

Thoughts on functional and existential love

(November 2010 – January 2011)

1. When you think about the types of love, you soon ask yourself how love can be defined as a concept. I will first use the following definition here for the purposes of my work, which makes no claim to be precise.

Def: Love is a state of mind of a subject, which is characterised, above all, by the fact that the subject clearly and unambiguously affirms an intense relationship with an object¹.

Love is usually experienced by the loving subject as a positive feeling, which is called affection, sympathy or love.

2. A loved object can be perceived and treated by the loving subject (usually unconsciously) both as a means and an aim. Tied to this, I distinguish between two pure forms of love: **functional** and **existential** love, whereby a "pure" form can only occur in exceptional cases.

In the case of *functional* love, the object is loved for providing a *service* to the subject; for the object is doing something for the subject. If it no longer does so (even temporarily), the subject feels an aversion, a resentment (even temporarily) against the object². This means that in this case the object is loved only as long as it provides the expected service.

In the case of *existential* love, the object is loved only for its mere *existence*; only because the object simply exists. If the object no longer exists, the subject feels a sadness, a mental pain².

3. It is precisely the nature of the respective negative feeling - aversion or grief - that determines what kind of love has been lost or broken off: If one feels an aversion then that was the *functional* love; if one feels grief then that was the *existential* one.
4. For a love between two people only a mixture of functional and existential love can be established, whereby the respective proportions can also be very different, so that this relationship expresses itself as more functional or more existential love. Of course, it is also possible for the two types of love to be equally pronounced, but statistically this is probably less common.

Existential love is perceived as "romantic", "true" love and is described in literature.

Functional love can be described as "egoistic altruism" or "altruistic egoism".

¹ that can be also animate

² if the object has not become indifferent for the subject yet

5. The only "subject" who can definitely experience exclusively existential love is God³.

In fact, since God is absolute and perfect, He does not "need" or "expect" services from people or other subjects/objects. Therefore, He can only develop a functional love for Himself, which is a mere logical abstraction.

The mere fact of the existence of an object, among others a human being, means that God has an "affirmative relationship" to this object, i.e. He loves us existentially.

6. With regard to the story of the tree of knowledge of good and evil from the Book of Genesis, the following can be noted:

Before Eve and Adam had eaten of the fruit, they looked at each other without shame. Their love for each other was solely for the purpose of reproduction and was therefore purely *functional*; i.e. it could not have been a romantic love: until then they had led a more or less vegetative existence.

After they had eaten the fruits of the tree, their eyes "opened". They have acquired the ability to critically assess things⁴. Among other things, they realised that they were naked and began to feel ashamed.

The reason for this initial shaming was that for the first time they experienced a feeling completely new to them: This was the birth of the *existential* love between two people, which until then had been reserved exclusively for God⁵.

In this relationship Adam and Eve acquired a new quality - namely the ability to feel *existential* love -, which was similar to that of God.

7. If we look at the parent-child relationship⁶, the following can be observed:

Since parents usually neither need nor expect anything from their children⁷, their love for their children is rather *existential*. This means that the so-called "paternal love" is an *existential* one. In this sense, the paternal love is similar in character to the love of God for human beings. This is, probably, one of the psychological reasons why many call God "Father".

If parents with age become more and more dependent on their children, the character of their love for their children must shift in the direction of *functional* love.

With children, this movement is exactly the opposite: as long as they are small, they depend completely on their parents and therefore experience pronounced *functional* love for them (mostly without being aware of it). This relationship (as a habit?) then often lasts all their lives, whereby it can shift somewhat in the direction of *existential* love.

³ God is Being, see for explanation and rational „On the Equivalence between God and Being“, I. Furgel.

⁴ Book of Genesis: To recognise good and evil

⁵ This occurrence would have happened eventually anyway, because God has endowed people with free will, i.e. the ability to make independent decisions.

⁶ in more or less intact families

⁷ This applies in particular as long as parents are not dependent on children (e.g. in advanced age).

8. In those societies and families where a woman or a man is married for purely functional purposes (reproduction, expansion of property or political influence, etc.) without having fallen in love romantically, *functional* love prevails, in the best case.

As we have seen, *functional* love is the counterpart of what God builds up as love for people and objects, namely *existential* love.

One can conclude from this that such societies and families neglect and do not take advantage of this ability, which is open to people, to love themselves existentially⁸. This may make their lives significantly poorer.

⁸ lit.: romantic