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Metamorphoses of Love / Metamorfosi dell'amore

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Abstract in italiano e inglese del fascicolo 2009/2

Kenneth Seeskin

Possessing the Good Forever - An Analysis of Erotic Love

pp. 13-22

This paper examines erotic love from two perspectives: that offered by Diotima in the Symposium and that offered by the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3. In the first, love for another person is based on an appraisal of their desirable qualities. As such, it is eventually transcended as the lover comes to realize that more value can be found in institutions, the sciences, and eventually the form of Beauty. In the second, love describes the basic human need for partnership. Even in paradise, when Adam is still innocent and has a direct relationship with God, God recognizes that: «It is not good for man to be alone».

The kind of love envisioned here cannot be replaced by a move toward transcendence. In a famous study of the Symposium, Martha Nussbaum argued that the lesson of the dialogue is that a person cannot have it both ways: either one becomes romantically attached to another person or he sees in that person a representation of something higher.

I submit that we have no choice try to have it both ways: admitting the need for partnership and transcendence simultaneously.

Robert W. Wallace

“Coming out” in Classical Athens: Heterosexual Love

pp. 23-32

To judge from extant sources, after Homer until the late Hellenistic period no Greek man ever publicly stated that he loved his wife. By contrast, after Homer elite men often stated that they loved (or felt passion for) particular adolescent males. This essay explores possible reasons for these differences from more recent practice, and their progressive modification.

Starting in the later fifth century, men might publicly state that they loved their dead wives. In New Comedy and then Hellenistic epigram, a young man might state that he loved (or felt passion for) a girl. Only the Greek novel, from the late Hellenistic age, expresses complete heterosexual love, although the readership of this genre may have been female.

Bruno Centrone

Il problema della reciprocità nell'eros platonico

pp. 33-50

Platonic eros is a desire that goes beyond love for an individual, being directed toward the world of ideas and culminating in the form of the good/beautiful. We are faced here with an asymmetrical relationship, where the lacking nature of the philosopher as a human being is juxtaposed to the self-sufficiency of the Good as a first principle. In his treatment of the relationships between human beings, however, Plato stresses the need of reciprocity by shaping a symmetrical relation, in which the roles of lover and beloved are closely intermingled. This confusion of roles is well exemplified in the figure of Socrates in the Symposium and in the other so-called erotic dialogues (Lysis, Phaedrus).

Enrico Giaccherini

Come, Eat of This Food. Maternal Love and *The Siege of Jerusalem*

pp. 51-68

The metamorphosis implied in the title of this paper is the one undergone by the most natural of all forms of love, that of a mother for her child, into the most unnatural of all possible aberrations: mother-child cannibalism. One such episode is infamously attributed by Flavius Josephus, in bk. 6 of his *De bello iudaico*, to one Maria daughter of Eleazar in the besieged city of Jerusalem during the military expedition led by Vespasian's son, and future emperor, Titus in 70 C.E. This episode plays a crucial role in the alliterative *The Siege of Jerusalem*, one of the two extant Middle English romances dealing with the Jewish war and the subsequent destruction of the Second Temple. The imagery of this popular romance, composed ca. 1390 in the NW of England, is characterized by an unusually high proportion of and obvious relish for violence that go hand in hand – at least according to the critical vulgate – with an equally virulent brand of anti-Judaism. Recent re-examinations of this romance, however, have convincingly argued in favour of a more nuanced assessment of its otherwise undeniable anti-Judaism. A comparative reading focusing on the cannibalistic-mother episode in *The Siege of Jerusalem* vis-à-vis the treatment of the same narrative material in the source-text(s), in combination with a (necessarily) brief examination of the pathetic element in the Middle-English poem's representation of the sufferings of the inhabitants of Jerusalem under siege, helps reinforce this 'revisionist' approach.

Gianfranco Fioravanti

Gli amici di Agostino

pp. 69-78

The paper analyzes the presence of several Augustin's friends in *Confessiones* (Alipius, Nebridius, Evodius, etc.) and shows how wide is Augustin's involvement beyond a simple experience of friendship.

Stefano Perfetti

Ci può essere amicizia tra umani e animali? Tommaso d'Aquino e Barbara Smuts

pp. 79-91

This paper compares the opposite views of Thomas Aquinas and contemporary primatologist Barbara Smuts. According to the former, for human beings it is not appropriate to feel love or friendship toward non-human animals (a detailed analysis of *Summa Theologiae* IIa-IIae, q. 25, art. 3 and other related passages is provided). According to the latter, relations with non-human animals should be thought in terms of intersubjectivity, thus can include love and friendship.

David M. Posner

What do Philosophers Want? Love and Loss in the *Essais* of Montaigne

pp. 95-107

Montaigne's attitude towards love in the *Essais* seems most often to be skeptical, even ironic. He asks: what empirical evidence do we have for the existence of genuine love or friendship? The answer most often given is: not much. And yet, in the essay that seems to treat most directly of love and friendship, "De l'amitié", he finds that his empirical method leads him to the opposite conclusion, even though his amitié with La Boétie seems to be both illicit and impossible. Montaigne goes on to show, almost in spite of himself, that not only does desire lead to wisdom and truth, but that one is brought to desire, and through desire to love, through the written word. The *Essais*, especially those that treat of desire, such as "Sur des vers de Virgile", are themselves meant – like the representations of desire in Virgil, Lucretius, et al. – to seduce us into wisdom.

Regina M. Schwartz

Justice and Law in *The Merchant of Venice*

pp. 109-125

While many of Shakespeare's plays are preoccupied with justice, and he draws heavily upon both legal and religious thought to animate the problem, in the *Merchant of Venice*, he puts versions of both Jewish and Christian ideas of justice into dialogue, and as if that were not complex enough, he adds common law and equity. Still more, the play interrogates the relation between love and property and how to understand these in relation to both human desire and dignity. The climax of all of these forces is dramatized in the amazingly condensed trial scene where we witness a vivid image of the cost of reducing the human person to property. When Shylock demands a pound of flesh as payment for a forfeited loan, his determination to seek retribution, damages, in the form of this obscene payment makes a travesty of contract law while the Venetian court's merciless response makes a travesty of Christian charity. If law and religion can both be degraded and readily misused on the side of evil, what then what is the ground we can appeal to for justice? The play seems acutely aware that once the world-view that anchored good and evil is dislodged and a commercial world-view takes hold, we should be wary of the results, offering its haunting image of the price of reducing the world of life and love to economics.

Tiziano Raffaelli

Love in Game Theory

pp. 127-132

Game theory has proved to be a powerful research tool both in the social and in the natural sciences. Originally confined to the strategy of pure conflict, in zero-sum games, its field of application has been extended to cooperation, coordination and the whole range of strategic interactions in which conflict and cooperation coexist. One of its main achievements is a better understanding of how these interactions evolve and tend to become stable.

Since it deals with the anticipation of each other's behaviour, love seems to be a promising field of analysis. And indeed, interesting research has been done on gift giving, commitment, strategies for mate choice, and other issues. The aim of this paper is to call attention to some of these recent developments.

Martin Zelder

The Essential Economics of Love

pp. 133-150

While many scholars might think economics to be antithetical (or at least unrelated) to understanding love, I argue that it is central to this enterprise. This idea is developed by a conceptual exploration of how economic reasoning enhances our understanding of love. Specifically, I consider the economist's approach to love as a household commodity, as well as different sorts of love (requited, unrequited), and the (somewhat paradoxical) connection between accumulating love and relationship stability.

Alessandro Balestrino, Cinzia Giardi

Love, Bonding, Value: Discussing the Economics of Love

pp. 151-163

Bringing together the arguments developed in the economic literature on love, we claim in the present note that love is good for the internal efficiency of a couple, because it creates an environment in which the partners feel secure enough to invest their material and emotional resources. However, several factors hamper the efficient maintenance of love and, perversely, love itself may constitute a danger to the stability of a marriage due to its «publicness » in the economic sense of the word. The intent in making such a chain of arguments is two-fold. First, we hope to demonstrate that economics can improve the understanding of the emotions – love in this case – by bringing unique insights into the matter. Second, we aim to show how dealing with such a subject as love economists might learn to amend and ameliorate their methodological stance.

Christine Helmer

Liberal Love: A Theological Perspective

pp. 165-175

This essay begins with the methodological question concerning how theology can speak in an interdisciplinary context today about love. Theology's challenge is to correct for a narrow understanding of its task as the prescription of normative doctrinal claims by re-defining the discipline as the conceptual analysis of religious concepts. On this view, theology shares with other academic perspectives an understanding of love as the tension between opposing elements, particularly the tension between love as directed to a particular and love as an exhibition of a universal essence or principle. The concept in classic Christian theology informed by the tension between the particularity and the universality of love is atonement. I diagnose the classic theory of atonement as inadequately balancing this tension by representing God according to both wrath and love. I turn to the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whose 1830 sermon *Why There is No Wrath in God* proposes a resolution to the tension between particularity and universality. Schleiermacher shows how love is twinned with wisdom in the concept of God. Schleiermacher understands redemption as a balance between the universal orientation of divine wisdom and redemption's actualization in the particularities of history as guided by divine love. A liberal theological understanding of love articulates a glimpse of God's liberal, and in this sense generous, love.

Flavia Monceri

Queer Loves: Restating Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities

pp. 177-195

In this article, I introduce and discuss some practices through which individuals modify the

culturally and socially established understanding of 'love' by interpreting and negotiating it again and again in daily interactions. I will articulate my argumentation into two sections, according to the following main assumptions: a) 'love' is to be conceived of as a social institution, as a set of rules governing the interactions between individuals. Being a social institution, love emerges from a process through which its 'normal' definition is established and presented as preferable for all group members, though there are no 'essential' features providing evidence enough for that 'normalcy'. In its turn, the 'normal' kind of love presupposes a 'normal' individual, whose body, gender and sexuality must fit the standards required to be entitled 'to love'; b) as a result, love, just like any other institution, is imposed on individuals who are requested to conform in order to be considered as 'normal'. Anyway, since no social institution is able to completely erase individual differences, the persistence cannot be avoided of 'not-normal' interpretations of 'love', and the practices to which they give birth are at the same time an expression of resistance and the main reason why the prevailing understanding of the social institution, in this case 'love', cannot refrain from changing over time.

Eva De Clercq

The Seduction of the Human Body and the Ambiguity of Love

pp. 197-206

In recent years, the problem of the body has become one of the most commonly discussed issues in philosophy. It is my belief that this intense fascination with the fate of the body is linked with the fact that, today, the body does no longer exist. In fact, in its incessant quest for

positivity and objectivity, our society has reduced the human body to a sheer physical object which, just like any other object, can be controlled, transformed and even erased. To a certain extent, cyberspace's bodiless exultation is the perfect epitomization of this line of thought. On the basis of an analysis of love in cyberspace, I will show that this vision on the human body is highly problematic for mainly two reasons. Firstly, because the body is not just an object out there in the world, but one intimately attached to our true-self. Secondly, because in diminishing the human body to a mere thing, society has deprived it from its symbolic inscriptions, making us vulnerable to the body's unacknowledged power. It is on the basis of this evaluation that I emphasize the importance of the se-duction of the human body which finds no place in cyberspace and which is increasingly threatened by our society's obsession with all-embracing control.

Adriano Fabris

Love as Involvement: Don Giovanni Defeated

pp. 207-216

The experience of love, as we well know, can be thought, felt, lived in many different ways, and in many different ways the word 'love' itself takes on several meanings. In this paper I will not discuss the several causes, the reasons, the explanations of love, but research its motivation, its sense. An inquiry concerning the personage of Don Giovanni can be useful. And finally the sense of love can be precisely defined as the way in which a relationship, a reasonable relationship, a good relationship can be set up.