

Romantic Love vs Selfless Love

Monart Pon - May 2022

*“To say ‘I love you’, one must know first how to say the ‘I.’” -Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*.*

Romantic love is self-worthy love. Selfless love is (self-)worth-less love.

To love with romance is to regard someone as a value and a pleasure, worthy of having in and for one’s life. Romantic love is worthy love.

In contrast, to love someone without regard to the value or worth to oneself, is to love without cause or reason. Selfless love is worthless love.

In reality and by the nature of human life, to love is to value, to treat and respect an existent – a person, an idea, a condition, a place, an activity, an event – as a value and a source of pleasure to oneself. Love is self-based, self-sourced, and self-motivated. Love is selfish. Selfish love is real, true love – love by reason, by rights, and for romance.

Selfless love is self-contradictory and invalidated by real facts. Selfless love is self-denial, self-abnegation, self-abasement, self-sacrifice – not good for self and against human life. Selfless love is unreal, false, and painful love (by intention and as consequence). Selfless love is love without reason or rights and not for romance.

Selfless love, to the extent it’s believed and practiced, leads not to a successful, happy life, but to suffering and death (or a living death), and, along the way, is ridden by guilt, shame, hatred, and fear. Yet, selfless love is extolled by altruists as the highest moral imperative, as love for the *alter*, as *other-ly* love.

Knowing that selfless love is irrational and cannot be practiced consistently (without dying), altruists blame, not their ethics, but humanity for being morally flawed, imperfect, selfish and evil; and so needs to be ruled by faith and force.

Altruism, under cover of being an ethics of benevolence and compassion, actually induces fear, doubt, and guilt. Guilt and shame, from not being able to practice an irrational and impractical ethics, weakens the will and makes the will more malleable and submissive to collectivist/statist tyranny.

The dominant moralities of altruism (other-ism) – Christian, Judaic, Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Environmentalist – praise selfless love as the moral, categorical imperative (*a la* Kant): that one should love another, not because of the value to oneself, but because it’s *not* of any value - because it is of *other* than value for oneself.

So altruistic parents should love their children, not for reason of their chosen, desired value, but merely as a duty, without inclination, derived pleasure, or any self-interest. Moreover, parents, for ideal selfless love, should love other children above and instead of, their own children.

Selfless love is called *agape* – based on unconditional, indiscriminate, promiscuous, dutiful, altruistic love.

Selfish love is called *eros* – based on conditions of one’s evaluation and discrimination of worth, pleasure, and desire.

Altruist love, *agape*, is actually love for those of little or no value to you, to love them over those of higher, personal value. The higher the value you sacrifice to those you don’t value, the higher the moral worth. Of even greater moral worth is to love those who are dis-values to you, those you despise, loathe, and are repulsed by – precisely because of that contempt you have for them.

In contrast, romantic love, *eros*, is founded on mutual admiration and self-esteem. It is love made by the choice and desire of oneself, for real reasons, to achieve one’s purpose: happiness and joy. Romantic love is rational, rightful love for the value and pleasure, the exaltation and ecstasy of oneself – for no other reason.

It's the only true, romantic love: there's, really, no “*other*” true love.

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Quotations from Ayn Rand, elaborating on love vs altruism:

Love, friendship, respect, admiration are the emotional response of one man to the virtues of another, the spiritual *payment* given in exchange for the personal, selfish pleasure which one man derives from the virtues of another man’s character. Only a brute or an altruist would claim that the appreciation of another person’s virtues is an act of selflessness, that as far as one’s own selfish interest and pleasure are concerned, it makes no difference whether one deals with a genius or a fool, whether one meets a hero or a thug, whether one marries an ideal woman or a slut. [Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics”, *The Virtue of Selfishness*]

When you are in love, it means that the person you love is of great personal, selfish importance to you and to your life. If you were selfless, it would have to mean that you derive no personal pleasure or happiness from the company and the existence of the person you love, and that you are motivated only by self-sacrificial pity for that person’s need of you. I don’t have to point out to you that no one would be flattered by, nor would accept, a concept of that kind. Love is not self-sacrifice, but the most profound assertion of your own needs and values. It is for your

own happiness that you need the person you love, and that is the greatest compliment, the greatest tribute you can pay to that person. [Ayn Rand, *Playboy* Interview: March 1964]

One gains a profoundly personal, selfish joy from the mere existence of the person one loves. It is one's own personal, selfish happiness that one seeks, earns and derives from love.

A "selfless," "disinterested" love is a contradiction in terms: it means that one is indifferent to that which one values.

Concern for the welfare of those one loves is a rational part of one's selfish interests. If a man who is passionately in love with his wife spends a fortune to cure her of a dangerous illness, it would be absurd to claim that he does it as a "sacrifice" for *her* sake, not his own, and that it makes no difference to *him*, personally and selfishly, whether she lives or dies.

Any action that a man undertakes for the benefit of those he loves is *not a sacrifice* if, in the hierarchy of his values, in the total context of the choices open to him, it achieves that which is of greatest *personal* (and rational) importance to him. In the above example, his wife's survival is of greater value to the husband than anything else that his money could buy, it is of greatest importance to his own happiness and, therefore, his action is *not a sacrifice*.

But suppose he let her die in order to spend his money on saving the lives of ten other women, none of whom meant anything to him—as the ethics of altruism would require. That would be a sacrifice. Here the difference between Objectivism and altruism can be seen most clearly: if sacrifice is the moral principle of action, then that husband *should* sacrifice his wife for the sake of ten other women. What distinguishes the wife from the ten others? Nothing but her value to the husband who has to make the choice—nothing but the fact that his happiness requires her survival.

[...]

The virtue involved in helping those one loves is not "selflessness" or "sacrifice," but *integrity*. Integrity is loyalty to one's convictions and values; it is the policy of acting in accordance with one's values, of expressing, upholding and translating them into practical reality. If a man professes to love a woman, yet his actions are indifferent, inimical or damaging to her, it is his lack of integrity that makes him immoral.

The same principle applies to relationships among friends. If one's friend is in trouble, one should act to help him by whatever nonsacrificial means are appropriate. For instance, if one's friend is starving, it is not a sacrifice, but an act of integrity to give him money for food rather than buy some insignificant gadget for oneself, because his welfare is important in the scale of one's personal values. If the gadget means more than the friend's suffering, one had no business pretending to be his friend.

The practical implementation of friendship, affection and love consists of incorporating the welfare (the rational welfare) of the person involved into one's own hierarchy of values, then acting accordingly.

But this is a reward which men have to earn by means of their virtues and which one cannot grant to mere acquaintances or strangers.

What, then, should one properly grant to strangers? The generalized respect and good will which one should grant to a human being in the name of the potential value he represents—until and unless he forfeits it.

A rational man does not forget that *life* is the source of all values and, as such, a common bond among living beings (as against inanimate matter), that other men are potentially able to achieve the same virtues as his own and thus be of enormous value to him. This does not mean that he regards human lives as interchangeable with his own. He recognizes the fact that his own life is the *source*, not only of all his values, but of *his capacity to value*. Therefore, the value he grants to others is only a consequence, an extension, a secondary projection of the primary value which is himself. [Ayn Rand, “The Ethics of Emergencies”, *The Virtue of Selfishness*]

Let us answer the question: “Can you measure love?”

The concept “love” is formed by isolating two or more instances of the appropriate psychological process, then retaining its distinguishing characteristics (an emotion proceeding from the evaluation of an existent as a positive value and as a source of pleasure) and omitting the object and the measurements of the process’s intensity.

The object may be a thing, an event, an activity, a condition or a person. The intensity varies according to one’s evaluation of the object, as, for instance, in such cases as one’s love for ice cream, or for parties, or for reading, or for freedom, or for the person one marries. The concept “love” subsumes a vast range of values and, consequently, of intensity: it extends from the lower levels (designated by the subcategory “liking”) to the higher level (designated by the subcategory “affection,” which is applicable only in regard to persons) to the highest level, which includes romantic love.

If one wants to measure the intensity of a particular instance of love, one does so by reference to the hierarchy of values of the person experiencing it. A man may love a woman, yet may rate the neurotic satisfactions of sexual promiscuity higher than her value to him. Another man may love a woman, but may give her up, rating his fear of the disapproval of others (of his family, his friends or any random strangers) higher than her value. Still another man may risk his life to save the woman he loves, because all his other values would lose meaning without her. The emotions in these examples are not emotions of the same intensity or dimension. Do not let a James Taggart type of mystic tell you that love is immeasurable. [Ayn Rand, “Concepts of Consciousness”, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*]

What is the moral code of altruism? The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value.

Do not confuse altruism with kindness, good will or respect for the rights of others. These are not primaries, but consequences, which, in fact, altruism makes impossible. The irreducible primary of altruism, the basic absolute, is *self-sacrifice*—which means; self-immolation, self-abnegation, self-denial, self-destruction—which means: the *self* as a standard of evil, the *selfless* as a standard of the good.

[...]

Now there is one word – a single word – which can blast Now there is one word -- a single word -- which can blast the morality of altruism out of existence and which it cannot withstand -- the word: "Why?" Why must man live for the sake of others? Why must he be a sacrificial animal? Why is that the good? There is no earthly reason for it -- and, ladies and gentlemen, in the whole history of philosophy no earthly reason has ever been given. [Ayn Rand, "Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World", *Philosophy: Who Needs It*]

To love is to *value*. The man who tells you that it is possible to value without values, to love those whom you appraise as worthless, is the man who tells you that it is possible to grow rich by consuming without producing and that paper money is as valuable as gold When it comes to love, the highest of emotions, you permit them to shriek at you accusingly that you are a moral delinquent if you're incapable of feeling causeless love. When a man feels fear without reason, you call him to the attention of a psychiatrist; you are not so careful to protect the meaning, the nature and the dignity of love.

Love is the expression of one's values, the greatest reward you can earn for the moral qualities you have achieved in your character and person, the emotional price paid by one man for the joy he receives from the virtues of another. Your morality demands that you divorce your love from values and hand it down to any vagrant, not as response to his worth, but as response to his *need*, not as reward, but as alms, not as a payment for virtues, but as a blank check on vices. Your morality tells you that the purpose of love is to set you free of the bonds of morality, that love is superior to moral judgment, that true love transcends, forgives and survives every manner of evil in its object, and the greater the love the greater the depravity it permits to the loved. To love a man for his virtues is paltry and human, it tells you; to love him for his flaws is divine. To love those who are worthy of it is self-interest; to love the unworthy is sacrifice. You owe your love to those who don't deserve it, and the less they deserve it, the more love you owe them—the more loathsome the object, the nobler your love—the more unfastidious your love, the greater your virtue—and if you can bring your soul to the state of a dump heap that welcomes anything on equal terms, if you can cease to value moral values, you have achieved the state of moral perfection. [Ayn Rand, "This is John Galt Speaking", *Atlas Shrugged*]

Like any other value, love is not a static quantity to be divided, but an unlimited response to be earned. The love for one friend is not a threat to the love for another, and neither is the love for the various members of one's family, assuming they have earned it. The most exclusive form—romantic love—is not an issue of competition. If two men are in love with the same woman, what she feels for either of them is not determined by what she feels for the other and is not taken away from him. If she chooses one of them, the “loser” could not have had what the “winner” has earned.

It is only among the irrational, emotion-motivated persons, whose love is divorced from any standards of value, that chance rivalries, accidental conflicts and blind choices prevail. But then, whoever wins does not win much. Among the emotion-driven, neither love nor any other emotion has any meaning. [Ayn Rand, “The ‘Conflicts’ of Men’s Interests”, *The Virtue of Selfishness*]

The psychological results of altruism may be observed in the fact that a great many people approach the subject of ethics by asking such questions as: “Should one risk one’s life to help a man who is: a) drowning, b) trapped in a fire, c) stepping in front of a speeding truck, d) hanging by his fingernails over an abyss?” Consider the implications of that approach. If a man accepts the ethics of altruism, he suffers the following consequences (in proportion to the degree of his acceptance):

1. Lack of self-esteem—since his first concern in the realm of values is not how to live his life, but how to sacrifice it.
2. Lack of respect for others—since he regards mankind as a herd of doomed beggars crying for someone’s help.
3. A nightmare view of existence—since he believes that men are trapped in a “malevolent universe” where disasters are the constant and primary concern of their lives.
4. And, in fact, a lethargic indifference to ethics, a hopelessly cynical amorality—since his questions involve situations which he is not likely ever to encounter, which bear no relation to the actual problems of his own life and thus leave him to live without any moral principles whatever.

By elevating the issue of helping others into the central and primary issue of ethics, altruism has destroyed the concept of any authentic benevolence or goodwill among men. It has indoctrinated men with the idea that to value another human being is an act of selflessness, thus implying that a man can have no personal interest in others—that *to value* another means *to sacrifice* oneself—that any love, respect or admiration a man may feel for others is not and cannot be a source of his own enjoyment, but is a threat to his existence, a sacrificial blank check signed over to his loved ones.

The men who accept that dichotomy but choose its other side, the ultimate products of altruism’s dehumanizing influence, are those psychopaths who do not challenge altruism’s

basic premise, but proclaim their rebellion against self-sacrifice by announcing that they are totally indifferent to anything living and would not lift a finger to help a man or a dog left mangled by a hit-and-run driver (who is usually one of their own kind). [Ayn Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies", *The Virtue of Selfishness*]

...Romantic love, in the serious meaning of that term—[is] distinguished from the superficial infatuations of those whose sense of life is devoid of any consistent values, i.e., of any lasting emotions other than fear. Love is a response to values. It is with a person's sense of life that one falls in love—with that essential sum, that fundamental stand or way of facing existence, which is the essence of a personality. One falls in love with the embodiment of the values that formed a person's character, which are reflected in his widest goals or smallest gestures, which create the *style* of his soul—the individual style of a unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable consciousness. It is one's own sense of life that acts as the selector, and responds to what it recognizes as one's own basic values in the person of another. It is not a matter of professed convictions (though these are not irrelevant); it is a matter of much more profound, conscious and subconscious harmony.

Many errors and tragic disillusionments are possible in this process of emotional recognition, since a sense of life, by itself, is not a reliable cognitive guide. And if there are degrees of evil, then one of the most evil consequences of mysticism—in terms of human suffering—is the belief that love is a matter of "the heart". not the mind, that love is an emotion independent of reason, that love is blind and impervious to the power of philosophy. Love is *the expression of philosophy*—of a subconscious philosophical sum—and, perhaps, no other aspect of human existence needs the *conscious* power of philosophy quite so desperately. When that power is called upon to verify and support an emotional appraisal, when love is a conscious integration of reason and emotion, of mind and values, then—and only then—it is the greatest reward of man's life. [Ayn Rand, "Philosophy and Sense of Life", *The Romantic Manifesto*]

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Photo: "Love's Light in Flight"

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