

# Love—You Wonderful Thing! A Brief Philosophy and Pedagogy About Love

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This study is a brief attempt to uncover the secret of love. From the extremely rich literature on the subject, it relies on only four classic thinkers and writers (Plato, Shakespeare, Attila József, Marx), among whom Marx's relevant statement is less known even among love researchers. Furthermore, it intends to draw attention to some notable Hungarian philosophers and poets. The ultimate message of the examination is that, although love is the subjective, intimate sphere of a person, it hopefully becomes clear how lovers can create human and communal relationships with each other and with their narrower and broader environment.

*Keywords:* love, miracle, community, loneliness, interest

## Introduction

We have an incredibly rich body of scientific and philosophical publications on the concept and essence of love. Furthermore, it is well-known that this mysterious, most enigmatic emotion is a recurring theme in the most diverse works of art. Below, I do not aim to provide any comprehensive picture of the meaning of love, but merely to make a brief attempt to summarize some striking, philosophical, or philosophically inclined approaches. I present four approaches, albeit briefly: I cite and explain the insights of two classic philosophers (Plato and Marx), and I will refer to the philosophical lines of two equally classic poets (Shakespeare and the 20th-century Hungarian poet: Attila József). Although I know the selection is made on an arbitrary basis, I still hope and trust that such an effort is not in vain: During the examination, we may read thoughts that—I believe—promise to be interesting and exciting at first glance. In my opinion, each contains deep insights, general recognitions, truths to be heeded by many, or at least suggests important further contemplation. Not least, it can draw our attention to lessons that education and its institutions should particularly consider. Finally, I intend to recommend some less-known excellent representatives of Hungarian intellectual culture and art, whose related thoughts undoubtedly enrich our knowledge about the possible connections between love and education.

## Results and Discussion

### “I Found My Match”

It is a well-known fact in professional circles that classical Greek philosophy of antiquity has essentially pondered all significant human dilemmas. It is hardly possible to bring up a profound question that engages and excites all of humanity, which the ancient Greeks did not think about and debate. They arrived at insights and

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truths about the world, nature, society, and the relationship of man to the world, which contain universal, general lessons. These are lessons that have not lost their relevance even today. And even if they sometimes erred on some questions and approached certain topics naively (let us not forget, their discussions were born roughly two and a half millennia ago, when certain specialized sciences had not yet developed), we can boldly state that we can still learn from their mistakes. History shows that the epochal missteps of great thinkers (and scientists) have driven progress: as long as they inspire philosophy, science, and art to propose new paths, forms, and directions. As we shall see, a similar thing happens with Plato when he contemplates the concept of love.

Among his many discussions on love and eros, it is definitely justified to highlight his work *The Symposium*. The culinary pleasures provide a good opportunity for the company (Socrates and his disciples) to engage in light conversation. The topic is extremely rewarding: What is the concept of love, its essential content, and the secret of its birth? Plato puts the beautiful story in the mouth of one of the interlocutors, Aristophanes. According to him, in the beginning, originally, man was a dual-faced being who believed himself to be exceedingly strong and brave: He even challenged the gods and became unrestrained. He dared to probe the secrets of the gods. This could hardly go unanswered: Punishment came. Zeus, the chief god, split this dual-faced human being (who were otherwise joined at their navels) and scattered them around the world. Thus, “Two became one, and now each constantly seeks his own half” (Plato, 2005, p. 191/d). When we find our other “half”, love is born there and then, in which we merge, blend into each other, and become whole, complete again. In this way, each of us actually finds “his own dear one, (...) and returns to our original nature” (Plato, 2005, p. 193/c).

Undoubtedly, it is a captivating, enthralling thought. While everyone knows that neither practice nor science confirms this, it is an ideal, a story, not reality. Yet, it feels so good to pause and reflect on Plato’s quote, which we can call the ideal of love. At the same time, it is certain for me that although we read the idealistic and naive thought of the philosopher above, it would be premature to dismiss it, because we can discover some reality in it. Namely, from the perspective that lovers can indeed feel the closest, most intimate connection: a sense of becoming one, as if they fit together so intimately, complement each other naturally! This is what common knowledge says: “I found my match”.

The wonderful feeling of belonging together is no coincidence, as the idea also appears in mythology alongside Greek philosophy. The example of Philemon and Baucis enchants everyone. The elderly couple—as known—gives lodging and supper to the two unknown wanderers (who are actually gods). One of them, Zeus, the chief god, rewards the two old people: He fulfills their only wish. They choose to die together and be buried next to each other. This happens, they are placed next to each other, and over their graves, intertwined trees are born: A linden tree grows over Baucis’ grave, and an oak tree over Philemon’s—symbolizing the miraculous fusion into one.

If I may mention a striking Hungarian reaction to the perception of love (as an ancient nature), then I would cite B éla Hamvas, a prominent writer, essayist, and philosopher of the 20th century. I do not believe many people abroad know him, although he was a man of great learning and a universal thinker. In one of his essay collections, he shows sharp insight when comparing two important human phenomena: love and friendship. He does not refer to Plato, but it is as if he continues the Greek philosopher’s thought: He writes, “The secret of love is that two become one, the secret of friendship is that one becomes two. (...) Love awakens all passions, (...) it liberates all the demons dwelling in a person, (...) it whips them up” (Hamvas, 1988, p. 135). In another work, he expresses the above relationship by saying, “there is only one, and yet they are two” (Hamvas, 1987, p. 180).

From the Platonic insight and related comments, the pedagogical lesson I derive is that love is a special, unique emotional world of human existence, a rare gift. If it happens, we should rejoice and, as much as we can, appreciate it with every fiber of our being, take care of it, and enjoy its magical effects. There are people among us who believe that love is the only good thing in our lives. Although I trust that many other good and important things can happen to us during our lives, it is hardly disputable that love is a unique state, unmistakable, and incomparable with anything else, the pinnacle of pleasant feelings, the most wonderful, and at the same time, the most powerful passion (as, among others, Stendhal believes). From the perspective of education, I consider it important to emphasize: For example, when we socialize the young, we must also think about preparing them for love. According to their age and as much as possible, let us make them aware that love is indeed a wonderful feeling, but if we cannot protect it, it can easily disappear or cause prolonged suffering.

### **Loving Someone—For Their Own Sake!**

The theme of love is richly explored in the works of Shakespeare, who was also blessed with a philosophical vein. It is enough to think of his drama *Romeo and Juliet* or his 75th sonnet among his lyrical works. However, now I deliberately choose a drama whose main message deals with a completely different issue. It is *King Lear*. We would never think that Shakespeare articulates the essence of love in this tragedy, deeply and concisely. We could say, here the literary definition of love is born.

It is not my task to present the work, especially to analyze it. However, for understanding and appreciating Shakespeare's definition of love, it is necessary to briefly touch on the context. The elderly King Lear decides to retire, so he intends to divide his kingdom and wealth among his three daughters. As a ruler, he appears to be an extremely vain person: He decides that he will make the inheritance distribution based on how much his daughters love him. The degree of love becomes the measure for awarding the kingdom and wealth. The two older sisters, seeing through their father's great sense of vanity, assure the king of their love for him with honeyed words. Meanwhile, the youngest daughter, Cordelia, speaks infinitely simply, honestly, and prosaically, not flattering hypocritically like her sisters. The king loses his mind, in his immense vanity; he loses his sound judgment, disowns Cordelia from the inheritance, and even banishes her from the country. As it later turns out, this decision causes his tragedy. Two princes (of France and Burgundy) vie for Cordelia's favors, both wanting to marry her. After Cordelia becomes destitute and homeless in an instant, Burgundy immediately renounces her, while France takes her home with joy and true love. Standing before his former rival, France throws the following warning, and here we can grasp Shakespeare's philosophical concept of love, literally quoting: "Love's not love/When it is mingled with regards that stands/Aloof from the intire point, will you have her?/She is herself a dowry" (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 31).

For me, it is clear that the definition rests on two conceptual pillars: Love is undoubtedly related, on the one hand, to "distracting views" and, on the other hand, to the "real point". The question now is, what kind of conceptual content (in fact, requirement) might these two criteria refer to? I believe Shakespeare's understanding is easy to decipher.

The term "distracting views" may refer to "dirty" financial matters or the arbitrary and violent interference of power. Neither orientation is sympathetic, but ideally, economic and political considerations have no place in the realm of love. According to the writer, we cannot call it love when one party (sometimes both) enters a relationship to gain some inheritance or wealth. Unfortunately, in practice, it often happens that a marriage is contracted to unite two properties or fortunes, with no feelings between the partners. The situation is no better

when political power's will or considerations influence the conclusion of a marriage. Many historical examples can be cited where a province (country, nation, empire) is strengthened by marriage, even though the prince and princess in question did not know each other, and were even betrothed as children. This might result in normal cooperation between the partners, and sometimes love may develop later. However, the general experience and tendency show that when politics steps into the intimate sphere, love is absent, or if it was there initially, it tends to be destroyed rather than strengthened.

The other part of the quoted text, namely the "real point", is self-explanatory. To fall in love, to love someone—for themselves. Not for anything else, not for any external reasons. It is the essence, personality, charm, spirit, and inner world of our partner that makes us fall for them, irresistibly drawing us to them, binding us to them fatefully. And it is precisely this wonderful, inwardly arising event, this infinite feeling, that will designate and fill the "real point". As Shakespeare asserts, Cordelia is a treasure in herself. Frank falls in love with Cordelia for her own sake, the princess who has suddenly become destitute and homeless: He accepts and loves her as she truly is, without any external conditions. According to Shakespeare, this is the secret of love, a truth that is difficult to dispute.

For me, it is evident that the above approach reflects a romantic view of love. Not everyone necessarily subscribes to this romantic view, but those who do will be strengthened in their belief and partake in the experience that love is a wonderful, captivating phenomenon. It is a noble sentiment that stirs the heart and soul, leaving a deep imprint on a person and often accompanying them throughout their life. The greatest pedagogical challenge of love is whether educational work can prepare the young (and of course adults) to become receptive to experiencing this exalted feeling. Furthermore, if we fall in love, can we manage it in a cultured manner? It matters greatly how we approach and manage our relationships. Do we succumb to various external interests, base intentions that do not arise from within, flashy but superficial fashion pressures, or cunning manipulative efforts? Or do we recognize and accept the truth that love is only a captivating and enriching phenomenon if we approach our partner sincerely, without any skewed or alien pressures, and responsibly embrace their entire being? There are plenty of dilemmas, which pose significant challenges to educational work. I can only sadly note how far the fields of education and pedagogical science still are from theoretically exploring and practically addressing the connections between love and education. Serious and valuable publications do not even recognize the importance of such efforts. (I could endlessly list pedagogical books that completely lack any examination of the topic of love. See, for instance—chosen merely at random—works by Th. Gary, J. C. Aggarwal, and among Hungarian researchers, István Báosik, Endre Kiss.)

Returning to Shakespeare's hero Frank (from *King Lear*), I can only add one wish: May the romantic standpoint envisioned by Shakespeare endure and spread even today!

### **Love as Paired Loneliness?**

There is a wonderful poem by perhaps the most philosophical Hungarian poet of the 20th century, Attila József. Intentionally, I will not quote from his grand and most beautiful love poems (Óda, Flóra, Tedd a kezed, etc.), but from a lesser-known piece, which, incidentally, is not about love, but about the pain of all humanity. However, we can find a line in it that—regardless of the poet's intention—reinforced a new conception of love. In his brilliant work "Humanity", we read the following lines: "Oh humanity (...) I do not dread to be born anew for you, you two billion paired loneliness!" (Attila József, 1971, p. 318) This term "paired loneliness" as a striking expression then resonated with many people, drawing them into its influence. Of course, it is good and commendable when poetry affects people. The problem begins when the expression "paired loneliness" is

interpreted as something that can characterize and justify one's own love life. Many people imagine that when someone falls in love, they are no longer interested in anything or anyone else outside of love. According to this view and practice, for a lover, the importance of learning and/or work ceases, as does maintaining parental, familial, and friendly relationships, and they are excluded from any political and public disputes. No ideology or idea excites them. Essentially, they neglect their human relationships and obligations. In everyday life, this attitude manifests as: "Excuse me! Leave me alone because I am in love". Thus, they behave as if they fall out of societal life! Ultimately, they become lonely, isolated from other people. This state is of a special nature: It transforms into paired loneliness. Because they are not alone, the lover's life is completely filled by their partner. All their thoughts, emotions, and activities revolve around their partner: Their partner's existence gives them the sole meaning of life, its captivating beauty. Their existence becomes cosmic in scale, and conversely, everything else outside of the love relationship is a burden.

The idea of "paired loneliness", at first glance, may seem effective and perhaps even sympathetic. But in the long term and in all aspects of life, I believe it is not a viable path. Although it may seem exceedingly comfortable and almost spectacular as a conception of love, it reflects only irresponsible and selfish behavior. It is evident that it is good to be alone with our beloved and enjoy the intimate world of "just the two of us", the special magic of the "I-you" relationship. However, as contemporary Hungarian philosopher Miklós Almási warns, the boundaries of an intimate relationship are quickly broken by societal obligations, "(...) one cannot escape reality unpunished, (...) society breaks into our intimate sphere" (Almási/b 2012, p. 34 and p. 127).

The counterpart (the other extreme, the opposite) of the excessive glorification or exclusivity of the "I-you" relationship is nothing but its neglect. Many signs (for example, the combined effects of the digital world) indicate that the intimate sphere, the form of "I-you" existence, is transforming, indeed weakening. The "you", the "other" as a person, is disappearing. On Facebook, Twitter, I am surrounded by followers, unknown figures who are around me, but because they are not persons, they cannot hold a mirror up to me, they cannot integrate into my individuality, (...) the more followers one has, the less one's personality becomes a social individual. They fall out of the world and become a citizen of a parallel reality, (...) in the digital age, emotional culture is inevitably deteriorating" (Almási/a 2019, pp. 22-23). It seems as if we avoid long-term and intimate relationships nowadays. It seems as if we do not have enough time for love, cannot express our feelings, and are content with fleeting relationships, quick and easily forgettable sex, or even wild erotica. Love, especially its romantic version, seems to be withering! What remains is superficial chatter, frequent and easy partner changes.

The idea of "paired loneliness" can easily lead to both the overvaluation of the "I-you" relationship and its spectacular degradation, sinking into the virtual world. These are two extremes, but neither strengthens love. The task of education here can only be to clearly point out that both views and efforts are justified and advisable to decisively reject or at least critically reconsider: Can we hope for lasting success with them? Can we really enrich the emotional side of the personality, including the manifestation of love? Or do we rather wear it down, damage it, and ultimately bury it? The educator should promote the critical discussion of this issue, the recognition of the emerging connections, and present a positive alternative in every possible way and form (As I try to propose a solution in the next point (the fourth concept)).

### **The Mystery of the Most Individual Existence and Community**

We know that Marx dealt with profound economic and sharp political issues. Fewer people are familiar with his philosophical work. But even in professional circles, not many think that he defines the essence of love in an

economic text. More precisely, he captures its philosophical concept, which can be considered, among the many philosophical approaches, as the deepest and most concise definition. According to him, the innermost content, the secret of love, is nothing less than that through it and by it, the individual's most private, most intimate emotional world, and at the same time, their communal mentality and attitude, are manifested. That is, "the *other* person as a person has become for him a need—the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social being" (Marx, 1977, p. 43). The phrasing is extremely simple, understandable, and followable, while pointing to a profound connection. Let's try to interpret and elaborate on the given message!

To me, it is evident that Marx's concept of love rests on two main pillars: the reality of the "most individual existence", in other words, the reality of the most intimate sphere, and the "communal" manifestation. The simultaneous existence of these two criteria is fundamentally important; if either "part" is missing, the relationship is distorted, and we can no longer truly speak of love. This phenomenon simultaneously refers to the individual's most intimate domain, their most subjective world, and their communal attitude. It is worth discussing the two aspects separately.

### **The Most Intimate Sphere**

Love, above all, is the individual's most personal world, their most private domain: a unique and singular attachment to a partner into which no one and nothing else can interfere. We know and experience that humans, on command, are capable of many things, even the most terrible deeds: That is, they can cause the death of their fellow humans. There is one thing, one task, that they are incapable of doing on command: falling in love. As I already indicated in connection with Shakespeare, love cannot be prescribed, for example, by a stubborn parent for their child (like when a vineyard owner wants to marry his daughter to the neighboring landowner's son just to unite the estates). Nor can a ruler dictate it to the prince, to marry the princess of another country—for the sake of a political alliance. Neither can a friend (girlfriend) determine who one should be in love with. No one can rule over love, not even oneself. Thus, we ourselves cannot dictate who, when, where, under what circumstances, and why we should fall in love with. We have no control over our own love. This is because—as Bădă Hamvas mentions regarding Montaigne, "love never asks anyone. It comes when it wants, and it mercilessly overpowers a person, like an elemental force" (Hamvas, 1988, p. 131). The lover is not recognized by self-control or the mastery of their actions, thoughts, and emotional world. As common knowledge says, "they've lost their mind". Love is indeed an incomprehensible, inscrutable, uncontrollable, mysterious phenomenon, a peculiar mystery that cannot be understood, possessed, consciously controlled, only "experienced". When it comes, it crushes the individual like a steamroller, completely taking over them; and if it does not arrive, then no matter how much we want and desire it continuously and strongly, it still does not happen. Love can be born at any time, with anyone, in any form, but unfortunately, it may also never appear in everyone's life.

It seems that pedagogy, education stands helpless against this private world. Examining and knowing the causes and characteristics of the "most individual existence", it can do very little. Precisely because it is a mysterious world, where emotions and uncontrollable (often fatal) subjective forces rage. However, it can certainly call attention to the fact that if someone falls in love, they should be grateful for their good fortune, because we can regard that feeling as a gift from fate, which it will be important to cherish and appreciate. Conscious education can encourage the acceptance that experiencing love, to a significant extent, depends on the lover themselves. At the very least, it can suggest the understanding that they too are responsible for the development of their own love story.

### **Community Aspect**

On the other hand, love also entails a communal aspect, showing how the most personal and intimate feelings intertwine with the broader social context. Marx's view points out that in our most individual existence, we are also communal. This means that even in the depth of our personal emotions and relationships, the social and communal dimension is ever-present. This dual nature of love highlights that it is not just a private affair but also one that connects individuals within a larger community, reflecting both personal intimacy and social interaction.

Understanding and accepting this dual nature of love can help individuals appreciate the complexity and depth of their emotional experiences. It also emphasizes the importance of balancing personal intimacy with communal responsibilities, ensuring that love enriches both the individual and their social connections. Education should, therefore, not only encourage the appreciation of love as a private gift but also foster the understanding of its communal implications, guiding individuals to navigate the interplay between their personal and social lives.

### **Community (and Communalism) as a Mirror**

No matter how mystical and captivating love may be, we cannot deny or diminish the moral weight of responsibility. Ultimately, it is in and through love that, referring back to the second part of Marx's thought, it reveals how individuals form relationships with their communities, how they express their own communal identity. For we must never forget humans (including those in love) are social beings, bound by countless threads to their closest and broader environment (parents, siblings, relatives, friends, classmates, colleagues, members of political and civil organizations, and of course, the beloved partner). It is crucial what kind of relationships individuals build with others because their quality (sometimes decisively) shapes their lives—even their love lives. This connection is vividly and accurately captured by the aforementioned József Attila: "even if you bathe yourself within/your face can only be washed in others" (József, 1971, p. 124). The poet's poem "Not I Who Call" testifies that although one can live alone and in solitude, in the long run and by tendency, humans are necessarily and naturally connected to communal existence and relationship systems. In fact, the community itself thrives on the activities, diligence, and creativity of its members, while individual people can accomplish this by fulfilling their will and purpose, and by developing their own strength. The community, in essence, is a symbolic mirror that reveals who people really are, while serving as a control for human development.

Similarly with love, lovers must consistently maintain and nurture their relationships with those around them. It's necessary to live in normal relationships with friends, neighbors, and to learn or work based on the dormant powers and abilities within them, and to participate in public life. And perhaps it's about more than just not being exempt from social (social) obligations. Experience shows that even the most loving face can fade over time, fade away, and eventually cease to exist. Unless the individual receives reinforcement, positive charge, enriching source from their social relationships outside their personal relationships. If we want our love to last a long time (even until death), then let's work to constantly renew it. Renewal can only come from outside, from all our social relationships. Then the communal requirement can become truly important. If we succeed from the point of view of community spirit, we show positive results, values, and experiences in our human relationships (and obviously in learning, work); it is likely to renew and enrich our intimate world. And vice versa: If we fail humanly in our communal existence, it will probably have a negative impact on our innermost world, our love relationships.

The principle of communality therefore means that the individual represents not only their own interests, will, and goals, but also takes into account the interests, will, and goals of other people (group, organization,

nation, humanity). Essentially, communality means reconciling various—often conflicting—viewpoints and striving for the normal, dignified path and manner of coexistence and cooperation. But at least we strive to maintain and enrich social relationships.

The perspective and value system of communality seem highly noble, but in practice, it may be the greatest challenge to implement. Let me refer to at least one problem related to love life. In Western culture (and ideally in every civilized community), the majority of men are supporters of women's equality, visibly proclaiming that women are equal to men in social terms (not that men and women are equal and identical in everything). However, in everyday events, many men still maintain humiliating dependency relationships (within or outside marriage) with their female partners. If they expect that from the smallest question to the most serious dilemmas of life, their interests, will, and goals should always prevail. On the basis that a woman's only task is to automatically serve the man (and/or husband), I believe that with such a mentality and attitude, it's not love that can be realized, but something else (a lower form of coexistence).

### **Summary: As the Main Lesson**

The topic of love, as I referred to, has a vast literature. Therefore, in my above examination, I do not even attempt to present the major treatments. I deliberately avoided listing the diverse and very rich documents, studies, and books, significantly reducing the number and scope of references. I only quoted a few—albeit striking—thoughts from my perspective.

Love is a unique world of feelings, captivating, a marvelous phenomenon. Looking at the relationship between man and woman from the perspective of love, it's easy to accept—citing a Hungarian writer for the last time—Karinthy Frigyes' witty statement from the early 1920s: "Man and woman. How could they understand each other? After all, each wants something different—the man wants the woman, the woman wants the man" (Karinthy, 1957, p. 63). This is a real observation; its truth is not easy to dispute. However, based on my research so far, as the main lesson, let me supplement the above quote. Indeed, man and woman want something different, yet a particular manifestation still connects and unites their emotional state: namely, shared desire and collective experience. Perhaps this is when love is born?

I know, the above four viewpoints (and their brief examination above) can only contribute a tiny part to the explanation of the concept. And it may also emerge from future research that the secret of love cannot be revealed at all, remaining an eternal mystery. We can only approach it and learn its new and new facets as an endless process. However, this does not seem insignificant either. In any case, it is clear to me that the philosophical and other scientific research on the topic of love remains current and exciting. The lag in educational theory in this regard is particularly noticeable: Scientific researchers, professionals, and practicing educators still have significant debts in developing the relationships between love and education, as well as drawing relevant lessons.

Finally, I would like to recommend the summary of my message: It is undeniable that love is a marvelous phenomenon, a miracle in itself, but when it enters our lives, we do not marvel at it as a miracle cure, but rather perceive it as a human ordeal for which we need and desire to fight very hard. Love itself is mysterious, an eternal dilemma, bittersweet struggle, but it would still be good to know and accept the following lesson: Love is the most subjective formation, which nevertheless transcends its own particularity when it carries the communal existence and value world of humans. Sooner or later, it becomes clear how much the loving person wants and can exist in a normal (that is, communal) social relationship. I think every person involved could consider this minimal lesson.

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