge. The conflicts of the project are in the form of psychological games which lover plays to conquer his beloved. The young woman resists to the manipulative games of an expert lover to the best of her intelligence and abilities. Though in the effort lover consumes his entire identity. He confesses that his personality has turned to a fluid and exists precisely to facilitate consequences. He ascertains emotional authenticity of surrender by his beloved. Cordelia's soul is awakened after skillful awakening of sexual desires in her by Johannes and she forgets the guilt and faults. This is the triumph of a seducer. Along with the protagonist, we reach to the conclusion that to love is beautiful only as long as resistance is present; as soon as it ceases, to love is weakness and habit.

In his autobiographical work *The Words* Sartre says "Dogs know how to love; they are gentler than human beings, more faithful; they have a tact, a flawless instinct that enables them to recognise good, to distinguish the good from the wicked (Sartre 29)." He further says "when one loves children and animals too much, one loves them against human beings." (Sartre 29).

Victor Frankl is of the opinion that our lives take on meaning through our actions, through loving and through sufferings. Love makes a person indispensable even if his/her existence is unproductive in social context. Victor Frankl in his book *Yes to life in spite of everything* while examining uniqueness of an individual asserts that value of a personality is realised when specific meaning of life is fulfilled. "This is the way of love, or better still being loved" (87).

This kind of love where one is passive recipient without any effort on his part, without consideration of any virtue that he possess or not and without having earned it. "Love is not a reward but blessing" (87).

Two strongest contenders in the meaning of life are love and happiness, which are not in conflict. Love is taxing, dispiriting affair. Love is a sort of bovine contentment. An individual can flourish only with the flourishing of others. Love means mutually creating space to flourish. All evils of society will automatically disappear if all follow the path of love. An Aristotelian man is stranger to love, because human acts as political animal. This kind of love acts a larger force. Kierkegaard for this kind of love says, "Love is the expression of the one who loves, not of the one who is loved. Those who think they can love only the people they prefer do not love at all. Love discovers truths about individuals that others cannot see." George Pattison in his book *A Metaphysics of Love* has analysed Kierkegaard's views on love that "Love and be silent" in *Works of Love* and "Fear and trembling is not the primus motors, in the Christian life, for that is love", in *Fear and Trembling*.



Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stresses the importance of self-mastery and largely sees love as an impediment in our way to reaching the superman ideal. Albert Camus thought love makes life incredible and dangerous. Stirner believed that when we love, it's not so much about the other person, but rather we love ourselves being in love. He calls it egotistical love. Love is a choice so one has to own the responsibility of choosing it. Love contains the seeds of self-destruction. Lovers try to control the view of beloved about them, which is an impossible task.

Albert Camus contemplated that if he had to write a book on morality, it will contain only one page with only one suggestion that the duty of mankind is to love. According to Camus what makes life worth living is rebellion; in art; in beauty, and in love, which calls for an action. "Love is a form of art and, through it, a means of scaffolding a future that does not yet exist, but could. Absurdity may be king, but love saves us from it. For Camus, love is the conscious choice to see the world in all its terrifying reality. Love is not just a confrontation with the absurdity of the world; it is a refusal to be broken by it" (Lombardi 1).

Absurdity focuses on the actual experience of love. Love devoid of its moral, social, cultural, and philosophical values is authentic love. Love that focuses on the biological feelings of love, which are temporary, non-exclusive, and do not imply commitment is inauthentic love. Social and moral norms are against multiple relations but Camus resolved them to some extent and kept many parallel multiple relationships and rationalized them. Camus writes in the *Notebook*, "A love which cannot be faced with reality is not a real love" (Camus 120). His views were more elaborated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he suggests that chemistry between two individual is always different. "But of love I know only that mixture of desire, affection, and intelligence that binds me to this or that creature. That compound is not the same for another person. I do not have the right to cover all these experiences with the same name" (Camus 74).

Don Juan falls in a new feeling of love even before the end of the current feelings. He is symbol of an absurd man who experiences love as a passionate, joyful feelings, rather than symbols or status of love. Such experience of love is categorized as lust or infatuation by the society. Don Juan syndrome is despicable and taboo in the society because he leaves a woman not because he has ceased to desire her but because he desires another, and thinks, it is different. In his book *Sisyphus* Camus says "If it were sufficient to love, things would be too easy. The more one loves the stronger the absurd grows. It is not through lack of love that Don Juan goes from woman to woman. It is ridiculous to represent him as a mystic in quest of total love. But it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and profound quest. Whence each woman hopes to give him what no one has ever given him" (Camus 67). It seems that he is justifying that most of the people are made for living and only a few are made for loving. Knowledge of love



always contains the virus of illusion. In acquiring, conquering, possessing or consuming the love the malware of illusion spreads and ultimately destroys the circuit. Love is the only way to possess another human being in essence. It is a way of encroachment of territorial exclusiveness of consciousness of another human being. Love is acknowledgement of deficiencies and potentialities of another person. Lover overcomes his deficiencies and maximizes his virtues by self-actualisation which provides the meaning to his life.

Love is sublimation of sexual desires. It is the epiphenomenon of sexual instincts and drives. Love is a vehicle to take long and arduous journey of life and sex is the fuel of it. Love is subjected to want of freedom, which makes the seeker of love insecure. Marriage provides the sanctity to it. The commitment to lifelong love howsoever absurd it may be is the solution of insecurity in lovers.

A bad marriage is the beginning of philosophy and a good marriage is death of philosophy. With this thought, I give rest to my thoughts.

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